

LEWIS COUNTY'S EARLY HISTORY

NOTE BY EDITOR: W. P. Bonney, Secretary of the Washington State Historical Society, and one of the Contributing Editors of the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, furnishes a copy of the address he delivered at the dedicatory ceremonies of Lewis County's new courthouse at Chehalis on June 17, 1927. The address contains a brief and compact record of Lewis County's early history. The entire program was elaborate and joyous. Chehalis had declared a holiday and apparently the people of the entire county assembled in person or by representatives to participate. The program was in charge of the Chehalis Citizens' Club and Clarence Ellington presided. The Mayors of neighboring cities and towns made brief congratulatory addresses. One of the most gracious incidents in this line was the address of acceptance. Henry Rayton, Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, presented the completed building and the address of acceptance was made by L. L. Lynn, Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Centralia. That city has been a rival of Chehalis for many years. The new courthouse is a beautiful and substantial structure. Its cost was about \$425,000. Members of Pomona Grange participating in the program express joy over the fact that the great work had been achieved without a bond issue. One beautiful and durable ornament is placed in the corridor, a bronze tablet bearing an artistic portrait of Meriwether Lewis, for whom the County was named. This tablet is the work of James A. Wehn, a sculptor of Seattle. For its value to history, Mr. Bonney's address is here reproduced.

Mr. Bonney's Address

Eighty-one years, five months and 28 days ago, the House of Representatives of the Oregon Provisional Government enacted a law creating a county north of the Columbia River extending from the Cowlitz on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west, from its southern boundary, away up to that much talked of line 54 40 North latitude, a vast domain with a population of but few civilized persons. However, it was destined to be divided into many counties as the years rolled by. While the law creating Lewis County was enacted on the nineteenth day of December, 1845, it provided that the organization of the

county should not take place until the election which would be held in June, 1846.

The first officers chosen for Lewis County were Jacob Wooley, S. B. Crockett, and John Jackson, County Commissioners, or as styled in those days, "Judges of the County Court." R. Brock was named Sheriff, Assessor and Collector; James Birnie, Treasurer, and Alonzo M. Poe, Clerk.

While Lewis County voters did not put a new set of officers in the field at the 1846 election, they did take a very prominent part in that election—naming Dr. Wm. F. Tolmie as their Representative to the Legislature and having the leading voice in the choice of Governor for all Oregon. There were three voting precincts in Lewis County in those days, John R. Jackson's home at "Highlands"; Michael T. Simmons' home at New Market, and Dr. Tolmie's home at Nisqually. George Abernathy had been serving as Governor since the election of 1845 when he took the place of the governing committee of three. He was on the ticket for re-election in 1846 and was opposed by A. L. Lovejoy, who flipped a penny with F. W. Pettegrove for the privilege of naming the town on the Willamette and lost. He lost again running for Governor against Abernathy. In the old part of Oregon, Lovejoy received 518 votes, Abernathy 477. It is supposed that Lovejoy and his friends were celebrating when the belated returns from Lewis County were received which read 61 votes for Abernathy, 2 for Lovejoy, giving Governor Abernathy a lead of 18 votes.

A manuscript in the files of the Washington State Historical Society recites that Lewis H. Davis settled near the river bank about three miles west of Saundersville; that he laid out a town-site which he named Claquato; that he donated a site for a church and also erected a public building at the cost of \$1,000, which he donated to the County of Lewis as a courthouse. Claquato became the county seat of Lewis County and so remained for a period of years, until changed by an act of the Washington Territorial Legislature. This act reads in part: "An act to relocate the county seat of Lewis County. Section 1. Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Washington that from and after the first day of August, A.D., 1874, the county seat of the said county of Lewis shall be and remain at the town of Saundersville, in the said county. And the board of county commissioners are hereby directed to cause all books, archives and other county property which by law is required to

be kept at the county seat, to be removed to said town of Saundersville, by or before the first day of August, A.D. 1874."

Section 2 of the act provides that the removal of the county seat from Claquato to Saundersville is contingent upon the filing a warranty deed with the County Auditor of Lewis County, by Mrs. Basey, the proprietress of said town of Saundersville, conveying to the said county a block in said town of Saundersville at least four hundred feet square, upon which county buildings are to be erected.

In Section 3 the County Commissioners were empowered to adopt the necessary plans and let contracts for the erection of suitable county buildings, and for that purpose "may appropriate a sum not to exceed \$1,000."

Section 4 provides that all acts necessary to be done at the county seat, which shall or may be done at Claquato (heretofore the county seat of said county) between the date of the approval of this act and the first day of August, A.D., 1874, shall be legal and valid. The act was approved November 11, 1873.

On November 14, 1873 the same Legislative Assembly passed a supplement act, permitting the County Commissioners to receive a deed from William West for a block of land of the same dimensions as provided in the former bill, it being the true intent of this supplement to allow the said Commissioners to locate the most eligible site for county buildings as near the Northern Pacific Railway as practicable.

A later Legislative Assembly passed an act "To change the name of the county seat of Lewis County.

"Section 1. Be it enacted by the legislative assembly of the Territory of Washington, that the name of the county seat of Lewis county be, and the same is hereby changed from Saundersville to Chehalis and the said county seat shall hereafter be styled and known as Chehalis in all legal proceedings."

This act was approved November 5, 1879.

The expense of operating counties, even in those early pioneer days, required financial ability. Taxable property was scarce, lands had not been surveyed and real estate was not taxed. The expedient of poll tax was resorted to, but it was not popular, hence hard to collect. The collected monies of Lewis County were far short of the necessary expenses, so that when several other counties had been created from land within its boundaries, the new counties not assuming any of the indebted-

ness, Lewis County had a heavy burden, so much so that the Territory of Washington did by its Legislature pass an act for the relief of Lewis County, permitting the taxes due the Territory from the County to be retained by the County for the years 1877-1878.

Lewis county occupies a unique position in one respect, at least, being the only inland county in Western Washington.

W. P. BONNEY.