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# The backgrounds and organization of the great Oregon migration of 1843

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THE BACKGROUNDS AND ORGANIZATION OF  
THE GREAT OREGON MIGRATION OF 1843

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Michael B. Husband

March, 1966

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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate  
Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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## PREFACE

To define the motives for any human migration is often a formidable, but nevertheless an inspiring and challenging undertaking. This study, therefore, is devoted to a detailed examination of the events which led to the highly significant migration from the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys to the Oregon country in 1843. I shall demonstrate that this, the first home-building immigration to the Pacific Northwest, was not a mere response to leadership, but was stimulated by a deep-seated frontier force based upon the desire of the inhabitants of the western states to better their lot. It was no aimless wandering upon which these pioneers embarked; it was the grand answer to a pressing need for more "elbow room."

The visionary and idealistic, yet sound motives which actuated the movement in 1843 offer a fascinating insight into the character and temper of the farmer and merchant of the early 1840's. To capture this spirit, the author has relied heavily on primary sources which

demonstrate the sentiments of these pioneers. This study is concerned not only with the conditions and events which released the Oregon question from its dormancy and initiated the "Oregon fever" in 1843, but offers, in addition, a detailed analysis of those motives and inducements in order that their true impact may be determined. It is the author's hope that this examination may in some small way contribute to the study of American expansion.

In conclusion, I must express my indebtedness to Professor Roy M. Robbins for his guidance and encouragement, and to Miss Ella Jane Dougherty, Interlibrary Loan Librarian of the Gene Eppley Library, for her inestimable assistance in obtaining the numerous research materials necessary for this study.

University of Omaha  
March 18, 1966

Michael B. Husband

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## INTRODUCTION

The claim of the United States to the Oregon country was based primarily on the discovery of the Columbia River by Captain Robert Gray in 1792, the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805-06, and by the establishment of the American fur post at Astoria in 1811.<sup>1</sup> This claim was supported by the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, which obliged Spain to relinquish her rights to any Oregon claims.<sup>2</sup> A third claimant, Russia, withdrew from the disputed area and retreated north of the latitude 54°40' as a result of an 1824 treaty with the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The British claim to the Oregon area was founded on the voyages of Captain James Cook and the travels of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and on the provisions of the Nootka

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<sup>1</sup>See Frederick Merk, "The Genesis of the Oregon Question," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. XXXVI (March, 1950), pp. 583-612.

<sup>2</sup>Hunter Miller, Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America (8 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1933), Vol. III, pp. 3-64.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 151-162.

Sound Convention. The latter, signed in 1790 with Spain, declared that the subjects of the two nations would not be molested while carrying out trade or settlement in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>4</sup>

Since both claims were equally valid and neither nation possessed a clear title to the entire Oregon country, the United States proposed that the Columbia River serve as a boundary as both countries could make good use of its harbor.<sup>5</sup> The matter was allowed to rest until 1818, when the two nations opened formal negotiations.

In October of that year, a treaty between the United States and England provided for the joint occupation of the area between the forty-second parallel and latitude 54°40' for a period of ten years.<sup>6</sup> The United States had refused to divide Oregon at the Columbia River. Nine years later, the joint occupancy agreement was extended indefinitely, subject to abrogation by either party on one year's notice.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Lester Burrell Shippee, "Federal Relations of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIX (June, 1918), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>U. S., American State Papers, (Foreign Relations), Vol. IV, p. 853.

<sup>6</sup>Miller, Vol. II, pp. 658-662.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 309-314.

Between 1820 and 1840, the Oregon question remained relatively dormant while fur traders from both Canada and the United States exploited the country. This was due in part to several unfavorable reports of the unlikely possibilities of Oregon as an area of settlement and commercial expansion.<sup>8</sup> The United States Government was at this time preoccupied with more domestic matters, and this fact contributed to the general indifference towards Oregon. The natural advantages of the Oregon country were, however, recognized by many inhabitants of the West, and they remained a matter of latent interest with them until circumstances necessitated a more detailed examination of the area's offerings.

In the 1840's, the Oregon question was again brought into prominence by the emigrations to the Pacific Northwest from the States. The emigration of 1842 was a relatively small one, and was not nearly as well organized as the movement of the following year.<sup>9</sup> But the Great Migration of

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Greenhow, The History of Oregon and California (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), p. 323.

<sup>9</sup>The company consisted of 109 men, women, and children; H. O. Lang, History of the Willamette Valley (Portland, Oregon: Himes & Lang, 1885) p. 247. Eighteen wagons were included in the company; Miss A. J. Allen, Ten Years in Oregon; the Travels & Adventures of Dr. E. White (Ithaca, New York: Mack,

1843, unprecedented in size and in the superior quality of its leaders, was to have a decisive influence in bringing the vexed Oregon dispute to an end. The emigrants were pioneers in many fields; commercial development, colonization, political initiative, and social betterment, and pioneers make the way for others to follow.

The West initiated the Oregon movement in Congress, and the disappointment over the lack of sympathy in the executive branch of the Government during the Tyler administration only increased the aggressive agitation of the westerner. In Congress, the friends of the West valiantly sought the occupation and settlement of the Oregon country. A devastating panic and hopeless despair were to strike the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys in the late 1830's and early 1840's, and this motive, compounded by the glowing reports of those who had preceded them, made it evident to the farmers and merchants of the Mississippi Valley that 1843 was the year for a move. For as long as there was room to move, there was individual hope and freedom:

"There's no sense in going further-it's the edge of cultivation."

So they said, and I believed it-broke my land and

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Andrus & Co., 1848), p. 147. The 1843 company included approximately 200 wagons and 1,000 persons; Missouri Statesman (Columbia), June 16, 1843.

sowed my crop-

Built my barns and strung my fences in the little  
border station

Tucked away below the foothills where the trails  
run out and stop.

Till a voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable  
changes

On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated-so:  
'Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind  
the Ranges-

Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting  
for you. Go!'

--Kipling.

## CHAPTER I

### HARD TIMES IN THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

For the inhabitants of the American West, the early 1830's proved to be a period of rash, hopeful prosperity. Paper currency and "pet banks" were plentiful, and business stability was given but little consideration. Andrew Jackson was supported by hordes of unorganized farmers, impatient of restraint and wildly optimistic. Once the death of the United States Bank had tied the hands of the big eastern plutocrats, there was no one left to control the kind and amount of speculation which was to sweep the Mississippi Valley. The numerous "pet banks," chosen for the deposit of national funds, began to extend enormous loans, and hundreds of these state banks were established overnight in hopes of receiving a portion of the deposits. The people of the Mississippi Valley, with small means and no credit, turned to wild paper expansion. A spirit of daring enterprise swept the area, and "Over-trading, speculation, and investments in unproductive undertakings became the



dominant note in American society. . . ." <sup>1</sup> In 1836 came the inevitable results--a severe rise of prices and increased wild speculation. Inflation reached its climax in the following year, and spread ruin among farmers and businessmen. Banks failed, and unfulfilled promises of bank reforms followed. An Ohio newspaper reported that Andrew Jackson ". . . gave these banks the public moneys, and they gorged themselves on it till they could hold no more, and blew up. . . . A great name cannot transform error into truth. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Jackson's solution of the bank question was not the direct cause of the problems of the farmer, but the imbroglio in which it left the currency certainly intensified his difficulties to a great extent.

The Panic of 1837 prevented the distribution of the fourth installment of surplus federal revenue to the states, upon which the West had relied for the continuation of vast internal improvement programs. The work, however, did not cease altogether, and the states, particularly Illinois,

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<sup>1</sup>Reginald McGrane, The Panic of 1837; Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, January 18, 1843.

borrowed large sums to expand their improvements.<sup>3</sup> Agriculture also continued to prosper after the Panic, as the farmer was able to receive credit from the country storekeeper rather than from the town bank. Most of the state banks regained their footholds, but it soon became evident that they had recovered much too rapidly:

. . . of nearly 1,000 banks in the United States, including branches, 343 suspended specie payments entirely in 1839, 56 went out of business, and 62 resorted to partial suspension. As before, the larger number of these was in the West and South.<sup>4</sup>

This second suspension of specie payments was the greatest blow which the farmers had suffered, and their actions were indicative of their true spirit. Throughout the Mississippi Valley, ". . . men became restless, visionary, even revolutionary."<sup>5</sup> The prosperity which had ~~preceeded~~ followed the Panic of 1837 had stimulated lavish crop

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<sup>3</sup>Edward Gaylord Bourne, History of the Surplus Revenues of 1837 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), pp. 128-9. See also Alexander Trotter, "Observations on the Financial Position and Credit of Such of the States of the North American Union as Have Contracted Public Debts," North American Review, Vol. LI (July, 1840), pp. 316-336.

<sup>4</sup>U. S., Congress, Senate, National Monetary Commission, The Independent Treasury of the United States, Senate Doc. No. 587, 61st Cong., 2d Sess., 1910, pp. 39-40.

<sup>5</sup>James Christy Bell, "Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838-1846," Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI (Jan. 1921), pp. 118-9.

production, and Martin Van Buren noted that such over-production ". . . left our granaries and storehouses filled with a surplus for exportation. . . ." <sup>6</sup> However, there was no nation willing to assume this responsibility, and surplus crops rotted in the fields and barns. The farmers of the Valley, with no money market for these crops, were forced to resort to barter to carry on their business, with notes drawn on cows, chickens and pigs.

The state of affairs in the 1840's should have come as no surprise to the farmers, laborers and businessmen of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. As early as 1831, an Illinois newspaper warned that the uncontrolled extension of paper bills would cause the farmer to:

. . . sell his grain to the country merchant for State bank paper at a discount of from ten to thirty percent in the nearest commercial city. . . . The depreciation of the paper thus operates as a tax on the farmer, the mechanic, and all the consumers of merchandise . . . the loss of confidence among men, . . . over-trading and speculation on false capital . . . withers all efforts of industry. . . . <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>James D. Richardson (ed.), The Messages and Papers of the Presidents (10 vols.; Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1897), Vol. III, p. 542.

<sup>7</sup>Sangamo Journal (Springfield, Ill.), March 11, 1842.

Too late did the farming and laboring classes realize the full implications of the Panic. The chaotic condition of the currency hurled them, along with the small merchants, into a state of complete social and financial derangement.

Charters for state banks were usually rushed through state legislatures by scheming speculators. Once the bank was established, stock was sold at a premium, and banking commenced with a capital of only a few thousand dollars or less. Having gained the confidence of the farmers, the banks often issued loans to them and proceeded to speculate heavily with bank funds. When these speculation ventures failed, as most of them did, the farmers and other borrowers became liable for the bank's debts.<sup>8</sup> The retention of bank paper only served to complicate the collection of debts, for paper, due to its fluctuating value, did not pay a debt, but rather substituted yet another liability for it. Paper money was issued by whim and extortion, and the farmer found it increasingly difficult to labor under such insecurity. Bank paper, as issued by state banks, often became worthless before it was collected or immediately

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<sup>8</sup>An excellent and lengthy editorial concerning the agrarian sentiment against unorthodox banking practices may be found in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), February, 1843.

after it was deposited. The problem for the farmer was basically one of procuring tax specie:

How can our people hope to get rid of the present debased and wretched paper currency, if they consent to legalize it by making the public revenue payable in it? . . . whatever currency the State receives and pays out of its Treasury, will be the circulation among the people.<sup>9</sup>

Paper money had put several states, and more especially Illinois, so deeply in debt that the repeal of state bank charters was demanded by scores of irate and destitute citizens. This, however, did not occur before many farmers were driven from their home states to search out a more hospitable area.

The utter frustration and open hostility over the value fluctuation of bank notes was voiced by nearly every small businessman and farmer in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. An itinerant preacher from Columbus, Ohio, wrote that:

The currency is . . . in vast confusion. For instance, I had on Monday a quantity of Chillicothe paper, which I there exchanged at par for Indiana State Bank . . . scrip and was assured I had done well. But 'ere I reached home the state scrip had depreciated 50 percent.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1842.

<sup>10</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, pp. 119-20.

The farmers of the western states scorned such radical vacillation, and strongly resented the irresolute financiers who wielded the financial prerogative. A group of Illinois farmers and merchants probably were speaking for the entire West when they expressed a demand to know ". . . what aristocratic privilege was ever equal to that of controlling the currency of seventeen millions of people and making money plentiful or scarce at pleasure?"<sup>11</sup> It would be difficult to estimate the amounts lost by depreciation, counterfeits and bank forgeries. Farmers felt, and rightly so, that if banks were created, their issues should be secure. Paper money became the standard for property values while at the same time its own values were fluctuating. The measure of value, felt the farmer, should be certain and permanent. It must not be assumed however, that ". . . unless we have bank paper we can have no money. It is the circulation of bank paper that drives specie out of circulation... ." <sup>12</sup>

The farmer and laborer soon realized that the financial situation would be their eventual ruin, and that

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<sup>11</sup>McGrane, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup>Illinois State Register, January 27, 1843.

they were completely defenseless against such a calamitous state of affairs. The chaotic condition of the currency was equalled in severity by poor markets, and there was little opportunity to improve the situation in either agriculture or business. Many embittered victims of the bank note likened the banks to "the Dead Sea first that tempts the eye, but turns to ashes on the lips."<sup>13</sup> The banking system had been fairly tested in most western states, but it was found to be lacking in effectiveness on every occasion. The people of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys were primarily engaged in agriculture, and stood to lose a great deal when banks became insolvent, leaving them with worthless paper notes. An old farmer said that "I have followed in the beaten path honestly looking for bank reform, and here I am . . . bewildered and lost. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

As conditions grew steadily worse, banks failed and paper continued to depreciate. The state banks found themselves incapable of paying specie, and the Shawneetown, Illinois Bank announced that paper notes would be bought,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1843.

<sup>14</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, August 9, 1843.

sold and loaned on "the best possible terms."<sup>15</sup> As specie became scarce, paper depreciated further, and it was said that one bank in the Mississippi Valley would not pay more than fifty cents on the dollar, if that much.<sup>16</sup> By 1843, it was noted that "Every mail furnishes accounts of the failure of one or more of these concerns, by which farmers and mechanics lose themselves thousands of dollars. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the critical lack of specie and poor marketing procedures, the bottom fell out of the market for agricultural produce in the fertile Mississippi Valley. A prime reason for poor marketing practices was the fact that the emphasis was placed upon crop diversification and stock improvement rather than upon the problems of the market.<sup>18</sup> Farmers, even those who possessed adequate funds, were unable to transport and market their products efficiently.

In St. Louis, the agricultural market was at a standstill in 1842, and reports of threatened mob action

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<sup>15</sup>Illinois State Journal, February 24, 1843.

<sup>16</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, September 15, 1843.

<sup>17</sup>Vincennes Western Sun, February 19, 1842.

<sup>18</sup>This trend was observed in most of the newspapers and agricultural journals examined by the author.



aimed at unscrupulous brokers and bankers were frequent.<sup>19</sup> The situation in Illinois was equally inauspicious. The following tables will give some indication of the crop and livestock trends in McLean County, Illinois:

TABLE 1  
PRICE TRENDS (IN DOLLARS PER HEAD) IN LIVESTOCK  
IN MCLEAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS<sup>a</sup>

Year	Steers			Hogs		
	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average
1833	10.31	5.62	7.78	4.00	.62½	2.31¼
1836	..	..	..	2.21	1.12½	1.52
1840	..	..	26.00	6.00	1.12	3.47
1843	13.31	3.37	7.22	..	..	..
1844	9.37	2.12	5.39	1.00	.21	.51

<sup>a</sup>Ezra M. Prince, "Prices in McLean County, Illinois, From 1832 to 1860," Illinois State Historical Society, Transactions, Fifth Annual Meeting (Springfield, 1904), p. 539.

<sup>19</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 121.

TABLE 2

PRICE TRENDS (IN DOLLARS PER HEAD AND PER BUSHEL) OF  
CORN AND LIVESTOCK IN MCLEAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS<sup>a</sup>

Year	Corn	Horses			Cows		
		High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average
1833	.33½	50.00	29.00	39.50	12.00	10.12	11.06
1837	..	75.00	25.25	50.10	25.00	15.50	20.25
1839	.30 1/3	85.00	47.25	61.68	30.00	11.00	20.09
1840	.20 1/3	100.00	26.00	56.80	16.50	11.50	13.89
1843	.12½	25.00	12.75	18.87	8.25	5.31	6.44

<sup>a</sup>Prince, p. 537.

The wheat prices in Illinois had declined so sharply that it became unprofitable to transport the grain to market. A young farmer who had brought some rather poor peaches to market was asked why he had selected such imperfect fruit for sale. The young man unhesitatingly offered the excuse given him by his father--". . . these 'ere infernal pollytics [sic] had made times so almighty hard, that he couldn't even raise any nice soft peaches as he used to . . ." <sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>The Kentucky Gazette (Lexington), September 10, 1842.

Even the price of flour, a vital commodity on the frontier, dropped more than fifty percent in many market centers.<sup>21</sup>

The New Orleans market, vital to the prosperity of the farmers and merchants of the Mississippi Valley, was in a state of utter confusion during the 1840's. The currency situation was chaotic, owing to the fact that area banks were rarely willing to accept bank notes other than their own issues. Few goods, as a result, were shipped up the Mississippi River, and an incalculable loss to both the agrarian and business communities ensued. The New Orleans market review stated that:

We have now arrived at a period of the season when, under the most favorable circumstances, we have generally to report a dull market . . . the currency still remains in the deranged conditions so frequently noticed. . . .<sup>22</sup>

An equally distressing report on market conditions served to admonish desperate merchants and perplexed farmers of more unmanageable "hard times" ahead:

. . . all branches of business are so disordered and trammelled by the extraordinary difficulties of the times that we can scarcely be said to have

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<sup>21</sup> Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> New Orleans Daily Picayune, July 3, 1843.

a market for anything, so limited are the transactions and so various the stipulations in the purchase and transfer of produce and merchandise.<sup>23</sup>

This unfortunate exigency necessitated the importation of certain staples from foreign markets, and one can only wonder at a nation of nearly four million agriculturists laboring under such adverse conditions.<sup>24</sup> Farmers could not long endure such adversities--they needed and demanded a home market.

A primary source of marketing inadequacies was the abominable condition of transportation facilities in the Mississippi Valley. The roads, where they existed, were in shameful disrepair. Charles Dickens, while travelling through the United States, described western roads as having no variety except depth. Another discription of western roadways brought to light the fact that:

It is hard to flesh and blood, and not less to horse flesh than to man flesh, to push it forward through the thick and thin of this region of intolerable mud and mire. . . .<sup>25</sup> (And it is growing worse every day). . . .

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., June 26, 1842.

<sup>24</sup>The Illinois State Register, October 7, 1842, lists the number of Americans engaged in agriculture in 1842 at 3,700,000.

<sup>25</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, pp. 123-4.

Aside from their deplorable condition, the roads in the Mississippi Valley were inadequate for market transportation for a variety of reasons. Livestock often walked off many valuable pounds on the road, and farmers frequently found no market for their animals upon their arrival in a likely commercial center. To transport grain by wagon was inexpedient, as freight rates were exorbitant and dependable wagoneers were rare. Wagon rates from Platte City, Missouri to St. Louis usually averaged from one to two dollars per hundredweight.<sup>26</sup> There were no railroads, and transporting produce by water proved no less costly and dangerous than road travel. Water freight charges were high, and heavy insurance rates were imposed due to the frequency of boiler explosions and river snags. The water rate for wheat transport for a 300 mile trip on the Mississippi River was approximately thirty cents per bushel in addition to insurance premiums.<sup>27</sup> In the cold months, waters were often frozen, and shipment by boat was impossible.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. For a detailed report on the causes and dangers of steamboat accidents on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers see "Steamboat Disasters," North American Review, Vol. L (January, 1840), pp. 19-42.

Because no European country was prepared to accept the vast agricultural surplus amassed in the western states after the Panic of 1837, many farmers found it expedient to let their crops rot in the fields. An expensive journey to market invariably ended in disappointment and served only to add to a farmer's burden of debt. The only large scale, dependable outlet for their goods was New Orleans, but this huge market was glutted by 1843.

The farmer felt that the tariff regulations in effect during this trying period added to his financial misery by preventing a normal trade intercourse with foreign nations:

Our farmers feed all the mouths in our own country . . . and still have a surplus to sell to foreign nations, which pay for it in manufactured articles. A tariff which prevents the importation of those articles in whole or part, lessens their means to buy, and in the same degree diminishes the chances of our farmers to sell. Thus excluded from foreign markets by our own legislation, the produce remains at home to overstock the domestic market, and the price falls.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of the tariff regulations and trade restrictions, it is unlikely that any foreign nation would have been prepared to alleviate the surplus problem to any measurable degree. Nevertheless, the tariff issue was a convenient

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<sup>28</sup>Illinois State Register, October 7, 1842.

issue, and it played an important part in the decision of many farmers to abandon their homes in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys.

To compound the already intolerable state of affairs in the western states, the "Hungry Forties" brought disease to the Mississippi Valley, and heavy rains caused the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to flood, inundating fertile farms and driving families from their homes. The breaking of virgin soil and the flooding of the lowlands invited the mosquito, and devastating outbreaks of malaria ensued. In Iowa, "Mosquitoes abounded, and their humming at times sounded like the approach of a coming storm. . . ." <sup>29</sup>

A Missouri farmer with 3,000 acres attributed his decision to leave the Mississippi Valley to the continuous attacks of the ague. <sup>30</sup> This farmer had Oregon in mind, and he was only one of hundreds who realized that the Mississippi Valley offered nothing but pain and suffering, with no compensation for their toil.

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<sup>29</sup> Melvin Clay Jacobs, Winning Oregon: A Study of an Expansionist Movement (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), p. 63; from The Palimpsest, Iowa State Historical Society, Vol. V, p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 42.

By early 1843, utter discouragement blanketed the Valley. Fields were covered with weeds, water ran relentlessly over entire farms, there was no money, crops failed and sickness weakened spirits. Wheat was dirt cheap, corn could not be given away, and steamboats on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers were burning bacon and other animal products for fuel. One dejected farmer exclaimed:

The weather of late has been very wet. . . .  
Specie is scarce, honest men ditto. . . . Snuff  
is going up--juleps are going down. Mosquitoes  
are lively, and steamboat explosions are going off  
slowly. Some bank bills are beneath par, and  
others are beneath notice. . . . Times isn't  
what they used to was.<sup>31</sup>

Farmers accustomed to a stable, or even an unstable medium of exchange could not long endure the barter system to which they were reduced. They could barter for staple goods, but they needed ready money to pay taxes or enter land claims. A farmer often found that the bills he had hoarded for such purposes were depreciated beyond any value to him. Although the yearly expenses of a farmer in the Mississippi Valley might be extremely low, it is doubtful that a family would wish to exist at this standard should a more promising opportunity arise. There were countless

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<sup>31</sup>New Orleans Daily Picayune, August 3, 1842.



reports of farmers owning hundreds of well-stocked acres who could barely get money enough to pay the postage on a letter.<sup>32</sup>

Laborers in the western states had no more economic freedom than the farmers, and the farmer was usually able to trade his goods for the things necessary to keep his family alive. The laborer, however, was often unable to gain employment when work on internal improvements ceased, and he found himself in the midst of a disastrous labor glut. The North-Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser noted with lamentation the shattered hopes and the powerless ambitions of farmers and laborers throughout the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys in 1842 and early 1843. Another newspaper offered the following advice:

Black your own boots, shave your own face, iron your own hat, get some friend to cut your hair, and let your wife patch your garment should they need it, instead of purchasing new ones, such HARD TIMES as these.<sup>33</sup>

As the depression raged throughout the Valley, the local newspapers devoted more and more space to bankruptcy

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<sup>32</sup>"Debts of the States," North American Review, Vol. LVIII (January, 1844), p. 121.

<sup>33</sup>Vincennes Western Sun, September 9, 1843.

notices. Sheriffs and constables, trying to collect debts, were frequent visitors at almost every door. Farmers and mechanics were warned that if the present state of affairs continued, they would be receiving only twelve cents a day for their labor.<sup>34</sup> Many victims of the disasters were not well-disposed to the idea of waiting for conditions to improve. The hard facts of their existence in the Mississippi Valley were forcing them to think along new lines. Several Illinois farmers decided to better their situation by collecting their pigs together and driving them to Chicago themselves, thereby saving high transportation costs. However, after paying expenses, the misguided farmers received only twenty-five cents per hundredweight.<sup>35</sup>

The question facing the prospective emigrants was simply one of location. Where would they move? The western states were rapidly filling up, and the "Great American Desert" still bore a hostile stigma long after Major Stephen Long and Zebulon Pike had pronounced the region west of the Missouri unfit for agricultural pursuit. Why

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<sup>34</sup>Sangamo Journal, February 23, 1843.

<sup>35</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 124.

had the discouraged farmers not settled in Iowa Territory, or in what is now Kansas and Nebraska? Their answer lay in the hope for a great market on the Pacific. The Western farmer needed a cash outlet for his goods, and Oregon seemed to promise the panacea for the problems of the Mississippi Valley.

Ready cash was a prerequisite to settlement on much of the open land in the west, and this factor discouraged the idea of such a migration. Oregon, on the other hand, seemed to offer the Mississippi Valley farmer everything which he lacked at home--good land and a healthy climate, access to the stores of the generous Hudson's Bay Company, and above all, a market for surplus produce. Oregon was portrayed as a land of perpetual spring, where free farms promised prosperity, and the advantages over the other unclaimed areas of the country were numerous. The restless frontiersmen of the western states had been receiving favorable reports of the Oregon country from traders, missionaries, explorers and settlers for well over thirty years, but conditions in the Mississippi Valley created a motive for movement so forceful that the "Oregon fever" had made remarkable inroads by 1843. It must be remembered that the frontiersman has always possessed the

habit of migration, especially when hard times plagued him and his productivity. The inhabitants of the western frontier were:

. . . within one generation of frontier conditions; their families had moved into the valley after similar disappointments and with similar inducements and hopes for the future. . . .<sup>36</sup>

The promotion of an Oregon migration was only another expression of the desire for security for which the farmer and laborer longed. When the emigrants departed, many made no effort to dispose of their land; they simply abandoned it for a promise of better things to come. The unanimous responses to the question of personal motivation was simply--"we come to better our condition."<sup>37</sup> One Missouri farmer gazed upon his unproductive acres and resigned himself to the following philosophy:

Well, I allow the United States government has the best right to that country, and I am going to help make that right good. . . . I am not satisfied here; there are few things that we can raise here that will pay for shipment to market. . . .

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<sup>36</sup>Helen B. Kroll, "The Books That Enlightened the Emigrants," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XLV (June, 1944), p. 105.

<sup>37</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Second Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1894), p. 55.

I have to sell everything I can spare every year, to make ends meet. I'm going to Oregon where . . . we'll all start even.<sup>38</sup>

Peter Burnett, a leader of the Great Migration, declared that although he had worked hard, lived simply, sold his property and endeavored to improve his mercantile business, his indebtedness seemed to decrease but little.<sup>39</sup>

The frontier farmer and laborer, if past experiences were any indication, could only assume that the friends of paper money were preparing the way for the recurrence of the very disasters which created the discord in the western states. The western frontiersman, unaccustomed to restraints of finance or boundary were anxious to escape to an abiding country where rumors of oppression and calamity might not reach them. Agrarian unrest had reawakened the migratory spirit of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. Oregon promised an escape from the obstacles interposed by nature and the banking system so that ". . . enterprise, industry and art may have free scope and human happiness be increased."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Peter H. Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 65. Burnett had been a judge in Missouri, and later became a real-estate promoter in Oregon, and Governor of California.

<sup>40</sup>Vincennes Western Sun, March 19, 1842.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RESTLESS TEMPER

The agricultural and financial instability in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys from 1837 until 1843 had provided the farmers and laborers with a timely motive for emigration to a more hospitable area. The unrest, however, served also to arouse a more inherent force in the frontiersman. This was the traditional visionary idealism and restlessness which so characterized frontier development, and which, in times of extreme bad fortune, drove men to seek out better conditions in the great beyond. In 1843, conditions were ripe for impassioned and exaggerated prospects. The people of the Mississippi Valley could afford to be visionary, for they could afford little else. Even in prosperous times, farmers could easily discover enchanted lands which they found much more desirable than their own homes. In hard times they sought the freedom which they felt the region west of the Rocky Mountains could afford. One member of the Great Migration made the following observation:

Fearlessness, hospitality, and independent frankness, united with restless enterprise and an unquenchable thirst for novelty and change, are the peculiar characteristics of the western pioneers. With him, there is always a land of promise further west, where the climate is milder, the soil more fertile, better timber and finer prairies . . . You of the old states can not readily conceive the every-day sort of business an "old settler" makes of selling out his 'improvements', hitching his horses to the big wagon, and . . . starting on a journey of hundreds of miles to find and make a new home. . . . Just now Oregon is the Pioneer's land of promise . . . the Oregon fever has broke out, and is now raging like any other contagion.<sup>1</sup>

The frontier spirit, therefore, was as much psychological in this case as it was geographical. The idea of "escape" from the Mississippi Valley became a state of mind with the pioneer, and he was motivated by a unique blending of necessity and desire. It must be said of the Oregon pioneer that "His very needs inspire him. Struggle and achievement give him strength."<sup>2</sup>

An Illinois newspaper, while encouraging a great Oregon migration, maintained that Americans were emphatically a restless people, but that the disposition to migrate to new areas was much more manifest among the inhabitants

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<sup>1</sup>"Letter From Iowa Territory, March 4, 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (September, 1902), pp. 311-12.

<sup>2</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 22.

of the Mississippi Valley.<sup>3</sup> The character and temper of the emigrants upholds this frontier characteristic. The pioneer was fond of change, especially in 1843 when conditions in the Valley and in Oregon warranted a move. Never having enjoyed close neighbors, the farmer found himself more crowded than ever when natural conditions severely reduced the productivity of his acreage. An old pioneer in western Illinois, when asked why he had decided to join the migration, exclaimed that people were settling right under his nose, the nearest farm being some twelve miles distant!<sup>4</sup> The same situation was evident in Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio and even Iowa.

The passion for change and the bold individualism which characterized the pioneer of the Mississippi Valley was examined by a rather bewildered Alexis de Tocqueville many years before the prospect of an Oregon venture was conceived in the minds of western farmers:

Restlessness of character seems to me to be one of the distinctive traits of this people. The American is devoured by the longing to make his

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<sup>3</sup>Peoria Register and North-Western Gazetteer, November 2, 1839.

<sup>4</sup>Verne Bright, "Folklore and the History of the 'Oregon Fever,'" Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII (December, 1951), p. 246.



fortune; it is the unique passion of his life; he has no memory that attaches him to one place more than another . . . and is less afraid than any other inhabitant of the globe to risk what he has gained in the hope of a better future, for he knows that he can without trouble create new resources again.<sup>5</sup>

Jesse Applegate, an influential leader of the migration, and an imposing figure in Oregon's future political development, asserted that his only motive for emigration was the restlessness of his nature. If the emigrants had accomplished anything praiseworthy, Applegate remarked, it was only incidental to their restless and selfish aims.<sup>6</sup> This self-interest made the Oregon emigrant a better and a highly effective pioneer, for it was born of his characteristic independence and self-reliance. Because the emigrants were instinctive home-builders, they were also potential builders of towns, a state, and a nation. The opportunity to express themselves guided their progress during the formative months of the migration plan and throughout their careers in Oregon. The Great Migration

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<sup>5</sup>J. P. Mayer (ed.), Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey to America, trans. by George Lawrence (London, Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1959), p. 182.

<sup>6</sup>"Letter of Jesse Applegate to the Oregon Pioneer Association," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX (December, 1919), p. 399.

has demonstrated that "Individualism, American style, insists on personal liberty to act, but aims at progress by competition and cooperation."<sup>7</sup>

Another interesting facet of the pioneer character in 1843 was the traditional love for liberty on an individualistic basis. Jesse Applegate explained the backgrounds and effects of this tendency among the emigrants:

Descended from the old Puritans of England, the love of liberty is as natural to us as the color of our skins. A life of many generations on the border between the civilized and the savage has not only trained us to such a life of hardship and adventure, but fits us for its enjoyment. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The year 1843 was not only a convenient time for the fulfillment of basic needs and desires, but it was also a year for the satisfaction of adventurous spirits and quests for glory. The idea that the appeal of the undiscovered was strong in America, a notion perpetuated by Frederick Jackson Turner, was never more evident than in the "Hungry Forties."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>George W. Pierson, "A Restless Temper. . . ," American Historical Review, Vol. LXIX (July, 1964), p. 983. See also, by the same author, "Goin' Some," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. LXIII (Autumn, 1964), pp. 571-575.

<sup>8</sup>Applegate, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX, p. 398.

<sup>9</sup>See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The West and American Ideals," Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (October, 1914), p. 245.

Many an emigrant expressed a desire to see something of Indian life and perhaps indulge in the then famous sport of hunting the buffalo. Because the western pioneer was continually seeking out new areas for the development of his talents, he allowed his imagination to run wild while preparing a trip to Oregon. James Nesmith, a prominent leader of the migration, admitted that he was ". . . impelled by a vague spirit of adventure. . . ."10

A spirit of pure adventure was invariably associated with a desire for a complete change of scene, for the emigrant was constantly driven by his desire to give his labor and his name to a new country. This, of course, was an integral part of the individuality which the emigrant sought to perpetuate. Most of the emigrants were Scotch-Irish in lineage, and their parents and relatives had pioneered the Alleghenies to Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee and thence to Illinois and Iowa. Consequently the Oregon emigrants possessed a prevailing ambition ". . . to be the most western members of their respective

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<sup>10</sup>T. W. Davenport, "An Object Lesson in Paternalism," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (March, 1903), p. 47.

families and to call no man master. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Nature's barriers were simply things to be conquered and put to practical advantage. Alexis de Tocqueville marvelled at the ease with which western pioneers were able to accept change:

In the United States a man builds a home in which to spend his old age, and he sells it before the roof is on; . . . he embraces a profession in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable belongings elsewhere. . . . <sup>12</sup>

One significant reason for the overall effectiveness of the Great Migration was the fact that its promoters and organizers were solidly dedicated to success. The emigrants realized that in moving to Oregon, they would be primarily responsible for the establishment of political, social and economic precedents for the future of the country. Because they comprised the largest company ever to reach Oregon up to that time, they felt that they were heavily obligated not only to themselves, but to the nation. A western farmer induced others to follow him to Oregon in 1843 by

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<sup>11</sup>John Minto, "Antecedents of the Oregon Pioneers and the Light These Throw on Their Motives," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Phillips Bradley ed.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), pp. 136-7.

exclaiming that "If every man in the Territory were to lose one cow worth \$100, the loss would be a trifle in comparison to the loss we shall sustain if we lose this migration."<sup>13</sup>

The emigrants, an intrepid, determined and resourceful group, were not accustomed to failure in any enterprise they undertook. They were, for the most part, responsible merchants and farmers and laborers of exemplary character. They were home-builders, and were consequently more apt to fulfill their goals than wanderers or adventurous ne'er-do-wells. Jesse Applegate, writing in his later years, recalled that the 1843 emigrants were adapted both mentally and physically to perform the task, and ". . . no matter what our individual motives as individuals, as a class we have well executed the purposes of our creation. . . ." <sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the Great Migration did succeed because the pioneers' idea of what was difficult to do had not yet been built up by comfortable living into an insurmountable barrier. Times were hard in the Mississippi Valley, but prospects were

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<sup>13</sup>Melvin Clay Jacobs, Winning Oregon: A Study of an Expansionist Movement (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), p. 45; from the Columbian (Washington Territory), May 22, 1853.

<sup>14</sup>Applegate, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX, p. 398.

bright in Oregon, and obstacles in the path were automatically removed. Although some of the pioneers were poorly equipped for so long and arduous a journey, this was primarily due to the lack of a suitable precedent. They were able to endure the trek in spite of their shortcomings, however, for ". . . they were resourceful and filled with an abiding faith in their ability to succeed."<sup>15</sup> There were few aimless wanderers among the company and those who were idealistic and visionary put these qualities to work for them. Adversities in the face of promise were overcome by the emigrant simply because instability seemed to breed enthusiasm and an opportunity to challenge the unknown. Tocqueville noted that the outstanding characteristic of the depressed westerner was his ability to envisage continuous betterment of social conditions.<sup>16</sup> This factor never manifested itself more strongly than in the year of the Great Migration.

Unfortunate circumstances in the western part of the United States had awakened pioneer unrest, and this

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<sup>15</sup>Frederick V. Holman, "Qualities of the Oregon Pioneers," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX (September, 1919), p. 237.

<sup>16</sup>Mayer, p. 183.

restlessness in turn fostered the search for agricultural and commercial advantages in Oregon. As potential town-builders, the pioneers, having witnessed the rapid growth of towns and business in the western states, viewed Oregon with an optimistic eye. The time had come to utilize the resources Oregon had to offer. The prospective emigrants regarded social and economic development in fairly simple terms. By mentally arranging the vast natural resources of Oregon, they could envisage dynamic and rapid expansion, despite a lack of capital and transportation facilities. A leading Illinois newspaper elaborated upon the commercial possibilities of Oregon, maintaining that it would be of ". . . great advantage to the Western States, and cause them to increase in population and industrial development, and make them the centre of this great republic. . . ." <sup>17</sup>

By 1843, however, farmers and merchants were much more interested in establishing a market in the Pacific Northwest than in the salvation of the depressed Mississippi Valley. The desire for Oregon was not merely a longing for land, but a hope for security of commercial status and national and international markets. The fulfillment of

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<sup>17</sup>Alton Telegraph, November 9, 1839.

this desire would enable the pioneer to obtain what he lacked in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys--sufficient reward for his labor. Editorials similar to the following one served to emphasize the importance of this accomplishment:

We have so frequently and earnestly urged upon the mechanics, laborers and indigent classes of residents the importance of a change location and mode of life. . . . Be persuaded to try the [Oregon] country if you are not comfortably and permanently provided with the means of earning a subsistence where you are. The evil days are not ended. . . There never was a better time than the present to seek a home in the fertile west.<sup>18</sup>

In response to such urgings, and in answer to a need for financial security, the Valley provided the first permanent home-building society for Oregon. It was a population suited to occupy an area which required individuals accustomed to hardships and the adversities of a frontier existence. Any other kind ". . . would speedily have given up and contributed nothing to the social evolution."<sup>19</sup>

For several years prior to the departure of the Great Migration, traders, missionaries, explorers and settlers had made no effort to conceal from the western

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<sup>18</sup>Peoria Register and North-Western Gazetteer, August 11, 1838.

<sup>19</sup>James R. Robertson, "The Social Evolution of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (March, 1902), p. 13.



farmers the vast resources of Oregon. The resulting propaganda, as discussed in a later chapter, was multitudinous and often highly exaggerated. Emigrants who distrusted this wave of Oregon literature were usually quite pleasantly surprised upon their arrival in the Far West. Owing primarily to elaborate newspaper editorials, it was understood that Oregon was destined to become a grand thoroughfare to the China trade, and the resulting boom in commercial transactions would assure the United States the dominant position in world commerce.<sup>20</sup> Another review announced that "No part of the western coast of America is better suited to commerce than Oregon; for none is possessed of such immense resources."<sup>21</sup> Cattle had been introduced into Oregon by the missionaries, and a missionary journal expounded the attributes of the Willamette Valley, the intended destination of most of the emigrants. The review especially praised the fertile soil and the fine woods and prairies of the area.<sup>22</sup> Many hopeful pioneers

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<sup>20</sup>Alton Telegraph, November 9, 1839.

<sup>21</sup>Democratic Review, April, 1843.

<sup>22</sup>Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal, December 21, 1842.

envisaged a railroad through the Oregon country, and an enormous rise in commercial benefits. The demands for good laborers and farmers, as expressed by the few missionaries and settlers in Oregon, were intense. A letter from Willamette Falls, dated 1842, contained the following plea:

. . . a good millwright is very much wanted, as well as apparatus for building mills and a great many wholesome settlers, embracing some capitalists who will open trade with the Islands and China, which can be done from this coast with great facility. . . .<sup>23</sup>

The importance of the Pacific trade, and especially the China trade, had been ardently promulgated long before the "Oregon fever" took hold in the Mississippi Valley. In 1821, Representative John Floyd of Virginia, whose contributions to the Oregon movement will be discussed in a later chapter, felt that with little labor and small expense, the China trade and great commercial position might be secured to Americans. The commercial gains, he continued, would increase steadily in the future.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup>"Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement. 1842-43," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (June, 1903), p. 179.

<sup>24</sup>U. S., Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 2d Sess., 1821, Vol. XXXVII, p. 956.

China trade demonstrated the importance of the commercial gain motive in the settlement of Oregon.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned motives for migration, the emigrants of 1843 expressed various secondary, yet highly recognizable reasons for the Oregon venture. The prospect of tax-free land and enterprise encouraged impoverished farmers and merchants. Many emigrants joined the trek simply because Oregon was not "fenced in" and nobody dared to keep them off the land. Many Southerners joined the company to escape the social chaos and killing competition of a slave economy. Captain R. W. Morrison, a leader of the venture, said that he was unable to earn a living in his Missouri home as poor markets, transportation inadequacies and competition with slavery made it unprofitable for him to continue his farm.<sup>26</sup> And Lindsey Applegate, a brother of Jesse, joined the migration after a pro-slavery mob, driven by intolerant public sentiment, drove him and his friends from the voting booths of Missouri.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>For a more detailed study of the Asiatic trade and its influence on the settlement of Oregon, see R. H. Cleland, "Asiatic Trade and American Occupation of Oregon," American Historical Association, Annual Report for 1914, Vol. I, pp. 283-389.

<sup>26</sup>Minto, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 35.

Several emigrants came to Oregon in the hope that they might secure passage on Pacific ships and sail to far-off ports. One such wanderer was James W. Nesmith, whose restless peregrinations took him from his native Maine to Ohio, Illinois and Missouri. Having heard that Oregon was a great whaling port, Nesmith determined to go there to secure space on a whaler bound for South America.<sup>28</sup> There were no whalers when he arrived in 1843, but Nesmith liked Oregon, and became a prominent figure in the early development of the Territory.

The classic beauty and advantageous climate of Oregon must not be overlooked as prime motives for the 1843 movement. For those who had suffered in the Mississippi Valley, Oregon offered a healthy retreat. Nearly every letter from the Oregon country noted the absence of the ague, the "plague" and other afflictions common in the Valley of the Mississippi. William Winter and Overton Johnson, members of the Great Migration of 1843 and authors of a guidebook based on the experiences of that company, were later to write that the principal advantage of Oregon

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<sup>28</sup>"James W. Nesmith's Statement," Letters Pertaining to the Oregon Migration, Salem, 1878, MS (microfilm no. PA46), Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

over the Mississippi Valley was a mild and healthy climate and a good commercial situation.<sup>29</sup> The same work described the Oregon scenery as:

. . . varied, romantic, picturesque, and grand . . . the imagination that has been accustomed only to the level surface and dull monotony of the Valley of the Mississippi, must be stretched to its utmost to comprehend the mighty picture.<sup>30</sup>

Oregon was essentially a land of choice. To be in a position to select one's occupation, land, crops and location was crucial to the ultimate success of the first Oregon home-builders. When conditions in the Mississippi Valley severely limited activities there, pioneers could easily make the decision to leave. To exist under such oppressive circumstances violated the very temper of the western frontiersman, consequently the move from one area to another was achieved with relative ease. One member of the migration remarked that "Some got tired of catfish in Missouri, or suckers in Illinois, and wanted to change on to salmon. . . ." <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Overton Johnson and William Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains; A Narrative of the Emigration of 1843 (Reprinted from the original edition of 1846; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1932), Preface, p. iv.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-7.

<sup>31</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 35.

Closely aligned with the self-reliance and independence of the frontier farmer was yet another timely motive for the 1843 migration. This was the promise of free land. The emigrants were pre-eminently home-seekers, and in spite of their adventurous spirit, they displayed a personal gain motive no less selfish than that of other frontier settlers. Although the emigrants may have wished to strengthen national security by the occupation of Oregon, their individualism served to remind them of their duties to themselves. Consequently, whatever the emigrant sought in Oregon, change of climate, new scenes of activity, or enlarged opportunities, he sought for himself and his family.

The champion of free land in Oregon was the dynamic Senator Lewis F. Linn of Missouri. On January 8, 1841, Senator Linn introduced a joint resolution to occupy, settle and grant lands, and to extend certain laws of the United States to the Oregon country.<sup>32</sup> No action was taken on the bill, but it did create an interest in the occupation of Oregon, especially among the discontented victims of the Panic of 1837. Mr. Linn's action was in response not only

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<sup>32</sup>U. S., Congressional Globe, 26th Cong., 2d Sess., 1841, Vol. IX, pp. 89-90.

to the needs of his farmer neighbors and merchants, but also to an 1840 petition from a group of Oregon settlers. In essence, the petition was a request for:

. . . the high privileges of American citizenship; the peaceful enjoyment of life; the right of acquiring, possessing, and using property; and the unrestrained pursuit of rational happiness."<sup>33</sup>

To further encourage a large Oregon migration, Senator Linn, in 1842, proposed the construction of a line of protective forts and supply posts between the Missouri River and the mouth of the Columbia River. This action served to strengthen his lifelong contention that . . . the title of the United States to the Territory of Oregon is certain, and will not be abandoned."<sup>34</sup>

In the same year, Mr. Linn made his most dynamic and appealing proposal. He suggested that every male Oregon settler over eighteen years of age receive a grant of 640 acres, or one section of land, and that wives and children

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<sup>33</sup>William H. Gray, A History of Oregon, 1789-1849, Drawn from Personal Observation and Authentic Information (Portland, Oregon: Harris & Holman, 1870), pp. 194-196.

<sup>34</sup>U. S., Congressional Globe, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1842, Appendix, p. 736.

under eighteen years of age receive 160 acres.<sup>35</sup> Once Oregon was placed under the sovereignty of the United States, the land would become part of the public domain to be sold at the average price of \$1.25 per acre. Consequently, the Linn Land Bill aroused great expectations among farmers in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys who were subjected to high taxes and depressed agricultural conditions.

Linn had responded to the inquiries and demands of scores of anxious Americans, and he soon realized that his bill would serve as assurance that the government of the United States would not abandon its citizens to a foreign power. Senator Linn encouraged settlers to march towards Oregon with every public right before them.

Opposition to the Linn Land Bill was centered in the Whig Party, and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Rufus Choate of Massachusetts were the leaders in dissent. Despite Calhoun's opposition to "exclusive possession" of Oregon, the bulk of the Mississippi Valley sentiment supported the bill.<sup>36</sup> Linn had succeeded in aligning popular demand with government activity, and the support

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1842, Vol. XII, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup>Missouri Statesman (Columbia), January 27, 1843.



accorded his proposals bears this truth out. The bill passed the Senate early in 1843, but failed in the House. News of the failure did not reach the prospective emigrants until after their organization and arrival in Oregon, therefore the bill served only to encourage the migration at that time. Senator Linn's death in the fall of 1843 suspended the vitality of his measures, but the "Oregon fever" which he had helped to spark, and the donation laws passed by Congress a few years later fulfilled his implied promise.

A prominent newspaper reported the impracticality of Linn's bill, but the question of practical application seems irrelevant.<sup>37</sup> It mattered not that the Linn Land Bill was not destined to pass and become a law, it was enough that the United States Government was beginning to once again assume a prominent role in the occupation of Oregon. The fact that the government was willing to consider a liberal land policy for the emigrants was the source of immeasurable encouragement. To the impatient pioneers, a hint was as good as a promise.

The reaction to the efforts of Mr. Linn by the proponents of the migration are interesting to note.

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<sup>37</sup>Niles National Register, April 22, 1843.

Senator Samuel McRoberts of Illinois felt that if a bill similar to that proposed by Linn was passed, there would be little difficulty in Americanizing Oregon completely and forever.<sup>38</sup> Linn's bill, however, had this effect before a comparable act was passed. R. W. Morrison remarked as follows--"Well, the Donation Bill passed the Senate, but failed in the House, but I believe that it, or a law like it, will pass, and I am going to Oregon anyhow."<sup>39</sup> E. L. Applegate, another emigrant remarked as follows:

This proposition [the Linn bill] deeply touched the heart of the western pioneer. . . . All had heard of the perpetually green hills and plains of Western Oregon . . . and, as a natural consequence, under these favorable circumstances, the spirit of emigration warmed up; and the 'Oregon fever' became as a household expression. Thus originated the vast cavalcade.<sup>40</sup>

Jesse Applegate advised other westerners that "If you are going to Oregon by all means go this spring for if Linn's Bill pass next year every man's neighbor and friends will move in that direction."<sup>41</sup> Elijah White, the leader

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<sup>38</sup> St. Louis Daily Republican, January 10, 1843.

<sup>39</sup> Minto, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> H. O. Lang (ed.), A History of the Willamette Valley (Portland, Oregon: Himes & Lang, 1885), p. 261.

<sup>41</sup> Maude A. Rucker (ed.), The Oregon Trail and Some of Its Blazers (New York: Walter Neale Co., 1930), pp. 225-6.

of the 1842 migration, and the Indian agent in Oregon, felt that the Linn proposal ". . . has the double advantage of being popular and useful . . . manifestly acting as a strong incentive to all. . . ." <sup>42</sup> Peter Burnett also declared that the Linn Bill encouraged his emigration as he had a wife and six children eligible for land donations under the provisions of the Linn Bill. <sup>43</sup> It is quite interesting to note that when the wagon trains began moving across the plains, the Bible and Linn's Bill often formed the entire library of many emigrant families. <sup>44</sup>

The efforts of Senator Linn served to keep the Oregon question alive by urging Congressional action in behalf of the settlers. Linn's advocacy of the United States' right to the Oregon country was so pronounced that one newspaper carried the following prediction--". . . the question of original right will be started, which would

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<sup>42</sup>Miss A. J. Allen, Ten Years in Oregon; The Travels and Adventures of Dr. E. White (Ithaca, New York: Mack, Andrus & Co., 1848), p. 173.

<sup>43</sup>Peter H. Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 64.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph Schafer, "Notes on the Colonization of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (December, 1905), p. 385.

supersede all discussions about boundary lines."<sup>45</sup> Senator Linn was responsible for the crystallization of much of the Oregon propaganda into popular demand, and he therefore ". . . deserves, and will receive the gratitude of the western people for his noble exertions in behalf of those 'who pave the way' for their country's greatness."<sup>46</sup>

In the light of the aforementioned motives for migration in 1843, it would be correct to assert that the undertaking of the pioneers was neither irrational nor mysterious, for with them "Emigration is their business . . . ." <sup>47</sup> An idea was conceived out of sheer necessity, a plan was devised, and an agitation was worked up. The "Oregon fever" seized those who sought to transform their desires into action; those who wished to have a personal hand in the shaping of their destinies. Oregon promised ". . . new visions of perfection. The star beckons to some with hope, for it can mean freedom and another chance at goodness, or power."<sup>48</sup> How important this idea was in a

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<sup>45</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, January 18, 1843.

<sup>46</sup>Illinois State Register, June 10, 1842.

<sup>47</sup>Burlington Weekly Hawkeye (Iowa), November 23, 1843.

<sup>48</sup>George W. Pierson, "Under a Wandering Star," Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXIX (Autumn, 1963), p. 636.

time of severe depression! The great spirit of the migration closely resembled that of the migration to the New England coast over two centuries earlier, and in this respect, the early history of Oregon ". . . is an epitome of American history."<sup>49</sup> The inhabitants of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys, enveloped in disaster, realized that "Oregon was before us in its future glory, and we grasped the prospect of its coming as the impulse of our scheme. We needed no speeches, no reports to awaken us. Oregon invited us."<sup>50</sup> The speeches and reports which did come, however, only intensified the "Oregon fever."

Out of the restlessness of the Mississippi Valley grew a force equal to the "Oregon fever" in its influence upon the Great Migration of 1843. The force was "Manifest Destiny," and it provided the prospective emigrant with yet another timely motive for the move to the Oregon country.

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<sup>49</sup>Edward Gaylord Bourne, "Aspects of Oregon History Before 1840," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (September, 1905), p. 257.

<sup>50</sup>James Christy Bell, "Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838-1846," Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI (March, 1921), p. 99.

### CHAPTER III

#### "MANIFEST DESTINY" AND MISSION

The emigrant of 1843, having suffered the ravages of the Panic in the Mississippi Valley, was seeking a national market which he thought of in terms of new territory. He wished only for what he really needed, health and sufficient reward for his labor. He was not looking primarily for national expansion. Anglo-American animosity only served to intensify his zealous search for security. The idea of "Manifest Destiny" must be considered, in the case of the Great Migration, in terms of personal gain. The key to the "Manifest Destiny" in relation to the Oregon Migration lies in the fact that the country had to be "Americanized" in order that it could be exploited to the advantage of the farmers and merchants of the western states.

The people of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys generally recognized the claim of the United States to Oregon, but they felt, in a time of financial depression, that this claim should be substantiated for their own

betterment. What they accomplished, however, appealed strongly to national pride.<sup>1</sup> The idea that the 1843 emigrants were ". . . deeply imbued with the spirit which actuated the patriots of the Revolution" may be contested in the light of the motives discussed in the previous chapters.<sup>2</sup> The emigrants were undoubtedly patriotic, but the author questions this characteristic as a primary motive for the movement westward in 1843.

The claim to Oregon was recognized primarily because the westerners stood to gain from the area's commercial and agricultural advantages. The Illinois Legislature declared that the title of the United States to Oregon was indisputable and should be implemented by grants of land to emigrants.<sup>3</sup> A large group of emigration advocates proclaimed that the advantages of Oregon colonization should

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<sup>1</sup>John Back McMaster, A History of the People of the United States (8 vols.; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1929), Vol. VII, p. 300. For the history of the "Manifest Destiny" idea see Julius W. Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny'," American Historical Review, Vol. XXXII (July, 1927), pp. 795-798.

<sup>2</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Illinois State Register, April 14, 1843.

not be extended to any foreign power.<sup>4</sup> It was generally ascertained that Oregon was ". . . ours by discovery--ours by exploration--ours by surrender--by title--and by treaty."<sup>5</sup> The general western attitude was one of expansion, and throughout the western states there was the evidence of a unanimous allegiance to a dream of social and financial amelioration. It would seem that the emigrants' claim to Oregon rested not upon the fact that there were British in the area, but rather upon the premise that ". . . it is our destiny because it is right."<sup>6</sup>

It must also be remembered that the unique individualism of the western farmer and merchant created a demand for liberty and self-government, especially in hard times. As a result, the emigrants were essentially embarking upon ". . . the great experiment of liberty. . .," and the notion of nationalism was of secondary importance.<sup>7</sup> Obstacles in the path of this venture, such as the British trade

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<sup>4</sup>Vincennes Western Sun, January 24, 1843.

<sup>5</sup>Kentucky Gazette (Lexington), February 26, 1843.

<sup>6</sup>U. S., Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 1846, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup>J. C. Parish, The Persistence of the Westward Movement and Other Essays (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), p. 48.



monopoly in the Pacific Northwest, were to be dealt with accordingly. The demands for British removal from Oregon were manifestations of the emigrant's desire for a commercial, democratic "empire" of his own. Oregon was destined to be a land possessed by a strong population for freedom's sake, not especially for the sole benefit of the nation.

It was obvious to the emigrants that those who first settled Oregon in great numbers would rule its commercial advantages. Albert Gallatin repeatedly emphasized the fact that the sole owners of Oregon and its resources would be those who colonized the area.<sup>8</sup> In 1842, Governor Kinney of Illinois declared that the western pioneers would, by the very nature of their needs and desires, populate Oregon, ". . . notwithstanding John Bull. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

A force which gave strong impetus to the Great Migration was the assumption by some that Oregon could not

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<sup>8</sup> Lee Frederick Merk, Albert Gallatin and the Oregon Problem (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). The Illinois State Register of October 13, 1843 contained the following statement: "The truth is, however, that the real safeguard to the title of the United States to Oregon must be found in the citizens of this country who emigrate to her rich and beautiful territory."

<sup>9</sup> Ezra M. Prince, "Prices in our Lean County, Illinois, From 1832 to 1860," Illinois State Historical Society, Transactions, Fifth Annual Meeting (Springfield, 1904), p. 444.

be settled by Americans, that it must be colonized by Europeans.<sup>10</sup> The realization that such a valuable area might be lost when needed most by depressed farmers had a significant impact upon the organization of the movement. The people of the West generally wished to see the ". . . young empire of the Pacific . . ." established by westerners who would benefit by the settlement.<sup>11</sup> Westerners were often made to feel duty-bound to establish in Oregon a commercial empire to vie with their once-glorious Mississippi Valley.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that the American population was rapidly expanding also contributed to the "Manifest Destiny" theory in relation to Oregon. When people felt the urge to take up new land, Oregon, because of its widely publicized advantages, became the natural goal:

No power on earth, nor all the power of the earth, can check the swelling tide of American population, nor deprive that population of its indomitable enterprise and restless energy.

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<sup>10</sup>"Mexico and the Great Western Prairies," Edinburgh Review, Vol. LXXVIII (July, 1843), p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 61.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Every portion of this continent . . . will be . . . filled with industrious and thriving Anglo-Saxons, impatient of restraints upon their industry. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The nationalistic motives for migration in 1843, therefore, are indeed open to question. Both England and the United States had well-founded claims to Oregon; Americans were simply better at "pioneering". In 1843, the financial condition of the farmer and merchant was based upon his land, his livestock and his credit. All of these were insecure in the Mississippi Valley, but likely to be secured to them in Oregon. It must be said that the western pioneers were certainly reaching out to take possession of Oregon land, and conditions in the Mississippi Valley only strengthened the organization of the Great Migration.<sup>14</sup>

The migration was a manifestation of the irresistible progress of the western population. It was not ". . . a test

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<sup>13</sup>"The Value of Oregon," Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review, Vol. XIV (May, 1846), p. 436.

<sup>14</sup>Leslie M. Scott, "Influence of American Settlement upon the Oregon Boundary Dispute of 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXIX (March, 1928), pp. 8-9. For a sound inquiry into the geographic influence of westward expansion, see Ellen Churchill Semple, American History and it's Geographic Conditions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903).

of patriotism, albeit every citizen is a quixotic propagation of his republican faith. . . ."15

The emigrant, however, realized his probable effect upon national progress. In fulfilling his desires, he knew that he was fulfilling a national obligation, but nationalism played a secondary role. The ". . . provision of an ample labor supply for the successful accomplishment of all they foresaw in the future of the Pacific Northwest was one function of Manifest Destiny. . . ."16 Individual commercial advantage was essentially a national advantage during hard times, and thus the nationalistic obligations of the emigrants were indirectly fulfilled.

The subjugation of British interests in Oregon was followed as a matter of course. One 1843 emigrant, in answer to a query as to his purpose in Oregon, said, "we've come from Missouri . . . we've come to make our homes in Oregon and rule this country. . . ."17 Because of the general

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<sup>15</sup>T. W. Davenport, "An Object Lesson in Paternalism," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (March, 1903), p. 47.

<sup>16</sup>Helen B. Kroll, "The Books That Enlightened the Emigrants," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XLV (June, 1944), p. 118.

<sup>17</sup>John Minto, "Antecedents of the Oregon Pioneers and the Light These Throw on Their Motives," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 52.

land hunger, the pioneers became involved in political issues and the boundary dispute with England.<sup>18</sup> It was recorded that "If we have our hand in the Lions' mouth, we should get it out the best way we can."<sup>19</sup>

As a result of this involvement, the emigrants necessarily developed very definite attitudes towards the English occupants of the Far West, and of the British Empire as a whole. The possibility of war with England over Oregon was certainly not welcomed by the majority of the Oregon emigrants. They were concerned primarily with the commercial stipulations of the Anglo-American treaties.<sup>20</sup> Consequently they believed as did James K. Polk, that the best way to treat John Bull was ". . . to look him straight in the eye."<sup>21</sup> A good many British citizens and politicians felt that to save the commercial advantage of Oregon to the Empire would require the dispatch of an armed fleet to the

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<sup>18</sup>Albert Katz Weinberg, Manifest Destiny, A Study of National Expansion in American History (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1935), p. 116.

<sup>19</sup>Illinois State Register, February 17, 1843.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Julius W. Pratt, "James K. Polk and John Bull," Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XXIV (December, 1943), p. 349.

Columbia.<sup>22</sup> The knowledge of this sentiment may have provoked a few emigrants, but it is not likely that it created any perceptible nationalistic movement within their ranks.

The Great Migration actually surprised the British and forced them to change their policies by demonstrating that they could neither defend nor colonize Oregon.<sup>23</sup> The rapid influx of American settlers severely weakened British progress in Oregon. The British did not feel that agricultural and colonization possibilities in the Pacific Northwest were important, and many declared that other than cultivation on a subsistence level, Oregon held few commercial promises.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps it would be correct to state that the British lost Oregon by placing ". . . the beaver paramount to the plow. . . ." <sup>25</sup> Western farmers realized that if they cultivated the land, it would be theirs.

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<sup>22</sup>The Times (London), February 4, 1843. An article to this effect was reprinted in Niles National Register, March 11, 1843.

<sup>23</sup>Scott, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXIX, pp. 5-11.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting, (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 73. One British writer predicted that "Even the persevering Yankees

The Americans, unlike the British, made no pretense of a policy other than sheer opportunism in the conduct of the fur trade. The emigrant displayed the same attitude towards the soil and other commercial ventures. The emigrants desired the exclusive benefits of Oregon's resources and perhaps they felt that "If that territory is basely surrendered, the honor of our country ages with it."<sup>26</sup>

Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, wrote that the minds of the emigrants were often poisoned with anti-British propaganda.<sup>27</sup> Animosity on the part of the pioneers, was perhaps associated with the fact that the fur traders ". . . have selected out the finest sites for farms . . . they are in fact grasping at everything. . . ."<sup>28</sup> When an early emigrant

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would not think of emigrating to Oregon in their ox-wagons . . . ." Reverend Gustavas Hines, A Voyage Round the World With a History of the Oregon Mission (Buffalo, New York: George H. Derby & Co., 1850), p. 416.

<sup>26</sup>Peoria Register and North-Western Gazetteer, November 10, 1838.

<sup>27</sup>"John McLoughlin's Last Letter," American Historical Review, Vol. XXI (October, 1915), pp. 104-134.

<sup>28</sup>Melvin Clay Jacobs, Winning Oregon: A Study of an Expansionist Movement (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), p. 108, from the Iowa Capitol Reporter, May 14, 1842.

was maltreated by the Hudson's Bay Co., he warned McLoughlin that his uncle was arriving with a later migration--"His name is Uncle Sam, and I hope you will know him!"<sup>29</sup>

Animosity towards the British was kept alive in the Pacific Northwest because it was essentially a personal matter. Owing to Anglo-American collisions in the old Northwest Territory caused many westerners to resent British intrusion in the "new Northwest."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the possibility of British-Indian alliances against American lives and property created a motive for some emigrants to strengthen the pioneer hold on Oregon. Even then, animosities, as far as the American settlers were concerned, were based upon the commercial advantages of the Oregon country. The Great Migration was essentially an economic movement, and most of the emigrants settled south of the Columbia River and the immediate area of dispute. If the emigrants demanded the American occupation of the whole of Oregon, it was to protect their social and financial interests.

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<sup>29</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon (2 vols.; San Francisco: The History Co., 1886), Vol. I, p. 248.

<sup>30</sup>Jacobs, p. 99.



It is ironic to note that Dr. John McLoughlin was perhaps the most valuable friend the emigrants had in all Oregon. He fed, clothed, nursed, supplied, housed and located many emigrants, and his generosity was widely acknowledged. Newspapers and letters confirmed the Chief Factor's benevolence for the prospective emigrants of 1843. Although McLoughlin's kindnesses significantly reduced British influence in the Pacific Northwest, his last days were embittered by ingratitude as his generosity came to be misrepresented and misunderstood.<sup>31</sup> McLoughlin's power was absolute and despotic, and westerners were vehemently opposed to despots, regardless of their benevolence.

A unique characteristic of the Great Migration was the fact that it did not depend upon the full support of Congress for its successful completion. This seems to uphold the idea that "Manifest Destiny" was not interpreted in a nationalistic perspective by the emigrants. The West, through the activity of Senator Benton and Senator Linn, had initiated the Oregon movement in Congress. But Linn's bills failed to pass, and the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 neglected the Oregon

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<sup>31</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Second Annual Meeting, (Portland, Oregon, 1894), p. 35.

question.<sup>32</sup> The Oregon question, with the Texas issue, came to be a game of partisan politics, and it was left to the emigrants to carry out their migration without a strong dependence upon governmental assistance. One contemporary observer remarked that ". . . had Congress been relied upon, Oregon would have inevitably become a dependency of Great Britain."<sup>33</sup>

The efforts of Benton, Linn, Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts and Albert Gallatin, however, must be given a place of honor in the early history of Oregon.<sup>34</sup> Senator Benton continually induced families to migrate to Oregon for the benefit of themselves and their country.<sup>35</sup> Jesse Applegate of the Great Migration declared that Benton,

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<sup>32</sup>Hunter Miller (ed.), Treaties and other International Acts of the United States of America (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1934), Vol. IV, pp. 363-477.

<sup>33</sup>H. O. Lang, A History of the Willamette Valley (Portland, Oregon: Himes and Lang, 1885), p. 224.

<sup>34</sup>Cushing's attempt to arouse an interest in the occupation of Oregon may be seen in U. S., Congress, House, Cushing's Report, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101, pp. 1-2. (U. S. serial set no. 351). The report included maps, letters, petitions and a great deal of miscellaneous information. Ten Thousand copies were printed for distribution. See also Niles National Register, June 8, 1839.

<sup>35</sup>See U. S., Congressional Globe, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1842, p. 106.

rather than the emigrants, was primarily responsible for the occupation of Oregon.<sup>36</sup> An Illinois newspaper reported that the Oregon question had been brought to its proper light quite belatedly, and then only with the help of the emigrants and ". . . some of the distinguished members of the West."<sup>37</sup>

Discouragement over Congressional activity only prompted rapid action on the part of the pioneers. John Burch McLane, an 1843 emigrant, felt that ". . . our Government was inclined to give up our country to the British government. Webster was particularly inclined to do it. . . ." <sup>38</sup> Senator George McDuffie of South Carolina declared that he would not give "a pinch of snuff" for the whole of Oregon.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>"Letter of Jesse Applegate to the Oregon Pioneer Association," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXX (December, 1919), p. 399.

<sup>37</sup>Illinois State Register, March 24, 1843.

<sup>38</sup>John Burch McLane, "The First Wagon Train to Oregon," Letters Pertaining to the Oregon Migration, Salem, 1878, MS (microfilm no. PA46), Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

<sup>39</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting, (Portland, Oregon, 1900), p. 31.

In the face of such opposition, the friends of emigrants labored feverishly. Senator McRoberts of Illinois decried the blind selfishness of Congress in relation to the lack of action on the Oregon occupation.<sup>40</sup> Another report included the following plea:

If our government would but furnish a little protection and will tolerate the settlement of immigrants in the Oregon territory, a very few years would elapse before a state sufficiently strong for all the purposes of self-protection would be planted. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Thomas Jefferson Farnham was approached by several American citizens in Oregon who voiced the following query:

Why are we left without protection in this part of our country's domain? Why are foreigners permitted to domineer over American citizens . . . and make us dependent on them for the clothes we wear? . . .<sup>42</sup>

The West, and especially the Mississippi Valley had initiated the Oregon movement in Congress. This was accomplished with the help of Senators Linn and Benton,

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<sup>40</sup>Illinois State Register, February 10, 1843.

<sup>41</sup>Sangamo Journal (Springfield, Illinois), October 25, 1839.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies, Vol. XXIX of Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (32 vols., Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1905), p. 23.

and Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts. Because the United States, as well as England, lacked a clear title to all of the Oregon country, the movement had encountered little sympathy in the executive branch of the Government during the administration of John Tyler. Members of Congress seemed to feel that it would be a fatal mistake to force the issue, and as a result, the Government as a whole did not contribute substantially to the Great Migration. It has been said that the occupation of Oregon was secured not in Washington, but on the banks of the Columbia River.<sup>43</sup> The failure of the Linn Bill and the neglect of Oregon in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty disappointed the West. This disappointment, coupled with the realization that Senators Linn and Benton were forcing Congress to awaken to the importance of the Oregon country, only increased western agitation for emigration and occupation. Thus, "While statesmanship debated, hesitated and protested, he [the emigrant] . . . went forward and settled the issue. . . ."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Henry S. Commager, "England and the Oregon Treaty, 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVIII (March, 1927), p. 19.

<sup>44</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1898), p. 40.

## CHAPTER IV

### FUR TRADERS AND EMIGRATION

For many years, historians and students of the frontier movement to Oregon have attempted to calculate with, divergent views, the true impact of the fur-traders and the missionaries upon the migrations to the Pacific Northwest. While the general contributions of the trading era are, and have been universally acknowledged, many scholars feel that the role of the missionary period in relation to the Great Migration has been grossly exaggerated. On the other hand, some feel that the significance of the fur-trading period in the Oregon movements has failed to receive the proper consideration. One justification of this study is founded on the belief that the missionary era in Oregon contributed significantly to the momentous Great Migration of 1843, perhaps more so than the trading period. Both eras represent distinct westward movements and must be treated as such to a certain extent. The close relationship between these movements and the trek of the farmer of the Mississippi Valley merit considerable study.

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching similarity between the fur-traders and the Oregon emigrants of 1843 was the fact that both groups originated, for the most part, in the Mississippi Valley. The earliest effort made by any American group with material interests to terminate the joint occupancy treaty had come from the Valley. Most of these traders operated out of St. Louis where trading operations were headquartered for some years. Although American fur traders failed in their efforts to drive the powerful Hudson's Bay Company from their field, their goals and ideals had inspired the frontiersmen of the western states since John Jacob Astor established his Pacific Fur Company at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1810.<sup>1</sup>

The hope of the American trader and trapper to dominate the field in the Pacific Northwest was unable to arouse a workable issue in the Jacksonian era, and perhaps their object was too remote from the common interest of the eastern states. To the adventurous and visionary inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley, the traders were

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<sup>1</sup>P. Koch, "The Story of Astoria," The Magazine of American History, Vol. XIII (March, 1885), p. 269.

the "pathfinders" who were destined to play an important role in showing the way to Oregon.

The primary object of the American traders, aside from the desire to expel the Hudson's Bay Company from the field, was immediate profit. It is relatively simple to see the similarity between this motive and the self-gain aims of the western farmers and merchants of the Great Migration. Consequently, the traders acted in complete accord with the spirit of the "Oregon fever" which swept the Mississippi Valley in 1843. Many mountain trappers and traders wintered on the Missouri border, and thus offered firsthand information to the prospective emigrants.

The dreams of the early traders in the Oregon field appealed to insecure frontier merchants and farmers primarily because American trade preponderance in the Pacific Northwest would practically assure their success in the establishment of markets and commercial enterprises. John Jacob Astor obviously intended permanent occupation and was especially interested in securing the China trade. A contemporary historian noted that Astor had planned to effect the establishment of trading posts on the Columbia River and across the plains, thereby obtaining control of



the entire continental fur trade.<sup>2</sup> Many emigrants felt that Astor's scheme was workable and practical, and his work in that direction probably motivated many a profit-seeking frontiersman. Astor longed to see Oregon settled, but the influence of the fur traders was destined to relative dormancy until conditions in the Mississippi Valley forced farmers and small businessmen to seek out new fields. Only then was Astor's hope fulfilled.

I considered as a great public acquisition the commencement of a settlement on that point of the western coast of America, and looked forward with gratification to the time when its descendents should have spread themselves through the whole length of that coast.<sup>3</sup>

Another figure important both to the fur-trading era and the period of Oregon migration was Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth. Wyeth, a Bostonian, entered the Oregon fur trade in the early 1830's, hoping to succeed where John Jacob Astor had failed. He entered the field against heavy British opposition, low capital, inexperience, lack of confidence among the Indians and with a premature salmon-

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Greenhow, The History of Oregon and California (Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1845), p. 293.

<sup>3</sup>Koch, The Magazine of American History, Vol. XIII, p. 272.

packing scheme.<sup>4</sup> Wyeth failed in his venture, but he became interested in Oregon as an area for settlement and commercial and agricultural exploitation. He constructed Fort Hall, located near present-day Pocatello, Idaho, in the hope that a successful trading post might yet save his venture.<sup>5</sup> He later established Fort William near the mouth of the Willamette River, and tried to wrest the fur trade from the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>6</sup> The British competition, however, proved much too formidable, and Wyeth sold both posts to the Hudson's Bay Company. Fort Hall became a crucial stopping-off place for the Great Migration, and it has been said that "Oregon was taken at Fort Hall."<sup>7</sup>

Nathaniel Wyeth was a colonizer, a commercial adventurer, a visionary idealist and a prophet. As a result, his progress was followed by the victims of the Panic who also realized the possibilities of Oregon enterprise. Wyeth realized that the Oregon country had to be explored and described to interested persons, and his

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<sup>4</sup>See John A. Wyeth, "Nathaniel J. Wyeth and the Struggle for Oregon," Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. LXXXV (November, 1892), pp. 835-847.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 846.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 839.

views were widely read on the western frontier.<sup>8</sup> He helped to kindle an interest in the Pacific Northwest as a field for settlement when such an area dominated the thoughts of dejected agriculturists and bankrupt merchants. Washington Irving once remarked that Wyeth, had he been able to maintain his position in the fur trade, ". . . might have regained for his country the opulent trade of the Columbia . . ."<sup>9</sup> The end of the Wyeth venture marked the end of the American fur-trading era in the Pacific Northwest.

When Wyeth returned to Oregon he brought with him the first missionaries, the pioneers of yet another significant period.

The trader demonstrated to the prospective emigrant that Oregon could offer what he needed most, a market for his surplus goods. The traders ascertained that the China trade could be profitable, and this idea left its mark on

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<sup>8</sup>See U. S., Congress, House, Wyeth's Memoir, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101 (Supplemental Report), Appendix I, 22. (U. S. Serial Set No. 351). Extra copies of this report were printed for public distribution. See also John Wyeth, Oregon; Or a Short History of a Long Journey From the Atlantic Ocean to the Region of the Pacific, By Land, Vol. XXI of Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (32 vols.; Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1905), pp. 20-112. The above work was originally published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1833.

<sup>9</sup>Wyeth, Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. LXXXV, p. 838.

the imaginations of many pioneers. The failure of many American traders due to the preponderance of the Hudson's Bay Company demonstrated that Oregon was a natural haven for individualistic merchants who could prove their worth. The mode of business in Oregon seemed to appeal to frontiersmen opposed to any restraint and desirous of profits:

. . . in the American mode of commerce with the natives there was no unity of purpose--no communion of interest--no fraternity of feeling--no system--no guiding spirit. . .<sup>10</sup>

Fur companies, both American and British, were extremely important as markets for agricultural surpluses. As the period of migration approached, settlers in Oregon were selling their produce to the fur companies at an average price of 62½ cents per bushel.<sup>11</sup>

The traders made no attempt to conceal the natural advantages of the Oregon country from the residents of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. Nathaniel Wyeth, in an attempt to encourage a large migration, wrote:

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<sup>10</sup>James Christy Bell, "Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838-1846," Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI (1921), p. 65.

<sup>11</sup>James R. Robertson, "The Social Evolution of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (March, 1902), p. 19.

The soil is good, timber is heavy and thick, and almost impenetrable from underbrush and fallen trees. . . . I have never seen a country of equal beauty . . . and I doubt not it will one day sustain a large population.<sup>12</sup>

Alexander Ross, who spent some forty years in Oregon as a fur trader, wrote that his post on the Columbia River was one of the most beautiful sights in the western country. In a glorified report, he remarked that he lived like a king in Oregon, surrounded by such imported luxuries as books and wine, and other valuable commodities easily obtained from the natives.<sup>13</sup>

Many western farmers remembered Joshua Pilcher, a long-time trader who had reported that the mildness of the seasons in Oregon ". . . is infinitely greater than in the corresponding latitudes and elevations in the valley of the Mississippi. . . ." <sup>14</sup> He noted that the winters were less cold and the summers less hot in Oregon than in the western states.<sup>15</sup> Although the American trading era came to a

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<sup>12</sup>Wyeth, Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. LXXXV, p. 841.

<sup>13</sup>"Fur-Hunting in Oregon," Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. XII (February, 1856), p. 344.

<sup>14</sup>U. S., Congress, Senate, State of the Fur Trade, 21st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1831, Senate Doc. No. 39, p. 18. (U. S. Serial Set No. 192).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

close before the organization of the Great Migration, such impassioned propaganda served to inflame pioneer spirits and encourage emigration at a time when the people of the Mississippi Valley needed encouragement more than ever before.

The Fur-trading era had demonstrated that a route could be traversed to Oregon from the western frontier, even with the use of large, heavy wagons. This was perhaps the most significant legacy of the era as far as the westward movement is concerned. The "mountain men," by working with their traps and goods towards South Pass, in present day Wyoming, helped to open the road to the Willamette Valley of Oregon. The valley of the Green River, just west of the main ridge of the Rocky Mountains in present day Wyoming, was the strategic center of trader activity, and these mountain entrepreneurs frequented many trails later utilized by the emigrants in their trek westward.<sup>16</sup> South Pass, long used by the trader, became the gateway to the Pacific Northwest. In one report, Jedediah Smith ascertained that the road through South

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<sup>16</sup>W. J. Ghent, The Road to Oregon, A Chronicle of the Great Emigrant Trail (New York: Longman's, Green & Co., 1929), p. 6.

Pass would furnish easy communication with the Pacific slope, ". . . being easier and better than on this side [the eastern side] of the mountains with grass enough for horses and mules . . ." <sup>17</sup> Smith, noting the passage of trader's wagons over the Rockies, wrote that ". . . the ease and safety with which it was done prove the facility of communicating over land with the Pacific Ocean. . . ." <sup>18</sup>

Joshua Pilcher seemed to have the temper of the Mississippi Valley farmer in mind when he wrote:

The Rocky Mountains are deemed by many to be impassable, and to present the barrier which will avert the westward march of the American population. The man must know little of the American people who supposes they can be stopped by anything in the shape of mountains . . . I say, then, that nothing is more easily passed than these mountains. Wagons and carriages may cross them in a state of nature with little difficulty, and with little delay in the day's journey. Some parts are very high; but the gradual rise of the country . . . makes a considerable elevation without perceptible increase. . . . <sup>19</sup>

Fur traders furthered the cause of the Oregon migrations when, in the early 1830's, the fur-bearing animals became quite scarce. Many traders and former trappers

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<sup>17</sup>U. S., Congress, State of the Fur Trade, 21st Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 22.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

turned to the Oregon soil, and helped to spark the "Oregon fever" among the farmers of the Mississippi Valley. Other traders opened supply posts along the route to Oregon for the benefit of the emigrant trains.<sup>20</sup> In 1843, Jim Bridger constructed Fort Bridger on the Green River in what is now Wyoming, and this outfitting post became a familiar point on the emigrant trail in that year.<sup>21</sup>

The traders, in addition to the aforementioned contributions to emigration in the 1840's, were also primarily responsible for inflaming any nationalistic sentiments the western population may have displayed by apprising them of the British preponderance in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>22</sup> It may be argued that the singular objective of the fur trade was immediate profit, and the idea of national advantage was merely incidental. The Mississippi Valley farmers and

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<sup>20</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 66-67.

<sup>21</sup>Charles M. Harvey, "The Road to Oregon," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. CV (May, 1910), p. 635.

<sup>22</sup>For a detailed account of the development of British-American competition and animosities in the Oregon country, see Lester Burrell Shippee, "Federal Relations of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IX (1918), pp. 89-331 and Vol. XX (1919), pp. 35-395.



businessmen were seekers of profit and secure investments. In an era when tempers were short and idealistic, the British trade monopoly loomed as only another barrier to be conquered, just as the mountains and the elements had to be subdued. The only way to subdue such a force, felt the pioneers, was to "Americanize" the trade. Robert Greenhow, the historian believed that Astor's venture might have succeeded had the administrative partners been American, rather than men unconnected with the United States by birth or citizenship.<sup>23</sup>

The Oregon fur business invited competition, and as a result the individualistic tendencies so reverently adhered to by the inhabitants of the western states flourished. When the severe competition resulted in the failure of an American enterprise such as the Pacific Fur Company, the issue served to keep alive a United States claim to Oregon.<sup>24</sup>

Jedediah Smith believed that emigrants would, and ought to play a significant role in the removal of the

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<sup>23</sup>Greenhow, p. 305.

<sup>24</sup>Koch, Magazine of American History, Vol. XIII, pp. 269-271. The Astor venture came to an end in 1812, when control came into British hands.

British traders, who had been able to take possession of the Columbia River and ". . . spread over the country south of it, while no Americans have ever gone, or can venture to go on the British side."<sup>25</sup> Nathaniel Wyeth wrote:

A population is growing out of the occupation of the country, whose prejudices are not with us, and before many years they will decide to whom the country shall belong, unless in the mean time the American government make their power felt. . . .<sup>26</sup>

It is rather ironic that the Hudson's Bay Company, as previously mentioned, proved to be most generous and hospitable to the emigrant train of 1843 almost without exception. Only in business were they intolerant of competition. Dr. McLoughlin was an invaluable friend to the settlers, but American colonization, coming from the Mississippi Valley, was the factor which determined the end of the British monopoly in Oregon. "In the coming democracy of the soil his McLoughlin's feudal kingdom is to pass away."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>U. S., Congress, State of the Fur Trade, 21st Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 23.

<sup>26</sup>Wyeth's Memoir, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup>Constance Lindsay Skinner, Adventurers of Oregon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), p. 236.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIBLE AND THE PLOW

If the exploits of the fur traders had been a significant impetus for migration to Oregon in 1843, the encouragements of the Protestant missionaries in that area were even more influential. The first missionaries to invade the Oregon country were the Methodists, who, under the leadership of a dynamic Jason Lee, left St. Louis in January of 1834.<sup>1</sup> Lee's journal of the trek west was widely used by the emigrants of 1843 as a guide-book, and his assertion that a general improvement in health outweighed the adversities of travel undoubtedly spurred on many a skeptical pioneer.<sup>2</sup> When Lee later gave a dull report of his trip, he paid particular attention to the absence of Indian hostilities, the

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<sup>1</sup>Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal, January 31, 1834.

<sup>2</sup>The diary of Jason Lee may be found in Archer Butler Hulbert (ed.), Overland to the Pacific, Vol. V: The Oregon Crusade (8 vols.; Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1935).

excellence of the climate enroute and the abundance of game which caused the travellers to feel ". . . no apprehension of want. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

Having arrived in Oregon and examining the possibilities of the area, Reverend Lee later reported that the area was well-suited to agriculture, and that the climate was remarkably mild and conducive to good health. Lee lectured ardently when he returned to the East in 1838 for reinforcements, and his rousing talks kindled enthusiasm wherever he spoke. On September 20, 1838, Lee held an emigrant meeting at Springfield, Illinois, and there is no doubt that this gathering had a very significant effect on the Great Migration. <sup>4</sup> When emigration became a reality, the advice and guidance of Jason Lee was not forgotten.

In the early autumn of 1834, the Lee party came upon the magnificent Willamette Valley. Upon weighing the possibilities of this area to the monotony of the Flathead Indian country, Lee noted that it was not a difficult decision to make the Valley his base of operations,

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<sup>3</sup>Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal, November 16, 1838.

<sup>4</sup>Cornelius J. Brosnan, Jason Lee, Prophet of the New Oregon (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1932), p. 99.

thereby abandoning his Flathead mission,<sup>5</sup> Thus Reverend Lee's dream for a white colony in Oregon at the expense of the natives, the intended objects of salvation, began, ironically, with his enthusiastic entry into the Oregon country. Lee's early discouraging impressions of the Indians fostered a deep-seated advocacy of white emigration into the area, for foresight told him that they would be its eventual rulers. His most important work, he ascertained, was the nurture of the white settlers.

Lee's partial abandonment of his spiritual work, although unfortunate for the Indian, is not difficult to comprehend. Reverend Lee ". . . came solely as a missionary to the Indians. He soon saw the possibilities and the vast resources and the great value of this country."<sup>6</sup> Lee felt, as did many of the 1843 emigrants, that a spirit of personal adventure would make it extremely difficult to hold the settlers to the idea of the salvation of the natives. Lee himself asserted that the emigrants were naturally

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<sup>5</sup>John Martin Canse, "Jason Lee: New Evidence on the Missionary and Colonizer," Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (October, 1915), p. 258.

<sup>6</sup>J. C. Moreland, "Jason Lee Memorial Addresses," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII (September, 1906), p. 249.

disposed to providing for themselves, and said ". . . I am satisfied that such a colony will find enough to do for a long time without looking after the Indian. . . ." <sup>7</sup>

Daniel Lee, Jason's nephew and an equally ardent advocate of emigration explained the policy of the Methodist mission as follows:

A larger field of usefulness was contemplated as the object of the mission than the benefitting of a single tribe. The wants of the whole country, present and prospective . . . were taken into account. . . . <sup>8</sup>

Jason Lee's interest in immigration into Oregon paralleled an eager promulgation of a great agricultural community in that country. Owing to the state of things in the Mississippi Valley, Lee's influence in this direction had an immeasurable impact upon those who chose to leave the troubled West in 1843. In a letter to Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts, Reverend Lee suggested that the United States Government take steps to guarantee that the land that emigrants settled upon would be secured to them. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Hulbert, The Oregon Crusade, pp. 145-6.

<sup>8</sup>M. L. Wardell, "Oregon Immigration Prior to 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII (March, 1926), p. 45.

<sup>9</sup>U. S., Congress, House, Jason Lee to Caleb Cushing, January 17, 1839, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101, Appendix H, p. 3. (U. S. Serial Set No. 351).

In addition, Lee requested that the laws and protection of the United States Government be extended over Oregon, for ". . . there is the germ of a great state."<sup>10</sup>

Lee had actually carried on where Lewis F. Linn had ended. He agitated ceaselessly for land donations in Oregon, and his work, with that of Senator Linn, culminated in the Donation Land Law passed in 1850.<sup>11</sup> Lee thus played a vital role in the development of the "Oregon fever" on the Mississippi Valley frontier in the early 1840's. He recognized the fact that Indian titles could be extinguished, and prophesized that once emigration from the states began, the missionaries themselves would terminate their spiritual services and become permanent settlers.<sup>12</sup>

The prospective farmer emigrants of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys looked to Lee and his party for guidance and inspiration for reasons other than their support of land

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup>For a list and description of the various Oregon donation bills introduced, see U. S., Congress, House, Report of the Surveyor General of the Public Lands in Oregon, 31st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1850, House Report No. 271, pp. 1-5. (U. S. Serial Set No. 584).

<sup>12</sup>U. S., Congress, Lee to Cushing, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 4.

donations. Jason Lee was an agriculturist himself, and it is interesting to note that the Lee party were the first Americans to develop a cattle enterprise west of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>13</sup> Reverend Lee once invested \$600 of the mission funds in a cattle company, and such confidence in the agricultural possibilities of Oregon helped to stimulate the western farmer to action.<sup>14</sup> While on his speaking tour in the East in 1839, Lee succeeded in collecting nearly \$5,000 in missionary funds and private donations, and with this cash, he greatly expanded his agricultural enterprise in Oregon.<sup>15</sup> As a result of this activity, the Methodist missions functioned not only as information centers and sources of intoxicating propaganda, but also as general rallying points for emigrants. Jason Lee brought his message directly to the people of the western states.

The Methodist missionary field further stimulated the 1843 trek by means of the Oregon Memorial of 1838, inspired by Jason Lee. This petition, the first such

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<sup>13</sup>Oregon Spectator, May 14, 1846.

<sup>14</sup>Wardell, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.



resolution from the American settlers of Oregon, was a concise, well-written statement of the advantages of Oregon, and it stressed the importance of a speedy and formal occupation by the United States. The petition was signed by the members of the missionary force and the small band of American settlers.<sup>16</sup> The resolution was carried to the East by Reverend Lee when he journeyed there in 1838. He subsequently presented the document to Senator Linn, who read it before the Senate early in the following year. The petition was accepted, but the bills it inspired were tabled.<sup>17</sup> Congress was not in the mood to act on the occupation of Oregon, a fact to which Senator Linn would well have attested.

The memorial stressed the agricultural advantages of Oregon, advantages which the members of the Great Migration sought so relentlessly. The signers of the

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<sup>16</sup>The petition was signed by ". . . 36 out of a possible 51 settlers south of the Columbia River. . . ." Nine of these were Canadians desiring American citizenship. The remainder were approximately half settlers and half missionaries and their families. Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, Empire of the Columbia (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), pp. 227-228.

<sup>17</sup>C. J. Pike, "Petitions of Oregon Settlers," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXXIV (September, 1933), pp. 220-221.

petition asserted that "The products of our fields have amply justified the most flattering descriptions of the soil, while the facilities which it affords for rearing cattle are, perhaps, exceeded by those of no country in North America."<sup>18</sup> The petitioners insisted that the ". . . resources of the country cannot fail to induce emigration and commerce . . . ," and the prospective emigrants soon realized that their influence could greatly reduce the country's dependence upon the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>19</sup>

The Methodists were not the only spiritual leaders to fan the flames of the "Oregon fever" during the "roaring forties." The Presbyterian tide, under the direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and led by an indomitable Marcus Whitman, felt this same obligation towards the white community. Dr. Whitman himself, in a letter to his parents, said:

I have no doubt our great work is to aid the white settler of this country and to help found

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<sup>18</sup>U. S., Congress, House, The Oregon Memorial of 1838, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101 (Supplemental Report), Appendix H, p. 4. (U. S. Serial Set No. 351).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

its religious institutions. . . . The white settlers will demand the soil and seek the removal of both the Indians and the Mission. What Americans desire of this kind they always effect, and it is equally useless to oppose it or desire it otherwise. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Whitman's advocacy of the Great Migration centered about his conviction that white farmers, settling around his missions, would induce the Indians to take up an agricultural life. The first American settlers Whitman saw arrive were the coarse "mountain men" with their half-breed families. Because these crude people were often more repulsive than the Indians themselves, Whitman did everything possible to encourage the emigration from the Mississippi Valley of wholesome families.<sup>21</sup>

Other American Board missionaries felt as Whitman did in respect to the white influx. Henry Harmon Spalding, located at the Lapwai station in what is now Idaho, stressed the need for good men to settle in Oregon.<sup>22</sup> And the Reverend Asa B. Smith felt that the only way the missionaries would

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<sup>20</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-First Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon: 1893), p. 65.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 163. (From a letter of August 23, 1842).

<sup>22</sup>Wardell, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII, p. 53.

accomplish anything was to make themselves independent of the natives and support white emigration.<sup>23</sup>

In accordance with their promotion of the Great Migration, the missionaries were responsible for a great deal of glorified propaganda aimed at the population of the western states. Shortly before the organization of the 1843 party, Dr. Whitman reported that the settlers in Oregon were doing rather well for themselves, an assertion which was well-received by many an emigrant.<sup>24</sup> Another missionary, in a letter to a friend in the States, referred to Oregon as ". . . one of the loveliest regions that nature ever bestowed upon man."<sup>25</sup> Reverend Spalding, in a direct attempt to secure publicity for a migration, requested a friend to print a descriptive letter in the latter's newspaper.<sup>26</sup> An ". . . easy life in a mild climate . . ."

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<sup>23</sup>Clifford M. Drury (ed.), The Diaries and Letters of Henry Harmon Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842 (Northwestern Historical Series, No. IV; Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1958), p. 148.

<sup>24</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, April 12, 1843.

<sup>25</sup>Alton Telegraph, October 17, 1839.

<sup>26</sup>"Spalding's Letter," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LI (June, 1950), pp. 127-133.

was the theme of most of the missionary reports reaching the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys.<sup>27</sup> A prominent newspaper announced that Oregon was a country of liberty and unparalleled equality.<sup>28</sup>

Advice to the emigrants came in many forms. Elijah White, a missionary aid with Dr. Whitman advised the emigrants to "Have no apprehension of want; it is a land of plenty. . . ." <sup>29</sup> White further advised that the Indians were under control and native hostility was not likely. Commodore Charles Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition which visited Oregon in the early 1840's, noted that the missionaries were primarily involved with agricultural pursuits and the anticipation of the white influx.<sup>30</sup> Colonel John C. Frémont, in the report of his second expedition to the Pacific Northwest, marvelled at-

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<sup>27</sup>Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal, November 16, 1838.

<sup>28</sup>Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, Pioneer and Martyr (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1937), p. 321; from the Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 8, 1843.

<sup>29</sup>Miss A. J. Allen, Ten Years in Oregon; The Travels and Adventures of Dr. E. White (Ithaca, New York: Mack, Andrus, & Co., 1848), p. 223.

<sup>30</sup>U. S., Congress, House, Extracts From the Report of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., House Report No. 31, p. 78. (U. S. Serial Set No. 426).

the ". . . abundant and enviable comfort . . ." which enveloped mission stations.<sup>31</sup> There were few reports of caution, and advice, while not always accurate, was taken with confidence.

While the Presbyterian missionaries as a group were instrumental in supporting the Great Migration, the individual efforts of Marcus Whitman must not be overlooked. As a leader and pilot of the company and author of the famed Whitman Bill, Dr. Whitman assumed a vital role in the success of the Great Migration.

In the winter of 1842, Whitman journeyed to the East to confer with the American Board. Although a primary objective was to save his faltering mission from dissolution, his great desire was to demonstrate that a safe and practical route could be opened from the Mississippi Valley

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<sup>31</sup>Colonel John C. Frémont, The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, Oregon and California (Buffalo, New York: George H. Derby & Co., 1849), p. 257. The report of Frémont's first expedition was made available to the 1843 emigrants. While the Senate was debating on the Oregon question, Frémont filed his report with the War Department. Senator Linn offered a resolution to print it for Congress with 1,000 extra copies for public distribution. The report was transferred from the War Department to the Senate, and was ordered to be printed. The newspapers were not long in seizing the story. See U. S., Congressional Globe, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1843, Vol. XII, p. 389.

frontier to Oregon.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Whitman hoped to influence official action in behalf of the occupation of Oregon by demonstrating its value to settlers and to the nation.<sup>33</sup>

Whitman's efforts in behalf of the migration earned him the respect and the confidence of the prospective emigrants. When he passed through the western frontier region late in the winter of 1842, Whitman found a feverish agitation in favor of migration to Oregon for the next spring.<sup>34</sup> James Nesmith remarked that the Doctor was persistent in his conviction that wagons could make the journey to the Columbia River, and this bit of encouragement was responsible for the acquisition of many recruits for the migration.<sup>35</sup> The fact that an unprecedented

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<sup>32</sup>Archer Butler and Dorothy Printup Hulbert (eds.), Overland to the Pacific, Vol. VII: Marcus Whitman, Crusader, Part Two (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1938), pp. 104-5.

<sup>33</sup>James S. Dennis, D. D., Christian Missions and Social Progress, (3 vols.; New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1906), Vol. III, pp. 441-2.

<sup>34</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. VXCVI, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon: 1875), pp. 42ff.

number of wagons moved to the Columbia River in 1843 helps to define the unique character of the Great Migration.

A. J. Lovejoy, a prominent emigrant, remarked that Dr. Whitman, in his valiant work, was ". . . going on to save the country for the Americans. . . ." <sup>36</sup>

To insure the safety and success of the Great Migration, Dr. Whitman, while in Washington, proposed a bill for the establishment of a chain of supply posts from the main crossing of the Kansas River to Oregon. <sup>37</sup> Although no action was taken on the bill, the possibility of its execution acted as a strong impetus to migration.

As a result of these efforts in their behalf, the emigrants were generally fond of Marcus Whitman. John Burch McClane, who rode with Whitman throughout much of the journey, described the Doctor as an exceedingly generous and kind person. <sup>38</sup> Peter Burnett felt that

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<sup>36</sup> "Lovejoy's Narrative," Letters Pertaining to the Oregon Migration, Salem, 1878, MS (Microfilm No. PA46), Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

<sup>37</sup> "Whitman's Bill and Letter," Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Nineteenth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1891), p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> John Burch McClane, "First Wagon Train to Oregon," Letters Pertaining to the Oregon Migration, Salem, 1878, MS (Microfilm No. PA46), Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.



Whitman endured more, and contributed a greater service to the cause of migration to Oregon than any other man, including, perhaps, Senator Linn.<sup>39</sup> It was generally acknowledged that Whitman's ". . . presence and influence were everywhere felt along this journey. . . ." <sup>40</sup> One dissenter from this established view was Daniel Waldo, another 1843 emigrant, who felt that Whitman was driven by greed and opportunity. He claimed that ". . . Whitman lied like hell to me . . ." in regard to the condition of the Oregon agricultural facilities.<sup>41</sup>

Without regard to the character of Marcus Whitman, it must be said that he exerted more influence than any missionary in behalf of the Great Migration. He did not personally "save" Oregon as many would claim--no man could have done that. But in the colonization of Oregon, he did his full share:

As I hold the settlement of this country by Americans rather than by an English colony most important, I am happy to have been the means of

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<sup>39</sup>Drury, Marcus Whitman, p. 345.

<sup>40</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 76.

<sup>41</sup>Drury, Marcus Whitman, p. 342.

landing so large an emigration onto the shores of the Columbia, with their wagons, families and stock, all in safety.<sup>42</sup>

The missionaries, both Methodist and Presbyterian had demonstrated that Oregon was worth saving to the United States, and that settlement should be carried out by the farmers and laborers of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. It should be noted that the Catholic missionaries under the leadership of Father Pierre de Smet, were primarily concerned with the Salvation of the Indians, and exerted little direct influence upon the Great Migration. Jason Lee, in 1842, had helped to found the Oregon Institute, thus assuring the children of prospective emigrants a proper education.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the wagons were taken all the way to the Columbia River, rather than abandoned at Fort Hall as in the migration of the previous year, may be attributed to Whitman's encouragement as well as to the determination of the pioneers. The fact that Mrs. Spalding and Narcissa Whitman were the first white women to cross the continent in a wagon probably encouraged

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<sup>42</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-First Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1893), p. 64. Marcus Whitman to his parents.

<sup>43</sup>Brosnan, p. 195. The Oregon Institute was later to be known as Willamette University at Salem.

many a leery frontier wife. The public placed a great deal of confidence in the reports of the missionaries, despite frequent inconsistencies and exaggerations. It is a tragic irony that the missions benefitted but little from the migration. Supplies were depleted and Indians angered, and thus the emigrants had a hand in the dissolution of the missionary era in the Pacific Northwest.

Like the fur traders, the missionaries were largely responsible for any nationalistic motives the emigrants may have shown. One of their primary objectives was to introduce enough settlers into Oregon to significantly reduce British influence.<sup>44</sup> When the colonization theories of the missionaries as a group are considered, ". . . it was unanimously voted, that the colony of Willamette held out the most flattering encouragement to immigration of any colony of the globe. . . ." <sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Niles National Register, March 18, 1843.

<sup>45</sup>Allen, p. 223.

## CHAPTER VI

### "WHERE ROLLS THE OREGON"

In addition to the influence of the fur traders and the missionaries, other propagandists more intimately associated with the frontier population were to have an equally significant effect upon the Great Migration. Representative John Floyd of Virginia was the leading figure in the agitation for an Oregon migration during the 1820's, and he was probably the first to raise the question of United States' right to Oregon with his resolution calling for the settlement of the Columbia River area.<sup>1</sup> Another Oregon propagandist, the eccentric Boston school teacher Hall J. Kelley, has been called the father of the Oregon migrations.<sup>2</sup> His passionate encouragement of an Oregon migration and his magnificent descriptions of the Willamette Valley had a great impact in the Mississippi and Ohio

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<sup>1</sup>U. S., Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1820-1821, Vol. XXXVII, p. 679.

<sup>2</sup>Fred Wilbur Powell, "Hall J. Kelley, Prophet of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVIII (1917), pp. 1-54; 93-139; 167-223; 271-295.

Valleys.<sup>3</sup> His life's work however, was vexed by misunderstanding and a lack of recognition arising from his distorted perspectives as to the organization of a movement.

The "Oregon Fever" was further stimulated by the reports of several prominent explorers, whose writings were again referred to when conditions necessitated a move in 1843. Commodore Wilkes, who visited Oregon in the years 1838-1842, reviewed the advantages that area held for farmers and merchants, and his report was widely read on the frontier.<sup>4</sup> William A. Slacum, who explored Oregon with a United States Exploring Expedition in 1836 and 1837, noted the gentle climate and the agricultural advantages of the Far West.<sup>5</sup>

John K. Townsend, a Philadelphia physician and ornithologist, marvelled at the beauty of the Oregon

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<sup>3</sup>U. S., House, Hall J. Kelley's Memoir, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101, Appendix O, 47-61. (U. S. Serial Set No. 351.).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1843, House Report No. 31, pp. 65-78. (U. S. Serial Set No. 426). (In 1842, a synopsis of the Wilkes Report was published at Washington for the benefit of prospective emigrants).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Slacum's Report, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1839, House Report No. 101, Appendix N, pp. 29-47. (U. S. Serial Set No. 351).

country, and offered a detailed report of the condition of the route to the Columbia River in the 1830's.<sup>6</sup> Townsend's report was referred to by scores of prospective emigrants during the 1840's.<sup>7</sup> In May of 1839, Thomas Jefferson Farnham, an Illinois lawyer, led a group of fifteen men from Peoria to the Columbia River.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that Robert Shortess, a member of Farnham's party, in a letter which was subsequently published in the Booneville (Missouri) Herald, helped to persuade the Applegate family to support the Great Migration of 1843.<sup>9</sup> Farnham's report

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<sup>6</sup>John K. Townsend, Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River, Vol. XXI of Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (32 vols.; Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1905), pp. 107-368.

<sup>7</sup>A portion of Townsend's narrative appeared in the St. Louis Reporter, March 3, 1843; from Melvin Clay Jacobs, Winning Oregon: A Study of an Expansionist Movement (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers Ltd., 1938), pp. 50-51, n. 22.

<sup>8</sup>Peoria Register and North-Western Gazetteer, May 4, 1839. See also the November 9, 1839 issue of the same paper, and Leroy R. and Ann W. Hafen (eds.), To The Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842, Vol. III of the Far West and Rockies Historical Series (13 vols., Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1955), pp. 19-151.

<sup>9</sup>M. L. Wardell, "Oregon Immigration Prior to 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII (March, 1926), p. 57.

of the journey and of Oregon extolled the ease of the route of travel and the advantages of the Oregon area, where farmers could raise ". . . Twenty to thirty bushels of wheat to the acre. . . ." <sup>10</sup> His adventures and advice were circulated throughout the Mississippi Valley. <sup>11</sup>

The influence of two additional chroniclers on the Great Migration must not be overlooked. The exploration of John Charles Fremont in 1842 and 1843 yielded the first government report relative to an Oregon expedition, and thus gave the emigrants some hope of government interest in the area. <sup>12</sup> People from the western states sent to Washington for copies of Fremont's report to carry with their other guidebooks on the migration. <sup>13</sup> Senator Linn

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<sup>10</sup>Thwaites, Vol. XXIX, Part II, p. 50. (See also Vol. XXVIII).

<sup>11</sup>Farnham's Travels in the Great Western Prairies was originally published in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1841, and reprinted in Thwaites, Vols. XXVIII and XXIX. An advertisement of the report was printed in the St. Louis New Era, March 9, 1843; from "Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement, 1842-1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (June, 1903), p. 182.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years View; or A History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, From 1820-1850 (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), Vol. II, p. 478.

<sup>13</sup>Jay Monaghan, The Overland Trail (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947), p. 237.

asserted that the Fremont report proved the attractiveness and advantage of the area between Missouri and Oregon, and thus encouraged the emigrant to proceed with great optimism.<sup>14</sup> J. W. Nesmith soundly refuted Fremonts' claim to the title of "Pathfinder", but the impact of the Fremont report on the migration was significant.<sup>15</sup>

The demand for Oregon literature in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys became insatiable by 1842, and the literary achievements of Washington Irving served to encourage the adventurous and the "broke".<sup>16</sup> Irving seemed to arouse the wrath of the sensitive farmers and merchants of the Mississippi Valley by his tales of Anglo-American rivalry in the Pacific Northwest. Astoria, published in 1836, and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, published shortly thereafter, were widely read by the prospective emigrants.

The reports of those pioneers who composed the migration of 1842 provided other prospective emigrants with

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<sup>14</sup>Benton, pp. 478-9.

<sup>15</sup>H. O. Lang, A History of the Willamette Valley (Portland, Oregon: Himes & Lang, 1885), p. 278.

<sup>16</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Third Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1895), p. 74.



optimistic advice and glowing descriptions of the Far West. This small company of 109 persons, under the leadership of Dr. Elijah White left Elm Grove, Missouri, early in May of 1842.<sup>17</sup> Optimistic frontiersmen felt that this movement would be ". . . but a prelude to a vast avalanche of emigrants to Oregon next spring. . . ."18

Dr. White, in reporting the progress of his company, noted that the trek was accomplished with little suffering and loss of property, and that both the Indians and the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were receptive and friendly. In general, White felt that ". . . our journey has been laborious, but pleasant. . . ."19 White advised the 1843 emigrants as to the method of preparing wagons and provisions, and his reports were referred to quite frequently by the pioneers.<sup>20</sup> Dr. White was appointed Sub-Indian Agent for the Oregon country and this governmental

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<sup>17</sup>Lang, p. 247.

<sup>18</sup>Kentucky Gazette (Lexington), June 11, 1842.

<sup>19</sup>Miss A. J. Allen, Ten Years in Oregon; The Travels and Adventures of Dr. E. White (Ithaca, New York: Mack, Andrus & Co., 1848), p. 155. Only one death, an accidental shooting occurred.

<sup>20</sup>"Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement, 1842-1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (June, 1903), p. 171.

check upon the natives probably alleviated the fears of many emigrants. In addition, White encouraged the speedy settlement of Oregon and advocated government support of the colonization of that area. It was generally recognized that ". . . Dr. White gives a most glowing description of that country. . . ." <sup>21</sup>

As settlers slowly trickled into Oregon prior to 1843, a continuous stream of letters began to flow from that country to the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys, enticing pioneers for the Great Migration. An Oregon settler anxious for neighbors might write that ". . . Perhaps there is no country in the world that offers more inducements to enterprise and industry than Oregon." <sup>22</sup> A more forceful attempt to secure emigrants appeared in another letter from Oregon in which a settler declared that "Here are the visible footsteps of God! . . ." <sup>23</sup> Another contented settler described the magnificence of Oregon:

The Firrs [sic] their length their Extrem Hight [sic]  
As yet remains in doubt

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<sup>21</sup>Illinois State Register, June 10, 1842.

<sup>22</sup>Verne Bright, "Folklore and the History of the 'Oregon Fever'", Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII (December, 1951), p. 242.

<sup>23</sup>Peoria Register and North-Western Gazetteer, August 11, 1838.

But tradition throws an obsur [sic] light  
 That many had grown Quite out of sight  
 Ere Hood Began to Spout.<sup>24</sup>

Such literature inflamed the minds of the Missis-  
 sippi Valley farmer and its effect on his decision to move  
 was as significant as the reports of the traders and  
 missionaries. Groups desirous of an 1843 movement capi-  
 talized upon the idealism and needs of the frontiersmen,  
 and in early 1843 several Columbus, Ohio citizens compiled  
 a lengthy report on the advantages of Oregon. Letters from  
 settlers, missionaries and explorers were cited, and the  
 influential document was a mixture of ". . . history,  
 description and exhortation. . . ." <sup>25</sup> At any rate, the  
 report was a significant impetus to the Great Migration,  
 for it offered the reader a picture of Oregon as a land  
 of continuous change, variety and beauty.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Charles L. Camp (ed.), James Clyman, American  
 Frontiersman (San Francisco: California Historical Society,  
 1928), p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> George W. Fuller, The Inland Empire of the Pacific  
 Northwest (2 vols., Spokane, Washington: H. G. Linderman,  
 1928), Vol. II, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup> James Christy Bell, Jr. "Opening a Highway to  
 the Pacific, 1838-1846," Studies in History, Economics and  
 Public Law, Vol. XCVI (1921), p. 109. Another letter from  
 an Oregon settler contained the following information:  
 "There is enough to live on in this country. The inhabitants

The prospective emigrants were especially interested in information and advice relative to the route of travel, and letters of this nature were received in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. One such dispatch included the assertion that "A few days of agreeable travel, at a trifling expense, now bring the once unapproachable West into next-door neighborhood with New England itself."<sup>27</sup> A traveler advised future emigrants that the route was better suited for wagons than any road in the United States.<sup>28</sup> A United States Army officer, in attempting to encourage the Great Migration, asserted that the road from Missouri to Oregon was indeed quite passable with wagons.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to establishing the passability of the route to Oregon the letters of settlers served to inform prospective emigrants of the agricultural advantages of the Far West. As agricultural betterment was a primary motive

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are generally good farmers, raise large quantities of grain, and have from 40 to 100 head of cattle, 20 to 60 head of hogs, and horses without number. . . ." Niles National Register, March 30, 1843.

<sup>27</sup>Democratic Review, April, 1843.

<sup>28</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 110.

<sup>29</sup>North-Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser, May 5, 1843.

for movement to Oregon in 1843, reports such as the following written in early 1843, were gratefully received:

. . . I have done well, being now worth more than when I left Iowa. We have not had a sick day since we left the States. . . . There is enough to live on in this country. . . . There is nothing to be found in your store but what we have an abundance of, and at a cheaper rate, as they are brought here free of duty. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Settlers reported that all crops did exceedingly well in Oregon soil. Prices were relatively high, especially in comparison to the agricultural sluggishness in the Mississippi Valley, and ". . . we can sell as much at that price as we can raise!"<sup>31</sup> Reports of turnips growing to circumference of nearly five feet undoubtedly induced depressed farmers to transfer their agricultural efforts to the fertile Willamette Valley.<sup>32</sup> The possibility of obtaining large tracts in Oregon was comforting to inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley; a settler wrote that his farm was nearly as large as the whole state of New Hampshire.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Kentucky Gazette (Lexington), November 4, 1843; from the Bloomington Herald (Iowa).

<sup>31</sup>Bell, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVI, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup>Bright, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII, pp. 242-243.

<sup>33</sup>John Ball, "Across the Continent Seventy Years Ago," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (March, 1902), p. 101.

Many reports served to apprise the 1843 emigrant of the hospitality of the area and its population. The Indians were portrayed as a peaceful people, being honest and friendly in their dealings. As for the small white population of Oregon, a native of Indiana who visited the Far West in the early 1840's described them as follows:

. . . The white people live without any forms of law; but in general, are very honest in paying their debts, . . . they have no sheriffs, constables, fees, or taxes to pay. They profess to be very hospitable to strangers, and kind to one another. No breaking each other up for debts. Here are no distilleries, no drunkenness, nor much swearing. They seem, indeed, to be a very happy people.<sup>34</sup>

It was generally recognized that Oregon attracted only stalwart and industrious persons. Those who migrated did so with assiduous and businesslike intentions, and an observer reported that ". . . I have known some to attach so strong an attachment as to declare that . . . no consideration could induce them to return them to their former homes."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Joseph Williams, Narrative of a Tour from Indiana to Oregon in 1841-2 (New York: The Cadmus Bookshop, 1921), p. 23. (Originally published in Cincinnati).

<sup>35</sup>Bright, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII, p. 243, from the St. Louis Reporter, March 3, 1843.

As Oregon became the object of widespread publicity, the newspapers of the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys staunchly supported the "Oregon fever". Any news item relative to the Oregon question, whether it originated in Washington or in Oregon, found its way into the western press. The general western attitude was for expansion, and newspaper editors could not afford to discourage emigration to Oregon at the risk of being labeled unpatriotic and narrow-minded. A typical newspaper editorial described Oregon as a ". . . terrestrial paradise . . ." to which ". . . the hardy and enterprising youth of our land may be induced to turn their attention. . . ." <sup>36</sup> The influence of the printed page upon the Great Migration was considerable, and Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri felt that the role assumed by the frontier paper was primarily responsible for the encouragement of a large company in 1843. <sup>37</sup>

In addition to the letters and newspaper articles, a number of emigrant guidebooks were printed in time for their utilization by the 1843 emigrants. Many were grossly

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<sup>36</sup>Akron Beacon Journal, February 15, 1843.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years View; or, a History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, From 1820 to 1850, (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), Vol. II, p. 469.

romanticized and exaggerated accounts of the route and of the Oregon country itself. The authors of a prominent guidebook advised that while the books were usually not designed to mislead emigrants, the travelers should not be disappointed if the nature of things was not as portrayed.<sup>38</sup>

While the reports of explorers and missionaries were widely used as guidebooks, several books and pamphlets were printed expressly for use as travel guides. Perhaps the most influential of these was compiled by Mr. Phillip L. Edwards of Richmond, Missouri. Printed in 1842, the brief pamphlet offered advice relative to the organization of a wagon company to proceed to ". . . the happy El Dorado. . . ." <sup>39</sup> Edwards advised wise and ample provisioning of wagons despite the fact that he felt wagons could not travel beyond the plains into the mountains.<sup>40</sup>

Edwards' description of the Oregon country was primarily devoted to the outfitting of the companies,

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<sup>38</sup>Overton Johnson and William Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains; A Narrative of the Great Migration of 1843 (Reprinted from the original edition of 1846; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), p. xiv.

<sup>39</sup>Phillip L. Edwards, A Sketch of the Oregon Territory, or Emigrant's Guide (Reprinted from the original edition of 1842, printed at Liberty, Missouri; Kansas City: H. C. Revercomb, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 4.



especially with the tools of agriculture. For he declared that in no country of the world would the farmer be rewarded so abundantly for his toil.<sup>41</sup>

The Edwards book probably stirred the souls of many frontier farmers by offering informative suggestions as to the cultivation of the Oregon soil. The work included an exacting geographic study of the area, as well as explanatory notes concerning Indian habits and communication in Oregon. The writer, although he preferred his home state of Missouri to Oregon, felt that the general appearance of Oregon was ". . . picturesque and lovely beyond anything to which we of the Mississippi Valley have ever been accustomed. . . ." <sup>42</sup>

The journal of Samuel Parker, the missionary, was another popular and informative guidebook used by the pioneers. Although Parker found the trek rather fatiguing, he assured others that they would be amply recompensed by the natural beauty, the healthy climate and the realization of what waited ahead for them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Samuel Parker, Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains Under the Direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the Years

A rather lengthy guide for emigrants planning an Oregon trip in 1843 appeared in the Iowa Capitol Reporter in March of that year. The article was signed by ". . . one who intends to emigrate," and he advised his readers that with oxen and mules, a company, traveling at an average speed of fifteen miles per day, could reach Oregon in 100 to 150 days.<sup>44</sup> Good rifles and ample ammunition were recommended for the trek, and the following list of necessary provisions-- 150 pounds of bacon, one barrel of flour, one-half bushel of beans, ten pounds of rice, twenty pounds each of coffee and sugar, one year's supply of durable cloth and two blankets per person.<sup>45</sup>

The writer suggested that each man take at least twenty to fifty dollars with him with which to initiate his business in Oregon.<sup>46</sup> Division of the unit into companies under captains was advised, and this policy was adopted by the pioneers shortly after their departure.<sup>47</sup> In addition, he felt that such items as fishing tackle and hand tools

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1835, 1836 and 1837 (2nd ed.; Ithaca, New York: Mack, Andrus and Woodruff, 1840), p. 119.

<sup>44</sup>"Emigration From Iowa to Oregon in 1843," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, Vol. X (July, 1912), pp. 427-8; from the Iowa Capitol Reporter, March 25, 1843.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 428.      <sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 429.      <sup>47</sup>Ibid.

be carried in the wagons, the latter for the construction of ferries to ford the Platte River.<sup>48</sup>

It should be noted that although the unpleasant aspects of the journey were often mentioned in the guide-books, the adventurous and restless emigrants tended to overlook them. The romanticism and glory associated with the trip and the goals set by the travelers usually offset any fears they may have held.

As the "Oregon fever" spread throughout the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys in early 1843, several supporters of an Oregon migration conducted lecture tours in the western states for the purpose of recruiting members. Perhaps the most effective speaker, and the man closest to the emigrants, was the illustrious Peter H. Burnett, who later became a captain of the Great Migration.

Burnett was essentially in the same depressed condition as his Missouri neighbors, and he spoke as follows:

Out in Oregon I can get me a square mile of land . . . Dad burn me, I am done with this country. Winters its frost and snow to freeze a body; summers the overflow from Old Muddy drowns half my acres; taxes take the yield of them that's

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 428-430.

left. . . . There'll soon be schools and churches, stores and towns, everything they have in the old states. . . .<sup>49</sup>

Peter Burnett stood for everything that his friends and neighbors desired. He advocated, in his lectures, the prohibition of slavery in Oregon, and opposed the construction of distilleries. (The author is not certain how ardently the average frontiersman would have defended the abolition of whiskey).<sup>50</sup> He stimulated many a pioneer when he assured them that ". . . the American eagle is flapping his wings. . . ." <sup>51</sup>

Edward Henry Lenox, a young emigrant of 1843, remarked that his father was so moved by a Burnett lecture that he decided then and there to move his family to Oregon.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Bright, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII, p. 252.

<sup>50</sup>John Minto, "Antecedents of the Oregon Pioneers and the Light These Throw on Their Motives," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 45.

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Schafer, "Notes on the Colonization of Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (December, 1905), p. 388. The Platte Eagle (Missouri) of March, 31, 1843, praised Burnett's able and informative lectures, from "Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement, 1842-43," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (June, 1903), pp. 174-5.

<sup>52</sup>Edward Henry Lenox, Overland to Oregon; A History of the First Emigration to Oregon in 1843 (Limited edition; Oakland, California: By the author, 1904), pp. 13-14. ✓

In fact, when Burnett asked his listeners to sign up for a spring migration, the young Lenox recalled that his father was the first to respond.<sup>53</sup> Burnett's talks were indeed rousing, as the following excerpt from one of his lectures will demonstrate:

. . . the pigs [in Oregon] are running around, . . . round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so that you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Such propaganda, with the reports and letters of others interested in an Oregon migration in 1843, seemed to make that new land face east instead of west. Agrarian unrest and the timely reports of those who preceded the pioneers made clear the fact that 1843 was destined for the largest migration to Oregon ever. The "Oregon fever" had reached its climax, and as participants in Oregon emigration meetings worked to plan and recruit, the organization of the Great Migration became a refreshing reality.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Bright, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII, p. 252.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GREAT TREK

By the early spring of 1843, the "Oregon fever" was taking full effect in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys, and plans were being formulated for the Great Migration. Petitions for the occupation and settlement of the Oregon country were filed in every part of the West, and emigrating societies were formed for the purpose of organizing a large company for the trek. The Oregon propaganda had inflamed adventurous souls on the frontier, and Oregon suddenly seemed to be closer to the Mississippi Valley than it had ever been before. An old settler remarked that he was going to join the company because an acquaintance had reported that ". . . it is a leetle [sic] the greatest country on the face of the earth. So I'm bound to go. . . .<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1839, there were no less than ten emigrating societies in New England and the Mississippi Valley, but the "booming" of the Oregon country during the early

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<sup>1</sup>"Letters of Peter H. Burnett," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (December, 1902), p. 412.

1840's prompted a great many Oregon meetings throughout the western states. The importance and practicability of a large Oregon migration ". . . has been universally admitted."<sup>2</sup>

A significant meeting was held in Alton in November of 1842 for the purpose of supporting the settlement of Oregon.<sup>3</sup> A similar assembly convened in Springfield in February of the next year, and the necessity of a large emigration of profit-seekers was stressed.<sup>4</sup> In Ohio, an equally significant meeting was conducted in the same month, and the advantages awaiting emigrants in Oregon were emphasized.<sup>5</sup> An Ohio farmer declared that he could raise a company of fifty families on short notice.<sup>6</sup> In April of

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<sup>2</sup>Alton Telegraph, June 18, 1842.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Illinois State Register, February 17, 1843. See also the Sangamo Journal (Springfield, Illinois), February 16, 1843.

<sup>5</sup>"Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement, 1842-43," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (June, 1903), p. 174; from the Ohio Statesman, February 17, 1843.

<sup>6</sup>M. L. Wardell, "Immigration to Oregon Prior to 1846," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII (March, 1926), p. 58.

1843, a call was issued for a convention of southern and western states to be held in Cincinnati in July to encourage an Oregon migration.<sup>7</sup> Although the convention took place after the departure of the Great Migration, the interest expressed by so many in the settlement of Oregon prompted rapid organization of the 1843 company.

Missouri was no less active in the area of public Oregon meetings, and a committee in St. Louis requested prospective emigrants to unhesitatingly hand in their names in order to stimulate a ". . . perfect concert of action . . ." in relation to the planned migration.<sup>8</sup> Bloomington, Iowa, another gathering place for advocates of an Oregon trip, was the scene of several meetings in the spring of 1843. It is interesting to note that many emigration societies financed agents in Washington to keep them informed on Congressional action in behalf of the occupation

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<sup>7</sup>D. W. Howe, "The Mississippi Valley in the Movement for 54°40' or Fight," Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Proceedings, Vol. V (1911-1912), p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>Melvin Clay Jacobs, Winning Oregon; A Study of an Expansionist Movement (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), pp. 47-8; from The People's Organ (St. Louis), April 5, 1843.



of Oregon and to lobby for legislation to facilitate emigration.<sup>9</sup> John M. Shively, an 1843 traveler, was a prominent agent, although his influence upon Congressional action was negligible.

Resolutions for the organization and provisioning of a company were included in the charters proposed by the groups.<sup>10</sup> The rules and regulations set down by the emigrating societies were explicit, although final organization did not occur until after the departure of the train. For persons between the ages sixteen and twenty-one years of age, parental consent was required before membership could be granted.<sup>11</sup> Good character was insisted on,

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<sup>9</sup>David Lavender, Westward Vision; The Story of the Oregon Trail (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963), p. 363.

<sup>10</sup>"Letter From Iowa Territory, March 4, 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (September, 1902), pp. 311-312. By 1842, emigrating societies were established in such places as Portage and Columbus, Ohio; Tremont and Pekin, Illinois; Michigan City, Indiana; St. Louis and St. Charles, Missouri; Iowa City, Iowa; Savannah, Missouri; Sangamon City, Illinois; Jefferson City, Missouri, and many other towns throughout the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. Harrison C. Dale, "The Organization of the Oregon Emigrating Companies," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI (September, 1915), pp. 209-210.

<sup>11</sup>"Emigration From Iowa to Oregon in 1843," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, Vol. X (July, 1912), p. 423; see also pp. 418-424 for the proceedings of an Oregon emigration meeting in Iowa in 1843.

and Negroes and mulattoes were barred from membership in the companies.<sup>12</sup> The society reserved the right to expel any undesirable person at any time. Dues were required of each member, and a common fund for the provisioning of the train was established in most societies. In return for the dues, some companies promised to furnish wagons, horses, provisions, tents and hunting equipment.<sup>13</sup> As these various societies were established, the heroic appeal and glamour of Oregon probably led the emigrants to organize a bit too much. This situation, however, served only to increase the total effectiveness of the Great Migration.

The rigid exclusiveness of the Oregon societies resulted in the amassment of emigrants of exemplary character. Marcus Whitman remarked that the travelers ". . . appear very well & I have no doubt are generally of an enterprising character. . . ." <sup>14</sup> Those who lacked enterprise were gradually sifted out.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Dale, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI, pp. 212-213.

<sup>14</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Nineteenth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1891), p. 177.

<sup>15</sup>See Frederick V. Holman, "The Qualities of the Oregon Pioneers," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX (September, 1919), pp. 89-139.

As the emigrating societies organized their members throughout the western states, prospective emigrants began to pour into Independence, Missouri, the rendezvous point selected for the Great Migration. Adventurous farmers and merchants from Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky and Indiana assembled with cries of "Whoo Ha! Go to it boys! We're in a perfect Oregon Fever!"<sup>16</sup> The emigrants, ". . . worried suddenly about what they had undertaken, milled everywhere, asking unanswerable questions about the trail and about Oregon. . . ." <sup>17</sup> Matthew Field, an assistant editor of the New Orleans Picayune who accompanied Sir William Drummond Stewart on his adventure and pleasure trip to the Pacific Coast, offered the following sketch of the assembled emigrants:

They are clean and evidently apparelled in their best Sunday gear. Their countenances were sedate and the women wore that mild composure of visage--so pleasantly resigned--so eloquent of a calm spirit. . . .<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Verne Bright, "Folklore and the History of the 'Oregon Fever,'" Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LII (December, 1951), p. 241.

<sup>17</sup>Lavender, p. 367.

<sup>18</sup>New Orleans Daily Picayune, November 21, 1843. For Field's journal of his 1843 trip with Sir William Stewart, the Scottish nobleman, see Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott (eds.), Prairie and Mountain Sketches

Trading stores and blacksmith shops were crowded with anxious emigrants, and excitement seemed to envelop the encampment. On May 18, a meeting was held to appoint committees to inspect the wagons and to draft rules and regulations for the journey.<sup>19</sup> As the date of departure drew near, nearly 1,000 persons and over 120 wagons were assembled at the point of rendezvous.<sup>20</sup>

The company left the rendezvous point on May 22, and Peter Burnett wrote that the march began ". . . in

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(Collected by Clyde and Mae Reed Porter; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957).

<sup>19</sup>Peter H. Burnett, "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (March, 1904), p. 65. See Appendix I for the rules and regulations for the government of the 1843 emigrating company.

<sup>20</sup>John McLane, an emigrant, reported that 990 persons and 400 wagons were assembled. John Burch McLane, "The First Wagon Train to Oregon," Letters Pertaining to the Oregon Migration, Salem, 1878, MS (microfilm no. PA46), Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. The Missouri Statesman (Columbia), June 16, 1843, announced the departure of 200 wagons and about 1,000 persons. The Kentucky Gazette (Lexington), July 15, 1843, contained the following list:

290 men over 16	121 wagons
130 females over 16	698 oxen
298 men under 16	296 horses
<u>312 females under 16</u>	973 loose cattle
1,030 Total	

sunshine and song. . . ." <sup>21</sup> On June 1 the members elected Burnett as their captain and James Nesmith as orderly sergeant. In addition, nine councilmen were also elected, and a formal military organization was officially adopted. <sup>22</sup> Matthew Field described the election procedures as follows:

The candidates stood up in a row before the constituents, and at a given signal they wheeled about and marched off, while the general mass broke after them "lickety-split [sic], each man forming in behind his favorite, so that every candidate flourished a sort of tail of his own, and the man with the longest tail was elected! <sup>23</sup>

The individualistic pioneers, however, were not the type to subordinate themselves to regulations, and dissention erupted within a week after the departure of the company. Burnett, disappointed in the behavior of the emigrants, resigned his position after only eight days of service. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Burnett, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, p. 101. See Appendix II for a map of the route.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>23</sup>New Orleans Daily Picayune, November 28, 1843. The adoption of the essentially military organization was postponed until the train was well under way. This was due to the deep abhorrence of a militaristic restraint which the pioneers exhibited. Military discipline, however, in spite of individualistic sentiment, was deemed necessary for the safety of the company.

<sup>24</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon (2 vols.; San Francisco: The History Co., 1886), Vol. I, p. 396.

The discontent was initiated by a regulation limiting the number of cattle per member, and this factor led to the eventual division of the party. By the time the company reached the Blue River, two distinct divisions emerged. Those not encumbered with large herds of cattle attached themselves to the "light column;" those having more than four or five cows were obliged to join the "cow column" under the leadership of Jesse Applegate.<sup>25</sup> The emigrants found it impossible to travel as a unit in harmony; they disagreed about the route to be followed, the camping sites, methods of organization, and the hunting of game. Disunion plagued the company from the outset. Matt Gilmore made the following observation:

After we passed the Green River present-day Wyoming we abandoned guarding and broke up into small companies. . . . Some of the emigrants were robbed, though it was their own fault for not sticking together. . . .<sup>26</sup>

David T. Lenox was chosen company captain after Burnett resigned the position, and for a great deal of

<sup>25</sup>Jesse Applegate, "A Day With the Cow Column in 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. I (December, 1900), p. 372. ✓

<sup>26</sup>"Letter of S. M. Gilmore," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV (September, 1903), p. 282.

hard work, he received no compensation.<sup>27</sup> His many duties, performed with the assistance of the other superior officers, included the selection of campsites, the course of travel for the next day, order and discipline, the arousing of emigrants in the mornings and presiding over company meetings. John Gantt, however, an ex-army officer, was chosen as the party's guide, and was paid \$800 for his services.<sup>28</sup>

The most vexing problem facing the officers was the strong tendency towards disintegration among the emigrants. The final solution was the division of the party into four parts, and this suggestion was probably contributed by Dr. Whitman.<sup>29</sup> The commanding officer became a colonel, rather than a captain, and four captains were elected to lead the four divisions.<sup>30</sup> Thus the Great

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<sup>27</sup>Edward Henry Lenox, Overland to Oregon in the Tracks of Lewis and Clark; A History of the First Emigration to Oregon in 1843 (Limited edition; Oakland, California: By the author, 1904), p. 18.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 17. Gantt left the company at Fort Hall, and Whitman and A. L. Lovejoy guided the divided party to the Columbia River.

<sup>29</sup>Dale, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI, p. 223. There is little evidence of punishment for defection from the company. The officers realized the futility in attempting to suppress the frontier tendency to disperse.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Migration, having traveled beyond the effective jurisdiction of the United States, became a moving government. The company officials were responsible for the administration of justice, for which the statutes of a particular state or some of its own devising were adopted.<sup>31</sup> Suits were tried by an elected judge and the council composed of the more capable men in the party.<sup>32</sup> Laws were revised or repealed as their need or obsolescence became evident. The cases most frequently arising were those concerning the neglect of guard duty and indiscriminate hunting.

Even in disunion, there seemed to be a strong sense of co-operation among the travelers. Although it was not unusual to see a wagon or two traveling many miles from the main group, the emigrants were dedicated to the protection of each other in the event of an Indian attack or a similar calamity.<sup>33</sup> The emigrants employed the wagon

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<sup>31</sup>Burnett, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, p. 67. See also John Minto, Annual Address, Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Sixteenth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1888), p. 94.

<sup>32</sup>Dale, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI, p. 219. See also James W. Nesmith, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII (December, 1906), p. 333.

<sup>33</sup>Applegate wrote that his "cow column" included sixty wagons divided into fifteen platoons of four wagons



"corral" system when they encamped for the night. This plan involved the connection of the wagons in a circle for livestock containment and for protection against possible Indian attacks. Divided they marched, and the encouraging words of Marcus Whitman echoed from wagon to wagon: "Travel, travel, TRAVEL; nothing else will take you to the end of your journey; . . . nothing is good for you that causes a moment's delay."<sup>34</sup>

The trip, according to the reports of the emigrants, progressed rather well and with a minimum of difficulty. Peter Burnett wrote that the route from Missouri to the Kansas River was a ". . . beautiful rolling prairie . . ." and once the Platte River was reached, he remarked that ". . . the only inconvenience arising from the road is the propensity to sleep in the daytime. . . ." <sup>35</sup> Although the fording of the Platte was a formidable undertaking, the journey, up to that point, was a relatively easy one.

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each. Each platoon was entitled to lead the company in turn. Applegate, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. I, p. 373.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>35</sup>Illinois State Register, August 11, 1843; and Burnett, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III, p. 419.

James Nesmith, however, noticed that disunion and disagreement were at a high mark at this point in the trek.<sup>36</sup>

From the Platte River Fort Hall, the first reports of bad roads were recorded, and from the Fort to the Blue Mountains, the problem was the inconsistency of good grass, water and fuel.<sup>37</sup> As the train approached the Snake River area, the emigrants experienced their first encounter with a desert. The mountains themselves were not as prohibitive as had been expected, as the ascent, with the exception of the Cascades, was usually gradual and wide.

The most difficult part of the trip was the descent of the Columbia River to Fort Vancouver, where the Hudson's Bay Company met the emigrants and transported them to the Willamette Valley.<sup>38</sup> The Indians had not been particularly troublesome throughout the journey, as the Pawnees were beggars and nuisances, and the Sioux and Cheyenne were

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<sup>36</sup>Nesmith, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII, p. 342.

<sup>37</sup>"Journal of John Boardman; An Overland Journey From Kansas to Oregon in 1843," Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. II (October, 1929), p. 103; and William T. Newby, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XL (September, 1939), p. 234.

<sup>38</sup>Oregon Spectator, January 21, 1847. (Jesse Applegate's young son drowned while descending the Columbia).

primarily livestock thieves and not extremely hostile at the time.<sup>39</sup> Other difficulties more frequently experienced ranged from the prairie dust and the mountain cold, to the high prices for provisions at Fort Laramie.<sup>40</sup>

The trek from Independence to the Columbia River was accomplished in 147 days, from May 22 to October 16.<sup>41</sup> The emigrant generally regarded his journey as monotonous, dreary and often dangerous, but broken, however, by the classic beauty of the country and the realization that a dream was fast coming true:

Day after day  
We wend our way  
Through sage and sand,

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<sup>39</sup> Boardman, Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. II, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Burnett, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, p. 74. Nine deaths occurred during the course of the trek due to illness, drownings and miscellaneous accidents. Bancroft, p. 408.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 83. John Boardman recorded the mileage between Missouri and Fort Vancouver at 1,993 miles. Boardman, Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. II, p. 121. Johnson and Winter of Indiana placed the figure at 2,131. Overton Johnson and William Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains; A Narrative of the Great Migration of 1843 (Reprinted from the original edition of 1846; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), p. 194. The daily mileage ranged from seven to twenty-five miles per day, depending upon road, water, weather and grazing conditions. Newby, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XL, pp. 219-242. A detailed bill of the route may be found in Johnson and Winter, pp. 185-194.

In hope to find  
 To please our mind, <sup>42</sup>  
 A home in a happy land.

As they recalled the days of the "Oregon fever" in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys, the emigrants were generally as pleased with Oregon upon their arrival as they were with the prospect of its settlement months before. A happy traveler declared that ". . . we found the Pacific sea-breeze, mountain air, rolling hills and fertile soil, was all that our imagination had fancied. . . ." <sup>43</sup> Samuel Penter, formerly of Arkansas, Tennessee and Missouri, wrote that he settled as easily and as conveniently as he had expected. <sup>44</sup> Peter Burnett, equally content with his new home, declared that ". . . if a man cannot supply all his wants here he cannot anywhere. . . ." <sup>45</sup> Edward Lenox

<sup>42</sup>"Diary of Mrs. C. Sharp," Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Thirty-First Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1903), p. 188.

<sup>43</sup>John Arthur, "A Brief Account of the Experiences of a Pioneer of 1843," Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Fifteenth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1887), p. 100.

<sup>44</sup>Samuel Penter, "Recollections of an Oregon Pioneer of 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII (March, 1906), p. 61.

<sup>45</sup>"Documents Relating to the Oregon Emigration Movement, 1842-43," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV, p. 181.

marvelled at the ready response of the soil to the plow and seeds.<sup>46</sup> Other new settlers wrote of the hospitality of the Oregon country, and their letters served to stimulate others as they themselves had been stimulated.

The quest which was born of the chaos in the western states did not come to an abrupt halt when the emigrant wagons reached the Willamette Valley. The Great Migration of 1843 was a momentous contribution to the early development of Oregon, and the members of the company were instrumental in establishing the political, social and economic foundations of a great state. As the new settler surveyed his Utopia, he might well have

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<sup>46</sup>Lenox, p. 59. It should be noted that the emigrants settled in the area south of the Columbia River for two reasons. In the first place, the land there was ideal for agricultural and commercial pursuits. Secondly, the Hudson's Bay Company diverted settlers away from their northern domain whenever possible. Every adult male could receive 640 acres of land under the provisions of the Oregon Provisional Government of July, 1843, organized by the American settlers in Oregon at that time. For a study of the Provisional Government, the following sources should be consulted: F. L. Herriott, "Transplanting Iowa's Laws to Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. V (June, 1904), pp. 139-150; George H. Himes, "First Government in Oregon," Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI (July, 1915), pp. 162-167; and Frederick V. Holman, "A Brief History of the Oregon Provisional Government and What Caused its Formation," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIII (June, 1912), pp. 89-139.

declared that ". . . the end is not yet by a great deal;  
the beginning is hardly more than made."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye (Iowa), November 23,  
1843.

## CONCLUSION

The Great Migration was a turning point not only in the history of Oregon, but also in the territorial development of the United States. It would be quite safe to assert that the emigration of 1843 was as important to Oregon and the United States as the coming of the Jamestown colony was to Virginia and the colonies. For the American community to spread by gradual expansion, acquiring additional adjoining land step by step, was a natural process. But for a group of farmers, merchants and laborers to make a single leap of 2,000 miles was altogether another matter in the history of westward expansion. Even the existence of influential motives for migration does not shroud the unique brilliance and the dedicated execution of this quest. Those who made the trip did not seek to crown themselves or their deeds with halos of romance or glory; they were ordinary men and women making what they felt to be ordinary progress.

This first large migration of home-builders opened the wagon road from the Missouri frontier all the way to

the Columbia River and establish beyond any reasonable doubt the practicability of completing the trek with wagons. The year 1843 marked the beginning of the true, distinctively American period in the history of the Pacific coast. The period following the arrival of the Great Migration also saw the birth of a remarkable agricultural and commercial empire, designed, as the pioneers had hoped, to fulfill their basic needs and desires.

The illustrious members of the Great Migration distinguished themselves in the political and commercial development of Oregon, and were responsible for the initiation of a number of social institutions throughout the Pacific Northwest. The renowned Applegate family was greatly responsible for the development of Oregon's educational and governmental facilities. The Lenox family was influential in early church organization, and Morton M. McCarver and others held numerous public positions.<sup>1</sup> Others were prominent in Indian affairs. Still others, including John Burch McLane, were occupied with lumber mills and merchandising.<sup>2</sup> James Nesmith became a judge

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<sup>1</sup>H. O. Lang, A History of the Willamette Valley (Portland, Oregon: Himes & Lang, 1885), pp. 617-618.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



and later a United States Senator, and William Newby was involved in a number of commercial enterprises, including the Pacific Telegraph Company and the Oregon Central Railroad.<sup>3</sup> Newby, in addition founded the town of McMinnville, named for his home town in Tennessee. Peter Burnett and Morton McCarver laid out the town of Linnton, in memory of their staunch ally and Senator from Missouri, and A. L. Lovejoy assisted in the founding of Portland. Thus the emigrants of 1843 laid the political, economic and social foundations of the Oregon country.

The emigrants, having become settlers, secured themselves in their new home by the adoption of democratic institutions, for frontier and individualism has promoted democracy from the beginning. They were predominantly agriculturists, and their provisional government included an efficient land law. The Provisional government adopted in the early months of 1844 was largely drawn up by and composed of those who had come in 1843. It was a strongly democratic code, and was designed to satisfy the needs

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 619, and William T. Newby, "Diary of the Emigration of 1843," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XII (September, 1939), p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon (2 vols., San Francisco: The History Co., 1886), Vol. I, p. 415.

and desires which had been unavailable in the western states. This system of government performed quite satisfactorily until it was superseded by a regular government of 1845, and by the territorial government of 1849. The Great Migration created such an ardent arousal of public sentiment that the stability of the provisional government was assured.

The 1843 influx marked the real and substantial beginning of the permanent occupation of Oregon by the United States, and after the events of that year, there was little doubt that Oregon would be American. The eyes of the Government had been opened to the value of the Oregon country, and the emigrants were primarily responsible for substantiating the American claims to that country. Congress and the President were forced to act; the result was the Oregon Treaty of 1846.

The 1843 migration was the first of many significant movements to the Pacific Northwest. The favorable reports and advice of the 1843 travelers served to stimulate others in the western states to action. Even after prosperity had returned to the Mississippi Valley, settlers poured into Oregon from that area. The year 1843, therefore, marks

the beginning of the settlement of Oregon by town-builders. The pioneers of that year had achieved an unparalleled conquest at a small cost, and they shall go down in history as men and women who pledged an almost fanatical allegiance to a dream:

They came not as the flying come,  
In silence and in fear.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting (Portland, Oregon, 1896), p. 37.

## APPENDIX I

### THE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OREGON EMIGRATING COMPANY

Resolved, Whereas we deem it necessary for the government of all societies, either civil or military, to adopt certain rules and regulations for their government, for the purpose of keeping good order and promoting civil and military discipline. In order to insure union and safety, we deem it necessary to adopt the following rules and regulations for the government of the said company:--

Rule 1. Every male person of the age of sixteen, or upward, shall be considered a legal voter in all affairs relating to the company.

Rule 2. There shall be nine men elected by a majority of the company, who shall form a council, whose duty it shall be to settle all disputes arising between individuals, and to try and pass sentence on all persons for any act for which they may be guilty, which is subversive of good order and military discipline. They shall take especial cognizance of all sentinels and members of the guard, who may be guilty of neglect of duty, or sleeping on post. Such persons shall be tried, and sentence passed upon them at the discretion of the council. A majority of two thirds of the council shall decide all questions that may come before them, subject to the approval or disapproval of the captain. If the captain disapprove of the decision of the council, he shall state to them his reasons, when they shall again pass upon the question, and if the same decision is again made by the same majority, it shall be final.

Rule 3. There shall be a captain elected who shall have supreme military command of the company. It shall be the duty of the captain to maintain good order and strict

discipline, and as far as practicable, to enforce all rules and regulations adopted by the company. Any man who shall be guilty of disobedience of orders shall be tried and sentenced at the discretion of the council, which may extend to expulsion from the company. The captain shall appoint the necessary number of duty sergeants, one of whom shall take charge of every guard, and who shall hold their offices at the pleasure of the captain.

Rule 4. There shall be an orderly sergeant elected by the company, whose duty it shall be to keep a regular roll, arranged in alphabetical order, of every person subject to guard duty in the company; and shall make out his guard details by commencing at the top of the roll and proceeding to the bottom, thus giving every man an equal tour of guard duty. He shall also give the member of every guard notice when he is detailed for duty. He shall also parade every guard, call the roll, and inspect the same at the time of mounting. He shall also visit the guard at least once every night, and see that the guard are doing strict military duty, and may at any time give them the necessary instructions respecting their duty, and shall regularly make report to the captain every morning, and be considered second in command.

Rule 5. The captain, orderly sergeant, and members of the council shall hold their offices at the pleasure of the company, and it shall be the duty of the council, upon the application of one third or more of the company, to order a new election for either captain, orderly sergeant, or new member or members of the council, or for all or any of them, as the case may be.

Rule 6. The election of officers shall not take place until the company meet at Kansas River.

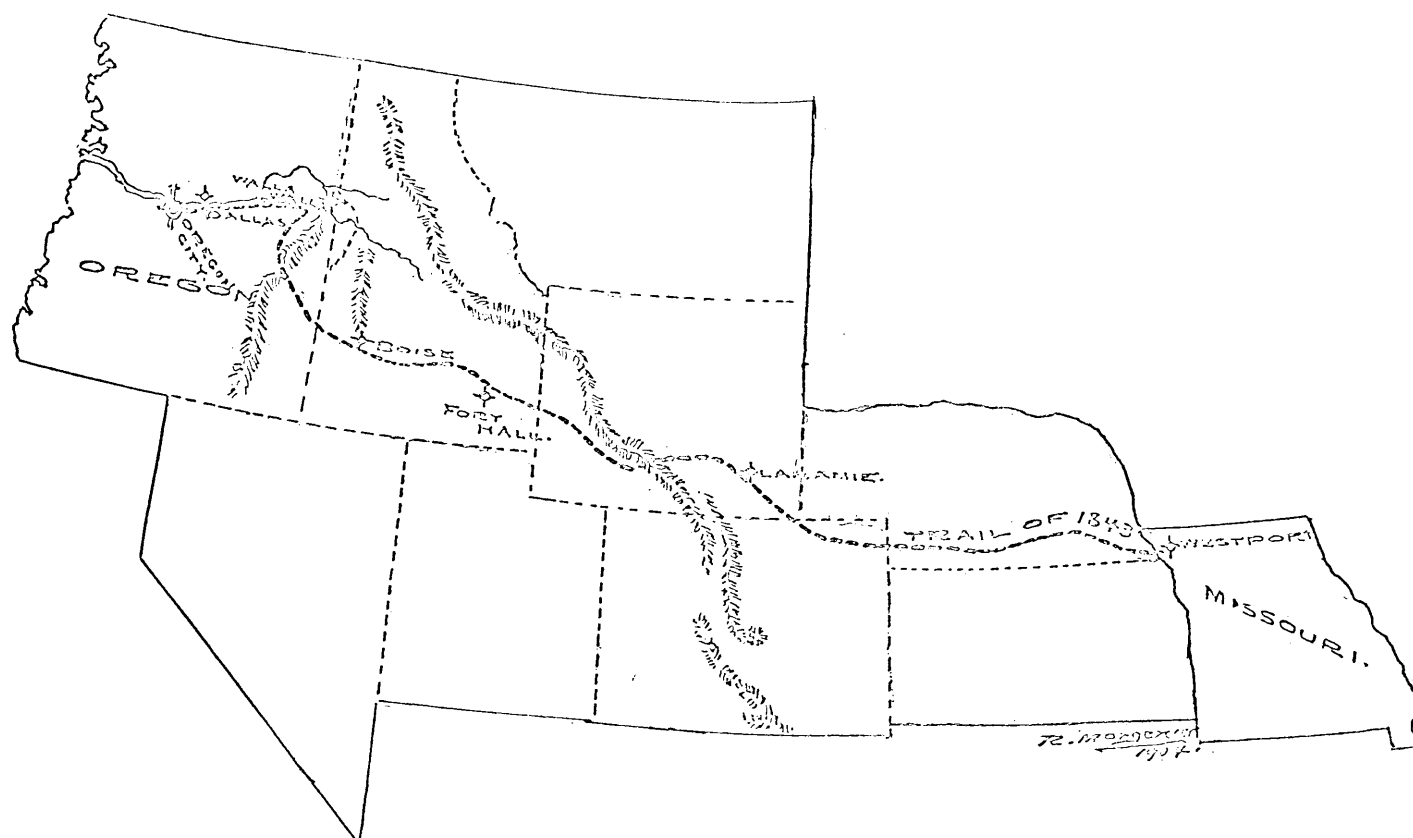
Rule 7. No family shall be allowed to take more than three loose cattle to every male member of the family of the age of sixteen and upward.\*

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\*"Letters of Peter H. Burnett," Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (December, 1902), pp. 406-407.

APPENDIX II

MAP OF THE ROUTE



\*Edward Henry Lenox, Overland to Oregon in the Tracks of Lewis and Clark; A History of the First Emigration to Oregon in 1843 (Limited edition; Oakland, California: By the author, 1904), p. 18.

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