

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Amy E. Fackler for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Museum Studies, History and Anthropology presented on May 25, 1995. Title: The Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial as Interpreted by Museums on the Oregon Trail.

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Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

This study describes and analyzes Oregon Trail related exhibits of eleven museums and two interpretive centers that are geographically located along the Oregon Trail from Baker City, Oregon to Portland, Oregon. The exhibits were featured at the facilities during the 1993 Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial, a celebration that was initiated and organized by the state of Oregon. The context of the Sesquicentennial and the geographical feature of all facilities located on or near the trail provided a unique opportunity to investigate the influences upon and development of exhibits with a common theme, as well as their reaction to a major state celebration promoting "heritage tourism." Out of a total of thirteen facilities, I viewed ten personally. I also asked questions of the curators or directors regarding the exhibit and its development.

Especially of note in this study was the exhibits' content on themes prominent in western American history and the possible influences upon their interpretation. I found exhibits to range from very contemporary depictions of the Oregon Trail experience, with an emphasis upon the complexity of issues the predominantly Euro-American trek created and reflected, to traditional interpretations focused exclusively upon uncritical regard and reverence for the emigrants and their journey. American Association of Museums (AAM) standards condone diversity in all aspects of museums, including exhibits. Those museums with more contemporary than traditional depictions better fit the AAM guidelines, and often used the Oregon Trail exhibit within a larger theme. I found the influences upon the interpretations were the institutional goals, funding, exhibit development methods, and the internal initiative of staff and volunteers. The two interpretive centers in the sample had similar influences, although their role was more focused than museums upon benefitting the local economy.

The 1993 Sesquicentennial stimulated most museums to create or add to an Oregon Trail exhibit, but did not directly affect interpretations. Sesquicentennial agencies played a general organizational and supportive role.

The Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial as Interpreted by Museums on  
the Oregon Trail

by

Amy E. Fackler

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2: OREGON TRAIL BACKGROUND .....	4
PROFILE OF AN EMIGRANT .....	10
WHY OREGON.....	10
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	13
THE ROLE OF MYTH.....	19
SUBJECTS INVESTIGATED FOR THE OREGON TRAIL.....	25
PLACE OF THE OREGON TRAIL IN HISTORY.....	41
CHAPTER 4: MUSEUM ROLES.....	44
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS.....	44
MUSEUMS AND EDUCATION.....	49
CONTENT AND THE PUBLIC.....	51
INTERPRETIVE TECHNIQUE AND THEORIES.....	61
INTERPRETIVE CENTERS.....	66
CHAPTER 5: TOURISM AND THE MUSEUM AUDIENCE.....	69
CHAPTER 6: HISTORY OF OREGON TRAIL CELEBRATIONS.....	73
CHAPTER 7: METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	81
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM.....	81
BACKGROUND.....	81
SAMPLE OF MUSEUMS AND INTERPRETIVE CENTERS.....	83
INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS.....	92
ANALYSIS.....	97
CHAPTER 8: THE SESQUICENTENNIAL AND RELATED AGENCIES... ..	99
SESQUICENTENNIAL.....	99
OREGON TRAIL COORDINATING COUNCIL.....	107
INTERPRETIVE CENTERS.....	112
FUNDING.....	122

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
MARKETING.....	124
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES.....	128
INTERPRETIVE BENT.....	129
POST-SESQUICENTENNIAL ACTIVITIES.....	134
SUMMARY.....	135
CHAPTER 9: MUSEUM EXHIBITS.....	136
TYPE A: PERSONAL INTERVIEW/EXHIBIT VIEWED.....	137
TYPE B: MAILED IN QUESTIONS/EXHIBIT VIEWED.....	234
TYPE C: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW/EXHIBIT VIEWED.....	248
TYPE D: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW ONLY.....	267
CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	279
GENERAL.....	279
EXHIBIT INTERPRETATIONS.....	283
INFLUENCES UPON INTERPRETATION.....	299
FURTHER FINDINGS.....	314
SUMMARY.....	317
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	321

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Oregon Trail - Entire Route.....	7
2. Oregon Trail - Portion of the Route Within the State of Oregon.....	86

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Sources and Listing of Oregon Museums and Interpretive Centers on the Oregon Trail.....	88
2. Interview Procedure for all Museums and Interpretive Centers in Sample.....	91
3. Questions Asked all Museums/Interpretive Centers.....	93
4. Interpretive Orientation of Oregon Trail Exhibits and Interpretive Centers Along the Oregon Trail.....	285
5. Oregon Trail Exhibits: Summary and Interpretive Categorization.....	300
6. Creation or Addition to Oregon Trail Exhibits for the 1993 Sesquicentennial.....	311

# THE OREGON TRAIL SESQUICENTENNIAL AS INTERPRETED BY MUSEUMS ON THE OREGON TRAIL

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The state of Oregon promoted a campaign to celebrate the Sesquicentennial of the first major Oregon Trail migration. The pinnacle year of the promotions took place in 1993, and many programs that were specifically developed for the Sesquicentennial continued into 1994. Events were advertised through a variety of media, and attracted attention across the United States, as well as foreign countries. Oregon museums and interpretive centers were part of the myriad of activities surrounding the statewide celebration; they were involved with programs and exhibits focused on the Oregon Trail.

The objective of this study is to determine interpretations of Oregon Trail related exhibits and examine the factors that influenced them. Oregon museums and interpretive centers involved in this analysis are those physically on or near the actual Oregon Trail. This investigation is a natural experiment; the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial and the choice of facilities along the trail provided a unique opportunity to evaluate the Oregon Trail related exhibits within a standardized context.

Interpretations of the Oregon Trail are a valuable addition to the larger framework of Western American

history. The Oregon Trail is an example of an historical episode that is portrayed with varying, even competing, points of view. Scholarly interpretations are controversial, as they are of Western American history in general. Interpretations and viewpoints have shifted over time, especially in the late twentieth century. Whether purposefully or unwittingly, many Oregon Museums and interpretive centers joined in the discourse of the Oregon Trail's significance through their interpretations. Therefore, this investigation also illustrates how museums exhibit and interpret historical issues.

Interpretive centers have become increasingly important in Oregon, especially during the Sesquicentennial. For this reason, they were included in this investigation, although they are proportionally small in number. By including interpretive centers, commentary is provided about the relationships with and distinctions between museums.

In order to fulfill the goals of this study, I gathered information to discover how Oregon institutions developed and manifested Oregon Trail subjects. Institutional goals, historical authenticity and objectivity, overall presentation, procedural methodology, and thematic orientation were all investigated elements in the exhibits.

Agencies organizing the Sesquicentennial were interested in economic development and the desire for

nationwide exposure. I investigated contributions of Sesquicentennial related agencies to determine their relationship with museums and museum exhibits. I also looked at special Sesquicentennial programs and publications to understand their possible influence and effect.

I visited museums and interpretive centers with the same geographic delimiters that had Oregon Trail related exhibits displayed during the 1993 Sesquicentennial. In addition, I personally interviewed the curator, director, or interpretive specialist. Because some exhibits were no longer on display at the time of the investigation, I arranged a telephone interview. Through the evaluation of exhibits and investigation of the issues perceived of the Oregon Trail by exhibit staff, a sense of the role the Oregon Trail holds in the museum world emerges. This research project can be considered a case study developing an initial explanation of how museums participate in a complex web of commercialized and controversial history.



## CHAPTER 2: OREGON TRAIL BACKGROUND

The Oregon Trail is the name for the 2,000 mile route emigrants traveled westward toward the Oregon country. Established as the "Oregon National Historic Trail," the physical trail is part of the 1978 National Scenic and Historic Trails Act (McPhail 1989: 5). This act established the National Historic Trail System for preservation, public use, facility development, and enjoyment (Baker County Steering Committee [BCSC] ca. 1987: 1). It also directed the secretary of the interior to propose a management plan for the trail by 1981 (Oregon Trail Advisory Council [OTAC] 1988: 1).

Prior to the establishment of the Oregon National Historic Trail, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established the Oregon Trail as a significant national resource, as did the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (McPhail 1989: 5). The former initiated the protection of resources, while the latter led federal agencies to "preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of the national heritage" (BCSC ca. 1987: 1). Federal attention has helped preserve remnants of the trail, and has nurtured public awareness of its existence and history.

Many emigrants came to what was known of as the "Oregon Country" until the area was organized as a territory in 1848. Oregon statehood was established in

1859. The term "Oregon" is used throughout this study to refer to what is now Oregon State. It includes the eras of the region's shifting boundaries especially when specific dates are vague.

Early phases of establishing the Oregon Trail began with explorers, such as the Lewis & Clark expedition in 1804-1806. Trappers and traders also played an important role, as in 1812 traders "stumbled" onto "South Pass", a key passage over the Rocky Mountains (Faragher 1979: 5). Explorers and traders continued to discover and survey routes to the northwest, often following earlier trails established through thousands of years by Native Americans (Faragher 1979: 5-7; Hawkins 1930: 115). The trails increased in traffic with use from explorers, trappers, and finally emigrants (Faragher 1979: 5-7). Although the trail varied in its specific course, the general route established in 1812 remained the one primarily followed to the Oregon Country throughout the Euro-American emigration (Faragher 1979: 7). The precise route shifted slightly because during the decades of travel new routes or cutoffs were discovered, and wagons would spread out when possible to "avoid eating each other's dust" (Faragher 1979: 7). Wagons would convene at especially difficult areas, such as passes and river crossings, but would often separate again "as private convenience, economic exigency or the individualism of the traveler seemed to compel" (Hawkins 1930: 124).

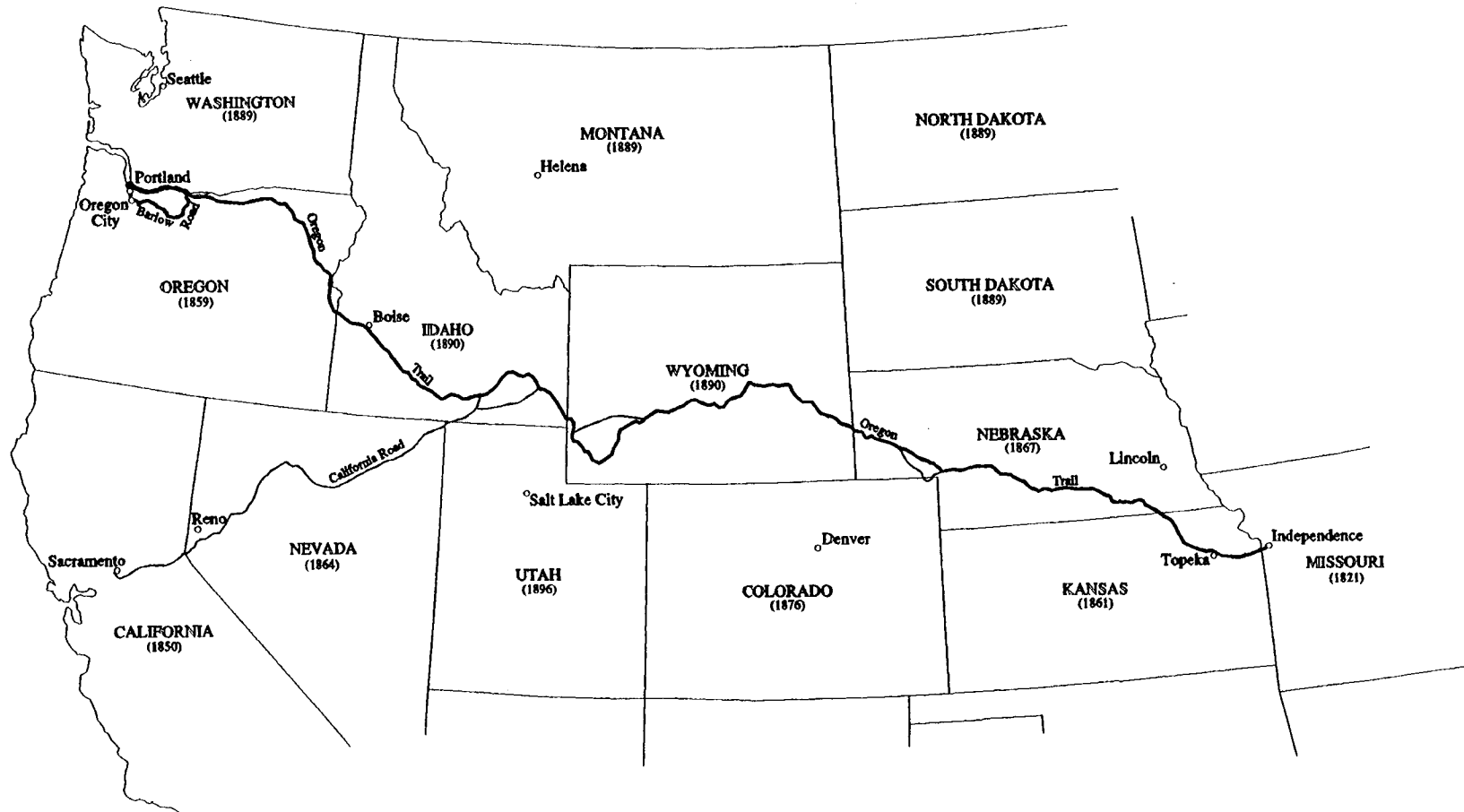
The year 1843 represents the first large emigrant crossing of nearly 1,000 people on the Oregon Trail, marking what was known as the "Great Migration." General emigrant Oregon Trail travel began in 1840, and is recognized to have continued in significant numbers until 1870s when railroads allowed a much faster trip (Faragher 1979: 4). Travelers were predominantly from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri (White 1991: 190). The four to six-month journey to Oregon usually convened in Missouri, and left at nearly the same time of year in order to cover the 2,000 miles before heavy snowfall. By 1884 railroad routes could cover the same journey in three days (Woodard 1990: 16).

During the migrations, over 50,000 people traveled to what is now Oregon (White 1991: 189). An additional 200,000 people used much of the same trail, and branched off towards California, and Utah (Lang 1992: 26; White 1991: 189). Although it is generally the group that specifically traveled to Oregon that the Sesquicentennial commemorates, all groups that used the trail are acknowledged.

The general route, as shown in Figure 1, began in Missouri, went through Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and then to Oregon. Within Oregon, the trail extends 547 miles (Oregon Trail Advisory Council [OTAC] 1988: 25). This figure of 547 miles combines the two possible routes near The Dalles, Oregon.

Figure 1. Oregon Trail - Entire Route

# OREGON TRAIL



Year each state admitted into Union shown in parenthesis.

C & G White Cartography, Inc. 5/10/93

The route in what is now Oregon began after traveling northwest from Farewell Bend where the trail left the Snake River. It then crossed northward through the Powder River and then across the Blue Mountains, turning west near what is now Pendleton. From there, the trail passed through north-central Oregon and on to the Columbia River near Biggs Junction. About twenty more miles west it reached The Dalles. From there early trail travelers had only one option: to set out on the Columbia via raft to Fort Vancouver - then up the Willamette River to Oregon City. The water route from The Dalles to Oregon City was 114 precarious miles.

Beginning in 1846, the Barlow Trail became another possibility. Joel Palmer first "discovered" this overland route around Mt. Hood, which followed old animal and Native American Trails, and also used fords and natural land contours. Samuel Barlow improved this trail, and petitioned the legislature for permission to operate it as a toll road (Wasco County Historical Society [WCHS] 1975: 3). The Barlow Road began near The Dalles, and many emigrants first traveled to the town to obtain provisions. The road traveled south past Mt. Hood, and then west through the Cascades ending in Oregon City. Both the water route and the Barlow Trail are considered principal routes and are included in this study.

## PROFILE OF AN EMIGRANT

Those who followed the Oregon Trail were generally of Euro-American descent, and came from a culture that esteemed yeoman farmer lifestyles (Faragher 1991: 16-17). Many of the emigrants came from the Midwest and upper South, usually from rural areas or small towns. Of course some people were from other areas, such as the newer cities of the Midwest, or from the urban East (Jeffrey 1979: 28). With the exception of the peak gold rush years (1849-1851), most emigrants traveled as a family; estimates suggest that approximately 50 percent of the Oregon Trail population were adult men, with the other 50 percent women and children (Jeffrey 1979: 28).

## WHY OREGON

Motivations for undertaking the journey vary. A major impetus was the availability of land. The unofficial and extra-legal Provisional Government in Oregon approved land grants for settlers beginning in 1843; this allowed claims of up to 640 acres. After boundary questions were settled in 1846, Congressional Acts followed, such as Oregon Donation Land Claim Act passed in 1850. This permitted individuals to claim 320 acres until 1855, and further allotted 640 acres if the claimant was married or became married within one year. The main stipulation in this Act was that the owner reside

on the property and cultivate it for four consecutive years (Lang 1992: 27). This act was a major component in the Euro-American quest for westward expansion (Hamm 1990: 102).

Later government programs, such as the Homestead Act of 1862, increased the emigrant's appetite for land and illustrates some of the draw to Oregon. The early acts had a direct effect upon emigration, as they in part stimulated the heavy traffic on the Oregon Trail between 1843 and 1859.

The perception of Oregon as "Eden" also encouraged settlement. Through evidence from literature of the time and personal anecdotes, it is obvious that many regarded Oregon as a fertile, fruitful and a potentially bountiful agricultural area. This perception is responsible for bringing large droves of families seeking better conditions and new opportunities. A study by Dorothy Johansen found that the propaganda and expectations of Oregon brought most people along the Trail (Lang 1992:26).

The agricultural depression in the Mississippi Valley in the late 1830s and into the 1840s is also credited as a factor. Along with financial calamities and environmental catastrophes (such as bad weather, floods), disease added to the regional misery (Jeffrey 1979: 27). Rumors of available, potentially profitable land in Oregon brightened the prospects of many Midwesterners.



These scenarios undoubtedly encouraged many travelers; and although reasons for crossing the trail varied, the allure of Oregon as an attractive, "Edenic" world permeated perceptions. Years of fireburning by Native Americans had produced acres of verdant prairie land in the Willamette Valley, producing the type of landscape coveted and admired in the mid-nineteenth century (Boyd 1990: 65-86).

William Lang raises an important point, however, when he concedes:

we can only guess how many emigrants fully or partially believed in Oregon as a latter-day Eden. Even trying to compose a list of reasons why they went to Oregon can be a fruitless task. They went for reasons as varied as their personal situations and as diverse as their definition of self-improvement or security (Lang 1992: 26).

There obviously is more than one caricature that can be created from the tens of thousands that traveled the Oregon Trail. The only obvious common reason for people to decide to travel the Oregon Trail was that they believed they could improve their condition (White 1991: 189).

### CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Whatever led the emigrants to pioneer in Oregon, their stories have left lasting impressions on the collective and individual minds of many Americans. Although the reasons for undertaking the journey and personal experiences varied, the traditional images of the Oregon Trail story have been largely standardized. By "traditional images", I refer to the literature and popularized icons that permeate American thought regarding the Oregon Trail experience.

I define traditional as "a transmittal of cultural elements throughout generations, so as to create a societal prototype of beliefs or behavior." The traditional images of the Oregon Trail experience and the emigrants are not completely static, but many have evolved into persistent icons. Generalizations about personality traits and the experiences of the journey have endured through time. Many Americans have learned to admire and revere the pioneers of the Oregon Trail, and the story has maintained its popularity.

The rugged individualist of the Oregon Trail is perhaps an extension of the quintessential American. A blend of unique individuality and a strong family unit is part of the composition of the trail legend. Visions of strong and hearty pioneers and the perseverance through the hardships of the journey West, are conjured up in many

depictions. The reward of the toil, the land itself: fruitful, virginal, ripe with potential. Traditional portraits of the journey provide a sense of opportunistic entrepreneurs, hard-working and deserving after their long struggle on the trail. These images were created through recollections of those that traveled the trail, and were expanded and reinforced throughout subsequent generations.

These descriptions are by no means exhaustive. They are selected representations that are pervasive and are examples that illustrate contrasts with some contemporary viewpoints. These traditional traits began to permeate the works of Western American historians in the late nineteenth century. The image of the Oregon Trail experience is in part a composite of the multitude of individual accounts accumulated through journals, diaries and reminiscences.

Personal accounts about the actual crossing of the Oregon Trail established a pool of personality traits. For example, in Jesse Applegate's recollection of the 1843 Oregon Trail experience, he states:

No other race of men ...would undertake so great a journey;...relying only on the fertility of their invention to devise the means to overcome each danger and difficulty as it arose...they are always found ready and equal to the occasion, and always conquerors. May we not call them men of destiny? (Applegate 1900:377)

This excerpt was part of a speech presented to the Oregon Pioneer Association in 1876, 33 years after the

experience. Applegate's comments illustrate early descriptions of the journey and the emigrants' characteristics. The concepts of hearty individuals and entitlement to the Oregon Country were seeds planted by those who experienced the Oregon Trail. The excerpt also reveals the problem with memory. Reminiscences and personal accounts can become imbued with the glorifying light of exaggeration through selective memory or embellishment. Ralph Ellison put it this way, "'That which we remember is, more often than not, that which we would like to have been; or that which we hope to be. Thus our memory and our identity are ever at odds; our history a tall tale told by inattentive idealists'" (Kammen 1991:2). Stated this way, some traditions are seen to begin with memories that may not be accurate. The earliest conception of traditions implies a quest for a laudable identity.

The "men of destiny" ideal germinated in following decades. The generation between 1890 and 1920 is described by Gerald D. Nash as "nostalgic." Americans longed for the frontier and endeavored to soften their sense of loss of a West that no longer was (Nash 1991:208). As industrialism permanently transformed the country, the West of the pioneers had disappeared. This lost world was one "which had been at the very center of the American Dream" (Nash 1991:198). The West and what it represented was a communal identity, "the national

mythology which Americans used to explain themselves not only to each other but the rest of the world..." (Nash 1991:198).

The often quoted Frederick Jackson Turner is credited for representing much of the post-emigrant generations' longing for west of their parents and grandparents. Turner's 1893 thesis, "The Significance of the West in American History", popularized and institutionalized ideas and reverence for the "frontier." The Oregon Trail is the last obvious leg of this westering frontier process, and Turner's thesis, proclaimed the end of the frontier, the "closing of a great historic moment" (Turner 1893:2).

Turner defined the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" significant because it "lies at the hither edge of free land" (Turner 1893:3). In the American West, the frontier and pioneering population symbolized all of the applauded "American" qualities. The frontier experience, Turner argued, was the determining factor of American character, as illustrated in statements such as:

This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character (Turner:3).

He further regarded the frontier as "productive of individualism, democracy and nationalism" (Turner 1893:17,19). The attributes of self-reliance, hard work

and individualism, Turner insisted, created the American character and developed a distinctive American culture (Nash 1991:3). These are the images that persist. The tradition quickly formed into equating the frontier qualities with American nationalistic character. The Oregon Trail is the final and epic saga of this frontiering experience.

Portrayal of the frontier experience as a defining element of national character pervade literature and historical accounts from the era. For example, a 1912 account of the pioneers along the Oregon Trail states the following:

The emigrants...knew how to 'rough it,'... (t)hey were hopeful, cheerful, and happy in the prospect of better things, and full of courage to make the Herculean effort to get to Oregon. They were also a hardy, vigorous lot of men and women, with children that could...take part in the strenuous life of a pioneer settlement. The great labor...for a two thousand mile trip...naturally and effectually debarred the weak, infirm or diseased from attempting the trip...(Gaston 1912:240).

This example has an evolutionary feel to it; only the fittest could survive the journey. Traditional accounts support the belief that the trail was "a process involving both natural selection and survival of the fittest" (Hawkins 1930:124).

Pioneers are depicted as a sturdy, optimistic group. John B. Horner described the Oregon Trail pioneers, or "white settlers", in 1919 in the following terms:

strong of intellect and heroic of heart. Many of them were the descendants of the sturdy Pilgrims and the adventurous Cavaliers...they took up the westward journey of their ancestors, and traveled 3,000 miles...their hardships were so severe that every mile of the long journey could have been marked with graves of those who fell along the way (Horner 1919:82).

Genetically conditioned to make such a treacherous journey, according to this perspective, the emigrants persevered - but not without cost.

In the traditional view, recognizing the hardship of the Oregon Trail highlights the sacrifices made for "their descendants who have lived to see the great results" (Gaston 1912:231). Despite all of the obstacles, the pioneers helped to reinforce a heritage of already strong character.

Many of these impressions remain intact as of 1993. Undeniably, the journey was difficult. However, some accounts of the Oregon Trail and emigrants emphasize the traditional aspects and personality traits exclusively. Many contemporary historians feel that in doing so, attention is denied to many other important components of the experience. In essence, a balance of ideas and expanded investigations of the Oregon Trail's significance are sought (Limerick 1994).

## THE ROLE OF MYTH

*"Myths control history" - William Truettner*

Many of the perceptions about the West and the Oregon Trail are interpreted and criticized as being rooted in myth. I define myth as "a story, theme, personal figure or cultural ideal passed down through generations that may or may not have a factual basis or explanation, and that often reflects and in part defines a society and its ideology." There is some overlap between "tradition" and "myth." Kammen states that "tradition" is reliant upon the transmission of its statements, beliefs, customs, etc., to endure (Kammen 1991:25). "Myth", Kammen describes as follows:

...is more likely to be fabulous than true...more likely to involve some sort of story, and quite likely to concern deities, demigods, or heroes in order to explain aspects of a society's cosmology or sense of identity (Kammen 1991:25).

Traditions pass down stories and aspects of ideas, while myths become the ideas themselves. Important for the symbolic images of the westering population, myth - in the West and the Oregon Trail - has acquired acceptance as a relevant phenomenon. As historians have continued to investigate and explain the Oregon Trail, the idea of "myth" has increasingly become part of the discussion, because some traditional traits of the American West and the Oregon Trail are recognized to have evolved into



myths. Myth has the ability to be accepted as historical reality (Robbins and Sayre 1994:4).

"Every generation has had its own distinctive perception of the West as myth" Gerald D. Nash states (1991:200). Ideas about the Oregon Trail have changed through time, and with events and cultural shifts through the decades, the Oregon Trail takes on new meanings. However, some aspects have persevered. Nash created an outline of the eras up to the present, in which he details how the mythic West has endured (Nash 1991). He describes how various periods expressed more resistance to the images of the traditional and mythological West; yet components have remained entrenched in American culture. The following is a summary of Nash's analysis of Western myth.

Between 1920 and 1945 the myths and initial impressions of the West remained intact, although some challenges filtered in during the Depression. In the early 1930s the Western American traits of "aggression, greed, ... materialism and swashbuckling" were added to the list of pioneer personality stereotypes (Nash 1991:222). This perception began to be discussed in intellectual circles. However in mainstream academia and history, investigation about the frontier continued, although with less emphasis upon the "West as myth" (Nash 1991:222). In popular culture, the mythic West stubbornly persisted,

especially in times of stress and uncertainty (Nash 1991:199).

Between World War II and the 1960s new dimensions were added to myths: psychoanalysis and more technological means for transmitting myth, such as television and radio. Historians, for the large part, tread on familiar ground by leaving myths unchallenged (Nash 1991:199). There are of course some notable exceptions. Henry Nash Smith delved deeply into the mythic West in his book, Virgin Land (Smith 1970[1950]). He defined "myth" as an "intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image" (Smith 1970:XI [1950]). He was not concerned whether myths "accurately reflected empirical fact", but he did concede that they sometimes have far-reaching influences (Smith 1970:XI [1950]).

The heady 1960s initiated serious questioning of western myth. Many of the values and beliefs held by Americans underwent profound scrutiny. Some viewed the Vietnam War as an imperialistic endeavor and saw early westward migration as symptom of the same ailment (Nash 1991:199). Celebrations of the westward movement were challenged. Concurrently, attention began to focus more upon other ethnicities (Nash 1991:199), facts missing from the Oregon Trail accounts and the frontier. Some historians found the traits that the American West and the frontier espoused, shameful at worst and incomplete at best.

Historians have continued to elaborate upon the ideas that emerged in the 1960s. By 1993, thought and theory on the American West and the frontier included many books and articles that contest traditional depictions and encourage new explanations. Nash holds a deterministic view of the processual change of historical interpretations. His thoughts are that the interpretations reflect the changes in the society from which they are derived. Furthermore, he believes the latest contemporary interpretations are a phase that "will soon run their course" (Nash 1991:276).

Historians such as Patricia Limerick, Richard White and William Robbins think otherwise. They, and others in the historical field, believe their ideas can widen the western history field considerably. Their view is that much of the myths remain in American culture, and is ultimately detrimental to the comprehensive understanding of western history and culture because oversimplification can obscure the reality of events and can ignore important elements and their complexities. Many contemporary scholars attempt to guide their inquiries towards multiple subjects of Western American history. These historians focus upon "the aggregation of studies of race, gender, class, community, economic dependency, and the environment in the West" (White 1992:10). Some have labeled this most recent historical thought "new western history."

In a slide/lecture given on the Oregon Trail at Oregon State University, Henry Sayre and William Robbins

discuss the role of myth and the Oregon Trail and how they perceive its effects:

In its mythical context, the western trail ended in a land of milk and honey; a place where golden dreams came true; a providential setting that glistened with hope for those seeking renewal; a wonderland filled with a rare and raw beauty that would defy the ages: those great utopian myths have been part of our historical lore for the last century and a half...But that...Edenic world is an escape from reality, from history...[t]o better comprehend the myth and aura that circumscribes our understanding of the Oregon Trail, we suggest a closer look at the cluster of values, the symbols and the cultural world surrounding the celebrated trek to the Pacific Northwest... It is important to recognize...the hidden and unacknowledged consequences, the larger meaning of the great emigrant trek to the Oregon Country (1994:1-2).

In their quest for the "larger meaning" of the journey to Oregon, these scholars and other like-minded critics acknowledge the less known chapters of the story. By doing so, they enrich the entire story through legitimizing other voices. They do not necessarily disregard all traditional views, but rather foster awareness of a larger framework from which to operate historical analyses.

In order to complete and expand the story of the West and of the Oregon Trail, the contemporary historical version demands closer scrutiny of western settlement. The term "settlement" is misleading according to William Robbins, who prefers "repeopling" as a descriptive term because other people were already occupying the land

(Robbins 1992). Patricia Limerick refers to the westward migration as a Euro-American "invasion" or "conquest", defined as a "literal, territorial form of economic growth" (Limerick 1987:28). Limerick theorized that settlement episodes in the West are simply later versions of established American behaviors: "Westward expansion was the most concrete, down-to-earth demonstration of the economic habit on which the entire nation became dependent" (Limerick 1987:28). Economic studies are a predominant factor in Limerick's book, and in many contemporary studies. The presence of ethnicities, the role of the federal government, and ideas of "progress" (Limerick 1987:26-30) are other factors that combine to redefine the frontier and the West of American history. Limerick states that recognizing these and other factors of "moral complexity" in historical studies of the American West "does not require us to surrender the mythic power traditionally associated with the region's story" but would provide a "base for parables and tales of greater and deeper meaning" (Limerick 1991:54).

The goal in this study is to describe how museums involved in the Sesquicentennial interpret the Oregon Trail to the public, since both traditional views and more contemporary interpretations of the Oregon Trail contain standard elements of western American history. There are certainly gradations between traditionalist and contemporary views. How museums decide to interpret the

subject matter of the Oregon Trail can reveal not only how they perceive their roles as public educators, but where they fall in the extremes of traditional and contemporary American western history. The subjects of western history are narrowed for this project to reflect those judged to specifically relate to the Oregon Trail experience. Four major subjects are treated: Native Americans, the environment, non-European populations, and women.

#### **SUBJECTS INVESTIGATED FOR THE OREGON TRAIL**

##### **Native Americans**

The displacement of Native Americans is an important historical issue. Scholars today strive for understanding that the native presence in the Northwest for at least 12,000 years is crucial for discussion about the cultural autonomy and ensuing miscommunication and misunderstandings that often erupted on the overland trail. Patricia Limerick states that of the many discussions on Native American topics, "Most misleading is the impression of a single, homogenous group identity" (1987:215). Many different Native American cultures were met by settlers along the journey. Variations between cultures existed; also the simple but often unacknowledged fact is that Native American tribes were still groups of individuals whose behaviors and beliefs varied.

In traditional historical accounts, Native Americans are generally approached in two ways: (1) sentimentally as a "Noble Savage," a wise, sagacious, tragic figure, in essence a victim, or, (2) as a "menace, a potential threat to the courageous and determined groups who traveled the Oregon Trail from the 1840s through the 1860s" (Robbins and Sayre 1993). Scholars criticize both interpretations as oversimplified and for their failure to expose diversity and the tremendous affronts to the Native American culture. An example of the simplistic approach of villainizing the Native Americans who encountered Euro-American settlers is found in John B. Horner's 1919 book:

They [the emigrants] found themselves among Indians whose language was strange and whose habits were barbarous. But despite the opposition of the Natives, in place of forests sprang up homes, school-houses, churches and cities; the prairies were transformed into fields, gardens, orchards; and the treacherous Indian was taught to revere the God of our fathers (Horner 1919:82).

Clearly, society has changed since Horner wrote this account. But to contemporaries on the Oregon Trail, Native American lifestyles truly may have seemed "barbarous". There was little to prepare the emigrants for tolerance of those different from them. From a distant vantage point in time the intricacies of cultural precepts can be more easily traced; the ensuing relationships and miscommunications are more understood.

That is not to say that stereotypes do not still exist. Although arguments now emphasize recognition of the intense cultural clashes between the Native Americans and the settlers, oversimplifications remain. James Axtell recognizes some more modern and well-meaning stereotypes that have been introduced, but nonetheless prove to be ultimately unsatisfying. These stereotypes include:

the 'great man' or 'heroes' approach (the 'devious side of treaty-making'), the 'who-is-more-civilized' approach ('barbarities committed by whites against Indians' contrasted with the 'civilized' contributions of Indians), the 'crushed personality' and 'cultural theft' approach ('change only destroys Indian cultures, never adds to them'), and - by far the most important - the 'contributions' approach ('long lists of the contributions Native Americans made to the general American way of life' [Axtell 1987:70-71]).

These descriptions also fail to fully credit the Native Americans with a profound and complex place in the history of the American West. Emphasis, Axtell feels, should be directed toward seeing the national history and Native American history as a "mutual history of continuous interaction and influence", rather than disparate entities (Axtell 1987:70).

The traditional historical presentations of the Oregon Trail usually begin with American settlement by European immigrants or by those of European ancestry. The ten thousand (and possibly more) years of Native American occupation is seen as a backdrop, or opening act for the



great Euro-American migration on the "frontier." Some historians vehemently oppose even the use of the term "frontier", believing it to connote "an image of Anglo Americans bringing 'civilization' to a western area and its peoples." This implies that not only the land, but Native Americans as well, were a "primitive frontier folk in need of civilizing", which undoubtedly was not the self-perception they held (Riley 1992:5).

When providing facts about the Oregon Trail and westward migration in general, critics charge that "we routinely ignore the thousands of years of history and development that preceded the arrival of Americans and Europeans" (Riley 1992:248). Concern is voiced that the Oregon Trail is often depicted as the climax of the story, and Native Americans a peripheral component that slowly fade off into the sunset. Scholars now hope to convey that the Native American history before the onset of the American population was fascinating and rich within itself; it does not need Euro-American associations in order to deem it palatable or important. Furthermore, they hope to illustrate that the cultures are not extinguished.

American perceptions of progress, manifest destiny, and views of land, ownership, and natural resources all affected Native Americans. During their thousands of years of occupation, Native Americans evolved into a culture with far different conceptions. The basic

cultures of the emigrants and the Native Americans were so very different and the Oregon Trail experience was a situation where many encounters between the two peoples began. Their first impressions of each other were based upon many factors that are complex and multifaceted.

### Environmental Perceptions

Euro-Americans on the Oregon Trail held many preconceived notions about the environment and land they were heading to as well. Contemporary scholars are sensitive to the perceptions of the natural environment that the Americans had as they infiltrated the West. The widespread, assumed belief of a "new", "virgin" land, stemmed from the convention of viewing nature as a commodity belonging to humans. Overall Euro-American culture reinforced this belief, including interpretations of the Judeo-Christian religion (Woodard 1990:2).

The basic concept of land ownership and private property was so entrenched in Euro-American culture, that Native American confusion on this subject baffled settlers and the federal government. To most Euro-Americans the concept of private ownership was an assumption that generally did not require reflection or questioning. Furthermore, land ownership was directly related to "civilization." The logic of this assumption was as follows: civilization is acquired through the desire to work, and the motivation for work originates with

individual ownership (Robbins 1992: lecture). Keeping in mind that generalizations are difficult for the whole of Native American culture, land was not seen as a private possession. With such a contrasting set of beliefs, it was difficult for Euro-American settlers and Native Americans to understand each other. The Euro-American emigrants eagerly anticipated land ownership; their goals are an important element when investigating environmental perceptions.

The differences in environmental cultural precepts between Euro-Americans and Native Americans are evident in how the settlers reacted to the land itself. In the mid nineteenth century, Euro-American perceptions were in part guided by predominant Christianity and love/fear of an "untamed wilderness." The traditional viewpoint emphasizes this challenge.

William Robbins quotes John Quincy Adams's speech in 1846 in the House of Representatives: 'We claim that country [Oregon Territory] -- for what? To make the wilderness blossom as a rose... and subdue the earth, which we are commanded to do by the first behest of God Almighty' (Robbins and Sayre 1993).

Adams's religious reference indicates a doctrine predisposed to altering the landscape. To "subdue" the land was to control it and cultivate it. Contemporary historians are interested in the relationships between culture (which includes Christianity) and the perceived

mandates therein that prescribed cultivating the land for human benefit. Many of the Oregon Trail travelers saw their journey as a means to collect the reward of "free" land. As stated by William Lang, "In a republic of predominantly Christian people...the Edenic portrait was compelling. It suggested that a regenerative reward awaited those who made the long trek west" (Lang 1992:26). According to the emigrants beliefs, the effort of making it to Oregon would be rewarded by land and opportunity "to found and feed a new culture" (Lang 1992:27). Oregon Trail travelers were intent upon transplanting their agricultural subsistence lifestyle to the Oregon country, along with other aspects of their culture. "Subduing" the land and the environment was an integral component and a key to their cultural objectives.

The conception of entitlement to the bountiful land was a common theme throughout the Oregon Trail process. Weaned on this belief, Native Americans are either unacknowledged, or viewed as undeserving of the region's bounty. An example is the missionary Marcus Whitman who had little regard for Native American claim to the land. Primarily because he perceived that the Native Americans had "'refuse[d] or neglect[ed] to fill the designs of Providence'" he thought that "'they ought not to complain at the results'" (White 1991:72). The "results" were a loss of Native American land and challenge to their traditional culture.

Christianity was interpreted by many Euro-Americans to profess that humans were the pinnacle of creation. Nature was a set of commodities created by God for human use, and they believed that it "was their duty to make use of it" (White 1991:212). Products of nature, such as plants, animals, and minerals, were valued "according to their utility" (White 1991:212). If there was no perceived human use for a species, it was considered "'useless'"; the only source of redemption being an ability to "inspire feelings of beauty, reverence, awe, or sublimity in the people who beheld them" (White 1991:212).

Native American values varied widely, but fundamentally differed from those of Euro-Americans. Their religions were more animistic. Dependent upon plants and animals for subsistence, Native Americans are believed to have more sensitive perceptions of the natural environment. This includes "respect for the earth and its inhabitants that was reaffirmed through a spiritual belief system" (Woodard 1990:7). Native Americans were more prone to see themselves as a part of the land rather than comprising a higher eschalon mandated to control and dominate it (Woodard 1990:9). Plants and animal were "conscious beings whom Indians endowed with symbolic and religious significance" and were "no more a simple commodity than were humans" (White 1991:212-213). This fact is not to suggest an innate superiority of the Native Americans or the Euro-Americans; nor is it to assume that

Native American cultures practiced conservation similar to contemporary ecological precepts. The information is discussed here in order to provide some context for views of the environment along the Oregon Trail, and what cultural precepts may have influenced these visions.

The irony is that Native Americans had managed and manipulated some aspects of the environment, perhaps for thousands of years. This was accomplished through subtle and dramatic ways, such as incendiary activities in the Willamette Valley which produced prairie-like settings, or oak savannahs, which the Euro-American emigrants found ideal for their farming lifestyle. In fact, contemporary archaeologists and historians are discovering more information through journal research and archaeological investigations that "sizable prehistoric populations... influenced the extent and composition of forests, established and expanded grassland area, and altered landscapes through a myriad of human devices" (Robbins 1993:140). Although many journal anecdotes credit (and in some ways condemn) the Native Americans with setting fires, the realization that this was a true manipulation of the land seems to be lacking among Euro-American explorers and emigrants. Instead, Native Americans and their actions were thought to be a part of nature itself (Robbins 1993:144). Many Euro-American were unable to believe and accept that Native Americans were in part

creating the environment they so esteemed. (Robbins 1993:144).

Another example of Native American cultural and environmental adaptation was their introduction and adaptation of domesticated horses. This generally was not acknowledged for what it was: "a culturally engendered force shaping the landscape of the Indian Northwest" (Robbins 1993:146).

Many emigrant accounts portray information about the travelers' perceptions of land and environment while on the Oregon Trail. Some scholars attribute positive and negative overland journal descriptions to general aesthetic principles. Many emigrant observations of nature were inspired by artistic conceptions (Boag 1993:125).

Some scholars find that ideas influencing emigrant perceptions of nature were mixed with nationalism and American identity. The pervasive American desire to create a unique national character, different from that of Europe, could in part be achieved through the beautiful and vast landscape, and the qualities it inscribed in those who lived in it (Boag 1993:128). This is of interest when considering Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier" thesis, which concerns the establishment of American character and identity.

Euro-American and Native American perceptions of the environment are important to recognize. Familiarity with

the influences of these perceptions allow a fuller understanding of contemporary issues regarding the environment, as well as their origins. Discerning how exhibits discuss these issues is a part of examining contemporary ideas and where they originate.

### Emigrants Other than European-Americans

*In many of the historical narratives associated with the Oregon Trail, it is common practice to ignore the presence of sizeable numbers of others (Robbins 1994:10).*

Traditional depictions of the Oregon Trail pay little attention to people who are not from a Euro-American background. A 1900 article about the Oregon Trail shows that blatant preoccupation with Euro-American ancestors exists:

The Oregon migrations effected at one sweep a two thousand-mile extension of the Aryan movement westward...No other outward movement of Aryan people ever covered anything like the distance made by the Oregon pioneers... (Young 1900:342).

Many historians in the 1990s view this reference to specific "white" racial groups as a means to assert and perpetuate cultural dominance and control. Reginald Horseman explains that exclusion of non-white individuals from reaching equality and the absorption of other "white" races into the "existing racial mass" would assure the stability of cultural configurations. "Internally it was



made quite clear that the American republic was a white Anglo-Saxon republic..." (Horseman 1981:226).

Lack of information about "others" is what Robbins refers to as "a fundamental problem that lies at the intersection of myth and history" (Robbins and Sayre 1993), meaning that the vision provided by traditional images of the Oregon Trail is that of a primarily Anglo-Saxon race coming to a sparsely habited land. This depiction is now viewed as a "myth" since the story is primarily about Euro-Americans, yet a diversity of ethnicities was present. Many historians insist that telling the stories of "others" is essential to provide a complete account of the Oregon Trail experience.

African-Americans are one of the groups of people that were present on the Oregon Trail although of far fewer numbers. A few African-Americans are recorded to be in Oregon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as York, the slave that accompanied Lewis and Clark on their survey of the West (McLagan 1983:3). The Oregon Trail journey also included some African-Americans. For example, Jacob Dodson, an African-American man, came to Oregon in 1843 with the John Fremont party. He was a freed slave of the Thomas Hart Benton family.

Some of the African-Americans that traveled the Oregon Trail were slaves of overland families, and it appears that they were often freed upon arrival in the Oregon country. However, those were not the only

circumstances that resulted in an African-Americans on the overland trail. In 1844, George Bush, an African-American, and his family arrived in Oregon. George was a wealthy man, and was renowned for his assistance to other families while on the journey (McLagan 1983:18-20).

Another African-American, Moses Harris, was a mountain man and wagon train guide. Moses also aided many families, such as the Whitmans and Spaldings; interestingly, he also played a major part in the rescue of the "Meek cutoff" party (McLagan 1983:14-17).

These are just a few of the documented African-Americans on the Oregon Trail. Numerous others are recorded, and there are probably many more that existed without leaving any formal record (McLagan 1983:4-12). These examples are included to illustrate the presence of other ethnicities, a theme that many late twentieth century scholars hope to publicize.

It would also be of interest to trace attitudes and behaviors toward African-Americans on a trip where close proximity and daily contact would encourage greater communication between different ethnicities. Subsequent treatment of African-Americans once the Oregon country was reached is another area of further study. Asking whether or not the Oregon Trail experience influenced or reinforced certain behaviors is an area where research is needed.

The Provisional Government of Oregon, addressed the subject of African-Americans. The Second Executive Committee passed a measure in June 1844 that forbid slavery; however, it also refused any African-American residence in Oregon. A summary of the law reads:

Slavery or involuntary service should not exist; any negro slave brought into the country should in three years become free; any free negro or mulatto coming into the country should leave within two years; if he (or she) failed to leave the country after notice, he should be whipped on the bare back with not less than twenty nor more than thirty-nine stripes, and flogged likewise every six months until he did leave (Horner 1919:99-100).

Although the measure was repealed in the following session, it does reveal attitudes of leaders of the provisional government. The threat of punishment adds depth and texture to a flat history of Oregon as a land of individuals and freedom. Although a temporary law, it reveals that this land wasn't based upon equality as we know it in the 1990s. Not much middle ground between slavery and freedom existed for African-Americans. Temporary residence, punishment, and removal, were the only solutions to problems of African-American status that were perceived by Euro-Americans. The referendum on the Oregon state constitution in 1857 also banned African-Americans from Oregon, proving that it remained an issue throughout the years of Oregon Trail travel (Limerick 1987:278).

The treatment of African-Americans during the Oregon Trail era appears harsh and prejudiced. Investigation of positive and negative experiences of African-Americans on the Trail and after arriving in Oregon, could contribute to a more complete understanding of the Oregon Trail's significance. Assuming that many people regard the Oregon Trail as representative of the American experience and ideals, then including information on all Americans could enrich the story. Although the number of African-Americans on the Oregon Trail were admittedly few and records are sparse compared to that of Euro-Americans, the subject offers many possibilities for future development.

### Women

Women's views of the Oregon Trail are also emphasized as valuable by many contemporary historians. The "Madonna of the Prairie" image pervading much of the traditional history is now seen as simplistic and stereotyped. One component of the family aspect of the trail, women were viewed as sacrificial, hearty trail homemakers. Resilient and persevering, the women represented the strength of the family unit. Their presence in this manner created a wholesome picture of the travelers.

In fact, women played many roles and held different views of the experience. Of course, some probably fit the classic mold perfectly; however, the Oregon journey proposed new challenges and situations for women. Julie

Roy Jeffrey suggests the trail offered an opportunity for women to contest their traditional role in society, but in the end it denied them this chance, as the trail experience reaffirmed traditional values (Jeffrey 1979:26, 106). Through intensive research of overland journals, John Mack Faragher validates this view. He argues that the trail was a rather conservative experience: it did not influence people to "change but to transfer old sexual roles to a new but altogether familiar environment" (Faragher 1979:187). Duties remained traditional as long as was reasonable, and women had different preoccupations than men.

Glenda Riley urges people to move beyond the "Saint in the Sunbonnet" image of women who "supposedly helped 'conquer' the American West" (Riley 1992:1). The westward journey embittered and adversely affected many women; however many endured it and found new strength (Riley 1992:76).

Many women were afflicted with "Melancholia", an extreme depression. One woman wrote: "I have had the blues pretty bad...Glad, glad shall I be when this journey is ended. How little I knew what a risk I was running when I started!" (Kaiser 1961:340). Yet others formed friendships and were rather "high-spirited" (Luchetti and Olwell 1982:29). Generalizations are difficult to apply, since the experience produced such varying reactions (Riley 1992:76).

Riley also emphasizes that the trail experience was not the only important event on the subject of women and the West. "The experience of the white woman in the 'settling' of the West is not without value - however it should be leavened and balanced by accounts of other [female] groups..." (Riley 1992:248).

#### **PLACE OF THE OREGON TRAIL IN HISTORY**

The Oregon Trail experience is still a very popular story in the late twentieth century. Holding a statewide Sesquicentennial celebration is evidence of this fact. Many historians recognize the Oregon Trail is an intriguing story about American culture, but feel it is but a chapter in long book of casts and characters. Many scholars feel there are so many other stories to tell about the West, that overemphasizing the Euro-American aspect of the overland trail pre-empts discussion of other episodes which are just as valid and absorbing.

Many historians in the late twentieth century assert that by expanding the ethnic boundaries of the Oregon Trail experience a more complete picture is created and the appeal is also widened to include those outside the dominant culture.

Topics about Native Americans, the environment, other ethnicities, and women are just a sample of the themes and ideas that have recently been scrutinized in academic circles; they are by no means exhaustive. I outline them

to reveal that many traditional depictions and assumptions about the Oregon Trail are currently being challenged.

Of course not all modern scholars agree with the destructuring of myths. For example, William Savage Jr. acknowledges that some of the arguments of traditional depictions of the American West are credible, such as the needed historical attention for diverse ethnic groups and women. However, he asserts, "As well...nations need their myths; and it so happens that myths involving the West are the most enduring and persuasive ones in America's possession" (Savage 1993:1245). According to Savage, there is reluctance to completely relinquish the myths and their power. He insinuates that those criticizing myths are "spoilsports" and overly skeptical.

Glenda Riley acknowledges that the perception of scholars who try to expand the discussion of Western American history is often negative.

Scholars who attempt to rethink and restructure the traditional picture of the American West are frequently criticized for having a penchant towards extreme revisionism, political correctness, and an unnecessarily negative view of the nation's heritage (Riley 1992:1).

Riley hopes to dispel the notion that current historical theories are all innately negative. She believes that it is not necessarily a negative endeavor to make attempts at "asking critical questions about the past" so to fundamentally better serve students and the nation's future (Riley 1992:1). Riley explains that by

interpreting the past through the lens of current needs and concerns, history can provide valuable lessons relevant and necessary for today's population (Riley 1992:3).

Historical analyses are dynamic; facts may be malleable depending upon the angle at which they are manipulated. The questions historians ask direct the nature of the interpretations. What is popular in one era may not be as relevant to people in later generations. This can reflect the changing values of a culture. Values are inscribed in popular history, and these ideals evolve parallel with society. A major goal of this study is to see how these ideas have influenced museum exhibits, because museums are a vehicle through which ideas are generated as well as reflected.



## CHAPTER 4: MUSEUM ROLES

### PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Museums have varying subject matter as dictated by their mission statements and overall goals. Museums that are oriented toward western American themes are becoming increasingly popular. A surge of new museums with western themes has recently opened, while established institutions have expanded in the past decade (Price 1993:229). Many issues in Oregon's historical museums focus upon or relate to western subjects such as the Oregon Trail. Decisions about how to present information are dependent upon how museums see their individual responsibilities. The responsibilities and expectations of museums vary; however, there are general guidelines that museums have traditionally adhered to.

Museums exist to serve the public. They are held in public trust and are designed to educate, entertain, and enlighten through scholarly resources (Weingartner 1984:35). Museums collect and preserve objects, and through their use, augment or even heighten knowledge and understanding. Museums achieve this through education, research, and exhibition (AAM 1987:21).

Historical museums are important and unique institutions that use artifacts as the medium to reach the public. "The concrete reality of the past, embodied in historic objects, engages the imagination and stimulates

the senses like no other form..." (Price 1993:229). The historical museum serves as a refreshing format for learning.

Some museum professionals urge recognition of the importance of artifacts in order to utilize resources most effectively. Michael Ettema describes the current trend in museums as a struggle between two theories: formalist and analytical. The formalist ideal is a complete focus upon the objects with no new conceptual challenges or information. This produces preoccupation with concrete explanations of facts and artifacts that are "the sole purpose and justification of museum activities" (Ettema 1987:62). Formalist theory asserts that objects actually embody abstract moral traits and can be self-evident just by their existence.

This doctrine developed in the United States through Victorian era (1837-1901) efforts to instill and maintain a high level of decorum, virtues, and behavior. Objects related to Euro-American culture were believed to "express the spirit of the people who made them" and relate, just by their appearance, the high standards and moral dignity of those that made and used them (Ettema 1987:66). By displaying such items, people could be influenced positively. No interpretation or "explanation" was necessary: the simple material culture was enough.

In the latter part of the Victorian era, "traditional values" were espoused as the virtues that built and

maintained a civilized nation. Due to fear that these values were eroding, a nostalgic desire to recapture a simpler time developed. Many people pined for the traits and virtues that they felt their ancestors possessed: "individualism, self-reliance, economic initiative, courage, simplicity, honesty, and taste" (Ettema 1987:68). Museums illustrated these concepts through the display of objects made and used by earlier generations believed to have had these qualities. The artifacts themselves were thought to be able to convey these ideals (Ettema 1987:68). This is an especially interesting perspective for museums to examine during the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial, since the very traits longed for in the Victorian era are often seen as representative of the emigrants to Oregon.

Criticisms of the formalist theory state that "when the medium has... become the message" new scholarship is squelched (Ettema 1987:72). Michael Ettema believes that when historical knowledge is equated with the knowledge of objects, the same often outdated conclusions are made that emphasize aesthetics, nostalgia, and linear technological progress (Ettema 1987:72). In addition, with no context or a starting point to provoke ideas, the audience will attach their own meanings and reinforce views they already hold, rather than being challenged to create new ideas and relationships on which they can build (Ettema 1987:80). The result is a failure to allow museums to reach their

potential in educating and providing a framework for new discussion in a complex, multi-ethnic society.

A contrasting technique, analytical theory, also does not completely fulfill pluralistic educational goals. This perspective is, however, credited with attempting a more "holistic" approach to interpreting artifacts from the past. Through scholarly research, new insight into history and its relationship to the present can be related. Analytical perspectives admit complexities and examine some of the many factors that are involved in decision making in the past, showing the results that affect the present. Analytical techniques show the fluidity of history. The "hows and whys" are emphasized rather than the "whats" and "whos" (Ettema 1987:75, 76).

The flaw from a museum perspective is that artifacts become unessential to the interpretation. Text is the primary means to relate information, since abstractions are most easily understood through verbal communication rather than visual (Ettema 1987:77). Objects and artifacts are demoted to inconsequential accents, rather than used as an educational tool (Ettema 1987:77). Since it is the objects that attract people, that provide a unique means of education, it is unfortunate to not utilize them to their potential.

The contrasting methods, formalist and analytical, tug at opposite goals, rather than achieving a balance. Michael Ettema explains the dilemma as being caught

between "inadequate content and ineffective communication" (1987:77). Synthesizing the two approaches would use the strengths of both techniques. Objects are powerful and symbolic tools, but unable to transform and provoke serious thought on their own. Addressing the shared cultural meaning of artifacts, what they represent, and why, would better educate audiences. Discovering and asking questions about the social functions of objects would allow correlations to develop between choices made in the past and their affect upon those that must be made in the present (Ettema 1987:81). Exhibits are more profound and attractive to audiences when they "draw on the whole range of widely shared but often subtle meanings that our society as a whole has assigned to objects" (Ettema 1987:82). By doing so, museums share more information and transferable concepts than facts alone.

Museums play many roles. The dichotomy of formalist and analytical theories shows that emphasis varies, but the central tenet of museums is to educate the public in ways that no other facility or program can. How museums choose to use their unique strengths can affect the results upon the audience; many museums empirically operate with attributes of both theories. Formalist and analytical theories may prove useful in evaluation of Oregon Trail related exhibits.

## MUSEUMS AND EDUCATION

Because museums are involved in the ever-changing realm of public education, their mandates are dynamic. Theories and revisions are constantly produced by the museum community to better understand and successfully direct their methods of participation. Committees and commissions have periodically evaluated museum standards and policies around the country and from the information gathered, publish materials of insight and advice related to current conditions. One such commission was the Museums for a New Century. Appointed by the American Association of Museums (AAM), it established some target areas for museums nationwide to concentrate upon. Leadership in education and research, collection care, goal setting and greater inclusion of minorities and pluralistic issues were some of these areas (AAM 1987:31-33).

Currently, the AAM is implementing goals to achieve high standards of public education relevant to all types of museums. An AAM publication, Excellence and Equity, stresses the commitment to education, with a representation of American society's pluralism (Hirzy 1992:3). "Reflecting the diversity" of American society was the paramount goal of this task force when it outlined a modern version of national museum goals and responsibilities.

According to the 1992 AAM Excellence and Equity goals, museums of every genre should commit not only to the education and attraction of diverse audiences, "but first they should reflect our society's pluralism in every aspect of their operations" (Hirzy 1992:3). Small museums, of which there are many in Oregon, are also part of this equation. According to the AAM, "size is not a criterion for excellence", and guidelines encourage programs for training of staff and volunteers in order to better serve their audience and the collections themselves (AAM 1987:32). Smaller facilities may or may not have access to publications and other national resources such as the AAM. Limited funding to join and/or receive information, and simple lack of exposure or interest may prevent full utilization of these professional sources. Some smaller institutions may prefer to focus upon the local area without consulting larger organizations. Where Oregon's smaller museums fit in this discussion will be important to investigate, as overall goals and exposure to materials can directly influence standards and interpretation.

Regional heritage is an important component for many small museums, since it aspires to provide the local area with "a sense of belonging and place" (AAM 1987:21). The best of these, according to the committee on Museums for a New Century, are those that "build on the particular contribution they alone can make to their communities"

(AAM 1987: 21). This statement conveys the vital significance of the mission statement: it focuses the museum in a direction that ultimately serves to foster understanding of a particular era, subject or region.

The mission statement is one aspect of the museums studied in this paper. Since the purpose of it is to direct the course for the museum to navigate, it is imperative that this is scrutinized closely to see the boundaries and goals of each institution visited.

#### **CONTENT AND THE PUBLIC**

All historical museums must come to terms with how their exhibits explain the past, the ultimate reasons for their interpretations, and the context in which their interpretations are made (Donath 1991:82). Claudine Brown states that Museums are becoming (or should be) more sensitive to understanding "whose culture is being preserved and whose is not, from whose point of view the story is being told and whose point of view is being suppressed or distorted, whose culture is being respected and whose culture is being demeaned" (Brown 1992:3). Because of pressures of time, funding, exhibit costs and patronage, some museums are unable to produce frequent and updated interpretations and presentations. "Thus, the conventional, monolithic view of the West as a romantic and triumphant adventure in the Turnerian mold lingers..." (Price 1993:230).



Another reason that these "monolithic" views of the West continue to be portrayed is because the issues involved are not consensual and therefore exhibiting them to the public is risky. Popular culture may or may not fully reflect or disseminate scholarly ideas, such as conflicting views of the Oregon Trail (Donath 1991:99). Even if the public is aware of the new ideas filtering through academia, people in viewing the exhibit may not accept them. Hence the gap, or abyss, between academic thought and popular culture. A question that museums must ask is: should museums bridge the gap if there is one? When museums choose to present material that is innovative and ideologically new (and furthermore not a consensual historical interpretation), they are vulnerable to adverse public outcry.

A case in point is the Smithsonian exhibit "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920." As an art exhibit, basic presentation and display considerations differ from those in a historical museum. However, in terms of interpretive issues, it expresses many of the same concerns that historical museums currently face.

Asserting that western art was often "racist, sexist and imperialist", the controversial exhibit "struck a sensitive nerve with a public weaned on a more heroic West" (Price 1993:230). Ideologically, the exhibit's objective was to present images of westward expansion "to

discover essential truths about the cultural basis of national identity" (Broun 1991:ix). The exhibit examined influences upon artists' renditions of western American expansion. The goal was to illuminate the power of myths and historical perceptions of expansion and their present impacts. The exhibit showed that many historical perceptions served as a basis for national identity.

Elizabeth Broun, the Director of the National Museum of American Art, states:

Today, a century after America's creation myth was ushered into the world, we struggle with its inadequacies and insensitivities. By retracing the path of progress through decades of expansion... we can see the larger realities that lay to either side of this artificially straight line, finding there a new perspective on our past and future" (Broun 1991: ix).

In the Smithsonian exhibit relationships were shown to exist between artists' productions and the formation of western myths. Revealing the development and solidification of myths to the exclusion of other issues (such as those discussed in chapter three) allowed conclusions to be drawn about the portrayal of history that today are hotly debated. The argument pits traditional, mythical images against modern, more complex interpretations of the migration westward.

Controversy followed "The West as America" exhibit. Since many Americans "still consider the so-called pioneer spirit of the 'Old West'...the one that 'forged' the nation" (Truettner 1991:28) the exhibit's direct

confrontation with traditional images and their origins stimulated strong responses. The "New West historiographical" interpretive content, according to organizers, "present[ed] the unvarnished truth of conquest and exploitation" that was perceived as "heretical" and "touched a raw nerve in the collective American conscience" (Gulliford 1992:200).

Conceptions of "truth" vary. Part of the problem may be in presentation. Labeling a certain perspective as the "unvarnished truth" is an incendiary assumption. Those with different ideologies may more likely be offended and react defensively rather than calmly contemplate new concepts. Objectivity is not easy, nor is it always the best philosophy; however, an environment perceived as rigid or dogmatic encourages hostility, not education. The exhibit illustrated that "truth" is an elusive and malleable concept.

Exposing the public to academic philosophies of western expansion is ambitious and seemingly would fit in to the AAM's parameters of striving to reflect diversity. However, some of the outcry against the exhibit was initiated by powerful people - powerful in terms of political influence and funding.

In a Wall Street Journal editorial, the exhibition was evaluated as "'an entirely hostile ideological assault on the nation's founding history'"; a columnist claimed it was "'the most politically correct museum exhibit in

American history'" (Gulliford 1992:201). In addition, two United States Senators (including Slade Gorton from Washington State) threatened to initiate budget cuts and demanded Secretary Robert McAdams, director of the Smithsonian, to define the institution's "'political agenda'" (Gulliford 1992:201).

Despite the critical publicity, a majority (about 70 percent) of the comments left in guest books were positive (Truettner and Nemerov 1992:70). Impressions varied, but comments suggested strong deliberation about the museum's approach. The comments revealed that some felt threatened by the interpretations; there were angry accusations about lack of objectivity and to what amounts to blasphemy. Others were surprised at all of the controversy. Two comments below illustrate the point:

Wonderful art, but a sickening example of the dishonesty of...historical interpretations...  
LJA, 4/12/91 (Truettner and Nemerov 1992:79).

I sought out this exhibit after reading acerbic critiques of it in a Nebraska newspaper. How hard it is from some to give up a romanticized [vision] of westward expansion!...  
R.T., Lincoln (Truettner and Nemerov 1992:79).

The difficulty that museums have in balancing the general public's expectations and current historical thought is evident. Even at the Smithsonian there does not exist a magic formula to avoid controversy. With such a wide and diverse audience, education is an arduous process, difficult to achieve without offending.

Recently, another planned Smithsonian exhibit has "drawn particular attention, amounting to a furor" (Heyman 1994:8). The "Enola Gay" exhibit dealing with World War II and the atomic bomb, resulted in its cancellation and the resignation of the Director of the National Air and Space Museum. Smithsonian Secretary Michael Heyman stated that the Smithsonian was "seeking to understand when controversy is productive, when destructive, and how to assure that our integrity and reputation for balance and fairness do not suffer" (Heyman 1994:8). It appears this quest will be an ongoing project.

Museums able to balance all of the pressures of remaining on the cutting academic edge, identifying varying perspectives, AND maintaining patronage are tackling an onerous agenda. Byron Price states that a "mature museum... will be multifaceted rather than monolithic and will recognize both triumph and failure, grandeur and simplicity, unity and diversity" (Price 1993:233). The ability of museums to "reflect the whole of human experience" is a difficult mandate (AAM 1987:21).

The "Truth in Presentation" ideal, as described in a report by the Committee on Ethics to the American Association of Museums, established that dissemination of new knowledge is of paramount importance. This is to be accomplished while maintaining "intellectual honesty and objectivity" in presentations, address a wide variety of issues, and "ensure that exhibits are honest and objective

expressions and do not perpetuate myths or stereotypes" (AAM 1978:14).

Theoretically, the emphasis of scholars is to portray the diversity of the American West, to "strike a believable balance between sometimes diverse aesthetic, historical, and political perspectives" (Price 1993:233). Whether this works empirically is one aspect to be investigated in this study.

Jackie R. Donath explains that popular impressions and beliefs about historical and cultural issues can pose great challenges to historical museums. She states that beliefs about American history "can present some significant problems to any museum which must try to reconcile an important, but mythological subject with an institutional mandate to collect, exhibit, and educate" (Donath 1991:83).

Museum attempts at educating the public are problematic. The effort to portray complex and dynamic issues while attracting diverse audiences (as encouraged by the AAM) is difficult. Many of the museums in this sample are a component of a regional historical society. These institutions are also under pressures to attain levels of scholarship and to attract audiences. The goal for historical societies, according to at least two authors, is "to combine the probing inquisitiveness of the best historians with the specificity and the detail of the best curators" (Rabinowitz and Warner 1982: 34). Curators

and historians expressing ideas is one thing; reception of them is another.

Furthermore, artifacts and limited amounts of text, the most typical formats used by museums, are restrictive. Fostering understanding of complex issues is difficult to develop in exhibits. If the audience fails to accept ideas in certain exhibits, it may often be that the content was difficult to digest or simply incomplete. Willingness to attempt such interpretations is another issue. Drawing the line where objectivity ends and subjectivity begins is ever vague.

Interpretation in museums that deal with western American heritage poses difficult challenges. If a museum's role is to educate, entertain, and reflect diversity, while simultaneously preserving the heritage of a region or ideal, the potential for problems is almost guaranteed. The public may expect to see one interpretation and not agree with new concepts displayed, such as the example at the Smithsonian. If public resentment ensues, there can be much at stake: funding, visitation, and the age-old fear that the public regards museums as an elitist, academic institution without much value to the average citizen.

It takes time and repeated exposure for some people to assimilate new ideas. The public's general conception of history provides a basis for cultural identities.

Michael Kammen discusses public memory in the context of tradition and heritage:

Public memory, which contains the slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often contested (Kammen 1991:13).

This statement brings up important considerations for museums in terms of the relationship between communal public "memory" and identities. Many people may be quite happy with the status quo, and are accustomed to thinking of their nation and to some extent themselves in a certain way. To be successful, museums must be sensitive to egos and ideas that threaten audiences.

The Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum in Los Angeles is an example of a museum that is quite aware of the continued public infatuation with romantic, mythical images of the frontier. Some critics charge that the museum is overly aware and fails to present a realistic picture of the West.

Although the museum is credited with some innovative exhibit techniques, Jackie Donath criticizes it for emphasizing "a mainstream, masculine West in which Native Americans, other minorities, and women are given, at best, cursory treatment" (Donath 1991:91). Despite its claims of offering the "'perfect blending of scholarship and showmanship'", Donath sees it as presenting a "predigested



West that cements together the very myths and realities it promised to separate" (Donath 1991:90). In other words, showmanship is first priority. The richness and complexity of meaning is lost behind the entertainment.

Much of the criticism stems from corporate sponsorship; many organizations were involved in various aspects of the museum. Certain exhibit rooms, such as the "Anheuser Busch saloon memorabilia" are named after businesses. These sponsorships which reflect the organizations' desire to associate themselves with the "western mystique" (Donath 1991:93). Add to this merchandising and the public's enthusiasm for the exhibits, and a formula emerges of "uncritical celebration of the significance of the West in American culture" (Donath 1991:99).

Because the museum is popular, criticism rings hollow in some circles. One argument contends that if it attracts visitors, it is at least providing some historical learning, as well as generating operating funds. A rebuttal would be that it may attract but does not encourage thought or reflection of the many elements of western history; that its success owes "more to the demands of the present and the marketplace than to understanding of the past" (Donath 1991: 99). Commercialization of history poses many challenges to museums.

## INTERPRETIVE TECHNIQUE AND THEORIES

The discussion of pressures and expectations of museums is directly related to how subjects are interpreted. Because the historical facts are always open to debate upon their larger meaning, interpretations are an increasingly important and tense concern of museums.

Pioneer interpretive specialist Freeman Tilden defined interpretation as:

An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information (Tilden 1977:8).

This definition was expanded by Edward Alexander, who emphasized the educational aspects of interpretation in the context of a museum (Alexander 1979:195). Alexander asserts that interpretation has a "serious educational purpose" because it "seeks to teach certain truths, to reveal meanings, to impart understanding" (Alexander 1979:195). In order to fulfill this educational goal, a museum setting requires that interpretation is based on "original objects"; when they are "properly arranged, they have innate powers to impart and inform" (Alexander 1979:195). When objects are used in conjunction with the senses and verbal text "they constitute a powerful learning process" (Alexander 1991:195-196). He further states that research in every aspect of a museum, from

objects to presentation methods is of primary importance in order to communicate effectively (Alexander 1979:195-196). Alexander explains that a museum can reach its potential using these interpretive measures, and inspire the visitor to seek further information that will continue the learning process indefinitely (Alexander 1979:196).

G. Ellis Burcaw sees interpretation "becoming even more important since it is a pivotal area in which the nature of tomorrow's museum is being forged" (Burcaw 1981). With interpretation emphasized, questions emerge. How can neutrality be maintained? Should every museum stress interpretation? In attempting to answer such questions, a clear view of what comprises and defines interpretation is needed.

Interpretation can be seen as the telling of a story. In William Cronon's essay, "A Place for Stories", the innate tendency of humans to relate facts in a narrative medium is discussed. In the telling of a story, identical facts can lead to completely different interpretations. Cronon asks, "where [do] the stories come from?" (Cronon 1992:1348). A clue to determining interpretive perspectives is to evaluate the relationship of impressions between the beginning and ending points of a narrative (Cronon 1992:1362, 1370). The difference between them reveals the author's viewpoint.

For example, some interpretations of the Oregon Trail begin with an idyllic setting of Native Americans living

harmoniously with nature; in the end, the land is ravaged and destroyed by Euro-American enterprise and settlement. Or, conversely, the beginning may have a neutral, inviting, but somewhat primitive landscape. Native Americans are sensed to be in the background but are not the focus. As the pioneers struggled over the Oregon Trail and began to live on the land, the end result is the creation of new communities that we, as observers of the story, enjoy and live in today. The latter example illustrates an ascendant line of action, the former, a declensionist, or a falling from high to low (Cronon 1992:1357).

Understanding the momentum of a story may at least aid in recognizing the human trait of coloring a subject with story-like interpretations. This in turn may help make curators and historians more aware of their own biases. Complete objectivity in interpretation is truly not innate. Part of the interpretive problems lies in deciding what themes and sources to trust as being authentic, appropriate, and objective. Realizing their own biases and their roots is important for museum professionals who develop presentations, especially in light of "cultural equity and equal access goals" that are "primary issues for museums of all types" (Brown 1992:3).

The use of narration to relay facts and events is ubiquitous in worldwide culture. In America, the story of western settlement is no exception; stories and

interpretations in history reflect society as a whole. Furthermore, they touch upon how people see themselves. Cronon philosophizes that narratives are a means to "motivate and explain our actions" and therefore may also "change the way we act in the world" (Cronon 1992:1375). Guided by this opinion, interpretations in museums are very important and deserve notice and deliberation.

Interpretive strategies are affected by many variables. Object selection, placement and interpretation will all affect how the visitor sees a subject (Donath 1991:90). Limitation of visitors' attention and time creates problems for comprehension of subjects. The text and presentations in the best exhibits are designed with the varying backgrounds and limitations of the audience in mind.

For the general public, the ranges of education, background and learning styles must all be addressed. For example, many older people are comfortable with more text, and can generally maintain a lengthier attention span in terms of reading. Those from younger generations are often not as accustomed to text. Modern youth generally require more interactive stimuli because of their background - electronics, technology, video games...all are an everyday part of their life (Bucy 1993). For better or worse, many options other than reading exist for learning.

Incorporating differing learning styles as well as the ambitious guidelines for museums can be overwhelming. Attempts to promote various interpretations of a subject must be tempered with knowledge about audience requirements and limitations.

Many museums do not feel comfortable with the promotion of interpretation within the museum, and choose other methods of communication, such as simple labels with objects. Without interpretation, ideas are more difficult, if not impossible, to discern. As educational goals become more standard for museums, incorporating interpretive information consequently becomes more important. Interpretation clarifies concepts and increases understanding of them. Interpretation has become a specialty. A discipline within itself, academia has recognized it as a field and courses are often incorporated in museum studies programs as well.

Many of the advances in interpretation has stemmed from government agencies. The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service have been on the forefront of interpretation. These agencies have incorporated interpretation into their displays at the various national sites under their jurisdiction. National Historic Sites, National Scenic Areas, and National Parks are some of these sites. The aforementioned agencies have all been a part a development that has also had an impact on museums: the rise of the interpretive center.

## INTERPRETIVE CENTERS

The definition of an interpretive center is difficult to pinpoint. The previously mentioned concerns of museums are generally shared with an interpretive center. There are fundamental differences between the museums and interpretive centers, although they are becoming increasingly more difficult to discern. These differences focus primarily upon their management and orientation towards object collections.

Many of the existing interpretive centers in Oregon are run by federal agencies and utilize public funds for their operation. Interpretive centers have different approaches to management, and specific location will often have an important meaning. The historical relevance of an area will often dictate the centers location and specific managing agency (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

Philosophies on object collections also differ. Museums collect and preserve artifacts and objects. Artifacts are defined by James Deetz, an archaeologist, as "that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans" (Nye 1981:7).

Museums are unique in their primary role of housing objects. Interpretive centers are not designated caretakers of such material. They traditionally rely more on replicas, models, special fabrications, and interactive displays. Interestingly, more interpretive centers are

entering the field of artifact collection. Although fundamentally not object oriented, more artifacts are used and being housed in interpretive centers (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

Concurrently, in many museums an emphasis on the importance of interpretive techniques has increased. The American Association of Museums (AAM), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the Institute of Museum Services (IMS) have all stressed the primacy of the object in past decades. They emphasized the management of collections and the orientation of objects. This focus is changing. Contemporary concerns revolve around the "museum's public dimensions" (Pool 1992:6). A quote from the AAM Task Force on Museum Education as delivered at the 1990 AAM Annual Meeting is included in Marilen Pool's "Museums and Tourism on the Oregon Coast" and reads:

The community of museums in this country shares the responsibility with other educational institutions to enrich learning opportunities for all individuals, to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry who appreciate the value of knowing about their pasts, are resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present, and are determined to shape a future in which experiences and many points of view are given voice. In this endeavor, museums will play a powerful, beneficial role for people of the next century (Pool 1992:6).

These educational goals include the awareness of the importance of audience response and assimilation of information. The ultimate goal of interpretation is to



"seek to protect and preserve natural and cultural history" (Shelton 1994: personal communication). This is accomplished through interpretive strategies. These strategies acknowledge and strive to affect the visitor population individually. That is, they attempt to reach the audience emotionally and intellectually. In turn, attitudes and ultimately behavior are affected (Shelton 1994: personal communication; Bucy 1993).

Interpretive centers in Oregon have become a great attraction. They have become increasingly sophisticated and visible and attract a wide audience. Museums and interpretive centers have assimilated traits of each other and there has been a blending of subject matter and technique. Interpretive centers are now covering subject matter and themes that have traditionally been handled by museums. However, it is important to realize their ideological differences when evaluating their content related to the Oregon Trail.

## CHAPTER 5: TOURISM AND THE MUSEUM AUDIENCE

The growth of tourism has involved museums, and is especially important in the Sesquicentennial Celebration. In contemporary society, visitors to museums include more than the local community. Museums are increasingly part of a larger framework of tourist attractions, many of which foster relationships and work closely with local entities involved with economic growth, such as the Chamber or Commerce, or special economic councils.

Both state and federal governments have also become noticeable elements in tourism strategies. Oregon's 1993 Sesquicentennial Celebration is a perfect example of a partnership with all of these forces. Regional groups along with state and national government worked to create a Sesquicentennial Celebration of which museums were a focal point. In order to analyze this situation, an understanding of the tourist museum audience is necessary.

Familiarity with the audience attending museums is imperative for museums to develop successful and relevant exhibits. With the influx of tourism this is a grand task. Tourists visiting a museums have some traits in common. However, their interests, needs, and expectations of a museum will vary.

A general definition of tourist, or visitor, as stated by Marilen Pool is "a person who travels away from his or her place of residence temporarily for some

physical and/or psychological change, for recreation, pleasure and/or education" (Pool 1992:6). Another source states simply that tourism is:

temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs (Mathieson and Wall 1989:1).

In 1993, Oregon's Sesquicentennial generated tourists who fit such definitions. Facilities and activities were created in anticipation for their needs, and the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration embraced tourism as a means to stimulate the economy and interest in the local region's heritage. Tourists have been categorized in many studies, an initial step in analyzing those predisposed to more likely visit museums.

Basic tourism classifications as quoted by Marilen Pool are: ethnic, cultural, historical, environmental and recreational (Pool 1992:7). Historical tourism is a type that encompasses museums, churches, historic sites and monuments. This genre of tourism has more recently been named "heritage tourism" (Pool 1992:7). While other types of tourism strive to accommodate and control the impact of the industry, heritage tourism is unique in that it is "likely to be engaged in by all types of tourists" (Pool 1992: 7). That is not to suggest that every tourist traveling to a certain location will visit a historical

museum; it merely says that all types of tourists as collective groups do frequent museums.

Museums, then, are an important component for tourism. Since they are not isolated attractions to a small segment of society, but rather to a large mixture of all types of the tourist public, they can serve many purposes to the tourist planner. They are a versatile tool in luring in the basic tourist.

The reasons for creating tourism enterprises vary. One ubiquitous reason is money, because tourism generates dollars. Many communities have discovered tourism as a means to stimulate a sluggish economy or as a transition from changing markets and resources. For example, in Bend, Oregon, The High Desert Museum has encountered rapid growth since its inception in the late 1970s. The changing economy from resource-based industry, to resort/recreational tourism both helped visitation to the museum, and the museum helped to advertise the area. In effect, museums serve as both a tool for encouraging tourism and as a direct beneficiary of it in terms of exposure and financial survival.

Communities will have obvious motives to involve themselves in tourism enterprises: to initiate or continue visitation and resulting revenue building activities in their communities.

The state and federal government may have similar goals. However, the general growth in their role in

encouraging and supporting tourism enterprises is interesting and significant. Over the last fifty years, government has become a high profile contributor to tradition, primarily through funding (Kammen 1991:12). The Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial is a case in point.

In a report submitted to Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt in 1988, the Oregon Trail Advisory Council (OTAC) recommended that "manned interpretive centers" and "visitor centers" be placed at Baker (City), Oregon City, Pendleton, and The Dalles. Furthermore, it suggested that "The Governor and this Council, working through existing or new channels with Oregon's congressional delegation should coordinate funding and construction of the visitor centers" (OTAC 1988:ii). These visitor centers are categorically similar to museums. The common "historical attraction" genre is the critical factor.

In this report, the OTAC also acknowledged that "[t]he challenge confronting our state is how best to weave a balance between historic preservation and economic promotion" (OTAC 1988:i). Tourism is viewed as a means to achieve complementary economic, historical, educational, and cultural goals.

## CHAPTER 6: HISTORY OF OREGON TRAIL CELEBRATIONS

Researching the history of Oregon Trail celebrations is an important part of this investigation in order to help establish a context for contemporary projects. Furthermore, the general attention given to the Oregon Trail in the past may help explain current interpretations.

The reflection of the significance of the Oregon Trail experience began soon after the journeys were over. The Oregon Pioneer Association (OPA) emerged in 1873. Although not focusing on celebrations, it played an integral part in gaining attention for the Oregon Trail, and especially for encouraging people to record their experiences and donate copies to the organization for preservation (Oregon Historical Quarterly [OHQ] 1993a:247-249).

Settlement in the Oregon country by January 1, 1859 was the primary requirement of membership in the OPA (OHQ 1993a:247). Annual reunions and publications of pioneer experiences were the focus of activities. "Transactions", published by the OPA from 1873 to 1886, were the printed accounts of these pioneer experiences. The philosophical goals of the organization were to preserve the heritage of the pioneers (OHQ 1993a:251). Reverence for these early pioneers is fostered, as indicated by the organizations purpose:

to perpetuate the memory of those early pioneers...whose sacrifices and sufferings and toil have converted the untamed [sic] wilds of their adopted land into a paradise for their children...you did not shrink from the perilous execution of your high resolves to open here a new theater for civilization, and to found and secure a goodly home for your children (OHQ 1993a: 251).

The pioneers are esteemed for their role in establishing "civilization" for the benefit of subsequent generations. The OPA's successor, the Oregon Historical Society, took on and expanded the OPA's role beginning in 1898 (Vaughan 1989:2).

Another organization worked to preserve the trail and celebrate the Oregon Trail experience. Ezra Meeker, who traveled the Oregon Trail in 1851-1852 at age 21, founded the Oregon Trail Memorial Association (OTMA) in 1926 when he was 95 years old. His activity stimulated interest and preservation of the Trail as an historical landmark.

In 1906 to 1907 Meeker, then in his late seventies, recrossed the trail from west to east. During this trip, he established markers and monuments, encouraging others to follow suit. Meeker often asked at his appearances, "Who are these pioneers we wish to honor? Where is this old Oregon Trail?" These are the same questions that the organizers of the 1993 Sesquicentennial sought to answer (OTCC 1994:7).

Meeker advertised and promoted tributes to the overland travelers and their adventures. He did so through his enthusiasm and authenticity as an actual

veteran of the Oregon Trail. Michael Kammen suggests that "he established himself as the American pioneer incarnate (Kammen 1991:398)." After Meeker's death, the Oregon Trail Memorial Association persevered.

In 1930 President Hoover proclaimed April to December of that year to be observed nationally as the "covered wagon centennial" (Pipes 1930:82-83). This date was chosen to commemorate the first ten wagons to reach the Rocky Mountains, and because they were the first on the Oregon Trail. These celebrations primarily took the form of pageants and dinners (OHQ 1930:208). The last day of the celebration was to honor the pioneers, as well as Meeker's birthdate (Kammen 1991:399).

That same year the OTMA sponsored the sale of Oregon Trail Memorial half dollars from at least six banks in Oregon. The coins were one dollar each, of which 40 cents went to mark the Oregon Trail within the state (OHQ 1930:208-209). This was related to an act passed by Congress using memorial coins to finance granite monuments along the trail. The goals of the OTMA emphasized benefit for the public. Officers of the association stated in 1935 that educational activities should be foremost, while commercialism should be avoided (Kammen 1991:398).

An interesting fact regarding the OTMA is that its headquarters were in New York City. This fact illustrates the national scope of Oregon Trail interest. "What the Cause Means to America" is the heading of a pamphlet



provided by the organization. In this section, quotes from Dr. Howard R. Driggs describe the scope, or "the meaning and cause to which the OTMA is dedicated."

The inner, the more vital significance...means the saving of one of the most thrilling of the epics in the great story of the making of America...The cause is all-American in its scope and spirit. It touches closely every part of our country...Every state in the Union has some heroic son or daughter who has played a valiant part in the trail-blazing, homebuilding story of the Far West (Oregon Trail Memorial Association [OTMA] ca. 1930).

The national tone to the Oregon Trail in this context shows that it evolved from the belief that most Americans, no matter what part of the country they lived in, inherently possessed this "heroic" westering trait. It served as a cultural bond. Driggs expands upon this theme of the unifying aspect of the Oregon Trail:

What is the West? It is merely the transplanted East. It is the blended North and South... It began along the shores of the stormy Atlantic. Our American pioneers were descendants of those who planted our thirteen American colonies and who afterward fought to establish the nation dedicated to freedom (OTMA ca. 1930).

The emphasis of the OTMA is clearly upon the westward movement as an American trait: its origins on the eastern seaboard and the eventual move to the Pacific. Those who partook in the journey cemented the tradition of westering, and bravely "establish" the nation of the "free" (OTMA ca. 1930). "What the Cause Means to America"

is pride and constancy: a consistent progression from east to west of "heroic sons and daughters" (OTMA ca. 1930). By the continuity, the American ideals of freedom and bravery were reinforced, and indirectly they were present in all geographical areas of the nation. A little more than fifty years removed from the event, national reminiscences and preservation attempts began on a national level.

A further reference to the national attention to the Oregon Trail comes from a comment made at an Oregon organizational event. Ted Huggins, President of "Western States Promotion Council, Inc.", explained at a meeting in Portland "that the Western State Promotion Council, Inc., is focusing nation-wide attention upon the West through the 'Old West' publicity campaign" (Spencer 1914). The "Old West" became a promotional concept.

The OTMA changed its name to "American Pioneer Trails Association" (APTA) in 1940. The organization wished to "broaden its activities" by commemorating other historic highways (OHQ 1940b:429). Besides marking the historic routes of the Oregon Trail, the OTMA/APTA planned to commemorate the centennial of the Oregon Trail in 1945. The preoccupation with World War II squelched these aspirations.

The state of Oregon also planned celebratory events. In 1935 members of the Oregon trails commission held their first meeting to plan the marking of historic spots.

Eleven other states had similar commissions (OHQ 1935:301).

The 1943 Oregon Trail Centennial was planned to be a major statewide event. Early in 1941, the state legislature appropriated "\$15,000 for the biennium to lay plans for, and to publicize" an Oregon Trail celebration (Parrish 1941). Philip H. Parrish, Chairman of the State advisory Committee of the Oregon Trail Centennial Celebration presented historical background to a related group on September 12, 1941, stating that:

1843 was the biggest year historically in the history of the Oregon Country; in picture sequences nothing before or after could properly be compared with it and unless a celebration in 1943 were held, there would be nothing comparable to look forward to around which to observe an historical centennial (Parrish 1941).

The Oregon Trail was regarded as a deserving subject for a large-scale celebration.

The logo for the Oregon Trail Centennial Commission was initially: "HONORING THE PIONEERS WHO ESTABLISHED THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE in the OREGON COUNTRY" 1843- 1943.

On January 30, 1941, the Oregon Trail Centennial Commission filed its Articles of Incorporation with the State of Oregon Corporation Department. The goals and pursuits of the Commission were:

To encourage, stimulate, develop, and promote the observance of the 100th anniversary of the coming of the historic Oregon Trail to the Willamette Valley... all to the end that the

Oregon Trail may be better known...and the historic events occurring in the year 1843 may be better understood and appreciated by the people of Oregon and throughout the United States, and thus a direct benefit may be conferred upon all the people (Parrish 1941).

These goals never materialized. The outbreak of the World War II detracted attention from the Oregon Trail to more immediate concerns, especially on the West Coast, where proximity to Japan accentuated worries about attacks on American soil. No plans, "no activities whatsoever" were implemented on behalf of the Oregon Trail Centennial Commission (Oregon Trail Centennial Commission 1942). The Oregon Trail Centennial Commission officially disbanded in 1944 (OHQ 1944:190).

Other organizations existed that also engaged in planning Oregon Trail centennial events; all were doomed to a similar fate. These were part of a network of city officials and various individuals. Some, such as the Portland Oregon Trail Centennial Committee, were branches of the core Oregon Trail Centennial Commission. All were derived from the State Advisory Committee of the Oregon Trail Centennial Celebration.

The Oregon State Highway Commission planned to mark the route of the Oregon Trail in the state by 1943. This was at least in part due to prompting by the OTMA, which hoped that more highway maps would include the route in their publications (OHQ 1940a:108). In addition, Governor

Sprague requested the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) to observe the Oregon Trail Centennial in 1943.

The war hampered all of these groups efforts. Other centennials followed, such as the 1959 celebration for statehood. However, no widescale projects were planned specifically for the Oregon Trail.

Before 1993, there were no widescale statewide celebrations related to the Oregon Trail that included notable museum involvement. The Sesquicentennial marks an attempt to combine history, heritage, and marketing for a fully multi-faceted event. The Sesquicentennial of the Oregon Trail provides an opportunity to investigate historical celebrations and the role museums play within such a context. Museum presentations of an iconized historical event can yield information on variables that influence interpretations.

## CHAPTER 7: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The object of this study is to find out how Oregon museums and interpretive centers along the Oregon Trail interpreted the Oregon Trail experience. It is important to emphasize that the study does not attempt to determine or evaluate the effectiveness of interpretation; the goal is not to judge the success of the methodology museums and interpretive centers employed, but simply to discover what it was they attempted to communicate and approaches whereby they reached that decision. This is determined through looking at exhibits and obtaining information about the agencies and their methods and approaches as expressed by personal interviews with exhibit staff.

### BACKGROUND

In preparation for the examination of exhibits and interviews with museum directors, I found and documented materials on the state agencies involved with the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial. These were primarily related to the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (OTCC), an agency created especially for the 1993 Sesquicentennial. This information was used to determine the overall setting of the Sesquicentennial and the possible agency influences upon museums and interpretive centers, including their

exhibits. The OTCC created many publications such as a quarterly newsletter "The Trail Marker" and a "Heritage Resource Guide" for the Sesquicentennial. These materials proved a rich resource in assessing the OTCC's developmental history and their objectives, motives, and role in the celebration.

The Sesquicentennial also provided an opportunity to describe the part played by museums and interpretive centers in a statewide event. The celebration was a chance to see how the facilities and their leaders perceived their role and what their exhibits and their content contributed educationally. The combination of state agencies, museums, and interpretive centers, allowed a unique opportunity to investigate the relationships between these groups and their views of subjects in western American history.

The investigation is a natural experiment; the 1993 Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration provided a standardized context for which to evaluate the exhibits and influences. My selection of those museums and interpretive centers along the Oregon Trail provided a controlled means to identify those variables that influenced exhibit development and content because of the standardized criteria. The Oregon Trail related agencies, relationship to the actual trail, and statewide celebration, were identical factors for all museums and interpretive centers. The investigation allows a chance

to expose differences in the manifestation and influences of the exhibit in different facilities, by describing their content and what was involved in their creation.

#### **SAMPLE OF MUSEUMS AND INTERPRETIVE CENTERS**

In order to have a comprehensive picture of how Oregon museums and interpretive centers represented the Oregon Trail during the Sesquicentennial, the study design included all such facilities existing near or on the Oregon Trail that met the following minimal criteria:

1. Each facility had to be open at least three days per week, six months a year.
2. A phone number had to be available, and at least one person who could be contacted.
3. An Oregon Trail exhibit had to be displayed during any part of the Sesquicentennial from January 1, 1993 to December 31, 1993.
4. The museum or interpretive center had to lie within ten miles of the Oregon Trail or highways that closely follow it.

The first two requirements insured that the museum or interpretive center was open to the public on a regular basis, and that communication would not present a problem. The third stipulation set the parameters of dates and the general subject matter, insuring that exhibits related to the objectives were considered.

The last requirement was based on methodological and pragmatic considerations. Since all institutions of the



sample are on the trail, the differences among them cannot be due to trail-related features, but rather to issues inherent to the museum or interpretive center, or other influences such as local culture, demography or economics. One goal of this study was also to determine influences upon ideas the exhibit presented.

The sample consists of thirteen facilities. Inclusion of all facilities on or near the Oregon Trail was physically possible because this total was relatively small. Because all exhibits in the defined geographic area were investigated, this study has no sampling error, and important methodological feature that permits integration and generalizations.

### Map of the Route

Eleven museums and two interpretive centers fit the above criteria. The "Oregon Campground Guide," created by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Oregon State Parks, and distributed by the State of Oregon Tourism Division, served as a guide for the actual Oregon Trail route and its relation to the highways. This is a typical roadmap with the Oregon Trail highlighted in red. From east to west the main highway is I-84 and for a short time it follows I-205 south. The Barlow Road option for the trail is approximately 129 miles, and roughly follows the smaller highways of I-97 south, and highways 216 and 26 west. The primary consideration was that the museum or

interpretive center be located near the Oregon Trail, and these highways are mentioned to illustrate that they are close to the actual route. The general Oregon Trail route in Oregon is shown on Figure 2.

### Establishing the Sample List

Thirteen facilities out of the 21 that met the geographical and facility requirements had an Oregon Trail exhibit during the Sesquicentennial (see Table 1). I elicited the names and locations for the facilities from four basic sources:

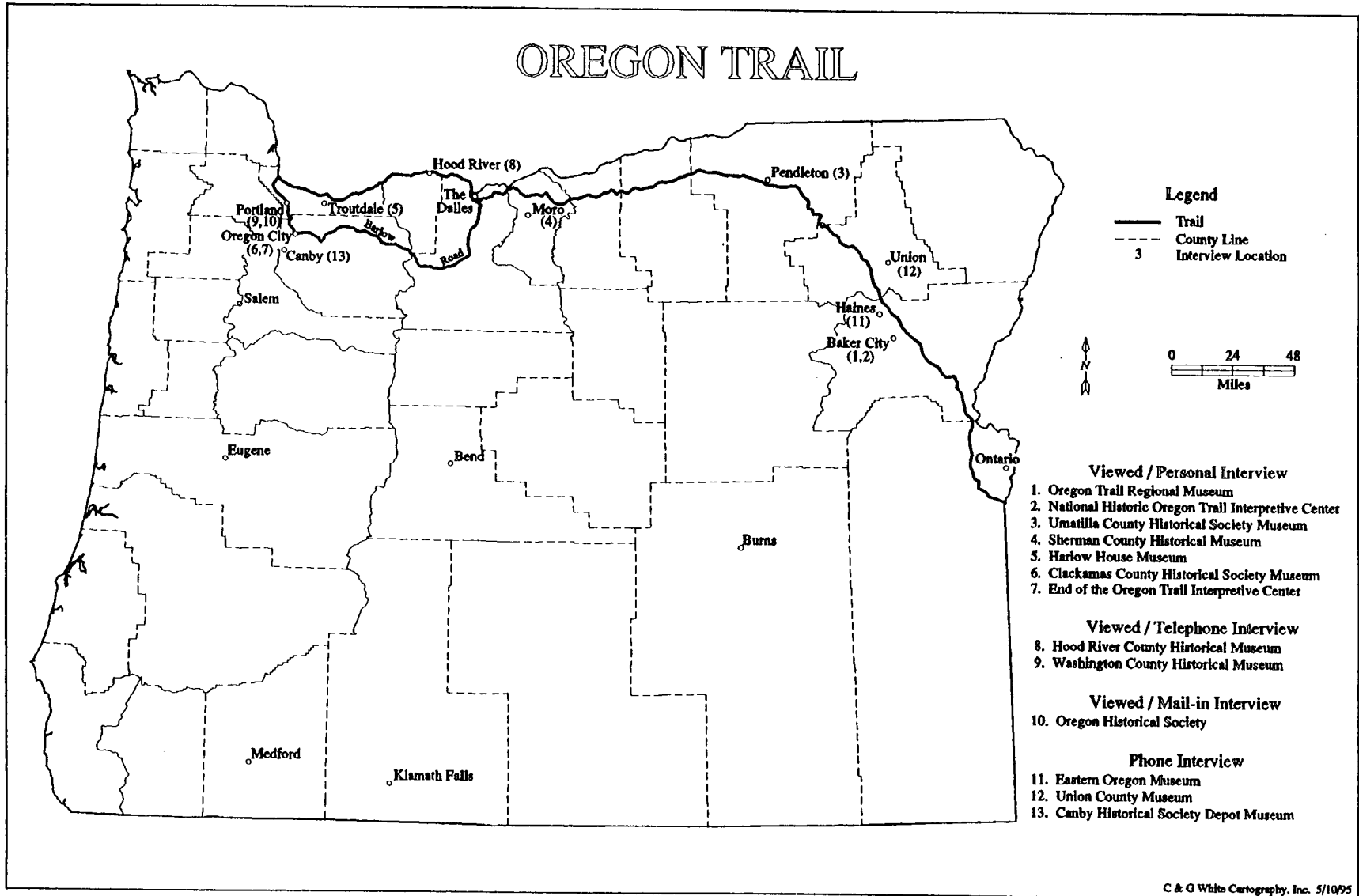
1. 1993 Oregon Museum Association Pocket Guide
2. The Official Museum Directory 1993 of the American Association of Museums
3. Applications for Oregon Museum Grant - in Aide Program, received by Oregon Museum Association President, Bill Lewis
4. Sesquicentennial publication: Oregon Trail Events 1993

The 1993 Oregon Museum Association Pocket Guide is the most comprehensive museum listing in the state. Because there is a nominal fee for membership, not all museums register with the organization. In order to insure that non-member museums were included, other sources were consulted.

The Directory from the American Association of Museums proved to be a rather thin source for museums in the geographical area. The reasons for this are unclear,

Figure 2. Oregon Trail - Portion of the Route Within the  
State of Oregon

# OREGON TRAIL



**Table 1. Sources and Listing of Oregon Museums and Interpretive Centers on the Oregon Trail**

<u>Museum or Interpretive Center</u>	1993 OMA Pocket Guide	1993 AAM Official Museum Directory	1993 Oregon Museum Grant-In-Aide Application	1993 Sesquicentennial Oregon Trail Events
M = Museum HM = Historical Museum IC = Interpretive Center				
<b>A: OREGON TRAIL EXHIBITS DURING SESQUICENTENNIAL:</b>				
Nat'l Historic OT IC				X
Oregon Trail Regional M	X		X	
Union County HM	X	X		
Eastern Oregon M	X	X	X	
Umatilla County HM	X		X	
Sherman County HM	X		X	X
Hood River County M	X		X	
Canby HM			X	
Barlow House M			X	
End of The OT IC	X			
Clackamas County HM	X		X	
Oregon Historical Soc.	X	X		X
Wash. County HM	X		X	
<b>B: NO OREGON TRAIL</b>				
Echo HM	X			
Fort Dalles M		X		
Sandy Pioneer Assoc.			X	
Cascade Locks HM			X	
Gresham Pioneer M	X			
McLoughlin House M	X		X	
Stevens-Crawford M	X			

since membership in the AAM is not a prerequisite for being listed in the book. It appears that some states simply have more complete listings, either due to greater exposure, solicitation, or simple awareness. Speculation aside, the listings for Oregon, especially those on the Oregon Trail route, were meager.

I investigated the Oregon Museum Grant-in-Aide Program Form B applications at the suggestion of Bill Lewis, President of the Oregon Museum Association in 1994. I hoped that some of the more obscure and smaller museums might materialize. Although a modest grant, it is nonetheless one that attracts applications from smaller museums, and can prove an important funding source. I thought it might catch a few stragglers that either missed the deadline for publication in the Pocket Guide, or could not afford the fee. This proved a sound procedure, since one facility, the Canby Historical Museum, was discovered only from this application form. In addition, these forms listed the mission statement of the institutions and hours open, with phone numbers and addresses.

The Sesquicentennial Oregon Trail Events 1993 publication was published by the Oregon Economic Development Department (OEDD). I chose this as a source for its focus upon the Sesquicentennial, hoping that it would list the museums with Oregon Trail exhibits.

The combination of these sources fulfilled the objective of obtaining a comprehensive list of museums on

the Oregon Trail. However, since there is no single formal listing of all the museums in Oregon, I considered it possible that some may have inadvertently been missed. For this reason, I also made an announcement at an Oregon Museum Association annual meeting in early spring of 1994, asking members for recommendations for other museums appropriate in my geographic sample. I also contacted Ron Brentano of the Oregon Historical Society to see if had any further suggestions. He travels a great deal to many of the smaller museums in the state and is in frequent contact with them. He confirmed that my list was complete.

There were 20 historical museums and/or interpretive centers found through these sources that met the geographical sample criteria. Table 1 lists each museum and in what source(s) they were found. I contacted each museum on Table 1 in early April 1994 to determine if they had displayed an Oregon Trail exhibit during the Sesquicentennial. If it had a trail exhibit that was still on display, I made plans to visit it and conduct a personal interview with the director, or curator. If the exhibit was already dismantled, I planned a telephone interview for a later date. There were three occasions that necessitated combining the two approach methods. Table 2 lists the museums and interpretive centers in the sample and the method used for each one.

Table 2. Interview Procedure for All Museums and Interpretive Centers in Sample

<u>Museum or Interpretive Center</u>	Personal Interview	Telephone Interview	Mail-In Interview
<b>A: EXHIBITS VIEWED</b>			
Nat'l Historic OT Interpretive Center	X		
Oregon Trail Regional Museum	X		
Umatilla County Historical Society	X		
Sherman County Historical Museum	X		
Hood River County Museum		X	
Harlow House Museum	X		
End of The OT Interpretive Center	X		
Clackamas County Historical Museum	X		
Oregon Historical Society			X
Washington County Historical Museum		X	
<b>B: EXHIBITS NOT VIEWED</b>			
Union County Historical Museum		X	
Eastern Oregon Museum		X	
Canby Historical Society Museum		X	



I discovered that 13 exhibits out of the 20 had Oregon Trail related exhibits during the Sesquicentennial, and 10 of those 13 were still on display as of April 1994.

## INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

### Design and Content of Questions

The purpose of the interview questions was to establish some basic facts about the museum and obtain information on the interpretations. Identical questions were asked in all 13 cases. I designed the questions to elicit information about the facility, perceptions of the exhibit creators in determining the goals and themes, as well as the exhibit's relationship to the statewide celebration. I took special care to ask open-ended questions, especially regarding interpretation. The goal was to obtain information about the exhibits and how the directors and curators perceived them, without influencing them with leading questions related to my ideas. I attempted to include the types of questions that would produce meaningful information on which to further analyze the museums' trends and relationships with exhibit and facility variables. Generally, questions were designed to gain insights into interpretations and influential factors related to them. Table 3 lists the questions and the organizational categories.

**Table 3. Questions Asked All Museums/Interpretive Centers**

**General Institutional**

1. What are your operating hours?
2. How many square feet does the museum/interpretive center have?
3. What is your annual visitation?
4. What are the overall goals/mission statement of the museum/interpretive center?
5. What publications or resources is the museum/interpretive center listed in?

**Funding**

6. What is your annual operating budget for 1993/1994?
7. What sources of funding were acquired for this project?
8. How much money was spent on the Oregon Trail exhibit?

**The Project**

9. What considerations are involved when choosing a project?
10. How did you decide to have an Oregon Trail exhibit?
11. What are the goals of this exhibit?
12. What audience are you targeting?
13. Did visitation numbers change after the Oregon Trail related exhibit was installed?

**Sesquicentennial Celebration**

14. Are other museums involved with this exhibit?
15. How were you in contact (if at all) with the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council, Oregon Tourism Division, or other sesquicentennial celebration related agencies?
16. What kinds of special publications for the Oregon Trail exhibit and/or the Sesquicentennial Celebration do you have?
17. a) What are the starting and ending dates of the exhibit?  
b) If exhibit was up before January 1993, were any changes or additions made for the Sesquicentennial Celebration?
18. Have there been any related Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial programs (of which the exhibit was a component)?

**Content**

19. What was the overall theme of the exhibit?
20. How does the overall theme relate to the mission statement or institutional goals?
21. a) What additional concepts or ideas do you hope to relate?  
b) How did you come up with these ideas?
22. What sources did you use for your information on the subject matter (especially sources on the Oregon Trail)?
23. What processes do you follow when writing the text?

**Exhibit**

24. What is the format of the exhibit? How much space, types of cases, etc.?
25. Were there special methods or strategies employed in the display?
26. a) What kinds of artifacts did you use?  
b) Were they generally those already in your collection, or did you borrow some as well?
27. How did you advertise the exhibit?
28. Do you have any evaluative techniques audience or exhibit?
29. What are your Oregon Trail related plans for the future?

Exhibits on Display During Research Period

The goal while visiting the museums and interpretive centers with Oregon Trail exhibits still on display was: (1) to conduct an oral interview with the Director or Curator of the museum, and (2) describe and evaluate the exhibit.

I conducted a practice interview with Bill Lewis, Director of the Benton County Historical Society, and tested my draft of questions with him. He offered me criticism and suggestions and helped to clarify my intentions, how they would be perceived by others, and helped weed out questions that were unclear or inappropriate. Since the Benton County Historical Museum is not on the Oregon Trail and hence not in the sample, it provided an ideal opportunity to test my questions.

The personal interview format allowed me to ask specific questions on each exhibit. It also allowed me to be certain that my questions were understood by the interviewee. The personal interview helped me to fully understand the director or curator's answers, and provided a means to expand on a topic if necessary. Some interviewees offered me more time than others; the duration of interviews varied between forty minutes and two hours each. Following this protocol, I conducted seven personal interviews out of the 10 museums that I visited to view the exhibits still on display (see Table

2). Slight alterations in procedure were required for three facilities.

In one instance, time pressures necessitated flexibility in the personal interview format. It was difficult to schedule and interview with the appropriate person (Dottie Harrington) at the Oregon Historical Society (OHS). She was the curator of their "Trails to Oregon" exhibit on display at the History Center throughout the Sesquicentennial. Ms. Harrington was very difficult to reach, and by the time I directly spoke with her, I had finished the rest of my data gathering. Because of OHS's tight schedule and preoccupation with an upcoming exhibit, she was unable to meet with me in person. We tentatively decided to schedule a telephone interview. Unable to reach her after many attempts, I eventually left her a written questionnaire, which she filled out and returned to me. Although this method was not identical to the other respondees, I obtained the necessary information. I visited OHS and viewed the exhibit, and included the institutional questions in their written format for my analysis.

Another unique situation occurred with the Washington County Historical Society. Because their Oregon Trail exhibit was of the traveling genre, it was not at their museum at the time of my study. In this instance, I also conducted a telephone interview in place of a personal interview, and visited the exhibit separately. Both

events took place within 24 hours of each other to insure the associations were clear in my mind.

In the case of the Hood River County Museum, a telephone interview was combined with a personal visit. This situation occurred because of some initial misunderstandings. The first few contacts with the museum resulted in my perception that there was a small Oregon Trail exhibit in 1993, but was no longer on display as of April 1994. During the course of the telephone interview, I learned that much of the display remained. I traveled to the museum shortly thereafter, and evaluated the exhibit. Since it was very small, I felt that the combination of methods was sufficient to obtain the information.

#### *Exhibits Not on Display During Research Period*

I conducted telephone interviews with the three locations those locations where the exhibit had been dismantled before my study began (See Table 2). The same questions were asked as those for the personal interviews. Telephone interviews assured that I would speak to the correct person, and that I could have tangible results more quickly. With a small sample and a short time frame for my research, avoidance of any incomplete or straggling responses was imperative.

## ANALYSIS

Analysis consists of descriptive evaluations of museum and interpretive center exhibits and their influences. The process primarily consisted of detailed observations of the exhibits that I personally viewed and responses to the interview questions. When I viewed the exhibits, I looked for the topics that were addressed and their context; I especially looked for indications of contemporary or traditional views of the Oregon Trail. I paid attention to themes stated by the interviewees and how this related to the ideas and content presented in the exhibits.

I used both the interviews and exhibits to determine if there were tendencies towards formalist or analytical presentations. If there were, I determined to what degree these orientations affected the exhibit interpretations.

I also analyzed interview responses to describe the internal influences upon the exhibitry. The procedures for developing an exhibit, size, funding, mission statements, and goals are all factors that were investigated as possible contributors to the exhibit's interpretation and emphasis upon subject matter.

I acquired resource material from the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (OTCC) to see what subjects were discussed in their promotions and to help determine how far their influence spread. I also looked at the

publications to learn about how the agency formed and what kinds of projects they were involved with.

Besides describing the Oregon Trail exhibits, I analyze all of the above factors to find relationships between them and their effects upon the Oregon Trail related exhibits. The goal is to find out what subjects were interpreted and to form ideas about the common influences and to expose the major differences.

I had to adjust to the circumstances of the sample museums and interpretive centers. Obviously the museums with exhibits still on display during the research period will yield the most information. However, the procedure and standard questions asked of all thirteen facilities, provided consistency for the investigation.

The conclusions will develop some explanation for the features of the Oregon Trail exhibits, including the factors that lead museums and interpretive centers towards choosing certain interpretations.

## CHAPTER 8: THE SESQUICENTENNIAL AND RELATED AGENCIES

This chapter describes the role of the Oregon Trail Coordination Council, its predecessors, and related agencies in the Sesquicentennial Celebration. Information was acquired from primary sources published by related organizations. Through this material, a sense of the development of the celebration, the agency activities and roles is established. The information is important for understanding the framework for Oregon Trail exhibits and the possible influences.

### SESQUICENTENNIAL

*The Sesquicentennial celebration capitalized on the value of the Oregon Trail as a historical resource and the growing interest in the history of the West to fulfill the commemoration's mission to develop the Oregon Trail as a resource for the State of Oregon (OTCC 1994:67).*

The Oregon Trail 1993 Sesquicentennial originated with the state government of Oregon. The Sesquicentennial was heavily marketed: advertisements for the Oregon Trail Celebration and its events reached as far as Japan, London, and France. Within the United States, network news and print media featured the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration (The Trail Marker [TTM] 1993c:3).



In the 1990s, skepticism about any program related to local or state government is common. A high profile, heavily marketed celebration such as the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial is no exception. The blend of history and government sponsorship is likely to be a suspect undertaking. This study attempts to look at the influence of such a celebration on museum exhibits with the absence of preconceived notions or antagonistic feelings. Simply because an exhibit is initiated by the state government and is in part designed for profit and to create new markets does not inherently mean that it is biased or academically sterile.

Although many agencies were involved in the Sesquicentennial, the primary units involved were the Oregon Trail Advisory Council (OTAC) and later the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (OTCC). Examining the roles these agencies played in the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial is important for this investigation. Understanding the overall context the Oregon-trail related exhibits is essential to help determine the rationale for the exhibit and even some of its content.

### Origins of the Celebration

The Oregon Trail Advisory Committee (OTAC), established by Executive Order 84-10 in July of 1984 was charged with the following responsibilities:

- A. Promote public awareness of historical significance of the Oregon Trail and encourage the development and protection of the historical sites and outdoor recreation sources along the Oregon Trail;
- B. Act in an advisory capacity to other Oregon commissions, bureaus, agencies and committees for making recommendations on their activities and policies that relate to the history...of the Oregon Trail;
- C. Serves as the official liaison with other Oregon Trail sites, the National Oregon-California Trails Association, and federal departments, bureaus and committees concerned with the Oregon Trail and coordinating and planning activities to foster state and national recognition of the significance of the Oregon Trail;
- D. Submit a proposal of existing and potential interpretation sites and cultural resources also on the Oregon Trail, to the Governor, by January 1, 1988 (OTAC 1988:1-3).

It was through the mandates for the OTAC that the 1993 Sesquicentennial and the OTCC was born. The first recommendation of the OTAC was to "organize and carry out the '150th Year' Celebration of the opening of the Oregon Trail in 1993. Make the Oregon Trail a top priority state project" (OTAC 1988:5). The OTAC stated that such a celebration would have appeal throughout the state, the nation, and even internationally (OTAC 1988:5). It was with this proclamation that the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council ultimately was formed.

Another suggestion of the OTAC was to "Assure full coordination of Trail activities/issues between affected stated agencies" (OTAC 1988:6). These agencies include the Governor's Office, Economic Development and Tourism, Land Conservation and Development Commission, Oregon

Department of Transportation, State Parks Division, Department of Education, Wagonmaster (proposed title for a director of Oregon Trail related activities), and the Oregon Historical Society (OTAC 1988:6-9). This suggests the vision of a highly coordinated and comprehensive celebration.

Other goals of the OTAC were to develop visitor centers across the state. This was to include four interpretive centers at Baker City, Pendleton, The Dalles and Oregon City. As of 1995, only one interpretive center, that at Baker City, had been built and opened to the public. The OTAC also suggested five unmanned kiosks to be erected and more interpretive panels at various locations throughout the state (OTAC 1988:11).

"Historical accuracy in trail interpretation" and protecting trail resources were regarded as of the "utmost importance" to the OTAC (OTAC 1988:13). Part of my research was to investigate how the Oregon Trail related agencies interpreted the Oregon Trail. Both the OTAC and the OTCC published material on the Oregon Trail, which will yields some of this information and is discussed below.

The OTAC Governor's report has a section entitled "Promoting the Oregon Trail." Physical access to the trail is deemed important when possible. More importantly for this project, the authors acknowledged that many preconceived notions exist about the Oregon Trail, and

that it might be trivialized through product promotion and image-making. With this caution in mind, the report states that elements of the trail are relevant to contemporary society by the OTAC. These are concepts of "family", opportunity, as well as potential disaster" (OTAC 1988:16). "Family" is referred to in the traditional sense-- husband, wife, children, and possibly even extended members-- yet the OTAC asserts the material could also address single-parent households, since tragedies along the trail resulted in such an adjusted configuration (OTAC 1988:16).

The OTAC also acknowledged that the trail experience did not guarantee a happy ending. Although the report claims that the Oregon Trail promised opportunity, it "could also result in equally great disaster" (OTAC 1988:16). Whether this image is more of a reverence for sacrificial pioneer martyrdom, or awareness of the range of experiences and personal and circumstantial failings, is unclear.

The emphasis of the OTAC report is clearly upon the pioneer experience itself, rather than other expansion into other areas, such as Native American or women's perspectives. However, this is a general summary, so it is difficult to know what sub-themes they envisioned.

It is apparent that "fictionalizing" was greatly discouraged, since the diaries and journals were deemed an exciting primary account and needed no embellishment or

fantasy. When approaching the topic of the "real" Oregon Trail, the authors state that it is a story of "courage, risk, adventure, success, disaster, hope, luck, birth, death, danger, physical privation, fear, and determination" (OTAC 1988:16).

The OTAC also held public forums in areas directly related to the Oregon Trail (Oregon City, The Dalles, Arlington, Pendleton, La Grande, Vale and Baker). This gave an opportunity for voices to be heard on the subject matter, as well as the economic benefits to be derived from participation in the Sesquicentennial.

The OTAC concluded that protection and preservation of the trail was a predominating concern. Although it was acknowledged in these meetings that "potential economic benefits" existed, there was often a distinction made between "*promotion and exploitation* of the Oregon Trail [*italics mine*]" (OTAC 1988:87). Romanticizing the trail experience was frowned upon, and the necessity of historical accuracy emphasized. The OTAC continually recognized this as an important factor of the Sesquicentennial Celebration. "The challenge confronting our state", they concede, "is how best to weave a balance between historic preservation and economic promotion" (OTAC 1988:i). As implied here, the OTAC historic preservation includes historical accuracy.

### Oregon Historical Society

The Oregon Historical Society (OHS) played a prominent role in the Sesquicentennial. The OTAC's Governor's Report suggested that OHS could serve as a vehicle to connect visitors and information during an Oregon Trail related project. Since OHS is the "greatest single repository of trail history in the state", the OTAC believed visitors should be aware of and have access to its historical records. OHS was also seen as a vital link to other statewide historical societies, directing visitors to these other resources (OTAC 1988:9).

Another goal established by the OTAC was to aid the statewide historical societies by improving historical programs, and strengthening research facilities, especially those with trail-related resources (OTAC 1988:9). Senate Bill 317, passed in June 1989, directed OHS to "administer a program for the development of the Oregon Trail as a major historical attraction" (OTCC 1994: 12). Section 3 of this bill specifically dictates OHS's responsibilities as coordinating development and recognition of the Oregon Trail. This mandate included encouraging "interpretation in cities situated along the Oregon Trail" (OTAC 1988:110).

### Oregon Tourism Division

Because tourism is a three-billion dollar industry in Oregon (Whiteley 1994/1995: 2), the Oregon Trail

Sesquicentennial was a tool to maintain and increase this figure. As stated by the 1991 Director, Debbie Kennedy, the celebration would be a "springboard for launching the Oregon Trail as a new tourism destination" (TTM 1991a:1).

Senate Bill 317 also directed the Oregon Tourism Division to promote "the celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Great Migration of the Oregon Trail" in such a way as to produce "a major tourist attraction" (OTCC 1994: 12). The Bill stipulates that promotional literature with information on recreational, historical and cultural opportunities along the trail should be created and made available. Concern for the "historical integrity" of the trail was also included.

In meetings with county representatives, the Oregon Tourism Division and the OTCC outlined a triad of goals: Celebrate, Heritage, and Lasting Legacy (TTM 1991b:3). These key words described the hope that events would be planned for communities that would explore the local heritage and also tie in with the state celebration. The "legacy" would be to leave something that could be enjoyed by future generations (OTCC 1991b:3).

The state government was a highly visible instigator of the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial from its early stages. The governor-sponsored OTAC recommendations blossomed into a network of government support and mandates. Integrating the state leadership with the private sector and volunteers became an important concept

with the formation of the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (OTCC).

#### OREGON TRAIL COORDINATING COUNCIL

The OTCC emerged in December 1990 as an independent non-profit corporation by the request of then Governor Barbara Roberts (OTCC 1994:13). The council's responsibilities were to plan Sesquicentennial activities, and to coordinate the four proposed interpretive centers, and other interpretive markers and kiosks along the National Historic Trail. In addition, the OTCC was to develop the Oregon Trail as both an historical attraction and an economic tool for tourism (OTCC 1994:13).

"Heritage tourism" was a fundamental concept in these operations. Seen as a partial remedy for communities with an "eroding" economic base dependent upon natural resources, "heritage tourism" was seen as a "low-impact, high-volume, high-return investment" (OTCC 1994:3). Creating new jobs and income through the celebration was paramount; however, OTCC organizers maintained that it could also be a means to "connect Oregonians to one another" (OTCC 1994:4).

The OTCC played an advisory role for museums along the Oregon Trail; it served as a liaison for information, contacts and publicity of Oregon Trail exhibits. An example of work in this capacity was their publication and distribution of the *Oregon Trail Celebration '93 Heritage*



*Event Planning & Resource Guide* (OTCC 1992). This information worked as a starting point for those interested in becoming involved in the celebration. Non-profit organizations and performers were listed, as well as sources for special materials. The guide served to delegate directly to the communities and individuals interested in the Sesquicentennial, the task of creating or embellishing a project of their own (OTCC 1994:61).

The guide exemplifies the overall role the OTCC was trying to play: that of proponent and enthusiastic supporter - empowering others to control their own projects.

Senate Bill 169, passed in April 1991, reinforced the mandate of the OTCC and emphasized that its objectives would "result in a positive economic and cultural impact for the state" (OTCC 1994:13). The financial support in this bill included \$2,500,000 in lottery revenue for the OTCC. The funds were to be allocated for "capital construction projects", identified as the four interpretive centers in Baker City, Umatilla, The Dalles, and Oregon City (\$1,000,000) and distributed as matching grants. These funds were also to fulfill general requirements for the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration (OTCC 1994:13-14).

The Coordinating Council consisted of a forty-person board of business and government leaders from throughout the state. A non-profit organization, the OTCC had some

paid positions, including three to six full-time staff, and at least one administrative assistant (TTM 1991a:1). The appointed Chairman was Brett Wilcox of The Dalles, President of Northwest Aluminum Company (TTM 1990a:1). The OTAC remained influential on Sesquicentennial events, serving as "historical advisors" for the OTCC.

Other roles and committees of the OTCC include: Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Legislative Advisors, Interpretive Center Representatives, Marketing and Events Committee and Honorary Members (TTM 1991a:2).

To illustrate the role of the OTCC, the "Trail Marker" a quarterly publication of the OTCC, suggests to consider their organization in this way:

think of the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council as the hub of a large wheel, the connecting point for the committees and the subcommittees working with us, all bearing weight to keep the larger wheel turning (TTM 1992c: 5).

The OTCC is multi-faceted, and pervasive. The Committees worked on many projects, all designed to involve the state collectively, and as individuals. An important part of this task was convincing the various sectors of essential funding for projects. This fact is revealed in such comments as "the real legacy of the Oregon Trail celebration will reflect the commitment of Oregon's communities to the Oregon Trail and Celebration '93" (TTM 1992d:7).

Originally the role of "Wagonmaster" was bestowed upon Jim Renner, a position which was to coordinate all of the various agencies (OTAC 1988:5). With the emergence of the OTCC, he moved to a position as Interpretive Specialist. Jill Thorne became Executive Director of the OTCC before and during the Sesquicentennial Celebration (later, Jim Renner took over this position). Thorne envisioned the role of the OTCC as a means to link "our past to our future through economic development and heritage tourism" (Thorne 1992:2).

Thorne urged people to become involved. She frequently used traditional imagery to offer people reasons to join the celebration.

These rugged individualists have made us and our state who we are today. This is why the entire state of Oregon should... [celebrate] the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail (Thorne 1991:2).

The sense of heritage as defining contemporary populations is a theme found throughout the OTCC's publications.

A successful celebration, as emphasized by Thorne, was dependent upon efforts of individuals. She acknowledged the need for wealthy, prominent patrons, yet repeatedly petitioned "every-day folks" for donations of time and money.

In paralleling the efforts with the Covered-Wagon Centennial in 1930, Thorne noted "the keys to the successful event were every-day folks" (Thorne 1992:2).

Thorne enthusiastically invited "business and community leaders to join every-day folks [in] celebrating our Oregon Trail legacy" and noted the involvement of high-ranking government officials, such as Bob Packwood, who commended the Sesquicentennial program. Thorne wrote that Packwood was encouraging "folks to 'join' the Oregon Trail Celebration '93", through contributions (Thorne 1992:2). Thorne's repeated use of the "everyday folks" colloquialism suggested attempts to appeal to peoples' sense of heritage.

A major event planned by the OTCC was the Sesquicentennial Wagon Train that crossed the Trail states in 1993 from May to September. Leaving from Independence, Missouri, and ending in Oregon City, the core group of twelve wagons acquired participants throughout the journey for various durations. The Wagon Train had over ten sponsors, such as Nike, inc., Henry Weinhard's Private Reserve, and the Dairy Farmer's of Oregon.

The grand finale of the Sesquicentennial, which included the Wagon Trains last stop in Oregon City, also had heavy sponsorship. In addition, Portland company, Metropolitan Events/Public Relations, was hired to "plan, promote, and to deliver the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Wagon Train" under the authority of the OTCC (OTCC 1994:56). This celebration, the "Trails End Finale" was held on Labor Day weekend in 1993, and some events included a three-mile walk with the wagon train into town,

museum tours, living histories, and Native American encampments (TTM 1993d:6). Over 80,000 people celebrated the Trail's End Finale, illustrating the popularity of the Oregon Trail and successful marketing (OTCC 1994:56).

#### **INTERPRETIVE CENTERS**

Four interpretive centers were anticipated to open by 1995. Sites were: Baker City, Umatilla, The Dalles, and Oregon City. Baker City was the only institution on schedule, opening in 1992. Each was considered an individual project with its own board of directors, fundraising groups, and other entities, and each had its own focus, within the framework of the larger Oregon Trail theme (OTCC 1994:25).

#### **National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Institute Baker City, Oregon**

The only facility to open in time for the Sesquicentennial, the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Institute (NHOII), attracted more than 500,000 visitors in its first eighteen months between 1992 and 1994. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages the center, and financial support comes from state, federal, corporate, and foundation sources, as well as from the Baker City community (OTCC 1994:27).

A variety of exhibit styles is employed to interpret the Oregon Trail experience. The classic Northwestern

history subjects of Native American, explorers, and fur trappers are addressed along with the overland emigrants. The regional early mining history is an additional theme, providing some local background to Euro-American settlement (OTCC 1994:26). Outdoor trails near Oregon Trail ruts, living history exhibits, stage productions, traveling exhibits and educational programs are some of the other programs available at this 23,000 square foot facility (OTCC 1994:26).

This facility and its exhibits are discussed in greater detail in the museum findings in the following chapter.

*Umatilla Indian Reservation Interpretation Institute  
Pendleton, Oregon*

The Interpretive Center, sponsored by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla (CFU), planned to concentrate upon Native American perspectives (Umatilla, Walla Walla, and the Cayuse), with a focus upon the groups prior to, during, and after Euro-American migration (TTM 1992b:3).

Early projections for the Umatilla facility were optimistic. Individual, corporate, state, and Native American contributions were generating some of the \$13 million of projected monies needed for the project (TTM 1992b:3). Trouble came in the form of lack of federal support; attempts to obtain federal funds resulted in rejection for three consecutive years (Phinney 1993e:2A),

which was curious since the other Oregon Trail interpretive projects had at least partial federal funding approved. The Tribes had independently raised \$4 million, an amount greater than the three other interpretive projects combined (Phinney 1993d:1A).

In August 1993 members of the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla nations staged a symbolic protest over the lack of federal funds. Nation members held the Official Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial wagon train "hostage" in expression of their disapproval and disappointment of the federal lack of commitment for their interpretive project (TTM 1993g:6). The Trail Marker states that "To those who traveled with the Wagon Train, the protest was the most stirring aspect of the entire experience" (OTCC 1994:56).

Comments at the protest about the project and the Sesquicentennial in general were made by Antone Minthorn, chairman of the General Council for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. He emphasized the Tribes' intent to "commemorate" the Oregon Trail rather than "celebrate" it. Commemoration meant conveying the Tribes' viewpoint, which, he stated "has been overlooked for the past 150 years" (TTM 1993g:6).

Minthorn expressed concern over presenting Native American perspectives, since "much has been oriented toward the non-Indians and the emigrant experience, we were here when the first wagons rolled by...and we are still here" (TTM 1993g:6). He acknowledged support from

the state, but conveyed the need for nation-wide support "for this project that looks at our peoples' perspective of the Oregon Trail and Manifest Destiny" (TTM 1993g:6).

Minthorn equated the denial of federal funds with "economic injustice" (Phinney 1993d:1A). Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) supported the Tribes' project, it did not have enough clout to gain the consent of Senator Robert Byrd, R-W.V., who was the chairman of the Senate Interior Appropriations Committee. Senator Byrd declared that the BIA would not fund any interpretive center projects (Phinney 1993d:2A).

Minthorn expressed his dismay at a policy that he felt was unfair and based on false assumptions. He understood that Senator Byrd's rejection was based upon the fear that approval of one Native American Interpretive Center meant other Native American groups would be clamoring for dollars for similar projects. "'I feel compelled to ask why this standard is not applied to Non-Indian projects in other agencies'" Minthorn stated, since the same principle could apply to non-Indian interpretive centers (Phinney 1993d:2A).

Jill Thorne, Executive Director of the OTCC, expressed her regret of the lack of federal sponsorship, and stated that "'the federal government back east continues to send a broken message to the people out west.'" The reason for the funding rejection, Thorne stated, was simply because the project was sponsored by



Native Americans (Phinney 1993d:2A). She reaffirmed the state commitment to the project, declaring that efforts would still be made to help the Tribes reach their goal (Phinney 1993d:2A).

The fact that the planned interpretive center would be near the National Historic Interpretive Center by Baker City, designers and participants in the project wanted to neutralize the pioneer viewpoint with a strong statement of the Native American experience (TTM 1993/1994b: 5).

The Umatilla Indian Reservation Interpretive Institute was planned as a way to "complete the Oregon Trail story by focusing on the historical and contemporary impacts of the Oregon Trail migration on Tribal culture" (OTCC 1994:27). In addition, preliminary plans hoped to "de-mythologize the history of the Westward movement" (OTCC 1994:27). The Center was hoped to address the widespread unemployment on the Reservation, which in 1993 was 28 percent (Phinney 1994d:1A).

Themes of the center plan to focus on three major ideas:

1. *We Were* - the presence and history of Columbia Plateau peoples for thousands of years.
2. *We Are* - the impact of Euro-American culture on Native people and their perseverance.
3. *We Will Be* - using traditional values and to adjust to contemporary and future conditions (OTCC 1994:27).

Supporters of the center feel the image of the Euro-American pioneers struggling and sacrificing to reach

their dream would be more complete with the input or Native Americans. Antone Minthorn expressed this sentiment during his speech at the wagon train demonstration: "'We gave up almost everything - our economy, our Indian ways, and even to some degree our Indian cultures - so you all could seek your dreams'" (Phinney 1993d:1A). The latest projection for the grand opening of the Umatilla Interpretive Center is 1996.

The Umatilla Tribes participated in the Sesquicentennial in another way: Living history. An 1840-era village displayed Native American lifestyles. Examples include material culture, daily routines, past-times and foods. Authentic tee-pees, food processing and equipment, hemp and corn husk weaving, sweat house, hide tanning and games were just a few of the many activities (Phinney 1993c:1A; Phinney 1993b:1A). The village was adjacent to an outdoor pioneer living history exhibit in the Pendleton Round-Up Pavilion.

The Oregon Youth Conservation Corps as well as grants from private foundations funded the Tribes' program (Cooke 1994: personal communication). Ten youths were selected as primary participants in the program, which ran from June 19 to August 29, 1993. Approximately 10,000 visitors toured the village (Cook 1994: personal communication). The displays introduced the theme that the Tribes will show in their interpretive center: a

Native American perspective of the Oregon Trail era (Cook 1994: personal communication).

In contrast, the Round-Up Pavilion displays concentrated upon the pioneer experience. Wagons, live animals, crafts, music, maps, photographs and a slide show all illustrated the "trials and tribulations of overland emigrants" (Phinney 1993a:1A).

These two projects exemplify the community involvement for Sesquicentennial projects. Even though the Umatilla Indian Reservation Interpretive Institute did not attain its aspirations by 1993, efforts continue.

*Crate's Point Living History Park  
The Dalles, Oregon*

The planned Interpretive Center at The Dalles, Oregon has evolved into a different project than first envisioned. Originally, the facility was proposed to have an interpretive center like the others, with its own regional emphasis upon the Oregon Trail. Unable to realize this vision by the time of the Sesquicentennial, the community sponsored a living history at Crate's Point. Living histories are dramatic presentations of people and/or historical events. During the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial, they usually were based upon a fictional character that serves as a representative of many people in an era, or an actual person, documented through historical sources (Hubbard 1991:4-5). The Oregon Trail

living histories used many journal articles and entries as a basis of their presentations.

The Dalles area was where emigrants, beginning in 1846, had to choose between two routes to the Willamette Valley: over the Barlow Pass, or via the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. The living histories recreated the decision making process that emigrants went through when they reached the area. The program ran from May 16 to September 26 daily, from 8:00am to 6:00pm, and used volunteer and paid labor. Explanations were given for background information on "the difficulties faced by the early Oregon Trail travelers" along with two interpretive panels that told about how the pioneers felt when they reached The Dalles. The information was to help the visitor "Relive the pain, anguish and the adventure" (The Dalles Convention and Visitors Bureau [TDCVB] 1993). Interpreters who performed the living histories presented participants with information on what was involved with the decision making, including the influence of con-men.

The living history was marginally successful its first year. The following 1994 season was problematic. Sparse attendance and accusations of poor planning and handling of the event lead to a final closure on July 4, 1994. The lack of profit from the venture ended any further attempts. My discussions with residents at The Dalles revealed that there are many skeptics about the future of such a program.

Two facilities planned for Crate's Point, the Wasco County Historical Museum and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) Discovery Center, have been developed independently of the Oregon Trail commemoration or Sesquicentennial related funding. The facilities tentatively plan to include some outdoor area for living histories, but it is not a priority. Funding has been secured for the first phase of both the museum and interpretive center. Between the two future facilities, the Oregon Trail will be addressed in some format, but it is not planned as the main emphasis.

The Wasco County Historical Museum likely would have the most information on the Oregon Trail experience, since the CRGNSA Discovery Center encompasses a wider regional area, and will probably focus more upon natural history. The Wasco County Historical Museum has no discernible ties to the OTCC or any other Oregon Trail related program; it is a private foundation funded by the late Ernest Kuck. The Wasco County Historical Museum is a separate project than the CRGNSA Discovery Center, although they are collaborating to create a single attraction for the area, and will share some expenses related to construction and development on the same site.

With funding a challenge to complete these two facilities, a third "interpretive center" focusing solely on the Oregon Trail would have been superfluous and illogical. The living history program allowed the

community to join the Sesquicentennial Celebration, without the difficulty of establishing another interpretive center.

End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center  
Oregon City, Oregon

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center also had goals unmet by the Sesquicentennial. The final project, estimated at approximately \$46 million, was originally scheduled to open in 1993. This date was pushed back to 1996 for the project in its entirety; although the \$3 million "Preview Center" kept the 1993 date for opening (TTM 1992g:5).

Interpretive plans for the center were to incorporate the trail events, passage over the Barlow Road, arrival into the region and settlement throughout the Willamette Valley (OTCC 1994:29). Besides the pioneers, Native American culture was also to be examined and celebrated. How the natural resources entice people to the area both in the past and present is another subject planned for the center (OTCC 1994:29).

The first phase of the facility was financed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and opened in 1994. The revenue to complete the project is under the direction of the Oregon Trail Foundation.

A facility with the same name is part of my sample. When the new interpretive center is built, the objects and displays from the old facility will be moved to comprise

part of the new exhibitry. The planned center is a greatly expanded version of the present facility, and will cover much more subject matter. The existing End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is discussed later in this chapter. This facility's predecessor with the same name was visited and is discussed in Chapter Nine.

### **FUNDING**

Financial support for the OTCC and related Sesquicentennial projects relied on numerous sources. Money was raised by the OTCC to support its own programs, over \$4.5 million was acquired, of which \$4.0 million was directly distributed for activities and operating expenses (OTCC 1994:67). Revenue leveraged on behalf of Sesquicentennial programs and projects between 1991 - 1993 is estimated at \$19,800,000 (OTCC 1994:69).

Support from federal sources (32 percent of revenues, \$6,300,000) derived primarily from a Federal Highway Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act grant; state financing (33 percent of revenues, \$6,400,000) from Oregon State Lottery profits. In addition, foundations, corporations, county governments and individuals all contributed monetarily for a combined revenues of \$7,100,000, or 35 percent (OTCC 1994:69).

The state government was heavily relied upon. The state legislature aided the Sesquicentennial project by approval of special projects. Through Senate Bill 781, the

state was allowed to create and sell commemorative coins, with the revenue raised distributed to State Parks for "historical sites and observances" (TTM 1991d: 7).

The Lottery money distributed to the state manifested through Senate Bill 562 (TTM 1991d:7). "Celebration '93" grants distributed up to \$5,000 of matching grant funds to counties in Oregon that created trail related programs (TTM 1992e:7). Museums that acquired lottery funding for trail related exhibits were:

The High Desert Museum, Bend, Oregon - for exhibit "WANDERING WAGONS: MEEK'S LOST EMIGRANTS OF 1845".

Sherman County Museum, Moro, Oregon - "OREGON TRAILS, RAILS, AND ROADS IN SHERMAN COUNTY"

Washington County - Traveling exhibit "PROFILES OF THE OREGON TRAIL, 1843" displayed in twelve locations throughout the county.

The latter two exhibits are examined further in the following chapter. The High Desert Museum was outside of the sample area.

Wasco County also acquired funds for the living history at Crate's Point in The Dalles. The county's program is mentioned since early plans for the area included the construction of an Oregon Trail interpretive center, but living histories and programs do not meet the criteria for inclusion in this study.



## MARKETING

Information about the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial reached millions of people. The efforts of the OTCC, as well as other government sponsored agencies, helped to market events. The Marketing and Events Committee was responsible for advertising and educational activities, general marketing of the special events, and merchandising (TTM 1992c:5).

The Sesquicentennial logo, designed for and featured on many products, depicts a traditional pioneer image: a mountain backdrop, with two oxen pulling a wagon with the faint image of a man behind the reins and a female woman or child near him. This logo was used for publications and commemorative merchandise. Marketed items ranged from "t-shirts, sweatshirts, covered wagons, bonnets...jewelry to gourmet food products" just to name a few (TTM 1992a:1). The President of the OTCC thought that the logo-bearing merchandise would advertise and promote participation in the Sesquicentennial Celebration (TTM 1992a:1). The proceeds from licensing the logo on various products went to the OTCC, the Sesquicentennial Celebration in general, and for trail marking and preservation (TTM 1991c:5).

In late 1993 Oregon Trail Commemorative License plates were sold with profits dedicated to the development of interpretive centers along each of the Oregon National Historic Trails (TTM 1994a:1; Whiteley 1994/1995:2). The

additional trails (Nez Perce, Applegate, and Lewis & Clark) were incorporated into the OTCC's mandate late in 1993.

Advertising was a fundamental component throughout the Sesquicentennial. Collaborative efforts with tourism divisions of other Oregon Trail states broadened the Oregon Trail campaign. Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Oregon were all partners in multi-state marketing ventures (OTCC 1994:58). A major project included advertisements in magazines geared toward Western and Mid-Western readers, with reply cards for those who wished to receive more information about any or all of the regions (OTCC 1994:58). Over 33,000 cards were returned requesting information on Oregon's planned Sesquicentennial activities and resources (OTCC 1994:58).

Newspapers, radio and television also provided coverage of Oregon Trail events. Nationwide newspapers printed information about the Oregon Trail in their TRAVEL sections, and NBC, ABC, CBS, BBC, CNN and Voice of America all featured the Oregon Trail on their radio and/or television programs (OTCC 1994:58).

A local version of a cooperative marketing effort was represented by the Oregon Tourism Division and the OTCC. These two agencies worked together and used the Sesquicentennial to lure tourists to Oregon. State and community events were advertised to local markets and those in neighboring Washington State. In these efforts,

the OTCC stated that part of their campaign was to "emphasize contemporary perspectives of the Oregon Trail" (OTCC 1994:59). Magazine ads, brochures, calendar of events, and guide books were some of the resulting advertising projects. Magazine ads resulted in over 97,000 reply cards for information, not including the previously mentioned number from the national ads (OTCC 1994:59).

The OTCC also produced the "Oregon Trail Celebration '93 Heritage Celebration & Planning Guide" which was the result of soliciting and acquiring ideas and programs that would relate to the Oregon Trail. It featured resources on planning, such as "budget planning", "cross marketing and promotion" and "hints for working with the local media." Also in this section is an example of a "Museum Event Planning Checklist," a timeline of when to accomplish specific tasks, such as determining a program with goals, audience, theme, and format. Some logistical suggestions for planning were also suggested, such as revenue and personnel support (OTCC 1992:21-22).

The guide also featured resources on many subjects that might be incorporated into a Sesquicentennial project, such as lectures, living histories, and local and national organizations.

The resource guide was intended "to help educators and planners develop activities and celebrations...and to find those talented folks who can make the experience

special" (OTCC 1992:1). The goals of the publication helped to inform those interested in having a Sesquicentennial related project; it did not specifically tell them what it should be about. In fact, the resource guide suggested that each project ask "What do we want to celebrate?", "Why do we celebrate the Sesquicentennial?" and "Who celebrates? (OTCC 1992:1).

When asking "what" to celebrate, the guide noted that almost any topic or span of years is appropriate. The guide suggested that programs and exhibits could focus upon events of the entire 150 years since inception of the Oregon Trail, or a small piece of history, as indicated by the comment: "You can look on the first human presence thousands of years ago or look into the future" (OTCC 1992:1).

The guide also suggested that the Sesquicentennial had the potential to show relationships between the past and contemporary society. The Sesquicentennial is thought to be able to "enrich our lives and help us understand where we have come from, where we are now and where we are going in the future" (OTCC 1992:1). Additionally, the Sesquicentennial was stated to be able to illuminate "the evolution of the social, political, and economic fabric of our lives" (OTCC 1992:1). Much has changed in 150 years, and the Sesquicentennial is seen as a means "to reflect on these changes in our communities" which includes

"landscapes, families, schools, churches, clubs, industries and government" (OTCC 1992:1).

The OTCC encouraged groups of all sizes and backgrounds to join in the celebration. It also emphasized the importance of overall goals for a project, such as raising money for a community historic house, or to instill "a sense of community pride" (OTCC 1992:1).

The OTCC provided a foundation from which other entities might build. They did not dictate what the Sesquicentennial should mean or exactly how it should manifest; instead they created general guidelines and planning considerations, allowing local groups to create projects, including exhibits that would have their own personal mark.

#### **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES**

The OTCC served as a catalyst for other trail-related programs. These were many and varied. Events ran the gamut of media and ingenuity, from the use of local celebrities to living histories and elementary school programs. The specific activities are too numerous to list; however, some highlights are as follows: commercials with the Portland Trailblazer Basketball team reliving a walk along the trail (TTM 1992f:1), curriculum guides and school program planning workshops, commemorative stamps, videos, and even Oregon Trail license plates. Education was a major emphasis, and

student programs allowed schools the opportunity to engage in the Oregon Trail dialogue. Some student curricula were especially designed to compliment films and encourage reflection on alternative aspects of the trail. Such was the case of a cooperative project between Neiworth Media Group, KPTV-12 and the Oregon Historical Society.

Activities were designed for grades four to six, to enhance the films *Beyond Eden's Gate* and *At Journeys End*. The subjects included "Trail Basics, Trail Impacts, Native Americans, Land Impacts, Economic Impacts, Pioneer Life, Settler's Heritage, and Today's Trail" (TTM 1994b: 7). This program's titles clearly illustrates a blending of subjects. Scholars such as Darrell Millner and Chet Orloff contributed to the films, providing information on the "region's ethnically diverse history" and specific facts of Northwest history (OTCC 1994:40).

#### **INTERPRETIVE BENT**

*The recurring theme through out every Oregon Trail Coordinating Council project was, and is to create a new understanding and appreciation for our historical foundation -- to learn from yesterday, to remember for tomorrow... (OTCC 1994:19).*

Forty-three interpretive panels and exhibits were mounted at various places along the trail, reaching from Nyssa to Oregon City. The company hired for the project, SeaReach, Ltd., emphasized the need to balance Euro-American views with those of Native Americans (OTCC

1994:22). SeaReach worked directly with members of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to ensure that proper representation would be incorporated in the panels (OTCC 1994:22).

Public Service Announcements during Black History month were sponsored by KGW Channel 8 (Portland) and the OTCC. Darrell Millner, the Department Chair and Professor of Black Studies at Portland State University, was the scholarly advisor (TTM 1993b:6; OTCC 1994:39). The announcements spotlighted African-American pioneers who were involved in the settlement of Oregon, including the Oregon Trail. The people included were: Markus Lopus, a sailor with Captain Robert Gray in the 1780's; Moses Williams, a Buffalo Soldier; Moses Harris and Jim Beckwourth, American fur trappers in the 1840's who also assisted many Oregon Trail emigrants; and George Bush, an emigrant of 1844 who eventually settled near Puget Sound. The OTCC hoped that the Public Service Announcements would "be expanded to express the multi-cultural perspectives of Oregon's early years" (TTM 1993b:6).

A bronze sculpture entitled "The Promised Land" made by David Manuel of Joseph, Oregon, was a memorial commissioned by the OTCC for Oregon Trail emigrants. The eight-foot bronze piece, "captured the spirit and strength of the pioneers' long journey." The pioneer family depicted included a husband and wife, their young son, a Bible, a wagon wheel, and a doll symbolizing a daughter

they lost along the way (TTM 1992h:7). This scene "memorializes the overland pioneers' spirit and persistence" according to the *Trail Marker* (1993a:3). The artist, David Manuel, was named the "official sculptor of the Oregon Trail celebration" by Governor Barbara Roberts (TTM 1993a:3).

The *Trail Marker*, and other publications of the OTCC, incorporate disparate images of the Trail into its articles. The image of the hearty, strong, sacrificial pioneer is affirmed; emphasis is definitely upon the pioneer struggle and their adventures. This is especially true as related to ancestral traits that are espoused to compose contemporary descendants. Descriptions of the Oregon Trail pioneers conjure up many of the images that many today admit as imbued with myth:

It is the story of 350,000 emigrants who sold their farms, left their homes, and walked across open prairies and rugged mountain ranges a century and a half ago, helping to redefine the boundaries of the United States. Their independence, enterprise, and optimism still defines the American spirit (OTCC 1994:3).

The classic western ideals revered as the "American spirit" are embodied by these pioneers.

This theme continues with an admission that Native Americans were present. However, the proclamation seems stifled - afraid to go too far, repressed. "The land this emigrant trail crossed was home to Native Americans... emigrants crossed the land for decades" (OTCC 1994:3).



This comment only hints, and does not really depict, Native American populations. The failure to recognize the Native American presence for thousands of years, and the reality that settlement of Euro-Americans displaced these people is a curious omission.

References to subjects of Native Americans, ethnicities, the environment and women appear, but they are not common. The attempts to include "others" is clear through the use of such phrases as "multi-cultural experiences." Remarks regarding Native Americans often divulge the severity of disease and displacement, and even cultural autonomy. For example, in one issue, Native American culture is viewed as complex and perpetual:

Many emigrants thought they were setting off into a wilderness when they crossed the Missouri in 1843. They were not. Native American societies had functioned in the "West" for centuries. Highly evolved networks of trade and communication protocols helped maintain order and territory (TTM 1993e:7).

Obviously, there are efforts to include Native Americans; however, the information is usually fragmented and fails to effectively compete within the larger matrix of the stoic pioneer saga. For example the above excerpt makes important points about Native Americans. The remainder of the article, however, discusses the Hudson's Bay Company and their role in the northwest and with the settlers. The quote is not only out of context with the rest of the article, but its importance is diluted and unfulfilled.

The organizers viewed their efforts at including multiple viewpoints as successful. "Oregon Trail Celebration '93 allowed us all to focus attention on commemorating our diverse heritage... Our diversity strengthened the story we came together to tell" (Thorne 1993:2)

"Diversity" was achieved in some aspects; however, many descriptions and outlined goals of the Sesquicentennial focus exclusively upon Euro-Americans. The impression that the authors were sincere in their attempts to convey lesser known chapters of the Oregon Trail story is evident; yet for whatever reason the fact remains that more often than not, treatment of these "other" subjects is cursory.

It is easy to be critical of this fact; yet, the Oregon Trail theme conjures up the images of Euro-Americans. Within the context, the OTCC succeeded in introducing the subjects of Native Americans and African Americans. If the OTCC is indeed a catalyst for other projects to branch off of, such as museum exhibits, ideas related to contemporary historical viewpoints are mentioned.

It is revealing in itself that the subject of the Oregon Trail was chosen. Other aspects of Oregon history that would be more inclusive, such as "migration to Oregon" might be a wiser choice if the goal is to

represent the greatest number of citizens. The plans for the OTCC reveal that other projects are in the works.

#### POST-SESQUICENTENNIAL ACTIVITIES

The OTCC was granted a broader mandate by the state legislature in 1993. The goals of "heritage tourism" and economic development were extended to other National Historic Trails in Oregon: The Nez Perce Trail, the Applegate Trail and the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Each represents a critical element of Western History and a chance to...educate our children...about who and what we are. Each represents an opportunity to develop viable resources for rural economic development through heritage tourism (TTM 1993f:1).

This comment denotes the "trails" as an element in defining the self and culture. While the OTCC's parameters are predominantly of the Euro-American experience, the Nez Perce Trail introduces the possibility of expanding ideas in new directions.

The OTCC emphasized that they would continue cooperative efforts with the various government, county and private entities, especially the Oregon Historical Society. Interpretation was outlined as a main objective through education and the reaffirmed commitment for the four interpretive centers along the trail (TTM 1993/1994a:4).

Special future projects include the Applegate Sesquicentennial in 1996, a possible National Park Service visitor center near Joseph, Oregon to tell the Nez Perce story, and the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial in 2004-2006 (Renner 1994:2).

#### **SUMMARY**

The OTAC and OTCC served as a catalyst and as a type of skeleton outline for the celebration, of which individuals, private and public groups and communities were encouraged to flesh out with their own ideas and projects. As guides, the agencies stimulated museum involvement through grants for counties, resource materials, and exposure.

The OTCC encouraged other other museums, groups and communities to create Oregon Trail related projects. The Resource and Planning Guide (OTCC 1992) suggested that groups establish their own goals, and who and what was to be represented. Their influence on specific projects was to be that of a resource, support, and communication base.

The activities and publications of the OTCC indicated a mixture of impressions about the significance and meaning of the Oregon Trail. Much of their materials conveyed a traditional image of the emigrants, and a focus upon their activities. Yet there were related activities programs, and comments that revealed an awareness of larger issues.

## CHAPTER 9: MUSEUM EXHIBITS

This chapter presents data gathered on exhibits related to the Oregon Trail from the thirteen facilities in my sample. The interview questions are also incorporated to provide information on what factors were involved with exhibit conceptions and design. The methods used to obtain the information are listed and described in chapter seven. Discussion is focused upon relationships between the diverse interpretations of institutions located near the Oregon Trail and the factors associated with them.

Each facility is discussed individually, and I used subheadings for basic categorical evaluation. These categories correspond roughly to the interview questions (see Table 3). Each museums' and interpretive centers' categories are discussed in the identical order, except for some subheadings because of some lacking information, or the flow of the text necessitates combining or slightly shifting their order. The facilities are discussed combining their geographical order along the trail from east to west, and by the type of investigative method. These methods are categorized as Type A (Personal Interview/Exhibit Viewed); Type B (Mailed Questions Exhibit Viewed); Type C (Telephone Interview/Exhibit Viewed); and Type D (Telephone Interview Only).

**TYPE A: PERSONAL INTERVIEW/EXHIBIT VIEWED****Oregon Trail Regional Museum**

2490 Grove Street

P.O. Box 214

Baker City, Oregon 97814

(503) 523-9308/523-3449

Interview with Caroline Sherrieb, Director, 4/16/94

***General Institutional******Size***

The Oregon Trail Regional Museum, located in Baker City, is a large facility, open from mid-April to late October. Approximately 900 of the total 30,000 square feet were devoted to a section which included the Oregon Trail. A specific Oregon Trail section occupied space on one wall near the entry of the building; the larger section had some artifacts related to overland emigration and settlement within a larger context of Native American artifacts, natural history, and community development.

***Mission Statement***

The mission statement is wide in scope, with a regional focus:

to collect, preserve, study and exhibit those objects that will serve to illustrate the story of man and nature in Eastern Oregon; preserving our cultural heritage for the pioneers of the future.

This statement establishes a broad mandate for the facility.

### *Visitation*

The increase in attendance between 1992 and 1994 was dramatic: between 1991 and 1992 attendance almost doubled from 18,000 to 32,000. In 1993, the number was even higher, approximately 58,000. The numbers are probably even greater, since their only records are derived from a guest book, which many visitor's fail to sign. This great increase was attributed to the opening of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in May of 1992.

The numbers were welcome. Baker County was eager to improve its economic situation through tourism. An area historically dependent upon natural resources, Baker City and its environs were hit hard by economic downturn of extraction related industries.

### *Funding*

Funding for the project depended primarily upon entry donations. In 1993, a small grant was acquired through Oregon Economic Development. Some of this was used for Oregon Trail related projects, but not necessarily for the exhibit, since little, if any, changes were made.

The annual operating budget was about the same for 1993 and 1994: approximately \$55,000. Since the exhibit was created about a decade earlier, it was not possible to determine how much was delegated to its development. This indicates that the Sesquicentennial did not have a great effect upon development of related Oregon Trail exhibitry.

### *Sesquicentennial*

The economic environment and proximity to the Oregon Trail provided a perfect setting for the OTCC. It was exactly the type of circumstance that the OTCC was in part created to help remedy. "Heritage tourism" was viewed as a means to aid ailing economies, with low-impact, high-volume, high return results" (OTCC 1994:3). The OTCC was involved with the museum, but no there was no indication that they influenced any part of the exhibit.

### *Programs / OTCC*

The OTCC did not play a part in sponsoring programs of Oregon Trail interpretation. However, they were a resource base and reference point for the museum. For example, the Oregon Trail Regional Museum bought books suggested by the OTCC. The OTCC worked with other agencies as well, and helped network such programs as the Governor's Conference on Tourism, which was held at the Museum. The Oregon Department of Tourism, also working with the OTCC, helped to advertise the museum through publications such as "Eastern Oregon Vacationlands."

Perhaps most significant was the action the community itself initiated related to the Sesquicentennial. The Director of the museum, Caroline Sherrieb, was part of the group "Historic Baker City". This organization was comprised primarily of merchants that worked together to share and disseminate information with each other and



tourists. They were able to refer visitors to other points of interest and places of business, both locally and statewide. The museum acted as a liaison and information source to a great number of visitors and potential visitors. Especially with some limited hours of the Chamber of Commerce, the museum fielded calls about places to visit, overnight stays and general Sesquicentennial events. They became a "second information center."

### *Marketing*

The museum generally was advertised through the OMA Pocket Guide, the previously mentioned Northeast Oregon Vacation Lands Guide, Visitor and Convention Bureau materials, Tour Guides for travel services, and through special events, such as sponsorship of an East-West Shrine game, and local events like the District boys basketball tournament. The exhibit was not a specific selling point; it has been on display since between 1982 and 1983, when the facility first opened. The exhibit has changed little in the intervening years, and no significant additions were made for the Sesquicentennial. However, the name of the museum implies that Oregon Trail related materials are prominently featured.

### *Project Considerations*

There was no specific target audience for the exhibit. The museum is "family oriented" and with a

strong focus on the local population. Caroline Sherrieb stated that they try to avoid the "stiffness" that she detects in some facilities. She emphasized that the local citizens are the "results" of the settlers. This concept is evident in the exhibits and artifacts portrayed throughout the facility.

Artifacts are most often related to families in the area. Stories about them and their general histories are the draw for many visitors, as well as the motive behind donating and accepting artifacts. The museum in general, and the Oregon Trail exhibit, are artifact based.

The reason for creating the exhibit in the early 1980's was because of the available artifacts, and the ability to trace their history. The goal of this exhibit is to preserve the "heritage for tomorrow's pioneers." Cultural heritage is paramount; artifacts are used as the means to relay it.

This concept corresponds directly to general considerations the museum uses in choosing projects. Caroline reiterated continually that the exhibits were artifact driven. Input from the community was often a factor, based upon artifacts offered or made available temporarily. Interpretation is not a consideration; the exhibits are important for their material importance, especially as related to local people.

### *Theme*

When asked the overall theme of the exhibit, "artifacts" was the response. Materials and goods brought across the trail are the focus - with very little additional text beyond artifact names, if even that. Additional ideas and concepts that are hoped to be displayed, again are not ideas, but materials.

### *Methodology*

Resources for information rely heavily upon family histories, personal knowledge of the director and volunteer staff, and well known local history. Outside sources and research are not sought after. There was no indication of attempts at methodological or theoretical training; the director was satisfied with the current system.

Limited funding and the sheer efforts it took an all volunteer staff to maintain the museum, were most likely the chief factors. Although there are no evaluative techniques, the museum does appear to have a loyal audience, and fulfill many who visit. The involvement of the community is one indication; there are many volunteers, and repeat local visitors.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The exhibit is part of an overall introduction to the museum. Major Oregon Trail material is in a hallway near

the front door. It is also partially an outgrowth of a nearby room that has Native American artifacts, natural history topics with examples of tools, flora and fauna of the area, and an area related to settlement.

### *Objects*

There are no introductory statements to the Oregon Trail section, which is why it is difficult to pinpoint its exact parameters. The section that the director indicates as that of the Oregon Trail primarily consists of artifacts in two main cases, supplemented by an Oregon Trail map and large (approximately twenty feet by two feet) painting entitled the "Old Oregon Trail" said to be painted by a Native American, H.L. Lopp. The painting is the largest, most notable object in the Oregon Trail section. It depicts one wagon, a scout, oxen, and people in a typical scene along the trail. A woman, baby and one other person are in the wagon, with a man walking along side.

The other artifacts are basically accompanied by object names only. The objects are in two large cases with some primarily hand-written labels, and some that are typed. The artifacts include: a flour bucket, coverlid, wool carder, dishwear, sunbonnets, shawls, wagon model, candle molds, traveler (measures circumference of a wheel), box of tea, wood plane, stew pot, turkey call, powder horn, gun, and some other objects that were all taken along the journey. Some Native American artifacts

are interspersed, such as a pendant, grinding stones and a few other small items.

### *Content*

In the adjacent room with multiple subjects (Native Americans, natural history, and settlement) the Oregon Trail is not specifically mentioned. The subjects are isolated, although they all interrelate. For example, many of the natural history specimens were obviously encountered by overland emigrants, as well as contacts with Native Americans. However, the limited text in the Oregon Trail section creates some confusion over the relationship between settlement in the area and the Oregon Trail, especially if the visitor is not already familiar with the history of the area. The early Oregon Trail passed through the area nearly two decades before widescale settlement.

One source of clarification of emigrant settlement patterns is a short narrative on a piece of notebook sized paper, mounted and hanging on the wall near the Oregon Trail exhibit. It is entitled "Baker Valley - A Brief History." Gold is attributed as the catalyst for settlement. Prospectors first came in large numbers to the region in 1861 and were soon followed by settlers. The area, the narrative continues, "has an extraordinary history encompassed in the...land and in the progress and accomplishments of our people." Very little text exists, and what there is concentrates upon themes of uncritical

regard for Euro-American ancestors and settlement of the area.

### *Summary*

The exhibit appears chiefly traditional in nature. This may be deceiving because of the limited text; however, the placement of topics and the lack of relationships between these tends to support the status quo of classic Oregon Trail depictions. Combined with the orientation of the mission statement toward "preserving the heritage for the pioneers of the future", the exhibitry does not attempt to engage in discussion, debate or even commentary. It simply is there to show material culture. This is an exhibit which fits neatly into the "formalist" criteria. The objects are the exhibit. This exhibit is the most extreme of any in the sample in its reluctance to go beyond displaying artifacts.

Many elements are present for expanded versions of topics such as the Oregon Trail - the natural history, Native American presence and history, settlement, and the part of the mission statement to "illustrate the story of man and nature in Eastern Oregon." Greater attention to exposing the relationships between these subjects would produce a more modern exhibit. Doing so would more completely fulfill the guidelines of the Museums for a New Century report and AAM's Excellence and Equity. However, my impression is that this museum is not concerned as much

with national standards as it is with meeting the community's needs; they are viewed as two separate issues.

National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

Bureau of Land Management

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Baker City, Oregon 97814

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Interview with Walt Tegge, Interpretive Director 4/16/94

*General Institutional*

This facility is unique in the study because it was the only one out of the original four Oregon Trail related Interpretive Centers to be built in time for the Sesquicentennial. For this reason, I include a brief account of its development.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) operates the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC). This responsibility was acquired because of BLM's role as public guardians of the land where Flagstaff Hill is located. Flagstaff Hill is directly on the Oregon Trail, and had long been considered by local residents as an opportune site for an historic related project (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

Citizens of Baker County initiated the project. The community asked the BLM for some type of facility near Flagstaff Hill. According to Walt Tegge, Interpretive Director, the proposal was driven primarily by economics: the county was economically depressed and was "dying a slow death" (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

Although initial ideas stressed an entertainment or theme park type of facility, the BLM expressed interest because no major Oregon Trail related facility existed anywhere in the area.

In order for the BLM to become involved, an educational approach was mandated. The BLM has a cultural resource responsibility, especially as related to the National Trails system, of which the Oregon Trail is a component. After detailed studies, it was determined that an educational project related to the Oregon Trail would draw tourists and generate income. This fit in with the statewide plan to diversify the economic base. The NHOTIC germinated early in the statewide Sesquicentennial-related plans, and blossomed into the biggest single Oregon Trail related project in the state completed in by 1993. The OTCC, formed in 1991, encouraged the project.

#### *Mission Statement/Overall Goals*

The overall goals of the NHOTIC serve as the equivalent of a mission statement in a museum. The goal of the facility in part is to use the Oregon Trail subject as a means to market the area of Northeastern Oregon. This is accomplished through informing visitors about the public and private recreational and interpretive opportunities in the area. The Interpretive Center is used as the initial draw for tourists.



Improving the image and visibility of the BLM is another overall goal, as well as providing interpretive information (Shelton 1989: 4). Interpretive goals outlined for the facility centered on recreation in the area and education of the Oregon Trail experience.

### *Visitation*

The goal of the project was to create a world class facility that would draw a tourist and local audience. As of 1994, 45% of the visitors were from out of state, and 55% from in state. Almost half of the in-state visitors were not from Eastern Oregon. As a federal operated facility, universal access was a requirement, therefore seniors and disabled people comprised part of the target audience.

Visitation figures rose steadily as the Sesquicentennial approached, and exceeded expectations. The seven operating months in 1992 (Grand Opening May 23) resulted in 201,000 visitors; in 1993, there were 348,000 and near 300,000 were expected for 1994. The largest visitation was expected in the first few years, with a leveling off at 200,000 after the peak of the Sesquicentennial. The actual results were encouraging.

### *Funding*

Financial support for the project derived from a combination of sources. A partnership emerged among the federal and state governments, Baker City, Baker County,

and some private donors. Congressional monies were the root of the project, providing 60 percent of the \$10.2 million needed. Oregon state lottery funds brought in six percent, while private citizens, the city, and county contributed the remaining balance.

A support group, the "Trail tenders", is a hybrid comprised of a cooperative association and a volunteer group. Members volunteer their services and raise money for the facility through such activities as the sale of tiles. For example a tile may be purchased for a \$1,000 donation; the benefactor's name is put on the tile and placed near the center. The Trail Tenders are incorporated as a non-profit organization and have their own set of bylaws.

The annual budget during 1994 was \$1,000,000. \$750,000 came out of federal appropriations, with the remaining \$250,000 raised by the Trail Tenders. 1993 generated \$650,000 from federal appropriations, and an additional \$70,000 came from other sources. A donation box is prominently displayed near the entrance of the facility, but only averages a donation of approximately 33 cents per person, and is therefore not considered a significant source or revenue. The goal is to acquire \$1,000,000 annually from the federal budget, and to augment this with the funds raised by the Trail Tenders, state contributions, and visitor donations.

## *Sesquicentennial*

### *Marketing*

Part of the success may be attributed to advertising. The Oregon Trail Preservation Trust, with a first year marketing budget of \$450,000, helped advertise the OTIC through magazines ads (in *Sunset* and *National Geographic*) and three strategically placed billboards in the region. NHOTIC staff encouraged and "coddled media folks"; brochures and promotional inserts in newspapers were all used as marketing techniques (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

Three different in-house brochures were developed that were distributed through the Sesquicentennial. One, "A Step At A Time: The Oregon Trail", and another, "Flagstaff Hill - National Historic Oregon Trail" were both published by the BLM. The latter described the setting of Flagstaff Hill and its relevance to the Oregon Trail (BLM 1992/1993a). The former discusses trail travel: supplies, wardrobe, wagons, and daily schedules and its text develops concepts about pioneer character. A section named "A Pioneer Legacy" portrays the emigrants as a group with "bright hopes and raw, innocent courage." Their legacy, accomplished through "determination, sweat, blood and muscle", is one of "courage and determination that is a vital part of the American experience" (BLM 1993). These excerpts portray a classic "hearty" image of the pioneers that is present throughout the exhibitry and

other publications. However, this image is amended somewhat within the exhibit, as is discussed below in the "Exhibit/Content" section.

A third brochure is published in part by a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust. It outlines the major subjects of the Interpretive Center: Natural History, Pre-Emigrant Travelers, Native Americans, Emigrant Life Along the Trail, BLM history, and Mining and Settlement of Northeast Oregon (BLM 1992/1993b). Although some depictions of pioneers parallel themes of the other brochures, there is a more comprehensive interpretive orientation, which reflects the overall exhibitry. An interesting marketing technique is employed as well. Using the ideal of Oregon as "Eden", a headline of the brochure reads: "Northeast Oregon. It's Still the Promised Land." This section goes on to describe all of the recreational activities available: jet boating, fishing, panning for gold, and even llama trekking (BLM 1992/1993b). Even though there is an assertion of greater complexity to the Oregon Trail issue, the Edenic theme perseveres as a selling tool.

### *Programs*

During the Sesquicentennial, the level of programming intensified. Since this study is focused upon structural exhibits, those are of the most concern. It is important to note, however, that the Sesquicentennial related projects were many and varied. Festivals, wagon trains

and even Oregon Trail bicyclists were all part of extensive community-wide celebrations with which the interpretive center was in some way involved. Staff and volunteers took materials to fairs and celebrations during the Sesquicentennial. This consisted mainly of photos, handouts and a model of the center generally manned at some type of booth, often accompanied by living histories.

The NHOTIC individually sponsored many programs on site. The facility's educational goals requires rotating exhibits and programs as a fundamental component. Special programs in the theatre were part of this schedule, such as living history presentations and lectures with slide shows. Approximately \$50,000 was budgeted for Sesquicentennial programs, special exhibits and interpretive presentations. Many of the interpretive programs during the Sesquicentennial were contracted out.

A number of the living histories portrayed women, such as "school marms", and overland travelers. Various natural history related programs, such as nature hikes and lectures were held, and there were special demonstrations in the lobby.

Temporary exhibits were also held in the gallery - such as photographs, prints, and textiles. Examples include "Women of the West" art exhibit, "Petroglyphs of Northeastern Oregon", "Native American Imagery" art exhibit, "Photography of the Old West" exhibit and "Paintings of the Oregon Trail" art exhibit. I did not

see these, but their titles suggest an assortment of subjects that are all related to the Oregon Trail theme, and that expanded upon specific ideas (Oregon Economic Development Department [OEDD] 1993: 1-20).

#### *OTCC*

The OTCC played a supportive role, and was in constant contact with the NHOTIC. The official Sesquicentennial Wagon Train that came through Baker City was OTCC sponsored, as were many entrepreneurial and commercial related projects. Many of the Oregon Trail merchandising products with the official logo were featured in the gift store, and the OTCC and related agencies helped advertise the facility. Educational resource support was also provided by the OTCC, and the interpretive center reciprocated with their own information. The OTCC supplemented an already strong project.

#### *Project Considerations*

##### *Theme (s)*

The designer's instructions were to make the overland trek come alive; even the architecture of the facility is designed to feel like the interior of a wagon. The intent was to make the visitor understand and feel what an arduous, difficult journey the emigrants encountered when coming to Oregon.

The accuracy of the desired imagery is debatable. It reinforces many of the classic images of the Oregon Trail, and this emphasis presents the threat of ignoring other factors equally important. However, it is evident that the image has merit. The journey, judging by journal articles and descriptions of what such a trip entailed, would be onerous. Uncertainty and hardship were real. What is important in this study is noting the predominance of themes. The hardship factor is the force of the exhibit. Accuracy of this ideal is not as significant as the simple fact that it was chosen as a major theme.

This "hardship" theme is directly associated with heritage. The interpretive plan prepared in 1989, declares that the main goal for the NHOTIC is:

to instill in visitors an understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage... specifically, the Oregon Trail experience as it encompasses the life and times of people who settled the American West (Shelton 1989:4).

This comment illustrates the direct link to the larger theme of the American West, and the predominant role the Oregon Trail story plays in it. Additionally, the suggestion of identity adopted through ancestral traits exists. Walt Tegge, in a personal interview, expressed similar thoughts, as he described that the visit to the NHOTIC was a "pilgrimage" for many of the visitors, and offered a means to pay homage to their ancestors (Tegge 1994: personal communication). Whether this is the

intended effect or not, Tegge's comments reflect the facility's awareness and sensitivity of this fact. The attempts to elicit emotions from visitors of how it felt to be on the trail allows those with genealogical interests to feel a connection with their emigrant ancestors.

Emotional responses were indeed planned. The interpretive and design strategies were created to produce some very specific reactions. Most reflected a very positive image of the pioneers. Some of the images and feelings planned to be conveyed by the exhibit as stated in the interpretive plan were: "simple folks who worked with their hands", "tenacity", "self-reliance", "hardships", "determination", "toughness", "independence", "freedom", "hope", and "respect" (Shelton 1989:26). Some intended impressions of the facility itself are also listed, such as "credibility", "user friendly" and "open spaces" (Shelton 1989:26).

Interpretation in the exhibit fulfills many of its educational goals by its focus upon the emigrants, and more specifically, the actual journey itself. The subthemes as outlined in the brochure and the interpretive plan, reflect the orientation towards the pioneers. The themes were divided into percentages of the entire Oregon Trail exhibit. The following figures are fairly close to how the exhibit materialized, based upon my observations:



- a) 40% Emigrant lifeways along the trail
- b) 20% Mining and settlement of Northeastern Oregon
- c) 10% Pre-Emigration Trail travelers
- d) 10% American Indians
- e) 10% Natural History
- f) 10% BLM/General Land Office (Shelton 1989:20)

In order to remain within the parameters of this study, the main subjects to be evaluated in the exhibits will be a, d and e. Because of the obvious interrelationships, information related to other themes inevitably will arise.

### *Methodology*

An interdisciplinary planning team established the themes and organization of the interpretive center. The team was composed of archaeologists, interpreters, historians, recreation specialists, curators, exhibit specialists, and architects. All facts and materials used in the interpretation were professionally attained and authenticated. Dr. Steve Beckham, a history professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, was contracted for historical information and research. Beckham researched, wrote much of the information for the text, and verified all facts. He traveled to such places as the Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art and National Archives to acquire information (Hummel 1992:43-44). In addition, a cultural resource specialist was also involved and aided in authentication.

The early proposal for the interpretive center by the Baker County Steering Committee emphasized the emigrants as a symbol of "vitality, imagination and courage that is

uniquely American." This perception was "the lasting message of the Oregon Trail adventure" (Baker County Steering Committee [BCSC] ca. 1987:4). Although elements of these thoughts remain, the design team's objective was to create a "fair and accurate portrayal of the Oregon pioneers" who have often been romanticized (Hummel 1992:44). Admitting pioneer imperfections and limitations along with their strengths was an objective. In order to do so, expanding an understanding of their effects upon the land and people they encountered was required. In addition, attempts were made to broaden the view of the "frontier" concept, to stimulate "historical reassessment" (Hummel 1992:44). Along with this idea, Steve Beckham explains his perception of the West as not a wilderness, but "'a homeland for thousands of people who had lived there thousands of years'" (Hummel 1992:44).

Walt Tegge discussed aspects of the exhibit that presentation can be precarious and may create misunderstandings of interpretive objectives. The exhibit includes some materials, such as journal entries, that reflect the attitudes and values from 150 years ago; the purpose of including them is not necessarily meant to condone them, but to illustrate past cultural conceptions. Tegge asserts that what may now sound inappropriate, distasteful, or disparaging, might not in its original historical context. To ignore the fact that these

cultural values existed would produce an inaccurate and incomplete presentation.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The overall exhibitry is very professional. Labels are well-designed, textures are many and varied - the impression is of high quality and expertise. The facility uses an open exhibits plan, with life-size mannequins and taxidermied animal specimens. Interpretive methods include photographs, maps, graphics, auditory accompaniments, videos of film/slides with narration, and some interactive components. Titles are large, interpretive panels are well-made. Some are difficult to read, such as some text written on fabric near the ceiling, but generally, they provide a great deal of organized and nicely presented information.

Journal excerpts are heavily relied upon: they are used as an introduction of interpretive panels, to illustrate ideas, or even set apart on their own to dramatize an aspect of the trail.

#### *Objects*

Artifacts are interspersed, although many objects are replicas. The ratio as explained by Walt Tegge is approximately 65% replicas, 35% artifacts. Concentrated use of replicas is a fundamental difference between museums and interpretive centers; both have their positive

and negative effects. An advantage is the lack of barriers, which allows the visitor to feel a part of the exhibit since display items are accessible and part of the scene. The replicas do not discourage, and often even invite visitors to touch them. Artifacts, on the other hand, are displayed in such a way to prevent damage that occurs with human contact. Yet artifacts inherently appeal to many people that like to view authentic, tangible pieces of history. Walt Tegge indicated that that long range plan of the NHOTIC is to replace reproductions with actual artifacts. Time and funding prevented them from doing so originally. This is an indication that interpretive centers and museums are moving closer to common exhibitry methods. The federal government, of which the BLM is a part, generally does not allow borrowing or purchasing of artifacts, and so outright donations are relied upon.

A few artifacts are in cases such as mining tools, a Native American gathering bag, and a digging stick, are visible in secure cases. Near the beginning of the exhibit, there is a wagon, presumedly a replica, which holds materials, supplies and clothes. A replica of a chest with guns, book of explorers reports and surveying equipment are other featured items. There are more wagons and camp life artifacts, a medicine case, spectacles and a child's doll.

Parts of the exhibit are disjunct in regard to objects and text. Objects complement ideas, but sometimes are not fully integrated. The artifacts, and even some replicas, are placed as supplementary to text and graphics. They are essential to the exhibit, yet not the primary draw, which may be related to the status as an interpretive center, not a museum. In other areas, especially in regards to staged scenes, animals, life-like human figures, artifacts, and replicas cohesively tell part of the Oregon Trail story. These and other visuals, such as the graphics, and films, are the more dramatic attractions.

The Interpretive Plan states the purpose of replicas and historic objects is to "reinforce who the people were that made and/or used them" (Shelton 1989:16). Furthermore, understanding of the object can be acquired through "a suggestion of the context in which they were made or used" (Shelton 1989:16). This explanation suggests a partial formalist ideal, with the hint that the objects themselves are able to represent qualities of the people that made them. However, the heavy emphasis upon interpretation in the exhibitry avoids many of the most serious pitfalls of formalism.

### *Content*

*Introduction* - The introduction is near the large human figures that draws the audience in from the entry.

Statements begin with some traditional imagery, as written in a song, "Oregon, My Oregon":

Oregon, My Oregon, land of the empire builders,  
land of the golden west; conquered and held by  
free men, fairest and the best. Onward and  
upward ever, forward on and on, and on, hail to  
thee, land of heroes, my Oregon...

-J.A. Buchanen

This classical image is immediately countered with the admittance that although the emigrants were heroic, they were imperfect. They are described as "intolerant, prone to violence, exploitive, and sometimes ill-tempered." They brought much to the area, but took from it as well. Native Americans were displaced; and the emigrants "wrested a new territory and several states from what they perceived as wilderness." After stating that some "tragic consequences" resulted, the Oregon Trail is revered as a saga celebrating "human endurance."

The text presents an interesting mix of ideas. The presentation of the classical, earlier interpretations, represented by the song, is merged with the awareness of the emigrants faults. The results of the Oregon Trail are acknowledged to have some "tragic consequences." However, my interpretation of the overall theme is triumph over the physical demands of the journey. This is stated as the fundamental result of the overland trek.

*Subjects* - The endurance theme is visually created early in the exhibit. An expansive type of hallway takes the visitor through scenes of the trail journey that has

human lifelike figures accompanied by voices and some text nearby. The image is strong. The figures are elevated on stages and very awe-inspiring. They are in various predicaments along the trail journey, such as grief over the death of a child, or a scene of exertion, with a man and oxen perspiring as they both struggle along the trail with a wagon. Scenes primarily feature Euro-Americans, but at least one scene centers on Native Americans. These models create a feeling of sweat, dirt, weariness, and grueling hardship.

The following section of the exhibit is a chronological progression; from early explorers, fur trappers, to the overland journey and settlement. Soon thereafter however, it shifts to a more subject oriented content. The interpretive ideas are discussed below, and are not necessarily in the order portrayed.

General restlessness, donation land claims, removal of and protection against Native Americans, promotional advertisements, and patriotism are the reasons given for emigrants to begin the journey.

The character or personality of the pioneers is portrayed throughout the exhibits. Under the Title "Who Goes What Goes" the people are described as primarily "young, white, American-born men." Furthermore, men are stated in the text to have outnumbered women six to one. If true, this contrasts to the "family" image that permeates most conceptions of the Oregon Trail. However,

it is unclear whether or not they are including all travel along the trail, from early exploration routes, to prospectors. Even so, the family image is the one most familiar.

Little mention is made of other ethnicities in the exhibits, either why or why not they are part of the story. Part of this is probably due to the fact of the heavy emphasis on the overland daily life. However, the text notes that few African-Americans were on the trail; reasons given for their small numbers are lack of freedom and capital. If African-Americans were free, they generally had trouble financing a journey to the west. The exhibit does not expand upon this topic, and no mention is made of examples of those who did make the journey, such as the wealthy George Bush family.

Elder citizens are also noted as infrequent trail travelers. The physical demands are stated as deterrents for most to make such an attempt.

Those that did make the trip are characterized as "tough", "stubborn", "determined", and "hearty" in narration of one of the films. A diary excerpt from "The Journey" reads: "A lazy person should never think of going to Oregon." These journal excerpts are dispersed throughout the exhibits, in varying formats. For example, videos highlight emigrant's entries through modern dramatization. The designers are obviously conscious of



the reliance upon journal and diary entries, and explain the reasons why they are included:

They wrote about their epic journey as it unfolded, leaving us a rich, exciting legacy of journals and letters. From these echoes we can learn about their struggles through grasslands and sagebrush, over rivers and mountains, and through sickness and fear. Somehow, despite the odds, they kept their eyes on the goal.

The journals and letters are used to color the text, providing authenticity to the pioneer images. Their inclusion is an attempt to effectively illustrate the character and minds of those that traveled the journey.

Excerpts also express sentiments of Native Americans. In descriptions of contact with Euro-American emigrants, and the results of their journey, glimpses of what Native Americans endured are evident through quotes. A Sioux Chief in 1845 says "The Children of the red man cry out for food, but there is no food..." The emigrants adversely affected Native American subsistence, as the landscape altered, sometimes dramatically, to accommodate the new culture. Another Native American anecdote relates some of these changes. In this example, Washanke, A Shoshone Chief, presumably talks about another tribal member in 1859:

"...before the emigrants passed through his country, buffalo, elk and antelope could be seen upon all the hills; now when he look for game he see only wagons with white tops and men riding upon their horses."

Further text reveals the settlers' culture predisposed them to perceive the world they encountered very differently than the Native Americans did.

The environment is one example. Seen as dangerous and curious, emigrants often had mixed emotions of their western surroundings. The vastness of open landscape was bewildering, and offered no buffers from the harsh climate or other dangers. Under the title "The Immensity of it All", the prairie encountered on the journey was viewed as "picturesque", "sublime" and "humbling." Travelers are further said to have associated many landmarks with Asiatic and European architecture, such as castles, towers and forts.

The exhibit states that unfamiliar creatures the emigrants encountered, such as huge rattlesnakes, were perceived as frightening beasts. Text also reveals the effects on the environment of the harsh treatment by trappers and fur traders; their activities are said to have wiped out many beaver populations. Native Americans trading their salmon catches with Euro-Americans is another context that the natural environment is mentioned.

Physical surroundings are depicted as an important aspect of the overland journey. The topic correlates to discussion of actual settlement in the region of Baker Valley that began in the 1860's. Changes to the landscape ensued during and after the Oregon Trail migration. Activities of Euro-Americans are admitted to have had some

negative impacts. The effects of "grazing, new plant species and mining" are acknowledged to have "upset the region's ecological balance".

These actions of pioneers obviously impacted Native Americans, who had been living in Oregon for "more than 10,000 summers and winters." In a part of the exhibit titled "Consequences of Contact" some of these effects are described. Harm to streams, ruin of meadows for traditional foods, such as camas, disease, war and broken treaties, were just some of the results. Text reads "the miners and settlers took what they wanted" implying that they did not let Native American occupation or objections impede them.

Native Americans are portrayed as being more in tune with the natural environment. Quotes such as "The earth and myself are of one mind" by a Lapwaih Council member support claims that Native Americans "treated their home gently." Text states that they "lived closely with nature, seeking her rhythms, living with her cycles."

"Real and Imagined Foes" traces how some preconceived negative images of Native Americans developed. "'Captive' Narratives" advertised the barbarous, uncivilized and dangerous image. An unfamiliar environment compounded these fears. Native Americans, with their foreign beliefs, lifestyle, and religion "represented the unknown" to the emigrants.

The "Contact and Confrontation" section reiterates some statements from the introduction, when it accuses the "emigrant generation" as "often racist, intolerant, and prone to take matters into its own hands." The cultural differences, lack of full communication and government inaction were listed as other causes of problems. Although the "mutual feelings of vexation occasionally erupted in violence", Native Americans are credited with assisting the overland travelers in many ways, such as guides and trading partners.

Despite all the impediments, Native American culture is affirmed as resilient. "Eastern Oregon Indians Today" is a section that traces treaty negotiations and their contemporary interpretations. Native American culture shown to have persevered in many aspects, both politically and traditionally. They have government to government relations with the United States, and still celebrate age-old ceremonies, such as the harvest of traditional foods. They have maintained, and are continually influenced by, many of their ancestors' values, beliefs, languages and general culture. They are also a "modern people" that "remain a presence and voice in Oregon."

Another investigated theme was that of women. "No Respector of Persons" and "Women Worked Equally Hard on the Way" were some related titles. Countless journal anecdotes were incorporated into the exhibit, both from and about women, on many different subjects. Much of the

textual emphasis revolved around trail duties. John Newton Louis writes in 1851:

"A fine spree we had over the first fire we made of buffalo chips. The women did not like to touch it...for fear of getting their hands spoiled. But this will wear off in a short time."

Nineteenth century life is described as very gender-conscious. "Men did men's things, and women did what men let them." The divisions of labor that were assumed in this era were transplanted to trail life. Men's chores remained upon the wagon and the livestock, while women had their usual tasks of watching children, cooking and cleaning, and taking care of the sick. "'Each of us had our regular work to do'" writes a woman in 1852.

The norms of the time prescribed "purity, piety, and submissiveness" as a basis of female character. However, the trail is said to often blur the rigid lines of sex roles. "In a sense, the trail was the great equalizer." Women were often required to unpack and repair the wagons, and take the lead in setting up camp.

*Closing Statements* - I attempted to use William Cronon's theories of plot narration as discussed in chapter four to obtain an impression of the exhibit creator's overall interpretive stance by comparing the beginning and end of the Oregon Trail "story" that was told. The closing statements are difficult to identify because there is not a specific panel or section that

serves to end the exhibit. For this reason, a comparison with the introduction to determine an overall narrative plot line, was impossible. However, last two sections of exhibitry focused upon Native Americans and the BLM. Because Native Americans are discussed throughout the exhibit, and the BLM section does not contain the interpretive content relevant to this study, these do not yield much information regarding the plot narration strategy. However the placement of the largest section on Native Americans indicates that it is a reminder that after all of the drama of the Oregon Trail, Native Americans were here before and remain today.

The very last text of the exhibit is an isolated quote by William Butler Yeats: "I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams." This quote ties in both Native American and Euro-American cultures. Dreams of the two cultures undoubtedly varied, as did means of procuring them. Yet, for better or worse, their "dreams" of the past affect the present.

### *Summary*

Overall, the exhibit presented considerable information. It was attractive and engaging. The interpretations used a variety of formats: films, interactive video, visuals, text and artifacts.

The preponderant ideal of the trail's physical hardship and its users perseverance is interesting. At first glance, this appears to be a completely classical image. However, when the exhibit admits the difficulty of the journey it is not making sweeping commentary on the personal qualities of individuals or Americans in general. The "endurance" theme is associated with certain characteristics common in the American West, such as unyielding independence and individualism, but the exhibit does not directly assert or refute this. Descriptions of classical traits are presented, and text does ascribe some "heroic" qualities. However, negative traits of the emigrants, such as intolerance and violence, are also addressed. Subjects directly related to contemporary interpretations are mentioned, especially Native Americans. The emphasis is not as strong as the scholars who support and analyze a more contemporary perspective; there is no indication that the Oregon Trail experience is controversial, and the focus remains upon Euro-American trials and tribulations.

Positive summations are more visible, especially in regard to replicas and visuals presented. Those who do not read the text as closely will probably not absorb as much about the emigrant imperfections and ill consequences of the journey. Most of the titles are too general to give substantial indication.

No official evaluative techniques of the exhibit or audience exist. Status as a federal agency prevents such measures by demanding a difficult bureaucratic process if such a study is desired (Tegge 1994: personal communication). Although the NHOTIC is not allowed to solicit opinions, it can field them. There is a suggestions/complaints desk that receives comments; personnel generally "monitor" rather than "evaluate" and direct any concerns to the appropriate staff members. So far, general feedback has been very positive. Visitors, the community and organizations have all supported the OTIC. The few criticisms have primarily revolved around display methods. Tegge hinted that some visitors did complain about some of the terms used, such as "squaw". This stemmed from taking quotes from emigrants out of historical context (Tegge 1994: personal communication).

The NHOTIC is a unique facility in my sample because of its large size and its expansive dedication to the Oregon Trail theme. The permanent exhibitry is indicative of what is perceived by at least one design team, as enduring qualities, including themes and subjects, that will attract a large audience indefinitely. With such a large number of people with widely varying backgrounds, its interpretation is successful in presenting many ideas. The emigrants and their toils are predominant concepts. Conveying traits often associated with the mythological West, such as "freedom", "individualists" and



"independence" are goals of the exhibit (Shelton 1989:26). However, there are also attempts to neutralize completely idealistic images of the emigrants, as when contact with Native Americans are addressed.

To date, the large number of visitors suggests that the facility is popular with the public. Without formal evaluative techniques, or an available analysis of comments, the specific concepts that have been well or ill received are unknown.

The future of the center requires a maintenance of interest and financial support from the government and private sources. Many of the same projects undertaken during the Sesquicentennial are also planned for 1994 and beyond such as the living history presentations and temporary exhibits in the gallery.

The facility plans to expand. It is designed so a new wing could be added. An additional \$2.2 million is needed for a large list of future projects - which includes an outdoor amphitheatre, picnic area, and an orientation film for entire center. Built immediately prior to the Sesquicentennial, the timing of the project brought many of the Oregon Trail agents together. Talents of the regional community, professionals, organizations, and individuals were all required.

Umatilla County Historical Society Museum

108 SW Frazer

P.O. Box 253

Pendleton, Oregon

(503) 276-0012

Interview with the Director, Julie Reese, 4/19/94.

*General Institutional*

*Mission Statement*

The mission statement is to "Discover, collect, preserve and share things that are significant to the area in what has become Umatilla County."

*Size*

The Umatilla County Historical Society Museum (UCHSM) is modest in size and scope in comparison with the Interpretive Center near Baker City. Approximately 4200 square feet, the museum dedicated about 600 of that to the Oregon Trail.

*Visitation*

The museum attracted approximately 15,200 visitors in 1993. Data was unavailable for a comparison with other years, but the Oregon Trail exhibit has existed since the museum's opening in 1988.

*Funding*

The museum budget was approximately \$75,000 during 1993, and decreased between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for 1994. The disparity may have had something to do with Sesquicentennial projects, but not with the Oregon Trail

exhibit. No money was directly distributed to the display during 1993, since it was installed in 1988. The original amount used for it was minimal, approximately \$300. The only real expense for this exhibit was photographs. Artifacts are rarely purchased, and that money for this exhibit came from the Exhibit Committee Budget.

The Museum's funding is created through Board projects, membership organizations, fundraisers, books, memorial contributions, and some capital campaigns. Occasionally it receives grants, but generally there is little or no government funding.

### *Sesquicentennial*

#### *Marketing*

The Oregon Trail exhibit had no special advertising. No advertising budget exists, and it is not a priority or a fundamental part of museum operations. The Museum paid for general representation in the OMA Directory, and at four different Welcome Centers. Beyond that, the museum was only listed in publications that included it at no cost. Occasionally there are news releases for special projects, presentations or exhibits. Additionally, the local Chamber of Commerce has information about the museum, which they generally share other areas.

#### *Programs*

The UCHSM was involved with many Sesquicentennial activities. A presentation of flora along the Trail

discussed their aesthetics and medicinal purposes; a cooking demonstration illustrated what women experienced along the trail, "bring(ing) to life the reality of living in the back of a prairie schooner" (UCHS 1993). These two are examples of local programs that were submitted to the OTCC resource guide that was distributed throughout the state. There was also a two-part lecture series, "Tales from the Trail", hosted by the Wagonmaster of the Sesquicentennial Wagon Train, who was from the Pendleton area. He discussed the preparations for the journey in November 1992, and October of 1993 he followed up with the experiences, successes and problems. Dave Manuel, the official sculptor for the Oregon Trail commemoration also visited the area to discuss his piece of the Oregon Trail.

"Fanny", a living history performed by a woman from Baker City presented a drama of "courage, endurance, heart-break and hope on the Oregon Trail" (UCHS 1993). "Women Blazing the Oregon Trail - Then and Now" was a program about women in Oregon's history who have made contributions in various ways. Discussion ran the gamut from Oregon Trail women to "today's modern pioneers" (UCHS 1993).

The Historical Society and Museum also helped in any way they could with the Living Histories that were held at the Round-Up Grounds. The Chamber of Commerce initiated this program, which ran from June to August of 1993.

In my personal interview with Julie Reese, she stressed that the community is very active. Many volunteers exist in Pendleton, a city of slightly over 15,000 people, and much is accomplished. The Museum has over 120 volunteers, and 18 Board Members, as well as various committees. Julie wanted to have some programs about the Oregon Trail, but was careful not to saturate the local community with trail related programs. She felt that some variety was necessary in programming, so that local people would not tire of it.

Special publications during the Sesquicentennial included a double-issue of their periodical "Pioneer Trails", which is produced about three times a year. The articles told of the Oregon Trail related trails and sites in the county, with excerpts from diaries describing them.

A book was also reprinted with the cooperation of the Pioneers Ladies Club, Reminiscences of the Oregon Trail. It was originally printed in 1937, and has stories told by local people about the origins of Umatilla, some of which relate to Oregon Trail history.

During the Sesquicentennial, some special additions were made in the museum, although none specifically to the Oregon Trail exhibit, except a covered wagon, that could be seen as directly related to the Oregon Trail. There were some other miniature frontier type buggies and wagons as well, but not necessarily from the trail.

A platform with and indoor/outdoor scene of the first Indian Agency was established, and a pioneer cabin. Part of a traveling exhibit from The High Desert Museum, "Dressed With Beads," was also on display during the Sesquicentennial.

At the time of the interview, April 19, 1994, there were no Oregon Trail related plans made for the future. Although there may be changes later, the current exhibit is expected to remain as it is indefinitely, since the Director feels it tells the story in a compact way.

#### *OTCC*

The Museum Director, Julie Reese, served on a minor OTCC subcommittee for Historic Participation (HOPS). HOPS was formed to "develop exhibits, conduct workshops, and develop historical activity booths at county fairs" (TTM 1991e:7). My impression from Julie was that the HOPS group did not meet often and primarily worked to stimulate events in their communities and then informed each other about their local community and facility plans for the Sesquicentennial (Reese 1994: personal communication). The OTCC Chairman, Steve Correy, lives in Pendleton and was a convenient source for information and resource for stimulating events in addition to the HOPS program.

#### *Project Considerations*

The Oregon Trail exhibit was established with the opening of the museum. This specific subject was chosen

mainly because of the proximity to the Oregon Trail and its regional significance. Additionally, the Oregon Trail was important to the Native American culture, which is represented in other parts of the Museum.

### *Theme*

The overall theme of the Oregon Trail exhibit is "the Trail through Umatilla County and/or the era in the local region," which is related to the mission statement by its regional emphasis. The exhibit focuses upon the physical trail, its traces, and areas it traversed locally; this is an exhibit of facts, rather than overall interpretive concepts.

The overall goal of the exhibit is related by its attempts to familiarize the audience with the trail in the nearby area. The audience targeted is general - everyone from school children to adults. Very young children are not included because of their low attention span.

### *Methodology*

Generally, when choosing a project, the staff consider relevance to the Mission Statement. Other elements in deciding upon an exhibit include timelines and resources required to put it together. Time, space, available manpower and cost are all factors, as well as availability of artifacts and visuals. Furthermore, the information available and interpretive possibilities are

considerations. Beyond the aesthetics of an exhibit, the goal is to educate the viewer.

Specific procedures are followed for exhibits. A steering committee first plans exhibits that are often stimulated by volunteered or donated objects, and community input, a year before they are installed. Subcommittees engage in research using books, family interviews, libraries, on-site resources, diaries and government surveys. Text is then written by the subcommittees, and is edited by the Director. When material is questionable, such as stories from reminiscences, further research is done; if it does not provide affirmation, the material is either not used, or noted as an item of interest but with disclaimers.

### ***Exhibit and Content***

#### *Format*

Ideas presented reflect the Oregon Trail as a vital element in local history and emphasize that preservation of it has a history in itself. The emphasis is upon the evolution from use of the actual trail to its current role as an historical centerpiece.

Labels are typed on paper and folded to stand vertically. The exhibit has panels and a case. The panels depict photographs, graphics and text, while the case has documentary artifacts and a few other objects.



### *Objects/Visuals*

Artifacts are centered on the physical components of the trail, as well as its preservation. A wagon wheel is placed at the beginning of the exhibit, where there are descriptions of vehicles used on the trail. Animal skulls are present, indicating the harsh potential of the trek. The skulls were the only reference to natural history or the environment, and there was no supplementary text.

Additionally, a driving whip was in the case, as was an 80th anniversary coin for the Oregon Trail. A miniature "ghost wagon" replica from the Oregon Trail was near the case. A Bible, stamps, and a book written by a pioneer were also included. The artifact content was rather low, as much of the exhibit used photographs.

Photographs are mainly focused upon the physical trail and the people and events related to its preservation. Photographs portray Oregon Trail markers, Ezra Meeker in Pendleton and retracing the trail, wagons, views of the Oregon Trail, local trail preservationists, and President Harding at the dedication of the Oregon Trail Highway in 1923. There was also a sketch of Fort Henrietta near Umatilla, and a survey map of Pendleton featuring the Oregon Trail.

### *Content*

Little interpretation was associated with artifacts; most ideas and text centered on the photographs. A short overview at the beginning provided some basic facts: years

of use, number of people traversing it, where it was and some wagon descriptions - in essence, the "when", the "where" and the "how". The "who" and the "why" were not as clear. Many of the subjects looked for in this investigation were absent, or contained very little information.

Native Americans were mentioned briefly. They weren't addressed specifically, but as a passing reference in the text that is focused on the physical trail. For example, a picture of an Oregon Trail marker taken on the Meachem Highway mentions that it was an area near where Cayuse Indian traded fish and other food for calico. Another photograph taken of the Oregon Trail Highway dedication, features President Harding talking with some Native Americans in traditional dress. The trail itself is noted as following earlier trails "'that the Pawnee, Blackfoot, Bannock and Shoshone Indians had followed for centuries.'" This was taken from an excerpt for G.W. Kennedy, and 1853 emigrant. An excerpt from an 1850 wagon train journal describes part of a Constitution's By-Laws: "'No person shall molest or disturb an Indian unless they are the aggressor.'" How this relates to emigrants' views of Native Americans is not discussed, but it reveals the establishment of order and common conduct.

Another picture shows where the Cayuse and Bannock Wars were fought as the "Indian Nations tried to preserve

their land and heritage." It does not expand on what their successes or failures were.

Women were not mentioned specifically. Since the exhibit devoted little to the anecdotal or personal aspects of the trail, or even depictions of trail life, the absence of text on women did not seem out of context. There was, however, a brief review of travel conditions and general chores. The duties mentioned related to both men and women, such as unhitching the teams and washing utensils.

No reference to the pioneer character was given; in fact the only indication of why people traveled the Oregon Trail was "plenty of promise."

The exhibit provided only brief scattered sentences of more contemporary subjects. They were primarily small fragments added to the larger framework of the importance of the local segment of the trail. Any mention of contemporary or traditional subjects or nearby events was generally incidental to the primary focus of the physical significance of the trail in Umatilla County.

There were no obvious closing statements; the end of the exhibit is a transition to the history and role sheep have played in the county. Since this industry began in 1861 locally, this is the beginning of concentrated settlement in the area and direct result of the Oregon Trail migration.

*Summary*

With all of the other Oregon Trail activities in the community, reviewed previously, I inferred that it wasn't as crucial to incorporate many themes into the exhibit at the Umatilla County Historical Society Museum. The size of the facility prevents major undertakings, without great effort in changing other permanent exhibitry.

The interpretive focus in the exhibit was concise. It was primarily an introduction to local efforts of Oregon Trail preservation and commemoration. It would be ideal for a visitor traveling along the trail who is already familiar with some Oregon Trail history but wants to know about the physical traces in the county. The exhibit shows places to go, and explains the physical attributes. Similarly, a local person knowledgeable on the trail in general would be interested to know the precise route and context of it in their environment. For a person who is not as informed about the Oregon Trail, it may present some difficulty, since it lacks a sense of the impact of the Oregon Trail, whether it be large or small. The advantages are that it is not biased nor does it foster a romanticized image of the travelers or whitewash the ill consequences of emigration. The disadvantages are that it feels a bit flat - so little is presented that the greater issues of the Oregon Trail experience are not fully identified. However, the size of the exhibit

indicated that the Oregon Trail was not a primary focus in the museum.

The Sesquicentennial inspired additional programming that expanded upon some subjects related to the Oregon Trail experience; however there was not much influence upon exhibitry. The exhibit was up before the Sesquicentennial began and no significant changes were made for 1993.

*Sherman County Museum*

P.O. Box 173

Moro, Oregon 97039

(503) 565-3232

Personal interview with Sherry Kaseberg, Director 4/20/94

*General Institutional*

The Sherman County Museum exhibit relates the Oregon Trail in a larger theme of human migration. Entitled "Oregon Trails, Rails and Roads in Sherman County", the exhibit examines the different people that have passed through and inhabited what is now Sherman County.

*Visitation*

The attendance for the museum increased in 1993. Open seven days per week from early May to October, almost 4,000 people were recorded. This was an increase of nearly 900 people from the 1992 figure. The completion of the new wing and exhibit that opened in June 1993, as well as state Sesquicentennial promotions, were thought to have brought people in. Sesquicentennial groups that passed

through Moro included Cycle Oregon, a bicycle group, and the Sesquicentennial wagon train.

### *Size*

This exhibit was the pinnacle of the completion of an entire new wing in the museum, which nearly doubled its size. The new wing added 3600 square feet for a total of 7,524; the exhibit is approximately twenty feet by fifty feet, or 1,000 square feet. Although the exhibit is not intended to be separated, the specific content on the Oregon Trail is one of four subthemes; therefore, logically the 1000 square feet could be divided by four, for a total of 250 square feet devoted to the trail.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement is general, stating that the purpose of the historical society and museum is to "gather, preserve, exhibit, interpret, research and publish things relevant to Sherman County."

### *Funding*

Construction of the exhibit and new wing was approximately \$63,000; funding for it derived from many sources. A grant from the Oregon Council of the Humanities served as a catalyst for actual exhibit development. The grant of \$8,000 had stipulations that matched early conceptions and generated more ideas for the exhibit's interpretive bent.

The Oregon Trail Coordinating Council also contributed \$5,000 through its matching grant program. The county equaled the sum, and part of the total \$10,000 was used for other Oregon Trail programs in the county. These programs included: signs, picnic tables, wagon train hosted for two nights, and helped with a kiosk and a permanent Oregon Trail marker.

The Oregon Tourism Division also granted \$1330 earmarked for marketing. This money was used primarily for a brochure, with the same title as the exhibit.

Volunteer hours of labor, donated goods and supplies were also considered part of the total exhibit cost valued at \$32,000. The museum is run by volunteers who contribute many hours of service to museum projects and operation. The Director, Sherry Kaseberg, is also a volunteer. They estimated seven dollars for each hour a person contributed their time to the exhibit. The remaining amount, which put the total price tag at \$63,000, was taken out of the Sherman County Historical Society's funds. In summation, the figures are as follows:

\$ 8,000	- OCH grant
\$10,000	- OTCC matching grant program
\$ 1,330	- Oregon Tourism Division
\$32,000	- volunteer labor, goods, supplies
<u>\$11,670</u>	- Sherman County Historical Society
<b>\$63,000</b>	- <b>TOTAL</b>

This was clearly a major undertaking. This is especially true in a county with a population of 1,850. Although not

all of these funds went directly towards the exhibit, the new wing and the exhibit were related components for a new project. Considering the annual operating budget was \$67,000 in 1993 and \$47,000 in 1994, the project, including the exhibit, was very ambitious.

### *Sesquicentennial*

The state Sesquicentennial efforts did have a direct effect upon the ideas and interpretive strategies. Sherry Kaseberg stated that the Sesquicentennial campaign triggered the idea for the exhibit. Furthermore, without the state promotion and funding through the grants, the exhibit in its current form would not have been attempted. Proximity to the Oregon Trail was an obvious factor for their participation with an Oregon Trail related exhibit.

Although the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial influenced the exhibit, the museum volunteers made it very much their own. The goal of the exhibit was to put the Oregon Trail in context with the development of the county and the state.

### *Marketing*

Throughout the Sesquicentennial, the OMA Pocket Guide was a resource listing for the museum, as well as the Oregon Trail Events calendar for 1993. Additionally, the brochures developed in part with the grant money from the Oregon Tourism Division were well distributed during the spring and summer. Other sources included newspapers in



Wasco and Sherman Counties, Public Service Announcements in The Dalles, and a bi-annual newsletter.

Capturing a share of the tourism market was acknowledged by some in the community to have its benefits, although some local residents had reservations. Concerns over costs and benefits were an issue. In an area that has nearly 100% farming resource base, promotional tourism can strike a nerve with local residents. Tourists have caused great damage to property in the past, especially due to fires. Many local people in the area resented some officials from urban areas coming onto their property and their often presumptuous attitude. In general, financial and manpower resources of people east of the urban centers were overestimated.

#### *Programs*

The Sherman County Historical Society (which includes the museum) had an annual fall in-county bus tour that showcased some of the local Oregon Trail related history. Historical Society volunteers created a narrative to accompany the tour and provide background information.

The Historical Society and Museum helped with the OTCC wagon train when it passed through Moro, but I did not get the impression that it was museum based assistance, but more of a community effort. Moro has a population of 310, so I assume it was both.

When first asked what the Oregon Trail related plans for the future were, Sherry Kaseberg joked that "we just

wish it would go away." However, that is not exactly the case. The Museum Board has been appointed to the 11 county Oregon Trail Coalition, an offshoot of the OTCC. As of 1994, the group had concentrated upon marketing and promotions for facilities along the trail. Kaseberg thinks that the appointment is a lot to ask, especially since the main beneficiaries are those along I-84 between Baker City and Portland. Any fallout south of the Columbia River she feels is incidental. She suggests that including more businesses that directly benefit from the promotions would be more appropriate.

### *Project Considerations*

#### *Theme*

The overall theme is "to provide an opportunity to learn about Indians...explorers, emigrants and pioneer settlers" (Kaseberg 1994: personal communication). The theme addresses four different groups, and the exhibit is divided likewise. This is not a theme that follows methodology for interpreters, as outlined by Dave Bucy (Bucy 1993: lecture). The procedure Bucy proposes requires that the theme answer that question "I want the viewer to know that \_\_\_\_\_ ." "That" is a key word because it necessitates the developer to incorporate concepts rather than facts. However, this exhibit outlines the subjects involved, that were also addressed in the previously mentioned brochure.

### *Methodology*

Project planning in the museum is admitted by Kaseberg to be one of its weakest areas. Trustees and volunteers all have interests and motivation, but it can be difficult to substantiate ideas. Other museums helped Sherman County Museum with their trail exhibit. An object was borrowed from the Horner Museum, and the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) supplied photographs, maps and advice. Individuals, such as Betty Long from the Maryhill Museum of Art and Ron Brentano of OHS, also helped with specific needs.

Kaseberg asserted that project volunteers were very resourceful. As an all volunteer organization, their dedication and ambition is strong (Kaseberg 1994: personal communication). Kaseberg and the crew are self-educated in museum skills, and used exhibit design books as well as innovative techniques. For this exhibit in particular, they created an exhibit strategy by imagining four visitors with very different backgrounds. The sample audience included: a fourth grade student, who just completed studying Oregon history in class; an Oregon history professor, an expert on the subject matter; a Wisconsin man with no Oregon Trail or Oregon history background; and a local woman, with an unknown level of interest and previous knowledge.

The exhibit designers wanted to engage visitors from other locations, and still interest and surprise the local

audience. Part of their job was to acknowledge the potential of local politics, especially in a small town. For example, county residents expected the new wing to feature visible storage, and when this failed to materialize, there were numerous criticisms. Kaseberg noted that the out-of-town audience was thrilled with the choice to present an ambitious exhibit; comments left in the guestbook were very positive. The teams worked hard to educate a variety of backgrounds, and were proud of their accomplishment (Kaseberg 1994: personal communication).

Attracting children was an important goal for the exhibit. In a small community, there are limited entertainment centers; one is a park neighboring the museum. The museum has made efforts in their exhibit strategy to include hands-on types of activities, which proved to be very popular. A trunk in the exhibit contained Oregon Trail era clothing that could be worn while in the museum. In addition, there was a "hands-on" relief map, six to eight feet long.

Another technique included a "storyboard." This exhibit development method divided the museum into different subjects and helped plan the concepts and related objects and visuals. Advice on the text was also derived from an exhibit book, which provided hints on text length and labeling ideas.

Ross R. Cotroneo, Ph.D. Professor of History at Western Oregon State College, was also involved as a guest scholar, a role required by the Oregon Council for the Humanities grant. He provided many resources, ranging from books, and Library of Congress sources to diaries and undiscovered original quotes. The exhibit team was then assigned topics, and obtained volumes of information. Sherry edited text submittals down to the "essentials"; she was pleased with the overall results, but later felt that possibly not enough attention was paid to clarify the "who", "what", "where", and "why".

The core exhibit team consisted of housewives with various interests, seamstresses, a local man from the State Highway Department, and Kaseberg. They all were dedicated to "excellence and consensus." All those on the core exhibit team agreed to the process and verified each step along the way (Kaseberg 1994: personal communication).

The exhibit took nine months to complete. Kaseberg stressed that it was all volunteer; they could have hired an outsider to create in less time, but, as she said, "it wouldn't have been ours" (Kaseberg 1994: personal communication).

The exhibit team kept journals during this process. They commented on what they did, how they learned to do it, and how they felt about it. This was suggested to

them as a good way to benefit from their experience, and have a record of their achievements.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The exhibit was about twenty feet by fifty feet, with vertical panels about seven feet high. There are varying widths, but most panels have a base to set objects upon or used as a barrier to the public. There are many diagonals incorporated into the floor plan, to help guide the traffic flow. Labels were created in-house, and are very professional.

The four subjects are divided by section. The three not specifically on the Oregon Trail will be noted briefly, as will information that is relevant to issues the Oregon Trail addresses.

#### *Objects*

Not many artifacts were related to the Oregon Trail, but many photographs and lasercopies were incorporated to help illustrate the themes. The artifacts and objects are described in more detail with the content of each exhibit section.

#### *Content*

This exhibit explains the settlement of people in the area. Local Tenino Native Americans were presented to illustrate their early presence. Movement of people

through and to the area continues with explorers, the Oregon Trail and settlers. Methods of travel are trails, railroads, and county and state roads.

*Introduction* - Introductory statements establish the theme of many trails with equal focus. In this context, the Oregon Trail is a thread of an overall history, as opposed to the entire story. The overland journey is an event in an overall theme, not the theme itself.

*Subjects* - The first section covers the Tenino Indian bands in the region, it presents the culture and some general attributes of their migrations and subsistence. This section of the exhibit has a large mural, artifacts and text. My impression was that it was affirming that the culture had its own patterns and trails that were part of the overall history of the region, not a precursor to Euro-American settlement. Photographs of tule mat lodgings, mat-covered tepees, fishing camp, and foods, supplement information on the local seasonal rounds. Other photographs depict Teninos in action, such as descriptions of approximate territories of the four Tenino bands. Tools include fishing equipment such as a net made of hemp 100 feet long and six feet wide, projectile points, beaded bags, dolls, baskets, mortars and pestles.

Besides descriptions of their subsistence and dwellings, there is a brief reference to the relinquishing of their traditional lands: "The Indians' geographic claim to tribal land was forever altered with the arrival of

explorers and settlers..." The Treaty of 1855 and subsequent removal of the Teninos to the Warm Springs Reservation were then described. There is not much detail, and not anything of note regarding contact between the Teninos and Euro-Americans: only two short journal excerpts say much, and those are in the Oregon Trail section. One states the "'Indians as thick as hops here and not very friendly'" from a journal in 1847. The other mentions three wagons that were robbed by the Indians. These examples are a negative depiction, but they are so small that they do not significantly contribute to an overall impression. The idea is to show the people and their culture, not relate it to subsequent Euro-American settlement.

"The Early Explorers" section had journal entries regarding Native American. Lewis and Clark, Nathaniel Wyeth, British Northwest Fur Company and John C. Fremont are all explorers mentioned in this section that were confirmed to have traversed through Sherman County.

The Oregon Trail section focused upon supplies for the trail and provided numerous journal excerpts. There are two large titles in this section, "The Trails Through Sherman County" and "The Oregon Trails 1843-1880." The former specifically describes physical aspects of the trail as it crossed through Sherman County. A brochure "A Guide to Oregon Trails in Sherman County" repeats much of the text in this section, describing the route, as well as



local places that were along it. It was a good tie to the exhibit, providing supplementary information for those who are interested.

A sub-section in the Oregon Trail area, "Supplies for the Journey Across the Oregon Trail," was further narrowed by the titles: "Tools and Equipment", "Food", "Personal", "Animals", "Clothing" and "Transportation." Artifacts were used to exemplify these subtitles. A wagon, partially reconstructed, was displayed, as was a folding rocking chair that was brought across the plains. A diary found in Wasco County by an unidentified author that was written in 1850 on the journey west from Nebraska Territory to Oregon City is shown. This is a good addition, since there are so many excerpts, and the actual piece helps to authenticate, at least emotionally, the text. Other pieces include a Bible brought to Oregon in 1861, a clock, barrel, book, blanket, bonnets and guns - typical objects that would be found in an overland wagon. Some of these are in a case, while others are placed standing on the exhibit ground. They are not part of scene, or used with human figures or with any other "in situ" types of methods.

A map with very professional graphics of the Oregon Trail is prominently displayed with journal excerpts directly related to specific point marked upon it. There is a bombardment of these excerpts: they cover many topics. The primary subject is the land being crossed.

From commendations of the "'grandeur'" to hassles with sagebrush, the idea of a highly contrasting landscape with changing weather conditions is conveyed.

One example is from near the area, when the Columbia River was reached. The scene is described as extremely disappointing:

...We had thought we would find the Promised Land, we had set our hopes on a new Eden! Not So! We found a dry and arid land... not a piece of wood, not even a stick...a violent wind carried clouds of dust...That was it, that was all we found there... - 1848

This shows how high expectations were, and how reality could prove very disheartening. The environment is portrayed as a contrast to preconceived notions.

The only reference to women is in the dress-up trunk. A description of what women wore in the 1800's and on the trail includes a full-length dress, apron, and bonnet. Clothes similar to the description are found within the trunk.

There are no assumptions about character or even physical attributes of those that made the trip west. The only reason given for the journey was "'Oregon Fever.'" The Oregon Trail portion of the exhibit represents a group of people, and their trip lead them through the area on the way to the Willamette Valley. It is in the following sections that discuss settlement in the area, something that did not occur until 1858.

Part of the exhibit's purpose was to convey the idea that the Oregon Trail was a transitional time for the area; emigrants did not stay permanently in the county until late in the Oregon Trail migration, or after railroad travel was available. Generally, Euro-American settlement in the county occurred after land in the Willamette Valley was claimed. Major settlement in Sherman County occurred during 1888 through 1920. The only permanent residents of Euro-American descent up until this era were "hearty stockmen and those who offered services to travelers." The sections describing actual settlement incorporate into the discussion methods of travel to reach Sherman County. Stagecoach and newly built railroads from the east, wagon teams from California and steamboat via the Columbia were the prescribed routes. The history and effect of these traveling means are addressed, and the ensuing conglomeration of wheat farms, businesses and government entities are portrayed.

The wheat farmers, the dominant industry in the area, are portrayed as direct descendants of Oregon Trail Pioneers. The "sons and daughters of Willamette Valley pioneers" are said to have "'bounced back'" across the mountains to Sherman county, to "obtain large acreages of cheap land." They began to farm wheat, which remains the main crop.

There was no empirical data provided to support these claims of direct lineage with Oregon Trail pioneers.

Whether or not the claim is accurate, it is interesting how the direct relationship to pioneers from the Willamette Valley is made.

### *Summary*

This exhibit was impressive in many ways, most of all by the dedication and ambition. The resourcefulness and motivation of volunteers in a small community to create an exhibit of high standard was truly impressive and inspiring.

The subjects exhibited reflected overall ideas related to a more contemporary historical approach; Native Americans were portrayed as a subject in their own right, and Euro-American settlement as another migration to the area. The exhibit also touched upon environmental perceptions on the overland journey, and how it related to expectations of Oregon.

There were no evaluative techniques for the exhibit, with the exception of a guestbook. In it were some very positive comments, including "totally cool" from a child, and "I have a debt of gratitude for all your hard work." Many comments recognized the talent and time that was part of the exhibit.

The prestigious Albert B. Corey award the Sherman County Historical Society received for the exhibit gives an indication of how it was received professionally. The American Association of State and Local History (AASLH)

awarded the organization with this honor out of all small historical agencies in the United States or Canada. Considerations for the award were scholarship, vigor, and imagination displayed in the project, and the use of resources, interpretation, and educational programming. The organization's volunteer and membership base and financial growth are evaluated.

The brochure for the exhibit, "Oregon Trails, Rails, and Roads in Sherman County" also received an honorable mention from another national museum organization. The American Association of Museums (AAM) Publications Design Competition recognized the brochure for "overall excellence, creativity, and ability to express an institution's overall personality" (Stark 1995: personal communication).

The museum plans to leave the exhibit as it is indefinitely, making small improvements, but no major overhauls.

**Harlow House Museum**

104 SE Kibling St.

Troutdale, Oregon 97060

(503) 661-2164

Interview with Ellen Brothers, Director - 4/9/94

***General Institutional***

***Size***

The Harlow House Museum is part of the Troutdale Historical Society. The historical home recreates living scenes, and has a few small displays. One of the these

relates to the Oregon Trail. It is a very small, and exhibited in a room that is about ten feet by ten feet, or about 100 square feet. The house has a little over 2,000 square feet, and concentrates upon the period from 1880 - 1940.

#### *Visitation*

Primarily, local people visit, with an annual number generally near 2,000. The Sesquicentennial did not attract more visitors, in fact numbers were slightly down. The Oregon Trail exhibit has been up at least since 1992; Ellen Brothers, the Director, began her position in 1992 and the exhibit was up at that time. Because the exhibit was created before her tenure, my interview left some questions unanswered.

#### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement of the Harlow House is to "gather, preserve and make available material relevant to the community of Troutdale, the Sandy River, Columbia River Gorge and related areas (Troutdale Historical Society ca. 1992).

#### *Funding*

The operating budget of the past few years has ranged between \$4,000 and \$4500. Over 90% of funding is derived from private sources and donations. A very small amount is acquired through a grant from the Oregon State Lottery,

based upon attendance. The specific dollar amount was not available to me, but is assumed less than 500 dollars. The Sesquicentennial did not add any significant amount to the budget, and none in terms of the exhibit.

The exhibit, which consisted primarily of artifacts donated to the general collection, did not cost much. The director was not aware of any significant funding delegated to the exhibit.

### *Sesquicentennial*

#### *Marketing*

The exhibit was not specifically advertised; however the museum as a whole was represented in the OMA Pocket Guide, Oregon Motorist, and two newspapers. The exhibit was not used as a draw to the facility; it was a supplemental display that was not affected much, if at all, by the Sesquicentennial. The Sesquicentennial did not stimulate any additions or changes to the exhibit.

#### *Programs*

There were, however, some special programs related to the Oregon Trail during the Sesquicentennial. A dedication for three interpretive was given, one of which was placed in front of the Harlow House Museum. There were also programs for general historical society meetings. One such program was a presentation on Oregon Trail foods. Aspects of the trail life were discussed, and some food was prepared. This was similar to the program at the

Umatilla County Historical Society Museum, but it was not given by the same woman.

The three interpretive panels were partially financed by the OTCC, with help from the nearby Factory Outlet stores, where two of the panels were placed. Although the Harlow House Museum was not associated with organizing the project, one of the panels was placed in front of the facility. A stretch of one route of the Oregon Trail passed through property very close to the house, which explains the placement of the panel, and in part, the reason for displaying Oregon Trail material.

### *Project Considerations*

#### *Theme*

The overall theme of the Oregon Trail exhibit was interpreted by Brothers as to show what kinds of good were packed in a wagon, and how. Additionally, the habit of bringing precious items, such as family heirlooms, that were not utilitarian was addressed. The goal was to depict life on the trail, and the decisions that trail users made regarding essential items.

#### *Methodology*

Since the exhibit was produced before her tenure, the director did not know much of the planning techniques of the exhibit or other reasons for including it in the historical house. Generally, however, she stated that



considerations for project development are concerned with the timeliness of the display.

Ideas are generated for exhibits with the help of an historian who is part of the Harlow House. Sources are often anecdotal; they supplement material with research from locations such as the Oregon Historical Society. Because Troutdale lacks a comprehensive written history, the job is a significant challenge.

One sector targeted for the exhibit and museum, besides a general audience, is school groups. Providing information that is difficult to obtain of the local area to young people is one obvious way to fulfill the mission statement. Exhibit staff feel the facility provides an opportunity of exposure to local history that is otherwise unavailable (Brothers 1994: personal communication). The museum serves as an educative tool to transmit local history.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The Oregon Trail related exhibit is presented primarily with visuals and very little text. A long case contains artifacts, information and a poster are displayed on a wall, and some objects are placed around the room for an overall impression. Labels are handwritten on paper, with a few typed on notecards. The main title reads "The Oregon Trail from 1841-1869."

*Content*

*Introduction* - Introductory statements describe the basic route of the Oregon Trail in the area, and assert that travel was "difficult and often downright dangerous." The theme is stated outright as the "three things that helped them along the trail - Food, Faith and Fun." This theme differs from that stated by Ellen Brothers, who stated the theme revolved around packing objects for the journey. Objects related to the "food, faith, and fun" activities were packed, however, but the connection is tenuous.

*Subjects* - Text was sparse. No descriptions of what prompted the journey are made, nor is there mention of Native Americans. There are pictures of a Native American dwelling, Sakaka-Wea (Sacajawea), and a print of Indian men. There is no supplementary text. Native American artifacts, consisting of projectile points, spears, hand axes, bags made from leather and textiles, and gloves are presented. No information accompanies these objects.

The only description of pioneers is that from a book, A Letter Home. The book is said to "amplify...the sacrifices made by the pioneers in claiming the west for America." This statement indicates a traditional image of the pioneers; being the only textual clue, it is difficult to make broad statements about what it represents. However the absence of any other information regarding

pioneers in a general or specific context led me to use this quote as an example.

The natural environment is alluded to in an excerpt from a letter written in 1852. The letter, written by J.C. Mathern's, lists the advantages of the Oregon Country. The ability to raise thirty to fifty bushels of wheat to the acre is boasted, as is the fact that they "'never have nor never will have to feed our stock winter or summer...'" The land is admired for its productivity and seemingly endless resources. There is nothing to dispute this ideal in the exhibit; it does not attest to share the same ideas, but with little else to judge, whatever text is shown is assumed to have importance.

A map of the Oregon Trail is displayed, entitled "The Oregon Trail - The Adventure is Still Here." The landscape of areas related to the trail is described, as are resting stops. It is a tourist related addition.

A sheet of suggested items to bring on the overland journey is also displayed, with a conglomeration of advice. Related artifacts displayed are wagon parts and items taken along the journey: a chest, plates, cooking utensils, lanterns and a quilt.

There are objects related to the stated theme of "food, faith and fun." Mainly, these include food items, such as dried beans, some knitting materials, a few Bibles and songbooks. No significant information is added. The overall exhibitry is visually based.

### *Summary*

The exhibit is formalist in nature; the little text and general information supports the ideal that viewers will draw conclusions simply by the presence of physical objects. Part of this approach has to do with the setting. Historical houses usually do not focus upon interpretive displays. The objects are generally placed how they would appear in their original setting. The Harlow House Museum mixes a museum with a historical home. The result is a combination of display methods.

The Sesquicentennial did not affect this exhibit, or alter the display strategy. Though the text that was present portrayed a classical, traditional image of the pioneers and the environment, the focus of the exhibit was more directly upon objects of the journey. From this, presumedly, conclusions were to be drawn about the pioneers and the overland journey. A small display of Native American artifacts, pictures and prints was present, but no interpretation existed, so it is hard to know what was message was intended.

The exhibit was expected to remain in its current form at least until after 1995.

*The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center*

500 Washington St.

Oregon City, Oregon

(503) 657-9336

Interview with David Porter, Executive Director, 4/8/94

*General Institutional*

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center had big plans for 1993 and the Sesquicentennial.

Unfortunately, a variety of problems prevented most of the ideas to materialize in time for the Sesquicentennial.

When I called the facility, I was told to speak to David Porter, the Executive Director of the Center. He answered the questions very well, but he was a recent hire, and did not as know the specific information on exhibit planning and content. His focus at the time was planning for an enlarged interpretive center, that had failed to materialize in time for the Sesquicentennial.

The present End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center materials that I saw in Oregon City are expected to be incorporated by the new facility with the same name. The new project is an expanded version of the old one, which represents efforts of many entities: Clackamas County, the state, Oregon City, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, and people and agencies involved with historic preservation. The "Oregon Trail Foundation," which encompasses these interests, was formed in 1991. As of 1994, the plans for the new center were reactivating after a dormant period. A host of problems, including

personnel problems with a previous director, had plagued efforts to create the immense facility. This discussion will address the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center that I saw in 1994, since this was the facility open throughout the Sesquicentennial.

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center opened in 1986. Before this was built, there was nothing in the area to commemorate the Oregon Trail. Abernathy Green, a large field in Oregon City, is regarded as the final stopping point at the end of the trail, and incidentally is the location for the future expansion.

Community awareness of a potential Sesquicentennial Celebration in the future helped to stimulate efforts to build the original structure.

#### *Size*

The 2,000 square feet facility is devoted entirely to the story of the Oregon Trail, as is indicated by the name. Although it is called an interpretive center, it is very similar to a museum, and artifacts, rather than replicas, are used almost exclusively.

#### *Visitation*

Open year-round (except January), the annual visitation was reported as nearly 20,000 people. This number increased dramatically during the Sesquicentennial, although the exact number of visitors was not available.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement of the Interpretive Center reflects concern to have a local facility that would honor the emigrants and mark the completion of their journey. David Porter states that its is to generally acquaint people with the Oregon Trail story and to represent the significance Oregon City held.

### *Funding*

The 1993 operating budget was approximately \$80,500, a figure that did not change in 1994. The interpretive center did not require any special funding for projects during the Sesquicentennial. Gift sales and admission generates the total income; there are no gifts, grants or any other notable sources of revenue.

The Oregon Lottery provided funds for projects within the community, but none specifically through the existing interpretive center. Likewise, the facility was represented on the board of the OTCC, but did not receive funding for Sesquicentennial related projects.

### *Sesquicentennial*

#### *Marketing*

A marketing technique networked many of the local museums and historic homes during the Sesquicentennial. "Passports" were sold for a discount price that allowed admission to many locals throughout the county; one of

these was the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Specifically, the facility was advertised through local newspaper publications and listings of the region's historical resources. Also, marketing efforts through a regional/national Sesquicentennial marketing strategy, were coordinated with the Oregon Tourism Division. The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center avoided extra publicity, however, because the new facility was not completed. The Portland Visitor's Association included the interpretive center in their promotions of traveling tourism.

A leaflet style brochure, that presented an overview of the history of Oregon City, was produced by the interpretive center. Outlined were the Native American presence near the Willamette River waterfalls, boundary disputes, Hudson's Bay Company holdings, and arrival and settlement of Euro-Americans. These subjects are echoed and expanded upon in the exhibit.

### *Programs*

The finances during the Sesquicentennial indicate that the interpretive center did not create many additions or special programming for it. In fact, exhibits changed little, if any. Maintenance types of activities could be expected, but there were not any special programs hosted by the facility.

I speculate that one reason for this is that the community is densely populated with a number of historic



homes including the Clackamas County Historical Museum discussed later in this chapter. Special events were planned for Oregon City that were broad enough to attract a wide audience. These events were not sponsored by the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. In addition, the planning for the new interpretive center demanded time and attention; especially since the larger facility failed to materialize, there would presumably have been difficulty in initiating other trail-related programs.

One community event was the End of the Oregon Trail Celebration held over Labor Day in 1993 at Clackamas Park. This was a highly publicized event, that centered around the final stretch of the Sesquicentennial Wagon train. Other events included living histories, Native American village recreations, and a walk/fun run. The annual "Oregon Trail Pageant", a theatrical production about the Oregon Trail also was heavily promoted during the Sesquicentennial.

### *Project Considerations*

#### *Methodology*

The procedures and content considerations could not be answered by the Director; the exhibit had been up eight years, and the only other person I could find who was a part of the facility, the museum manager, had been there only four years.

### *Theme*

Exhibit themes are expressed by David Porter as "the story of the Oregon Trail, particularly the end of the Oregon Trail" with additional ideas focused upon the general overland experience. However, it must be kept in mind that Mr. Porter was not part of the development of the exhibit, and at the time of the interview was focused upon the new project. He was excited about some additional ideas to be displayed in the new center, including an examination of native botanical species and changes to the environment that ensued with Euro-American introduced plants, suggesting that some contemporary topics are planned for the new center.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The exhibit incorporated many different techniques. Glass topped cases, simple dioramas, wall signage, graphic images and a video film were all present. Aesthetically, exhibit methods vary. Labeling techniques are both handwritten and typed on notecards. Many of the panels with text and graphic images were of professional quality, that used black ink upon a neutral background, such as tan. Most of the exhibit employed a higher level of expertise; the panels are especially noteworthy.

### *Objects*

Artifacts are related to items transported in the journey. There are pieces of wagon wheels that were discovered along areas the trail passed through, as well as complete wagons. One of these was a "watercraft wagon", presumably transformed for the water passage down the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. Guns and accessories were also displayed, along with the objects required for daily living, such as clothes, silverware, cooking utensils and other household materials essential for the trail. Traveling equipment, trunks, and tools were also common. A few letters that were written while on the trail were also on display.

Taxidermied animals are also shown to illustrate species encountered during the journey, generally displayed without accompanying text. Beaver, fox and skunk are examples, that emphasize the local fauna. Although there is not a physical example, buffalo are investigated and interpreted relating to Native American subsistence, the natural environment, and the effects of abuse upon this resource by Euro-Americans.

The use of interpretive text, artifacts and animal specimens indicates a mixture of formalist and analytical approaches. Objects are not given a lot of explanation, but they do help to support ideas that text initiates.

*Content*

*Introduction* - A large mural of a pioneer scene serves as the main introduction. It is a popular depiction of women and children in a wagon, flanked by men and livestock. There is no obvious introductory statement, but the overall impression is one of a rather peaceful progression. One of the first panels with text, "The Overland Trail" primarily provides an account of a daily schedule while on the trek westward.

*Subjects* - The exhibit covers a lot of information. Although the theme was broadly stated, there is a focus upon trail travel, who and what was encountered, and some consequences.

The overland trek is described as extremely difficult; reasons given for embarking upon such a trip are economic hardships, health conditions in the Midwest, and enticing advertisements of the Oregon Country, including "uncluttered horizons and a land of plenty". Under the title "The Promised Land", manifest destiny and hopes of "'free land'" is said to have drawn "the pioneers to Oregon as if by magnet." Following titles, such as "The Great Migration", "Manifest Destiny" and "A New Territory", expand upon these subjects.

Other text tells of how the "hardy" Americans began infiltrating the region after the decade that Dr. John McLoughlin had established a sawmill and flour mill at the waterfalls of the Willamette River in Oregon City.

Methodist Missions in 1841 established milling operations nearby, and word of these accomplishments only helped to spur the Euro-American desire to engage in the journey.

Numerous anecdotal illustrations accompany the text. Journal, diary and letter excerpts are present throughout the center. A film also provides quotes from Oregon Trail travelers. Personalities in the film are described as often "tight-lipped and grim" while others were jovial, light-hearted and full of song.

The film also depicts the challenges of the journey, but asserts that 90% of the emigrants made it to the destination. Elsewhere, the exhibit states that of the approximate 340,000 that started the journey, 30,000 perished, which is near ten percent.

"Hardships" described under the title of the same name primarily deal with topography challenges. Rivers, deserts, and mountains all presented difficulties along the route. However, elsewhere in the exhibit, the "dangers of accident, Indian attack, thirst and starvation" are listed as potential threats that many emigrants were forced to battle.

A large, tall, multi-panel set describes the buffalo in terms of its range and populations, and especially its vital role in Native American culture and diet. As Euro-American numbers increased on lands traditionally ranged by the buffalo, a near mass extinction of the animals ensued. Reasons given were suggested as a misguided

perception of the environment and reckless disregard for nature. Some journal excerpts illustrate the mindset of those who participated or witnessed the destructive slaughter of the buffalo:

Fine sport this is for all the Boys.  
- George Belshaw

God Forgive us for such waste and save us from  
such ignorance.  
- Edward Parrish

The devastating effects this had upon Native American culture are admitted, and the ways in which it played a part in upsetting the natural balance of the plains.

The use of the film is also a part of this process. The natural environment is described and shown to some degree, such as descriptions of difficult terrain and the show of wildflowers, and supported by journal entries.

The introduction of new species to the region is also addressed, another effect the Euro-American migration had to the area. For example, Blackheart Cherry Wood is described as "one of 800 fruit trees of different varieties...brought across the plains by Henderson Luelling." A judgement regarding the significance of the changing landscape is not suggested, leaving the visitor to consider that issue for themselves.

"The Promised Land" expectation of the settlers is also referred to in presentations of the environment. Oregon was presumed to be a place where the land "was more fertile than anywhere else on earth..." with a gentle

climate, sufficient rainfall and a long growing season. The text reveals the perception of the settlers that "There was enough land along the Willamette for everybody." Although this is a confessed belief of the pioneers, there are elements throughout the exhibit that indicate this ideal had its ramifications.

Native Americans are important in the settlement process. The migration affected the very structure of their culture and livelihood. A stream of facts, under the title "Indians" provides an overview of the relationships between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. This portion of the exhibit is prominent, with a similar, tall, six-paneled structure with graphics and text.

Native Americans are reported to have been very helpful to the emigrants during the critical years of the overland trek, acting as guides, trading partners, and providing other "vital services". Cultural differences are attributed to misconstrued perceptions, often stemming from the disparity in technological advances; Native Americans were intrigued by Euro-American "'medicine'", while Euro-Americans are said to have viewed Native Americans as "'savages' with no right to the land."

Both Native Americans and the emigrants are accused of committing "acts of extreme barbarity and injustice." The edge of this remark is somewhat blunted for Native Americans, as they are stated to have been "finally compelled...to resist the [Euro-American] push west"

because of increasing demands of land by the ceaseless flow of new people. Diseases imported by emigrants devastated Native American populations, resources such as the buffalo diminished, and broken treaties only compounded the issues, and resulted in increased aggression. For the Native Americans violence appears to be a desperate measure, while similar actions are not explained for the emigrants.

Near the end of the exhibit, under the title "Oregon City", the presence of Native Americans for at least 3,000 years near the Willamette River waterfalls is reiterated. The fact that "Native American culture evolved around the waterfalls without interference until white immigration forever altered its course" is stated, indicating that Euro-American migration did not have positive results, although not expanding upon exactly what they entailed.

Non-European races other than Native Americans are not addressed in the exhibit, however women are. "Women, Children and Men" portrays women as often reluctant to take the trip, and were "realistic and stoical in their day to day lives." Duties included cooking, driving oxen, collecting buffalo chips, laundry and pitching tents; little time was left for socializing. Added to these hardships was the common condition of pregnancy and/or nursing an infant, as well as caring for other children. The text reveals that women helped with the sick and dying, served as midwives, and were general "caretakers."



"The challenge of rearing a family and maintaining domestic order against the disordered life on the frontier lead women to spend hours in worry" as the threat of accidents affecting their family were always present. The film also illustrates women engaged in these chores, with children helping much of the time.

The image of women paints an exhausting and wearying picture. The duties described are supplemented with journal anecdotes, which implies credibility. These chores and demands were probably very real; text does not describe their reactions or any implications, however.

"Pastimes" is title under which natural wonders, hunting, music, cards and other activities are described. These serve to balance somewhat the accounts of drudgery, illustrating the human capacity to find pleasure or relief from daily hardship.

The procession of subjects does not occur in an order that is indicative of particular emphasis or bias. In fact, the traffic flow does not direct the visitor to follow one particular path.

"The End of the Oregon Trail" panel concludes the exhibit interpretation, however. This panel supports a positive and somewhat traditional portrayal of the emigrant trek. Oregon City is noted for its importance as the end of the Oregon Trail, a point where emigrants "fanned out across the fertile Willamette Valley in search

of the new homesteads which they had come so far and sacrificed so much to find."

The ending note is obviously a positive conclusion to the story. The neutral initial setting introducing the exhibit is cemented with a similar concluding image, imbued with hints of martyrdom. Interestingly, this concept is both challenged and affirmed in subtle and overt ways throughout the exhibit. There are mixed elements of images, which is probably an accurate account of the people and the journey as a whole.

*Closing Comments* - The final comments could also be viewed as balancing accounts of Native American hardships with the recognition that in their own way, the pioneers did sacrifice and encounter difficulties. Whether or not this justifies all of the effects of their settlement is not specifically addressed, but subjects within the exhibit provide facts that would allow a visitor to ponder the issue if they were so inclined.

### *Summary*

As in any interpretation, the lens the viewers look through, formed by their own experience and beliefs, colors their perception. This exhibit includes information on subjects often addressed in modern historical discussion on Western American history, such as effects upon Native Americans, and emigrant perceptions of the landscape, and repercussions of their actions upon the

environment. Yet, it also provides traditional depictions of pioneers, and their "hearty", sacrificial traits. Women's primary role as "caretaker" is noted, but not analyzed further. The exhibit is a starting point for discussion on this issue, but does not delve deeply into the reasons behind this role.

Some subjects are more completely portrayed than others; however, as a whole, the exhibit presents material that introduces concepts that might be explored further by the viewer and offer new insight.

*Clackamas County Historical Society Museum*

211 Tumwater Drive

Oregon City, Oregon 97045-2900

(503) 655-5574

Interview with Robert Monaghan, Director, 4/16/94

*General Institutional*

*Size*

The Clackamas County Historical Society Museum hosted a small exhibit of the Oregon Trail in their 18,000 square foot facility. Approximately 400 feet of the total was devoted to the Oregon Trail; it is a component within the larger matrix of county history.

*Visitation*

The museum has been in operation since 1990. Open 362 days a year, annual attendance has been between 15,000 and 20,000. An increase in attendance was noticed during the Sesquicentennial, but the exact figure was not known.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement, to "collect, preserve and interpret the history, culture and technology of Clackamas County, Oregon", is again, very general. However, the exhibit had very specific ideas that will be addressed later in this section.

### *Funding*

The exhibit is estimated at costing between \$1500 and \$2000, and all of it was all derived from the general operating fund of approximately \$174,000; no project related grants were involved. Additions made for the Sesquicentennial did not add significantly to the overall original cost.

### *Sesquicentennial*

#### *Marketing*

During the Sesquicentennial, the exhibit was not marketed in any new or unusual way. No money is earmarked for advertising; the museum usually depends upon press releases for new exhibits and special programs or notices, such as a lecture or acquisition of a significant artifact. New exhibits are generally not advertised separately. The museum itself is listed in the OMA Pocketbook, the National Directory for the AAM, and many tourist related publications, such as the guide for the American Automobile Association (AAA).

*Programs*

During the Sesquicentennial, the CCHSM was also involved with the "passport" program that was mentioned earlier in the discussion of the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. In fact, according to Robert Monaghan, 26 to 27 museums and historical homes participated. The discount price issued to individuals and families was considered a success in increasing visitation.

The only other Sesquicentennial related program that the CCHSM sponsored was a presentation given by artist Mary Cross. Ms. Cross conducted research on pioneer quilts, and coordinated and designed a "Signature Quilt" that was signed by members of the 1993 Sesquicentennial wagon train. The quilt was commissioned by the Oregon Trail Pageant, Inc., Clackamas County, and Metropolitan Events. The quilt was presented to the Clackamas County Historical Society at the "Trail's End Finale", the previously mentioned large local community celebration, held over Labor Day weekend in 1993. This quilt was then put on display with the Oregon Trail exhibit and remained at the time of this investigation.

As stated earlier in the section of the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, numerous events throughout the community celebrated the Sesquicentennial. Robert Monaghan explained that one representative from each county coordinated with other state Sesquicentennial

members. If there were events or ideas that were wished to be associated with the Sesquicentennial and the OTCC, individuals and individual agencies were to contact the county representative. This procedure effectively streamlined communication between various entities, and allowed participation in many events, but not necessarily sponsorship of it.

The Clackamas County Historical Society published a fifth edition of a book on the Barlow Road in time for the Sesquicentennial. In addition, a 20 minute video was produced with help from a Meyer Memorial Grant. "Pioneer Woman" dramatizes a contemporary epic poem about womens' experiences on the trail. This film is available to watch in the museum, as is sold in the gift shop.

An addition to the Oregon Trail exhibit was specifically made for the Sesquicentennial, which featured a biographical sketch of a man named Muderom Crawford. Entitled "A Pioneer Profile", Muderom's job as an emigrant escort was portrayed. Hired by the federal government, Crawford led travelers to Oregon for three years; he later made a name for himself in Oregon through politics. The Clackamas County Historical Society operates his daughter's house as an historic site, so his story tied in well for the Sesquicentennial. The Crawford display opened in January 1993 and ended in early 1994.

### *Project Considerations*

The original Oregon Trail exhibit has been on display since the museum opened in 1990. The Clackamas County Historical Museum (CCHSM) chose not to heavily emphasize the Oregon Trail, since the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center was nearby. The Director, Robert Monaghan, felt that it was essential to include some part of the Oregon Trail history because of its local significance, but exhibit planners did not want to repeat what another facility already had developed.

### *Themes*

The director hoped to convey the human side of overland migration, and insight into decision-making process in the nineteenth century compared to the late twentieth century. These are manifested through the theme that the rites of passage continued throughout emigration without interruption, such as birth, death, marriage and life affairs. Attempts were made to illustrate that during a great passage, the rites of passage in part comprise it. The journey was life.

### *Methodology*

For this project, and in general, the driving force for exhibits are the artifacts. Robert Monaghan feels that artifacts are essential for an effective exhibit. Interpretation is important as well. Once the artifacts

are chosen, then ideas about themes and interpretive perspectives are generated.

Staff and volunteers involved in exhibitry use a combination of methods. Brainstorming is initiated by looking at what artifacts are available. They utilize the extensive resources in their research library, as well as outside archival sources. Themes and interpretive perspectives are established, followed by strict guidelines for text and labeling.

Robert Monaghan is proficient in label writing; he teaches workshops on the subject. He strives to keep them simple and accurate. His methods include maintaining an approximate 7th grade reading level, which is suggested by his sources as appropriate for the general public. The museum's target audience is families with children, which would require a compromise of reading standards.

No text is to go beyond 75 words, and no sentence beyond 25 words; the goal, an average of 12 words. Concise text is mandated in order to allow a person to spend a reasonable amount of time reading, and be able to walk out with new concepts.

### ***Exhibit and Content***

#### ***Format***

Since the exhibit was part of a larger framework of exhibits, the subject is focused and occupies relatively small space. Subjects dealing with issues of Native



American populations and other ethnicities are not avoided, but are treated elsewhere in the museum. The Oregon Trail is an important component of local history; yet it is presented in this museum as a chapter in a larger history.

The Oregon Trail section is preceded in order by displays of Native Americans and Trappers and Traders. The Native American section describes their presence in the area and the different cultural groups, such as Clackamas, and Molallas. General culture and subsistence are presented, and supplemented with artifacts, art and journal excerpts from later Euro-American contacts. There is no evident relationship entertained between the emigrants and Native Americans. Later exhibits in the museum, however, address other issues pertinent to Native American cultural development and survival.

The fur trapper segment is very brief, encouraging viewers to visit local historic homes to learn more.

Immediately after the Oregon Trail exhibit, diverse subjects are displayed. Up until the Oregon Trail, the presentation progressed in a linear fashion; after it, issues were primarily addressed by subject matter rather than by sequence. For example, there are exhibits on government, religion, education, diversity, industry and commerce and architecture. Native Americans comprise part of the discussion in some of these displays, thereby

avoiding the tendency to package them in one corner, as a precursor to Euro-American history.

### *Objects*

The signature quilt discussed earlier is displayed on a wall. This ties in to a nearby piece on Oregon City's "sister city", Independence, Missouri. Pioneer maps, drawings, and photographs of wagon ruts suggest the reason for such an alliance.

Artifacts are displayed near an ad "'To Emigrants'" advising what to bring for the journey. The list is made by the scout Muderom Crawford "Commanding Emigrant Escort." (Crawford, as mentioned earlier, had a more extensive display during the Sesquicentennial.) Objects on display include a kettle, lantern, jugs, violin, trunks, quilt, and a loaded wagon. The wagon contains some of the same items, along with tools, chest, a mirror, pots and pans, chair, churn, mattress and oxen yoke. A very unusual object is a chair made from leather and wood that was built in the Oregon Country, using wood from the wagon and leather from the oxen that pulled the wagon on the trail. The artifacts work well with the text and journal excerpts; they merge the formalist and analytical approaches in an effective way. The objects are not different from those in other exhibits; however, their focused use in showing rites of passage and the overall larger context of the emigrant trek, is a way of using

material culture as an expression of behaviors and self-representation at a specific point in time.

The transitional section "Call This Land Home" further uses objects to represent materials were seen as representing permanence. A rug, bedpost, chair, lamp, rifle, doll and a few books are all present.

### *Content*

*Introduction* - The Oregon Trail does not have an identifiable introduction or conclusion; it is part of a larger context. The transition to this topic occurs with a painted representation of Oregon City as it appeared in 1846.

*Subjects* - A journal excerpt from 1852 illustrates a pioneer's perspective of the Oregon Trail traveler:

The head of the family, urged on by the pioneer spirit that was his heritage from a sturdy sire, had resolved to gather his wife, his children, and such of his household effects as were portable...into wagons...and across the wilderness to the...Oregon Territory.  
-Abigail Jane Scott

This was written on the second day of the journey, as is indicated by a map of the Oregon Trail. The woman's style illustrates the perception that some emigrants held of their own undertakings: it was an admirable effort of estimable participants. A clue as to the thought processes that went into decision making during the nineteenth century is provided by this quote.

Text under the title "Overland Migration" places the compelling desire to travel west in the context of widespread human behavior. The Oregon Trail trek is admitted to be of great significance, especially for its sheer numbers of participants. Reasons given for such a journey are "as numerous as the emigrants themselves" and included hopes of financial improvement, health, freedom, politics, patriotism, abolition, and free land. Advertisements of the region are said to "appeal to the universal concepts of health, wealth, freedom or happiness." This places the emigrants in a realistic human light, without comprising the significance of the journey.

Hardships are addressed in the form of journal excerpts. These accounts illustrate the theme "rites of passage" by the many predicaments described: cholera, childbirth, accidents, weather, death, and fear of abandonment, to name a few. The environment is little noted, except for some difficult passages, as another obstacle. Rites of passage continue with more positive events: marriage, the comfort of children, and entertainment are a some examples. Heavy reliance upon these primary accounts of the trail is used to convey the main themes.

A computer program, presented as a game, underscores the decision-making process of the Oregon Trail. The interactive game was very engaging and promised to convey

what it felt like to travel the Oregon Trail and "relive one of the greatest adventures in American history." The challenges include food quests, low provisions, accidents, equipment failures and so on. The user has a lot of control over the outcome as decisions may lead to success or failure. Completing the journey is said to lead to "a new and better life in the rich, fertile, Willamette Valley." Points are given upon arrival in Oregon; a certain score allows you to enter your name on to the "list of legends." The game recreates many situations that make the trail experience very real. It makes the participant think as it entertains.

The last feature related to the Oregon Trail exhibit is a videotape that can be viewed on a television in a nearby room. The "Pioneer Woman" is about 20 minutes long, and very dramatic. The video is based on an epic poem written by Pat McMartin Enders. As the drama unfolds, it is accompanied by eerie sounds of violent weather, and for the most part, loud ominous music. The emphasis is clearly upon the repression of women. Hardships are bemoaned one after another, accompanied by loud lamenting of the need to "comply", be "cheerful", "maintain the harmony" and "be a helpmate". Very few positive moments occur, and there is a strong element of martyrdom, such as comments about the dreams women sacrificed to make the journey in order to obtain the husband's dream of land ownership. These are feelings and

issues that very well might have occurred, and they are emotional. However, it is extreme, and one-sided. For example the thunderous background with loud music intensifies as the narrator shouts: "A woman sets fire to her wagon screaming 'I never wanted to leave home'"; and similarly, a widow pitches herself and her baby into the campfire. The intense and melodramatic presentation is overkill. The narration and format detracts from the issue as a whole. There are no explanations as to why this negative interpretation of womens' experience exists, or how it relates to the Oregon Trail related exhibit.

#### **Summary**

The Sesquicentennial effect upon the Oregon Trail exhibit was minimal, the desire to keep a simple format in order not to repeat efforts at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center undoubtedly played a part.

The Oregon Trail exhibit was interesting and for its size, informative. It was not ambitious in terms of presenting a complexity of issues, which in part stems from the concise thematic organization. The Oregon Trail section was not comprehensive. It did not specifically cover many of the topics that were especially looked for; its size prevented a thorough examination of many subjects. However, the relationship to neighboring exhibits presents the Oregon Trail as one part of a rich local history.

**TYPE B = MAILED IN QUESTIONS/EXHIBIT VIEWED**

*Oregon History Center*

Oregon Historical Society

1200 SW Park Avenue

Portland, Oregon 97205

(503) 222-1741

Mail-in Interview with Dottie Harrington, Curator, 6/3/95

Curator Dottie Harrington provided written responses to identical questions asked in personal interviews with other museum curators and directors, as she was unable to meet with me for a personal or telephone interview.

*General Institutional*

*Size*

The Oregon History Center is 60,000 square feet; the "Trails to Oregon" exhibit, approximately 3,500 square feet. Exhibits in this facility are well publicized and popular and they reach a wide viewership.

*Visitation*

As part of the Oregon Historical Society and a repository for state history, the Oregon History Center's audience is large and varied. Over 100,000 people visit the museum each year. Despite evident community interest in the Sesquicentennial, no increase in visitation was noticed after the exhibit was installed. No formal evaluative techniques were employed in conjunction with this exhibit; "casual observation" was relied upon.

### *Mission Statement*

The Oregon Historical Society plays a vital role in preserving state history, which is reflected by their mission statement to "collect, preserve, research, exhibit and teach the heritage of the state." This is a wide mandate; the facility is unique in that it represents the entire state and is affiliated with many other historical organizations.

### *Funding*

The annual operating budget of \$2.5 million may appear large, but it is distributed widely. The exact figure for the "Trails to Oregon" exhibit was unavailable; however, support for the exhibit came from numerous corporation and foundation sponsors. Sixteen contributors, ranging from Ackerley Communications to Oregon Lottery Funds, are listed at the beginning and end of the exhibit. In addition, a two-sided leaflet type brochure for the exhibit was funded in part by the Governor Hotel and U.S. Bank. The number of contributors indicates that sponsors are willing to embrace the expansion of traditional ideas of the Oregon migration, which OHS exhibit featured.



## Sesquicentennial

### *Marketing*

One indication of the extent of the audience is the exhibit's advertisements. Marketing methods included OHS's own publications, other print media, and television. In addition, the entire facility is advertised through tourism pamphlets for the Portland area.

### *Programs*

In addition to the exhibit, OHS was involved with Oregon Trail projects. Lectures, demonstrations, musical programs, guided gallery tours, and Oregon Trail tours were some of the featured activities that centered on the Oregon Trail. An educational "Heritage Fair" for schools was held in May of 1993.

Some programs continued into 1994. One example was the "Trails to Oregon Symposium on the History of Migration to the Oregon Country" held in February 1994. This program featured historians Susan Armitage, Patricia Limerick, and Elliott West. Topics included expansion of the Oregon Trail topic, as well as twentieth century migrations of Asian women and families.

### *OTCC*

The Oregon History Center created their exhibit "Trails to Oregon" in response to the Sesquicentennial. The exhibit ran from March 13, 1993 to June 12, 1994. The statewide planning for the trail celebration prompted

ideas within the OHS about hosting a relevant exhibit; the Oregon Historical Society was represented on the OTCC and involved in planning related programs. A further alliance with the OTCC formed with the passage of Senate Bill 317 in 1989. Directing OHS to "administer a program for the development of the Oregon Trail as a major historical attraction" (OTCC 1994: 12), the Bill set the groundwork for inclusion of OHS from the earliest stages of planning.

### *Project Considerations*

#### *Theme*

OHS staff involved with the exhibit created their own specific thematic ideas. Curators felt a contribution could be made to the Sesquicentennial commemoration in presenting material that was not repetitive of other statewide exhibitions. The exhibit's main objective was to "expand the public's awareness of all the people who have migrated to Oregon" (Harrington 1994). The "migration to Oregon" theme attempted to incorporate the stories of many Oregonians, to relate that "we are increasingly a multicultural and multiethnic society in this state" (Harrington 1994). In doing so, OHS more completely fulfilled its mission statement by reaching a "cross-section of our citizens" (Harrington 1994).

Chet Orloff, the Director of OHS, emphasizes the distinction between "The Oregon Trail" and trails to Oregon. He states that as "the state matures

historically, the idea of the 'trail' so strongly fixed in our history and collective memory must expand" (Orloff 1992: 55).

### *Methodology*

Specific ideas for the exhibit derived initially by discussion among members of the exhibits proposal review committee. Research by three curators fleshed out ideas. Sources included books, Oregon Historical Quarterly materials, OHS archival documents and newspapers. An outline was created, and a written walkthrough of the gallery helped to determine the main concepts to be displayed in each gallery section. Subthemes were then chosen for each concept, and finally the captions and text were developed with the review of artifacts and photographs.

As a comparison, this is nearly the exact opposite chronological process that the Clackamas County Historical Society Museum follows. OHS obtains ideas first from goals the staff want to achieve with the exhibit, then look to the artifacts and photographs; CCHSM uses the artifacts to generate the ideas. Both approaches have clear ideas they wish to express, but different means of achieving them. OHS emphasized a thematic approach as opposed to chronological; CCHSM used both. The difference may be in the size of the collections at their disposal: OHS presumably would have most of the artifacts they wanted available on demand. This hypothesis does not

imply the artifacts are less important, but suggests there is less concern regarding their acquisition. The OHS methodology oriented toward concept development suggests an emphasis upon the analytical approach, adding artifacts to help convey established concepts and specific goals. The objects are important, but the ideas are paramount.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

"Trails to Oregon" has many sections. The Oregon Trail is displayed in the area entitled "Trail of Destiny." The exhibit is large, and much like the exhibit at the CCHSM the Oregon Trail is one chapter within a larger theme. Therefore, I concentrated on the Oregon Trail section, with general references to how themes related to the other exhibit sections. .

The "Trails to Oregon" exhibit combines artifacts, graphics, maps, text and excerpts from overland diaries. A central area offers an interactive computer program, and side galleries exhibit the subjects and themes.

#### *Content*

*Introduction* - The introduction to the entire exhibit offers the concept of a comprehensive look at the Oregon Trail. It affirms the Oregon Trail as an important element of regional history, because as a whole "we adopt the image and spirit of the pioneer as our own history." However, it admits that the story of human migration and

experience in Oregon includes many other pieces. The exhibit "introduces you to some of the many people, places and events that led the way to Oregon."

The "trails" of the exhibit are as follows: First Trails, Trail to Opportunity, Trail to Destiny, Trail of Steel, Trail of Promise, Trail to Work, Trail to War, Trail to Peace, Trail Today, and Trail Tomorrow.

*Subjects* - "Trail to Destiny," which features the Oregon Trail, suggests that the government promise of free land and reports of a healthy climate inspired emigrants to go west. Additionally, many people were enticed by the ideal of Oregon as "'a land of milk and honey,' dreams of health and wealth,'" by adventure, and by the "lure of gold." These draws to Oregon and the context in which they operated are conveyed through a timeline listing significant political and developmental events.

Outfitting for the journey is displayed through text, journal excerpts, and a few artifacts. A cradle made from parts of a wagon that traveled the Oregon trail is shown with a chair, fan, and coverlet.

Some artifacts are ascribed to missionary activities. The "Trail to Destiny" includes the missionaries, since it is relevant in the discussion of how "manifest destiny" encouraged Euro-American movement west. In this sense, missionaries are depicted as opportunists: saving souls was part of their assumed mandate. This required inhabiting a new land. Crosses, a Catholic Ladder, and a

missionary's robe are some materials exhibited. Saddlebags, a trunk and shoes are traced to the missionaries, but are relevant for the emigrants as well, since both populations traveled the Oregon Trail. Furthermore, the missionaries are credited with bringing about an increase in emigration to Oregon.

The phrase "promised land" is stated to have its roots in religious philosophy. "Manifest destiny", compounded the fervent belief of Euro-American entitlement to the Oregon country.

In addition to a general reference to the overland journey's length, path and difficulties, the sea route to Oregon is described as well. An 18,000 mile trip from the east coast and around Cape Horn was one route; the other through the Isthmus of Panama. Both had their dangers and hardships that were equal to, and at times excelled, those of the overland route.

This is the only exhibit to mention Ocean travel in some detail. Most museums have had such a tight focus upon their regional boundaries, that such information may not have seemed appropriate. The focus upon the overland route that traversed their area demanded the attention. However, Portland is close to destination points from travel by overland route and by sea.

A couple of artifacts, such as an old compass that belonged to a seaman that traveled to Oregon, are included, as are journal anecdotes that illustrate some

predicaments encountered along the sea voyage. John Couch writes in 1849: "'You can already see the signs of insanity marked on the faces of some of us...'" Hunger, cold, sickness, lack of movement and disease were some of the less favorable conditions.

Excerpts are relied upon throughout the "Trail to Destiny" portion of the exhibit to illustrate difficulties and emotions. One example from an overland diary portrays the fear of the unknown. This fear often translated in demonizing Native Americans and the environment. John Johnson writes in 1851: "'a small company of pilgrims a thousand miles from home surrounded by wild beasts and wild men trying to make our way to the Oregon Country.'" Although it was unclear whether or not Mr. Johnson ever actually encountered Native Americans, he had formed a definite opinion.

Native American hostilities are documented in the section as well. Dwindling resources are given as a motive for some Native American hostilities that are documented in the section.

Other contacts between Native Americans and Euro-Americans are found in the "First Trails" section of the exhibit, where Native Americans are discussed in depth. The journey that their ancestors underwent approximately 15,000 years ago is traced; their cultural development acknowledged. The clues left behind by past generations of Native Americans are presented.

In terms of the context of the Oregon Trail, encounters between cultures are provided from a Native American perspective as well.

We were like deer. They were like grizzly bears. We were a small country; their country was large. We were contented to let things remain as the Great Spirit Chief had made them; they were not, and would change the rivers and mountains if they did not suit them.

- Chief Joseph

The text in this exhibit states that contact with Euro-Americans "brought the beginning of dramatic, often devastating, changes to Indian culture." Despite this fact, "the legends and the traditions of the first people live on" in Native American culture today, as they continue to "strive to maintain their heritage."

Issues related to Native Americans and the effects of Euro-American emigration are found in other "Trail" sections of the exhibit. For example, in "Trails to War", the nineteenth century Indian Wars are briefly portrayed. Although there is an entire section dedicated to Native Americans, concepts in the entire exhibit interrelate to form a bigger picture of human migration and experience in Oregon.

Subjects looked at in other sections, or "Trails" of the exhibit, such as the environment, women and other ethnicities, are addressed throughout the exhibit.

Environmental issues in "Trails to Opportunity" note the effects on natural resources because of shift in



economies. The change from a subsistence based economy of Native Americans, to participation in a world economy is a direct result of Euro-American movement West. This discussion is the most obvious environmental connection to the Oregon Trail. There are, as stated earlier, other aspects of the natural world in other "trail" sections of the exhibit. The only clear mention in the "Trail of Destiny" section on the Oregon Trail relates to the land's bounty for Native Americans and Euro-Americans.

Women and other ethnicities are portrayed in a validating and important way. They are not separated in isolated topics; rather they are part of the "trail" themes, and part of web of life and history of Oregon. The advantages of this approach are that it avoids the impression of "token" appreciation for, and the need to "prove" that their part in history was an important one. The subjects and themes chosen imply that these populations are fundamental parts of a complex history.

This is especially important for the Oregon Trail, since the experience spotlights Euro-Americans. Providing equal emphasis on other episodes and broader themes puts the Oregon Trail into perspective: the Euro-American journey to Oregon was significant and important, but not the pinnacle or defining moment of our society.

Historic effects of the Oregon Trail, are found throughout the exhibit. Directly asserted as such are comments such as "Farms spread out across the valley,

towns grew - 'Americanization' of the Oregon Country was well underway." The entire exhibit investigates forms of livelihood and contemporary populations. The impacts of the Euro-American migration are part of a larger matrix of human society and culture. The exhibit as a whole discussed are the many diverse peoples and cultures who have followed or blazed a physical or metaphorical trail to Oregon.

*Closing statements* - closing statements relate the trails to the need to make wise decisions in the present. How we as Oregonians choose to deal with current issues will define the "Trail Tomorrow."

In the conclusion, the Sesquicentennial is considered a chance to:

re-examine our roots, take an honest look at our accomplishments and our failures...The lessons of the past can give direction to the future if we listen...many...issues need decisions today based on acceptance of inevitable growth of a multicultural society in the 21st century.

The Oregon Trail includes "successes and failures." The Sesquicentennial, in this sense, is an opportunity to recognize them, learn from them, and move forward.

It should be mentioned that in the same facility, there is a permanent Oregon History Gallery, which includes a small section on the Oregon Trail. Generally, it uses more dominant artifacts than the "Trails to Oregon" exhibit and focuses upon the physical aspects of

the journey, for example, large wagons are associated with items that were taken on the trek. Bottles, dishes, guns, knives and other essentials are displayed. Material culture is analyzed, and the decisions and planning that went into considerations of what was taken, and what stayed behind. Text also focuses upon the route followed, and individual decisions about preparations and organization of the trip.

An image of a family enduring tough travel is conveyed in the following excerpt:

...men, women and children braved the same dangers and shared the hardships of the arduous westward trek. Stouthearted, they made the long journey at the slow pace of their cow.

Not much insight is given into the larger meaning or significance of the Oregon Trail; it appears to be more of a visual display.

In the permanent gallery, a much larger section on Native Americans is adjacent to the Oregon Trail section. Many artifacts are displayed, and text affirms the antiquity of their culture and how "Their lives have changed to accommodate outsiders and newcomers..." The Oregon Trail and Native American exhibits in the permanent gallery are not as thematically oriented as the "Trails to Oregon" exhibit. However, it is aesthetically intriguing.

### *Summary*

The "Trails to Oregon" exhibit reflected a real desire to address issues that are part of contemporary western history. By including a section on the Oregon Trail, it accomplished the goal of incorporating exhibitry for the Sesquicentennial; it did so in a format that expressed the Oregon Trail as one story in the larger theme of migration to Oregon. The goal was to avoid "Trail idolatry" and to concentrate upon "the various ways that various people (including indigenous inhabitants) came to Oregon, and the marks they made upon it when they got here" (OHQ 1993b:118). The title itself was specifically chosen to broaden discussion of the Oregon Trail in order to include more people and experiences (OHQ 1993b:118).

The additional exhibit in the gallery provided more visual flavor of the actual overland experience; the exhibit is a permanent fixture that reflects the public's ongoing interest in the Oregon Trail. The "Trails to Oregon" exhibit provided an opportunity for OHS to expand conceptually upon ideas that were not as evident in the gallery.

**TYPE C = TELEPHONE INTERVIEW/EXHIBIT VIEWED****Hood River County Museum**

Port Marina Park

Hood River, Oregon 97031

(503)386-6772

Telephone Interview with Madeline Edwards,  
Chairman/Director, 5/6/94

The Hood River County Museums's exhibit on the Oregon Trail was very small; more was added in April of 1993, during the Sesquicentennial, but was dismantled the following October.

During the course of the telephone interview it was revealed that much of the exhibit remained up; a contradiction to earlier statements. Thus a trip was made to view the exhibits. Since the telephone interview had already been conducted, a deviation from the standard personal interview/exhibit review method was necessary.

***General Institutional******Size***

The exhibit is approximately 100 square feet; it is small, and part of an introductory/orientation area of the museum. The Director did not consider Hood River to be a significant part of the Oregon Trail because even though the water route down the Columbia from The Dalles passed Hood River, it was not considered a stopping point for the journey. However, settlement of the immediate area by Euro-Americans began in 1854, while the trail was still in

use. The Oregon Trail is relevant in terms of bringing new populations to the area.

#### *Visitation*

Annual visitation is generally around 6,000, and the museum is open from April until October. During the Sesquicentennial, visitation numbers actually dropped. The 4,000 square foot facility caters to the tourist audience, and to local schools. There are no formal evaluative techniques for the museum, however a comment book receives many positive comments for the museum as a whole.

#### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement uses routine phraseology: "to discover, collect, preserve, display any material which may help establish or illustrate the history of the county."

#### *Funding*

The annual budget for 1993 was \$18,700, and very little was spent on the Oregon Trail exhibit; the only cost was the minimal amount needed to make labels from the computer. No special constructions were made, nor were there investments in materials.

## *Sesquicentennial*

### *Marketing*

Local newspapers mention major undertakings of the museum, such as their traveling exhibits, but the Oregon Trail exhibit was not such a project. The museum is listed in tourist based magazines and publications, but the budget does not allow many advertising expenditures. No special announcements were made for the Oregon Trail exhibit.

### *Programs/OTCC*

The reason for having an Oregon Trail exhibit at all was because of the statewide Sesquicentennial. In general, projects ideas for exhibits simply come from the Board who "keep theirs ears and eyes open." Ms. Edwards stated that they are not a "great big museum who put special emphasis on a certain topic." No additional programs or activities were pursued, and the museum did not become greatly involved with the OTCC or their efforts, although the museum received OTCC general publications such as *The Trail Marker*, and they informed the OTCC of their plans. Neither were other museums or facilities part of the exhibit. The museum has no future plans related to the Oregon Trail.

## *Project Considerations*

### *Theme*

Ms. Edwards said the exhibit did not have a theme; the ideas were simply to convey the history of Hood River Valley. The only theme evident was to show the chronological history of the local area. To this end, a timeline was featured, beginning in 1805 and ending in 1859. The purpose was to indicate the overall developments of the Oregon Trail and the era, and to show how Hood River county fit in.

### *Methodology*

People involved with the exhibit use their own heads, and when sources are needed, books and records in their own files are used. Written ideas are edited by Ms. Edwards. Other than these general procedures, there is not a detailed system followed for exhibit text and interpretation.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

The exhibit is featured near the entry, most of it along a wall.

#### *Objects*

There is a case with artifacts, which includes books, such as Prescription Relief of Cholera Symptoms; clothing, such as a bonnet and a beaded purse brought over the



trail; and cooking utensils, such as pots, pans, and a breadboard. The chronological history is displayed on the wall above this case. The artifacts used were primarily those that people would have carried with them over the trail; all objects were from their own collection.

### *Content*

There is no introduction or conclusion, and very little interpretation. The only major text was that from a poem, and a timeline. Brief accounts are given with some artifacts, such as a short family biography.

Events related to Native Americans presented in the timeline are disease and violent incidents. Epidemics such as the "Great Fever" in 1829-1832, and the 1847 outbreak of smallpox are mentioned. The treaty with the Wasco tribe in 1855 is listed, followed by a confrontation between Euro-Americans and Native Americans in 1856. The "Battle of the Cascades" resulted in hangings of local chiefs without trial. In addition, the murders at Whitman Mission are mentioned.

The beginning of the timeline has accounts of archaeological finds of Native American material. Discoveries indicated that Native Americans may have been in the area over 10,000 years. A large village is said to have been located nearby, in the heart of Hood River.

Similarly, the natural environment has brief entries on the timeline, but no hints as to the larger implications. In 1854 the first seeds for the fruit of

the Hood River Valley arrived from the lower Columbia River; no mention of the changes introduced species made on the native environment are insinuated or pursued. A list of events does not present interpretive themes. The exhibit used an encyclopedic approach, without attempts to convey more than isolated facts. The poem is the only other source of information. More clues are given about perceptions of the pioneers, as well as the museum's view of the larger meaning of the trail.

The poem is entitled "History of Hood River Valley in Oregon" and was written in 1968 by Lois Morgan. The poem is six stanzas long, and is celebratory in nature.

Pioneers are described favorably. "Plucky wives and cheerful men", "courageous folk" and "noble soul[s]" are honored for their sacrifices in coming west. The natural environment is "the untamed West", a "wilderness quite vast" with resources of timber, "rich land", fish and pure mountain water. The pioneers are esteemed for acquiring this land and rich resources for present generations. The result of their labor was the development of Hood River County.

*This county is the heritage  
That we were left in love and trust.  
It's more than sixty years of age.  
Establishment was right and just.  
The harvest reaped on virgin sod  
We treasure more than souvenirs.  
They willed us faith and hope in God.  
Thanks to Hood River's pioneers!*

Although the exhibit is not concept driven, the ideas this poem suggest cannot be ignored. There is a strong focus upon heritage. The gratitude felt toward the pioneers is akin to worship of patron saints. The land was "virgin" and wild and rich, and ready! There is no mention of Native American inhabitants - not even as a backdrop.

The images reflected in the poem are the type that are often criticized by contemporary western historians as discussed in Chapter Three. This is not meant to accuse the author of the poem or the museum of bad intentions; criticism is not a judgement on people who admire ancestors, but intends to point out an oversimplification. Denying complexity and depth to the emigrants and the Oregon Trail demeans it for all of those involved. Obviously, leaving out facts such as the Native American presence would offend many people; but leaving out any of the complexities of the trail hurts the case for pioneers as well. Excessive, uncritical praise creates a flat, mythological characterization of the emigrants which fictionalizes them and demeans their actual experiences.

This poem was not the exclusive feature of the exhibit. However, with little other text, it indicates that the designers of the display considered its ideas important. The poem was written in 1968, a time when many attitudes and values were questioned in general and regarding western settlement; this poem affirms the traditional view. The choice to display the material,

especially with little other information, is assumed to illustrate the overall orientation of the exhibit designers.

Although the entire exhibit was not up at the time of this visit, Madeline Edwards did not indicate that any other text was involved in the exhibit.

Without a stated, implied, or even considered, theme, and the lack of real integration with text, the exhibit must be considered formalist in nature. Little interpretation is attempted, or apparently deemed necessary. This shows the danger in formalist oriented exhibits: ideas that are presented through text can insinuate that is the intent of the exhibit as a whole whether they are or not.

The museum has many more exhibits, including an extensive display of Native American artifacts adjacent to the Oregon Trail. The exhibits are self-contained though, and are not integrated. Therefore, they were not relevant in discussion of the Oregon Trail exhibit.

### *Summary*

The exhibit was small and focused upon artifacts and a chronological explanation of relevant facts regarding the Oregon Trail and subsequent Euro-American settlement of the area. Although formalist in nature, the exhibit appeared to affirm traditional aspects of the Oregon Trail. Formalist exhibits would predictably be oriented

towards traditional depictions, because they are not as concerned with interpretation of any kind; by not including new concepts, the exhibits are more prone to lead the audience to draw traditional conclusions. In addition, the poem that was very traditionalist in nature was the only major text.

*Washington County Museum*

17677 NW Springville Road

Portland, Oregon 97229

(503) 645-5353

Telephone Interview with Katy Hill, Curator, 5/3/94

The Washington County Museum created a traveling exhibit for the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial. The exhibit targeted the general public of the county; it toured libraries and community centers throughout the area, and even was taken to one location in neighboring Multnomah County. It was on display at its home facility in February 1993, and traveled to other locations throughout the remainder of the Sesquicentennial until the end of 1994.

*General Institutional*

*Visitation*

The exhibit was successful judging by the visitation numbers when it was on display at the WCM's own facility. During February of 1993, visitation numbers increased. Although there are no formal evaluative techniques, Ms.

Hill directly attributes this increase to the attraction of the exhibit.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement of the museum is to:

...to preserve and interpret the history of the county, creating knowledge of the past to link and enhance knowledge and understanding of the present, and present it in a diverse and educational format.

Although the "history of the county" is a broad mandate, the statement specifies some overall goals. In other words, there is a reason for preservation and interpretation - an educational purpose. History is a tool for creating an understanding of larger issues that affect the present. This is the only museum in the sample to have a mission statement that penetrates beyond the boundary of a physical region, and that incorporates integrative concepts of education.

### *Funding*

Two grants generated the total income for this exhibit. A Collins Foundation grant provided \$4500 in funds, and the OTCC, \$2500. The annual total operating budget for their facility was \$132,000 during 1993, and decreased to \$120,000 for 1994. The monies acquired for the Oregon Trail project were attributed to part of the difference.

### *Sesquicentennial*

The Sesquicentennial offered an opportunity to develop a project that quenched the thirst of the public for information on pioneers, while concurrently educating them in a way that offered connections to the present.

### *Marketing/OTCC*

The museum developed a packet that provided educational ideas for the organizations where the exhibit traveled. The OTCC provided funds and featured the exhibit in their publications.

The OMA Pocket Guide listed the museum, but the exhibit itself was only advertised through direct mailings to organizations that museum staff thought would potentially be interested in displaying it. I assume that the facilities that hosted the exhibit were responsible for their own marketing.

### *Programs*

Sesquicentennial related activities included an exhibit opening for members, and a living history presentation. The living history was entitled "Trails to Oregon: A Living Heritage." The program included stories, songs, and dramatizations. The program was funded and organized through the Oregon Council for the Humanities.

## *Project Considerations*

### *Theme*

The goal of the exhibit related to the mission statement and the theme. The overall goal was to relate the settlement process of the county to the present day through profiling early residents of the county. The theme of the exhibit was that through individual people, the gamut of experience of the Oregon Trail can be expressed.

### *Methodology*

According to Curator Katy Hill, the exhibit was developed because of the statewide Sesquicentennial celebration. In addition, many people express interest in pioneers, and are eager to obtain information. The exhibit also fit in with the history curriculum of local students. Another important reason was the availability of funding.

A traveling exhibit was chosen in part because of stipulations of the grants. The Collins Foundation grant was to be for the acquisition of a portable system; the OTCC grant was for the fabrication. Additionally, past success with exhibits in this format influenced the decision.

The museum considers several general factors when creating projects: they must fall within the parameters of the mission statement, and the collections must be able to



support it. Those involved also try to develop innovative ideas and methods to interest people.

The development of the exhibit text followed the museum's usual procedures. Katy Hill is basically a solo act. She researches, writes and edits, with occasional help from other staff or volunteers. For this exhibit the museum's own research library provided much of the materials, with supplemental information derived from "Oregon Historical Quarterly" and standard early Oregon Histories. Special information was gathered from the Pacific University Campus, and photographs from OHS.

### *Exhibit and Content*

#### *Format*

I viewed the exhibit while it was on display at the Beaverton City Library in Beaverton, Oregon. The exhibit is twenty linear feet long, and is a wall with both sides used for display. The display is two-dimensional: it is comprised of photographs, a map, drawing and text. This format was chosen to reduce its vulnerability during transit.

#### *Content*

*Introduction* - Because it is compact, it is concise. The exhibit provides biographical sketches of nine individuals who traveled the trail in 1843 and settled in Washington County. The introduction states that the exhibit examines the Oregon trail through these

individuals and their "reasons for coming, experiences on the trail, life as early settlers and legacies..."

*Subjects* - General reasons for making the choice to come West were "as complex as the individuals who came." This echoes other exhibits and writings and avoids stereotyping and over-generalization; treating the pioneers as individuals rather than as a homogenous group.

A sample of possible incentives is described, and include opportunity, adventure, health, patriotism, perceptions of Oregon as "Eden", and manifest destiny. Adherence to the dogma of manifest destiny was based upon the belief that acquiring personal property was more than self-serving; that it "coincided with national interest in making the northwest a part of the United States and extending the domain of Christian Civilization."

Although each emigrant undoubtedly had his or her own reasons for traveling the Oregon Trail, the list of possible motivations provides an understanding of the cultural context within which they were operating.

Six men and three women are profiled, some of which are couples. The story of one family describes the motivation for coming to Oregon. Otis Brown traveled the trail to Oregon before his wife, Tabitha, and their children. His reason for leaving home was the fear of cholera in Missouri, and the "promise of free land in a new and unspoiled country." He settled a claim, and traveled back to Missouri to bring the family to the

Willamette Valley. The experiences of both the husband and wife are described; the journey forced trials on both. For example, Otis Brown's return trip to Missouri resulted in capture by Native Americans. Although released after one night, survival was difficult since horses and provisions were taken by the captors.

Tabitha Brown's journal describing the struggle of fatigue and starvation, provides an interesting account of a woman's experience. Otis had reached the Willamette Valley ahead of the rest of the family. Tabitha was in a desperate situation, with no food and little prospect of aid. "'I was obliged to ride ahead as a pilot, hoping to overtake four or five wagons that left camp the day before.'" The group eventually prevailed, with the aid of her husband who met them with provisions after hearing of their plight. Tabitha adds "'through all my sufferings and crossing the plains, I not once sought relief by the shedding of tears...'" This confession illustrates the "stoic" quality so often admired in the pioneers. It also demonstrates that women had tribulations that necessitated them to assert themselves out of a traditional gender role of the nineteenth century.

Emigrants are shown to have personality flaws as well as virtues. A woman named Luceta Zackery traveled with her family, which included her ill-regarded father, "'Old Zackery.'" An 1843 journal excerpt exemplifies his disposition: "'Old Zackary...has been excluded from

Martin's company for defrauding a young man...and throwing him off in the wilderness." Clearly, this is not an admirable man. This example shows that emigrants were individuals, that they were, as the exhibit states, "just people with both good and bad traits."

Luceta's father's poor judgement was also responsible for a near catastrophe. The incident offers commentary regarding relationships between Oregon Trail travelers and Native Americans. Sara Hill's journal describes the incident. Because "'Old Zackery'" overpacked the wagon, ignoring the protests of others in his party, the load capsized while crossing a river. After Luceta and her sister, sitting atop the pack, fell into the river, two Native American men dramatically rescued them.

Sara Hill's story has other entries of a similar theme. While passing through another treacherous stretch of river along the Columbia, a Native American was their guide. "We went through like a bird in the air," she writes.

Photographs of a Wasco Native American is displayed with the caption "the 1843 emigrants were indebted to the assistance of Native Americans especially in the voyage down the Columbia River."

The effects of emigration and settlement upon Native Americans are listed as main contributors to the "Indian Wars." Wiley Cave, a single man who settled in Washington County area, complains that "'all the land was taken'" by

the time he was old enough to obtain a land claim. Native American hardships much graver than Wiley Cave experienced, are presented in this section. The aggressions of Native Americans are viewed as a direct result of the continual "encroachment of settlers on traditional Native American land, treaty violations and...the discovery of gold." Ironically, Wiley fought in the "Indian Wars." The very condition of declining land and personal opportunity that Wiley criticized, was one he helped create for Native Americans. Incidentally, no wars occurred in Washington County; the exhibit suggests that the decimation local native people by disease extinguished any threat of conflict.

Accounts of the Oregon Trail's offerings vary. After being drawn to Oregon by the sheer excitement and adventure it promised, David and Louise Lennox and their large family settled in Oregon, and were quite pleased with the results. Their profiles praise the natural environment profusely. In a letter David Lennox wrote in 1855 he exclaims that he lives in "one of the best valleys of the world" and describes the scenery as "the most captivating on earth." The trees are also remarked upon: "you see the green fir, pine, cedar, hemlock, ewe and various species of pine, towering into the heavens, and many have I seen 35 feet in circumference." Accompanying text asserts that this kind of description was partly responsible for the reputation of Oregon as an "Eden."

A single man featured expressed a different reaction. Henry Sewell drove a team in an 1843 wagon train in exchange for his board. His experience left him "'satisfied with the country'" but not ecstatic. He writes in 1844: "...I do not think that any person, having a good home in the United States, would be justified in crossing the mountains for all that is to be gained here." This account reveals an assessment rarely heard in Oregon Trail recollections.

Religion was also an important factor in Sewell's experience. Religion is said to have impacted many settlers' lives, and churches helped to bond communities and "offered help in surviving the remoteness of...early settlements."

### *Summary*

Although this analysis did not mention every person profiled in the exhibit, the major concepts are described. The exhibit relates a range of experiences of Washington County emigrants.

The variety of personality traits of emigrants are shown through actual examples derived from journals. Hardships on the trail were real, and inspired some of the popularized classic renowned traits of emigrants. Like the people that came, the reasons for making the journey varied as well.

Native Americans' actions are revealed through the eyes of travelers, and their displacement is recognized.

Using the biographies, facts are presented from the emigrants' viewpoint; narrative commentary reserves judgement on the emigrants or their actions. This method allows the viewer to formulate their own conclusions, while being informed of the general background and experiences that may have influenced emigrant decisions and perceptions. The order of some accounts illuminates some cause and effect of events, such as the relationships between emigrant land acquisition and Native American aggressions.

The exhibit is very analytical in nature. The primary visuals are photographs. Prints of most featured emigrants are displayed as well pictures relevant to actual settlement, such as schools, a steam plow, gold panning, a factory, store, and street scenes. No artifacts are exhibited, leaving most of the interpretation to rely upon the text. This text addresses a variety of topics that fit most closely into a contemporary historical mode; they admit a complexity to settlement issues, and address topics that are becoming established familiar in historical thought.

This exhibit combined the Sesquicentennial appeal with the museum's mission statement "to create knowledge of the past and to link and enhance knowledge of the present." The overland trek to Oregon served as an

opportunity for this museum to foster understanding of the Oregon Trail through experiences of local historical people.

**TYPE D = TELEPHONE INTERVIEW ONLY**

**Union County Museum**

311 South Main St.

Union, Oregon 97883

(503)562-6003

Interview with Kathleen Almquist, Exhibit Director, 5/2/94

***General Institutional***

The Union County Museum hosted an Oregon Trail exhibit through their 1993 season, May 9 until October 13. The Sesquicentennial Celebration was the principal factor in the creation of the exhibit.

***Size***

The museum is very small, with 6,000-7,000 total square feet. The exhibit was about 50 linear feet.

***Visitation***

The exhibit and Sesquicentennial related community events were considered the reason for a sharp increase in visitation. Numbers jumped from 1500-2,000 in past years, to over 3,000 in 1993.

**Mission Statement**

The mission statement is to "depict and interpret the aspects and lives of all the people of the area." These



objectives are broad, but incorporate a desire to expand beyond the traditional boundaries of exclusive Euro-American experience (Almquist 1994: personal communication).

### *Funding*

Only about 300 dollars was spent on the exhibit and its fabrication. All of this money came out of the general operating fund, which was about \$14,000 in 1993.

### *Sesquicentennial*

#### *Marketing*

The museum was listed in the OMA Pocket Guide, the American Association for State and Local History publication, and in materials of the American Automobile Association. Advertisement for this exhibit included local distribution of posters, an ad in an arts magazine, and news releases, including the radio in La Grande. The museum also featured it in their own newsletter.

#### *Programs*

Two wagon trains came through Union: one that was organized by the six states of the Oregon Trail, as well as the wagon train officially sanctioned by the OTCC of the Sesquicentennial. The museum coordinated a dinner for the Six-State wagon train with marginal results. Kathleen Almquist criticized the wagon train as being unorganized.

In addition, Cycle Oregon brought in over 400 people to the area in one day.

The programs and the Sesquicentennial in general are what initiated the exhibit. "Everyone was doing something" and an exhibit seemed appropriate (Almquist 1994: personal communication). Since their collections held relevant materials, it was considered feasible. The exhibit's goal was to "pragmatically enhance the local Sesquicentennial Celebration."

#### *OTCC*

The relationship with the OTCC was limited to general communication. The museum received the OTCC newsletter, and Jill Thorne, the Director of the OTCC and also a nearby resident, kept the museum informed about the Sesquicentennial wagon train.

#### *Project Considerations*

##### *Theme*

The exhibit's theme was to relate the experience of the local geography and topography of the area while on the Oregon Trail. Part of this attempt was to chronicle and interpret the lives of the people that crossed the trail. A "sprinkling" of diary excerpts revealed the impressions of attractive Native Americans they encountered, as well as a beautiful landscape. The physical land and people that inhabit it easily fits into the parameters of the mission statement, which emphasizes

the objective of representing all people that have been part of the area.

### *Methodology*

The method of research and text writing indicate a familiarity with interpretive techniques. Sources, including using local family manuscripts and books, were varied, and facts were verified and supplemented by local organizations and a history intern. At times, professional help, such as advice from an archaeologist, or comments from local retired history professors, was sought.

The text is influenced by techniques familiar in Tilden's models (Tilden 1977). After critiquing each other's work, museum exhibit designers try to relate interpretation to familiar cognitive models. For example, a wagon was exhibited that had a very high center gravity and was known to be precarious in its day: in the text it was likened to a "Suzuki Samari" of today, a vehicle with a similar reputation. Text was created to reach different types of audiences: catchy phrases were used to attract people, especially the "grazers that just go by quickly" with specifics added for those that like to know more.

### **Exhibit and Content**

#### *Format/Objects*

Objects affect the design and development process; museum staff manipulate them and experiment with the

design to formulate relationships with objects that might at first not be apparent. The exhibit format used a couple of eight foot cases, one fifteen foot case, and one small case. They used artifacts primarily from their own collection that came over the trail. Examples include: a big, black cauldron, a spinning wheel, quilts, tool chest, carpenter tools, blacksmith tools, oxen yokes, sodbuster plow, bonnets and dishes. Laundry related objects were also displayed, to correspond with a diary excerpt that described how filthy the emigrants became while on the journey.

The exhibit employed a format that suggests an analytical approach combined with artifact use, which would be a positive assessment according to Michael Ettema, the creator of "analytical and "formalist" terms (Ettema 1989). Since the exhibit was not personally viewed, it is impossible to discern the degree of interpretation or the actual layout.

### *Content*

The title was "Into the Grande Rounde (sic)." Part of the exhibit is based on emigrant accounts of the nearby descent, said to be one of the most difficult of the trail. The area was very scenic as they passed through, but emigrants pushed on to the Willamette Valley. Euro-American settlement began in the 1860's and 1870's, after the discovery of gold in Baker Valley. The exhibit tried to relate the subsequent geographical changes that have

occurred with cultivation and increased population. For example, the area was once known as the "valley of the cottonwoods": most of these trees no longer exist. Attempts were made to link the relationship between geography and people.

Additionally, "Treasures of the Trail" showed the care taken in packing for the journey.

### *Summary*

According answers I obtained in the interview, the natural environment was the central subject of the trail exhibit. It is unclear to what degree Native Americans and women were discussed. However, the theme is staff's intent to include all people and suggests that they may have been present. This exhibit is similar to the one at OHS, in that the main ideas encompass such subjects without the need to separate them out.

The interview described exhibit development skills and processes that suggest the museum makes a great effort to create meaningful exhibits. Combined with the theme and concepts developed, the all-volunteer, low-budget, organization was ambitious in its Oregon Trail exhibit plans.

This exhibit was part of the Union County Museum's goal to create more engaging and interpretive oriented exhibits. Ms. Almquist said that they are currently in a transition period; goals are to include more natural and

multi-cultural subjects. Plans for the future include a shift of perspectives away from a Euro-American centered facility to one that includes all people. To this end, a grant received from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla will help create an exhibit on the habitat and early inhabitants of the Umatilla River basin. The museum plans to become more involved in cultural tourism and look more at cultural and ecological concepts in the coming year.

There are no immediate Oregon Trail related plans for the future. Ms. Almquist feels that topics shouldn't wait to be displayed just in the big years. She states that subjects about the West, western identity, West vs. East, and geographical change are ubiquitous and important to address continually. These comments indicate an awareness of what discussions are prominent in current Western American history. Their museum is seen as a means to communicate information of regional history, but to also contribute discussion on the larger issues and concepts of the American West.

The Sesquicentennial allowed an attempt to do so while still in their transitional stage. The exhibit addressed issues, such as geographical change, while concurrently relating Oregon Trail history.

Eastern Oregon Museum

3rd and Wilcox

Haines, Oregon 97833

(503)856-3233

Telephone Interview with Evelyn Fisher, Curator, 4/25/94

*General Institutional/Funding*

The Eastern Oregon Museum had a very small exhibit related to the Oregon Trail. On display from April 15 1993 to March 15 1994, the exhibit did not require any funding. The museum had a \$14,000 budget in 1993 and has 6,000 square feet. Evelyn Fisher described the museum as "homey" with a lot of "reminiscences" and nothing "fancy".

The little or no money spent on the display did not adversely affect visitation; in fact, it increased dramatically in 1993. The 4,000 annual audience in 1992 was said to skyrocket to 20,000. These numbers helped to generate more income for the facility. This was a huge increase, considering they did not advertise the museum or exhibit, except in the OMA Pocket Guide, and in general brochures.

*Sesquicentennial*

The museum had little or no contact with the OTCC. The only evidence of communication with Sesquicentennial related agencies was with the Baker City of Commerce, which played a part in some local Sesquicentennial-related events. The museum was involved in an extension group organized out of Baker that talked about what tourism

would mean to Oregon, and I judged this contact to have influenced the volunteers' decision to have an Oregon Trail exhibit.

The reason given for displaying Oregon Trail related material was because of the activities in Baker City and the attraction of the Interpretive Center nearby. In addition, the emphasis upon tourism was a factor, as well as the general Sesquicentennial Celebration throughout the state. The city itself hosted some Oregon Trail related events, but the museum was not involved.

#### *Project Considerations/Exhibit and Content*

The exhibit seems to have had little or no interpretation, as there were no underlying goals, overall ideas or concepts. In fact, Ms. Fisher was not sure if the exhibit had a title. She said the museum was just showing artifacts along with an old map.

The exhibit occupied a size foot by three foot area on top of a showcase. Artifacts displayed were a wagon, sugar buckets, oxen shoes and collar. School children had also made a paper mache oxen team that was displayed with the items.

The only text was the inclusion of a laminated newspaper article from 1933. It was a recollection from an 80 year-old man about when his trip across the Oregon Trail as a seven year-old boy. No labels were used



either, although it is a project the museum volunteers are working on, since a computer recently became available.

The exhibit, from the description supplied, was formalist. The objects were the only means to tell the Oregon Trail story, and no supplemental information was given. It was more of a simple display than an exhibit.

Ms. Fisher stated that there was no curator, just a group of about sixteen volunteers who completely run everything. For this reason, most items are already in showcases, and they don't generally change.

A few of the items remained at the time of the interview; but there are no Oregon Trail related plans for the future.

### *Summary*

The impression from this telephone interview was of a very small exhibit that did not have any specific goals except to display objects related to the Oregon Trail. There were no thematic considerations or interpretive goals. It could have been with the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center nearby, that there was not much need felt for a major exhibit, however this is speculation. The organizational structure of the museum did not appear to feel that an interpretive exhibit on the Oregon Trail was necessary.

*Canby Historical Museum*

888 NE 4th Avenue

P.O. Box 160

Canby, Oregon 97013

(503) 266-9421

Telephone interview with George Carr/Herman Bergman, head museum volunteers, 5/3/1994

I conducted the interview with the two people that were the leaders of the museum organization; there was not any one person at this facility, run by volunteers, that was considered the director or curator. George Carr and Herman Bergman were the closest I could come to such titles.

*General Institutional/Funding*

The entire museum is very modest, with only between 800 and 1000 square feet. Visitation in 1993 was 850 people, which did not show any particular increase from prior years. The 1993 budget was near \$10,000; no information was available for earlier years, however, the only expenditure for the exhibit was the purchase of USGS maps.

The museum's mission statement is to "preserve the history of the Canby area", which is very general. The exhibit relates to this statement by its focus upon the Barlow Road, which went through the area.

*Sesquicentennial*

The museum wanted to be a part of the Oregon Trail celebration, and the exhibit was created especially for

that purpose. Museum volunteers had some contact with the OTCC, but not much. The museum's participation in the museum passport program in Clackamas County, along with the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, and the Clackamas County Historical Society Museum, was their biggest related project.

### **Project Considerations/Exhibit and Content**

The Barlow Road was the stated theme. The only text consisted of labels and some captions; the exhibit was considered too small for much else. The exhibit as described in the telephone interview was similar to that at the Eastern Oregon Museum. It consisted of just one display case that had charts, maps, and some photographs. In general, this had little or no interpretation. It could not be classified as formalist or analytical because no artifacts were mentioned as a component.

### ***Summary***

The purpose was to become involved with the Sesquicentennial with what resources they had available. I was unable to obtain a lot of detail from my interview, and my impression was that the exhibit was so small that it did not convey concepts of traditional or contemporary history; it was a display that had inconclusive content.

## CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### GENERAL

The museums and interpretive centers along the Oregon Trail that comprised my sample varied a great deal from each other: the size of institution, funding, organizational methods and procedures, and exhibit considerations, were all diverse. Likewise, their responses to and interpretations of the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial also differed, as discovered through exhibit evaluation and interviews.

### Procedural Strengths and Limitations

The limitation of the study was that only one staff member or volunteer was interviewed, thereby creating a dependence upon a single perception of the exhibit and its development. However, care was taken to speak to the appropriate person; the director or curator in all but two cases. The interpretive director was interviewed at the NHOTIC, and the two lead volunteers at the Canby Historical Museum, which had no designated director or curator. I judged these individuals as the most appropriate to answer my questions.

The strength of the investigation was that the 1993 Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial was a single, time-bound event, and the sample was established by the same criteria. These factors allowed me to isolate possible

other influences upon the exhibits and their interpretations.

### Interpretive Goals

One goal of historical representations and displays is to provoke people to think about current events and culture and seek relationships to the past. By finding patterns and expanding our thinking, people are better equipped to fully comprehend situations and to make wiser decisions in the present. Not all museums, however, see their function to serve this ideal. For those museums, a traditional approach, perhaps involving no interpretation at all, suffices.

The American Association of Museum (AAM) standards and objectives seek to educate the public in a dynamic and profound way. Publications such as Excellence and Equity (Hirzy 1992) set goals for museums. The AAM sets high standards for museums, encouraging them to reflect society's pluralism and to educate and attract diverse audiences (Hirzy 1992: 3). These guidelines would seem to foster an allegiance with contemporary western American historical thought, because they too strive to address complexities and diversity.

Elements that were examined in the study of museum exhibits on the Oregon Trail to determine overall interpretation included subject matter and theoretical background and development. Subject matter basically

looked at the topics and themes included in text and objects. It was difficult to determine the interpretive framework when little or no text was present, but concepts of analytical and formalist theories were helpful in understanding the overall orientation of an exhibit.

### Analytical and Formalist Approaches

I used analytical and formalist approaches to help categorize exhibits and understand whether or not they even considered interpretation an important part of their exhibit. The approaches, as discussed in chapter four, are based upon artifact use and the amount of interpretation. This study found that all the exhibits with contemporary western historical themes used more of an analytical approach than formalist, although some were mixed; both exhibits that supported traditional concepts of the Oregon Trail used strong formalist display methodology. This discovery supports Michael Ettema's claim that when no new concepts are presented, the traditional concepts are reinforced (Ettema 1987:72). I did not investigate the effectiveness of the interpretation. Further study could comment about how the analytical and formalist techniques develop to create specific interpretive concepts related to western history.

### Questions

The other means I used to infer the interpretation of exhibits was through interview questions about stated themes and research processes (see Table 3). The stated themes, overall goals and envisioned ideas provided through these interviews indicated how the exhibit was conceptualized. I attempted to understand the ideas behind the exhibit and how they were cultivated.

### Narration

In addition, I examined the relationship between the starting and ending parts of a story. This is part of the process to determine narrative viewpoints (Cronon 1992). Establishing a narrative stance can aid in determining overall perspective. Although this simplifies Cronon's thoughts about the role narrative plays in relaying historical events and phenomena, it does incorporate his basic ideas. Not all exhibits had clear introductions or conclusions, so Cronon's suggestion could not be applied across the board. However, it did help in a few cases.

### Evaluation

Evaluating the interpretations of the exhibits involved some subjectivity. The criteria of exhibit theories (analytical/formalist), exhibit development, and attention to certain subjects involved with contemporary western American history, cannot fully integrate all of

the intricacies involved in an exhibit. In this investigation, however, I attempted to balance how the exhibits were conceived with a report of what was actually present.

## EXHIBIT INTERPRETATIONS

### Overall

Exhibit interpretations of the Oregon Trail during the Sesquicentennial incorporated a wide variety of concepts. Some museums and interpretive centers had greater resources and ambitions than others and were therefore better able to convey ideas in a more organized and professional manner. There were also some museums that displayed little interpretation, accepted the status quo, and supported traditional imagery. In sum, there was a gradation of interpretations, from highly contemporary, to traditional. However, there was a general awareness of the need to address a wider range of issues than the traditional approach permits.

Contemporary and traditional approaches are discussed in Chapter Three. In general, the traditional approach to western American settlement emphasized the Euro-American experience in transplanting their culture in the West. This resulted in the further development of some uniquely American traits such as rugged individualism, heartiness, stoicism, and independence. These traits have become a



part of the mythology of the American West. Associating these attributes with mythology is not to deny that these traits were not present; rather it is to assert that it is only one part of a complex process of individual and cultural development.

The Oregon Trail story is based upon many of these same qualities. The very story itself, a long stream of Euro-Americans heading toward a "new" land, embodies classical images. The state-wide organized Sesquicentennial of the Oregon Trail illustrates the predominance of the trek in the popular culture and its celebration in Oregon history.

Contemporary discussions of settlement attempt to include issues that were previously overshadowed by traditional imagery. For this investigation, I looked at some specific subjects in exhibits that would be representative of contemporary western history and that would relate to the Oregon Trail. These include the complexity of personality traits, the perceptions of the environment, Native Americans, women, and other ethnicities.

The following discussion categorizes exhibits as contemporary, mixed, or traditional and gives supporting interpretive evidence. Table 4 summarizes the categories; specifics on the exhibits' content are found in chapter eight.

**Table 4. Interpretive Orientation of Oregon Trail Exhibits and Interpretive Centers along the Oregon Trail**

<u>Museum or Interpretive Center</u> M = Museum HM = Historical Museum IC = Interpretive Center	Contemporary Interpretation	Mixed Interpretation	Traditional Interpretation	Inconclusive
Union County HM	X			
Sherman County HM	X			
Clackamas County HM	X			
Washington County HM	X			
Oregon Historical Soc.	X			
Nat'l Historic OT IC		X		
End of the OT IC		X		
Oregon Trail Regional M			X	
Hood River County M			X	
Eastern Oregon HM				X
Umatilla County HM				X
Canby HM				X
Harlow House M				X

### Contemporary Interpretations

Exhibits in general suggested topics related to contemporary issues in western American history. In some museums the contemporary issues were interpreted in an exhibit that was devoted completely to the Oregon Trail. Other exhibits featured the Oregon Trail as a part of a larger exhibit, and the issues of contemporary western American history were portrayed in the larger context. For example, at OHS, Clackamas County Historical Museum, and Sherman County Historical Museum, exhibits covered a variety of topics, of which the Oregon Trail was one part. The exhibits related the trail to larger issues of migration to specific areas.

### *Oregon Historical Society (OHS)*

OHS incorporated standards of AAM's Excellence and Equity, as well as discussion relevant to contemporary western American history. The Oregon Trail was used as a means to expand upon the migrations to Oregon (Orloff 1992:55). The theme of the OHS exhibit, "to expand the public's awareness of all the people who have migrated to Oregon," reflects the clear conceptual ideas that the designers had in mind (Harrington 1994). The exhibit, "Trails to Oregon," includes the Oregon Trail as one component in a large history of migrations and community building. Native Americans are discussed in a separate section, "First Trails," and also throughout the exhibit's

other sub-themes. Likewise, women and various ethnicities were not specifically addressed in the Oregon Trail section, but were incorporated as part of the larger exhibit.

Environmental perceptions are addressed briefly in the Oregon Trail section, relating religious and political influences. The exhibit goes beyond traditional depictions of the Oregon Trail through its thematic orientation and design that incorporates many subjects under one ideal of "migrations to Oregon."

The introductory and conclusion statements help to solidify an interpretive stance that depicts many reasons for the migrations. These ideas feed directly into overall educational goals designed to obtain a better understanding of current events, and suggests how to make wise decisions now and for the future.

Additional programs, such as the "Trails to Oregon" symposium, also reinforce the interpretive focus. Hosting scholarly discourse on varying subjects of Oregon migration only served to strengthen the impressions of the exhibit.

#### ***Sherman County Historical Museum***

The Sherman County Historical Museum also mixed their exhibit within the larger context of human migration into the region. "Oregon Trails, Rails and Roads in Sherman County" explores movement into the area from early Native

American movement and habitation to the settlements and communities of today. Although there is not a wealth of information about certain topics, what is exhibited illustrates a fundamental understanding of the Oregon Trail as part of a greater theme.

Subject development was an important part of the Sherman County Museum exhibit. The exhibit designers used innovative procedures to develop ideas. Although the stated theme was general, additional concepts were created through exhibit development. The theme "to provide an opportunity to learn about Indians...explorers, emigrants and pioneer settlers" does not indicate the specific concepts they want people to learn. However, the exhibit explores the roles each played in the development of Sherman County as it is today. Providing equal emphasis to other aspects of history is an important part of contemporary western historical discussions. This exhibit mixes chronological and theoretical approaches, but is sincere in its attempts to focus attention on the greater significance of trails of all types running through and to the county. The museum director, Sherry Kaseberg, admitted that they did not pay enough attention was probably to the "who, what, where, when and why." With more details on the "why" I suspect this would have created an even more relevant discussion of contemporary western history.

*Clackamas County Historical Society Museum (CCHSM)*

The Clackamas County Historical Society Museum also placed the Oregon Trail in the context of larger issues. It had a different format than the OHS or Sherman County exhibits. This exhibit was specifically on the Oregon Trail; however it merged with neighboring exhibits of varying thematic orientations. The other exhibits served to balance related issues, rather than creating one large exhibit on the Oregon Trail itself.

The theme of the CCHSM exhibit was "rites of passage" on the Oregon Trail. This is a focused exhibit and does not highlight discussion on topics directly related to contemporary themes of western settlement. It does, however, provide a glance at the emigrants' journey, how they perceived themselves, and life on the trail.

It is interesting to note that the exhibit design begins with artifacts which are viewed as the defining feature. This is in contrast to OHS and Sherman County exhibits, which focus upon ideas and research first. Research and careful scrutiny of materials for presentation were part of the exhibit process, but it was the artifacts that initiated ideas. The combination of artifacts and conceptual development of the exhibit mixes formalist and analytical approaches.

### *Union County Museum*

Union County Museum and the Washington County Museum had very focused, smaller exhibits. Though modest in size and scope, the exhibits presented material that addressed issues acknowledging the complexity of the Oregon Trail and emigration.

The Union County Museum exhibit featured an attempt to reveal the perceptions of the landscape that pioneers first experienced, as well as ensuing changes of the geography after settlement. These concepts are in tune with current discussion of Western American history.

The Union County exhibit was not up at the time of the investigation. Interpretations of the exhibit were inferred from interview questions. The responses to questions indicated a transition in the museum towards much more diverse material about the history of the region. The curator, without prompting, expressed her awareness that museums can contribute to the overall discussion of western historical themes (Almquist 1994: telephone interview).

### *Washington County Museum*

Washington County Museum's traveling exhibit presented emigrants on the 1843 wagon train as individuals; that is, they went beyond stereotypes to show a variety of experiences on the trail. Both human fallacy as well as human strength were portrayed, and accounts

were presented from male and female points of view. The exhibit's theme was that through individual people, the gamut of experience of the Oregon Trail can be expressed. This "gamut" included the varying emotions, making mistakes, and different perspectives of Oregon once they arrived. The development of the theme was an important factor in the focusing the exhibit.

All of these exhibits focused more upon issues related to contemporary discussion of western history. Themes varied in size and scope, yet all were based on concepts designed to provoke the audience into viewing the Oregon Trail in a larger context. The exhibits had certain elements in common, especially extensive research on well thought out initial concepts. For example, at the Sherman County Museum a guest historian from Western Oregon State College aided the investigative process. All other facilities incorporated certain procedures for their research and either had volumous local resources or sought them out.

In addition, all exhibits were analytically oriented; all used text to convey abstract ideas, often times using journal or diary entries to do so. Union County's display was the only possible exception, because the exhibit was not viewed. Artifacts, objects, and other visuals were incorporated; yet this study did not determine the effect these had upon interpretation. The Clackamas County Historical Museum used both text and artifacts well,



although its specific information on the Oregon Trail was limited. Most other facilities used a combination of objects and analytical format; the overall effectiveness as yet undetermined.

### Mixed Interpretations

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) and the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EHOTIC) presented both traditional and contemporary interpretations of the Oregon Trail.

#### *National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Ctr. (NHOTIC)*

The breadth of subjects covered at the NHOTIC were many of those related to contemporary topics of western history. The Historian Dr. Stephen Dow Beckham stressed his desire to include a portrayal of the West in general as an occupied and populous place before Euro-American emigrant arrival (Hummel 1992:44). In addition, the design team hoped to create a "fair and accurate" emigrant composite, especially considering the highly romanticized versions in the past (Hummel 1992:44).

Many parts of the exhibit realized these aspirations. The effects of migration on Native Americans, the differing perspectives of environment, and the representation of emigrants as both heroic and flawed, were all addressed. The exhibit possessed most of the

same elements as those designated as contemporary exhibits.

However, the personalities depicted and the overall impression of the journey's difficulty suggested that traditional qualities were important interpretive considerations as well. The appeal made to elicit emotions such as "determination" and "self-reliance" by the interpretive designers are strong indication of this, as is the attempt to pass on cultural heritage (Shelton 1989: 4, 26).

Although interpretive centers would predictably be inherently analytical, there are some formalist aspects, as indicated by comments suggesting that artifacts reinforce the image of the people who made or used them (Shelton 1989: 16). Although hints toward formalist theory are present, they are too minute to make a strong connection toward traditionalist orientation.

According to Walt Tegge, the facility as a whole was not only built to educate the public; as well, it is used as a draw to bring visitors to the area.

Although there is not enough information to draw a conclusion, the traditional images in the exhibit, even though presented with alternative explanations, are deemed important as a necessary marketing tool. One brochure, published for the facility outlines all of its themes and ends with the hard sell: "Northeast Oregon. It's Still the Promised Land." (BLM 1992/1993b). In order to "sell"

the interpretive center and the region to the general public, the traditional language and images are used.

The OTCC and the Sesquicentennial were created for primarily for the tourism and economic potential of the Oregon Trail experience. In the case of the NHOTIC, the objectives of the statewide Sesquicentennial translated into the incorporation of some traditional imagery.

### *End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC)*

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC) also addressed a variety of issues. The exhibit incorporated contemporary historical themes, especially in regards to environmental changes. Buffalo were given much attention, especially the effect their demise had upon Native American subsistence lifestyles. The introduction of new species and women's roles and duties were also presented. What gears this exhibit towards a "mixed" status of contemporary and traditional is the conclusion and depiction of character traits.

The beginning point of the exhibit provides a neutral setting; the end, a positive conclusion, and notes the sacrifices that the pioneers made. According to William Cronon, the ascendant line of the story indicates the interpretive standpoint (Cronon 1992). In this case, that the emigration through the Oregon Trail generally was positive and effects were worthy of pioneer sacrifice. The exhibit also notes the "hearty" aspects of pioneer

character. The reason this tends toward a more traditional viewpoint is that it fails to explain what the implications are.

The reasons for the interpretations are difficult to discern. The development process was not able to be fully disclosed, since the exhibit's original developers were not available. Therefore, the process that the exhibit designers went through is unknown. Neither the Sesquicentennial nor the OTCC had a significant effect upon the center, which in part probably had to do with the focus on the new interpretive center. In addition, events related to the Sesquicentennial were community sponsored, rather than by one of the many historical related facilities in and near Oregon City.

### Traditional Interpretations

Two museums, Hood River County Historical Museum and the Oregon Trail Regional Museum, adhered more closely to a traditional interpretation of the Oregon Trail. Very little text was present, but the little that did accompany the objects conveyed a traditional image of hearty pioneers and a thankfulness for their actions.

The exhibits at these two facilities almost exclusively used artifacts to display the Oregon Trail topic. The exhibits created a feel of reverence for the emigrants and their overland experience. There were no hints at other components of the story.

### *Hood River County Museum*

The little text that was present at the Hood River County Museum placed the exhibit firmly in the traditional category. A poem about the pioneers and their settlement of the area describes the landscape as "untamed", the pioneers as "courageous folk" and "noble souls", and settlement in the county was "right and just." These images, especially when displayed with very little other text, conjure up these mythological traits.

### *Oregon Trail Regional Museum*

At the Oregon Trail Regional Museum, the exhibit was not as clear-cut. Little text was present, except labels. No attempt was made to integrate the Oregon Trail with other themes, such as Native Americans or the natural environment. The display emphasized artifacts, and the director stated "artifacts" as the theme. Most artifacts come from local families of the Baker City area. The objects have meaning simply by their association with known ancestors.

The text was so limited that the passing reference to the "progress and accomplishments of our people" should not be overly stressed. Although it can be viewed as an indication of overall perspective, it was not the defining element. Conceptual planning was also not a priority. Neither the Hood River nor the Oregon Trail Regional Museum had specific thematic goals. The preservation and

display of artifacts was the primary concern, which is a formalist approach.

### Inconclusive

#### *Umatilla County Historical Museum*

The Umatilla County Historical Museum did not include much imagery of pioneers or the expedition. The exhibit concentrated upon the physical aspects of the trail, and the attempt at its preservation and commemoration. It did not contribute toward conceptual ideas about the Oregon Trail, but neither did it assert a traditional viewpoint.

#### *Harlow House Museum, Eastern Oregon Museum, and Canby Museum*

Three museums had so little interpretation that they were better classified as a display. These were the Harlow House Museum, Eastern Oregon Museum, and Canby Historical Museum. These exhibits were all very small, ranging from twenty square feet to one hundred square feet.

The lack of text with a formalist approach does not absolutely ascribe traditionalist interpretations to an exhibit. Part of the explanation for such a format may be linked to the designers' lack of clear ideas or what concepts are hoped to be conveyed to viewers of the exhibit.

Although I viewed only one of these three museums personally, all information obtained indicated that very little text was incorporated in any of them. Without text, there is no way to judge what concepts are present. In fact, the Eastern Oregon Museum and the Canby Museum did not stress the conceptual development of their exhibits; they were primarily interested in showing artifacts and related visuals.

The Harlow House Museum illustrated "Food, Faith and Fun" along the trail. Again there was little interpretation. This may have had more to do with its status as an historical home, where interpretive displays are not commonplace. Its themes and overall goals were vague; however, the exhibit had been up for at least five years, and the current Director was not part of the original staff that assembled it. Conceptual ideas were not instrumental in creating the exhibit.

The Canby Historical Museum and Eastern Oregon Museum did not have themes or goals for their exhibits. Without some direction and general ideas for an exhibit, there obviously will be no new concepts involved. The displays foster no provocation.

Two of the four facilities with inconclusive results used the telephone interview as the only means to obtain information. This had some bearing on my conclusions, since I could not judge what actually was exhibited. These two interviews were particularly troublesome, since

I did not feel that the interview produced the most detailed or comprehensive results.

### **INFLUENCES UPON INTERPRETATION**

My investigation could not reveal all of the factors that influenced interpretations, but major components were discovered within the context of the Sesquicentennial Celebration. The influences upon exhibits' interpretations were found to be the goals of the facility, exhibit development methods, funding, and internal initiative of staff and/or volunteers. Table 5 lists the interpretive categories of the museum exhibits, and reflects some of the influences and their attributes.

#### **Museum Goals**

Exhibits of museums and interpretive centers along the Oregon Trail covered a variety of topics. A common denominator for all exhibits was their goal to reflect the relationship of the local area and the significance of the Oregon Trail. This underlying precept is expected. An obvious goal of a local museum would predictably be to furnish information about the region. One way for museums to focus their attention and overall objectives is through their mission statement.

The mission statements for all of the museums in this sample were very general. They stated that the purpose of the facility was to preserve and present the collections



Museum or Interpretive Center M = Museum HM = Historical Museum IT = Interpretive Center	Size of OT Exhibit (Sq. Ft.)	1993 Operating Budget	Amount Spent on OT Exhibit	1993 Visitation	Hosted Sesquicentennial Programs or Activities	Strong Exhibit Conceptual Development	A= Analytical F= Formalist I= Inconclusive
<b>CONTEMPORARY:</b>							
Union County HM	50	\$14,000.00	\$300.00	3,000	YES	YES	A
Sherman County HM	1,000	\$67,000.00	\$63,000.00	4,000	YES	YES	A
Clackamas County HM	400	\$174,000.00	\$1,750.00	20,000	YES	YES	A/F
Washington County HM	40	\$132,000.00	\$7,000.00	n/a	YES	YES	A
Oregon Historical Soc.	3,500	\$2,500,000.00	n/a	100,000	YES	YES	A/F
<b>MIXED:</b>							
Nat'l Historic OT IC	11,000	\$720,000.00	\$10,200,000.00	348,000	YES	YES	A/F
End of the OT IC	2,000	\$80,500.00	n/a	20,000	NO	n/a	A/F
<b>TRADITIONAL:</b>							
Oregon Trail Regional M	100	\$55,000.00	0	58,000	YES	NO	F
Hood River County M	100	\$18,700.00	0	6,000	NO	NO	F
<b>INCONCLUSIVE:</b>							
Eastern Oregon HM	20	\$14,000.00	0	20,000	NO	NO	I
Umatilla County HM	100	\$75,000.00	\$300.00	3,000	YES	YES	A
Canby HM	35	\$9,891.00	0	=850	NO	NO	I
Harlow House M	100	\$4,250.00	0	2,000	YES	NO	I

**Table 5. Oregon Trail Exhibits: Summary and Interpretive Catagorization**

and history related to the region. In this sense, the Oregon Trail was presented by virtue of its route through or nearby the area. Mission statements lacked a conceptual relationship to overall organizational goals.

Mission statements are a means to set parameters and a direction for the museum to follow. Exhibits, special programs and general activities have an underlying goal. Ideally, each museum, large and small, can fulfill a unique niche and educational purpose, as stated in AAM's publication, Museums for a New Century (AAM 1987:32). Focusing specifically on the region is one way to interpret the scope of the mission statement. However a broad mission statement fails to fully establish specific museum goals and guidance for exhibits and programs.

This situation is exemplified in the Oregon Trail exhibits. Very few facilities had a sufficiently narrow mission statement to guide them in presenting a focused exhibit. The mission statement was so broad, that it was irrelevant to the exhibit, except for the fact that it was a component of regional history.

There were a few exceptions. The goal of the Washington County Museum was broad and it attempted to relate its mission to some abstract educational goals. In addition to the purpose of preservation and interpretation of county history, the museum hoped to "create new knowledge of the past to link and enhance knowledge and understanding of the present." This statement provides

some framework from which to critique exhibit interpretations. The Oregon Trail exhibit followed this ideal by depicting nine emigrants who came to Oregon in 1843 and ended up settling in the county. The mission statement helped to guide the exhibit by linking local people and describing their cultural context as they made the trip to Oregon.

The parameters of the Washington County exhibit are broad; but it is one museum that attempted to show why the focus was upon the local area, connecting the local significance to a larger purpose.

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center had a more regionally focused mission statement. The purpose of the museum was to acquaint people with the Oregon Trail story, and to represent the significance Oregon City held. Again, the "why" or "so what" aspect is absent; but it is more specific than many other facilities in this study. A more clearly defined mission statement would enable the museum to establish themes to connect the disparate sections of the exhibit.

The Union County Museum was in the midst of a transition from a limited facility that focused almost exclusively on the Euro-American experience in the area, to one that included the diversity of people involved in its history. Its mission statement, "to depict and interpret the aspects and lives of all the people of the area," is an attempt to break past barriers that limit

discussion to Euro-American influences and contributions to the area. Again, the "why" is not provided, but intuitively it seems interpreting "all the people of the area" would expand the story and thereby illuminate more issues to create a more comprehensive picture of regional history.

Union County's exhibit is discussed in chapter eight, but generally, it encompassed elements of contemporary western historical thought. The mission statement, correlated to exhibit themes and goals, influenced the exhibit.

The Oregon Historical Society's mission statement, which encompasses its Oregon Trail related exhibit at the History Center, is simply "to collect, preserve, research, exhibit and teach the heritage of the state" (Harrington 1994). The statement is very general; however, the society's role in the state is diverse, which undoubtedly has bearing upon it. The exhibit, "Trails to Oregon" had very specific goals and themes. It succeeded in producing concepts that merged the Oregon Trail story into the larger discussion of human migration to Oregon - including the diversity of people, their reasons for emigrating, and the different eras involved.

The mission statement of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center was to "instill in visitors an understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage." The Oregon Trail was specifically used "as it

encompass[ed] the life and times of people who settled the American West" (Tegge 1994: personal communication). This mission statement is more detailed and focused than most. The fact that it is an interpretive center may have some bearing on its attention to establishing its overall conceptual goals. Also Euro-American "heritage" is the emphasis. The goal of providing an "understanding and appreciation of... cultural heritage" (Shelton 1989: 4) is reflected in the exhibits by its occasional traditional imagery. The mission statement affected the interpretations.

The mission statements of the other facilities were all nearly identical, focusing upon preserving, collecting, and exhibiting the history of their local areas. For those museums, the mission statement's impact upon interpretation was limited, and if it affected interpretation, it was usually only to influence a vague sense of thematic and conceptual orientation. The remaining facilities with the broad mission statements all varied in their commitment to interpretation as a whole, as well as their particular focus.

Those exhibits with a more focused mission statement all had displays that presented some material on contemporary issues related to western history. Most facilities did not have a focused statement regardless of their interpretations. The mission statements affected

interpretation when they were strong and focused, because they helped develop framework for historical concepts.

### Exhibit Development Methods

The emphasis of scholarly research and dedication to conceptual development affected interpretation. The museums that concentrated on exposing the audience to concepts of western history all followed specific research procedures.

The museums with either large in-house scholastic resources, like OHS and Clackamas County Historical Society Museum, were strongly oriented toward contemporary ideas. Those with scholarly advisers, like Sherman County Historical Museum and the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, also presented many relevant contemporary concepts. The Union County Museum and Washington County Museum both followed specific procedures for developing exhibit ideas, which included a focus upon research.

The museums with traditional interpretations, Hood River County and the Oregon Trail Regional Museum, did not indicate that research was involved in their Oregon Trail exhibit. Logically, this would correspond with the predominance of artifacts in their exhibits that had little or no interpretation.

Eastern Oregon Museum, Canby Historical Museum, and the Harlow House Museum did not indicate their procedures;

and so are difficult to categorize. In addition, the Umatilla County Historical Museum had a procedure for research, but its exhibit was inconclusive regarding its interpretive orientation.

### Funding

The operating budgets are generally larger at the facilities with contemporary and mixed interpretations of the Oregon Trail, the Union County Museum being the major exception. However the funds specifically acquired for an Oregon Trail related exhibit encouraged more conceptual development and research. The additional funding resulted in exhibits more oriented toward contemporary portrayals of the Oregon Trail. In other words, the total amount of money the facility had was not as significant as the project-oriented funding. Table 5 shows the amount of money spent on the Oregon Trail exhibits of the four different interpretive categories.

Sherman County Historical Museum is one example. Their grant from the Oregon Council for the Humanities, stipulated that a guest scholar must be a part of development. Scholarly help was as an influential factor in interpretation. In addition, the grant helped to formulate and solidify previously conceived ideas on how to join the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration.

Sherman County Museum and Washington County Museum also attained matching funds from the OTCC. Part of this

grant money was used for additional projects in the community, so the direct influence of OTCC funding upon interpretation is difficult to ascertain. For the Washington County Museum, the OTCC grant in combination with a foundation grant helped focus attention on the Oregon Trail exhibit. Part of the foundation grant's guidelines influenced the format of a traveling exhibit.

All exhibits with contemporary western historical orientations had at least \$300 spent on them; the Union County Museum representing the low end. The largest amounts were from the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, with a \$720,000 operating budget. Since the entire facility was geared toward the Oregon Trail, most of this money was used for the exhibits. I judged the NHOTIC as a mixed interpretation (see Table 4), because of its partial orientation towards contemporary historical discussion of the Oregon Trail.

The amount OHS spent on its "Trails to Oregon" exhibit is not known, although it is assumed to be significant. Much of the funding for this exhibit derived from corporations and foundations. The fact that this exhibit was strongly contemporary illustrates that companies do not feel compelled to align themselves only with traditional oriented projects, as was the case in other museums with western historical themes (Donath 1991:93). However, this judgement is not conclusive because the foundations and corporations were generally



not in the business of producing items related to the West specifically. That is, banks, television stations and the like, have generally not used the "western mystique" as a selling tool.

### Internal Initiative

What seemed to be the most significant factor influencing museum exhibits and their interpretations were internal organization and motivation. The facilities that attempted to create an overall thematic design and to develop an integrated exhibit were those that carried the most information and ideas about the significance and meaning of the Oregon Trail. Many factors came into play, but the underlying focus and ambition of the museums' staff and volunteers played a major part in interpretive orientation. This included efforts to acquire funds for the exhibit, commitment to thematic development, the use of innovative creative processes, and scholarly research. The rationale for displaying the Oregon Trail topic were inspired by the Sesquicentennial, but the exhibit ideas and concepts were prompted by internal procedures and ambition.

### Other factors

#### *Size*

Physical size of the exhibit and facility was not a dependable indicator or influence of exhibit

interpretation, however most large museums and exhibits were oriented toward contemporary or mixed ideas, although the Oregon Trail Regional Museum was an exception. The latter facility was large, with 30,000 square feet of exhibit space, but had only a small Oregon Trail exhibit. Two other facilities, the Union County Museum and Washington County Museum had small exhibits, yet were oriented toward contemporary interpretations. Sherman County Museum had a small to medium exhibit and was also more contemporary.

Although there was not a direct relationship between interpretation and size, it should be noted that no large Oregon Trail exhibits were categorized as traditional. The largest facilities, OHS, NHOTIC, EOTIC, and CCHSM, all indicated that research was an important factor in developing the Oregon Trail exhibit, and all exhibited some concepts of contemporary western history. The influence of size on the exhibits' content had more to do with the resources available in bigger facilities and the subsequent research.

#### *OTCC and the Sesquicentennial*

The Sesquicentennial Celebration and related agencies did not appear to affect interpretation. However, the Sesquicentennial and OTCC stimulated museums to create an Oregon Trail exhibit and to participate or initiate related Sesquicentennial programs.

Although many of the OTCC Trail Marker publications appealed to traditional depictions of the Oregon Trail experience, their role was not to supply specific content for exhibits, but to stimulate interest for facilities to begin a project, to direct where to obtain initial information if needed, and provide matching grant money for interested parties. The OTCC served as a base for Oregon Trail related activities, which included exhibits, but it was up to the individuals within each museum or interpretive center to pursue and develop projects. The decisions of staff and/or volunteers of museums and interpretive centers whether to create an Oregon Trail exhibit or supplement an existing one, was based upon individual initiative, other Sesquicentennial community events, and proximity to other facilities with Oregon Trail related material.

The Sesquicentennial stimulated Oregon Trail related exhibits in six museums and one interpretive center (see Table 6). In addition, one museum, the Clackamas County Historical Museum, supplemented its existing exhibit for the Sesquicentennial.

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) opened in May of 1992. The project was initiated by local Baker County citizens and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); the Sesquicentennial and the OTCC helped to support and market it, but did not provide direct funds.

**Table 6. Creation or Addition to Oregon Trail Exhibits for 1993 Sesquicentennial**

<u>Museum or Interpretive Center</u> M = Museum HM = Historical Museum IC = Interpretive Center	Created Exhibit for Sesquicentennial	Added to Existing Exhibit for Sesquicentennial	No Changes to Existing Exhibit for Sesquicentennial
Nat'l Historic OT IC	X		
Eastern Oregon HM	X		
Union County M	X		
Sherman County HM	X		
Hood River County HM	X		
Canby HM	X		
Clackamas County HM		X	
Oregon Historical Society	X		
Washington County HM	X		
Oregon Trail Regional M			X
Umatilla County HM			X
End of the OT IC			X
Harlow House			X

Union County, Eastern Oregon, Sherman County, Hood River County, Canby, Oregon Historical Society and Washington County Museums all created exhibits especially for the Sesquicentennial (see Table 6). The overall inspiration for creating an exhibit was the statewide attention to the Sesquicentennial. Proximity to the trail and the general broad mandates to educate people about local history of the facilities were also common reasons.

Facilities in my sample that made no changes to their existing Oregon Trail exhibits for the Sesquicentennial were the Oregon Trail Regional Museum, End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, Umatilla County Historical Museum, and the Harlow House Museum. General satisfaction of museum staff and volunteers with the exhibit in its original form was the general reason for no new additions. However, Umatilla County and the Oregon Trail Regional Museum were fairly close to the NHOTIC, the largest interpretive center, and focused entirely on the Oregon Trail. The Umatilla County Historical Museum also had programs, such as special lectures, related to the Oregon Trail. A reason its Oregon Trail exhibit was not supplemented for the Sesquicentennial was related to the director's concern of saturating the local community with excessive trail related programs and displays.

The other interpretive center in this sample, the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC) has been open since 1988, with no significant change to its

exhibits. This was a unique situation in terms of creating or supplementing exhibits for the Sesquicentennial. Energy was focused into building the new, larger, facility with the same name, and no additions were made to the existing center that I visited. Because the new center was not completed in time for the Sesquicentennial, no additional information was displayed.

The OTCC's major goals of developing the Oregon Trail as a resource and increasing heritage tourism (OTCC 1994:1,3,13) were realized through most facilities, especially the NHOTIC. The OTCC goals were played out in Baker City, as its economy ailed from a depression of extractive industries, a predicament that the OTCC was in part created to remedy. Tourism increased considerably near Baker City during the Sesquicentennial, and was a direct result of the NHOTIC. The Oregon Trail Regional Museum, located near the NHOTIC, did not specifically use their Oregon Trail exhibit to attract an audience, but attributed their great increase in visitation to the draw of the NHOTIC. The Oregon Trail Regional Museum benefitted from the increased tourism without having to create or add to its Oregon Trail exhibit; it focused more upon Sesquicentennial related activities, such as hosting conferences, than focused upon interpretive exhibitry of the Oregon Trail.

The Sesquicentennial served as part of an economic network for Baker County; the community, including the

Director of the Oregon Trail Regional Museum, worked to create a tourist attraction which included the draw of the NHOTIC. The tourism aspect of the Sesquicentennial was most noticeable in this area. Further study to determine to what extent the NHOTIC continues to draw tourists and aid the economy is suggested.

Sesquicentennial related activities, some sponsored by and some stimulated by the OTCC, varied in their interpretations of the meaning of the Oregon Trail. This investigation was not designed to fully analyze how these manifested. However, the way the projects networked with some museum projects, further illustrates how the OTCC augmented exhibits without directing them. For example, the Sesquicentennial Wagon Train brought many visitors to museums and encouraged museum involvement through helping to host the visitors for a night's stay.

Furthermore, the OTCC resources were in part created by museums. Some museums informed the OTCC about programs or resources; the OTCC compiled the information and added to it. The final product was published in the chance that other facilities might find them of use. The OTCC served as a network and an instigator of exhibit development.

#### **FURTHER FINDINGS**

The focus upon tourism at the NHOTIC brings up an observation upon the distinctions between museums and interpretive centers. As was discussed in chapter four,

the two formats for portraying history are similar in many ways, and appear to be borrowing more and more techniques from each other. In this study, the NHOTIC had goals and objectives similar to museums in terms of education and preservation of culture. The regional economic and tourism goals of the facility differ from museums; most museums were interested in tourism, but boosting the local economy was not stated as a primary goal. In the case of the NHOTIC, the mandate was in part created by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), its directing agency. However, the plans for the expanded EOTIC appear to be very oriented towards economic growth and increased tourism. The new EOTIC project is a product of the Oregon Trail Foundation, an umbrella agency of an assortment of supporters, including the county, state, Oregon City, Chamber of Commerce and local businesses (Porter 1994: personal communication). The future EOTIC will strive for both commercial and educational success. The OTCC and Sesquicentennial was originally going to jump start the new EOTIC to bring the tourists to Oregon City.

Despite the difficulties in getting the new EOTIC off the ground, the Clackamas County Tourism Development (CCTD) Council approved the Oregon Trail Foundation's request for promotional funds for "The Spirit Lives On" a multimedia presentation held in Oregon City to commemorate the trail. The Oregon Trail Foundation acquired \$144,000 from the council (McCarthy 1993a: A8). Less than a week



after the approval, the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners (CCBC) "turned a cold shoulder" for a request of \$76,000 by the county's 14 museums. The museums asked for the money in order to "keep their doors open to Oregon Trail visitors" during the summer of 1993 (McCarthy 1993b:B2). Ed Lindquist, a CCBC member reasoned that it was not in their budget, and that "'We got suckered into giving them money in the past'" (McCarthy 1993b:B2). Some of the museums had earlier asked the CCTD for some funds, but were turned down. The CCTD planned that the part of the funds appropriated to the Oregon Trail Foundation's multi-media show would help to direct tourists to other trail related points of interest, including museums. However, Laura Law, vice president of the Clackamas County Historical Society, stated that "they are going to direct people to places which are going to be closed" (McCarthy 1993b:B2).

Interpretive centers funding structure in the two cases of the NHOTIC and the new EOTIC involves a wide variety of community, state, and federal support, and are designed and perceived to fulfill more of a financial goal. The potential financial gain that interpretive centers and their guiding agencies promise appears to influence their development. The initial push by the OTAC and the OTCC for four interpretive centers to reflect the Oregon Trail illustrates this fact. The center planned by the Umatilla Reservation is an exception, however, their

trouble did not come from lack of community support, but lack of federal funds.

#### **SUMMARY**

The role of museums varied from adhering to the AAM guidelines by reflecting diversity and filling unique niches to simply being a local repository and showcase for artifacts. Because some museums, such as the Oregon Trail Regional Museum or the Hood River County Museum, saw their purpose more narrowly defined does not mean that their facilities do not serve an important purpose. There are segments of the population who are content and pleased with the role of museums that focus upon simple displays of artifacts. The museums' importance in education could expand with greater attention towards national standards and overlying goals, but at this point that is not an issue for the staff and volunteers.

Museums that sought to fulfill conceptual ideas more completely met AAM standards and contemporary western American historical interpretations whether they intended to or not. Further study could investigate how aware museum directors were of competing historical concepts of the American West.

In retrospect, additional questions about the exhibit designers' educational background in museums and history might have revealed more detail on the research and conceptual orientation of Oregon Trail exhibits. For

example, at the Sherman County Museum, volunteers worked very hard to educate themselves on exhibit techniques. This was reflected in the presentation, and how it stimulated their own creative processes about how to thematically orient their exhibit.

Although most exhibits incorporated an expanded idea beyond mythological and romanticized traits of the emigrants and the Oregon Trail, the focus was upon Euro-American experience. The fact that the subject of the Oregon Trail was chosen as the commemorative event is of course a major factor. However, the Oregon Trail experience was a starting point that could lead to future further expansion of subjects and ideas, which other museums, such as OHS, recognized.

One point that was not addressed by museums and interpretive centers in this study was that interpretation of the Oregon Trail is a controversial subject. Acknowledging this fact might add new light to interpretations. For example, by contrasting mythological and romantic traits with the more recent interpretations of western historians could provide an intellectual dimension to the community discussion.

One project that would have illustrated the controversy of the Oregon Trail is the Umatilla Indian Reservation Interpretive Institute, which planned to exhibit the Oregon Trail from the Native American point of view. The Institute was to address their culture as a

whole, not just in terms of the influence of Euro-American migration. Unfortunately, this project did not acquire the essential federal funding needed to complete its plans by 1993. The Umatilla plan is still on the table, and if it is completed, it will add significantly to the discussion of Oregon Trail interpretations.

In many ways history serves the contemporary needs of society; current vantage points influence perceptions of meaning and significance and even the subjects that are investigated. Objectivity exists in a fog of existing personal and cultural needs. In earlier eras, a traditional and mythological image of westward expansion and the emigrants satisfied most people. In the 1990s there is a greater push to understand more complex influences upon our current systems. Knowledge of this kind can be perceived as a threat to established and revered historical representation. To the contrary, many argue, as Patricia Limerick has done, that admitting complexity to issues makes them richer, more engaging, and interesting. Acknowledging that episodes such as the Oregon Trail and the westward movement of Euro-Americans was as "morally complex as any other place on the planet" is crucial in gaining a full understanding of their meaning (Limerick: 1994).

Exhibits of the Oregon Trail during the Sesquicentennial added to the discussion of contemporary western historical ideas. For the most part, exhibits

portrayed the emigrants as individuals with positive attributes as well as faults. The complex reasons emigrants had for traveling westward were admitted, and topics related to Native Americans, the environment, and women were addressed in many exhibits. Some exhibits strongly emphasized these points to the exclusion of traditional depictions, and some mixed their interpretations. There were also two facilities that portrayed traditional images of the Oregon Trail, with no attempt at, or possibly even awareness of, other interpretations (see Table 4). However, in general, most exhibits made attempts to reveal complexities involved with the Oregon Trail.

Little mention was made in most exhibits of other ethnicities, either portrayals of those who came on the trail, the reasons they were absent, or where the Oregon Trail fit in with other stories of migration to Oregon. The Oregon Historical Society is an exception; it portrayed the Oregon Trail as one component of events that lead to a diverse contemporary culture.

Future investigations can relate this study to the development of similar large, comprehensive projects and celebrations. This study attempted to document interpretations of and influences upon a significant western historical experience in the context of a widescale state project.

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