



EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION



Frances Fuller Victor

Widely regarded as the “Mother of Oregon history,” Frances Fuller Victor was born in Rome, New York. Before arriving in Oregon in 1864 she pursued a literary career in the East, Midwest and California, writing poetry, short stories, novels, and articles for magazines and literary journals. After arriving in Oregon she wrote an article, “Manifest Destiny in the West,” published in both *Overland Monthly* and *Out West Magazine* in 1869.

Although recognizing the significance of Marcus Whitman’s role in the settlement of Oregon, Victor was nevertheless highly critical of him and “believed that her most significant contribution to history was to challenge several myths associated with [him],” historian Sheri Bartlett Browne wrote.

Victor became acquainted with Joseph Meek (1810-1875), one of the early mountain men in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, who later settled in Oregon and served as a legislator and United States Marshal for the Oregon Territory. Her biography of Meek, *The River of the West*, published in 1870, was her first book and provided an account of Oregon history from Meek’s perspective that was both spirited and controversial.

- **Historian**
- **Born 1826, Rome, New York**
- **Died 1902, Portland, Oregon**

Victor has been recognized over the years as the first Oregon historian to gain regional and national attention. *All Over Oregon and Washington: Observations on the Country, Its Scenery, Soil, Climate, Resources, and Improvements*, was published in 1872. In her preface Victor explained that the inspiration for the book came from her trips back to the East where she was often called upon to “do volumes of talk about the West Coast, especially about Oregon and Washington,” due to the “dearth of information” about them available at that time.

Victor moved back to California in 1875 and worked with Hubert Howe Bancroft for over ten years. She wrote at least six of the volumes of Hubert Howe Bancroft’s 39-volume history series originally attributed to him: *History of Oregon* (2 vols.); *History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana*; *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming*; and *History of California*, vols. 6 and 7. In a tribute to Victor that appeared in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* after her death, William A. Morrison wrote:

Her history of ... Oregon was the first ever printed which brought the account past the provisional period and which took up the subject for thorough treatment. The press reviews at the time the Oregon volumes were published all united in their praise, and many, taking them to be the work of Hubert Howe Bancroft, pointed out the superiority of this work over the previously published volumes of the Bancroft series.

Victor returned to Oregon and wrote *History of the Early Indian Wars of Oregon*, published by the state in 1894. She continued to write for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* until her death.

In concluding his tribute to Victor, Morrison wrote:

No state has had its early history better preserved or more clearly set forth, a result for which in large measure Frances Fuller Victor is responsible, and for which the people of Oregon owe to her a deep debt of gratitude. By her work on the history of the entire region west of the Rocky Mountains she has well earned the title once conferred upon her – the Clio of the Northwest.