The Road to Oregon

Written by Dr. Jim Tompkins, a prominent local historian and the descendant of Oregon Trail immigrants, The Road to Oregon is a good primer on the history of the Oregon Trail.

Unit I. The Pioneers: 1800-1840

Who Explored the Oregon Trail?

The emigrants of the 1840s were not the first to travel the Oregon Trail. The colorful history of our country makes heroes out of the explorers, mountain men, soldiers, and scientists who opened up the West.

In 1540 the Spanish explorer Coronado ventured as far north as present-day Kansas, but the inland routes across the plains remained the sole domain of Native Americans until 1804, when Lewis and Clark skirted the edges on their epic journey of discovery to the Pacific Northwest and Zeb Pike explored the "Great American Desert," as the Great Plains were then known.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition had a direct influence on the economy of the West even before the explorers had returned to St. Louis. Private John Colter left the expedition on the way home in 1806 to take up the fur trade business. For the next 20 years the likes of Manuel Lisa, Auguste and Pierre Choteau, William Ashley, James Bridger, Kit Carson, Tom Fitzgerald, and William Sublette roamed the West. These part romantic adventurers, part self-made entrepreneurs, part hermits were called mountain men. By 1829, Jedediah Smith knew more about the West than any other person alive.

The Americans became involved in the fur trade in 1810 when John Jacob Astor, at the insistence of his friend Thomas Jefferson, founded the Pacific Fur Company in New York. Astor sent Wilson Price Hunt west in 1811. Hunt followed the Lewis and Clark route as far as the Dakotas and then went overland across Union Pass, near Jackson Hole. The choice of routes proved unsuitable, and it was after much hardship that the Hunt party arrived in Astoria (known then as Fort Astor) in the spring of 1812.

Astor had also sent the ship Tonquin to Astoria under Captain Jonathon Thorn. The Tonquin's crew established Fort Astor in April of 1811 before sailing north to trade with the Indians of Vancouver Island, a well-known port of call for ships trading in furs. Captain Thorn's cruelty -- he was said to be mad by some of his crew -- provoked the Indians to attack the ship and massacre its crew. It is believed that a mortally wounded sailor by the name of Thomas Lewis set fire to the Tonquin's powder magazine, blowing himself, his ship, and as many as several hundred Salish Indians to smithereens.

The situation at Fort Astor worsened such that by the spring of 1813, during the War of 1812, John George McTavish of the British Northwest Fur Company arranged to purchase Fort Astoria. As the HMS Raccoon approached, they were greeted by Americans happily waving a British flag. Fort Astor became Fort George without violence.

In the winter of 1812, before the British takeover, Robert Stuart of Fort Astor returned to St. Louis. He arrived on April 30, 1813, with six men, one of whom had gone insane from the stress of the journey. Stuart and his party were the first to travel the route of the Oregon Trail, although they did so in reverse. Their great contribution to American history was the discovery of the South Pass across the Continental Divide, the gateway for the hundreds of thousands of emigrants to come. However, John Jacob Astor considered knowledge of the South Pass to be proprietary information of great value to his Pacific Fur Company, and he suppressed word of its existence so successfully that credit for the discovery of the South Pass was for many years incorrectly attributed to Jed Smith, who found it on his own some years later.

About ten years after Stuart's journey, when the Canadian Northwest Fur Company was being merged with the Hudson's Bay Company and operations at Fort George were transferred to

Fort Vancouver, Peter Skene Ogden was on his way to Oregon. The Canadian-born son of a Revolutionary War Loyalist, he had gained the reputation of a hellion within the HBC. He is known to have attempted to incinerate a companion for the sport of it, assaulted an HBC official and beat him near to death, and led an entire outpost in a mutiny. For this, he was banished from the seat of HBC operations in eastern Canada in 1824 and assigned to Fort Vancouver. Chief Factor John McLoughlin, the senior official at Fort Vancouver, repeatedly sent Ogden to inspect distant forts and undertake lengthy journeys of exploration -- probably just to keep him out of the way at first, but he proved an able explorer. By the 1830s, Ogden knew more of the West than anyone other than famed mountain man Jedediah Smith. The results of Ogden's explorations were delivered to European cartographers, and the maps which they produced soon found their way to the United States where, ironically, they helped pave the way for the explorers and emigrants who would displace the British presence in the area.

Two lesser-known explorers who made direct impacts on the Oregon and California Trails were James Reddeford Walker and Captain Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville. Walker founded the town of Independence in Missouri in 1829, the same year John McLoughlin started what would become Oregon City. Walker met Captain Bonneville by chance in 1831, and together they followed the Platte River route, already a familiar trail by this time, over the South Pass to the Green River Rendezvous of 1833. Walker and Bonneville split their party there, with Walker heading southwest toward California and Bonneville northwest towards Oregon. Walker found a route to California which was passable by wagons and, obviously realizing the significance of this, later led the first wagon train over Walker Pass into southern (Mexican) California. For his part, Captain Bonneville explored west as far as the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers following a route very close to what became the Oregon Trail.

Scientists followed parts of the Oregon Trail as early as 1818. Harvard botanist Thomas Nuttal traveled with mountain man Manuel Lisa collecting plants in the Missouri River valley, and he later came to the Oregon Country with Nathaniel Wyeth. John James Audubon collected specimens of quadrupeds. Frederick Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttenberg, collected birds and Indian artifacts. Sir William Drummond Stewart of Scotland traveled what was to become the Oregon Trail from 1833 to 1838. He correctly foresaw the end of the fur trade and the coming of the emigrants starting with the missionaries.

The exploration of the Oregon Trail route also included a military presence. The first expedition was led by Stephen H. Long, who was sent by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in 1819 to make a show of force along the Platte River and scare off British traders from the new American territory. Starting in 1842, John C. Fremont, guided by Kit Carson, followed similar orders during his journey from Independence to Fort Vancouver to California. In 1841, Antarctic explorer Captain Charles Wilkes was sent on a spying mission to Oregon and San Francisco.

All of the knowledge of the explorers and traders was put together in 1834 when Nathaniel Wyeth and Jason Lee led the first people over the route of the Oregon Trail with the intention of settling in the Oregon Country.

Jefferson's Envoys to the West

Early in the spring of 1789, Yankee traders John Kendrick and Robert Gray were in Nootka Sound, laying off the coast of what was to be later named Vancouver Island. They were waiting to land and trade with the natives for sea otter skins. The British trader John Meares was also in Nootka Sound when a Spanish fleet arrived, captured Meares, and took him off to Mexico. The Spanish purpose was to shut down British trade in the area. The Americans, who were left unmolested, watched in fascination, correctly supposing that President Washington would be very interested in this "Sea Otter War" between Spain and Britain.

Following the China Circuit, Gray proceeded back to Boston, and upon his arrival on August 9, 1790 became the first American to circumnavigate the globe. A few short weeks later he was back on his ship, the Columbia Redeviva, and again headed for Oregon. In May of 1792, he discovered the elusive river of the west, which he named the Columbia after his ship. He barely beat British Captain Vancouver, who had sailed past the mouth of the river. Gray's discovery gave the

USA a basis for claiming Oregon.

Thomas Jefferson at this time was Washington's Secretary of State. He already had to his credit authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the first Ambassadorship to France. He was also a student of natural history and advocate of Western exploration. In late 1783, Jefferson tried to get Revolutionary War hero George Rogers Clark to lead an overland expedition of exploration, but Clark declined. In Paris three years later, Jefferson listened to a plan by John Ledyard to go overland across Siberia, cross the Bering Strait to Alaska, and dogsled to the Atlantic Ocean. Jefferson assisted Ledyard in obtaining passports, but suspicious Russians stopped him in Siberia.

Jefferson excited French interest in America. Andre Michaux, a French botanist, began planning to explore North America. In 1792 he approached the American Philosophical Society for donations to fund a trek across the United States to the Pacific. He received $128.25, including $25 from President Washington and $12.50 each from Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton.

The amount was hardly enough, and the venture never happened. Michaux became caught up in an attempt to take away Spanish lands in America, an effort which even drew in George Rogers Clark. The project depended upon money owed to France by the U.S. government and died when President Washington refused to cooperate.

Since 1796, Napoleon had been demanding Louisiana from Spain. By 1800, Spain was finally willing to give it up. On October 1, 1800, the secret Treaty of Ildefonso transferred Louisiana to France in return for assurances that they would maintain a buffer between the United States and Mexico. The Spanish agreed to continue to administer the territory from New Orleans.

In 1802, the Spanish Intendant of New Orleans revoked the Americans' right of deposit because of smuggling. The right of deposit allowed American traders to offload their barges into warehouses in New Orleans, where their cargo would await transfer to ocean-going vessels. Without the right of deposit, American trade through New Orleans was crippled because riverboats were stuck there, unable to unload and take on new cargo for the trip north. James Monroe was sent to join Robert Livingston in Paris to attempt to purchase New Orleans and the Floridas for up to $10 million.

At the same time, Jefferson was planning an exploration of Louisiana. Spain refused permission for an exploration across their territory, so Jefferson asked his private secretary Meriweather Lewis to lead a secret expedition into Louisiana to study the land and seek a river route to the Pacific. On January 18, 1803, a secret request for funds for an expedition to subdue Indians and prevent French infiltration was sent to Congress. A month later, the request for $2500 passed as a "commercial venture." Lewis immediately started preparing by ordering supplies and learning the rudiments of scientific observation.

Then, in March of 1803, Napoleon shocked Jefferson by offering all of Louisiana to America and at the same time breaking his promise to Spain of maintaining a buffer between Mexico and the US. The 909,000 square miles of the Louisiana Territory -- some 43,000 square miles larger than the US at that time -- sold for $23,213,567.73, which worked out to about 4¢ an acre.

Lewis was in Pittsburgh supplying his expedition with scientific instruments, trade goods, medicine, ammunition, a rapid fire gun, and a 22-oar keelboat when he heard of the Louisiana Purchase. In June, 1803, Lewis offered joint command of the expedition to William Clark, younger brother of George Rogers Clark.

The rest is history. On May 14, 1804, Lewis and Clark left Camp Wood near St. Louis on a three-year journey. They wintered at Fort Clatsop at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1805-06 and returned to St. Louis in late 1806, after the entire party had been given up for dead. Lewis and Clark provided a wealth of knowledge about the plains, mountains, and rivers to be crossed by the Oregon Trail, as well as information about many of the Indian tribes the overlanders would meet. They also cemented the American claim to Oregon begun by Robert Gray in 1792.

Feeding the Fad for Furs

The development of the Oregon Country started with the demand for furs. The fur trade in Oregon was started in 1778 by Captain Cook trading for sea otter. The Spanish traded from California. The Russians traded the Pacific coast under the auspices of the Russian-American Company. Americans, called Bostons by the natives, entered the fur trade in 1790. Up to 18,000 skins a year were taken from Oregon as part of a 'round the world trading route called the China Circuit.

Then came the land-based fur trappers and traders known as mountain men. Operating as independent entrepreneurs, they would roam the mountains for years at a time collecting furs to trade at prearranged rendezvous with their suppliers. The mountain men traded mostly for simple supplies such as whiskey and gunpowder and for miscellaneous trade goods they could use to bargain with Indians, while their suppliers took the furs back St. Louis, where they could be sold for serious money.

The first two mountain men were members of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery. Private John Colter left the expedition in 1806 as it was on its way back on the headwaters of the Missouri River. George Drouillard returned a year later for the life of furs. Both men worked for the Spaniard Manuel Lisa, who was clandestinely trading American furs out of St. Louis. Colter discovered the geyser basins of "Colter's Hell" and Yellowstone and once escaped naked from an Indian firing squad. Drouillard was killed in 1810 by Shawnees who cut off his head and disemboweled him.

At the same time, millionaire John Jacob Astor was also entering the fur trade. He expanded his business empire to the Pacific coast in 1810 when he started the ill-fated Pacific Fur Company. Astor's plan was to send his ship Tonquin with trade goods around Cape Horn to the Columbia River to meet up with an overland party, load up with furs, and head across the Pacific on the next leg of the China Circuit.

The overland party under Wilson Price Hunt left St. Louis March 1811, crossed Union Pass and headed up the Snake River where they found game scarce, split up, got lost, and had to resort to eating their own moccasins and drinking their own waste fluids. Morale was poor, and by the time the last of Hunt's party straggled into Fort Astor in February, 1812, the Tonquin had been blown up by its last surviving crew member at Nootka Sound off Vancouver Island.

Hunt's party began trading for furs in May, hoping Astor would send another ship. However, the fur trade at Astoria would only last a year, and it never prospered. Trading houses were set up side by side with those of the British North West Company, engendering much ill will and forcing traders into ruinous competition with one another. Robert Stuart and six men left Astoria late in 1812 to return overland to St. Louis and inform his superiors of the sorry state of affairs in Oregon. En route he discovered South Pass, which would be the funnel for so many covered wagons through the Rockies on the Oregon Trail.

In the spring of 1813, the NWC informed the Astorians of the ongoing War of 1812. Fort Astor was surrendered to the NWC without any reluctance. Some Astorians joined the NWC and others went independent.

The mountain men were now the only Americans trading furs in the Oregon Country. Armed with Hawken rifles, pistols, knives, and hatchets, the mountain men carried everything they might need with them: food, tobacco, tools, traps, and bullets. These buckskin-clad fur trappers lived the life of the Indians with whom they worked so closely. They had Indian wives, and in some cases white wives back in St. Louis, as well. They included Ewing Young, Joseph Walker, and Kit Carson. Many were mentioned in passing in the diaries of Oregon Trail emigrants. Some, such as Stephen and Joseph Meek, Old Bill Williams, Tom Fitzpatrick, and William Robidoux, even guided wagon trains to Oregon as the fur trade declined.

During the peak fur trapping years, around 100,000 beaver pelts were being consumed annually for the production of men's top hats. During the 1830s, the Hudson's Bay Company made a concerted effort to trap out the beaver population in Montana and Idaho, the last great concentration of the animals within legal reach of Americans. The beaver may well have been driven to extinction had silk top hats not come into fashion around the same time, all but eliminating the demand for beaver pelts. The bison of the Great Plains then became the animal most commonly hunted for its skin.

The most successful mountain man was William Ashley, who in 1822 advertised in the St. Louis Gazette for men who wanted employment for up to three years. The ad was answered by Jedediah Smith, Thomas Fitzpatrick, David Jackson, William Sublette, and Jim Bridger, who made up the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Ashley earned $80,000 the first year and retired to politics after the second.

Ashley started the first Rocky Mountain Rendezvous in 1825. There were sixteen of these annual get-togethers. The site was predetermined, usually along Wyoming's Green River. The first day was spent in drinking, gambling, ball playing, and racing. From the second day on, it was serious trading. Furs were sold or traded for traps, guns, ammunition, knives, tobacco, and liquor (at $64 a gallon!), all of which had to be brought from St. Louis. The last Rocky Mountain Rendezvous was in 1840.

The British In Oregon

Sitting on the banks of the Columbia River at Vancouver, Washington, on the 4th of July, one can sit back and enjoy one of the largest fireworks displays in the Pacific Northwest. It is ironic that the explosions are directly over the fort that for 24 years administered Oregon for Britain.

The North West Company was started in Canada in 1779. The owners were known as Montreallers and the traders were called Wintering Partners or Nor'westers. An 1804 treaty specified that any Canadian could trade in US territory simply by complying with American laws, and as a result, NWC employees rushed into the upper Missouri Valley. American Indian agent Pierre Choteau objected that they were not complying with a law that allowed only one trader per tribe. Governor Wilkinson of Louisiana issued a proclamation in 1805 that barred foreign residents from his territory.

The NWC came to the Oregon Country in 1807 under David Thompson, an astronomer and map maker, guided by experienced trappers and explorers Alexander MacKenzie and Simon Fraser. They placed a small wooden sign at the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers that stated, "Know hereby that this country is claimed by Great Britain as part of its territories and that the N.W. Company of Merchants from Canada do hereby intend to erect a factory."

For two years the NWC trapped side by side with Astor's Pacific Fur Company. Both companies at that time were unsupplied from home, and while they sometimes cooperated when serious problems arose, the competition hurt both companies. When confronted by a British warship in 1813 and informed of the War of 1812, Donald McKenzie surrendered Fort Astor to the NWC. Rebuffed by Astor, McKenzie returned to the fort, renamed Fort George in honor of the British king, in 1816 to work for the NWC.

The Hudson's Bay Company was originally chartered by King Charles II in 1670 -- it was a long-standing joke that the initials HBC stood for "Here Before Christ" -- and was confined to British territory around Hudson's Bay. After the French and Indian War in 1763 settled the question of colonial primacy in Canada, the HBC spread throughout eastern and central Canada. Some trappers took it upon themselves to unofficially extend the HBC charter over the Rockies into Oregon.

As early as 1819 there were some Nor'westers eager to consolidate with the HBC. They realized that competition between the two companies would soon deplete the populations of the animals they were trapping, bringing disaster upon everyone involved. Early in 1821, an agreement to unite with the HBC was reached, and that summer an act of the British Parliament amended the HBC charter to allow absorption of the NWC.

The Hudson's Bay Company came to Oregon legally and in force. Governor Simpson administered a vast territory that stretched from Alaska to California to the Rockies. The entire Columbia River watershed came under the sub-jurisdiction of Chief Factor John McLoughlin, a 6'4" white-haired trader from Eastern Canada. Fort George at the mouth of the Columbia was abandoned in favor of Fort Vancouver, completed in 1825 five miles from the confluence of the Columbia and its major tributary, the Willamette River.

Peter Skene Ogden was assigned to Fort Vancouver as Chief Trader in 1825. McLoughlin

immediately sent him to Montana to replace Alexander Ross, who was unsuccessfully trying to implement a policy of excluding American free trappers. Most of Ogden's men deserted him in Montana and became mountain men. Ogden himself would spend the next several years engaged in exploring. By the 1830s, Ogden probably knew more about the West than anyone save Jed Smith.

Ogden and McLoughlin were responsible for maintaining all of the forts along the Oregon Trail past Fort Bridger, which was maintained as a private enterprise by mountain man Jim Bridger. Fort Hall was originally built by Wyeth and later purchased by the HBC; Fort Walla Walla was originally a NWC fort; Forts Boise and Vancouver were built by the HBC.

British fur trapping in Oregon began to decline in 1833, and many trappers retired to farm the French Prairie region of the Willamette Valley. The Puget Sound Agricultural Company was established near Fort Nisqually to encourage farming in that area, as well. John McLoughlin had claimed the area around Willamette Falls in 1828 for the HBC and purchased it for himself in 1845.

Throughout his career, McLoughlin was beset with problems caused by Americans who questioned his authority and resented his presence as the representative of the former colonial masters of the United States. Hall Jackson Kelley, Nathaniel Wyeth, Ewing Young, Jedediah Smith, and Jason Lee were particular problems. Adding to his troubles, McLoughlin's boss would constantly drop in on whirlwind inspection tours.

McLoughlin was under orders to discourage American settlement. When it became obvious that they could not be kept out, McLoughlin encouraged them to settle in the Willamette Valley, probably hoping that he could contain the American presence. He was moved by the plight of newly-arrived immigrants, and many destitute and broken families got their start in Oregon thanks to supplies and equipment he loaned them. At the time of his death,
thousands of dollars were still owed to him by American settlers.

Because he defied orders, he was demoted and forced to retire by the British; because he represented the British, his land was confiscated by the Americans. McLoughlin died in a home to which the title had been taken away. His land claims and citizenship were honored posthumously, and today he is considered the "Father of Oregon."

The Great White-Headed Eagle

He stood six foot four inches tall. His abundant hair had turned brilliantly white. For twenty years, he had absolute control over a territory stretching from California to Alaska to Nebraska. The natives called him the White-Headed Eagle.

John McLoughlin was born in 1784 at Riviere du Loup, Quebec. He was the son and grandson of Irish farmers. His mother was a niece of Simon Fraser, for whom the Fraser River was named. Raised a Catholic, McLoughlin left home at 16 to be trained in medicine. At 19, he was practicing in Montreal. He joined the North West Company as a resident physician and fur trader. In 1812, he married Marguerite McKay, the Chippewa widow of a NWC trader who had been killed in the Tonquin disaster. She brought three children, he an older son, and together they had four more.

In 1824 the NWC was absorbed by the much older Hudson's Bay Company (Here Before Christ, it was said of it). McLoughlin was named co-factor of Fort George at Astoria, one of 25 Chief Factors in the newly-consolidated HBC. He was paid 16/17 of a share of the company -- about $8000 a year -- plus a £500 stipend.

McLoughlin was personally appointed by Governor George Simpson to head up 13 outposts from a base of operations at Fort Vancouver. He was the Chief Factor of the largest trading center west of the Rockies prior to the California gold rush. Built north of the Columbia River near its confluence with the Willamette, Fort Vancouver had eight substantial buildings within an enclosure for the 100 whites living there, and a number of smaller buildings outside the walls for a population of 300 Indians. Indians were not allowed inside and were forced to trade through a porthole in the door. Managing the post's fur trading activities was only part of the job. Fort Vancouver also boasted a farm producing food to be exported to Alaska, a small shipyard, a lumber

mill, and regular harvests of the astonishing salmon runs in nearby rivers.

McLoughlin ran the Columbia district like a feudal baron. He kept it free from war. His influence was wise but his word was law. He employed Kanakas from the Sandwich Islands as servants (these Hawaiians were called "Blue Men" because their skin reportedly took on a distinctly bluish hue during the winter months).

American immigrants started arriving in great numbers in the 1840s. When the overlanders arrived, quite often in dire distress, they were aided with HBC boats and food at The Dalles. McLoughlin sold them goods on credit and advised them of the best lands in the Willamette Valley. John Boardman wrote in 1843, "Well received by Doct. McLaughlin, who charged nothing for the use of his boat sent up for us, nor for the provisions, but not satisfied with that sent us plenty of salmon and potatoes, furnished us house room, and wood free of charge, and was very anxious that all should get through safe."

Immigrants were told of the Provisional Government, which was created from a desire to seek protection from HBC rules, and advised to abide by its laws. In 1845, with British subjects badly outnumbered by the more recently arrived Americans, McLoughlin agreed to bring the HBC's local operations under the Provisional Government's jurisdiction. Clark County was created north of the Columbia River, and two HBC employees became officers in the government.

This cooperation with the Americans was McLoughlin's downfall. Governor Simpson demoted McLoughlin following an exchange of increasingly argumentative letters. Accused of violating the spirit of his contract with the company and engaging in business on his own, his stipend was eliminated. On November 20, 1845, McLoughlin sent off one last angry letter to Simpson and retired to Oregon City.

In 1829, Dr. McLoughlin had taken possession of a claim at Willamette Falls which would grow into Oregon City. The claim was for the HBC, although he later purchased it from the Company. He surveyed, platted, erected buildings, and made improvements. In 1846 he built his retirement home, but McLoughlin remained a public figure during his retirement. He donated land for a jail and female seminary, and in 1851 he was elected mayor of Oregon City.

The last years of his life were not pleasant. Many Americans could not see beyond McLoughlin's years of service to the British Hudson's Bay Company, and despite the aid he rendered to many overlanders and his willingness to compromise with the Provisional Government, a conspiracy to strip him of his claim and ruin his reputation began as soon as Oregon became a part of the United States in 1849. Samuel Thurston, the Oregon Territory's Delegate to Congress, had written into the Donation Land Act a section giving most of McLoughlin's HBC claim to the legislature. Thurston and Jason Lee made false statements about McLoughlin before the US Supreme Court in an effort to publicly discredit him.

McLoughlin continued to live in his house and became a naturalized American citizen in 1851, while he was serving as mayor of Oregon City. However, the legal challenge continued, and McLoughlin died in 1857 before the injustice could be rectified. In 1862, the state returned portions of his claim to his family. In 1909, his house was spared from encroaching industrial development by moving it up the hill to where it now stands proudly restored as a National Historical Site. In 1957, Dr. John McLoughlin was named "Father of Oregon" by the state legislature.

Jason Lee's Mission to Oregon

When the first wave of American settlers arrived in the Oregon Country, it was ironic that they were greeted by two Canadians: one a sympathetic rival who was under orders to discourage them, and the other probably the single person most responsible for establishing white settlements, organizing schools, and creating a government. The first was John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. The second was Jason Lee, Methodist missionary to Oregon.

With the exception of a handful of explorers, traders, and mountain men, the first Americans to arrive in the Oregon Territory were Protestant Missionaries sent by the Methodist-Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches. They failed in their primary task of converting the Indians, but they were successful in providing a foundation of order for white settlement in Oregon

during a critical and potentially chaotic time of transition. In the course of trying to bring Christianity to the Indians, they founded the first permanent schools in Oregon. Their presence was also reassuring to people contemplating the trip to Oregon, as the missions, like the trading posts and forts that dotted the Trail, were seen as islands of civilization in the wilderness.

Attention was first drawn to Oregon in 1829 when the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) heard a report from their Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) mission about the abundance of unconverted Indians on the West Coast. The ABCFM was a Boston-based group of missionaries supported chiefly by the Congregational Church but also embraced the Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Methodist-Episcopals. They had been working to convert Indians since 1816, when they set up a mission among the Cherokee.

While the ABCFM would go on to play a major role in foreign lands, at that time their only prior experience outside the United States was in Liberia, an American colony in Africa created to send home freed slaves, and Hawaii, which was an important stop on the China Circuit. Captain Jonathon Green was dispatched from Oahu to explore the Oregon coast, which at that time extended from Alaska to California. Over the course of a two-year journey, he obtained the names of 34 tribes of Indians which he believed needed instruction. His report reached Boston in 1832.

At the same time, four Flathead Indians of the Nez Perce tribe in northern Idaho traveled 3000 miles to find General William Clark in St. Louis, who had explored Oregon 25 years earlier as a captain with Meriwether Lewis. They wanted to know about the "true mode of worshiping the Great Spirit." They wanted a copy of the "book of directions" on how to "conduct themselves in order to enjoy his favor" and how to "be received into the country where the Great Spirit resides and live forever with him."

A letter from these Indians was printed in the leading publication of the Methodist-Episcopal Church. This letter and Captain Green's report from Hawaii about the 34 heathen tribes of Oregon sparked the imagination of the people of the United States. Meetings were held to see what citizens could do. Committees were appointed to inquire into the situation.

Dr. Wilbur Fisk of Wesleyan University in Massachusetts asked the Methodist Mission Board and the ABCFM to establish a mission among the Flatheads. An appropriation of $3000 was secured and Dr. Fisk's former pupil, the Rev. Jason Lee, was chosen to lead a caravan to Oregon. Thirty-year-old Lee was working near his birthplace in Ontario when he received word of his appointment. Before heading west, Lee was sent on a tour of the eastern states to present his missionary cause to the people.

Lee contracted with Nathaniel Wyeth to accompany him on his second trading expedition. Supplies for the mission were forwarded to Oregon on Wyeth's brig, the May Dacre. The Wyeth-Lee Party set out with the 1834 fur caravan of Captain William Sublette, which also included naturalists J.K. Townsend and Thomas Nuttall.

They left Independence on April 28, 1834, and arrived at the Green River in time for the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous, the annual gathering of fur traders, Indians, and mountain men. There, they separated from the Sublette Party and struck out for the Oregon Country.

On Sunday July 27, 1834, during a layover along the Snake River, the local mountain men, Indians, and missionaries heard the first Protestant sermon delivered in the Oregon Country. It was reportedly a festive day, with Indians in full regalia and mountain men dressed in what passed for their Sunday best. After the sermon, there was a horse race in which a man was killed when he fell from his steed. The next day, Lee conducted the first Protestant funeral service west of the Rockies. Wyeth stayed behind to construct Fort Hall while the Lee Party went on to Fort Vancouver.

At Fort Vancouver, McLoughlin insisted it was too dangerous to be among the Flatheads and suggested instead the Willamette Valley. The Hudson's Bay Company provided men, boats, and provisions for the journey to Mission Bottom, outside present-day Salem, in the fall of 1834. The site selected was among the melons and cucumbers of former Astorian Joseph Gervais. They pitched tents and started building an unhewn log cabin. Men trained as missionaries found themselves pressed into service as woodsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths, and husbandmen. Lee was heard to say, "men never worked harder or performed less," and the first storm of the winter rained down upon a roofless house. They finished the cabin between storms. By spring, they had 30 acres fenced and planted.

Lee founded a school at Mission Bottom to educate the local Indians in what he considered a proper, Christian manner. There were fourteen Indian students the first year, of whom seven died and five ran away. In 1836 there were twenty-five students, of whom sixteen fell ill. Only one of the surviving students converted. By 1842, almost all the Indians in the Willamette Valley were dead of diseases brought to their homelands by white missionaries, mountain men, sailors, and settlers. The missions in western Oregon no longer had any reason to exist. Some of them degenerated into crass commercialism before being shut down.

In March of 1836, Lee wrote to his mentor, Dr. Fisk, to complain that without the able assistance of tradesmen and farmers to oversee the day-to-day details of running the mission, there was little time available for the business of religion. Lee's letter resulted in reinforcements in 1837 and 1838. The first arrived by ship on May 28, 1837. Among the new arrivals were such early notables as Elijah White, who would later return to the United States to lead the 1842 migration to Oregon; Alanson Beers and W.H. Wilson, who were in Oregon's first government; and Lot Whitcomb, who built the first steamboat in Oregon and founded the town of Milwaukie.

In 1837, Lee chose The Dalles as the site of his first branch mission, where he placed his nephew Daniel Lee in charge. Wascopam, as the mission was called, was at first successful, but backsliders soon outnumbered converts. In 1847, Wascopam was deeded over to Perrin Whitman, the nephew of Marcus Whitman.

After the arrival of the reinforcement of 1838, Lee returned to New England to plead for more farmers and mechanics to support his mission. At Westport, Missouri, he received news of the deaths of his wife -- Anna Maria Pittman, whom he had married only the previous year -- and son in childbirth. Lee carried with him a petition from the Americans in Oregon to the US government asking for protection from the British. This petition marked Lee's transition from missionary to colonizer.

Lee remained in New England for two years recruiting settlers for Oregon. His efforts were successful, and he married Lucy Thompson before returning to Oregon on the ship Lausanne with the Great Reinforcement of 1840. Lee's fifty recruits included seven ministers, two doctors, four farmers, six mechanics, and four teachers. Among them was George Abernethy, a miller who would become steward of the branch mission at Oregon City and later the first man to be elected governor of Oregon. Upon their arrival, the population at Mission Bottom totaled forty adults and fifty children. Branch missions were started at Nisqually, Clatsop, Umpqua, and Willamette Falls (near the present-day sites of Tacoma, Astoria, Roseburg, and Oregon City, respectively). Nisqually and Clatsop were both later abandoned. The Methodists organized a congregation in Oregon City in 1840 and began building a church there in 1842. The church was completed in 1844, the same year Oregon City was incorporated under the Provisional Government. The Oregon City congregation is the oldest continuous Protestant congregation in Oregon, and it is second only to the Catholic congregation at St. Paul in longevity.

In 1841, serious flooding made it apparent that Lee had chosen a poor location for his original mission, and he relocated from Mission Bottom to Mission Mill, a site within present-day Salem. Lee's Indian Manual Training School was moved to its present location at Chemeketa, and the following year a school for the white population was started at Mission Mill. The Oregon Institute, as it was known, was the first school for white Americans established west of Missouri. It later grew to become Willamette University, the first college in the Oregon Territory.

Lee was replaced in July, 1843, by Rev. George Gary for not converting enough Indians to justify the vast expenditures needed to maintain his missions. Lee was in Honolulu, heading home by ship, when he learned of this. He continued on without waiting for his replacement to arrive.

Lee spent the last two years of his life seeking vindication. He died in Canada on March 2, 1845, and his body was returned to Salem in 1906.

The Whitman Mission

The first American missionaries to Oregon were the Methodist-Episcopals supported by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in New England. The Methodist-

Episcopal Mission Board sponsored Jason Lee in 1834.

Two months after Jason Lee was appointed as missionary, the ABCFM sent Rev. Samuel Parker to Oregon to scout other locations for missions. Parker might have arrived in Oregon before Lee, except that he traveled only as far as St. Louis and waited there to catch the outbound fur caravans of 1835.

He was joined in St. Louis by the Presbyterian lay physician Dr. Marcus Whitman, who had been chosen to lead one of the missions for which Parker was scouting locations. They attended the annual fur trappers' rendezvous in Wyoming, and Whitman returned to Boston carrying a plea for spiritual assistance from the Nez Perce Indians. Reverend Parker went ahead to the lands of the Cayuse, Walla Wallas, Spokanes, and Nez Perce, where he chose sites for missions at Tshimakain, Waiilatpu, and Lapwai (near the present-day cities of Spokane, Walla Walla, and Lewiston, respectively). After paying visits to Fort Vancouver and Lee's mission in the Willamette Valley, Parker returned to Boston by ship via the Sandwich Islands and collected his knowledge of the West in a map for future travelers.

The ABCFM had a policy of preferring married missionaries, so Dr. Whitman married Narcissa Prentiss, who wanted to come to Oregon badly enough to marry a man she had never met. Whitman enlisted Reverend Henry Harmon Spalding, just out of seminary, Spalding's wife, and Rev. William Gray to join him. The Whitman party came overland with the fur caravans of 1836, making Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding the first white women on the Oregon Trail. A two-wheeled cart brought along for Mrs. Spalding, who could not ride a horse, was the first wheeled vehicle on the Oregon Trail. The party was able to get the cart as far as Fort Boise before being forced to abandon it due to the unimproved stretches of trail ahead of them. Upon their arrival in the Oregon Country, the women were sent ahead to Fort Vancouver while the menfolk built the Whitman Mission at Waiilatpu, near the Walla Walla River. The following spring, they went on to Lapwai along the Clearwater River to build Spalding's mission before retrieving their wives.

Whitman's mission was among the comparatively warlike Cayuse, while the Spaldings were among the Nez Perce, who were more favorably inclined toward whites. Unfortunately, Spalding's fiery temper soon destroyed their cooperative spirit. Both missions tried to teach the Indians to use grist mills but could not convince them to become farmers. The third mission scouted by Parker, at Tshimakain, was built in 1838 when the ABCFM reinforced the Presbyterian Whitman and Congregationalist Spalding with fellow Congregationalists Rev. Cushing Eells and Rev. Elkanah Walker. This was the only reinforcement Whitman and Spalding would receive.

The difficult circumstances of the missions were not at all understood by the American Board. Indians had well-established religions of their own and could not be rushed into conversion, and the missionaries were repeatedly insulted for their low success rates. Whitman's and Spalding's calls for reinforcements in 1841 and 1842 instead resulted in the ABCFM's decision to close Waiilatpu and Lapwai.

Immediately upon receiving the message to close the missions and transfer everyone to Tshimakain, a decision was made to send Marcus Whitman back to New York with a petition from Spalding and others asking the Board to reconsider. He was accompanied on a rare midwinter journey by Asa Lovejoy, an emigrant of 1842. They averaged a remarkable sixty miles a day for 150 days despite resting on Sundays and often being forced to take refuge from snowstorms. Rather than follow the Oregon Trail back to Missouri, they cut south by way of Taos to skirt around warring Indians. There, Whitman joined up with a Santa Fe Trail caravan bound for St. Louis.

In Boston, Whitman was censured by the ABCFM for abandoning his post despite the backing of the respected Rev. Samuel Parker, who had sited the missions. The Board did, however, decide to withdraw their order closing the missions.

On his return to the mission in 1843, Whitman played an instrumental role in guiding the first major emigrant caravan to the Willamette Valley. At Independence, he met up with a large group preparing to leave for Oregon, the Burnett-Nesmith-Applegate Party. Whitman agreed to travel with them. Captain John Gantt had been hired as a guide as far as Fort Hall, and from there Whitman guided them on to his mission. At the mission, the party of over 800 souls split up into smaller companies, most of them putting into the Columbia River at Fort Walla Walla on makeshift

timber rafts for the last leg of the journey.

Whitman's mission at Waiilatpu became a regular stopping place on the Oregon Trail from 1843 to 1847. In 1844, the seven orphaned children of Henry Sager and his wife, who died on the plains, were entrusted to the care of the Whitmans. In 1845, the Whitmans became legal guardians of the Sager children.

On November 29, 1847, the Whitman Mission was attacked by Cayuse Indians. Marcus Whitman was called to the door and struck with a tomahawk from behind. When Narcissa checked on the commotion, she was likewise killed. Sixteen other men and older boys, including two of the Sagers, were killed. Fifty-three women and children were taken captive and subjected to "indescribable indignities" before being freed a month later by Peter Skene Ogden of the HBC, who ransomed the captives for $500 worth of trade goods.

Measles is thought to have been the main reason for the attack. There had been an epidemic among the Cayuse, and rumors spread that the Whitmans were trying to poison them. To make matters worse, there was a custom among the Cayuse that medicine men who could not cure should be killed.

The government in Oregon City sent troops to fight the Cayuse War, the first major Indian War in the Oregon Country. The Oregon Rangers, as the troopers called themselves, headed for Tshimakain and Lapwai and escorted the missionaries safely to Oregon City. Later, an Indian bragging of taking Mrs. Whitman's scalp was killed and five prisoners were taken back to Oregon City for trial. There was little effort to establish that the five prisoners had participated in the mission killings, and indeed, there is some speculation that the Cayuse simply offered up five volunteers in order to appease the wrath of the white settlers and end the fighting. Whatever the circumstances, it appears likely that the trial was a sham and that the Indians, who were hung on June 3, 1850, were effectively lynched. The last words spoken by one of the Cayuse warriors were reportedly, "Now friends, now friends."

As a result of the violence at the Whitman Mission, all ABCFM missions in Oregon were ordered closed. This had the effect of slightly shortening the Oregon Trail, as its route would now bypass the former site of the Whitman Mission. Among the overlanders, fear of Indian attack along the Trail increased substantially.

Whatever mistakes the missionaries made in ministering to the sick and needy were far overshadowed in history by the martyr status accorded the Whitmans.

The End of the Missions

In the mid to late 1830s, missionaries came to the Oregon Country representing the Catholic, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist-Episcopal Churches. Their primary mission was to convert the natives and minister to the spiritual needs of the fur trappers. Their success, however, came more in the area of serving the increasing number of emigrants. Jason Lee actively promoted emigration, and Marcus Whitman was instrumental to the success of the first wagon train that braved the Trail by leading them to his mission.

The Catholic Black Robes arrived first, followed by the Methodists under Lee and the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, representing the ABCFM, under Whitman and Spalding. These groups were reinforced in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

Although there were Catholic priests in the Oregon Country since the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1824, the first Catholic missionaries came to Oregon from Montreal in late 1838. The Rev. Father Francis Blanchet, later to become Archbishop of Oregon, and the Rev. Father Modeste Demers were both French-Canadians. Their parish was likewise comprised mostly of French-Canadians, either active or retired fur traders.

A mission church was started at St. Paul on French Prairie just north of Lee's mission. Branch missions were opened at Cowlitz and Nisqually. The Rev. Father P.J. DeSmet came to the Flathead Indians of northern Idaho from St. Louis a year later and built an Indian school and the beautiful church of the Sacred Heart near Couer D'Alene.

The Catholic missions were reinforced by ship from Belgium in 1844, including six Sisters

of Notre Dame who started a convent at French Prairie. A convent and girls orphanage started by the Sisters of the Holy Names on the Willamette River has since become Marylhurst College. When Lee's Oregon Institute was suffering for lack of students, Blanchet offered to buy it and merge it with his boys school, but Lee turned him down. Father Blanchet's school became the University of Portland, while the Oregon Institute became Willamette University.

Several Independent Congregational missionaries also came to Oregon without the backing of the ABCFM. The Reverends J.S. Griffin and Asahel Munger and their wives were sent by the North Litchfield Congregational Association of Connecticut in 1839 because they were dissatisfied with the progress of the ABCFM missions. Griffin and Munger came west with fur trappers and wintered with the Spaldings and Whitmans. The journey caused Munger to become mentally deranged, so he was sent to work with Lee's older, more established Methodist Mission. It may be that they believed the larger community at Mission Bottom would be better able to deal with a madman in their midst. However, once there, Munger became obsessed with the belief that the Indians needed a miracle and, apparently attempting to provide one singlehandedly, impaled himself upon a spike over a blacksmith's forge. He was badly burned and died of his injuries the following day.

Griffin settled on the Tualatin Plains near Hillsboro, where in 1842 he started the First Congregational Church of Oregon. In 1840, Rev. Harvey Clark, also an Independent Congregational missionary, came across the Oregon Trail. His intentions were to labor among the Indians. As there were few surviving Indians in the Willamette Valley by this time, he settled on a claim near Griffin's in Forest Grove where he and Tabitha Brown (the Mother of Oregon) established the Tualatin Academy in 1848. In 1854, the Academy became Pacific University, the second-oldest college in Oregon. Willamette University, founded by Jason Lee as the Oregon Institute, is the oldest.

Not all of the missionaries were able to live out long and productive lives in Oregon. In July of 1843, the ABCFM recalled Jason Lee to Boston to answer for his low number of converts. Still seeking the vindication of his labors in Oregon, Lee died two years later. Without a population of Indians to focus their labors, the Methodist missions degenerated into gross commercialism and materialism.

Probably the low point of this materialism were the efforts made by Alvan Waller on behalf of the Methodists. To his credit was the establishment of the church at Oregon City and the revitalization of the mission at Wascopam; to his detriment were the efforts he made in cooperation with the anti-British faction of American settlers to deny John McLoughlin's claim to Mill Island, which Governor Abernethy subsequently claimed as Governors Island. Further, Waller cooperated with Jason Lee in his successful effort to include language in the Donation Land Act of 1850 that specifically denied McLoughlin his Oregon City claim.

One missionary who outlasted the others and had a profound effect on the development of Oregon was Dr. George Atkinson, the only missionary directly sponsored by the Congregational Church. He arrived in 1848 and spent his first 15 years in the Oregon Country serving the Congregational Church in Oregon City, which is today named for him. During that time, he was responsible for the creation of Pacific University and the Oregon City Women's Seminary, but his greatest contribution to the future was the creation of the state system of public education, for which he is today remembered as the "Father of Oregon Education." When Territorial Governor Joe Lane gave his inaugural address to the legislature, the section calling for a system of public schools was written by Dr. Atkinson at Lane's request. The first public school was Barclay School in Oregon City, housed in the former Women's Seminary that Atkinson had established some years earlier. By 1862, the system was in place: there were 125 academies, institutes, and seminaries accepting students in Oregon. One of them, St. Mary's Academy in Portland, is still open to this day.

All of the missions except the churches at St. Paul and Oregon City are relegated to history, but they made a lasting mark on Oregon.

Unit II. The Overlanders: 1841-1866

Oregon Trail Chronology 1841-1866

For twenty five years, as many as 650,000 people may have pulled up stakes and headed for the farms and gold fields of the West. No accurate records exist of traffic on the great overland trails of that era, and some believe the figure may have been as low as 250,000 people. However, estimates have been slowly creeping upwards over the years, and it now seems that something like half a million people headed west from the 1840s through the Civil War. It is generally agreed that Oregon was the destination for about a third of the emigrants, California for another third, and the remainder were bound for Utah, Colorado, and Montana. This was the last of the so-called Great Migrations. It lasted until the coming of the railroads.

1841
The first emigrant party, the Bidwell-Bartleson party, heads for California with 100 farmers and their families. En route, some of them change their minds and opt for Oregon, instead.

1842
Dr. Elijah White's party of 200 is known for resulting in many of the guidebooks that would be used by later emigrants. The journals of Medorem Crawford and Asa Lovejoy and the narratives of John C. Fremont contain useful information; the guidebook of Lansford Hastings contains fatal misinformation. White, Crawford, Lovejoy, Fremont, and Hastings would all later find their ways back to the United States and guide other outbound emigrant parties.

1843
Over 800 people outfit for the first major migration and push their wagons through much of the intermountain west, establishing that a wagon road to Oregon is feasible. Jesse Applegate's misfortunes on the Columbia River inspire him to forge a new route into Oregon. Oregon's Provisional Government is formed in anticipation of the arrival of this wave of emigrants.

1844
Four major wagon trains bring 2000 farmers, merchants, mechanics, and lawyers to Oregon. One party each leaves Independence, Westport, St. Joseph, and Bellevue (near Council Bluffs).

1845
An estimated 5000 Oregon-bound emigrants are on the Trail this year, most of them departing from Independence and Westport. Sam Barlow's party arrives late at The Dalles and strikes out to find an overland route around the south shoulder of Mount Hood. Stephen Meek leads a party through the uncharted reaches of central Oregon, gets lost in the high desert, and still beats Barlow to The Dalles.

1846
A relatively light year, with but 1000 emigrants heading to California and Oregon. Barlow's Mount Hood Toll Road and Applegate's Southern Route extend the Oregon Trail into the Willamette Valley. However, 1846 is best remembered today as the year of the ill-fated Donner party.

1847
A new destination opens as Brigham Young leads the Mormon Brigade to Utah. The 2000 souls on the trails this year include many non-Mormons bound for Oregon and California.

1848
A massive Mormon exodus swells the ranks of the emigrants to some 4000 pioneers, though it's an off year for the Oregon Trail side of the Platte River as cholera strikes Independence. Council

Bluffs and St. Joseph replace Independence as the leading jumping-off points. The discovery of gold in California draws off more than three-quarters of the male population of Oregon, but most return before the arrival of the 49ers the following year.

1849
Word of the gold strike at Sutter's Mill turns the trail into a superhighway as 30,000 emigrants, most of whom are California-bound, race west. Overland parties come from as far away as the east coast. Cholera spreads west along the Trail, helped by damp weather.

1850
There are more 49ers traveling the trail this year than in 1849! Some 55,000 emigrants make this the banner year on the trail, but cholera runs rampant, killing thousands.

1851
Word of the cholera epidemic spreads, discouraging many and holding traffic down to about 10,000 souls. Most emigrants start out for California but news of the Donation Land Act causes many to change their minds mid-route and opt for Oregon, instead. From 1851 to 1855, nearly half of those who would claim land in Oregon under the Donation Land Act leave the United States and head west.

1852, 1853
The cholera epidemic has nearly burned itself out and the gold rush is back on: 70,000 people head west in these years, about 50,000 in '52 and 20,000 in '53. Half leave from St. Joe and half from Omaha, and half head to California and half to Oregon.

1854
Most of the 10,000 emigrants on the trails this year are headed for Oregon. Problems arise as an Army command is annihilated near Fort Laramie, precipitating a three-year Indian war.

1855, 1856, 1857
Indian wars do what cholera could not and keep emigration down to only 5000 each year. Travel changes with the beginning of freight traffic leaving Leavenworth, Atchison, and Westport. The largest freight company is the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell.

1858
Gold is discovered in Colorado, and it's Pikes Peak or Bust! Heavy freight traffic to the military forts gives an assurance of safety, and 10,000 head west.

1859
30,000 travel the trails with no single objective in mind. Destinations include Colorado, Utah, California and Oregon. Stagecoaches make their first appearance on the Oregon Trail with the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express carrying passengers and mail. Horace Greeley follows his own advice and goes west.

1860
15,000 people escape the threat of Civil War by moving west. Silver strikes bring thousands to Nevada, including Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain). Russell, Majors, and Waddell begin the Pony Express from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California. Pony Express stops dot the Oregon Trail every fifteen miles; every other station is a stage stop. Sir Richard Burton, the English lecturer and explorer, visits Salt Lake City.

1861, 1862, 1863
The removal of troops from the western frontier to fight in the Civil War drops emigration to 5000 in '61 and '62, and 10,000 in '63 after word of gold strikes in Montana filters back east. The Pony

Express goes bankrupt following the completion of transcontinental telegraph lines. Pony Express owner Ben Holladay extends his stage company to Oregon.

1864, 1865, 1866
Some of the heaviest traffic since the California Gold Rush, but many emigrants are bound for Montana via the Bozeman Trail. 20,000 in '64 and 25,000 in '65 and '66 travel the Trails despite Sioux uprisings at several points along the way.

The end of the overland trails era began in 1866 with the formation of the Union Pacific Railroad Company. Following the "wedding of the rails" in 1869, an emigrant could travel from Omaha to the Pacific Ocean in less than two weeks. However, wagon trains could still be seen on the Oregon Trail through the 1880s. We have had visitors at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center who recalled making the trip to Oregon by wagon as late as 1912 because their families couldn't afford to buy train tickets, but the last wagon widely known to have braved the Oregon Trail was driven by Ezra Meeker in 1906. Meeker was an early emigrant who spent his last years touring the country to remind people of the significance of the Oregon Trail before the experiences of his generation vanished from living memory. Even today, he is considered the father of all efforts to mark, preserve, and raise awareness of the Oregon Trail.

Did the Oregon Trail Start Here?

Where did the Oregon Trail really start? The answer is difficult because there was no single Oregon Trail. There were cutoffs, alternate routes, and occasionally entirely new trails were blazed in the hope of finding an easier path. For over forty years, emigrants left the eastern half of North America with every intention of settling in the western half, even if they had no idea exactly where it was or how to get there.

Pioneers -- and for at least the first few years, the emigrants were truly so -- came from farms and villages across the Old Northwest and Southwest Territories. They sold their land, packed their trunks, and booked passage on a steamer bound for Missouri River towns such as Independence, St. Joseph, or Council Bluffs.

These jumping-off spots, as they were called, were places to supply the bands of travelers with the items necessary to get the party to its destination: a wagon, draft animals, clothing, food, and camping supplies. Early farmers and miners found it necessary to carry with them the tools of their craft -- plows, harnesses, picks, pans, and shovels -- but as towns and cities sprang up in the West, it was no longer necessary to take with them what they could buy in Oregon City or Sacramento.

As the trails became more heavily traveled, another handy and necessary item became available in the Midwest: guidebooks for emigrants could be purchased for a nominal fee, around 10 cents. At first, they were not all that reliable. Authors working from memory or interviews with recent travelers sometimes mixed up beacons or guideposts along the way.

In later years, as the Civil War neared and Indian uprisings became common, men would hire themselves out as guides or scouts. They were typically about as reliable as the guidebooks.

The initial jumping-off spot for emigrants to Oregon was Independence, Missouri. Its location on both the Missouri River and the Santa Fe Trail destined it for this status. When Oregon became a destination for Americans fleeing the economic hardships of the East in favor of free land and opportunity in the West, the facilities for outfitting for the trek were already in place at Independence.

Emigrants would camp for up to three weeks along the river banks where the steamers disgorged them as they purchased animals, had a wagon made, trained their teams, and bought their supplies. Then they met at Independence Court House Square, where they hit the trail for Oregon.

The initial route of the westward overland trail was to follow the Santa Fe Trail into Kansas until it reached a small, inconspicuous sign, probably the most understated road sign in American history. Marking the beginning of an arduous four-to-six month, 2000 mile trek across plains, desert, rivers, and mountains, the sign simply read, "Road to Oregon." One in ten pioneers would be

left in graves along the way. Families would be broken, and treasured possessions lost or left behind at river crossings or at difficult mountain grades.

Overcrowding at the Wayne City landing for Independence, followed soon by a cholera epidemic, left emigrants looking for other jumping-off spots. Westport, Oregon Crossing, Fort Leavenworth, Weston, and St. Joseph -- where the Pony Express started its brief but colorful existence -- were further up the river in Missouri, which meant that jumping off from those towns would also save a few days' travel.

When the Mormons were chased out of Illinois and headed west under the leadership of Brigham Young, their Winter Quarters were on the west bank of the Missouri River (pronounced "Misery River" by some) just north of present-day Omaha. The Saints set out for Utah the next spring following the north shore of the Platte River. For several hundred miles the Oregon Trail and Mormon Trail paralleled each other on opposite banks of the Platte River, until the two Trails joined for a time near Fort Laramie.

Many emigrants during and after the 1850s used jumping-off spots in Nebraska and Iowa at such places as Plattesmouth, Nebraska City, Council Bluffs, and Omaha. The farther west they jumped off, the shorter their trip would be.

Following the discovery of gold in the West, the emigrant trails took on a different character. Covered farm wagons carrying entire families and their worldly possessions were replaced by handcarts, two-wheelers, or pack animals without wagons carrying bachelors and wayward husbands who often had no intention of permanently settling in the West. All previous jumping-off spots were used by these fortune hunters.

Shops in Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska kept up with the changing times and brought in new stock to cater to their shifting clientele. Entirely novel products began showing up, especially those made out of a new and wondrous material: rubber. Emigrants quickly took to wearing India rubber boots, raincoats, and life preservers, and some even complained in their diaries that their air mattresses had leaked during the night.

Wherever they jumped off from, they were headed west. And their journeys had just begun.

Didn't the Oregon Trail Go By Here?

Across the street from Barton Store in Clackamas County is a triangular sign bearing the National Park Service's Oregon Trail wagon logo and the words "Route of the Oregon Trail." It is on the closest well-maintained road to the actual route of the pioneer emigrants. There are about 300 identical signs across the state of Oregon, showing where modern tourists can parallel the Trail's route.

There are two other similar signs, as well. One in Oregon City at Abernethy Green points to the "End of the Oregon Trail," and another (a gift from Oregon City) in Independence, Missouri, reads "Beginning of the Oregon Trail."

Where did the Oregon Trail really go? The answer is not simple, as there was no single route, just a destination: Oregon's Willamette Valley.

The route started on the banks of the Missouri River, originally at Independence, then Westport, then Weston across from Fort Leavenworth. The first route followed the Santa Fe Trail into Kansas Territory. The Westport Road bypassed the Santa Fe Trail, went through Shawnee Mission in Kansas, and caught up with the Oregon Trail at Lawrence. The Weston route caught up with the main trunk of the Trail at the Big Blue River.

The first few days on the Trail were times of trial and error, of sightseeing, of getting used to new conventions. Rules of the road had to be established and leaders elected. Up at dawn, on the road by seven. No swearing. A "nooning" for a cold meal. No alcohol except for medicinal purposes. Drive fifteen miles a day. Walk nearly all the way.

Deaths and graves would too soon become commonplace, but some of the first ones showed more time and care. Susan Hale's newly-wed husband walked back to Missouri to have a

tombstone made, then carried it in a wheelbarrow back past Alcove Springs to give her a proper burial. Then he continued on his way west, vanishing in the mists of history while her name lives on.

Angling across northeastern Kansas and southeastern Nebraska, the Oregon Trail is joined by the road from St. Joseph. For several hundred miles the Trail was punctuated by Pony Express stations. Hollenberg Station in Kansas is well preserved; Rock Creek Station in Nebraska was the site of a shooting that brought fame to Wild Bill Hickok.

The Platte River -- too thick to drink and too thin to plow, the pioneers complained -- was the major emigrant highway across the plains. The Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails all followed the Platte River, and historian Merril Mattes referred to the route simply as "the Great Platte River Road" rather than associating it with any single historic trail. Overlanders reached the Platte at Fort Kearny, the first of seven forts along the Trail (more would be built in later years to repress Indian uprisings). Forts Kearny and Laramie were owned and operated by the U.S. Army. Fort Bridger was an independent fur trading post. Forts Boise and Vancouver were Hudson's Bay Company trading posts; Fort Hall was originally an American fur trading post but soon passed into the hands of the HBC, as well. Fort Kearny had all the amenities and services of a prairie fort, including a post office and nearby Dirty Woman Ranch.

The Oregon Trail would follow the south shore of the Platte River, crossing the South Platte at California Crossing, and then follow the North Platte and the Sweetwater all the way to South Pass. The Mormon Trail paralleled the Oregon Trail on the north side of the Platte River all the way from Fort Kearny to Fort Laramie. Emigrants on both sides of the river could see fantastic rock formations such as Courthouse and Jail Rocks, Chimney Rock, Scotts Bluff, and Independence Rock. These were important landmarks on the journey, and many of them (and other rock formations) still bear the names of travelers written in axle grease or scratched into the stone many decades ago.

When the route was flat, the wagons would fan out rather than eat one another's dust, and the Trail would be many wagons wide. In other places the Trail narrowed, and the rocks are rutted several feet deep from hundreds of wagons following in single file.

At some places there were cutoffs or shortcuts where emigrants or later gold miners impatient to get to their destinations would bypass forts. Forts Bridger and Hall were both bypassed in this manner by the Sublette and Hudspeth Cutoffs. An alternate route crossing the Snake River at Three Island Crossing and going to the tree-lined Boise River became the main stem, preferred to the arid Snake River route, which the overlanders took to calling the South Alternate. Until an 1847 Indian attack, the Whitman Mission was a well-known stop on the Oregon Trail.

In 1841 and 1842, the first two years of the Trail's use by emigrant parties, the overland route ended at Fort Walla Walla, at the mouth of the Walla Walla River. From there, emigrants rafted their wagons down the Columbia River to the Willamette River Valley. For the next three years, the overland segment ended at The Dalles. Here, the pioneers had a choice of building rafts to carry their wagons down the Columbia or abandoning their wagons for British bateaux to Fort Vancouver and Oregon City. Beginning in 1846, the Barlow Road around Mount Hood became the preferred route for more than two-thirds of all emigrants -- except in the years 1847 and 1852, when early snowfalls closed the route. Even the Barlow Road had some alternates as travelers found better routes or chanced fines by going around the toll gates.

Ultimately, all roads led to Oregon City, the last place to camp while looking for new farms or business opportunities and the location of the land office where settlers filed their claims.

Oregon Trail Mileposts

Three days' travel out of Independence, the untried, greenhorn Oregon Trail pioneers came upon a hill rising from the flat grassland around it. Blue Mound seemed strangely out of place in the midst of the prairie. Eager emigrants climbed it to get a look at what lay ahead. Officers and guides urging the parties to move on allowed the curious only a quick glance.

As the wagon trains crossed Kansas and Nebraska, the mileposts were obstacles in the form

of rivers that had to be crossed: the Blue, Wakarusa, Kansas, Vermilion, Big Blue, and Little Blue. Steep banks and high water during May were common problems. Some rivers could be forded, but for rivers deeper than four feet or so, a pair of canoes would be lashed together, a wagon rolled on crossways, and the resulting ferry poled across. Some smaller creeks had toll bridges built by entrepreneurs hoping to cash in on the emigrant traffic.

Dotting the length of the Trail from Missouri to Oregon are numerous springs with names of explorers, descriptive names such as Cold or Cottonwood, or names reflecting pioneer determination such as Faith or Charity. Alcove Springs has a twelve-foot fall of water that provided much-needed relief for man and beast. The Donner Party carved the words Alcove Springs in eight inch letters on a nearby rock that could be read for over a century (recent travelers report that part of the inscription has broken away from the rock face, apparently through natural weathering). Two days away at Fremont Springs, similar graffiti can be seen displaying the names of 1842 scouts John C. Fremont and Kit Carson.

Later emigrants saw Pony Express stations and stagecoach stops about every fifteen miles from Hollenberg's Ranch House to Fort Bridger. The first one, Hollenberg's, was built in 1857 and is the only one left today in its more-or-less original state. Rock Creek Station in Nebraska was the site of the 1861 shootout involving David McCanles and James Butler Hickok, which gave Hickok his "Wild Bill" reputation.

Where the Oregon Trail out of Independence met the Platte River, the first of many forts was built to protect plains emigrants. Forts operated by the US Army usually had post offices where emigrants could send home letters, and eastbound riders headed back to the United States were sometimes willing to take along letters from westbound emigrants. The Platte River itself was another major obstacle, as in June it consisted mostly of shallow, stagnant pools separated by mud flats, sandbars, and a three foot deep main channel that meandered from bank to bank. It was too wide to be bridged and too shallow to for a ferry. Crossing the Platte from the northern Council Bluffs Road (the Mormon Trail) to the Oregon Trail on the Platte's south shore required a risky trek following a path of willow poles set out to mark stable sandbars that would support the weight of wagon.

The Oregon Trail had to eventually cross the South Platte River to gain access to the North Platte River, which overlanders followed all the way to the area of present-day Casper, Wyoming. This was done at California Crossing, named for the gold rushers of 1849. Before then it had been known as Brule Crossing. The Pony Express used another crossing twenty miles upstream and also called it California Crossing, so the Oregon Trail ford became known as the Old or Lower California Crossing.

Once across the South Platte, there was a steep grade as the Trail climbed up California Hill to a high plateau. Deep ruts are still visible there today. Then it was back down the other side on Windlass Hill, so named because it seemed impossible to descend safely without the aid of a windlass (legend has it that there actually was a windlass set up there for a time, but there is no evidence to support this). All available men and women held on to ropes to slow wagons making the descent.

At the bottom was Ash Hollow on the North Platte River, a sylvan glade with clean, cool springs which served as an oasis for the weary adventurers who had just struggled down from atop Windlass Hill. In her journal entry for June 5, 1852, Esther Belle Hanna described the great profusion of wild roses in full bloom to be found there.

Along the banks of the North Platte River is a profusion of massive sandstone features rising majestically from the plains. The first, Courthouse and Jail Rocks, could be seen for forty miles or three days away. Next came Chimney Rock. For two days before arriving its solitary finger looked like "an old ruin, then a very sharp cone, more the shape of a chimney than anything else." (A.J. McCall, June 13, 1849) Scotts Bluff was named for fur trapper Hiram Scott, who was purportedly abandoned for dead sixty miles away and crawled to that spot to die. The legend is retold in many emigrant diaries, the overlanders having heard it at local trading posts and forts.

The emigrants passed several fur trading posts beyond Scotts Bluff. The oldest, dating back to 1834, was William Sublette's post at LaRemay's River, later called Fort Laramie. Beyond Fort Laramie, Oregon Trail pioneers crossed a number of rivers flowing out of what the emigrants called

the Black Hills, today known as the Laramie Mountains. There were crossings of the Laramie River, Horse, Cottonwood, LaBonte, Box Elder, and Deer Creeks, the North Platte itself, and as many as nine crossings of the Sweetwater River. Many of these crossings were made with the benefit of ferries or bridges. Most of the streams were clear-flowing water up to 100 yards wide with banks littered with driftwood.

Emigrant diaries mention several prominent landmarks beyond Fort Laramie. One was Register Cliff, a soft sandstone formation that served as a message board for the emigrants. One interesting section of the cliff is that claimed by the Unthank family. Above the other names is written "A.H. Unthank, 1850" -- the family patriarch, Alva inscribed his name just one week before dying of cholera. Below it is "O.N. Unthank, 1869," Alva's nephew. Below them is "O.B. Unthank, 1931," Alva's great-grandson.

Farther up the trail are the spectacular ruts at Guernsey, Wyoming. The Oregon Trail at this point had to go over more soft sandstone, and the wagon wheels gradually carved a depression five feet deep. Nearby is the grave of Joel Hembree, a six year old boy with the Applegate company who was killed July 18, 1843, when he fell under a wagon. This is believed to be the oldest marked grave on the Oregon Trail, and it was seen by all who followed.

The abundance of grass next to Independence Rock made it a welcome stopping point for every train. The goal was to arrive here by the 4th of July to be sure of beating the winter snows to Oregon. Independence Rock is a large, low granite mass resembling a giant turtle and covering about five acres of prairie. It is the most often noted landmark west of Fort Laramie. Emigrants found many fur trappers' names already drawn on the rock and added their own names. Axle grease made of pine tar and hog fat was used to paint some names, and a handful are still visible in sheltered nooks and crannies. Some emigrants carved their names, dates, or initials, but this was much harder work than doing so in the sandstone of Register Cliff. The Mormons, in one of their many entrepreneurial ventures, had men who would inscribe names for up to five dollars each. In 1860 Sir Richard Burton calculated that there were between forty and fifty thousand names written in one way or another on Independence Rock.

Within sight of Independence Rock is Devil's Gate, where the Sweetwater River shoots through a crack in the granite. The Trail went around the feature, as it was entirely too narrow and steep-sided to allow a wagon road to be blazed, but emigrants would stop and climb to the top to peer over the edge. At least one young overlander fell to her death doing just that.

The next milepost was Ice Slough, a shallow basin at the 6000 foot level just before South Pass. Ponds and springs here were covered with turf. Ice from the previous winter was insulated under the turf and could be dug out during the hot summer months. The surface water was alkaline, but the ice was clear and good: "We dug down in the earth about 12 inches, and found chinks of ice. We carried it along till about noon, and made some lemonade for dinner. It relished first rate." (George Belshaw, July 4, 1853)

South Pass marks the halfway point of the Oregon Trail, a powerful symbolic landmark that lacked any distinguishing feature which we would actually think of as a landmark. Here, the emigrants crossed the Continental Divide and the eastern boundary of Oregon Territory. Before 1849, it was at this point that emigrants left the territory controlled (more or less) by the United States.

Expecting a narrow alpine pass, emigrants were surprised by the gradual approach leading to a broad, flat plain some twenty miles wide. The descent was steeper, but still not a bad stretch of road. About 3 miles into the plain is Pacific Springs, a marshy prairie bog fed by springs which was distinguished solely by being the first body of water the pioneers encountered that drained into the Pacific Ocean.

Most river crossings in Wyoming were difficult due to the considerable amount of snowmelt in July and August. The emigrants always arrived during this period of high water and had to cross rivers on submerged gravel bars -- a risky proposition at best. Straying from the marked course by even a few feet could mean disaster for people, wagons, and livestock. A ferry was eventually established at the Green River crossing, but other crossings remained dangerous.

Fort Bridger was a palisaded trading post and blacksmith shop established in 1842 by Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez to capitalize on the overland trade and the need for blacksmithing

services. Worn out animals could often be exchanged there for fresher ones.

Sublette's Cutoff was a fifty mile trek across desolate, hostile land that cut 46 miles, or about 3 days, off the journey. The waterless landscape crossed by Sublette's Cutoff was arguably the worst stretch of the Trail. Not popular until the gold rush of 1849, it called for a decision whether to save time or risk the death of animals. Some emigrants chose to travel the Cutoff by night, breaking camp at 2 AM and navigating by "head lights" -- lanterns carried by boys walking ahead of the wagons. Day or night, the wagons stirred up gritty, alkaline dust, and they generally traveled side by side in a broad front up to a mile across in order to avoid each other's dust.

Heading northwest towards the Snake River, the Oregon Trail emigrants passed through the lava lands, an otherworldly landscape dotted by cones, craters, springs, geysers, and waterfalls. Steamboat Springs, the principal feature of a group of mineral springs collectively known as Soda Springs, was a three-foot geyser that emitted a high-pitched whistle that reminded emigrants of the steamboats they had seen or ridden on the Missouri River. The area has been geologically active since before recorded human history, and some of the springs ran hot, others warm or cold. Some were white in color, others gray, buff, or red. Some tasted to the pioneers like soda water, others like metal or beer. One minister proclaimed that, "Hell is not more than a mile from this place."

Now traveling in territory worked by the early fur trappers and mountain men, the emigrants arrived at forts older than the Trail itself. Fort Hall was established by Nathaniel Wyeth in 1834 and later sold to the Hudson's Bay Company. After Oregon became a United States Territory in 1849, the HBC departed and the post served the emigrant trade exclusively. Many emigrants here tasted Pacific salmon for the first time.

The Snake River flows through the bottom of a chasm that in some places is only 20 feet wide. The rumble of American Falls, Shoshone Falls, and Twin Falls could be heard for miles. At Thousand Springs, a series of streams burst out from under the lava rimrock into the Snake River. Since these falls were on the other side of the river, this landmark was only of interest to the pioneers as a milepost.

The Snake River briefly escaped from its high walls at Three Island Crossing, allowing parched wagon trains a chance to cross to the north side and travel to the lush, green Boise River Valley. The river was six to eight feet deep, but its clarity was deceptive, making it appear shallower. Combined with its swift current, this was generally considered the most treacherous river crossing on the entire Trail. Guidebooks went into great detail on how to use two of the three islands to avoid mishaps. Still, wagons capsized and men and animals drowned. Many emigrants chose an alternate route, staying on the dry south bank of the Snake rather than risk fording the river.

Beyond Fort Boise (and after 1859) the Oregon Trail entered the State of Oregon. Past Farewell Bend, where the overlanders left the Snake River behind, the next milepost was the Blue Mountains. This heavily timbered expanse was full of steep grades that tried the weary emigrants and their animals. Many overlanders recorded their astonishment at the sight of 200 foot tall trees. From the crest could be seen the great volcanoes of the Cascade range. Nights in the Blue Mountains are often cold in late August and September, and the cool, alpine nights reminded the emigrants that the mountains ahead were even higher.

For five years, this stretch of the Trail went past the Whitman Mission. The mission provided food, medical attention, and blacksmithing services. Following the November 29, 1847, murders of the Whitmans, the mission closed down and was bypassed, shaving a few miles off the journey. At Fort Walla Walla, needy emigrants could often travel to Fort Vancouver in HBC boats.

Several tributaries of the Columbia River had to be crossed between the Blues and the Cascades. The Umatilla River was crossed at Echo, where emigrants saw the first frame house since leaving Missouri. The John Day River had a swift current and a solid bed of round stones. The Deschutes River was a difficult ford until a ferry was established.

The Dalles was the terminus of overland traffic for the first years of the Trail. Starting in 1846, the Barlow Road was open, allowing wagons to skirt the south shoulder of Mount Hood before descending into the Willamette Valley from the east. Emigrants taking the Columbia River from The Dalles to Oregon City stopped over at Fort Vancouver, the Hudson's Bay Company trading post and regional headquarters established in 1825. For many emigrants it was here, for the first time since Missouri, that they ate at a table or slept in a house.

The end of the Oregon Trail was Oregon City, not quite 2000 miles from Independence. Those arriving by river landed near Governor George Abernethy's house and proceeded to Abernethy Green, a large meadow behind Abernethy's house. The Barlow Road travelers entered Abernethy Green from the east. Here was the final campground.

Trading Posts and Forts Along the Oregon Trail

An 1849 emigrant, A.J. McCall, recorded in his diary passing by "a number of long, low buildings constructed principally of adobe, or sun dried bricks, with nearly flat roofs of brick" where the Oregon Trail meets the Platte River. This was Fort Kearny, the first fort built to protect emigrants crossing the Great Plains. No matter what year emigrants traveled the Oregon Trail, they saw forts along the way. Some were fur trading posts that predated the Trail, and others were military bases established to protect westbound emigrants and impress the Indians.

In 1845, Stephen Watts Kearny led five Cavalry companies on a sweep of the plains during which he and his men passed the huge Stephen Meek wagon train. Kearny's force of 250 dragoons was overwhelmed by the sight of 3000 emigrants crossing the countryside in their 460 wagons. Riding ahead, he held council near Fort Laramie with 1200 Sioux Indians and secured safe passage for Oregon Trail emigrants. The following year, Congress mandated the construction of forts along the route to Oregon, leading to the construction of Fort Childs on a site purchased from the Pawnee tribe for $2000 in trade goods. Fort Childs was renamed Fort Kearny by dragoons transferring from the original Fort Kearny at the mouth of the Platte River. The new Fort Kearny had a Post Office, which gave outbound emigrants the opportunity to send back letters assuring their friends and relatives that they were doing well. It also boasted the adjacent "hell-hole" communities of Dobytown and Dirty Woman Ranch, which were typical of the shantytowns that clung to the fringes of any military reservation.

Several fur trading posts were passed by Oregon Trail emigrants near where trails led to the various rendezvous points. Fort John was an American Fur Company post on the Oregon Trail near Scotts Bluff. It replaced an earlier Robidoux Trading Post. Two competing fur trading posts were Fort Bernard and Fort Platte. The oldest fur trading post was Fort William, dating back to 1834 when fur trader William Sublette established a post at LaRemay's (Laramie) River. He prospered by undercutting the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and capturing the Indian trade. The structure was typical of the era, with a rectangular stockade of cottonwood logs and elevated blockhouses on two corners and over the main entrance. Fort William was later sold to Lucien Fontenelle and renamed Fort Lucien. Later still, Fort Laramie was built of adobe only a few yards away, and the adjacent wooden fort was dismantled for firewood. This sort of salvage was common on the frontier in order to save on both labor and wood, and some of the beams of Fort Laramie's Bachelor Officers Quarters (nicknamed "Old Bedlam") came from Fort William.

Mounted riflemen sent from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie in 1849 found their route wrought with confusion as the epidemic of Asiatic cholera cut through the jostling crowds of emigrants rushing to seek California gold. Modern Fort Laramie was a U.S. Army post from 1849 to 1890 and boasted up to 180 buildings at its height. Just before arriving at the fort, outbound emigrants passed the site of the Grattan Massacre, where on August 19, 1854, 2nd Lt. John Grattan and 28 soldiers attempted to arrest several Sioux Indians for butchering a wayward Mormon cow. The arresting party killed a Sioux chief, and the wrathful Sioux slew them to a man. This incident was the start of over 35 years of intermittent hostility between the Army and the Sioux which culminated in the massacre at Wounded Knee.

Eight other forts and camps were constructed along the Trail by the U.S. Army in addition to Forts Kearny and Laramie. Most were only used briefly. Fort Grattan was a defense point and supply depot established at Ash Hollow following the nearby Battle of Blue Water. Fort McPherson, popularly known as Fort Cottonwood, was completed in 1863 at the confluence of the North and South Platte Rivers. The cavalry soldiers killed at the Grattan Massacre were eventually reburied at Fort McPherson. Camp Mitchell was established just outside of Scotts Bluffs at Mitchell Pass. It was in operation for only three years, from 1864-'67. Fort Fetterman was built

where the Bozeman Trail split off from the Oregon Trail, just past Fort Laramie. Camp Conner was sited at Soda Springs by Irish immigrant General Patrick Connor. Cantonment Loring protected emigrants and Idaho miners near Fort Hall. The Army's Fort Boise was built in 1863 by Oregon volunteers to protect emigrants on the Trail and gold miners in Idaho. The US Army took over Fort Boise after the Civil War, and it became the base of operations for General Crook's campaign against the Snake River Indians from 1866-'68, and also for General Howard's sorties against the Nez Perce and Bannocks in 1878. It is now the site of the VA Hospital in downtown Boise.

Fort Bridger was a palisaded trading post and blacksmith shop established in 1842 by Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez to capitalize on the overland traffic. When it became obvious that most Oregon and California bound emigrants were shortcutting the fort, it was sold to the Mormons in 1853. The Mormons burned the fort to the ground in 1857 to prevent its capture by US Army forces. The Army simply built their own Fort Bridger on the same site, incorporating a surviving stone wall of the original fort to save time and labor.

Fort Hall was a stockaded trading post on the east bank of the Snake River. It was established by Nathaniel Wyeth in 1834 and later sold to the Hudson's Bay Company. After Oregon became a United States Territory, the HBC departed and the post served the emigrant trade exclusively until it was abandoned in 1856. A new Fort Hall was built nearby by the US Army in 1870 to control the Indians of the area.

The HBC operated other forts in what used to be their territory. The original, or Old Fort Boise was located at the confluence of the Owyhee and Boise Rivers where they flow into the Snake. It fell into disrepair after the Hudson's Bay Company left the area, and a new Fort Boise was built in 1863, as noted above. Those traveling by the Whitman Mission went past Fort Walla Walla.

The Dalles was the terminus of overland travel for Oregon Trail emigrants until 1846, when the Barlow Road was opened. Camp Drum, opened in 1850 and renamed Fort Dalles in 1853, was manned by mounted riflemen. It became a quartermaster's depot prior to being abandoned in 1867. The Army sold the fort in 1877, but much of it was left intact by the local citizenry. The buildings of the fort are still present among the elegant old houses of The Dalles.

Emigrants taking the Columbia River from The Dalles to Oregon City stopped over at Fort Vancouver. The HBC trading post and regional headquarters under Chief Factor John McLoughlin was established in 1824 following the abandonment of Fort Astor, which was originally an American outpost established by John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company. For many emigrants it was here for the first time since Missouri that they ate at a table or slept beneath a roof. McLoughlin's hospitality won him considerable respect, though it would eventually cost him his job.

Army forts established before the Civil War were struck by severe budget and manpower cuts after the southern states rose in rebellion. Planned bastions on the plains became ordinary forts. The soldiers who built and maintained them, half of whom were German and Irish immigrants, earned about one-fifth as much as civilians doing the same work. On the other hand, the $11 a Private earned in a month was in addition to food, housing, clothing, and medical attention. Recruits were taught to ride, shoot, and fight in addition to receiving a basic education. Still, many pony soldiers deserted, taking their horses and guns with them. Meager salaries and a limit of 800 pounds of personal effects discouraged most soldiers from bringing their families west. Additionally, only officers got rooms to themselves, and many enlisted personnel slept in tents. The only women officially allowed on Army posts were laundresses, one for every 25 men. Nearly all of them ended up married.

During the Civil War, volunteer militias replaced regular Army troops at most of the forts. It was their job to keep the Indians under control until the regulars returned from the East. Some of the volunteers took this responsibility entirely too far, further provoking hostilities between Indians and whites. The most notable incident came at Sand Creek, Colorado, where former Methodist minister John Chivington and the militiamen under his command slaughtered a band of defenseless Cheyenne.

Following the Civil War, the US Cavalry returned to the West. They wore the standardized wool uniform of a dark blue tunic and light blue trousers familiar to any fan of western movies, though the pony soldiers usually ended up losing their Army-issue hats and replacing them with

more serviceable civilian models. Their weapons included a .45 caliber carbine, a Colt .45 revolver, and a saber. With the troubles in the East settled and a new crop of officers and generals risen through the ranks, the Army believed that it had the money, troops, and experienced leaders needed to control the Indians, and it set out to do so. It was in the years following the Civil War that conflicts between Indian tribes and Army soldiers gave rise to the legends of Geronimo in the south and Chief Joseph in the north.

The First Emigrants on the Oregon Trail

In May of 1843, hundreds of would-be emigrants assembled in Independence, Missouri and prepared to set off on a 2000-mile journey to Oregon. They were all suffering from an insanity rampant in America of the 1840s: Oregon Fever.

It was not a sudden malady; it had been building since the Lewis and Clark expedition. Oregon developed a reputation of having a perfect, disease-free climate that could make it the breadbasket of the West. Hopeful merchants like Nathaniel Wyeth, crackpot propagandists like Hall Jackson Kelley, and government agents like Lt. William Slacum had all written books extolling Oregon's virtues and encouraging settlement there. Fur traders had books written about their adventures out west.

The first person to follow the entire route of the Oregon Trail was Robert Stuart of Astoria in 1812-13. He did so in reverse, traveling west to east, and in the process discovered the South Pass, so named because it was south of the pass Lewis and Clark followed over the Continental Divide.

In 1834 New England merchant Nathaniel Wyeth and Methodist-Episcopal Missionary Jason Lee left for the Willamette Valley. Wyeth had made a trip to Oregon in 1832, and on his overland return he had contracted with trappers at the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous of 1833 to bring back supplies to sell at the next Rendezvous. He made good on his deal and at the same time guided Lee to the site of his proposed mission. The Wyeth-Lee Party was the first group of settlers to follow the entire route of the Oregon Trail. They were convinced by employees of the Hudson's Bay Company to leave their wagons at Fort Hall and continue on to the Willamette Valley by pack animals, an inconvenient but successful tactic.

A similar trek was completed in 1836 when Captain Benjamin de Bonneville conducted Marcus Whitman and Henry Spalding to their missions. They were likewise convinced to leave their wagons at Fort Hall. Part of the historic significance of this party was the presence of the first white women -- Spalding's and Whitman's wives -- to reach Oregon by the overland route (a handful of others beat them to Oregon by a few months, but they arrived by ship). The Whitman Mission would figure prominently in the Oregon Trail story for the first few years it was in widespread use, as the Trail went past the Whitmans' front door from 1843 until the deaths of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in 1847.

Starting in 1841, Senator Lewis Linn of Missouri annually introduced a bill to Congress to extend American jurisdiction to Oregon and offer free land to white settlers and "half-breed Indians." The prospect of 640 free acres of prime Willamette Valley farmland, as opposed to paying $200 for 160 acres in the States, was very enticing. The Donation Land Act finally passed Congress and was signed into law in 1850. For Linn's efforts, he was rewarded with a namesake town in Oregon: Linn City, originally called Robins Nest and later renamed West Linn when a fire devastated Linn City's business district and the town was rebuilt on higher ground a short distance west of its original location.

Another major milestone occurred in the spring of 1841, when the Western Emigration Society left Missouri for the Pacific coast. Led by John Bidwell and Captain John Bartelson, their intention was to go to California. However, at Fort Hall half of their number instead opted to head for Oregon.

The next year missionary Elijah White, newly appointed Indian Sub-Agent to Oregon, led 112 emigrants to Oregon. Their wagons were cut down to two-wheeled carts at Fort Hall, as it was generally believed at that time that wagons could not make the journey over the rough terrain of the

intermountain West. Missourian Philip Edwards, who wrote a pamphlet in 1843 to discourage emigration, was correct in his observation that no one had yet taken wagons all the way to Oregon.

Two events occurred in the winter of 1842-43 that greatly changed the status of wagons on the trail. The first was Marcus Whitman's dead-of-winter trip from Waiilatpu to Boston to plead his case before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which had ordered some of its Oregon missions to be closed. This successful trip put him in Independence on his way back to Oregon in the month of May, 1843. The other event was the Senate passage, 24 votes to 22, of Linn's Oregon bill. Although it was eventually killed in the House, it came close to passing and encouraged hundreds of people to head to Oregon that year.

Whitman met a large party of emigrants in Independence and promised to join up with them somewhere along the Platte River after conducting business in Westport and Shawnee Mission. With his encouragement, the pioneers decided that there were enough of them to push their wagons all the way through to Oregon. Though the emigrants succeeded in getting some of their wagons into the Oregon Country, Whitman later convinced them to abandon their remaining wagons along the Columbia River, build rafts, and float downstream to Fort Vancouver and the Willamette Valley. It would not be until 1846, with the opening of the Barlow Road, that the first wagons rolled into the Willamette Valley.

On May 22, 1843, the party left Elm Grove, twelve miles out of Independence. After a shakedown trek of 100 miles to the shores of the Kansas River (the site of modern-day Topeka) they elected officers. The mule trains left first, afraid they would get stuck behind the slower, ox-drawn wagons. At least 120 wagons and 875 people with over a thousand head of livestock left for Oregon within days of one another. Over 700 people and a somewhat depleted herd of livestock arrived safely in Oregon that fall. Thirty of their number turned south and set out for California at the Malheur River.

The Great Migration to Oregon was underway.

Outfitting for the Trail

It is believed that over 200 steam-powered riverboats sank in the Missouri River during the mid-Nineteenth Century. Two of them were excavated in 1988. One, the Bertrand, was brought to light 120 years after sinking in what is now part of the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge near Omaha. The other, the Arabia, was dug out of a soybean field near Independence more than 130 years after it went down.

The Arabia was supplying the covered wagon trade of Independence and Westport. Its cargo, right down to an unfortunate horse tethered to the deck, was brought up intact, preserved by the suffocating mud of the Missouri. The Bertrand was heading to Council Bluffs with a load of supplies and tools to outfit gold miners following the latest rush to Montana. Salvage crews back in 1868 removed a small treasure of gold bound for the banks in Council Bluffs, but they left its cargo of picks, shovels, bottles, clothing, medicines, and similarly mundane supplies for Twentieth Century treasure hunters.

Outfitting the western travelers was big business for merchants along the banks of the Missouri River from St. Louis to Omaha. The Oregon-bound emigrants were generally poor families who had sold everything they owned (or at least what the bank had not yet repossessed) and booked passage out of town on the same steamboats that were bringing in supplies for their local general stores. While outfitting for the journey, early pioneers were told they needed to purchase everything necessary to sustain them along the Trail for up to six months, as well as farming and building supplies for when they arrived in Oregon -- in other words, everything they would need for the rest of their lives.

Later Oregon emigrants had easier decisions to make. As time went on, the Trail and its environs were thoroughly documented and explored, and the route was improved by the passage of thousands of wagons beating the land flat, entrepreneurs operating ferries at the major river crossings, and the discovery of alternate routes that shaved days off the trip. As the road was more developed and the trip took less time, emigrants could carry heavier loads in their wagons. The need

to bring seeds and tools for use on arrival in Oregon vanished, as stores in Oregon City were now supplied with goods brought around Cape Horn by ship. However, they still needed food, gear, medical supplies, and clothing for at least four months on the road.

The first item needed was, of course, a wagon and team. Some brought their old farm wagons from home, while others purchased one at their chosen jumping off point. Dozens of blacksmiths made good money fixing up and manufacturing wagons for the overlanders. The big, sloped Conestoga wagons of the freight trade were too big for the Rocky Mountains, so a smaller wagon with a 10 to 12 foot flat bed capable of carrying up to 2500 pounds was developed from the basic farm model. A canvas bonnet stretched over 5 to 7 curved bows protected what was to be stored inside, and the sideboards were beveled outward to keep rain from coming in under the edges of the bonnet.

The choice of draft animals for the journey was an important decision. Horses were not satisfactory for pulling wagons across the plains, as the forage was not good, insects drove them to distraction, and tepid waters left most draft horses ill. A team of 8 or 10 tough mules would definitely be faster, but they were hard to control, given to mayhem in storms, and reduced to walking skeletons by the hard pull. The first choice of most emigrants was a team of 4 or 6 oxen, paired in yokes. The beasts were sure, patient, steady, and obedient. They showed adaptability to prairie grasses and were less expensive than horses. The emigrants correctly concluded that while oxen would not get them to Oregon in record time, they would, indeed, get them to Oregon.

Whichever animal was chosen, shoes were required, as the journey was long enough to wear away the animals' hooves. Teams heading to California, even oxen, required snowshoes as well. It was desirable to buy animals already broken in on prairie grasses, accustomed to yokes, and trained to follow instructions. However, such animals were difficult to find and more expensive to purchase when they were available. Thus, most emigrants planned to spend 2 or 3 weeks in Missouri training their teams and packing their wagons before actually setting out for Oregon.

The success or failure of a party depended most heavily on their choice of equipment and supplies for the journey. Every emigrant insisted on taking along some luxuries and items of sentimental value. Chamber pots, lanterns, mirrors, Bibles, school books, clocks, and furniture were crammed into odd spaces in almost every wagon. Emigrants were advised not to overload their wagons, but many underestimated the magnitude of the trek they were setting out on and were later forced to discard nonessential cargo. Hard stretches of the Trail became littered with such castoffs as emigrants lightened the load for their weary animals.

Certain accessories and tools for making emergency repairs to a wagon were necessary to bring along. These included rope, brake chains, a wagon jack, extra axles and tongues, wheel parts, axes, saws, hammers, knives, and a sturdy shovel. Cooking utensils were also required -- few overlanders were without a Dutch oven and a good iron skillet -- and the trip was simply not possible without a water barrel to get the party and their animals through dry stretches of the Trail. Weapons and kits for casting bullets were essential, as well, though they were far more commonly used for hunting than for fighting Indians.

However, most of the space in the emigrants' wagons was reserved for food. The endless walking and hard work made even the most delicate appetites ravenous. Hundreds of pounds of dried goods and cured meats were packed into the wagons, including flour, hardtack, bacon, rice, coffee, sugar, beans, and fruit. Coffee, though the emigrants had no way of knowing it, probably saved thousands of lives on the overland trails, as it required that the water be boiled, thus killing any germs (including cholera) that might sicken the emigrants. In addition to their supplies, many emigrants had the family milk cow tied behind the wagon to provide fresh milk at meal time, and some fixed a chicken coop to the side of the wagon, as well. The fresh milk and eggs -- and later, meat -- were an important source of protein and calories for the overlanders, and they made for a welcome relief from the dried and preserved food that dominated many of their meals.

It was possible to obtain fresh food along the Trail, but often not desirable. Hunting took precious time, though not many overlanders could resist the temptation of taking off after a buffalo herd when one was encountered. Trading posts sold food and other goods, but at high prices that few overlanders could afford.

The Queen City of the Trails

Independence, Missouri, lies on the south bank of the Missouri River, near the western edge of the state and a few miles east of Kansas City. Few towns its size can claim such a rich history: the Missouri and Osage Indians originally claimed the area, followed by the Spanish and a brief French tenure. It became American territory with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Lewis and Clark recorded in their journals that they stopped in 1804 to pick plums, raspberries, and wild apples at a site later identified as the location of Independence.

William Clark returned to the area late in 1808 and established Fort Osage. George Sibley became Indian agent for the Osage Indian tribe and the first factor of the tribal fur trading post. The story is told that Indians would gather outside his window to hear his 15 year old bride play the piano. The Sibleys also entertained such notable visitors as John James Audubon, Archduke Maximilian of Austria, Daniel Boone, Sacajawea, the Choteau brothers, and in 1819 the first steamboat to ply the Missouri, the Western Engineer.

As the population grew, Missouri became a separate Territory in 1812. By 1820, there were enough settlers to warrant statehood, but because of Missouri's stance in favor of slavery it took the Missouri Compromise of 1821 to attain it. The growing communities in the west were grouped together into Jackson County, named in honor of Andrew Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812 and future president. The community of Independence was named county seat over neighboring Westport and Kansas City.

Independence grew up around the building used for court sessions. In 1827, the town was platted and a log courthouse was constructed by slaves. The courthouse was used as a pig pen in the evenings and became thoroughly infested with fleas. The judge was forced to resort to bringing sheep into the courtroom before a session to clear out the fleas. A permanent solution to the flea problem came in 1829 with the construction of a brick courthouse in the town square. The City of Independence was incorporated in 1849, four years after Oregon City's incorporation under the Provisional Government.

Growth in western Missouri increased rapidly because of trade with Santa Fe. Before 1821, trade with the Mexican outpost was illegal. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, trade became legal and was actively encouraged by the authorities. William Becknell led the first legal trading expedition and thus won a place in history as the "Father of the Santa Fe Trail."

Originally, cloth and tools were obtained in St. Louis to trade in Santa Fe for furs, salt, and silver and hauled overland in Conestoga wagons. Within a few years, traders were paying to transport their wares to Independence by steamboat, where they were loaded onto wagons for the journey over the Santa Fe Trail. Like the emigrants of later years, the traders recognized that the riverboats could shave several days off their journey by allowing them to jump off farther west.

A brief but significant chapter in the history of Independence began in 1831 when Joseph Smith moved his Latter Day Saints to the city. They prospered on their large farms, started the first local newspaper, and opened their own schools. Townspeople were afraid the Saints would take over and disliked their anti-slavery views. A mob wrecked the newspaper and tarred and feathered the printers. The Saints departed rapidly for nearby Clay County, but the local citizenry still considered them a problem and the governor eventually ordered them out of the state. They moved to Commerce, Illinois, and rechristened it Nauvoo.

The outfitters who had set up shop to cater to traders on the Santa Fe Trail made Independence a natural jumping-off spot for the Oregon Trail. There was a riverboat landing at Wayne City and a mule-drawn railroad link to Independence. Robert Weston -- blacksmith, wagonmaker, and future mayor -- went so far as to specialize in wagons for the Oregon Trail. Although he insisted that a "Weston Wagon Never Wears Out," few survived the trip to Oregon. Hiram Young, a slave who had purchased his own freedom by making ax handles and ox yokes, also made covered wagons for the overlanders.

From 1841 to 1849, wagon trains headed to Oregon and California left from Independence Town Square and followed the Santa Fe Trail into Kansas. However, sandbars building up at the steamboat landing and a cholera epidemic in 1849 prompted emigrants to bypass Independence for

Westport. Doing so also shaved 18 miles off the Trail -- a good days' travel -- and eliminated a river crossing, as well.

Famous residents of Independence include Jim Bridger, hunter, trapper, trader, and guide; William Quantrill, leader of a Confederate band of raiders during the Civil War; Frank and Jesse James, outlaws, bank and train robbers, and local heroes; and Harry S Truman, destined to become President of the United States and end World War II with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Finally, it is interesting to note that it was predicted in the 1840s that the cities of Independence, Westport, and Kansas City would eventually merge into the great city of Centropolis, envisioned as the dominant metropolis of the area, much like Chicago or St. Louis. Today, Westport is part of Kansas City and Independence is its largest suburb.

Freighters, Stagecoaches, and Lone Riders

Along the Missouri River between Kansas City and Omaha are several small towns and cities that were, in one way or another, vital to the history of the West.

In 1825, trapper Joseph Robidoux started a trading post at Blacksnake Hills overlooking Kansas. Five years later, the US Army built Fort Leavenworth in Indian Territory between Blacksnake and Westport Landing to impress the Indians. It was off-limits to emigrants and traders. Across the river, an ex-Dragoon began the town of Weston in 1837 as a tobacco market. It was later "improved" with the addition of a whiskey distillery.

John Bidwell, emigrant of 1841, heard his first tales of California in Weston. Despite this, the sleepy little communities remained just that during the early years of the Oregon Trail. Thanks to merchants and craftsmen who had set up shop to capitalize on the caravans making the run to Santa Fe, Independence was well prepared to outfit overlanders for the Oregon Trail and garnered nearly all of the traffic.

Blacksnake Hills was platted and renamed St. Joseph in 1843, but it was commonly called "St. Joe." The town had three stores and a hotel -- nothing to sneeze at on the frontier! Then, with cholera in Independence and the discovery of gold in California, the population of St. Joe quickly doubled. By 1850 there were 3000 inhabitants living in brick homes and 10,000 emigrants in "Gambling Hells" -- ramshackle temporary communities described as little more than men, mules, and tents. Roads were built to connect Fort Leavenworth and St. Joe to the Oregon Trail. Weston had as many as eight steamboats at a time tied up at its docks.

In the 1850s, during the peak of emigration to Oregon and California, St. Joe and Council Bluffs were the most popular jumping-off spots, as emigrants quickly realized that two extra days by steamer past Independence saved two weeks by ox team. By the late 1850s, lower steamboat fares to Omaha caused emigrants to bypass the middle towns, leaving their inhabitants to find new ventures.

William Russell was an entrepreneur who spent five years on the edge of bankruptcy. In partnership with Alexander Majors and William Waddell he operated freight wagons on the Santa Fe Trail. With John Jones he operated the Pikes Peak Express stagecoach line from Leavenworth to Denver. Then, in 1857, he got his big break: an Army contract to haul 4.5 million pounds of supplies to Utah as Col. Albert Sidney Johnston took over as governor from Brigham Young. It took 41 wagon trains to move the Army's supplies.

The Pikes Peak Express consolidated with the Central Overland California in 1859, offering service from Sacramento to St. Joe and Independence. That same year, Russell bought out the Mormon mail contract from Salt Lake City to Independence. However, stiff competition from the Butterfield Overland Mail Company, which benefited from government subsidies that their competition lacked, led some observers to rechristen the C.O.C.P.P. Express Company's as the Clean Out of Cash and Poor Pay Express Company.

Then came the venture that would put Russell permanently into both bankruptcy and the history books: in a meeting with Frederick Bee, who had strung telegraph wires from San Francisco to Sacramento, and California Senator Gwin late in 1859, the decision was made to organize the

Pony Express. "The Pony" began operation on April 3, 1860. It connected the telegraph stations at St. Joe and Sacramento, making it possible to send a message from New York to San Francisco in only ten days. The General Office was the Patee House Hotel in St. Joe. The stables in St. Joe and many of the station houses were financed by Ben Holladay.

The total cost to set up the Pony was about $100,000. They purchased 500 Kentucky-bred horses and California mustangs of superior stamina for $175 each, up to $150 more than the normal cost of riding horses. They hired eighty riders -- "young skinny fellows, unmarried" -- for $50 a month plus board. They maintained 157 Pony Express Stations, of which 95 were built for the Pony and 62 were existing stage stops. There was a station every 10-15 miles, about an hour's travel at a horse's top sustainable speed, and most were sited to split the distance between the stagecoach stops, which were typically about 25 miles apart. Mail left St. Joe and Sacramento once a week and cost $5 for a half-ounce letter. Mail shipments were later increased to twice a week, and the cost came down to $1.

Each rider carried a leather mochila with four flaps. Riders rode three to six mounts from 45 to 90 miles between home stations and then returned. The goal was to deliver a letter in ten days. The fastest delivery on record was President Lincoln's Inaugural Address, which took seven days and seventeen hours to get from St. Joe to Sacramento. The Pony followed the Oregon Trail from Kansas through Wyoming. Emigrants waved and cheered on the riders as they passed.

Russell, Majors, and Waddell filed for bankruptcy in 1861, following the completion of transcontinental telegraph lines. Financier Ben Holladay took over management and closed down the Pony Express while expanding the stage and freight lines. He continued to close way stations as the Union Pacific passed them by during its construction. In 1869, he sold his lines to Wells, Fargo and Company and moved to Oregon. There, he went into the railroad building business with the Willamette Falls Portage Railroad at Oregon City, and later the Oregon and California Railroad from Portland to Sacramento.

Life and Death on the Oregon Trail

In December of 1847, Loren Hastings was walking the stump-filled, muddy streets of Portland, Oregon, when he chanced upon a friend he had known back in Illinois. Hastings had made the trip on the Oregon Trail unscathed, while his friend had lost his wife. Hastings' summary of their feelings was eloquent: "I look back upon the long, dangerous and precarious emigrant road with a degree of romance and pleasure; but to others it is the graveyard of their friends."

The overlanders encountered their first hardship before they even left home, as leaving friends and family behind was difficult. Henry Garrison described his uncle's parting from Iowa: "When Grandmother learned the next morning that they were then on their way, she kneeled down and prayed that God would guard and protect them on their perilous journey." She would never see them again.

Covered wagons dominated traffic on the Oregon Trail. The Independence-style wagon was typically about 11 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 2 feet deep, with bows of hardwood supporting a bonnet that rose about 5 feet above the wagon bed. With only one set of springs under the driver's seat and none on the axles, nearly everyone walked along with their herds of cattle and sheep.

However, the pioneers with their covered wagons weren't the only ones on the Trail. They shared it with stagecoaches, freight wagons, mail wagons, fur trade caravans, Army troops and supply trains, dispatch and Pony Express riders, pack horses and mules, Mormon handcarts, and even the occasional herd of horses headed for the States from California. Some of the less common trail vehicles included horse drawn carriages for the affluent and buggies of the 1849 Pioneer Line. Oddities included the 1859 Wind Wagon powered by sails, a steam wagon fiasco out of Nebraska City, and William Kiel's funeral cortege from Missouri to Oregon, complete with hearse, for his departed son, whose body was pickled in a vat of whiskey for the journey. The Donner-Reed party was slowed by Grandma Reed's "Palace Car," an oversized wagon with a side entrance equipped with stairs and Grandma's chair in the center of the wagon bed. The Reeds were forced to abandon the Palace Car in the Bonneville Salt Flats, where it was discovered and excavated in 1996.

Emigrants banded together into parties or companies for mutual assistance and protection. Parties usually consisted of relatives or persons from the same hometown traveling together. In some cases they formed joint stock companies, such as the Boston and Newton Joint Stock Association, Iron City Telegraph Company, Wild Rovers, and the Peoria Pioneers.

Organization was required to ensure a successful journey. The most successful groups had a written constitution, code, resolutions, or by-laws to which the emigrants could refer when disagreements threatened to get out of hand. Almost all wagon trains had regulations of some sort, and rare was the group that didn't elect or otherwise appoint officers. The regulations typically included rules for camping and marching and restrictions on gambling and drinking. There were penalties for infractions, social security for the sick or bereaved, and provisions established for the disposition of shares of deceased members of a party.

A typical day started before dawn with breakfast of coffee, bacon, and dry bread. The bedding was secured and wagon repacked in time to get underway by seven o'clock. At noon, they stopped for a cold meal of coffee, beans, and bacon or buffalo prepared that morning. Then back on the road again. Around five in the afternoon, after traveling an average of fifteen miles, they circled the wagons for the evening. The men secured the animals and made repairs while women cooked a hot meal of tea and boiled rice with dried beef or codfish. Evening activities included schooling the children, singing and dancing, and telling stories around the campfire. Some trains insisted on stopping every Sunday, while others reserved only Sunday morning for religious activities and pushed on during the afternoon. Resting on Sundays, in addition to giving the oxen and other animals a needed break, also gave the women of the wagon train a chance to tend to their domestic chores -- particularly doing the laundry, as the dust on the Trail pervaded every article of clothing exposed to it. Occasionally, a wagon train's arrival at a source of clean water was enough to prompt a special stopover for laundry day.

Marriages and births were always special occasions, and there were a surprising number of both on the Oregon Trail. Weddings were common either at the jumping off spots or, for those romances that bloomed along the Trail, on the Platte River or at Fort Laramie. A tongue-in-cheek conspiracy against the privacy of newlyweds by older-weds was called a "shivaree." Virtually every train had expectant mothers, and their newborns were often named for natural features, events, or important days. There is one story of an orphaned baby who was passed from breast to breast to be fed.

Leaving behind keepsakes, heirlooms, or wedding gifts was a painful reality many emigrants had to eventually face. Articles too precious to leave behind in the East were later abandoned along the trail to spare weary oxen. Hard stretches of the trail were littered with piles of "leeverites" -- items the emigrants had to "leave 'er right here" to lighten their wagons. In later years, the Mormons made a cottage industry of salvaging the leeverites and selling them back to emigrants passing through the Salt Lake Valley. This practice, while arguably displaying an enviable entrepreneurial spirit, engendered further ill will between Mormons and Gentiles.

The tiring pace of the journey -- fifteen miles a day, almost always on foot -- got to many an emigrant. Elizabeth Markham went insane along the Snake River, announcing to her family that she was not proceeding any farther. Her husband was forced to take the wagons and children and leave her behind, though he later sent their son back to retrieve her. When she returned on her own, her husband was informed that she had clubbed their son to death with a rock. He raced back to retrieve the boy, who was still clinging to life, and on his return found that his wife had taken advantage of his absence to set fire to one of the family's wagons.

Perils along the way caused many would-be emigrants to turn back. Weather related dangers included thunderstorms, lethally large hailstones, lightning, tornadoes, and high winds. The intense heat of the deserts caused wood to shrink, and wagon wheels had to be soaked in rivers at night to keep their iron rims from rolling right off during the day. The dust on the Trail itself could be two or three inches deep and as fine as flour. Ox shoes fell off and hooves split, to be cured with hot tar. The emigrants' lips blistered and split in the dry air, and their only remedy was to rub axle grease on their lips. River crossings were often dangerous: even if the current was slow and the water shallow, wagon wheels could be damaged by unseen rocks or become mired in the muddy bottom. If dust or mud didn't slow the wagons, stampedes of domestic herd animals or wild buffalo

often would.

Nearly one in ten who set off on the Oregon Trail did not survive. The two biggest causes of death were disease and accidents. The disease with the worst reputation was Asiatic cholera, known as the "unseen destroyer." Cholera crept silently, caused by unsanitary conditions: people camped amid garbage left by previous parties, picked up the disease, and then went about spreading it, themselves. People in good spirits in the morning could be in agony by noon and dead by evening. Symptoms started with a stomach ache that grew to intense pain within minutes. Then came diarrhea and vomiting that quickly dehydrated the victim. Within hours the skin was wrinkling and turning blue. If death did not occur within the first 12 to 24 hours, the victim usually recovered. One of this author's relatives, Martha Freel, came to Oregon in 1852. A letter sent home to an aunt in Iowa from Ash Hollow is now in my possession: "First of all I would mention the sickness we have had and I am sorry to say the deaths. First of all Francis Freel died June 4, 1852, and Maria Freel followed the 6th, next came Polly Casner who died the 9th and LaFayette Freel soon followed, he died the 10th, Elizabeth Freel, wife of Amos [and Martha's mother] died the 11th, and her baby died the 17th. You see we have lost 7 persons in a few short days, all died of Cholera." (June 23, 1852)

Cholera reportedly came from the Orient by way of New Orleans and St. Louis, though this has never been substantiated. The epidemic peaked in 1850, probably stoked by the immense numbers of prospectors and would-be gold miners on the overland trails in 1849 and '50. Adults originating from Missouri seemed to be most vulnerable to the disease. Fortunately, it was prevalent on the Great Plains, and once past Fort Laramie, overlanders were largely safe from cholera at the higher elevations.

Accidents were caused by negligence, guns, animals, and the weather. Shootings were common, but murders were rare -- one usually shot oneself. Shootings, drownings, being crushed by wagon wheels, and injuries from handling domestic animals were the biggest accidental killers on the Trail. The combined deaths from sharp instruments, falling objects, rattlesnakes, buffalo hunts, hail, and lightning amounted to less than any one of the "big four."

Deaths along the trail, especially among young children and mothers in childbirth, were the most heart-rending of hardships:

"Mr. Harvey's young little boy Richard 8 years old went to git in the waggon and fel from the tung. The wheals run over him and mashed his head and Kil him Ston dead he never moved." (Absolom Harden, 1847)

Starvation often threatened emigrants, but it usually only killed their draft animals and thinned the herds they drove west:

"Counted 150 dead oxen. It is difficult to find a camping ground destitute of carcasses." (J.G. Bruff, 1849)

"Looked starvation in the face. I have seen men on passing an animal that has starved to death on the plains, stop and cut out a steak, roast and eat it and call it delicious." (Clark Thompson, 1850)

Patty Reed, eight year old member of the Donner-Reed Party of 1846 recalled how her mother "took the ox hide we had used for a roof and boiled it for us to eat" when the party was stranded by an early snowfall in the high Sierras. Thirty five members of the party died, and many of the 47 survivors ate their own dead.

Looking back from the Twentieth Century, it is clear that Indians were usually among the least of the emigrants' problems, though the overlanders certainly thought otherwise at the time. Tales of hostile encounters far overshadowed actual incidents, and relations between emigrants and Indians were further complicated by trigger-happy emigrants who shot at Indians for target practice. A few massacres were highly publicized, further reinforcing the myth. The Ward Train, for instance, was attacked by Shoshones who tortured and murdered nineteen emigrants. One boy escaped with an arrow in his side.

The Oregon Trail is this nation's longest graveyard. Over a 25 year span, up to 65,000 deaths occurred along the western overland emigrant trails. If evenly spaced along the length of the Oregon Trail, there would be a grave every 50 yards from Missouri to Oregon City. Medicine kits the pioneers carried to treat diseases and wounds included patent medicine "physicing" pills, castor

oil, rum or whiskey, peppermint oil, quinine for malaria, hartshorn for snakebite, citric acid for scurvy, opium, laudanum, morphine, calomel, and tincture of camphor. It's a wonder that only one in every ten emigrants died along the way.

Disrupting the Natives

White emigrants of the overland trail era are often credited with disrupting the natives, causing sweeping changes in in their cultures, and precipitating wars. This is not entirely untrue, but the Oregon Trail was merely one chapter in a much longer history. The larger truth is that native lifestyles were disrupted by other Indians and by the arrival of Spanish horses well before the United States came into existence, wars and irreversible cultural changes were caused by government policies older than the Oregon Trail, and most contact between emigrants and Indians on the overland trails was peaceful.

Plains Indians were in a constant battle over homelands as migrating tribes shoved aside previous occupants, and the policies of the US government served only to further complicate this situation. In 1824, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was established -- not as an independent federal agency, but as a part of the War Department. During the Jackson presidency, a policy of Indian removal was implemented and the "five civilized tribes" of the northeast were forcibly relocated to the plains. As missionaries were moving to Oregon, the Cherokee Nation was following their Trail of Tears to Indian Territory.

Into this uncertainty came the covered wagons headed for Oregon and California. The emigrants distrusted and misunderstood the Indians, seeking revenge for any transgression, no matter how petty. Some emigrants actually shot at Indians for target practice, and guns always came out when Indians stopped by a pioneer encampment to trade. Minor skirmishes were labeled massacres in the press, and the number of dead grew with each retelling of the story at forts and trading posts across the West.

The first group of Indians encountered by emigrants headed west were the "civilized" tribes of the plains: the Fox, Sauk, Shawnee, and Potawatomi of the lower Missouri Valley. They readily learned English and assumed many customs of the whites. Passing the Methodist Shawnee Mission School, established in 1839 in Indian Territory just over the Missouri state line from Westport, marked the edge of white civilization.

Surrounding the "civilized" Indians were two groups of "friendlies," unassimilated but nonhostile tribes. One group included the Oto, Missouri, and Winnebago tribes. The other included the Omaha, Quapaw, Osage, Kansa (or Kaw), and Ponca Indians.

Upon reaching the Platte River basin, emigrants came into contact with the tribe believed to be the original (in historic times, at any rate) inhabitants of the Great Plains: the Pawnee. The four main tribes -- Grand, Noisy, Wolf, and Republican River -- were mainly farmers. Wars with the Sioux were gradually reducing their numbers, estimated by Lewis and Clark to be around 10,000. The cholera epidemic of 1849 killed perhaps half of those remaining. The Pawnee rarely fought with whites, and they were trusting enough to sell the Army a site for a new fort to protect the overlanders. The Union Pacific even hired them as guards against the Sioux.

The next group encountered were the Arapaho and Cheyenne. The Arapaho were religiously opposed to war. Closely associated with the Cheyenne, they were known for their friendliness and desire to trade. The Cheyenne were originally corn farmers from Minnesota but were forced to become buffalo-hunting nomads by the raiding Sioux. In 1840, the Arapaho and Cheyenne aligned with the Sioux, Kiowa, and Commanches against white settlement and the Pawnee, Shoshone, and Utes. They were guests of the Sioux when Custer and his men rode into battle at the Little Big Horn in 1876.

The Indians causing the most change on the Plains were those who called themselves Dakota (or Lakota or Nakota -- whites with different accents heard the Indian words differently). The Chippewa called them Naudewisioux, the "snake" or "enemy," and French trappers shortened the name to Sioux. They had migrated to Nebraska and Wyoming by way of Manitoba and the Dakotas, and their arrival on the Great Plains precipitated a long period of warfare and skirmishing

with the tribes they pushed aside. There were fourteen main Sioux tribes, of which the best known were the Oglala, Brule, Teton, Santee, Blackfoot, Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, and Two Kettle. Some Sioux farmed corn and augmented this with buffalo, game, and fish. Others were nomadic, moving entire villages seasonally. They were a powerful and proud people, and when pushed by settlers they responded with hostility. On August 9, 1854, along the Oregon Trail near Fort Laramie, the Grattan Massacre marked the start of a 36 year period of intermittent warfare between the United States Army and the Sioux tribes.

A highly respected leader of the Sioux during this period was Chief Red Cloud. In 1866, he demanded the abandonment of two forts along the Bozeman Trail. He was defeated after an attack on Fort Laramie. Chief Crazy Horse won infamy and immortality among whites when he led the Sioux against Colonel Custer and the 7th Cavalry along the Little Big Horn River. Custer's troops were wiped out. Word of the massacre reached the East Coast population centers on July 4, 1876, and newspapers gave it front page coverage the following day -- the day after the United States of America celebrated its 100th birthday. The timing was a remarkable coincidence, and it surely contributed to the hostile attitude of many whites toward the Indians.

The final battle of the Sioux Indian War was at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. Younger braves had been dancing the Ghost Dance, a religious movement that preached invincibility and promised the return of the great buffalo herds that had been slaughtered by white hunters and settlers. Indian Agents, fearing another uprising, demanded the Sioux be rounded up and moved to Pine Ridge Reservation. Some 350 Miniconjou Sioux were surrounded by 500 soldiers of the reconstituted 7th US Cavalry, the same unit embarrassed at the Little Big Horn. The 120 men of the Sioux band were turning over their weapons when a rifle went off. The soldiers started shooting at anyone that moved, including women and children. They even used field artillery against the Indians, many of whom were unarmed. Over 300 Sioux were killed; 31 soldiers died in the crossfire. Congress, swept up in the hysteria of the times along with most everyone else, awarded several Medals of Honor to soldiers at Wounded Knee.

In 1973, Indian activists seized the site of Wounded Knee to publicize the plight of American Indians. Congress was asked to pay compensation to descendants and build a memorial to the fallen Sioux. Instead, the Indians got a statement of "deep regret" that the massacre had taken place.

West of the Rocky Mountains, emigrants on the Oregon Trail encountered several bands they knew as the Snake River Indians. These were the intermarried Shoshone and Bannocks. Related tribes encountered along the California Trail included the Paiute and Ute Indians. The Shoshone, in particular, were friendly to whites. Credit goes to Lewis and Clark for reuniting a Shoshone chief with his sister, their interpreter and guide, Sacajawea. The Shoshone assisted mountain men and Mormons alike. Chief Washakie was a friend of Jim Bridger, and he helped whites with safe passage and boasted that he had never killed a white person.

The same could not be said for the Bannocks. The Massacre Rocks Incident and the Ward Massacre are blamed on the Bannocks. The 1878 Bannock War was caused by a decrease in buffalo and loss of hunting land. It started with the arrest of two drunken Indians who'd taken potshots at teamsters along the Trail and ended when Chief Buffalo Horn was killed, possibly by members of his own tribe.

Farther down the Snake River, the emigrants encountered the Nez Perce, French for "pierced nose." Their contact with whites was entirely positive from the arrival of Lewis and Clark until the time that gold was discovered on their land. It was then determined by white authorities that the Nez Perce would be better off on a reservation. Young Chief Joseph, however, had promised his father he would never give up the Wallowa Valley.

When Joseph refused to accept transfer to a reservation in 1877, the Nez Perce War began. Joseph continually outwitted and embarrassed the Army in what is now a legendary campaign that is still studied by aspiring officers in armies around the world. When it became clear that the Army would accept neither defeat nor compromise, Joseph decided to take his people to Canada, beyond the reach of American soldiers. Slowed down by women, children, and all of their possessions, they still kept ahead of the cavalry. They were captured only one day away from the border north of Yellowstone when the commander of the pursuing Army forces telegraphed ahead to another unit to

cut them off. Joseph's surrender included the famous words, "I am tired of fighting. The little children are freezing to death. I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

From the crest of the Blue Mountains to the crest of the Cascades, the emigrants met the Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Tenino, and Tygh Indians. Closely associated with, but not as friendly as the Nez Perce, they tolerated Oregon Trail traffic for the first few years. This ended when a measles epidemic at the Whitman Mission led to the killing of the Whitmans by Cayuse warriors in 1847 and the ensuing Cayuse War. The Cayuse were defeated by a volunteer army organized by the American Provisional Government and the British Hudson's Bay Company, and in 1851 they merged with the Nez Perce. In 1855 the Teninos, Wascos, Paiute, Tygh, and Klickitats merged into the new Warm Springs tribe. They held on to their traditional fishing rights along the Columbia River. Many pioneer diaries include references to looking down from the high cliffs to see Indians fishing for salmon at now-inundated Celilo Falls.

In the Willamette Valley itself, there were estimated to be over 5000 Chinook Indians of various tribes before the arrival of Euro-Americans. Most of the 800 Multnomah Indians were killed by a malaria epidemic caused by a single Swedish trading ship; the remainder were almost finished off by Methodist missionaries who unwittingly brought with them measles and smallpox, diseases to which the natives had no resistance. Other tribes suffered similar fates. By 1910 the Calapooya and Multnomah tribal groups were all but extinct, and there were fewer than 50 surviving Chinookans -- remnants of the Clackamas, Santiam, and Yamel (Yam Hill) tribes. These survivors were sent to the Grand Ronde Reservation. For some, the Oregon Trail was more disruptive than for others.

The City at The Dalles

In 1906 Ezra Meeker and the people of Dalles City, Oregon, erected a monument near the city center proclaiming the "End of the Old Oregon Trail 1843-1906." It is incorrect in dates, location, and facts.

Meeker had a policy of placing monuments at city centers or parks where they could get the best exposure. He is to be commended for this. If he had placed a plaque at Crates Point that said, "Temporary End of the Overland Portion of the Old Oregon Trail 1843-1845," few people would have given it notice.

In April of 1806, Lewis and Clark stayed at a spot they called "rockfort" camp. As salmon ran up the swift water, Indians were spearing them from the rocks of Celilo Falls or scooping them out of the water with long handled nets. These Indians menaced the whites as they portaged the rapids, and Lewis and Clark as well as the 1811 Stuart Party paid them tribute. Despite this, the Indians stole what they could and so earned the reputation of being the worst thieves between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean. William Clark himself came near to shooting an Indian -- any Indian -- when his dog was stolen (happily for all concerned, he soon got it back).

James Birney of the North West Company established a short-lived fur trading fort here in 1820. His French-Canadian trappers are responsible for giving the place its name, The Dalles, a French word for rapids of a river through a narrow gorge. Despite the official name of "Dalles City," most people, including the United States Post Office, call it "The Dalles."

In 1838, the Methodists built a branch mission named Wascopam at The Dalles. Jason Lee's nephew, Daniel Lee, was put in charge. In 1840, Alvin Waller was transferred from Oregon City to assist in building the parish among the Indians. At first they seemed successful, but backsliders soon outnumbered converts.

Oregon Trail emigrants described the mission as two dwellings, a schoolhouse, stable, barn, garden, and cleared fields next to the wooden huts of an Indian village. The Applegate Party of 1843 was met with warm greetings and fresh food.

Wascopam Mission was abandoned in 1847 and sold to Dr. Marcus Whitman for $600. After the Whitman Massacre, the property was returned to the Methodists. Neither the Whitmans nor the Methodists attempted to keep up the property, and emigrants of 1849 found the mission in

ruins and decay. After Fort Dalles was built, the old mission was burned and the U.S. government paid $24,000 to the Methodists for title to the land. Various lawsuits proved that the Methodists had never obtained legal title to the property, and $23,000 was returned to claimants.

At Crates Point, a protected harbor at the mouth of Chenowith Creek, the Oregon Trail pioneers put into the river. John McLoughlin, despite orders from his superiors, sent bateaux and food here to assist (and occasionally rescue) weary emigrants. Nearby were many pine trees to cut for building immense rafts that could hold up to six wagons. Writing in 1843, explorer John C. Fremont described them as "ark-like rafts, on which they had embarked their families and households, with their large wagons and other furniture, while their stock were driven along the shore."

In 1845, Samuel K. Barlow and his family arrived in The Dalles and, finding no boats readily available at such a late date, set off to scout the route of what would become the Barlow Road around the south shoulder of Mount Hood. Sam Barlow's road, originally called the Mount Hood Toll Road, began at what is now Third Street in The Dalles. With the Barlow Road open, it was no longer necessary to abandon the overland trail for crude rafts or overpriced HBC bateaux. Later travelers bypassed The Dalles entirely, leaving the Oregon Trail ten miles east to cut south to Barlow's route. Still, the Barlow Road had its own dangers, and about one in every four emigrants would opt for the water route even after the Barlow Road was opened in 1846.

In 1847, Captain Nathan Olney established a store in a log hut only two blocks from the Oregon Trail and Barlow Road. Aside from the old fur trading posts, it was the first business concern east of the Cascades in the Oregon Country.

Major H.A.G. Lee, of the Provisional Government's Oregon Rifles, arrived in The Dalles during the 1847-48 Cayuse War. He built a stockade around the old mission buildings that became known as Fort Lee or Fort Wascopam. In 1849, Colonel Loring of Fort Leavenworth established several posts along the Oregon Trail to protect the emigrants, including Cantonment Loring near Fort Hall and Fort Drum at The Dalles. Starting in May, 1850, crude log buildings were constructed a short distance west of the old Wascopam mission. The fort was redesignated Fort Dalles.

Fort Dalles was the headquarters for Army operations during the 1855-56 Yakima Indian Wars. Eight companies were assigned to the garrison. The Surgeon's Quarters that now serves as the Fort Dalles Museum was built at that time. In 1861, Fort Dalles was downgraded to a quartermaster's depot before being abandoned in 1867.

With Army regulars to serve, a town began growing around the fort in 1852. It was incorporated in 1857 as Fort Dalles. The land claim was entered at the U.S. Land Office at Oregon City. The name was later changed officially to Dalles City.

The Final Leg of the Trail

Looking down on the Columbia River Gorge from high up on Rowena Loop, one sees where the river cuts through the Cascade Mountains. For three years this was the end of the Oregon Trail as an overland route. It was here, just past The Dalles, that the wagons were loaded on rafts or bateaux and floated down to Fort Vancouver and Oregon City.

The west end of the gorge was wretchedly unsuitable for a wagon road: the river was hemmed in by steep slopes and cliffs of hard, volcanic rock, the climate was cold, wet, and windy, and the only areas that were reliably flat enough to permit wagons to pass were soggy bottomlands that were subject to seasonal flooding. Before 1843, no wagon had made it much past Fort Hall intact. From 1843 until 1845, wagons could reach The Dalles, but from there the emigrants had little choice but to make a raft of pine logs, buy a raft from enterprising Indians, or rent a bateaux from the Hudson's Bay Company for around $80. Many lives were lost on the rapids of the Columbia River, the relentless winds overturned many a raft, and there was a stretch of impassable rapids that had to be portaged. Worse still, families were often divided as cattle were driven over Lolo Pass, on the northwest shoulder of Mount Hood, to Eagle Creek and Oregon City. Despite these hardships, almost one in every four emigrants chose the river route after the Barlow Road was opened.

When -- and if -- the pioneers emerged from the Columbia River Gorge, they floated downriver to Fort Vancouver, a British fur trading post. Chief Factor John McLoughlin was under instructions to discourage American settlers, but the "Great White-Headed Eagle," as he was called by the natives, was a Christian in the best sense of the word and could not ignore the plight of the onrushing immigrants. He extended credit to many penniless pioneers, and he was still owed thousands of dollars at the time of his death in 1857.

McLoughlin encouraged the Oregon Trail travelers to head south to Oregon City and the Willamette Valley. This was in part to keep American influence from spreading throughout the extensive territory claimed by Great Britain under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay Company, but also because he had a stake in the city he had founded at Willamette Falls in 1829. The HBC ran a store there, and McLoughlin would build a house and later retire there. By 1844, Oregon City had three stores to supply farmers and was the seat of the newly-founded American Provisional Government. Anyone wishing to file a land claim had to come to Oregon City.

Two emigrants would make decisions at or near The Dalles that would change the character of the Trail. In 1843, Jesse Applegate had the misfortune of losing a wagon to the vagaries of the Columbia River, and his wife suffered the heartbreak of watching a child drown whom she had refused permission to learn to swim. From this experience, Applegate made the decision to open a trail across the inland deserts and into the Willamette Valley from the south. This he did, but the Southern Route (we know it today as the Applegate Trail) was a less than desirable route. The terrain was harsh and dry, and in one of those rare instances where emigrants' worst fears occasionally came true, Klamath Indians sometimes raided passing wagons. More than one wagon train over the years had to be rescued by Army troops or irregulars riding out of the Willamette Valley.

In 1845, Sam Barlow found himself arriving late at The Dalles, where he was faced with the prospect of waiting for a bateaux that was downstream with no scheduled return. Running out of money, food, and patience, Barlow stated that, "God never made a mountain but what He provided a place for man to go over or around it." He then set off with his wagons around the south shoulder of Mt. Hood, Oregon's tallest volcano.

Following an Indian trail, Barlow managed to get his wagons about halfway around the mountain before being forced to admit defeat. At the crest of the Cascade Mountains, Joel Palmer climbed the glacier now named for him and scouted a route off the mountain. Palmer saw that there was little chance of getting the wagons through, so the party sent some of their wagons back to The Dalles and cached the rest of their possessions at a spot they christened Fort Deposit. Most of the party and their livestock was able to enter the Willamette Valley by following the Lolo Pass Trail, an old Indian trail around the northwest flank of Mt. Hood that was too narrow and steep to allow wagons to pass. Thus free to proceed on foot, Palmer, Barlow, and Barlow's eldest son attempted to walk off the mountain.

Exhausted, footsore, and cold, Palmer and the Barlows stumbled into Eagle Creek and met local resident Philip Foster. Rejoining his wife and family in Oregon City, Barlow spent the winter contemplating his route over Mt. Hood. He approached the Provisional Government and obtained official permission to build the Mount Hood Toll Road in early 1846. The Provisional Government allowed him to charge $5 a wagon and 10¢ a head for livestock to use the Road.

With Philip Foster as his financial backer and a crew of forty men, Barlow hacked out a narrow road through forests, rivers, and marshy meadows from The Dalles to Oregon City, a distance of about 150 miles. Reuban Gant is recorded to have driven the first wagon across the new road in 1846; Barlow reported to the Oregon Spectator -- the first newspaper published west of the Rockies -- that 145 wagons and nearly 1600 head of livestock made it over the Road that first year.

Despite being cheaper than renting HBC bateaux and (perhaps) safer than rafting down the Columbia, Barlow was almost universally reviled for building his toll road. Many emigrants were incensed at the idea of having to pay a toll on the last 150 miles of a 2000 mile journey, particularly when they reached Laurel Hill, a slope so steep that the emigrants had to wind ropes around tree limbs and drag hundred-foot-long tree trunks to lower their wagons safely down the incline. Laurel Hill was such a nightmare that even after months of heat, dust, disease, and death, most diarists proclaimed it the single worst stretch of the Oregon Trail, bar none. The Barlow Road's elevation

was also a source of difficulty for the emigrants, as snow and icy fog are commonplace on the mountain during the fall. As Barlow's original toll gate was on the east side of the mountain, weary and frustrated emigrants cursed him for collecting tolls from dead people -- that is, charging tolls to people who would die while attempting to follow his road into the Willamette Valley.

Over the years, five toll gates were built to serve Barlow Road traffic from 1846 until 1915, when the right-of-way was willed to the State of Oregon and the last gate, near the town of Rhododendron, was removed. The route was one way -- west -- for its first fifteen years, until a road was blasted out around Laurel Hill. With the Barlow Road open to traffic in both directions, it became a true thoroughfare, and emigrants were gradually displaced by stagecoaches and freight wagons. In the 1880s, it served the first tourists headed up from the Willamette Valley to vacation and recreation sites on Mt. Hood.

Today, much of the western half of the Barlow Road in Clackamas County is paved over and used by skiers, hunters, and campers visiting the mountain from the Portland area, though this is less a testament to Barlow's skill as a surveyor than it is the result of the terrain dictating where it would be feasible to build a road. However, parts of the Road's eastern half in Wasco County are still very pristine, just as the last emigrant wagon left it over a century ago.

Applegate's Road to Oregon

Of the three brothers Applegate -- Charles, Lindsay, and Jesse -- Jesse was the dominant member of the clan. He was a college graduate and surveyor. After being turned down by William Sublette as a member of his fur company, he surveyed and farmed along with his brothers in western Missouri.

A good friend of Jesse's named Robert Shortess emigrated to Oregon in 1840. Shortess wrote letters back to Applegate singing the praises of the Oregon Country. While Shortess was helping to build the Oregon Provisional Government, Jesse was protesting his neighbors' practice of owning slaves and advertising his family's intent to migrate to Oregon in the spring of 1843. True to their words, the Applegate brothers sold their farms and bought several hundred head of cattle, the largest herd among the more than 5000 head of livestock believed to have accompanied the emigrants of 1843.

Within eight days of their departure, Peter Burnett resigned as captain of the wagon train. The Great Migration of 1843 broke into two parties over the issue of whether the livestock would slow the emigrants enough to risk running into winter weather in the western mountains. William Martin was elected captain of the "light column," consisting of those emigrants with mule-drawn wagons who had three or fewer cows (milk cows, for the most part). The remaining "cow column" was headed by newly-elected captain Jesse Applegate. Despite the fears of those in the light column, the cow column was able to keep a steady pace, following about half a day behind.

The Applegate brothers left their guide Marcus Whitman at his mission in southern Washington and then abandoned their wagons at Fort Walla Walla. They spent several weeks sawing lumber and building flat boats before departing for Fort Vancouver via the Columbia River on November 1, 1843.

Near The Dalles, tragedy struck the Applegate clan. "Whirlpools looking like deep basins in the river, the lapping, splashing, and rolling of waves... Presently there was a wail of anguish, a shriek, and a scene of confusion in our boat that no language can describe. The boat we were watching disappeared and we saw the man and boys struggling in the water." Eleven year old Elisha and nine year old Warren Applegate were drowned. Lindsay and Jesse each lost a child to the river.

The Applegates spent the winter in three log cabins of the abandoned remains of Jason Lee's Old Mission. Lindsay recalled, "We resolved if we remained in the country, to find a better way for others who might wish to emigrate." The Applegates did, indeed, remain in the Oregon Country, settling at Rickreal Creek in Yam Hill County, where Jesse was twice elected to the Provisional Government.

The Applegates learned from Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company that there was a low pass through the Cascades near Klamath Lake. Jesse and Lindsay organized a company

to undertake the discovery of a southern route into Oregon and luring emigrants to use it. On June 20, 1846, they set out from Rickreal into what maps called an "unexplored region." Constantly watched by Indians, they traveled south. They broke out of the forest near Klamath Lake, crossed the Tule and Goose Lake valleys to northern California, and crossed Black Rock Desert to the Humboldt River where they picked up the California Trail from Fort Hall.

They found a large wagon train gathered at Fort Hall and were able to persuade 150 families to take the southern route. Lindsay, Levi Scott, and a few volunteers went ahead to improve the trail. The bulk of the group cut off from the Oregon Trail at the Raft River on August 9, 1846.

There was insufficient food for the livestock and never enough water. Fourteen year old Henry Garrison described battles with Indians, disappointment with Applegate for not improving the road, and a trading post where Applegate bilked the emigrants out of their last dollars. Constant complainer J. Quinn Thornton said, "having at various times upon the journey thrown away my property, I had little remaining save...the most valuable part of our wardrobe. We passed many wagons, that had been abandoned by their owners... [giving] the appearance of a defeated and retreating army." Thornton's controversy with Applegate over the relief of the emigrants was carried on for almost a year in the pages of the Oregon City newspaper, the Oregon Spectator.

The plight of the wagons on the Southern Route eventually became known as those families who had declined to follow Applegate out of Fort Hall rolled into Oregon City, and a pack train of Willamette Valley settlers was sent to meet the southern emigrants. It included Henry Garrison's uncle, who had emigrated two years earlier and was expecting Henry and his family. The relief column met the emigrants at the North Umpqua River on November 14th and conducted them safely to the Willamette River Valley.

Applegate's route did have one thing in its favor, however: when gold was discovered in California in 1848, the Applegate Trail was used by Oregonians to get a head start on the 49ers coming from the East. They followed the Applegate Trail to Tule Lake and then the Lassen Cutoff to the Sacramento River. As they did not venture far into the high desert of Oregon's interior, they found the route hard going, but tolerable. They certainly had an incentive to tolerate it, though.

The April 6, 1848, Oregon Spectator contained an article written by Jesse Applegate. In it, he gave details and mileage estimates along his southern road into Oregon. All of the estimates were short, and the details optimistic. The Applegates and Peter Lassen were reviled by 49ers who were deceived into believing their route was better than the California Trail. The grassless, waterless route accented by spiteful Indians was better only than the Hastings Cutoff, the infamous shortcut that led the Donner-Reed Party to its gruesome fate.

The Road to Religious Freedom

The lands of the Great Basin, around the valley of the Great Salt Lake where once roamed the Ute Indians, were dry and unfruitful until the coming of the Mormons. With patient toil and the introduction of irrigation, the desert bloomed. They called the land Deseret, and they dreamed of founding a new nation.

The Mormon Church began during an emotional and religious era. Believers hold that eighteen-year-old Joseph Smith was visited by the Angel Moroni, told of the location of a set of golden plates buried in the earth, and set about translating them. This Book of Mormon included a history of American Indians, who were portrayed as being the descendants of a lost tribe of ancient Hebrews.

Officially begun in 1830 as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, the new sect caused considerable social polarization. The Saints were persuasive and able to win many new disciples; Gentiles not of the faith were loud with skepticism, criticism, and ridicule.

The great westward migration of the Mormons began in 1831 when Smith envisioned Kirtland, Ohio, as a place to organize an isolated commune. Within two years they were in Independence, Missouri. The locals were not tolerant of the Mormons' communalism or abolitionist views. They were again forced to move, first to Far West, Missouri, then in 1839 to Commerce, Illinois, which the faithful renamed Nauvoo. Although the Mormons did not hold a political

majority in Illinois, they voted reliably and thus held the balance of power. The Illinois legislature gave Nauvoo a liberal charter, allowing Mormons unrestricted police powers and complete control of the courts.

The sect continued to attract new followers during this period, including a large number of immigrants from the eastern states and from Europe, most of whom were women. This meant that unlike other frontier settlements, women often outnumbered men in Mormon communities. The practice of polygamy was mere gossip until 1843, when Smith publicly advocated the practice. There was a sharp division among the Saints over the question of polygamy. Smith was attacked in the pages of a Mormon newspaper and came to fear for his safety. He surrendered himself to a Carthage sheriff for protection, but on June 27, 1844, a mob broke into the jail and killed him.

Upon the death of Smith, church elders returned immediately from missionary journeys around the world to elect new leadership. Brigham Young was chosen to lead the faithful. Unlike Smith, Young had a strong pragmatic streak and did not often resort to revelations to make decisions.

His first decision was to leave Nauvoo. Young wanted to go west, but Oregon and California were ruled out as the settlers there were of the same mindset as those in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. He came to the decision to start the Great Migration in the spring of 1846 without having a firm destination in mind.

In 1847, an all-volunteer company left in search of Zion. They followed the Platte River, paralleling the Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger, and crossed the Wasatch Range into the Great Basin. When the Great Salt Lake Valley came into view, Young gazed upon the valley, recognized it as a place he had seen in a vision and said, "It is enough. This is the right place. Drive on." History has shortened his words to, "This is the place."

A second emigrant party left three months after the first group. Young met them halfway on his journey back to organize the third party for 1848. This was the largest group in the Great Migration of the Mormons, with over 2400 Saints braving the four month trip to newly-founded Salt Lake City.

A territorial government was set up in 1850 for Utah with Brigham Young as governor, but to the Mormons it remained the State of Deseret. The decade of the 1850s was marred by friction between federal and territorial officials. President Buchanan eventually declared Utah to be insurrectionary, and in 1857 replaced Young as governor with a federal appointee named Alfred Cumming.

A US Army detachment from Fort Leavenworth under General Albert Sidney Johnston escorted the new governor. Anxiety was high, and plans to destroy Salt Lake City were developed and almost carried out. Johnston's army was sabotaged en route as Mormons stole supplies, destroyed wagons, set grass fires, and even burned Fort Bridger. Able negotiations allowed the Army to enter the city unmolested. The new governor made himself acceptable to the Mormons, and the $15 million expeditionary force was able to return to Kansas.

In the meantime, hundreds of converts from Europe were arriving in the New World. Not enough wagons could be secured, so handcarts were constructed to bring the 1300 immigrants to Salt Lake City. Five companies left Nebraska in 1857. The first three arrived safely, but the last two left late and were hit hard by winter weather in the Rockies. They were met by a rescue party, but many Saints died huddling for shelter from the wind and snow near Devil's Gate.

Although the Mormons didn't celebrate the idea of "rugged individualism" we often associate with pioneers, they proved to be able trailblazers and established a highly successful desert community which flourishes to this day.

The 49ers and Other Argonauts

The year 1848 started out looking like it would be fairly quiet. The United States was recovering from a depression. A war with Mexico had been fought and won. The fur trade and its once-great empire was well into its decline. The Oregon Question, briefly threatening a third war between the United States and Great Britain, had been settled diplomatically. Mormons were en

route to Utah. Farmers were en route to Oregon. The pace of national life had slowed down.

Enter Johann Augustus Sutter, a Swiss immigrant to Mexican California. In 1839, he had convinced the Spanish governor that he was a minor European nobleman and so conned his way into ownership of a rancho in the Sacramento valley. He had become a successful farmer and herder, and he aspired to making his fortune as master of an agricultural empire. To this end, he hired James Marshall, an emigrant from New Jersey by way of Oregon, to oversee the construction of a sawmill. On January 24th, 1848, Marshall was inspecting a ditch when he noticed flecks of gold in the mud.

Despite efforts to keep it a secret, word got out. Oregonians heard about the discovery in July, when the brig Honolulu dropped anchor in the Columbia and tried to buy out Fort Vancouver's mining supplies under the pretext of supplying coal miners. The East Coast heard about the gold strike in August. Newspaper headlines proclaimed "GOLD! Gold from the American River!" in huge letters across the top of every front page in the eastern states. Success stories abounded: two prospectors dug out $17,000 worth of the precious metal in a single season; others dug up nuggets worth over $5000 in just two months of prospecting. The first dependable account of the magnitude of the gold strike to reach the East was delivered to the War Department in November, when an officer brought back 230 ounces of gold in a tea caddy. By the end of the year, the whole world knew.

Californians, of course, got a head start to the gold fields. Then came Oregonians, Mormons, and Hawaiians. Miners from around the world, including South America, Australia, and China, were welcomed at first, but later taxed or driven out.

The gold rush from the East was delayed until the spring of 1849, when the overland trails were again passable. That year, tens of thousands of 49ers poured into California. Some came by ship around Cape Horn, or took a packet ship to Central America, crossed the isthmus of Panama by mule train, and booked passage up the West Coast to San Francisco. These were the preferred routes for 49ers from the East and Gulf Coasts; for those in the American heartland, or who lacked boat fare, the California Trail was the way west.

For most historians, the California Trail started at Fort Hall: when wagon trains reached the Raft River just past Fort Hall, they found a sign on the right that read, "To Oregon," and on the left was a pile of gold-colored rocks, probably fool's gold, marking the trail to California. (A modern anecdote says when the parties reached the sign, they formed committees to discuss alternatives. Those who were able to reach consensus went to California; those who could read the sign went to Oregon. Californians, of course, tell this joke the other way around.)

Like the Oregon Trail, the California Trail is not to be confused with the trail to California. There is a difference: each emigrant, prospector, or farmer had his own trail to California. It started at their old home and ended at their new one. Along the way, they followed a well used (and later, often shortcutted) trail commonly known as the California Trail.

As an emigrant road, the California Trail is exactly as old as the Oregon Trail. The 1841 Bidwell-Bartleson Party got as far as Fort Hall when half of the California-bound party decided to start their farms in the Oregon Country, instead. In the following years, most emigrants were headed to Oregon, hence the popular name Oregon Trail for the entire route. However, all that changed when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill -- suddenly, everyone on the overland trails seemed to be heading for California.

The main trunk of the California Trail cut off at the Raft River in Idaho near the City of Rocks, angled southwest to the Humboldt River near Elko, Nevada, and followed the river past Winnemucca to its demise in Humboldt Lake. Crossing Humboldt and Carson Sinks, overlanders picked up the Truckee River, passed the present-day site of Reno, and crested the Sierras at Donner Pass. This put them in the Bear River basin, which empties into the Feather and Sacramento Rivers.

Always in a hurry, gold seekers took many cutoffs. Many bypassed Fort Bridger by using Sublette's Cutoff to Wyoming's Bear River. Some took Hudspeth's Cutoff straight from the Bear River to the California Trail, bypassing Fort Hall. Lansford Hastings recommended taking the Mormon Trail from Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City, circling south of the lake, crossing the Great Salt Desert, and joining the California Trail near Elko. Following Hastings' advice led the Reed-Donner Party across the Bonneville salt flats to its gruesome fate in the high Sierras, but later

travelers improved the trail and rendered the route serviceable. Some gold rushers lessened the hardship of Hastings' route by going north around the lake. A popular cutoff that became so heavily trafficked as to become the main branch of the trail was the Carson Pass Trail, which left the Donner Pass route at Carson Sink, picked up the Carson River, passed Carson City, crossed the Sierras south of Lake Tahoe, and went through the gold fields of Placerville to the American River and Sutter's Fort.

Much of the gold in California was discovered before the 49ers even arrived. Still, many stayed in California to farm, ranch, or open shops. Most who found gold did not make millions overnight but worked from sunup to sundown for $20 a day -- which was still a sight better than the dollar-a-day pay that was typical back East.

Life in the gold fields was unlike anywhere else in the country. Camps sprang up overnight. Cabins consisted of tents or old blankets tossed over a wood frame. Dirty, muddy streets filled with garbage and sewage, and outbreaks of diseases such as smallpox and malaria were common.

With so much wealth suddenly entering circulation, costs skyrocketed as merchants rushed to cash in on their own bonanza. Flour sold for $400 a barrel, sugar $4 a pound, and whiskey $20 a quart. Miners spent gold as fast as they found it. They drank, gambled, and danced with each other to Stephen Foster's popular song "Oh, Susanna."

Gamblers, saloon keepers, merchants, prostitutes, and lawyers preyed on the mostly male communities. The only real buildings in boom towns were the saloons, and the only women worked in the dance halls. There was no rule of law in mining camps, and robbery, murder, and violence became common. Vigilant committees were formed, and judges called "alcaldes" were elected to keep the peace.

Sacramento, San Francisco, and Stockton boomed as merchants sold out their supply of picks, shovels, knives, pans, skillets, canteens, and tents. In 1850, San Francisco was a jungle of tents and wood shacks. Its harbor was fairly littered with deserted ships. That year a fire leveled much of San Francisco, but there was so much money floating around that no one did much more than pause to take a breath before commencing the town's reconstruction.

Those 49ers who went bust in California had many opportunities to search for gold elsewhere. There was a rush every year from 1850 to 1873 as strikes were made throughout the west. This was the era of boom towns such as Virginia City, Boulder, Carson City, Boise, and Denver.

From 1851 to 1858, there were strikes in southern Oregon, Montana, Idaho and Nevada. Then came 1859, a banner year for mineral strikes. In Nevada, "Old Virginia" Finney and "Old Pancake" Comstock discovered a true motherlode: the famed Comstock Lode outside Virginia City. Miners brought out a million dollars a month in silver and gold during the peak of production in Virginia City. Meanwhile, other miners headed for Colorado with "Pike's Peak or Bust" painted on their wagon bonnets (about half of them later left under the slogan "Busted, by God"). From 1860 to 1864, rushes were on in Idaho and Montana as strikes there lured miners north. One monstrous nugget found in the vicinity of Helena, Montana, weighed 175 ounces.

In 1873, gold was discovered on sacred Sioux land in South Dakota's Black Hills. The Sioux refused to vacate their reservation, and the US government, despite promises to the contrary, did little to discourage prospectors from invading the reservation. By 1876, thousands of miners were in the Black Hills and another round of war with the Sioux had begun.

The last great strike in the lower 48 states was at Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1891. As each gold rush cooled off and the metal became harder to find, individual prospectors left for greener pastures and mining was left to big business backed by Eastern money interests. Dynamite came to America in 1868, a boon to prospectors and mining companies alike. However, the vastly more destructive technique of placer mining was used where the terrain allowed for it. Aided by high-pressure pumps that could kill a person with the powerful stream of water they produced, men channeled streams, opened sluiceways, and literally washed entire hillsides out to sea in their search for gold.

It is estimated that during the first five years of the California Gold Rush, $276 million in gold was dug out, panned, or otherwise brought to light by hand. In the next five years, the mining companies with all their manpower and heavy machinery were able to uncover only $220 million in

gold.

To some, the California Trail was the road to sudden wealth and prosperity; to many more, it was only a road to poverty and hardship. Within a few years, it was being used in reverse for the long trip home -- or, for those who had been hit hard by gold fever, for the considerably shorter trip to the silver mines of Nevada or the gold fields of Colorado.

Iron Horses Over the Ruts

While American emigrants were traveling the Oregon Trail, American soldiers were fighting a war with Mexico. Lessons learned from that war would lead to the end of the Oregon Trail as a major migration route. In November of 1845, while Sam Barlow was seeking permission from Oregon's Provisional Government to build his toll road, America was attempting to purchase California and New Mexico but being rebuffed by the Mexican government. On May 12, 1846, while the Donner Party was still in Kansas, Congress declared war against Mexico. In September of 1846, while the Donner Party was approaching their fate in the high Sierras, General Zachary Taylor was capturing Monterey. A year later, while the Mormons were founding Salt Lake City, General Winfield Scott was capturing Mexico City. On February 2, 1848, less than two weeks after gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, the Treaty of Guadaloupe Hidalgo was signed, officially ending the war.

The army learned two valuable lessons from the war: first, there was clearly a need to explore the West more fully; second, there was just as clearly a need for a transcontinental railroad system, if for no other reason than to ensure the swift transportation of troops across the vast American West.

In 1853, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis ordered Colonel John James Abert of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers to make a series of explorations to determine viable transcontinental railroad routes. Six survey teams crossed the United States that year, and each surveyor proclaimed his route to be the best. Davis, a southerner and the future leader of the Confederate States of America, favored a southern route.

Isaac I. Stephens, already named the first Governor of the new Washington Territory, and Captain George B. McClellan, future Civil War general and presidential candidate, surveyed between the 47th and 49th parallels. They went from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Puget Sound, where Stephens took over as governor.

Lieutenant John Gunnison worked along the 38th parallel from Fort Leavenworth to the Rockies. In the Great Basin, he was killed in a skirmish with the Ute Indians and replaced by Lt. Edward G. Beckwith.

Lieutenant Amiel Whipple surveyed the 35th parallel from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Santa Fe and then on to Los Angeles.

Lieutenants John Park and John Pope surveyed from Texas to San Diego along the 32nd parallel. They started at opposite ends and met in the middle. Lieutenant Park then went on to survey a route to San Francisco while another Army lieutenant, Henry L. Abbott, scouted the terrain from Fort Vancouver to California and back again. He surveyed two possible routes, one in the Willamette Valley and the other east of the Cascades.

Before the Civil War, no railroad company wanted to take on the cost of building a transcontinental railroad. During the war the federal government decided to back five companies: the Union Pacific; the Central Pacific; the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe; and later the Southern Pacific and Northern Pacific. The Pacific Railroad Bill was signed into law on July 1, 1862, and the rush was on.

Subsidies of public money and land were needed to make the effort desirable to the railroads: for every mile of track laid, the companies got a square mile of public land to sell to future settlers. Federal and state governments gave away 170 million acres in this manner. This massive influx of wealth was the beginning of the fortunes of the great railroad tycoons of the era, such as Leland Stanford and Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Omaha was the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific, which was building westward across

the plains. James Evans, working for Col. Grenville Dodge, discovered Evans Pass in 1866. As the UP moved westward, paralleling the Oregon and California Trails, the new terminals became jumping off spots for both the overlanders and stagecoach lines.

Sacramento was the western terminus of the Central Pacific, which was building eastward through the mountains. The CP initially enjoyed rapid progress, but construction soon bogged down at the edge of the Sierras. Most of the men had left to search for gold or silver, and the terrain made for extremely tough going. Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific decided to try an experiment, and one day in February, 1865, fifty Chinese workers arrived on a flatcar. They worked twelve hours that same day without complaint. Crocker immediately sent for more Chinese, and 3000 Chinese laborers pushed the CP through the mountains.

The Chinese took jobs no one else wanted, and hundreds died as a result: they hung over cliffs from ropes to tap holes in the rock; they inserted dynamite and were lucky to clear the explosion on their way back up; they used the new liquid explosive nitroglycerin when others balked. Surviving on a diet of oysters and vegetables rather than red meat and whiskey, they did not take sick working at high altitude.

The photograph of the golden spike ceremony on May 10, 1869, at Promontory, Utah, has plenty of Irishmen, Civil War veterans, and tycoons, but no Chinese are to be seen. Legend has it that as the last rail was being carried in someone yelled to the photographers, "Take a shot!" The Chinese dropped the rail and ran.

It took another fifteen years before Oregon was linked to the rest of the country by rail. The Oregon & California Railroad built south to Sacramento, and despite its name, the Oregon Short Line made a connection to the Union Pacific main line at Granger, Wyoming. It was now possible for an emigrant from the Midwest or the East Coast to board a train at Omaha and travel in relative comfort and safety all the way to the Willamette Valley. The Oregon Trail was obsolete.

Oregon Trail Diaries

The period between 1820 and 1860 in America is sometimes called the Age of Reform. People were driven by a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Reformers demanded an end to alcoholism and improved living conditions for prisoners, the handicapped, and the mentally ill. People like Dorothea Dix, Samuel Gridley Howe, and Thomas Gallaudet were horrified by the treatment of society's less fortunate.

Horace Mann, famed for remarking that, "In a republic, ignorance is a crime," was upset by the condition of American schools. Many communities had no schools, and where schools did exist, they were often terribly overcrowded. Teaching techniques left much to be desired, as well: students learned by rote memorization and recitation, misbehavior was punished by beatings, and teachers had no formal training. As Massachusetts Secretary of Education, Mann started a revolution in American education. He established graded schools where students moved from one grade to another after achieving required skills, and he set up training institutions that prepared teachers. Horace Mann's reward was a seat in Congress; America's reward was a better-educated populace; the benefit to Oregon Trail historians was a literate middle class, able to read and write.

And write, they did -- in great profusion. Other than the Civil War, no single event in Nineteenth Century American history produced more firsthand narratives. They wrote at any time and to anyone. They left graffiti on rocks. They wrote letters back home to loved ones. They recalled their adventures in newspapers, magazines, and dime novels. And they wrote to themselves.

Merrill Mattes, historian of the Great Platte River Road, estimates that one in every two hundred emigrants kept diaries during their journeys. Considering the large number of children and California-bound prospectors who did not write diaries, the 1/200 figure looks good. Doing the math, we can guesstimate that there were around 3000 personal historians to the Oregon Trail experience. Three types of Oregon Trail narratives exist: diaries, journals, and reminiscences. Diaries and journals were actually written by emigrants as they trekked the 2000 miles west; reminiscences were written much later in life.

The large number of diarists is remarkable considering the conditions the authors had to

endure. Pencils, pens, inkwells, and paper all had to be brought with them. Time was very limited, the only time available being that last hour of daylight after the animals had been tended, meals made and cleaned up, and chores completed. Their energy was limited, as well, as the average emigrant walked ten to fifteen miles each day. Many diarists can be excused for writing journal entries only on occasional laundry days, at forts, or during Sunday rest stops. Most letters were written at forts, as they could be posted home from there. These letters and diaries were invested with great sentimental value and often became family heirlooms of a sort. Not surprisingly, most diaries remained in Oregon or California with the descendants of their authors, and most letters remained in the East with the descendants of their recipients.

It is generally assumed by this time that most diaries and collections of letters have long since been recognized as historically significant and turned over to museums and libraries, but every so often come rumors of a family still holding on to one. Diaries are extremely valuable resources for researchers. Many institutions have microfilmed their collections and made them widely available. Collections worth noting include the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Brigham Young University, the Huntington Library in California, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Western History Research Center at Yale University, and the state historical societies of California, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oregon.

With a renewal of public interest in the Oregon Trail, diaries are being published in books such as Platte River Narratives and Dr. Ken Holmes' Covered Wagon Women. Publications of historical societies are also excellent sources of diary material. Among the best are the Missouri Historical Review, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Nebraska History, Wisconsin Magazine of History, and the Overland Journal, published by the Oregon-California Trails Association.

A copy of one such narrative, the reminiscence of Henry Garrison was given to this author by Marijane Rea of Oregon City, a direct descendant of Henry. Written in 1903 when he was 78 years old -- 57 years after the trip -- it tells the story of a 14 year old boy on the Oregon and Applegate Trails. One event he cited conflicts with other accounts, but most of the story appears to be accurate.

Henry Garrison's remembrances start in Missouri in 1841 at a place called Irish Grove, five miles from the river near St. Joe. He tells of the difficulties of being a Methodist preacher's son in a Catholic community. His uncles had left for Oregon in 1843, and he wished to join them someday. During the winter of 1845-46, the Garrisons tried selling their farm. Harsh economic conditions forced them to settle for $800.

They left for Oregon on May 5, 1846, heading to the ferry at Oregon Crossing on the Missouri River. With 50 wagons in line to cross ahead of them, it took three days to reach the far shore. They elected Rily Gragg as their Captain and Henry's father as First Lieutenant and member of the camp legislature.

At the crossing of the Big Blue River, Henry first met David Inglish, the same age as he and described as a "bully among the boys always ready for a fight." On several occasions, Inglish tried to beat up or even kill Garrison. Some years later, Inglish apparently came to an unpleasant end in Idaho, where he is believed to have been hung by a vigilante committee for robbing miners.

Along the Platte River, Henry's father took ill with inflammatory rheumatism and was entirely helpless. He had to be propped up in the wagon, not able to move below the neck. After arriving in Oregon, his father recovered and became a preacher and an 1848 California gold miner.

Henry at the age of 14 became responsible for his family and their wagons. A few days later, Henry's 7-year-old brother Enoch broke his leg. Henry recommended amputation but the doctor, actually a government hospital steward, refused. By the time amputation was performed, it was too late and Enoch died of infection. In Henry's own words: "It was reported that the Indians was in the habit of opening graves for the purpose of getting shrouding. To prevent this, the grave was dug in such a place that the wagons when leaving camp might pass over it. In digging the grave, those who have it in charge was careful to cut and lift the sod in squares so they could be replaced when the grave was filled. Before commencing the grave, bed-quilts were spread on the ground to receive the dirt as it was thrown from the grave. After the grave was filled up, the sods were carefully replaced. The remaining dirt was carried and thrown in the River. When we broke camp next morning, the wagons 74 in number passed over the grave. Fathers wagons was driven to one

side and did not pass over the grave."

Henry talks of seeing the Rocks: Court House Rock, Chimney Rock, and Independence Rock. It was at Independence Rock on July 12th that three of the Garrison children climbed the rock, crawled down into a crevice, and engraved their names. At South Pass, they realized they were on the Continental Divide and finally in the Oregon Country. Henry told of having problems staking down the horses, as the ground was frozen less than a foot below the surface.

The party's first contact with Indians was a Crow war party of 400 warriors along the Green River. They swapped horses and left satisfied. Later, along the Applegate Trail near Klamath, unfriendly Indians had to be fought off three times. Two people were killed.

At Fort Hall, they met Jesse Applegate, who convinced them to try his route into Oregon. Applegate's road passed through the territory of hostile Indians and long stretches of difficult, waterless terrain -- the Southern Route, as Applegate called it, would never become the emigrant highway he envisioned. Progress was slow, and food supplies ran low. At the Umpqua River, the wagons were met by a relief party and guided safely to the Willamette Valley. Henry's uncle, who had come to Oregon in 1843, was among the relief party.

Of his experience, Henry Garrison said, "Our journey is ended, our toils are over, but I have not tried to portray the terrible conditions we were placed in. No tongue can tell, nor pen describe the heart rending scenes through which we passed."

A diary is simply a daily record of events. Many are terse and practical, containing little more than records of expenditures, miles traveled, and the quality of the forage or availability of good water on a given day. Others are quite expressive...

Journal of a Trip to Oregon
Abigail Jane Scott
1852

June 29 - We came twenty miles. We struck the Sweet water about two o'clock and about three came to Independence rock; The Sweet water is about one hundred feet in width; The water is clear and palatable but is warmer during the day than water of the Platte. Independence rock is an immense mass covering an area of, I think about ten acres, and is about three hundred feet high; My sisters and I went to the base of the rock with the intention of climbing it but a we had only ascended about thirty feet when a heavy hail and wind storm arose obliging us to desist; We then started on after the wagons and before we reached them they had all crossed the river except the last to overtake. They had intended to let us wade it (it was waist deep) to learn us not to get so far behind the team; I would have liked the fun of wading well enough but did not like to get joked about being left. Immediately after leaving Independence rock we came in sight of the well known Devil's Gate five miles ahead of us and when we came near enough we turned off the road about one mile and halted for the night opposite to it in a bend of the river

We in company with many others paid this gate a visit; It is indeed a sight worth seeing; The Sweet water passes through it, and it really seems left by providence for the river to pass through as we can see no other place where it can find its way through the rocks; The cliffs of rock on either side are at least four hundred feet in hight and on the South side almost perfectly perpendicular; The rocks are in many places covered with names of visitors to this place a few of which were of as early date as '38 a great many were dated '50 and '51 but the majority were '52. We passed seven graves

A journal is usually written in on a more irregular schedule to record events which struck the writer as significant or interesting. Journals have a certain element of storytelling in them which diaries often lack...

"memorandum"
The Running Commentaries of Keturah Belknap

Just as we were ready to sit down to supper Joe Meek and his posse of men rode into camp. They were going to Washington, D. C. to get the government to send soldiers to protect the settlers in Oregon and they told us all about the Indian Massacre at Walla Walla called the "Whitman Massacre". They had traveled all winter and some of their men had died and they had got out of food and had to eat mule meat so we gave them all their supper and breakfast. The captain divided them up so all could help feed them. Father B. was captain so he and George took three so they made way with most all my stuff I had cooked up: on the whole we are having quite a time; some want to turn back and others are telling what they would do in case of an attack. I sit in the wagon and write a letter as these men say if we want to send any word back they will take it and drop it in the first Post Office they come to so I'm writing a scratch to a lady friend. While I'm writing I have an exciting experience. George is out on guard and in the next wagon behind ours a man and woman are quarreling. She wants to turn back and he wont go so she says she will go and leave him with the children and he will have a good time with that crying baby, then he used some very bad words and said he would put it out of the way. Just then I heard a muffled cry and a heavy thud as tho something was thrown against the wagon box and she said "Oh you've killed it" and he swore some more and told her to keep her mouth shut or he would give her some of the same. Just then the word came, change guards. George came in and Mr. Kitridge went out so he and his wife were parted for the night. The baby was not killed. I write this to show how easy we can be deceived. We have a rest and breakfast is over. Meek and his men are gathering their horses and packing, but he said he would have to transact a little business with his men so they all lined up and he courtmartialed them and found three guilty and made them think they would be shot for disobeying orders but it was only a scare "Now every man to his post and double quick till they reach the Hollow". The woman was out by the road side with a little buget [buggy?] and her baby asleep in the wagon under a strong opiate. After that we had trouble with those folks as long as they were with us; they would take things from those that did the most for them and there was others of the same stripe. They seemed to think when they got on the plains they were out of reach of the law of God or man.

A reminiscence is written later in life, long after the events being described. Reminiscences are the most suspect form of "eyewitness testimony" to history because of the many years that have passed. Historians generally check their accounts against diaries and journals, which were usually written only hours or days after the events they chronicle, as well as other forms of primary documentary evidence...

Reminiscences of A. H. Garrison
His Early life, and Across the Plains
And Of Oregon from 1846 to 1903

I think it was about the 12th of July when we arrived at Independence Rock. This is simply a legg ledge, or mountain of rock that runs down to within a short distance of the stream. We remained here one day to give the teams a chance to rest. Hoover, Brother David and myself climed to the top of the rock, my recollection is, the rocky ledge was five or six hundred feet high, on top, it was quite level, after looking around as long as we wished, we started to return to camp. After getting a part of the way down, we discovered a crevice that seemed to go to the bottom, as we could see a glimmer of light in the distance. We concluded to venture down, Martin Hoover first, and David next, we had a hard time of it after going quite aways down the crevice, we would have been glad to have been on-top again, but concidering it more dangerous to try to return than to keep on down, we kept, some places, the chasm was
so narrow, that we could scarcely squeeze through.

I think we must have been two hundred feet high when we started to down the crevice. When we got to where it was light enough, we left our names engraved on the rocks, but I doubt not

to this day, Jan 12th 1903, that there is any names in that crevice than those of Martin Hoover, David Garrison, and A.H. Garrison. When we returned to camp, and it had become known what we had done, we got two free lectures, one from Captain Garag Gragg, and one from Father, we was more frightened after hearing of the dangers the lectures cited than we was while creeping down the crevice.

Unit III. Settling the Oregon Country

The City on Willamette Falls

Near the mouth of the Clackamas River, there once stood an old, moss-covered, seemingly dilapidated house 300 feet long. In it lived the entire Clackamas Indian tribe. The Indians along this portion of the Wal-lamt, or Willamette, River were hosts to the hundreds of migrating Molallas, Calapooyas, Multnomahs, Teninos, and Chinooks who came each year to catch salmon at Hyas Tyee Tumwater -- what white men named Willamette Falls. The Indians' permanent marks can still be seen in petroglyphs at the base of the falls on Black Point.

The first white man to take an interest in the Willamette Falls area was Alexander Ross of the North West Company in 1815, who recognized that the falls could supply reliable, year-round power to mills along the river banks. In 1829, John McLoughlin established a land claim at Willamette Falls in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company and began to encourage former trappers to settle nearby. McLoughlin would later buy out the HBC's interest, putting the claim in his own name before retiring. Next were the Methodists in 1840, when the Reverend Alvin Waller established a mission and started building a church. The Methodists and McLoughlin would be at odds for a dozen years, driven more by strength of personality than by the soon mooted battle for political supremacy in Oregon City.

McLoughlin surveyed and laid out the townsite of Oregon City in 1842, replacing the commonly used name of Willamette Falls. Oregon City has always been a natural place of commerce, a narrow spot in the river valley where Indians came together to trade and fish and where whites found abundant and dependable power for mills and generators. The first business, the American Store, was established in 1840 by Captain Couch, who represented J.P. Cushing of Massachusetts. In 1843, Francis Pettygrove opened his Red Store. He and Oregon City lawyer Asa Lovejoy would later stake the claim which grew into the city of Portland. In 1844, the HBC opened their own store at Oregon City. The three stores were founded in response to the increasing numbers of Oregon Trail immigrants who needed to be resupplied to start their farms.

In 1844, Oregon City was incorporated by the Oregon Provisional Government. It soon had 500 residents, 2 churches, 2 saloons, a newspaper, 75 houses, 2 blacksmiths, 2 coopers, 2 cabinet makers, 2 hatters, 2 silversmiths, and 4 tailors to resupply and properly clothe the new settlers.

Along the northern edge of McLoughlin's townsite was the land claim of George Abernethy. He was a steward of the Methodist Mission from 1840 to 1844. He supervised their granary and operated a mercantile business. He invented and circulated "Abernethy rocks" -- flints inscribed with his initials and backed by his high standing -- for making change due to the lack of circulating currency. From 1845 to 1849 he served as Provisional Governor, the first man to be elected governor of Oregon. Abernethy Green, a grassy meadow just above his house, was the marshaling point for new arrivals, both those arriving by raft from Fort Vancouver and overland via the Barlow Road.

In 1846, John McLoughlin retired to Oregon City. He immediately applied for U.S. citizenship and started building his house. The Provisional Government denied his request for citizenship, as they recognized that they had no authority to grant it. When Oregon became a U.S. Territory in 1849, McLoughlin applied again and was duly naturalized on September 5, 1851. At this time, he was serving as Mayor of Oregon City. As a newly-minted American citizen, McLoughlin applied for land patents under U.S. laws to secure the claims he made while working for the HBC. Due to misrepresentation and false statements made before the United States Supreme Court by U.S. Delegate Samuel Thurston and Methodist missionary Jason Lee, the McLoughlin claim was denied. McLoughlin died in his house, without title to it, in 1857. In 1862, title to most of his claims were awarded to his son David.

Oregon City was the first capital of Oregon. The Provisional and Territorial Governments met there from 1844 to 1853, when the capital was moved to Salem. Other firsts for Oregon City included the first newspaper (1846), mail delivery (1846), jail (1845), library (1845), and debating

society (1842) west of the Rocky Mountains. Later pioneers built the first public elevator and, in 1889, successfully undertook the first long-distance transmission of electricity in North America.

In the 1840s and '50s, Oregon City became rich from the gold discovered in California. Merchants plying the coastal runs and canny citizens who knew an opportunity when they saw one sold lumber and wheat to boomtown residents for up to a thousand times what it cost to buy in Oregon. Gold dust flowed north into Oregon in such quantities that the Provisional Government had to authorize the minting of coins in Oregon City to keep the economy in order. California gold paid for a dozen fine mansions built along the rim of the bluff above Willamette Falls.

Industry in Oregon City began early, when McLoughlin had a mill race blasted into the rock in 1830 to power a sawmill. Since then, the power of the falling water has been used to manufacture lumber, flour, woolen cloth, electricity, and paper.

The same terrain that hemmed in the Willamette River at Oregon City and created the falls made it something of a challenge to get around the falls. An 1852 attempt to build a canal was stopped by a fire just before a devastating flood destroyed any hope of salvaging the effort. A portage railroad was built by Ben Holladay, former owner of the Pony Express, in 1861. It operated until a canal and locks for raising and lowering ships were completed in 1872.

Oregon City has been drowned by eight major floods since its founding. The last was in February, 1996.

Claiming the Farm

The single most important impetus for coming to Oregon was the lure of free land. The most important act of new settlers upon arriving in Oregon was to claim a piece of property, and for many years that could only be done in Oregon City.

There had been Americans in Oregon since the early 1810s, when fur trappers first arrived, but there was no real settlement until the 1830s. There simply weren't enough trappers interested in settling down for them to need an organized system of staking claims. However, with the arrival of missionaries and the first waves of settlers, a need arose for means to secure legal title to their lands.

From 1841 until 1843, Americans in Oregon struggled with the problem of land claims, courts, and organized government. In 1843, by a vote of 52 to 50, the settlers of the Willamette Valley authorized the formation of a provisional government until such time as the authority of the United States was extended to the Oregon Country. They drafted Oregon's first constitution, called the Organic Act. Section seventeen was the report of the Land Claims committee. It explained the methods of designating, recording, and improving a land claim, but perhaps more importantly, it limited the number and size of claims and excluded any religious missions. The intent was to prevent speculation and foster a community of self-sufficient farmers working their own land. Oregon City was named the capital of Oregon, and land claims were to be filed there with the recorder. Married couples were allowed to claim up to 640 acres at no cost.

When the United States finally did extend its authority and declare the Oregon Country to be a US Territory, Joseph Lane, the Territorial Governor appointed in 1849, was empowered to review all Provisional Government laws and accept or reject them. Only the law on minting gold "Beaver" coins was declared unconstitutional, as the US Constitution restricted the power of coining money to the federal government. The Provisional Government's land ordinances remained in force until the passage of the Donation Land Act of 1850.

The Donation Land Act called for the orderly and legal ownership of property in Oregon Territory. It voided all laws previously passed making grants of land, but was worded to take into account existing claims in the Oregon Country. It granted every white settler and "American half-breed Indian" above the age of 18 already living in Oregon a free half-section of land if single or a full section (640 acres, the same as allowed under the Organic Act) if married, with half in the wife's name. Residence and cultivation for four years was required. Settlers arriving after 1850 were granted half a section if married, or one-quarter of a section if single.

The office of Surveyor General for Oregon was created and the first federally-recognized land office was opened in Oregon City. A total of 7437 patents were issued under the 1850 law.

Probably the most famous filing was the plat for the city of San Francisco, which had to be sent up the coast by ship to be filed in Oregon City, the closest land office. The plat still proudly belongs to Clackamas County despite periodic efforts on behalf of San Francisco to have it returned.

The Surveyor-General was required to survey the land by the method established by the Land Ordinance of 1785. The Willamette Stone was placed just west of present-day Portland, thus defining the Willamette Meridian, and the first survey of Oregon City was completed by Joseph Hunt in March, 1852.

After 1854, land was no longer free in Oregon. The price was set at $1.25 an acre with a limit of 320 acres in any one claim. As the years passed, the cost per acre rose and the maximum acreage dropped.

In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act to encourage the settling of the Great Plains. However, the law applied to Oregon, as well. Any head of a family of any age, or a single person over 21 who was or who intended to become a US citizen could claim 160 acres (one-quarter of a section) of public land by paying a $34 fee then residing on and cultivating the property for five years. After five years, they received legal title to their claim. Alternatively, after six months of occupation they could purchase the property for $1.25 an acre.

The Railroad Land Grant Act of 1866 gave successful railroad companies title to every odd-numbered section of land for twenty miles back from each side of their right-of-way. This put vast tracts of land in the hands of the railroad companies, which they were expected to sell off to recoup the expense of building the rail lines. To prevent wild speculation and price inflation, the railroads were restricted to selling their land for not more than $2.50 an acre. However, the railroads were expected to pay property taxes on the land they were granted, and many companies deliberately avoided filing land claims in order to escape paying taxes. In 1916, Congress finally tired of the railroads' delaying tactics and took away 3 million acres. Most of this land remains publicly owned to the present day and is administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

Of all the Donation Land Claims in Oregon, the best known is probably that of George Abernethy, the first man to be elected to the governorship in the years of the Provisional Government. It was on his claim, in a meadow that became known as Abernethy Green, that the exhausted Oregon Trail emigrants camped long enough to find a promising piece of land that they could claim as their own.

Surveying the Land

Until just a few years ago, hidden away in a small Oregon State Park on Skyline Boulevard in Portland's West Hills there was a short concrete obelisk on a point overlooking the Tualatin Valley. On two sides were engraved the words BASE LINE, and on the other two sides were the somewhat more cryptic letters WILL. MER. This was the Willamette Stone, the common reference point for all surveys of the Oregon Country.

Before 1785, there were two systems of surveying land and assigning right of ownership in common use in the United States. The New England township plan called for a survey first and then permitted claims only on contiguous properties. Claims were smaller and the close cooperation of neighbors was a necessity, but there were no conflicts and no wasted land.

The Virginia practice allowed people to claim up to 400 acres with an option of 1000 more before even having the property surveyed. Used widely outside New England, this system was chaotic and confusing, and sorting out conflicting claims required considerable administration and expense.

Thomas Jefferson witnessed this confusion and recognized the need for a new system in the Old Northwest Territory (the upper Midwest). He was on the committee that authored the Land Ordinance of 1785. Resembling the New England township system, it established a rectangular system of survey. The basic units of measurement were the section, one square mile, and the township, 6 miles square. The 36-square-mile townships enclosed 36 sections of 640 acres each, numbered by surveyors from 1 to 36. A portion of the township's mineral resources was reserved for the government, and section 16 was reserved for schools. A provision for support of religious

institutions through the sale of public lands was stricken before final adoption.

This was all well and good, but there were settlers in Oregon before it became part of the United States. Thus, settlers did not have surveyed lines to block off their claims, and in any event, the rugged terrain of Oregon didn't lend itself to the grid pattern that the Land Ordinance of 1785 gave rise to in the Midwest. The early Oregonians resorted to a modified Virginia practice -- surveying land that had already been claimed -- since Oregon's first constitution had permitted claims of up to 640 acres, the same limit permitted by the 1785 Ordinance.

Land claims prior to the first surveys were laid out by metes and bounds -- that is, literally walking off boundaries and counting paces. These unsophisticated surveys later had to be translated into townships, ranges, and sections that were defined by proper surveys based on the Willamette Stone. A good example of this is the Trullinger claim near Molalla: parts of the claim are in sections 20, 21, 22, 27, and 28 of Township 4 South, Range 2 East. Trullinger's claim was found to enclose 646.70 acres, slightly more than the 640 acres he was entitled to have. Early settlers apparently got a "bye" on such discrepancies, as there is no record of anyone having overages stripped from their claims.

Almost immediately after Oregon became a US Territory, Congress passed the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act. It called for surveys on the ground to establish boundaries of existing claims, and it established the office of Surveyor General and created a Federal Court and Land Office at Oregon City, the first such institutions west of the Missouri River.

The survey of Oregon began on June 4, 1851, with the placing of the Willamette Stone. The base line was drawn from the Pacific Ocean to the Snake River. The Willamette Meridian was drawn from the Columbia River to California. It's easy today to look at a map and think that they simply drew in these lines, but it wasn't that simple in the mid-Nineteenth Century: they had to actually create the maps, following the imaginary meridian and base lines over hill and over dale, leaving stone markers as they went. Difficulties included rugged terrain, dense vegetation, cloudy or rainy weather, and the temptation for surveyors to take off to the gold mines to the south and east.

To fill in the maps, surveyors walked section lines and took field notes. They noted what they crossed and what they saw. At a later date, sometimes weeks later, a cartographer would make a township map from the field notes. These maps were often quite densely packed with information, showing section corners, subdivisions, types of terrain, vegetation, and artificial features such as roads, trails, houses, and areas of cultivation.

The original survey of Oregon City (T2S, R2E) was conducted by Joseph Hunt and was registered on June 30, 1852. The tail end of the Barlow Road, the last overland link in the Oregon Trail, is labeled simply, "Oregon City to Foster's." The road ends at George Abernethy's claim.

Oregon Fever, Gold Fever

Secretary of State James Buchanan received a letter in 1849 describing San Francisco and Monterey. It said that three-fourths of the houses were deserted or selling for the price of the building lot. Every blacksmith, carpenter, and lawyer had left. Brickyards, sawmills, and ranches were abandoned. Volunteer soldiers had deserted and sailors were jumping ship. Both newspapers had been discontinued. Even the judges had left.

Californians had word of the discovery of gold all to themselves for the first six months of 1848, but eventually the news spread to Oregon. In July, Captain Newell docked his brig Honolulu at Fort Vancouver. He bought all the mining supplies he could under the pretense of supplying coal miners, but this pretense quickly wore thin. Once the word was out, two-thirds of all adult males in Oregon headed south. Wagon trains of up to 150 men and fifty oxen-pulled wagons traversed the Applegate Trail and Fremont's route to Sacramento.

In Oregon, crops were neglected and Indian wars forgotten. Gaps appeared in newspaper editions. The Oregon Spectator, the first newspaper published west of the Rocky Mountains, disappeared from September 7th to October 12th, 1848, then reappeared with this apology: "The Spectator, after a temporary sickness, greets its patrons, and hopes to serve them faithfully, and as heretofore, regularly. That 'gold fever' which has swept about 3000 of her officers, lawyers, physicians, farmers, and mechanics of Oregon from the plains of Oregon into the mines of

California, took away our printers."

The 1848 session of the Oregon legislature was scheduled to meet on December 5, but twelve of the twenty-two representatives were missing. Seven had bothered to write letters of resignation, and five had actually been replaced by special elections. Among the missing were such Oregon Trail pioneers as Asa Lovejoy, founder of Portland, wagonmasters Peter Burnett and James Nesmith, and Osborne Russell, member of Oregon's first Executive Committee. Arrest warrants were issued for those who had not resigned, and the legislative session was canceled. Elections were mandated for a special session to be convened on February 5, 1849.

Some Oregonians struck it rich and lived out their lives on Nob Hill in San Francisco, but most had returned to the Willamette Valley before the first 49ers arrived from the East. Many came home with pockets full of gold dust and trunks full of clothing and furniture from San Francisco. Henry Garrison recalled that his father returned with fancy clothes and made him wear them to church, making him the target of much giggling among the girls in the congregation. When the services were over, he rushed home to change back into his buckskins.

Oregon changed from a community content to provide for itself to an ambitious and efficient supply house for people too busy mining and building to produce their own food. New flour mills, sawmills, and towns grew up along the banks of the Willamette. The river was alive with vessels loading goods for California. Debts were paid off -- except those owed to John McLoughlin -- as Oregon's economy leapt into high gear.

Across Oregon, businesses and industries were growing. New varieties of sheep were imported from Australia. Wheat purchased for 62¢ a bushel at the mill sold for $9 a bushel in California. Apples sold for $1.50 each in California, and 6000 bushels were immediately sent south. New orchards were set in the fall of 1848, and by 1856, 20,000 bushels were shipped. Roads and mail service from Oregon City to Sacramento were developed or improved.

Merchants like Francis Pettygrove, ship builders such as Lot Whitcomb, and ship owners like Captain John Brown made their fortunes overnight. Along the bluff above Oregon City's business district were located at least a dozen fancy mansions financed with California gold. Almost all of these mansions are gone today, giving up their prime view locations to businesses and new homes.

Prior to the California gold strikes, an almost total absence of circulating currency in Oregon had spawned such innovations as Abernethy Rocks: small stones inscribed with the letters "GA" and used as change in Governor Abernethy's store. But with gold suddenly pouring into Oregon as fast as $2 million a year, no standards existed for exchange. On February 16, 1849, the Provisional Government passed an act to provide the territory with desperately needed coinage. The law allowed $16.50 an ounce for virgin gold, without any alloys, to be minted into five and ten pennyweight pieces.

The only coins actually minted under this law were the Beaver coins produced by the Oregon Exchange Company. The pure gold $5 and $10 pieces were stamped "T.O. 1849, Territory Oregon, KMTAWRCS" on the obverse and "Oregon Exchange Company. 130G. Native Gold, 5D" or "l0pwts, 20 grains, 10D" on the reverse. The initials stood for the owners of the company: Kilbourn, Magruder, Taylor, Abernethy, Wilson, Rector, Campbell, and Smith. Most of the Beaver coins were later melted down and recast at the San Francisco mint, as they contained 8% more gold than US coins of equivalent dollar value. Those that survived have become rare and valued collectors items, as they were produced for only two weeks.

When Territorial Governor Joe Lane arrived to take office, one of his first duties was to review all laws enacted by the Provisional Government. The only law he voided was the coinage act, as the US Constitution restricts the power of minting money to the federal government. The stamps were to be broken on the rocks of Willamette Falls, but they somehow ended up in a museum, instead.

That, however, was not the end of gold fever in Oregon. The town of Jacksonville, Oregon, exists because James Cluggage and John R. Pool discovered gold in the Rogue River Valley in December, 1851, and January, 1852. Later in 1852, gold was discovered along the Umpqua River near Scottsburg, a town founded in 1850 by Applegate trailblazer and pilot Levi Scott. These strikes started a gold rush in southern Oregon that attracted miners from both the Willamette Valley and

California. The mines generated enough wealth that in 1853 and '54 there was talk in Jacksonville of attempting to separate southern Oregon from the rest of the Oregon Territory in the hope of eventually founding a new, pro-slavery state between California and the Willamette River Valley. Plans harbored by this movement to annex the northern reaches of California doomed it to failure.

Like the California gold fields, the Oregon mines attracted single, unattached men almost exclusively. Heretofore, Oregon had been the destination of families, farmers, and settlers; the mines brought a distinctly unsavory element to the Territory. This might have had little impact on the character of white civilization in the area -- miners tended to follow the latest rush, and the boomtowns along the Rogue and Umpqua Rivers would have eventually emptied out -- except that the Indians of southern Oregon were generally more hostile to whites than those in the north. The spring and summer of 1855 saw an escalating cycle of provocation, retribution, and retaliation that culminated in what was then described as the "most sanguinary war" -- that is, the bloodiest -- in Oregon's short history.

Tensions exploded in July, 1855, in the Humbug War, named for the creek along which the hostilities took place. More than two dozen Indians were cruelly and indiscriminately killed by shooting, hanging, or being thrown down abandoned prospect holes. On October 8, 23 noncombatant Indians (women, children, and old men) were killed in what was known as the Luptin Affair. The next day, 16 whites of all ages and both sexes were killed in the Rogue River Massacre. The fighting climaxed on October 17 at the Gallice Siege, wherein four whites and an undetermined number of Chinese were killed when Indians trapped a volunteer militia in buildings which they set ablaze with flaming arrows. (Note that when whites were killed, the settlers generally labeled the incident a "massacre"; when Indians were killed, the settlers chose different words.) The situation was eventually calmed by Indian Agent Joel Palmer, who spent 1855 imposing treaties on almost all the tribes of Oregon and sending them to reservations.

A few years later, in the early 1860s, gold was discovered in the southern Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon in the areas of Union Flat and the John Day River. These strikes gave rise to boomtowns such as Auburn, Sumpter, Elkhorn, Pocahontas, John Day, and Mitchell. Hard rock mines and prospect shafts were sunk throughout the area, and in the area around Sumpter, the entire valley was dredged and sluiced in search of gold. Baker County in eastern Oregon was unofficially born in May, 1862, when a group of miners in the Union Flat area organized an election board and sent in their returns under the name of Baker County, though at the time the area was part of Wasco County. On September 22, 1862, Baker County was carved out of Wasco County and Auburn was designated the county seat, an honor soon lost to Baker City.

The lure of gold is largely responsible for the speed with which white civilization spread beyond the Willamette Valley in Oregon during the 1850s and '60s. Prior to the strikes in southern Oregon, towns and villages in that area were slowly being established along the routes connecting the Willamette Valley to California; once gold was discovered, miners, merchants, and scoundrels of every sort flooded into the valleys of the Rogue and Umpqua rivers. Boomtowns sprang up overnight, new roads were graded, and the power of the local Indian tribes was broken. When the mines played out and the riverbeds would yield no more gold, the miners and prospectors moved on and left behind the infrastructure necessary to support farming communities and logging camps. Likewise, eastern Oregon was generally considered Indian country -- few others wanted to live there -- until the gold strikes in the Blue Mountains led to the forced relocation of the Nez Perce to make way for whites eager to exploit the newly-discovered gold fields. The search for gold became a dominant force not only in Oregon, but Idaho and Montana, as well, altering the patterns of settlement that had 'til then been driven by emigrants looking for farmland.

Beginnings of Self-Government

Oregon came into the American sphere of influence in the 1790s when Captain Gray discovered the mouth of the Columbia River. Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to explore Oregon in 1804, but he saw it possibly developing into a parallel, independent Republic of the Pacific, rather than a part of the United States.

The 1818 Treaty of London, which officially ended the War of 1812 and set the northern border of the Louisiana Territory at the 49th parallel, defined the Oregon Country as from Russian Alaska (54 degrees, 40' N) to Spanish California (40 degrees N) and from the Pacific Ocean to the crest of the Rocky Mountains. Political control was not vested in either the U.S. or Britain; the area was considered to be under "joint occupation." The treaty would be automatically extended every ten years (as it was in 1828 and 1838) unless one side gave notice of renegotiation (as the U.S. did in 1846).

In Oregon at this time, the need for government depended upon who you were. The local Indians had tribal laws and customs that served their cultures perfectly well. Hudson's Bay Company employees, whether active or the retired French-Canadians farming the Willamette Valley's French Prairie, came under the jurisdiction of the HBC charter and its factors. But the American fur traders, missionaries, former seamen, and arriving immigrants were on their own. They were outside the United States and lacked the protection of any government.

An incident occurred early in 1841 that underlined the need for an American government. Ewing Young, entrepreneur and cattle baron, died with considerable wealth, no apparent heir, and no system to probate his estate. A meeting followed Young's funeral at which a probate government was proposed. Doctor Ira Babcock of Jason Lee's Methodist Mission was elected Supreme Judge.

Most of the offices established in 1841 were vacant by 1843, as the probate government had no particular power outside divvying up the estates of the recently deceased in the event that they left no will or heirs. Lacking any other body to address the difficulties facing the American settlers, Babcock chaired two "Wolf Meetings" in 1842 which were ostensibly held to discuss the need to protect the countryside from wolves and other vermin "worse than wild animals," a thinly-veiled reference to the British. Babcock also chaired the two Champoeg Meetings which followed. The five meeting of '41 through '43 flowed together as a gradually unfolding process which led to the creation of a new government.

During 1842, agitation for an organized government began to increase. At one point a movement to make Oregon an independent country seemed popular. The annual arrival of new settlers and the simmering resentment of the British made for lively debates at the Oregon Lyceum and Willamette Falls Debating Society. Three individuals led the independence movement: Lansford Hastings, William Bennett, and James Marshall. Interestingly, it was in California that all three would later make their mark on history -- Hastings for his ill-conceived guidebook that doomed the Donner-Reed Party, Bennett for his role in the Bear Flag Revolution, and Marshall for discovering gold while supervising the construction of a sawmill for Johann Sutter in 1848.

On May 2, 1843, one hundred and two settlers met at Champoeg on the edge of French Prairie, halfway between Lee's Mission and Oregon City in the heart of the Willamette Valley. Fifty-two Canadians had instructions from the Hudson's Bay Company to head off any attempts at organizing an independent government. Fifty Americans stood united in favor of doing just that. Chaos almost prevailed, but when a vote was called for, two Canadians -- Etienne Lucien and Francois Matticaux, who were former Astorians and thus probably not as loyal to the HBC as the other Canadians -- joined the unified American bloc for a 52-50 vote. In principle, Oregon's Provisional Government was born that day.

A legislative committee was created and instructed to draft a constitution and report back on July 5. The committee met in Oregon City in May and June. Their constitution, called the Organic Act, was adopted on the 5th of July, officially marking the birth of the Provisional Government. The makeup of this nine-man committee was classically American, with a mountain man, missionaries, Oregon Trail pioneers, and one or two potentially shifty characters sitting at the same table.

Robert "Doc" Newell had been in Oregon as a mountain man since the early 1830s and had retired to his Champoeg farm. Thomas Jefferson Hubbard had jumped ship in 1834 and was cleared of a murder on Sauvie Island before settling down. James O'Neil had arrived with the 1834 Wyeth Expedition.

The next four members had all come to Oregon to be part of Jason Lee's Methodist Mission. William Gray, a Presbyterian farmer at the mission, arrived with the Whitmans in 1836. Alanson Beers had emigrated in 1837 from Connecticut. At age 62, Robert Moore was the oldest member, having come to Oregon with the Great Reinforcement of 1840. Robert Shortess had also

arrived in 1840. Oregon's first constitution is in his handwriting.

The last two members of the legislative committee were genuine overlanders, having come to Oregon via the Oregon Trail. William Doughty, age 31, was the youngest member of the legislative committee. He had arrived with the Bidwell Party of 1841. David Hill had just arrived the previous winter and was farming the Tualatin Valley. Hill would join Beers and Joseph Gale on the first Executive Committee, a three-man committee that was intended to replace the post of governor.

The last gasp of the independence movement was headed off in the revision process. The preamble originally read, "We, the people of Oregon Territory, For purposes of mutual protection, and to secure peace and prosperity among ourselves, Agree to adopt the following laws and regulations." At the insistence of the ultra-American party the words "until such time as the USA extend their jurisdiction over us" were added. The three leaders of the pro-independence movement left for California and the history books before the Organic Act was adopted on July 5.

John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, reported to his superiors that the "American party with a few Englishmen formed themselves into a body." Interestingly, the HBC was invited to join the government, but McLoughlin refused. His superior, Governor Simpson, saw the Americans as "very energetic, the Bowie knife, Revolving Pistol and Rifle taking the place of the Constable's baton in bringing refractory delinquents to justice."

The 1843 Organic Act created a legislature, an executive committee, a judicial system, and a system of subscriptions to defray expenses -- Americans were not taxed, but were encouraged to make donations to support the Provisional Government. The laws of Iowa, which was the only legal codex the legislature happened to have handy, were extended to cover areas not provided for. Four districts, forerunners of counties, were created: Yam Hill, Twality, Champooick, and Clackamas. Clackamas District originally covered much of present day northern Oregon, all of eastern Washington, most of British Columbia and Idaho, and part of western Montana.

An 1845 revision of the Organic Act changed the dates of elections and the meeting dates of the legislature. The executive committee, which had proven to be somewhat unwieldy, was changed to a single governor. George Abernethy, a miller for the Oregon City Methodist Mission, was elected Oregon's first governor.

With the revisions to the Organic Act in 1845, conditions changed for the HBC. The census of 1845 reported 2109 people in Oregon, 1900 of them American immigrants. Canadians found themselves in the minority, and a new tolerance emerged toward the Americans. For the first time an HBC employee, Frank Ermatinger of Oregon City, was elected to hold office in the Provisional Government, defeating Philip Foster for the post of Treasurer. In August of 1845, the HBC formally joined the Provisional Government. John McLoughlin came under much criticism from Peter Skene Ogden and Governor Simpson for selling out to the Americans. Within six months, McLoughlin was demoted to Associate Chief Factor, and shortly thereafter he retired to Oregon City. He would eventually become an American citizen and serve as mayor of Oregon City.

Oregon City was designated as the capital of the Oregon Country. Significant bills included one preventing the introduction, sale and distillation of ardent spirits; an income and property tax of 1/8 of 1% to replace the subscription scheme adopted in 1843; an act that banned both slavery and free blacks with a penalty of 20-39 lashes "every six months until he or she shall quit the territory;" the incorporation of Willamette Falls into Oregon City and the Methodist Mission into the Oregon Institute; the creation of the Multnomah Circulating Library; and authorization for Sam Barlow to open a toll road around Mount Hood.

The 1846 session was pared back to only essential business upon hearing that the U.S. had given notice to abrogate the joint occupation treaty. The 1847 session, held in December, was punctuated by the Cayuse War. The Provisional Government in cooperation with the Hudson's Bay Company put an army into the field to pursue the murderers of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. In 1850, five Indians were tried and hanged in Oregon City for the murders, though it is not at all certain that they were actually involved in the incident. The 1848 session was postponed until early 1849 because the discovery of gold in California nearly depleted the male population of Oregon, including many of the elected legislators.

The 1849 session would be the final session, as Governor Abernethy informed the legislature of the imminent arrival of Joseph Lane and other federal territorial officers. But first, the

debts of the Cayuse War had to be paid off and an estimated $500,000 dollars in gold dust circulating in Oregon had to be taken care of. A bill creating a mint passed with only two dissenters, who correctly pointed out the unconstitutionality of minting money. When Governor Lane took over the government, the only Provisional Government law he threw out was that authorizing the minting of money. Federal officials collected all the Beaver coins they could, but the Beaver coins contained 8% more gold than their US equivalents, and some people refused to give them up.

In the spring of 1849, Joe Lane of Indiana, President Polk's choice as Oregon governor, stood on the balcony of William Holmes' Rose Farm and proclaimed Oregon to legally be under the jurisdiction of the United States. The Provisional Government created at Champoeg was out of business, but it had done a credible job of steering Oregon in its evolution from a British-dominated territory to a full part of the United States.

The First Men In Charge

There are six men with a legitimate claim to being called the first Governor of Oregon. The Organic Act of 1843 called for a three person executive committee in the place of a governor. Two were elected in 1843 and 1844 before the Organic Act was amended in 1845. The first committee was comprised of David Hill, part of Dr. Elijah White's 1842 wagon train, Alanson Beers, part of the 1837 Methodist reinforcement, and Joseph Gale, an early immigrant who arrived in 1834 with Nathaniel Wyeth. Beers would join Governor Abernethy as a partner in the Oregon Milling Company. Gale built the first ship in Oregon, the Star of Oregon.

The second executive committee, elected May 25, 1844, was made up of Peter G. Stewart of the Great Migration of 1843; Osbourne Russell, a trapper along with Gale in the 1834 Wyeth Party who had taken to the mountains and returned to Oregon in 1842 as guide to Dr. Elijah White; and Dr. William J. Bailey, a sailor who jumped ship in Yerba Buena (San Francisco), was wounded by Rogue River Indians on his journey north, joined Ewing Young's cattle company, and then took up the study of medicine in Oregon under Dr. Elijah White.

George Abernethy -- Whig, merchant, and steward of the 1840 Oregon City Methodist Mission -- was the first man elected to the post titled "Governor" in Oregon. The meadow behind his house was the end of the Oregon Trail. He was elected on June 3, 1845, as the candidate of the Mission-supported "American Party." He was reelected in 1847. As Governor, he used his position on the Oregon Spectator's Board of Directors to squelch the Democratic editors by demanding that the paper not become involved in political debates. He vetoed a liquor law and was a member of the Oregon Exchange Company which coined Beaver money.

Joseph Lane was a Mexican War hero and Indiana Legislator. President Polk offered him the job of Oregon Territorial Governor in 1848. Polk, a Democrat, gambled that Lane would be in Oregon before incoming Whig President Taylor could legally cancel the commission. Lane accepted immediately and, escorted by mountain man Joe Meek, set off for Oregon. With a layover for winter at Fort Hall, they arrived in Oregon City one day early. Upon his arrival, Lane invited Abernethy to pay him a visit at William Holmes' Rose Farm, where he was residing. Ever the Whig, Abernethy noted that Lane had not yet shown his credentials and responded that he would be glad to receive Lane should he call to pay his respects.

Lane resigned the governorship in 1850. Territorial Secretary Kintzing Pritchette became acting Governor for two months until the arrival of John Gaines. A veteran of both the War of 1812 and Mexican War, Gaines was a Whig appointed by President Taylor. En route, his two daughters died of yellow fever, his wife died from a fall from a horse in Salem, and his son died soon after.

Gaines spent three years bickering with the Democratic legislature. He kept the capital in Oregon City. His most vocal opponent, Asahel Bush, wanted Salem to be the new capital. The Whig newspaper The Argus called him "Ass of Hell;" Bush responded in kind by calling it the "Air Goose."

Lane returned for a three-day term in 1853 just so President Pierce, a Democrat, could remove Gaines from office. As Oregon moved inexorably toward statehood, Lane became Delegate to Congress and eventually one of Oregon's first U.S. Senators. However, Lane's views favoring

slavery and secession made him unpopular in Oregon, and he served only one 6-year term.

George Law Curry, an overlander who emigrated to Oregon in 1846, was Territorial Secretary when Lane resigned. The former editor of the Oregon Spectator, Curry had resigned rather than accept Abernethy's demand that politics be kept out of the paper. He served as Territorial Governor in Salem until Pierce's appointee John Davis arrived.

Davis served only one year as governor before resigning to return to Indiana -- and he spent half of his term just getting to Oregon. Curry again became interim Governor, this time serving for six months until his own appointment as Governor arrived. He remained chief executive of the Territory until statehood.

For seven months, Oregon had two governors in office. The state Constitution was adopted and "Honest John" Whiteaker was elected Governor of the State of Oregon in June 1858. He was an authentic 49er, having made some money in the gold rush before going back home to fetch his wife and returning in 1852 to live in Eugene City. Rather than force the issue, Whiteaker quietly waited for President Buchanan to give him a state to govern. Statehood was granted on February 14, 1859, and Whiteaker was sworn in on March 3, becoming the last man who could call himself "the first governor of Oregon."

As governor, Whiteaker fought for land laws that favored settlers over land speculators and urged that Salem remain the capital. Before the Civil War, he had advocated slavery, yet he guided the state with the motto "The Union" through those turbulent years. Judge Matthew Deady said of him, "Old Whit ... Wrong in the head in politics, he is honest and right in the heart."

From Robin's Nest to Stumptown

For about a decade, Oregon City was Oregon's capital and largest city. Oregon City had three things going for it that secured its place in history: it had a prime location at Willamette Falls that provided reliable power for its mills, it had the first courthouse and land office west of the Rockies, and (in large part because of these two factors) it became the end of the Oregon Trail. The residents of Oregon City worked hard to enhance these advantages, but the town's glory years soon faded as settlers spread out and founded other metropoles with their own competitive advantages. Portland, still affectionately known to locals by its old, perhaps somewhat less than affectionate nickname of "Stumptown," was a mere upstart in its infancy, one of many towns competing to become the premiere city in Oregon.

Steamboats have plied the Willamette since 1850, and they were the primary means of transporting people and goods over long distances before the coming of the railroads. However, with the notable exception of the unfortunate steamer Claire, which was swept over Willamette Falls in the flood of 1860, there was no easy way to get a boat past the waterfalls at Oregon City. The town of Canemah, now a district of Oregon City, was founded in 1845 as the upper terminal of the portage around the falls, and a wooden-railed portage railroad was built in 1861 from Canemah to Oregon City.

Robert Moore began developing Robin's Nest across the river from Oregon City in 1840. By 1845, he was operating a ferry to Oregon City and renting tents to immigrants arriving on the Oregon Trail. Robin's Nest was renamed Linn City in honor of Senator Lewis Linn of Missouri, who spent several years promoting the annexation of the Oregon Country to his fellow congressmen. In 1854, the town became West Linn after a fire destroyed the business district and it was rebuilt a short ways west of its original location.

Attempts began in 1852 to build a canal around Willamette Falls on the West Linn side. Robert Moore's enterprise at Robin's Nest grew to include a boat basin and moorage, but no canal. Ben Holladay, owner of the portage railroad, negotiated for a contract to build locks on the Oregon City side but lost. The Willamette Falls Canal and Lock Company of West Linn won the contract in 1868. To receive their $450,000 payment, the canal and locks had to be opened by January 1, 1873. Construction lasted nine months using rock quarried in Carver, the same quarry that supplied the stone used to build several of Portland's most celebrated structures. When the owners attempted to rent a steamboat to open the locks, they found that all the boats in the area were already rented to

Holladay. A boat was found in Washington Territory and brought to Oregon City, only to become grounded at the sandbar at the mouth of the Clackamas River. The boat was freed, cleared the locks, and the money was awarded. Today, the locks are operated toll free by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Where Oregon City's chief advantage was Willamette Falls, it soon became clear that its biggest disadvantage was the river itself. As Oregon became an attractive port of call for large, ocean-going ships, the river proved too shallow for them. The mouth of the Clackamas River was the worst spot, as a perennially shifting sandbar formed where the two rivers flowed together. It became apparent some other city was destined to become Oregon's chief port.

Multnomah City, Oswego, and Milwaukie, all located along the Willamette River between Oregon City and Portland, threw their metaphorical hats in the ring, but none of them was able to build a network of roads to tap the population and agricultural production of the surrounding hinterlands. Multnomah City was next to Linn City and was later incorporated into it despite the prediction of Joel Palmer, 1845 partner of Sam Barlow, that it would outlive Linn City. Oswego was started by an Oregon City sawmill operator, and the entire town was sold in 1865 to the owner of the Oswego Milling Company. Milwaukie was founded by Lot Whitcomb and named for Milwaukee, Wisconsin (the spelling variation was intentional). The first steamboat on the Willamette, the Lot Whitcomb, was built in Milwaukie in 1850 by Henderson Leuelling. His brother Seth Lewelling (again, note the spelling) was a noted horticulturist who nursed a wagon load of fruit trees across the Oregon Trail and started one of the first orchards in the Willamette Valley.

There were other contenders for Oregon City's crown. East Portland was originally inhabited in 1829, making it as old as Oregon City. It was sold in 1845 for $200, incorporated five years later, and became part of Portland in 1891. Linnton, another town named for Senator Linn, was laid out in 1843 by Peter Burnett of Champoeg and Morton M. McCarver of Oregon City. Burnett stated, "I have no doubt that this place will be the great commercial town of the territory." Hoping to tap trade with the Tualatin Valley, a road graded up Cornelius Pass proved impassable and their venture failed. Burnett went to California to become their first governor. An 1843 pioneer settler of Linnton, James John, moved across the river and started St. Johns in 1865. It became part of Portland in 1915, two years before Linnton joined the growing city. Saint Helens was founded in 1845 at the tip of Sauvie Island in the Columbia River by Captain H.M. Knighton, but a devastating fire destroyed the city's chances of competing with Portland.

Portland itself was founded by two Easterners, Francis Pettygrove and Asa Lovejoy. Pettygrove was from Portland, Maine. He came to Oregon in 1842 by ship with his sister, Mary, and Mary's husband, Philip Foster. Mary Foster brought with her a lilac start which survived the journey and is still growing in front of the Foster House on the Barlow Road in Eagle Creek. Lovejoy was an overlander from Boston. He came to Oregon with the Elijah White party of 1842, guided Marcus Whitman east that winter, and returned to Oregon with the Great Migration of 1843, the wagon train that is generally considered to have opened the Oregon Trail.

The original inhabitant of what was to become Portland was William Johnson. He settled there in 1842, but he had no intent to establish a city and soon moved across the river to start a sawmill on Johnson Creek. On their way to Fort Vancouver in November 1843, William Overton and Asa Lovejoy pulled their canoes ashore on the western bank of the Willamette long enough to claim 640 acres in Lovejoy's name. Overton become the proprietor for Lovejoy, who remained an absentee owner. He took half the claim as his payment and promptly sold it to Pettygrove for $50. Pettygrove had been a successful merchant in Maine and was enjoying similar success in the Oregon Country running the Red House Store in Oregon City and a warehouse in Champoeg. In 1844, he built a log house on what would become the Portland waterfront.

Lovejoy and Pettygrove platted their new city in 1845. Both men wanted to name it for their respective hometowns. Following a dinner in the Oregon City home of Francis Ermatinger, an HBC employee and Treasurer of the Oregon Provisional Government, a penny was flipped. Pettygrove won and saved future Portlanders from being known as New Bostonians. Portland's first settler was Captain John Couch, who built a wharf and allowed the young city to begin to live up to its name.

Lovejoy remained in Oregon City and sold his half of the townsite to Benjamin Stark in

1845. Daniel Lownsdale, who had built a tannery in 1847 where Civic Stadium is located today, bought out Pettygrove for $5000. Lownsdale eventually owned all of Portland. Pettygrove moved north into present-day Washington and founded Port Townsend.

Under Lownsdale's influence, Portland actively sought to attract businesses and customers to patronize them. Merchants sent delegations to The Dalles and Eagle Creek to distract immigrants from Oregon City, and a road was blazed from Portland to Foster's Farm in Eagle Creek so they wouldn't have to pass through Oregon City at all. Portland grew so fast that tree stumps were left in the middle of the roads because no one could spare the time to tend to their removal. Local residents quickly found they could jump from stump to stump and stay above the muddy, unpaved streets -- hence the name "Stumptown." They went so far as to whitewash the stumps to make them more visible.

In 1853, a corduroy road was completed up Canyon Creek to tap the growing populations in the Tualatin and Yamhill Valleys. This access to prime farmland was key to Portland's success, as it allowed the town to become the hub of transport and commerce in the area. In 1855, a fruit peddler from Yamhill by the name of Aaron Meier brought his merchandise over the road. Twelve years later he teamed with Sigmund Frank to create Oregon's oldest retail house, Meier and Frank.

The late 1860s began a cultural heyday in Portland. Theaters such as the Oro Fino and New Market opened. Henry Pittock bought the local newspaper, the Oregonian, and built a fine mansion. Harvey Scott was his editor. Scott was against free silver, free high schools, and women's suffrage. In one of those truth-is-stranger-than-fiction twists of history, Scott's outspoken sister, Abigail Scott Duniway, became the state's leading suffragette and the first woman to vote in Oregon.

While the cultural scene in Portland was developing, the waterfront was crammed with rooming houses, saloons, bawdy houses, and an underground of professional shanghaiers. By 1873, Chinese were arriving by the boatload, a seemingly endless supply of cheap labor. That same year a fire destroyed 30 city blocks.

The late 1870s saw the start of a business boom. Portland saw the construction of banks, warehouses, wholesale grocers, brokerages, commission houses, corporations, and transportation companies. Captain Ainsworth owned the Oregon Steam Navigation Company; Henry Corbett ran the California Stage Line; Simeon Reed and William Ladd owned seventeen farms. By the turn of the century, Portland was the terminus for steamboat transportation on the Willamette and Columbia, a major port in transpacific shipping, and enjoyed the services of three transcontinental railroads.

From its original one square mile along the Willamette's west shore, Portland spread south across Marquam Creek and Palatine Hill and west up Marquam Hill and into the West Hills. Judge Philip Marquam, builder of the Grand Opera House, earned a reputation as "the father of good roads" in Oregon. Marquam Hill was originally the property of the Oregon-California Railroad, but a land swap brought the University of Oregon Medical School to the hill and made room trackside to build Union Station.

Portland really began to boom when it started to annex settlements on the east side of the river. In 1891, East Portland and Albina were added. A real estate development named for Reverend Sellwood was annexed in 1893, and further east was Ladd's Addition. North of Portland came St. Johns in 1915 and Linnton in 1917.

The expansion to the east side of the river soon overwhelmed the capacity of the ferries that had been established, necessitating the construction of bridges to connect the two halves of the growing city. The first was built in 1887, and there are today no fewer than eleven spans crossing the Willamette between Oregon City and the Columbia River. One has two separate lift spans, one for highway traffic and another for railroads. Another was so artfully designed that San Francisco copied it to build the Golden Gate Bridge.

The crowning glories of Portland's boom years were two adjacent structures built of the same rock as the Willamette Falls Locks. Pioneer Post Office replaced the original log post office built in 1849, and next door was the Queen Anne Chateau-style Portland Hotel, considered a minor masterpiece when it was finished in 1890. Sadly, it fell into disrepair and was razed to make room for Pioneer Courthouse Square, a public space greatly beloved of modern Portlanders.