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The French connection in early Oregon

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10.15760/etd.3153

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THE FRENCH CONNECTION IN EARLY OREGON

by

GREGORY CHARLES RATHBONE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN


HISTORY


Portland State University


1981

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

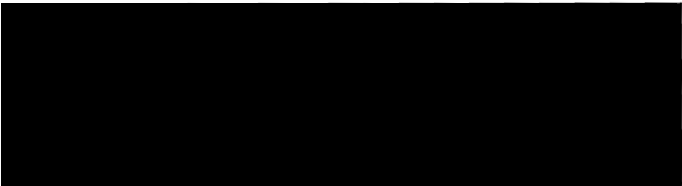
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to the following people for their help in pointing me into the right direction. First of all there are the unknown staff members of the archives in Portland, Seattle and Spokane. And in particular, a special thanks to Clifford Carroll, S.J., of the Jesuit archives in the Bing Crosby Library, Gonzaga University and to Rita Bergamini, F.S.C.P., who heads the Providence Sisters' archives. Finally, I wish to thank William Bischoff, S.J., and Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., for their helpful advice and suggestions along the way, and Victor C. Dahl, Ph.D., of Portland State University for his endless patience as the study progressed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.	v
INTRODUCTION.	1
CHAPTER ONE	
French-Canadians and Oregon's Economic Development (1810-1845).	8
CHAPTER TWO	
Diplomatic and Political Postures of the French.	27
CHAPTER THREE	
French-Speaking Religious (1830-1861).	50
CHAPTER FOUR	
A French Heritage in Oregon.	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	108

LIST OF FIGURES

1.	Hiring Contract to Employ Voyageurs and Rivermen for the Hudson's Bay Company.	23
2.	French Farmers of the Willamette Valley, 1836.	25
3.	Names of Frenchmen who Voted, May 2, 1843.	38
4.	French Supporters of the Temperance Society.	53
5.	Indian Tribes and Missions in the Pacific Northwest.	66
6.	Oregon's French Geographical Names.	96
7.	<u>Rose Blanches</u>	101

INTRODUCTION

The Flowering of the French in the Pacific Northwest

Many French-speaking people came to the Pacific Northwest. Although most came from Quebec, some traveled from as far away as France, Belgium and Switzerland. When they arrived in Oregon Territory, a juxtaposition of three cultures merged to form a unique French-speaking community governed by a dominant Western Anglo-American character and a living Indian culture for daily subsistence. Most importantly, the French brought their own traditions from Quebec and France. Also, French individuality became altered upon their arrival and through their necessity to adapt to the strange, unknown wilderness of the Pacific Northwest. Some changes came through the need for convenience, such as learning to maneuver a canoe across a quiet lake or down a swift moving stream. Such skills enabled them to cover large distances quickly. Other adaptations developed through a need for survival, such as learning the ways of unknown Indian cultures and living amongst them, or the methods to hunt and eat different types of game for their dinner.

To understand the context of the French-speaking people's experience in the Oregon Territory demanded an awareness of other people who settled the region, as well as of their extant Indian cultures. The voyageurs did not simply appear

in the Northwest after leaving Quebec. Since 1763, they had emerged as part of the British economic and political systems which at present prevail across Canada. When the voyageurs arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they encountered American, Russian, Spanish and various Indian cultures. The subsequent development of the area also hinged upon the relationships between the various European and American governments, and required dealing with the Indian tribal or council ruling bodies. Finally, after the French became just another minority in the region--following the great American migrations of the 1840's--the subsequent community relationships between the French and the Americans proved to be crucial for their survival. They learned to live peacefully with the Americans and adjusted to their newly declared independence from the British Hudson's Bay Company. This final phase was a struggle for survival until the great 1861 flood which finally dispersed the remnants of Oregon's French community. Nevertheless, in the years following the flood, many French-speaking persons came to the Northwest and left their heritage too.

Now let us avoid examining the abstract qualities of the French voyageurs too closely, and observe their wilderness lifestyle. A strong, broad-chested, French-speaking voyageur emerged from an Oregon forest and another canoed upon the still waters of the Willamette River. Soon each in his own time would stop to set his beaver trap beside the river. Once the trap had sprung the beaver would fall into the water and

drown. Experience had told the voyageur that this would prevent the beaver from gnawing through its own leg to escape from the iron trap, thus losing the catch.

Our voyageur periodically returned to the trapline to collect the beaver pelts and to reset the deadly traps. Once or twice per year he emerged from his forest sanctuary to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company either at Fort Vancouver or Fort Walla Walla. He seldom received the true value for his pelts, but he acquired a grubstake to begin another season's work.

The early appearance of the trapper followed the explorers into the region. When he returned to the trading posts, which were principally located in the Great Lakes region, he embroidered his tales about the wet climate, savage Indians and the bountiful wildlife.

"A beaver behind every tree," a trapper might boast.

Those trappers coming to the Northwest were optimistic about its economic future. A wilderness so vast and plentiful with a seemingly endless wildlife provided hope and a great profit for generations to come.

Once the great fur companies heard of these reports it became a race to dominate the next phase of settlement in the region. The Hudson's Bay Company (Honourable Company), the Nor'west Company and Astor's Pacific Fur Company raced against time, and each other, to establish their economic control over the region.

The Honourable Company soon controlled the entire region north of Oregon's southern boundary. The firm brought an early governing system as well as trading posts to the area. They controlled the region with the authority of Parliament's written law. They principally governed the French-Canadian employees who were experienced in the wilderness adventures. They filled the region with their traps and suddenly the Indian contended against them for the life-of-the-forests. Soon they provided a new foundation for the development of the trading post system which continued growing into large cities. They also helped to provide the essentials of the city life for the hunter.

Although the Honourable Company provided a lifeline to French cultural ties in Eastern Canada, it could not provide the finer qualities of the home. The firm was a job opportunity and the Frenchmen could not expect the company to provide wives and homes for them. The Honourable Company could not dispel the loneliness of wilderness life. This loneliness caused the Frenchmen to adapt an Indian lifestyle. The voyageurs often took Indian women as wives. They would sometimes travel with their trapper-husbands taking care of the traps and children. Sometimes they would be separated for long periods of time, but there always remained a home to return to.

These foundations grew into more permanent settlements with the addition of missionaries and settlers alike. The

missionaries, F. N. Blanchet and M. Demers arrived and established mission posts which eventually grew into parishes. Their French counterparts, the nuns, helped to establish schools, hospitals and orphanages. Mother Joseph best exemplified the missionary spirit amongst the French-speaking sisters. She built over twenty-five institutions throughout the Pacific Northwest including St. Vincent's Hospital in Portland, Providence Academy in Vancouver and St. Mary Hospital in Astoria. Although she disembarked upon the Vancouver docks at the close of the early French community, she personally carried the Providence Sister's tradition of service into the twentieth century. These people were important in establishing the essentials of a Christian society.

Other French settlers also arrived in the Willamette Valley and commenced building towns and small businesses. The first settlers of the valley were disillusioned old French voyageurs, who decided that they had had enough of the trapping life, and yearned for a more permanent home in their later years. This marked the beginning of settlements at Champoeg beside the Willamette River. Additional Frenchmen came into the region lured by the prospect of beginning settlements in which they could start a small business. In 1839, Medare Foisy moved to the valley, after having established the first press west of the Rocky Mountains at Lewiston, Idaho. He moved his "Ramage Press" to Champoeg in

1845. There he helped to codify Oregon's Organic Laws and printed religious material for the early Presbyterian, Indian mission booklets.

Another period of political change occurred in the 1840's, when the American population suddenly outnumbered the French. This influx of American settlers jeopardized both the Honourable Company's economic enterprise and Britain's political interests. When the Americans immigrated into the valley (1843), the French clearly were outnumbered by their presence. Subsequently, the Americans had ratified a territorial government with the cooperation of the French. And, Britain signed a treaty (1846) with the United States surrendering the Oregon Territory that stood below the forty-ninth parallel. The final change in the population came with the 1849 gold rush, when hundreds of French settlers departed for the hills of San Francisco. The depletion of the French population in Oregon left a small community along the Willamette River, as well as, various individuals scattered throughout the state.

This final change for the French-speaking community met a new challenge much greater than learning to survive in the deep Oregon forests. They now had to find a place in the American cultural setting which came upon them as quickly as a cold, icy wind through the Columbia Gorge, paralyzing every living creature with a ruthless blanket of ice. Americans arrived by the thousands in 1843 which transferred the French

from a majority people to a minority. As a result the French had to reestablish their land claims, and begin building anew in the midst of the encroaching American society.

They made considerable progress during the late forties and the fifties despite the huge numerical losses during the gold rush days. Thousands of the French took up roots and sought their fortunes in the hills of San Francisco. Despite these handicaps they managed to retain their identity as a community in the Champoeg region of the state. Some more isolated settlements were found throughout the state, but they were unable to maintain a community with its own identity.

The remnant of their presence came to an end with the flood of 1861, which disrupted the settlements along the river. Many settlers decided to relocate. Some left the state and others went to different communities. The strength of their identity had finally shattered. Although the physical presence was largely gone, there would always remain the history of their life and the influences which they left behind.

Few Frenchmen recognized the force of their presence, yet, a lasting movement had commenced whether by the lure of wealth or perhaps the desire to leave the growing eastern cities. By writing this thesis, I propose now to examine the French character and spirit as exemplified through the direct and indirect evidences from the past.

CHAPTER ONE

French-Canadians and Oregon's Economic Development (1810-1845)

Of all the European nations that explored, and settled the Pacific Northwest, France was perhaps the least active. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France surrendered to the British, one of her greatest colonial assets, Quebec. Although England became the colonial master of North America, the French-Canadians roamed through the wilderness from Mexico to Hudson's Bay and from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific Northwest. They came to the Oregon region as explorers, trappers, missionaries, or settlers, but always as subjects of the British colonial government.

Their economic significance ranged from trapping to farming. The French had been chasing the beaver across the North American continent for centuries. Consequently, their expertise facilitated the Hudson's Bay Company's control of the Pacific Northwest. The company had taken advantage of the Frenchmen by denying them any opportunity for management. In later years, 1830-1846, the firm settled these French-Canadians along the Willamette Valley. They cultivated farms at French Prairie also known as Champoege.

Two expeditions approached the Oregon Territory as French representatives during the eighteenth century. The first recorded visit of French Catholics appeared on January 1, 1743, when the LaVerendrye brothers, Pierre and Francois, discovered the Rocky Mountains. Perhaps they reached the Belt Mountains near present-day Helena, Montana, and then for seven days traveled farther west. The party terminated its peregrination by returning to Fort La Rein on the site of Winnipeg, Canada.¹ Later in the 18th century, a French exploration traveled to the Pacific Ocean under the leadership of Comte de La Perouse. He explored the California coastline and journeyed as far north as Alaska. He could have stopped along the Oregon coastline, but he left no available record that indicated his actual presence. Ironically, the close of French exploration in North America was symbolized by the loss of La Perouse's ship during his return voyage.²

The Lewis and Clark expedition probably brought some of the first known Frenchmen overland to the Pacific Northwest as guides, coureur de bois and interpreters. After

¹Charles E. Deland, "The Verendrye Explorations and Discoveries," South Dakota Historical Collections, VII (1914), 99-322.

²Thomas Vaughan (ed.), Western Shore (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1975), 347.

The pertinent chapter was written by Gordon Dodds of the Portland State University History Department.

concluding the territorial transformation to the United States, Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark began a 2,500 mile journey across an unknown continent to the Pacific Ocean. On May 14, 1804, the party journeyed up the Missouri River to explore the new land. When they reached Fort Mandan, several French engagés had been discharged from the party. Only four French-Canadians remained with the expedition, Peter Cruzatte, Francis Labiche, Baptiste Lepage, and Baptiste Lajeunesse. Other voyageurs may have joined the party along the route without having their names written in the journal. Nonetheless, one such voyageur became an active part of the expedition. Out of the northern wilderness came the peregrine, Toussaint Charbonneau, with his pregnant wife Sacajawea. He stayed with the party until they returned to St. Louis. He enjoyed life freely, and was often referred to as "our big belly interpreter."³

On August 25, 1805, the expedition descended the Columbia River. By the close of that year, the party had spent four months in the cold and rain at Fort Clatsop before beginning their return trip the following March. Their last resting place before leaving the region was on April 22, 1806, at The Dalles.⁴

³Bernard DeVoto. The Journals of Lewis and Clark (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), 63-73.

⁴Ibid., 391.

During the early nineteenth century, prominent fur companies fought for economic control of the Pacific Northwest, by utilizing the voyageurs as their frontline troops. John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company entered the region ahead of its most formidable competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company. He wanted to monopolize the beaver pelts and then sell them in China through a direct route across the Pacific Ocean, while the Hudson's Bay Company worked from its eastern connections. This approach helped to prevent many logistical problems of supply and transportation. Many other companies also raced for economic supremacy of the territory, but I will deal primarily with the two mentioned above since they provide fine examples of French activities in the fur industry.

Although the utilization of the French varied from one company to the next, they seldom held positions of responsibility. Neither had the success of these companies depended upon French control nor the lack of it. A comparison between the Pacific Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company will help to illustrate their nature in the fur trade.

The hiring policies differed with each company. The Pacific Fur Company had not practiced any preferential treatment amongst its employees. While the Honourable Company retained most of its French employees as engagés, so they rarely achieved positions of leadership.

Astor attempted to jump the North American continent by sending two expeditions to Oregon. One sailed on the ship Tonquin, the other came overland to found the Astoria post at the mouth of the Columbia River. The ship's company included two Frenchmen, Gabriel Franchere and Francois B. Pillet, who kept fairly good records during the voyage. Their journey to Oregon was long and difficult. Franchere embarked with the Tonquin on September 6, 1810, and after six months at sea the ship dropped anchor on March 22, when it arrived at what was believed to be the mouth of the Columbia River.

Crossing the bar proved fatal. A small party, including three Frenchmen, Basil and Ignace Lapensee, and Joseph Nadeau, set out in a longboat to cross the bar, a truly harrowing experience for these men who died in the treacherous waters. A wave capsized the tiny boat and all efforts to find any survivors proved to be fruitless. At nightfall the ship pulled away from the bar and anchored in Baker's Bay at Cape Disappointment.⁵ The next morning a second boat capsized while also attempting to cross the bar. One Hawaiian died while the other four reached the safety of dry land.

After they crossed the bar the party began to organize itself. The authority did not clearly rest with any one

⁵Hoyt Franchere (ed.), Adventure at Astoria, 1810-1814. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 44.

member. The clerks shared the responsibility with the ship's captain. When the Astorians divided their party into two groups to look for the lost Fox party, no single person delegated the search.

Pillet scoured the southern coastline with Alexander Ross for the lost party. They encountered the Clatsop Indians at Adams Point without any sign or word from the Indian tribes about the lost crew members. So, they returned to the ship without them.⁶

After locating their post at Fort Astoria, Gabriel Franchere headed a second party of twelve men to organize trade relations with the natives along the southern coast of the river. Franchere returned to the fort with information about a group of whitemen camping above the Dalles.⁷ The Astorians feared that these men worked for the North West Fur Company, so another party undertook to verify these claims. Franchere and Oxide Montigny led separate explorations into the interior. Montigny's group ascended the Cowlitz River where he encountered several canoes filled with Indians who charged towards them yelling and screaming. Fortunately, the natives merely proved curious to examine the whitemen, whom they had never seen before.⁸ Meanwhile,

¹Ibid., 44.

⁷Ibid., 45.

⁸Ibid., 48-9.

Franchere's search party proceeded up the Columbia River Gorge passing various Indian villages, under the shadows of Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens, when the party reached The Dalles where there were no whitemen to be found.⁹ So, they returned to the base camp with mixed feelings about the adventure. Although their expedition indicated the rival company had failed to reach the Oregon Territory, it also proved disheartening after losing an opportunity to meet some of their countrymen.

Meanwhile, after the Tonquin departed to explore the northern coastline, Franchere asserted a more positive role as leader of the expedition. He worked on building a crude warehouse to store dry goods and furs waiting to be shipped to eastern ports. Soon, the Astorians met David Thompson and others from the North West Fur Company. Thompson testified that the interior was unsuitable for trapping. Undaunted, Franchere organized a party of nine, including Pillet, Montigny, and four French-Canadian voyageurs, to explore the Okanagan region in northern Washington.¹⁰ On October 5, McLennan and Pillet returned from the interior with good trapping reports and accompanied by Franchere's old French-Canadian friend, Regis Bruguiere, who had been trapping

⁹Ibid., 51.

¹⁰Ibid., 55

along the Saskachewan River.¹¹

Astor's overland party traveled up the Missouri River in July 1810, but they had not reached Fort Astoria until February 15, 1812, with thirty men, one woman and two children.¹² Joseph Gervais, Louis La Bonte, Etienne Lucier and other French-Canadians traveled through the wilderness to become prominent citizens of Oregon. The reunion of the two parties provided an excuse for a small celebration by eating fresh fish, courtesy of the local Indians. As spring approached, the party prepared to reopen its trading posts along Oregon's rivers.¹³

The harsh winter months often forced the Astorians to ration food until spring. The winter of 1812-1813 was no exception. In addition to the cold, icy, coastal winds,

¹¹John A. Hussey, Champoeg: Place of Transition (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1967), 24, 43.

¹²Hoyt Franchere, The Overland Diary of Wilson Price Hunt (Ashland, Oregon: Oregon Book Society, 1973).
W. P. Hunt made little mention of the expedition's French-Canadians. He provided an accurate account of the major events in a more salient fashion. The original copy no longer exists because it became lost after being translated from the English into French. The 1820 French edition remains available today and it is the source for Hoyt Franchere's translation. W. P. Hunt mentioned one Frenchman, Carriere, but no others had been noted. (p. 55)

¹³Kenneth W. Porter, "Roll of Overland Astorians, 1810-1812," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXIV (June, 1933), 105-112.

this January brought news of the war between Britain and the United States. These eastern hostilities instilled mixed emotions amongst the French, whose political loyalties to Britain interfered with their economic concerns towards Astor's American company. The majority of the voyageurs felt they should return home, as quickly as possible, because of the international tension, and since their vital supplies for establishing the post failed to arrive. However, Gabriel Franchere delayed their departure another year because they lacked sufficient supplies and horses for the overland journey. Finally, on April 4, 1814, the overland party left the fort. By the sixteenth, the Astorians reached the Columbia Plain thus closing their adventures in Oregon. Their decision to leave rested with a sense of national loyalty and not due solely to the failure of the expedition.

The War of 1812 was not the only cause for their return east. For example, transportation problems hindered the needed supplies to establish a fur empire. New traps were needed to replace the old, damaged irons, and various food-stuffs were sought after by many trappers to supplement their venison diet. Many Frenchmen brought their knowledge of trapping from Canada's eastern forests to Oregon, but this alone could not solve all of their problems. Still, the fur industry required managers, as well as trappers in Oregon's forests. Pillet's knowledge of the forests allowed him to

serve best as a trapper and boatman, whereas Franchere possessed a fine education and his sense for management permitted him to become an unofficial leader, or manager, of the expedition. Perhaps the greatest deficiency of Astor's expedition developed from the lack of a strong leadership binding them together. The authority could have held them together long enough to firmly establish the company's empire.

Throughout the early decades of the 19th century, the Hudson's Bay Company maintained a powerful and absolute control over their territory and the Frenchmen that worked for it. The apathy of British politicians for the company's venture in North America permitted them to operate as a separate political authority in the region. Dr. John McLoughlin, chief-factor for the company, dictated policy throughout Oregon for twenty years. In an effort to keep the Americans out of Oregon, he instituted several Snake River expeditions beginning in 1824, to clear the area of beaver in order to discourage Americans from moving North for furs. These expeditions originated from Fort Nez Perce on the Walla Walla River, penetrated the Rocky Mountains and reached as far south as Utah and Nevada. Until 1840, Americans remained south of the Oregon Territory and the French voyageurs ruled as experienced masters of the North American forests.

Even without a foreign presence in the region many French-Canadians made a transition, during the 1830's, from

fur trapping to farming. By 1836, McLoughlin encouraged retired employees to settle in the Willamette Valley. Their settlement helped to secure British rights to southern Oregon and they provided the company with foodstuffs for its employees. Such a policy reduced the expense of transporting items from the east; it also committed the company to trade for the wheat produced by the French-Canadians.¹⁴ Such an obligation proved profitable for both parties, so by 1840 the French could stand alone with local markets and have an outlet to other world markets.

The annals of many French voyageurs have survived to illustrate how they made the transition from trapping to husbandry. Francois Champaigne joined Peter Skene Ogden's 1826 expedition at the age of twenty, as well as John Work's campaigns into the Snake River region. Ogden came to the Pacific Northwest from his home parish of Lenaute, Quebec. In 1834, he traveled with Jean Baptiste Gagnier in the Umpqua River expedition at the request of John McLoughlin. He hoped that the Frenchmen might further the company's exploration and trapping to the south. By 1831, he had prospered by the fur trade until he decided to settle down along the Willamette River, in 1841, where he became a

¹⁴Robert J. Loewenberg, Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and the Methodist Mission, 1834-1843. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 174.

leading citizen amongst the French-Canadians.¹⁵

Another example, Andre Longtain, was born in the St. Constant Parish, District of Montreal, in 1781, although some company accounts marked St. Pierre as his home. A member of Work's first expedition, he had been in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company for ten years. He served with Ogden in 1826 and with the Bonaventure brigade in 1832-1833. His years of experience in the field helped to build a strong individual and when he decided to retire in the Willamette Valley, he had earned the respect of his peers as a worthy representative of their community.¹⁶ He began with a modest land holding, but soon added to his tract of land by purchasing George W. Ebbert's tract for a hundred bushels of wheat. Both lots were at Campment du Sable.¹⁷ The actual date of his arrival cannot be known for certain, but he settled in the valley as early as 1833 or 1831. Beforehand he had journeyed through the wilderness with his wife and children

¹⁵Burt Brown Barker, Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin (Portland, Oregon: Binsford and Mort, 1948), 152.

John McLoughlin to Alexander Roderic McLeod, from Ft. Vancouver, October 19, 1830.

¹⁶Francis D. Haines, Jr. (ed.), The Snake Country Expedition of 1830-31: John Work's Field Journal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 144-5.

¹⁷Hussey, op. cit., 79.

in search of the elusive beaver.¹⁸ He served chiefly as a middleman in the canoes, although once hired as a trapper on the Snake River expedition. He married Nancy Okanogan, in 1820, with every intention of raising a family, but not the slightest impetus to settle down. In 1833, Longtain, his wife and three children traveled on the Snake River trip together. The difficult trip caused them much sickness during the journey, and when he returned he decided to settle down to the pastoral life of a farmer in the Willamette Valley.¹⁹

Michel Laframboise, born about 1791 in the Quebec province of Varennes, sailed to Oregon aboard the Tonquin. A principal figure in the Pacific Northwest through most of his life, he remained at Ft. George as an interpreter for the North West and Hudson's Bay companies. He once served as postmaster and then led the 1832 Umpqua expedition.²⁰ His position as its leader marked an exception within the Hudson's Bay Company, an illustration of his extraordinary character. He appears to have been in charge of an expedition in 1829 when McLoughlin wrote to him asking that he supply the men along the Coos River, or send them back immediately

¹⁸Haines, op. cit., 146.

¹⁹Hussey, op. cit., 79.

²⁰Barker, op. cit., 312.

with their furs. A standing order that all furs, or the account of them must be retained by the fifteenth of March, mirrored the need to complete fiscal accounts to be sent to Montreal in the spring.²¹

Laframboise represents a fine example of how the Hudson's Bay Company controlled the future of the voyageur. He sought his release from the company, but McLoughlin told him that he lacked the power to increase or terminate contractual terms. So, he negotiated a new contract with the company at 80 pounds per annum, an increase of thirty pounds. Since he had to wait a year for a reply from George Simpson, McLoughlin talked him into working for the company for another season at the old rate.²² He continued to work hard for the company in various positions of responsibility. However, his dissatisfaction grew because he never seemed to advance in rank and received minimal salary increases. In 1844, he noted "...that he was no better off than he was when he joined the Company twenty years earlier saying, he was still Michel Laframboise only older."²³ So, when he returned from the southern expedition of 1842-1843, he settled on his farm for

²¹Barker, op. cit., 70. McLoughlin to Michel Laframboise, December 10, 1829. Supporting evidence can be found in John McLoughlin to A. R. McLeod, August 18, 1830, p. 125, and John McLoughlin to Thomas McKay, December 29, 1830, p. 177.

²²Ibid., McLoughlin to George Simpson, Governor-in-chief, Rupert Lands, March 20, 1831.

²³Hussey, op. cit., 102.

the remainder of his life.

An illustrative contractual agreement was printed in the May, 1922, edition of the Beaver. Although dated 1867, it retained some similarities with the descriptions of earlier contracts. For example, all employees of the company required such an agreement and without one it was more difficult to conduct business. Such agreements also required a conformity to company rules which were designed to protect the firm's interests. The company often attempted to regulate trapping in order to maintain a constant stream of profits rather than depleting an area of its fur value. The company also controlled its employees through fixed wages, and although the Honourable Company lacked competition, the voyageurs rarely received a fair exchange for their goods. Still, in all fairness to the Honourable Company they were as honest as any other outfit throughout this period.

As more Frenchmen became disillusioned with their employer, they sought to retire throughout the Willamette Valley as farmers. Chief Factor McLoughlin often retained their allegiance by purchasing their goods, an act which assisted the company's supply efforts in the region. John McLoughlin's settlement policy became an integral issue betwixt and between the company's trade practices and the wheat produced by the French-Canadians. The farmers stayed in the valley and remained loyal to the company amid the influx of the Americans during the early forties. A most

FIGURE 1

Hiring Contract
 To Employ Voyageurs And Rivermen
 For
 Hudson's Bay Company^a

We, the undersigned, do hereby contract with the Hudson's Bay Company, acting by William Cowan, Chief Trader, for the performance of a voyage in the boats of the said Company in the capacity expressed opposite our respective names during the autumn of 1867 from Fort Garry to York Factory and back. We hereby bind ourselves to conform to such rules and regulations as the Company have hitherto enacted for the conduct of their brigades either during the voyage or at the posts "en route," also obligating ourselves to obey any order of the guide appointed to the charge of the row boats. We also agree to take whatever cargo may by the superintendent of transport at Norway House and York Factory be deemed fair lading without demur or refusal, and to remain at York Factory until the officer in charge there may deem for to dismiss us.

And I, William Cowan, on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company, do hereby promise that on the true and faithful performance of the conditions and obligations entered into by them in the above contract they, the said undersigned, shall receive for such services wages as follows: Guide, £10; steersmen, each, £9; bowsmen, each, £8; middlemen, each, £7.

his
 Joseph X Tayer
 mark

his
 Lambert X Wambay
 mark

his
 Che Keesik X
 mark

his
 Thomas X. Kakeewapet

his
 Antoine X Rat

his
 Thos. X Prince

^aNo author, "The Fur Brigade," The Beaver, Vol. 2, No. 8 (May, 1922), 22.

important consequence of his policy was the creation of trade amongst the farmers, the company and the Russian American Fur Company. The Russians agreed to buy their wheat if the Hudson's Bay Company could ship it to Archangel. McLoughlin paid a generous \$1.10 a bushel, but, he paid only half in cash. The farmers received the remainder in discounts at the company's trading post.²⁴ This policy made the farmers and the company economically and politically dependent upon each other.

Their economic power grew with the expanding wheat industry. By 1840, the French farmers sought a greater equity from the company for their wheat. The farmers wanted McLoughlin to build a warehouse, but he refused. The wheat was important for the company, so he decided to compromise by building a mill instead. This way the farmers would not have to transport their wheat to Ft. Vancouver, and the company would improve the product for export.²⁵

The economic development of the French-Canadians carried from a nomadic existence of trapping to the early establishment of an agricultural economy. If they had chosen to delay or ignore their opportunity to settle in the valley, then their future would certainly have passed into greater obscurity.

²⁴Loewenberg, *op. cit.*, 175.

See also, John S. Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869 (Berkeley: California, 1957, 195).

²⁵Ibid., 221.

FIGURE 2
 FRENCH FARMERS OF THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY
 1836^b

Settler's Name	When begun	Acres enclosed	Acres cultivated	Crook or sheep brush	Horses	Hogs	Houses	Remarks
Jean Baptiste McRoy.....	1831	69	35	556	33	22	3	Good
Andre Longtre.....	1835	45	24	400	3	33	2	Good
Charles Plante.....	1835	60	60	800	12	14	2	Good
Charles Rondeu.....	1836	24	24	200	9	10	1	Good
Louis Fourrier.....	1835	34	34	540	9	10	1	Good
Joseph Gervais.....	1832	125	65	1000	19	55	3	& 1 grist-mill Good
Xavier Delarout.....	1834	36	36	350	11	35	2	Good
Joseph Delor.....	1832	28	28	280	11	28	2	Good
E. Arquette.....	1833	80	50	600	5	31	2	Good
Jean B. Perault.....	1832	80	60	500	4	20	3	Good
Etienne Lucia.....	1832	70	45	740	21	45	4	& 1 grist-mill Good
Pierre Billique.....	1833	50	45	700	9	28	2	Good
Frederick Depau.....	1833	40	35	500	8	39	2	Good

^bReprinted in part from: William A. Slacum, "Slacum's Report on Oregon, 1836-7,"
 Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIII (June, 1912), 175-224.

As trappers, they opened the Oregon Territory by enculturating the Indian to accepting the eventual flood of white settlers. Also, their construction of Ft. Vancouver on the Columbia made it a port suitable for ships to enter the river to load and unload goods. As the first farmers arrived in the valley, they helped to secure their lifeline to the future. If the territory remained British, their cash crops could easily be sold to feed the employees of the Honourable Company or sold to feed the world market. If the Americans had secured the valley--which they achieved by the 1843 immigrations--the Americans would be a new market for the Frenchmen's wheat.

The French-Canadians took a severe blow from the continual influx of Americans in the valley. Although they were outnumbered, their position of importance had not been lost. Their early settlements gave them a head start in the community. Their economic interests ensured their participation in the government to protect their interests and their way of life. Their economic power also required that the new valley settlers solicit their support in forming a Provisional Government.

CHAPTER TWO

Diplomatic and Political Postures of the French

The colonial years meant international intrigue for the French government in the Northwest. However, before examining the local political power of the French settlers, let us see how the French government determined its diplomatic role and the future political course in the exploitation of the Oregon country. In the beginning the French diplomatic posture helped to settle European bickerings for ownership of the Oregon Territory. French settlers and trappers secured the Willamette Valley ahead of the Honourable Company which provided them with future political power in the formation of the provisional government. During the early years their role was one of "presence" which allowed them to hold the land for the European ruling household and especially for the French government. The political traditions of the French would have often brought the people of the valley to the brink of war through international and local conflicts. The political situation chiefly remained an international question until the settlement of the 1846 boundary question.

In the first international conflict, the Nootka Sound Controversy brought a conflict between Britain and Spain.

The Anglo-Spanish Nootka Sound Controversy of 1789 enabled France to play an important diplomatic role in the affairs of the Northwest. As an ally, France sided with Spain's Charles III, who saw many advantages in joining with the French on international affairs. Their family ties, known as the Bourbon Compact, headed mutual interests in colonial settlements, international politics and economic affairs. Spain's active roles in 1761 and 1783 to share French losses to Britain obligated France's continued support during the controversy, thus providing Spain with the balance of power needed to curtail British belligerency. France could not afford the abrogation of Spanish trade agreements nor lose her good standings with Spain.¹

In the midst of the French revolution, Spain conveyed a note to France on January 20, 1790, introducing the Nootka Sound Controversy. Concurrently, the Spanish foreign minister issued yet another message which instigated a formal complaint about the incident. Spain's failure to officially notify France of any actions against Britain allowed the French foreign minister to formulate military preparations under the pretense of national defense. These two nations traded hypothetical information concerning the landing of 50,000 men in England and the invasion of Holland.²

¹William Ray Manning, Nootka Sound Controversy (New York: Argonaut Press, Ltd., 1966), 425, 427.

²Ibid., 387-389.

See also Warren Cook's Floodtide of Empire.

Continued military preparations led to confrontations between the French National Assembly and the Monarchy. While France's position became more important in Spain's negotiations, revolutionary leaders became increasingly suspicious of the ministry's ambiguous intentions regarding Spain. The Constitutional Party accused the French minister of striving to fortify the monarchy. Their fears provoked the immediate recalling of France's minister in Madrid, to prevent any further diplomatic relations with Spain. Despite this action taken by the National Assembly, the government continued with plans for the armament of fourteen ships-of-the-line. On the following day, the assembly detected the king's motives. Spain needed an immediate decision regarding the position of the French government, but several weeks elapsed before a resolution specified that only the National Assembly maintained the right to decree war or peace but that the king should subsequently approve its action. In addition, the assembly decided that since the expense for the ships-of-the-line was vital to secure the national commerce, they should henceforth be completed.³

On June 4, 1790, the Spanish ministry sent letters to the European heads-of-state protesting British unreasonableness and on the sixteenth formally sought French assistance. The languid National Assembly, however, did not act upon the

³Ibid., 391.

issue during the next six weeks. While Spain awaited an expedient reply, negotiations between Spain and Britain moved towards a peaceful settlement, because neither country could afford to go to war.⁴

Although France never sent a ship supporting Spanish interests at Nootka Sound, her fear of such action played an important role which determined the future of the Pacific Northwest. The elimination of Spanish authority gave Britain the right to exploit and settle the region. However, the United States would soon challenge British supremacy following the Louisiana Purchase with the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-6.

The following years remained quiet for the Oregon Territory. A few unknown French-Canadians probably reached the region only to bring home drinking tales of their adventures and Indians in the territory. By the turn of the century only one nation would take the time and expense of sending a recorded expedition into the region. The United States sent Lewis and Clark up the Missouri River to help determine the extent of the recently acquired Louisiana Territory.

Although that expedition was authorized by the government, it seemed to have been a very quiet event in the then extant annals of exploration. The reports of these men were important,

⁴Ibid., 393-4.

but the French-speaking members were of little importance and rarely appeared in the journals. Still, their role in the adventure served well since they usually carried much personal experience to these western lands.

The political growth of the French in the Pacific Northwest proved uneventful for the next forty years, except in the imaginative minds of the politicians at home and for some of the voyageurs as they gathered around a campfire recalling their memories of home.

During the next four decades the region would become sprinkled with unknown explorers and adventurers, who commenced the settlement of the land. They were largely semi-hermitical, nomadic, French people that first encountered Indians, flora and fauna of the region. The new wilderness challenge was similar to eastern Canada and the northern United States (c. 1820). So, they easily applied their trapping techniques to capture the industrious beaver. Although permanent civilian settlements would not appear before the late 1830's, the voyageurs began the development of a political attitude. At Champoug, a few miles from St. Paul, in Oregon's first French missionary settlement, the Frenchmen figured prominently in Oregon's politics. Their unique political character brought a tradition which helped to form an independent, regional, political structure. Their outlook combined four major influences. The first was the colonial atmosphere with which they had grown up in Quebec,

a constitutional monarchy that willingly allowed them to wander in peace. Yet, the government also felt an obligation to maintain cultural ties with these adventurers through outposts and an occasional ship that visited the Pacific Coast. The Honourable Company largely worked independent of the sovereignty in governing the region. Their aberrant isolation from England fostered a sense of loyalty mixed with a strong practical independence through the unfettered structure of the Hudson's Bay Company. These French-speaking voyageurs depended upon the company for their supplies, transported through a network of outposts such as Fort Vancouver and Fort Walla Walla. Since the government was located across a continent, the Honourable Company had been privileged to govern the territories wherever they laid their traps.

The third political force emerged from the wilderness itself and remained with those who settled in the region. The early wilderness experience in the northwest resembled those in New France. The enormity of the forests gave the voyageurs a sense of freedom which was unique. It fostered a strong and important impact upon the attitudes of these men which revolutionized their beliefs. The wilderness and the distance from Quebec produced a sense of independence and self-reliance which encouraged the establishment of a provisional government first for their needs and lastly for the benefits of a distant parliament.

The final influence would be that of the Americans who merely trickled through an imaginative dike built between the two territories. The Honourable Company had hoped that the depletion of the beaver in the south would have discouraged the Americans from venturing too far north. This policy worked, more or less, until 1843, when the American flow of settlers broke through and the floodwaters rushed into the fertile Willamette Valley. They quickly outnumbered the French and eventually removed them from their position of political supremacy in the valley. The Americans brought an aggressive politics which sought to liberate the French thus forcing them to adopt a new political system. The unique change was that earlier the French had allowed the Hudson's Bay Company to determine political policy and now the local inhabitants would govern themselves.

In addition to the immigrant pressures, numerous social groups within the United States sought to retain Oregon as a United States territory. American home interests in the region are best exemplified by the Oregon Provisional Emigration Society in Massachusettes that helped to bring settlers into the territory. In 1842, a group of citizens gathered in Alton, Illinois, declaring, "We will never give our consent to surrender any part of the territory lying between the Russian and Mexican boundaries to a Nation, for any consideration whatever. . . ." ⁵ This home front

⁵John A. Hussey, Champoeg: Place of Transition (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1967), 124.

enthusiasm from the Americans would be transported to the valley by its trappers and settlers by the early 1840's. Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the American government utilized their authoritative influences over their citizens to help establish their dominance in the region. The company also used the prestige of the Catholic Church through the personage of Fr. F. N. Blanchet to influence the French-Canadians towards the more desirable British concerns in the region. But, if the territory was to remain in the hands of the Americans, then a civil government guided by American principals needed to be established. By early 1843, the Americans and the French-Canadians in the valley had divided themselves evenly with about 200 persons on either side. However, after the immigrations of 1843, the American populace grew to 3000, by 1845.

The earliest French settlers along the Willamette Valley took cognizance of the type of government that they desired in the region. McLoughlin's belief that the United States would govern the valley caused the French-Canadians to fret over the future of their settlements. Duflot de Mofras conjectured, "that free population of the Willamette will escape it [HBC] some day."⁶ Purser Slacum enlivened their interest with the assurance that, "Pre-emption right would doubtless be secured them when our government should take

⁶Ibid., 135.

possession of the country."⁷ Although this early expression of self-government served as a catalyst amongst Frenchmen, they never trusted that their lands would be safe under the authority of the United States.

During the 1830's, the Hudson's Bay Company's interests below the Columbia River lessened along with the settler's declining dependence upon the company for supplies. With the prospect of the French-Canadians separating from Britain they held a meeting on March 16, 1838, at the Methodist Mission. Here Phillip L. Edwards drew up a document petitioning for the United States to take possession of the valley. Thirty-six persons including nine French-Canadians signed the document. The influential Joseph Gervais, Etienne Lucier, and Jean Baptiste McKay also participated in the gathering.⁸ However, the United States Congress showed little interest in the petition and only consented to ship supplies to the settlers.

The valley residents postponed subsequent efforts of local government until the February 18, 1841, meeting at the Methodist Mission House. Father F. N. Blanchet headed the committee which framed a constitution and a code of laws. The inclusion of the old engagés led by Lucier encouraged

⁷Ibid., 132.

⁸Ibid., 134. T. J. Farnham noted that 67 signed the petition, "The only person who refused to sign evidently, was the recently arrived Catholic priest--an action prophetic of changes to come in the attitudes of the [French] Canadians."

the Methodists to return to enlist other French-Canadians. Since they constituted a majority, their support was imperative to legalize the petition. The significance of the meeting came with the formation of a civil government to administer justice amongst its citizens. The committee members reconvened the following June at the Catholic Mission near St. Paul. Father Blanchet did not call the meeting to order since he now opposed it under probable influence of the Hudson's Bay Company. Consequently, there was no report submitted to the other members. He requested to leave the service of the committee with a strong implication that the other French-Canadians should not participate in the formation of a local government.⁹ The Americans could not gather sufficient support amongst themselves because of the French impasse. Fr. Blanchet "...spoke to me [Lieutenant Wilkes] much about the system of laws the minority of the settlers were desirous of establishing, but which he had objected to, and advised his people to refuse to cooperate in, for his was of opinion that the number of settlers in the Willamette Valley would not warrant the establishment of a constitution, and as far as his people were concerned there was certainly not a necessity for one, nor had he any knowledge of crime having been yet committed." The officers which were elected the previous March held together loosely for two years when

⁹Ibid., 137, 139.

another meeting, May 2, 1842, officially recognized them until new laws could be drawn.¹⁰

The immigration of American settlers from 1842-1843 outnumbered the French-Canadians for the first time. The winter saw several attempts at civil organization but the French opposition prevented these gatherings from succeeding. On February 2, 1843, both parties met in the first solid move towards a provisional government. Later, six men gathered at the home of Joseph Gervais in St. Paul. This meeting became known as the first Wolf Meeting, because it supported a war against predators that endangered the domestic animals. On March 6, 1843, the second Wolf Meeting brought both parties out in force. Although the French-Canadians agreed to consider the formation of a civil government, nothing concrete developed until March 17, during a meeting in which only a handful of Frenchmen participated. In a futile effort to secure the lands below the Columbia River for England, McLoughlin and Fr. Blanchet discouraged their participation in forming a local government. Meanwhile, Governor Sir George Simpson told the London directors that the Frenchmen could not be relied upon to prevent the Americans from establishing their civil authority in the valley.¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., 138, 140.

¹¹Ibid., 144-147, 152.

FIGURE 3

NAMES OF FRENCHMEN WHO VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT AT CHAMPOEG, MAY 2, 1843^c

Lucier, Etienne

Matthieu, Francois X.

FRENCH-CANADIAN SETTLERS WHO VOTED AGAINST THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT AT CHAMPOEG, MAY 2, 1843

Aubichon, Alexis
Aubichon, Jean B.
Ausant, Louis
Arquoit, Amable
Bargeau, Cyfois
Beleque, Pierre
Biscornais, Pascal
Boivers, Louis
Bonnenfant, Antoine
Brischois, Alexis
Brischois, Oliver
Brunelle, Joseph
Chalifoux, Andre
Chamberlain, Adolph
Cornoyer, Joseph
Delard, Joseph
Depot, Pierre
Despart, Joseph
Donpierre, David
Dubois, Andre
Ducharme, Jean B.
Felice, Antoine
Forcier, Louis
Gagnon, Luc
Gauthier, Pierre

Gervais, Joseph
Gingras, Jean
Gregoire, Etienne
LaChapelle, Andre
LaBonte, Louis
Laderout, Xavier
Laferty, Michel
Laframboise, Michel
Lalcoure, Jean B.
Lambert, Augustin
LaPrate, Alexis
Longtain, Andre
Lor, Moyse
Matte, Joseph
Maloin, Fabien
Mongrain, David
Papin, Pierre
Pariseau, Pierre
Remon, Augustin
Roi, Thomas
Rondeau, Charles
Sanders, Andre
Senecalle, Gideon
Servant, Jacques
Van Dalle, Louis B.

^cFrederick V. Holman, "A Brief History of the Oregon
Provisional Government and What Caused Its Formation,"
Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIII (June, 1912), 114-115.

On May 2, an equal number of Americans and Frenchmen assembled at Champoege to form a government necessary to provide law and order for the community. The choice for their leader was handed to Supreme Judge Ira L. Babcock who satisfied both sides. Efforts to pass a report which allowed for the election of a supreme judge, clerk of the court, a sheriff, three magistrates, three constables, a treasurer, a major, and three captains failed because the Frenchmen refused community organization and government.

In order to solve the impasse, William H. Gray directed that the people divide themselves between those in favor and those opposed to the document. The count stood at 50 to 52 in favor of the constitution of which five French-Canadians crossed sides. At the last moment, Etienne Lucier and F. X. Matthieu voted for independence, no longer supporting Pierre Bellique, Francois Bernier, Xavier Laderoute, David Donpierre, Gervais and others.¹²

¹²Ibid., 154-156. F. X. Matthieu supported Gray's conclusions in his "Reminiscences of 1900." There is no record of a priest being present but, their actions were in unison and most likely under their direction. In 1842, they had "...written a declaration of their reasons for remaining separate...since few...of them were fluent writers, it is highly probable that the document was prepared by one of the priests." The 1843 document is not available.

F. X. Matthieu first arrived in the valley in 1841, a fugitive from Canada. He participated in an unsuccessful revolution for independence and escaped to the U.S. with the use of a false passport. J. N. Barry proposes that the Canadians refusal to unite may be due to the fear of being sent back to Canada for similar punishment. See J. N. Barry "Champoege Meeting of March 4, 1844," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXXVIII, 425-432.

The dissenters slowly left the room without any outward opposition to the results. The election of officers proceeded as the next order of business. Thus, Donpierre and Lucier became committeemen while Laderoute and Bellique were elected as constables.¹³

The French-Canadians managed to exclude themselves, and this prevented the other inhabitants from participating in the formation of a provisional government until February 18, 1841. So long as they held a clear majority in the Willamette Valley they carried the decision not to establish a local government. Finally, they were defeated by the growing numbers of Americans wanting to establish a local government. Thus, the inevitability of forming an organized government encouraged a greater active participation from the French community. For example, when the officers were chosen in the provisional government, George LeBreton retained a post as court clerk and recorder.¹⁴

This mixed assemblage of Americans and French-Canadians drew from a collection of rules to be administered throughout the Willamette Valley. The preamble accepted by the judiciary committee (May 16-19 and June 27-28, 1843) with the phrase, "until such time as the United States of America extends

¹³J. Neilson Barry, "First Local Government," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XLI, (June, 1940), 194-202.

¹⁴James M. Thompkins, "Political Development In Oregon: The Provisional Government, 1843-1849." (Master's Thesis, Portland State University, November 24, 1976), 4.

their jurisdiction over us," which had been added by George LeBreton at the insistence of the full committee.¹⁵ Since the committee held a majority of Americans, such a statement might indicate a preference towards the American democratic political system. At this moment the French-Canadians barely held their majority in the valley. Based on the reluctance of LeBreton, representing the French, it can be understood why they stood in opposition to the new American settlers. First of all, the French were governed by the Honourable Company since the company had been given authority to govern as well as being the principal entrepreneurs for the territory. As the protectorate for the region the firm had taken care to preserve the land for the beaver which had literally become a new way of life for the voyageurs. They certainly believed that another form of government was not needed at this time, especially when ruled by a body of Americans who had only settled the region during the previous two years. Finally, continued protection under the Honourable Company would aid in securing the lands where they had staked out their claims and cultivated the land for the last ten years.

Dr. McLoughlin realized the dangers of allowing the Americans to establish their local government in the valley. Consequently, the chief factor forbade the French-Canadians

¹⁵Ibid., 8.

from participating in the forming of a local government.

His actions worked in stopping them for the present.

Meanwhile as he attempted to secure Oregon below the Columbia River for Britain and the company, the French were unable to settle the valley as fast as their American counterparts.¹⁶

The influx of American settlers forced the company to make some concessions to the rising local authority, who agreed to accept the taxes of the provisional government and to participate in that government. It became evident that the Americans had clearly secured this valley for the United States, so the French-Canadians rapidly complied by filing their land claims which some voyageurs had lived and worked on for more than fifteen years. Although the French still held together as a community they had clearly become the newest minority in the Willamette Valley in just a few short years.

In 1845, the question over the Oregon Territory grew in prominence, and many of the settlers speculated about any such action which might be taken by either the British Parliament or the United States Congress. In either case, the populace's alarm grew over the presence of British and American ships-of-war anchored there. Demers found himself in a difficult position during Blanchet's absence, since many of his followers were French-Canadians and few were American.

¹⁶Ibid., 34.

The Americans had become a large community and were capable of causing trouble for the mission in the event of war.

So, Demers sought to remain neutral in the hope that this dispute could be solved without conflict.¹⁷

Fr. DeSmet traveled in the region and he expressed his growing concern over the recent events between Britain and America.

They were invested with orders from their government to take possession of Cape Disappointment, to hoist the English standard, and to erect a fortress for the purpose of securing the entrance of the river in case of war. In the "Oregon Question," "John Bull," without much talk attains his end and secures the most important part of the country; whereas "Uncle Sam" loses himself in words, inveighs and storms! Many years have passed in debates and useless contention without one single practical effort to secure his real or pretended rights.¹⁸

The impact of the French upon the negotiations between the United States and Britain served as a highly significant force in determining their results. France was once again an ally of the United States since there still existed a rift with Britain. A restless Sir Robert Peele feared the French military, particularly her new steam warships which challenged British supremacy on the high seas. The French were aware of power and her politicians spoke openly of their hatred for Britain. If there was to be a confrontation with the United States, then the French pressure for war would

¹⁷Hussey, op. cit., 175-6.

¹⁸Edwin V. O'Hara, Pioneer Catholic History of Oregon. (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1939), 81-2.

mount placing Britain with a problem of conducting two wars.¹⁹ So, Britain agreed to the settlement of a boundary giving the United States the lower half of the Oregon Territory.

In the early forties, Britain sought to favor the Hudson's Bay Company by seeking its advice and information in the event of war. It was important to improve their military posture in the region, so, in February, 1845, Peter Skene Ogden purchased Cape Disappointment from the Americans, simply known as Wheeler and McDaniel, for a total cost of 1200 dollars. However, the situation with France was deteriorating and a decision over the boundary had become imperative.

Richard Croker wrote the following advice to George Gordon Aberdeen, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on May 13, 1846:

If you get 49 and the Columbia, you will have done a miracle, but I have no hope for miracles now-a-days, and I shall gladly assent to 49 and half the Straits of Fuca; but for God's sake, end it; for if anything were to happen to Louis Philippe, we should have an American war immediately, and a French one just after, a rebellion in Ireland, real starvation in the manufacuring districts, and a twenty-per-cent complication is the shape of Income Tax--not pleasant in prospect, and still less so if any portion of the Black Cloud should Burst.²⁰

In an effort to eliminate some of her problems and after

¹⁹John S. Galbraith, "France as a Factor in the Oregon Negotiations," (Pacific Northwest Quarterly, XLIV, April, 1953), 69-73.

²⁰Robert C. Clark, History of Willamette Valley, Oregon (Chicago: 1927, 2 vols.) I, 859. Continued on page 45.

having come to some solution on the fishing rights in the east, Britain agreed to the settlement of a boundary giving the United States the lower half of the Oregon Territory.

With the settlement of the international question we can return to the problem of the provisional government. Early in the paper we looked at the question of French-Canadian control of the meeting. With the tremendous increase of American immigrants into the valley, the British stood little practical chance of holding the Willamette Valley for themselves. Therefore, the French-Canadian community needed to accept the recent American social and political dominance and try to work out a new solution which would protect their rights and property. If we take a careful look at the particulars of the meeting and the settlements of the land laws we can better understand the transition which the French faced at this time.

The May 2, 1843, meeting represented an important event. With only a handful of French-Canadians, the participants took the first steps towards self-government. Their decision reinforced American possession of the valley. Following the establishment of a civil authority, the residents realized the importance of having their lands surveyed under the new law. This reaffirmation would guarantee their rights to the

Also, Wheeler and McDaniel fail to leave history their Christian names. See, Gloria Griffen Cline, Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 163.

lands which they had managed during the previous decades. To illustrate the problems and procedures of establishing their land claims, let us see how Michel LaFramboise and Andre Longtain met the crisis.

Andre Longtain settled in the valley with forty-five acres enclosed, twenty-four which were planted. By 1841, he cultivated thirty of fifty-five acres. He owned ten horses, two buildings and produced a crop of 250 bushels of wheat which was low compared to the other farms in the valley. To re-establish his claim under the laws of the Provisional Government of 1841, he charged Jesse Applegate to survey his land claims on February 1, 1844, which totaled 640 acres. In 1852, he swore an oath that he had lived on the land since 1834, although William Slacum and Duflot de Mofras believed that he started his farm the following year.²¹ Longtain and Robert Newell owned adjacent lots on the location of the proposed Champoeg townsite. Since the residents were required to surrender those lands needed for the new town, an accurate survey became imperative. After the survey had determined their exact locations, it was clear that Newell would be a more significant leader in the development of the townsite. Problems rose when the filed documents for Longtain's plot became lost in 1853. He notified the Surveyor General on August 24, 1852, claiming

²¹Hussey, op. cit., 80.

the boundaries marked by Jesse Applegate in 1844. Three days later Newell presented his donation land claim which contained a full section. There appeared to be a severe conflict between the two claims, thus requiring a completely new survey. Samuel D. Snowden made the survey on May 10, 1853, beginning with Newell's northeast corner. The discrepancy favored Newell which reduced Longtain's claim to 563.38 acres. By 1900, the Longtain claim had been broken up and sold throughout the years, but none of the exchanges have been recorded. At the time of the final settlement of his land claim, he faced an even greater disaster when the flood of 1861 swept his house away. As he attempted to re-establish his claim he chose to rebuild his house on higher ground.²²

Michel LaFromboise decided to settle down on his farm when he returned from the Southern Expedition of 1842-1843, although he hired out as a guide on occasions. He worked for Lt. Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. and Governor George Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company when they passed through the valley. He filed his donation land claim in 1852 swearing that he lived at the site twelve years ago. There remained a continuous debate over the exact location of his lands. When he married Emelie Picard on July 9, 1839, he believed that his home was north of the Willamette River. However, Longtain disputed his claim and placed him south of the river.

²²Ibid., 210-211, 221-222, 233.

The dispute was never completely resolved.

The flood of 1861 wiped out all of Champoeg and half of its rival Butteville. None of the original residents wanted to rebuild the town, although some attempted to place their houses on higher ground. The Newellsville hamlet sprang up in 1878 with only four resident families. John B. Piette remained closest resident Frenchman at the Champoeg site. Another important figure before the flood, Adolph Jette from Prepontigny Parish, Quebec, became a prominent figure in the valley during the latter part of the century.²³ By 1878 George LaRoque sold his claim to Donald Manson, Jr., and Longtain's was broken up.

From this point the French community existed only in the hearts of various French families scattered throughout the state. By the turn of the century there were just a few outstanding figures who, for all intents and purposes, passed away with the deaths of F. X. Matthieu in 1914, and Archbishop Francis Norbert Blanchet in 1885.

After the break-up of the French-speaking communities, Father F. N. Blanchet had spent the remainder of his years in the service of all Catholics and not just a French community. In 1859 he returned to the valley with thirty-one priests and nuns. In 1866, he traveled to Baltimore to participate in the Second Plenary Council. One year following

²³Ibid., 234.

his golden jubilee in 1869, he set out for Rome to assist in the Vatican Council.

The French-Canadians played an important role in settling the Oregon territory from the 18th century until 1860. It was important because they were the first on the scene in any significant numbers. Although the Spanish preceded them, they were the ones that entered the forest with the hopes of making a living by trapping the beaver. They certainly would have carried their prominence into the future if they had been able to settle larger numbers and to persuade some of the French women to travel from Montreal to the Northwest. The future of their community was doomed with the large American migrations and they began to realize this themselves. Subsequently they departed with the gold rush and other distant persuasions since they no longer ruled in the Willamette Valley.

CHAPTER THREE

French-Speaking Religious (1830-1861)

The Catholic Church, as represented by Fathers Blanchet and Demers, played a highly significant role in the formation of Oregon's character. The Church missionaries commenced their work where the Protestant missions had failed in the valley, by holding the French community together through their Catholic faith. The Hudson's Bay Company supported the growing need for a Catholic priest, hoping to keep the French community in line with company authority. Years of company loyalty and trade agreements for their wheat bound the two institutions through mutual interests.

In 1830, the early settlements along the Willamette River realized the necessity of a priest, a need which reflected the religiosity of their culture. Since they ceased to wander through the woods searching for the ever elusive beaver, they finally settled at home where a priest could be sent to build a mission.

The American Methodists settled in the Willamette Valley ahead of the Catholic missions. They faced a French community deeply rooted in the faiths and traditions of Catholicism. Since the French exceeded the Americans in

numbers they stood a limited chance of breaking the control of either the company or the Church over its retired employees. Jason Lee, a Methodist minister, settled in the valley hoping to convert both the Indians and the Frenchmen. To succeed he proposed to separate the French from the Hudson's Bay Company, otherwise both the political and religious control of the valley could be lost to the British.

When Father Jean-Pierre DeSmet, a French-Belgian, entered the Willamette Valley with his party in 1844, the Methodists began moving out after ten fruitless years amongst the local inhabitants. DeSmet looked for a place to settle which could serve as a base for supplying other Jesuit missions in Oregon, as suggested by Fr. F. N. Blanchet.¹

During the 1830's the French-Canadians, other than the Indians, represented the largest ethnic group in the Oregon Territory. Winning their religious support meant control or at least a strong influence on the economic and political strength in the valley. The Methodists sought the support of the French community through the Temperance Society which intended to prevent alcohol from reaching the natives. French support became imperative to the Methodists, since the company had proposed building a distillery. Many French supporters donated money to the society, while others signed but refused to become supporting members.

¹Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., The Jesuits of the Middle United States (New York: America Press, 1938), Vol. II, 297.

Separate interests of the French-Catholic and American missionaries fostered the creation of two distinct communities. Jason Lee's inclusion of the French became especially necessary because he could not ignore the solidly established French in the valley. He witnessed limited success. After Fr. Blanchet arrived at Fort Vancouver from Montreal, he easily restored the Catholic faith of the French-Canadians. Catholicism had become an integral aspect of the French character through the centuries. The presence of a priest acted as a magnet drawing them to their faith. Although weak in faith from many years of isolation, they greeted him with the enthusiasm of an old friend. His fear of the Methodists' influence caused him to settle in the valley during October 1839. Uniting the settlers, he drastically stifled the potential strength of the Methodists, either political or religious.

Even the early voyageurs remained loyal to the Church in their hearts. Their first efforts to obtain a Catholic priest were denied by the Hudson's Bay Company. Despite their interest in obtaining a priest they were never overly religious in the actual practicing of their faith. In most cases they rarely went to confession or attended mass even when the sacraments were available. Some waited until the last moment before death to receive them. Their love-hate relationship with their faith appeared insignificant to themselves since they still believed ardently. Reasons for

FIGURE 4

French Supporters of the Temperance Society^d

Joseph Gervais	\$8.00
Xavier LaDescoste	6 bushels of wheat
Desportes McKay	\$8.00
Charles Plante	6 bushels of wheat
Charles Rondeau	
Joseph DeLor	\$4.00
Andres Pecor	
Louis Forcia	
Etienne Lucier	

French Non-supporting Petitioners

Pierre Depau	John Baptiste Perrault
A. Erquette	P. Billique

^dWilliam A. Slacum, "Slacum's Report on Oregon, 1836-7," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIII (June, 1912), 175.

their mixed loyalties to the Church rest in their culture. Being French and Catholic remained an integral part of their French mystique.

The spiritual needs of the French prompted them to request the fur company to send a French-Catholic priest from Quebec to the Willamette Valley. For years the firm would not listen to their plea, until the growing strength of the American Methodists threatened to control the French communities in the valley, a situation which also meant political and economic control of the region. Finally, the Church received permission on February 2, 1837, to establish a mission in the Columbia Department. Father Blanchet enthusiastically answered the missionaries from the Bishop of Quebec. His departure hinged upon extra room after loading the batteau. However, the voyageurs took little interest in finding room for him. Consequently, the young priest had to wait until the following year before leaving Montreal. Angered, the bishop of Montreal wrote to Governor Simpson complaining about the delay in finding passage west. On March 3, 1838, the reply to the bishop's request arrived, thus making it possible for Fr. F. N. Blanchet to leave the following spring. He left Lachine on the third of May.²

²Letitia Maria Lyons, Francis Norbet Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Missions (1838-1848) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1940), 5-7.

The brigade journeyed up the Ottawa River on the first leg of a 3,000 mile expedition through central Canada to the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department. At the Red River settlement, Blanchet first met Chief Factor John McLoughlin as he headed to London via Montreal. The party remained at the fort until June 6, 1838, when Father Modeste Demers, another French priest, joined him as his companion to the Oregon Territory. Finally, on July 9, they resumed their journey reaching the Norway House by the seventeenth, also the location of an annual rendezvous. The party traveled in a southerly direction descending the Columbia River on October thirteenth. They reached the Dalles des Morts just forty-three miles above the town of Revelstroke. They stopped to split the party in order to pass over the rapids. The first party made the passage safely, but the second group lost twelve of the twenty-six men. The remnant of the last group reached the House of the Lakes on the twenty-fourth. News arrived by Indian messenger at Fort Colville while they returned to look for the lost members. Only the bodies of three children emerged. The party spent eight days at the house which became their first apostolate in the Oregon country.³

By November 24, the brigade appeared as tiny specks as they approached Fort Vancouver.

³Ibid., 8-14.

Then, each man in his finest, hats decorated with feathers or bunches of bright ribbon, gay colored shirts, brilliant sashes from which dangled beaded Indian pouches, the brigade swept down the river. As the boat drew nearer and nearer, the chorus of song from the voyageurs swelled louder and louder, broken now, by the shouts of welcome from the shore. When the canoes had been brought opposite the fort, still in the middle of the river, they wheeled in perfect line and came, side by side, in toward the bank. Once there, order was gone, for as the oarsmen stepped to the shore, they were swallowed up in the crowd that was waiting.⁴

The future settlers of the Willamette Valley, Joseph Gervais, Stephen Lucier and Pierre Beleque greeted the brigade along with Douglas who substituted as chief factor in the absence of McLoughlin. Father Blanchet gathered the French-Canadians around to celebrate the first mass in Oregon.

Thus began the important work of establishing the first Catholic mission along the Columbia River. Nearly every Frenchman professed the Catholic faith and Father Blanchet saw himself as coming to their rescue. He expressed alarm to find that due to the long absences of a priest some of them had been converted to one of the other religions.⁵

Blanchet's ministry formally began on the twenty-seventh of November at Ft. Vancouver. The next day he established classes of instruction which would prepare the women and children for baptism. Demers spent the next couple of years working with the Indians.

⁴Ibid., 19.

⁵Ibid., 20.

A primary concern of the two missionaries was locating a suitable place for their mission. On December 20, 1838, the vicar chose 640 acres of clear prairie land near the fort. This location did not best assist the French-Canadians living along the Willamette River. However, his instructions required that the mission be located at the fort, because he represented both the company and the Church. The sensitive relationship with the company demanded his cooperation otherwise he might be forced to return to Quebec. Although the Americans stood in greater opposition to the Church, they would be the ones to allow Father Blanchet greater freedom of its operation. Following the Treaty of 1846, the company began retreating behind the forty-ninth parallel and with it a political force which often directed the missions of the valley. Even though Blanchet could not establish his mission on the Willamette River, his instructions had not prevented him from visiting the families who lived there.

Mssrs. Stephen Lucier and Peter Beleque paddled down the Willamette River to welcome Fr. Blanchet at Fort Vancouver. Upon their arrival, Blanchet agreed to journey up the river to their French settlement. The party paddled for two days until they reached Campment du Sable and four miles farther they came to the church which the French-Canadians had constructed when they heard of Bishop Provencher's assurance

that the missionaries would be sent to them.⁶

On the sixth, the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord, their little church celebrated its first mass on this great occasion. Every corner was filled with the Frenchmen and their wives and children. During the mass, Blanchet read a pastoral letter from Bishop Signay.

To our very dear children-Greetings and Benediction of our savior.

Since the Bishop of Juliopolis told of the desire you manifested to him to have among you priests, who would interest themselves in your spiritual concerns, we have not ceased to pray that the Lord would give up the means of procuring for you an advantage so precious. Your desires and ours have been rewarded. The members of the Honourable Company of Hudson's Bay have had the liberality to offer a passage in one of their canoes to two priests whom we propose to send to you, and we accepted their offer with gratitude.

Thank God, our very dear children, for the acquisition you have made in these generous missionaries, who have separated themselves from their friends, their families from all hopes and consolations which they would have to for the salvation of our souls and those of your brothers who are still unhappy enveloped in the shadows of paganism. Sweeten their ministry among you by your docility, obedience and zeal to profit by their instruction and good example. Look upon them as your spiritual fathers, charged with speaking to you of God and of speaking to God for you. They will count their weariness, their labors as nothing, if they find in the flock confided to them this desire of knowing the true religion, of practicing it and of honoring it, which without doubt has been the motive of your reiterated demands for a priest to live among you. This, our very dear children, is what we hope to

⁶Ibid., 26. The church was constructed of logs, 30 x 70 feet and it began construction in 1836, and it is believed to be the first church built in Oregon.

have the consolation of learning from the first news we shall receive from them after their arrival at their destination.⁷

Although ordered to establish his mission at Ft. Vancouver, Blanchet continued his mission in the valley until February 4, when he returned to the fort. His great concern for the Frenchmen living in the valley was demonstrated by his taking the time necessary for visiting each one of the families before leaving. During his stay, he secured possession of 640 acres for a future more permanent mission. After arriving at the fort he prepared his progress report which was taken to Montreal with the departure of the "spring express."⁸

Every spring the Hudson's Bay Company organized a small bateau flotilla to journey to points east concluding at Montreal. Their purpose was to cash in the beaver pelts and to purchase needed supplies or sundries for the coming winter. Most of Blanchet's reports to the Montreal diocese made this journey. Landerholm's translation of their reports illustrated the nature and content in Notices and Voyages of the Famed Quebec Mission to the Pacific Northwest. The reports illustrated the progress made at the mission as well as the geographic description of the region.

When Blanchet looked at the situation in the valley he recognized its potential good for the religious development

⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

⁸ Ibid., 29-38.

of the region, both for the natives and the French-Canadians for whom the Catholic religion was promisingly new. Many of the Frenchmen had not been to church for ten or twenty years and did not practice their faith in the forests. It was an improbable task to re-establish the faith which seemed so strange to them.

The Hudson's Bay Company's tight control over the activities within the territories restrained even the numbers of missionaries entering the region. Its authority severely hindered the religious needs of the French-Canadians. In contrast, the company appeared to have little control over the American missions which stayed primarily at the American establishments of Ft. George and along the Willamette Valley. Bishop Signay and Father Blanchet continued to appeal for the needs of the French community with little success. Blanchet feared the loss of these men to the Methodists or Presbyterians. After Governor Simpson had agreed to the passage of the two priests into the region, he refused to consider the matter of sending more missionaries across the continent.⁹ Formal appeals were made in 1839 for assistance in the valley without success. Governor Simpson feared that the Honourable Company may be furthering the religious interest of the Catholic Church, but this policy had actually hurt the future of many company employees. Their religion

⁹Ibid., 49.

was being refused to them and there had always been a strong implication of English prejudice against the French. This attitude could be found in the Hudson's Bay Company's policy that had prevented the promotion of the Frenchmen within its structure.

However, during the following year, Bishop Signay attempted to secure some formal action on the part of the governor to supply the needed priests. Simpson replied:

The governor and committee are not at all satisfied that the measures which have recently been adopted under your Lordship's direction for the purpose of advancing religious instruction on the west side of the mountains, have been attended with the benefits so earnestly desired.... Until they received my report on the state of the missions after my arrival in the Columbia next year. I am instructed to say that the Governor and Committee are unwilling to comply with your Lordship's request in reference to a passage for a missionary thither by the spring canoes.¹⁰

The committee was unsatisfied with the measures taken by the bishop because his concern for the faith of the voyageurs interfered with the trapping profits of the company. During the company's early years in the Pacific Northwest, the voyageurs's success depended upon a good supply of beavers in the region. Priests would help to bring stability by giving the trappers a place to settle down. The environmental impact produced two disastrous results for the Honourable Company. First, the priest would mark the

¹⁰Ibid., 51. Simpson to Signay, December 20, 1840; the document can be found in the Quebec Archives.

beginning of a new era of settlement which would bring more people and eventually towns. This growth would drive the beaver away from his natural habitats. Secondly, these growing settlements would draw those French-Canadians who were growing tired of running traps and wanted to settle down, to cultivate the land, and to begin a new future. These environmental impacts, the diminishing number of beavers and the increasing settlers, threatened the Honourable Company's territorial control and profits.

However, with the influx of American settlers in the region, Governor Simpson changes his priorities. He realized that the company must secure the territory. Therefore, the voyageurs were needed to remain there both for hunting and farming to establish a defensive line between the company's enterprise and the Americans.

After the governor refused to answer the needs of the priests in 1840, Blanchet was forced to look elsewhere for them. From St. Louis, Missouri, came Fr. DeSmet, a French-Belgian Jesuit under his own power. His French background and French associates who traveled with him became a marvelous asset for the French-Canadians. Although the governor appeared to be reconsidering the needs of the Catholic French-Canadians, there was no action being taken at this time. Blanchet did not fully understand the reasons behind the decision of the governor to refuse his request, so he decided to look for arguments that would defend their

position. Since the governor's itinerary included Fort Vancouver, Blanchet would present this memorandum to him. First, he noted that: "The servants of the company. The great majority of the workers are and have always been Canadian and Catholic. They have done and continue to do the most difficult and fatiguing work with a capacity without equal perhaps, even in the experience of their employees."¹¹ He felt that the company had a moral obligation to its employees and to the local natives. Also, the growing number of the American Protestant ministers should be of paramount importance to the British government, since their political strength over the valley would seriously jeopardize the Oregon Territory as a British possession. Blanchet went ahead and presented his apologetic without actually knowing the reasons for the company's refusal to send any more priests into the region. Regardless of the ban, Blanchet's appeal led to the sending of additional priests for the mission.¹²

Nicholas Point, S.J., a French Jesuit, sailed to the Americas in 1835 to answer his call to the western Canadian missions. No accounts of his journey remain for the researcher. However, after joining Father DeSmet during the 1840's, he meticulously marked his adventures in journals and in paintings depicting the places and events in his travels.

¹¹Ibid., 54.

¹²Ibid., 57.

These records often tell of Indian life and wilderness lore as he witnessed them, and his travels through Montana and Idaho brought him into contact with the Coeur d'Alene, Flathead, Nez Perce and Calumet Tribes. They also provided the only available drawings of many forts that no longer exist.

Point held an important place in Oregon history as a French painter of the west. His paintings left us the great heritage of the Nez Perce and Calumet Indian tribes whose nations marked a significant part of present-day Oregon.

The most striking feature of his works were the bright colors which he painted. These color representations showed the zest and gaiety of the Indians and the role which color played in Indian life. For example, he loved to paint the Indians when they were on the hunt or celebrating a special occasion, when they would wear their bright colors and feathers. If anything his paints were not complete because they lacked authenticity in presenting the starkness of Indian daily life.¹³

One of the tremendous surprises which he left behind were the paintings he had the Indians do when he presented

¹³Joseph P. Donnelly, Wilderness Kingdom: Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains: 1840-1847, Journals and Paintings of Nicholas Point, S.J. (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1967). Some prints of his paintings and journals may be found also in, Nicholas Point, "Bright Vignettes of a lost World," Life. Vol. 63, No. 22, December 1, 1967, 52-59.

canvass and paints to them. Their works allow us to visualize how they pictured the whiteman through the various emphases in their drawings. One of these, by a young Indian, depicted his fascination with the barge in which Nicholas Point had arrived. He showed the exterior of the vessel with man and mule pulling the craft upstream. He also drew the interior contents which indicated that he had been allowed to visit the boat at one time. Another interesting drawing illustrated the Indian's conception of a fort with its flags and large wooden doors. The fort was conceived with vertical and horizontal lines, as opposed to presenting the material shapes or textures used to build the fort. Above the fort he drew its contents of wagons, horses, and men that carried axes and hoes. These aspects of the whiteman's life which fascinated the Indians most were their corresponding cultural objects, for example, the buildings that housed the settlers, or gardening tools, and the clothing. They never illustrated a close compatibility between the two peoples because there was no shared life between them, so they usually appeared separately on the canvas. These segregated relationships led some to question the extent of missionary conversions based on faith. To a limited degree, Indians principally in the Montana region had accepted Christianity because of their early exposure to the converted Iroquois who entered the territory. But, Washington and Oregon tribes lacked a mutual expression of God which could be shared amongst the tribes.

FIGURE 5

Indian Tribes and Missions in the Pacific Northwest



Finding this expression became an important goal for the missionaries.

Finally, Point as a missionary utilized his paintings as a method of catechesis, to illustrate the Christian faith to the Indians. His paintings brought considerable success to his missionary efforts by visualizing concepts that were verbally difficult to explain. Even with these drawings, some of the Church's mysteries such as the Trinity, must have caused considerable confusion amongst the Indians.

The Frenchman's religiosity played an important role in the lives of those who came to the Pacific Northwest. This fact is true even though they rarely had, or took, the opportunity to practice their faith, because the Church stood as a living cell of the French culture. Point aided greatly in the success of DeSmet's mission amongst the Flatheads and settlers as they traveled through the state of Oregon. Their expedition's success would have been limited without the use of his paints to teach the Indians the Christian faith, and to rekindle the Christian traditions of the isolated trappers and settlers. While traveling through the area, Point unexpectedly encountered his sister on the great river, the Columbia. She served as a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

The arrival of another group of French missionaries marked the passing into another era of cultural growth. Once again the needs of the people of Oregon would require more

qualified and educated people to help to build the new cities and towns of the state. And the French would continue the lead in the further development of the religious institutions, by providing needed personnel for their future schools, hospitals and parishes. Although the people's needs demanded that more religious be sent to Oregon, the Bishop of Montreal did not want to send any priest unless he felt that they were properly suited for the job. One of the earliest applicants was Blanchet's brother, Augustine. When he first applied for the post, he was refused. But, Fathers Anthony Langlois and John Batiste Zachary Bolduc arrived in his stead. They sailed from Boston on September, 1841. Their arrival helped to free the bishop for the rest of his duties.¹⁴

The religious communities continued their growth, and on November 4, 1844, Fr. F. N. Blanchet became the first vicar of the Columbia Mission. However, the news of his appointment reached the territory a year later. He humbly insisted on his unsuitability for the position and often wrote to Bishop Signay or Bishop Turgram expressing his concern. Later, he wrote to his brother, Augustine. He remarked that he was too old for the post, unaware that he would contribute another forty years of service to the Oregon parishoners.

I am already old and "hor d'age"; my powers diminish; I am slow at business and it is only by close application that I arrive at a knowledge of anything; I have

¹⁴Ibid., 59.

a treacherous memory; my vigor is done; I do not know English; I have never had time to study due to the demands of the ministry where I have always been busy. Why then go against nature, wish to draw light from where there is only darkness? What can I say and do further? Even here they see that I am not in my place; they advise me to abandon it since I am not capable of guiding and governing; it is my wish to give my place to another; I ask only a corner on the Columbia. I am blamed at all times; at all times I am taken to task; I am at fault, lacking. So, for the greater glory of God and in the interest of my fellow creatures, would it not be better than I even a blameable leader. My Lord, intercede for me. I have thought that my brother might replace me if that should be found agreeable. He has more energy, more talent, greater capacity than I. Storm heaven that I be listened to.¹⁵

His concerns were genuine. And he believed that because of the influx of Americans into the region in 1843 and subsequent years, the religious needs of the French-Canadians were no longer as outstanding. But, in the end he accepted the wishes of the church and began to prepare for his return to Montreal from Ft. Vancouver for the consecration.

By the close of the summer of 1844, Fr. DeSmet had returned to the Oregon region from St. Louis. Fr. Blanchet suggested that he not utilize the extant Methodist mission which had been offered to him. Although the purchase would have been less expensive than to renovate a location which already had some buildings for classes and storage, the site at St. Paul was chosen in twelve days of his arrival.

"Monseigneur Blanchet," he wrote to Father General Roothaan

¹⁵Lyons, op. cit., 150.

August 29, 1844, "has given me a fine piece of land, an English square mile in extent . . . at a half league from his mother-house."¹⁶

On October 9, 1844, he wrote to his brother, Francis, about the details of the property. Apparently the Methodists had offered their academy since they intended to abandon their mission site. However, the property lacked trees, so Blanchet encouraged them to journey a couple of miles to St. Paul and to locate a mission there. He had purchased the land immediately following his arrival in the valley and currently waited for someone to settle a French-Canadian mission there. DeSmet found the land perfectly suited with lumber and with magnificent views of Mts. Hood, Jefferson and St. Helens. So, DeSmet accepted this location of the St. Francis Xavier Mission overlooking the Willamette River.

On October 3, 1844, DeSmet left the Willamette River for the mountains. He left behind several able Frenchmen, a priest and a small group of sisters of Notre Dame de Namur whose missionary works would endure even to the present.

Blanchet was probably the first to recognize the passing of the French dominance in Oregon through his letters. Nevertheless, the mission remained a French project through the ensuing decades. The territory's need for English-speaking

¹⁶Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J. The Jesuits of the Middle United States. Vol. II. (New York: America Press, 1938), 297.

religious would have to originate from the local populace, and it did. However, when Blanchet traveled to Europe in pursuit of missionaries he could not have imagined the excessive numbers of Americans that would move into the valley. So, when he returned with his collection of Frenchmen they returned to an apostolate that was more Anglicized than before his departure.

Fr. DeSmet had helped Blanchet to work out the details of his trip, which enabled him to embark on a ship, December 5, 1844. His journey took him to Hawaii, Liverpool and finally to Canada where he was to be consecrated bishop on July 25, 1845, at Montreal's St. James Cathedral. He allowed some time to visit with many of his old friends and for some reflection prior to his departure for the European continent. During his travels he made several appeals for his vicariate and established the Society of Oceana in France for the purpose of sending missionaries to the Pacific Northwest.

Upon his return to Oregon, Blanchet arranged through the Oceanic Maritime Society to sail with Captain Menes aboard the L'Etoile du Matin. His party, including seven sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, five priests, two subdeacons, and one ecclesiastic, departed, February 22, 1847, for a six month voyage to Oregon. They finally reached the Columbia Bar on August 13, 1847, where they anchored in Gray's Bay for their first night in Oregon.¹⁷

¹⁷Ibid., 156, 243, 169, 170.

But, while Blanchet traveled in Europe, a steady stream of Americans had entered the Willamette Valley during the forties. This influx of people made Oregon City the new center of Anglicized economic and social activity in the area. He suddenly realized that the new settlements necessitated the relocating of a church in the valley, and they also meant that the missionaries had to acculturate themselves more than ever to a foreign apostolate. So, in March 1844, he journeyed to a small city and arranged for a new church where Father Demers would serve as its pastor and De Vos, his assistant. He also discovered that during his extended trip, Demers had been appointed Vicar-General. The ambitious Demers began an intensive building program of churches, schools, convents without much thought of their costs. One of these enterprises was under the direction of Father Louis Vercruysse, and he remarked, "This chapel was built, not with contribution from the Association of the faith, but with money contributed by the settlers themselves." The rivalry between the Protestants and the Catholics for contribution only heightened their differences. For example, his purpose for building a house and chapel for the priests at Fort Vancouver intensified Protestant fears of a Catholic takeover. When Douglas took command of the fort from McLoughlin, the Catholics feared that he would prohibit a Catholic settlement there because he was such a firm Presbyterian. However, this bias proved a misnomer amongst their fears. Still, as the numbers of American

immigrants continued to rise, Fathers Demers and De Vos realized the urgent need of an English speaking priest. Demers wrote to Cazeau about his concern and expressed the hope that the prejudices amongst the people would eventually disappear.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Father A.M.A. Blanchet, Francis's brother and future bishop, arrived at Walla Walla on September 27, 1846, where Father Brouillet told him "that from Fort Hall to Walla Walla there were no less than a hundred wagons abandoned on the road because there were no beasts to pull them."¹⁹ To meet the challenge that the Americans brought meant significant changes redefining the needs of the Catholic Church in Oregon. Blanchet appeared to be less concerned about just the French-Canadians and more concerned about the Americans and the continuing apostolate with the Indians. Consequently, on March 1, 1848, he opened the first Provincial Council in Oregon.²⁰ There was another devastating, and nearly final, event which precipitated the change in Blanchet's policy. That year the majority of the French-Canadians left the Oregon Territory for the gold in California. Despite this drastic reduction in the French-speaking community many would remain to become leaders in the development of Oregon.

¹⁸Ibid., 172-4.

¹⁹Ibid., 181.

²⁰Ibid., 186.

Following A.M.A. Blanchet's visit at Montreal, he returned to Oregon with Several French Oblates destined for the missions north of the Columbia River. The Oblates on the trail were Pascal Ricard, George Blanchet, Eugene Casimir Chirouse, and J. Ch. Pandosi.

Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet and his three companions left Montreal for Oregon on March 23, 1847, at five o'clock in the morning. They arrived at St. Louis, Missouri on April 15. From the time of their arrival until their departure, April 27, they were occupied in assembling provisions and making plans for the hazardous trek over the Oregon Trail. While at St. Louis they were joined by the Oblate missionaries who had sailed from France in time to accompany Bishop Blanchet's party.²¹

Following the Whitman Massacre, November 29, 1847, Bishop Blanchet, Mr. Rousseau and Father Ricard, O.M.I., journeyed down the Columbia River to Oregon City. Later the party reached St. Paul and the residence of Archbishop Blanchet, on January 15, 1848.²² Demers was also there waiting to depart for Vancouver Island because the previous November 30,

²¹Marian Josephine Thomas, S.H.N., "Abbe Jean-Baptiste Abraham Brouillet First Vicar General of the Diocese of Seattle." (Master's Thesis, Seattle University, December, 1950), 14-5.

The author notes three important sources for the above quotation from her thesis. (1) The Journal de l'Eveque de Walla Walla dequis Montreal capital du Canada jusqu'a Walla Walla, kept by Brouillet during his journey to Oregon. This journal can be found in the Seattle Diocese Archives, volume II of Chroniques de la Providence Sts. Anges, Vancouver, W.T. Also, the March 23, 1847, issue of the Walla Walla Centennial, p. 14, and the Centennial Souvenir of the Catholic Church in Walla Walla Valley 1847-1947. For a copy of the last source see Appendix C, p. 162-163 of Thomas's thesis.

²²Ibid.

See Brouillet's account of the massacre.

he had been consecrated Bishop of Vancouver Island. The three French bishops decided to take advantage of their gathering, and held the first Provincial Council for three days from February 28, to March 1.²³ Although it was a time for reflection they made some decisions attending to house cleaning business in the region. One of the results of their meeting prompted Bishop Blanchet to write Brouillet at Walla Walla directing him to teach theology to Leclair in preparation for his ordination.²⁴ Also, Brouillet had been directed to continue learning Cayuse to take north to his Cayuse Indian apostolate. His command of their language afforded him the privilege to instruct and translate the Our Father, Hail Mary, Creed, and beginning catechism to the Indians.²⁵

Their dedication to the Catholic faith and their willingness to instruct others seemed characteristic of the French in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The priest and ministers were willing to face native reluctance with great patience, understanding, and a willingness to adapt the Church catechesis to the Indian culture by learning their

²³F.N. Blanchet, Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon (Portland: Oregon Catholic Sentinel Press, 1878), 64-5.

²⁴Thomas notes that the proceeding of the council are located in the Seattle Diocese Archives, II, 343-353; III, 295-305. And Blanchet's Historical Sketches, 68. Finally, Leclair would be ordained, October 21, 1849.

²⁵Thomas, op. cit., 21.

language and living in their houses. For example, Adrian Croquet of the late nineteenth century best exemplified a Jesuit who applied acculturation to his work with the Indians. He was often called the "Saint de l'Oregon" by both the Frenchmen and the Indians of the Willamette Valley.²⁶

Bishop Blanchet attempted to depart from St. Paul and return to the Walla Walla mission in June 1840, but the superintendent of Indian Affairs prohibited him from traveling east of the Cascades until the hostilities quieted down. Then Bishop Blanchet decided to establish St. Peter's mission at The Dalles, and Brouillet joined Blanchet at The Dalles for the duration.²⁷

During the summer of 1848, news of the gold rush reached the Willamette and Columbia River Valleys. Consequently, much of the French population of Oregon left and sought the fortunes in the hills of San Francisco. There French priests were not available to minister to the sudden influx of Frenchmen to the area, so, Frs. Antoine Langlois and Brouillet departed for San Francisco.²⁸

Jean-Batiste Abraham Brouillet was ultimately destined

²⁶Jean Bosse. Memoires d'un Grand Brainois: Monseigneur Adrien Croquet, le "Saint de L'Oregon." Unpublished.

²⁷Ibid. Blanchet to the Secretary of the Interior, April 6, 1868, Seattle Diocese Archives, IV, 22.

²⁸Thomas, op. cit., 23.

for the St. James Mission of Vancouver, Washington Territory, from 1850-1863, and later became the first vicar of Seattle. His life mirrored significant events in Oregon since the St. James Mission location rested across the Columbia River. During its early existence, the little parish led by its French-speaking pastor affected many of the lives of the people of Oregon. The Brouillet story commenced with Abbe Augustine Magloire Alexander Blanchet, who also founded the Sisters of Charity of Providence, on October 30, 1845, and later, July 2, 1846, was appointed Bishop of Walla Walla. These two gentlemen first met during the 1846 summer in Montreal. Blanchet sought missionaries from the Quebec Diocese and often spoke lovingly of the Oregon region and of the great potential which a missionary could find there.

The missionary bishop was appealing to the priests of Canada to accompany him in his missions of the American West. Having noticed that Father Brouillet was listening to him more attentively than any other, he had a sort of prophetic intuition of the good this virtuous priest could accomplish among the Indians: "My dear friend," said he to Father Brouillet, "I know you dearly love your fine parish; you are happy here today, in the name of God, to make the sacrifice of leaving it to become an apostle, what would you say?"

I would say, me voici! (Here I am!), interrupted Father Brouillet, and His Grace, visibly moved, shook hands, Father added: "Count on me; if my bishop gives me permission, you shall not leave alone."²⁹

²⁹Ibid., 143. See also her notes on Brosseau, J. D., O.P. St. George d'Henryville, et La Seigneurie de Noyan. La Cie d'Imprimerie et Camptabilite de Saint Hyacinthe, 1913.

The romance of Oregon had captured the evangelical spirit of Father Brouillet. He immediately arranged to return with his new friend and companion in Christ. When the gold rush came, he continued with his simple ministry amongst a partially scattered French community. However, his love for these people soon carried him south, because large segments of the French population migrated to California to discover their fortunes. Brouillet merely intended a temporary leave-of-absence to minister to his brothers around San Francisco until their lives stabilized again. He worked for a year around the gold mines. The French voyageurs faced many difficult situations as a minority. Since there was no other available priest that spoke French, Brouillet felt obligated to remain at the city. Most of the French miners found their misfortunes instead of fortunes, and those returning to the Oregon region returned penniless. These people often remained displaced from their home culture most of their lives. A second home of insecurity and loneliness loomed before them. Fr. Brouillet, however, was becoming more attached to his latest apostolate by attempting to bind them together through cultural ties in their faith. Nevertheless, in 1850, Mgr. A.M.A. Blanchet halted his exploits by recalling him from San Francisco, and named him the new Vicar General of Walla Walla, replacing Blanchet himself who had been moved to his new post at Nesqually (Seattle). Brouillet was also given charge of "inspection" of the Indian

Missions throughout eastern Washington and Oregon.³⁰

The 1850's also marked the commencement of a permanent role for French religious women in Oregon. Religious women, primarily French-Canadian nuns, played an important role in settling the Pacific Northwest. In addition to establishing social institutions, such as hospitals, schools and orphanages, they illustrated their faith through the Catholic schools and by their mere actions in their daily lives. Although they arrived later than the men, enormous obstacles stood before them. The difficult journey from French Canada or Europe remained unchanged. Once they arrived in Oregon, they faced a new beginning in an alien culture. They were minorities who sought to become religious leaders of the people. And acculturation became imperative if their tiny communities would succeed. Still, their fellow French-speaking communities helped to make them feel needed and welcomed in their new home upon their arrival. However, these warm greetings were not always evident. In 1856, a small, bold group of Providence Sisters sailed from Montreal to the Isthmus of Panama; from there they sailed north to their destination at the Portland docks. Once they departed from the ship they found the archbishop had departed on a trip, and he had neglected to leave behind instructions regarding their new responsibilities and duties in the Oregon frontier.

³⁰Ibid., 143.

Blanchet had originally appealed to the sisters for their assistance in Oregon during his stay in Montreal. They responded with generous hopes and enthusiasm for the western missions, but they also became easily discouraged, after the long and difficult voyage, to find nobody to greet them.

Sr. Laroque, designated as the superior of the missionary community departed with five sisters from Montreal, October 18, 1852. They hoped and prayed to establish a House of Providence at Olympia, but the bishop had other plans for them. Rather, they sailed directly to Oregon City, where the party waited two-and-a-half months for words of direction from the bishop. During their brief stay they realized that most of the Frenchmen had departed for the gold fields near San Francisco. They waited alone and abandoned until the sisters decided to sail to San Francisco on February 1, 1853.³¹

Another religious group of Notre Dame de Namur Sisters also found the Oregon missions difficult. In 1847 Blanchet reached Walla Walla, and he encouraged the sisters to open a boarding school there two years later. They taught local students for four years before they unexpectedly moved south to California. Sister Renilda was all that remained of that congregation. There appeared no exceptional reason for their departure.

³¹Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Journal de l'Eveque de Walla Walla, Portfolio, 437.

See also, Antoinette's Institute of Providence, 5 vols. (vol. III, 77).

By 1855, few nuns had arrived in the area to assist the priests and brothers in their missions. The situation became desperate for the Church since the diocese lacked the funds to pay for good teachers. They needed the sisters to help establish both the religious foundation and educational foundation for the growing communities in Oregon. The desperate need for dutiful sisters to teach the children caused Fr. Blanchet to send appeals eastward to Bishop Ignace Bourget in 1856. The following groups responded early to the call even without knowing the physical and cultural difficulties which stood before them. First came the Sisters of Charity of the House of Providence, who initially settled in Vancouver, Washington, but later spread throughout Idaho, Montana, British Columbia and Oregon. Then came the Sisters of Saint Anne at Lachine who worked at Victoria on Vancouver Island. Finally, came the twelve Sisters of Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, who were chosen to go to Oregon.³²

Sister Mary of Mercy (Adelaide Renauld),
 Sister Mary Alphonse (Mary David),
 Sister Mary of the Visitation (Aglae Lucier),
 Sister Mary Francis Xavier (Vitaline Prouost),
 Sister Mary of Calvary (Violet McMullen),
 Sister Mary Fabronia (Meline Vandandaigue),
 Sister Mary Florentine (Alphonsine Collin),
 Sister Mary Perpetua (Martine Lachapelle),
 Sister Mary Arsenius (Philomine Menard),
 Sister Mary Julia (Oline Carbonneau),
 Sister Mary Agatha (Celina Pepin).³³

³²Sisters of Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Gleanings of 50 Years. (Portland: Glass and Prudhomme Company, 1909), 54-55.

³³Ibid.

From 1844-1861, the women began to play an important role in the next phases of settling Oregon; that is, the building of a solid social and cultural foundation through education and works of charity. The first community of French sisters to arrive in Oregon were the sisters of Notre Dame De Namur, who in 1844, aboard the Indefatigable, sailed to Oregon via the Cape Horn. On July 31, this party crossed over the treacherous waters of the Columbia Bar by sending a small boat ahead to take depth readings. A mere thirty feet of water was found to allow the eighteen foot hull to cross the bar. As the ship eased across the bar, hearts beat fast as they silently recited their prayers, "Notre Pere. . .," anticipating the potential dangers which faced every ship seeking entrance into the mighty Columbia River.³⁴

The next day, the party anchored at Astoria and the sisters stayed at the home of James Birnie of the Hudson's Bay Company. Meanwhile, Father DeSmet traveled to Ft. Vancouver. When the party arrived four days later, DeSmet greeted the new French missionaries with good news, "all the Coeur d'Alenes...converted and six hundred baptisms among the Indians of New Caledonia."³⁵ As they stepped on the

³⁴Sister Mary Dominica McNamee, S.N.D. de N., Willamette Interlude (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, Publishers), 1959. See also, Garraghan, op. cit., II, 295, and DeSmet, S.J. Pierre Jean, Oregon Missions and Travels Over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-1846. New York: Edward Dunigan, 1847, 45.

³⁵Garraghan, op. cit., II, 296. Recalled in Blanchet's Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon..., 143.

shores of the historic fort, Dr. John McLoughlin, the Honourable Company's chief representative in the Pacific Northwest greeted them.

DeSmet wrote of the great occasion for the French sisters coming to Oregon, "Our little squadron consisted of four canoes manned by the parishioners of Father Blanchet, and our own sloop. We sailed up the river and soon entered the Willamette, the water which flows into the Columbia. As night approached, we moored our vessels and encamped upon the shore." He continued in his journal, "Finally, the 17th, about eleven o'clock, we came in sight of our dear mission of Willamette. A cart was prepared to conduct the nuns to their dwelling, which is about five miles from the river."³⁶ As the party gathered together they prayed in thanksgiving for a safe and magnificent journey. In unison they solemnly chanted the Te Deum.

"The Church," Sister Loyola, superior of the nuns wrote in her journal for August 17, 1844, "L'etable de Bethleem."

"Unthinkably filthy," Sister Marie Catherine sighed.³⁷

This humble beginning represents the first Catholic

³⁶H.M. Chittenden and A.T. Richardson, Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S.J., 1801-1873. (4 vols.) (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), II, 447-8.

³⁷Norvins, L. de (pseud). Notice sur le Territoire et sur la Mission De L'Oregon suivie de quelques Lettres de Soeurs de Notre Dame etablies a Saint Paul de Wallamette. (Brussels, 1847), 124.

establishment in Oregon proper. Here the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur would begin a long and dedicated relationship in the missions with the Society of Jesus.

Thus commenced the first apostolate for the first ladies of the Catholic Church at St. Paul. These French-speaking sisters and Jesuits, according to DeSmet, represented a real threat to the Methodists in the valley. Missionaries fiercely competed with their schools, hospitals and faiths for the attention and favors of the local populace. Sister Loyola began their first school for the girls at St. Paul. In order to begin the classes on time the girls' first instructions were given in the open air since the building would remain uncompleted until October.³⁸ On October 17, the sisters moved into the new convent. Fr. De Vos, new superior for the St. Francis Xavier Mission, came from Montana to celebrate their first French Mass at the convent's chapel.

"We shall have holy mass every day," Sister Loyola wrote in her journal, "and an instruction on Sunday by one of the Reverend Fathers of the Society of Jesus."³⁹ De Vos proved an unable administrator and would be replaced the following year by an Italian.

In March, 1852, the St. Paul school closed its doors because there were no French students to educate. The gold

³⁸Edwin V. O'Hara, Pioneer Catholic History of Oregon. (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1939), 125.

³⁹Garraghan, op. cit., II, 298.

rush had nearly devastated the little French school.⁴⁰

On September 15, 1955, the sisters returned to open a new school replacing the Sisters of St. Mary at Beaverton and at St. Stephen's Parochial School.⁴¹

Another significant community of sisters who came to work in the state of Oregon were the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Their purpose called for them to utilize the wealth and influence of the rich in order to educate the orphans and the poor. The first community assembled, in 1844, at Montreal, where they answered the missionary call to Oregon. In 1859, the twelve sisters departed from Longueil for Portland.⁴²

The group arrived and located themselves at a former hotel called the Lownsdale House at 4th and Mill, "a two-story, unpainted frame building with two small wings," deeded to them by Blanchet on September 12, 1860. Mother Veronica became the community's first superior. When they had arrived in Oregon, Fr. Blanchet celebrated their first mass by using their steamer trunk as an altar. They slept on the floor and used carpet bags as pillows in the hotel, until the moment came when their school would be more prosperous.⁴³

⁴⁰McNamee, op. cit., 254.

⁴¹Catholic Sentinel, September 8, 1955.

⁴²Ibid., February 26, 1870, 2.

⁴³Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Gleanings of Fifty Years. (Portland, Oregon: Glass and Prudhomme Co., 1909), 69, 74-5.

Fr. Piette traveled as the chaplain elect for the Holy Name Sisters in Portland. His carpentry skills aided in the constructing of a needed altar, plus chairs and desks for the school. So began St. Mary's Academy on November 6, 1859.

Although the French-speaking people practically ceased to live in the valley following the 1861 flood, the Canadians continued their spiritual works throughout the Willamette Valley. They opened a second school in Oregon City (April 23, 1860) and a third at St. Paul, Oregon, (January 1, 1861) in a building vacated by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.⁴⁴ Education had clearly become their apostolate in Oregon with an eagerness to serve anyone who was willing to attend their classes.

After they settled at their hotel accommodations, Fr. Blanchet, the man most responsible for bringing them to Oregon, gave the sisters block 151 at Third and Stark to utilize for educating the disadvantaged. Later, they purchased block 163 for the expansion of the school. During their first five years they averaged 25 full-time students per year.⁴⁵

The next significant community of religious women to enter the Willamette Valley were the Sisters of Charity of Providence from Montreal. While Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet of

⁴⁴Ibid., 84.

⁴⁵Catholic Sentinel, February 26, 1870, 2.

Nesqually visited Montreal he appealed to various religious houses for missionaries in Oregon.⁴⁶ Five volunteers responded from the House of Providence. Sr. Laroque was named superior of the group and they departed October 18, 1852. Their efforts to settle in Oregon had failed. Nevertheless, a second party of sisters would depart four years later.

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, superior of the missionary community, arrived at Ft. Vancouver on December 8, 1856, to spend their first night in Oregon at the home of Fr. Blanchet. On February 25, 1857, they occupied a house near the fort.⁴⁷ The community initially settled in Washington but their works contributed to the general well-being of the settlers in the state of Oregon.

Mother Joseph was born Esther Pariseau, on April 16, 1823, in Elzear, a town near Montreal. She arrived in Portland while A.M.A. Blanchet of Nesqually was absent from the territory touring Europe. This time the bishop left instructions for the sisters to begin construction of a convent and schoolhouse. However, Vice-General Abbe J.B. Brouillet believed the sisters could be of better service in Olympia. The sisters remained at the Fort where they inherited an old fur-storage barn from the Hudson's Bay Company. Mother Joseph

⁴⁶Mother M. Antoinette, F.C.S.P., The Institute of Providence: History of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor Known as the Sisters of Providence (Montreal, 1937-1949), II, 22.

⁴⁷Ibid., II, 56.

for her carpentry skills worked immediately on building an altar and a tabernacle. Another structure became their school which opened in the fall of 1856.

Two years later, the community established their first hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, Vancouver. Mother Joseph erected the building to contain a laundry and a bakery. At the request of several ladies, she included a special section with a four-bed hospital. The first patient was a woman with consumption, or tuberculosis, who was admitted on May 19. The hospital was blessed on June 9, 1858, and during the first year served a total of fifteen patients.⁴⁸ In addition the sisters devoted much of their time to visiting the sick in the area.

The Providence Sisters finally became incorporated, January, 1859, one month before Oregon joined the union of the United States. Mother Joseph's community brought to the foreground the leadership of their superior by electing her president of the corporation on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph.⁴⁹

Throughout the forthcoming years, the sisters spent most of their time in apostolates in the Washington and Montana Territories. However, in 1875, they opened St. Vincent Hospital, Portland and St. Mary Hospital in Astoria. This

⁴⁸ Ibid., V, 77.

⁴⁹ Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament McCrossen, F.C.S.P., The Bell and the River (Palo Alto, 1956), 153.

group of sisters was not merely a group of missionaries, but a dedicated community working to serve the poor and sick in the Northwest.

During the first forty years, Mother Joseph proved herself a builder and an architect of dreams to come true. She was personally responsible for designing and organizing twenty-five hospitals, orphanages, and schools throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Most of the financial support came from her "begging tours" which were conducted regularly during the first forty years of Mother Joseph's missionary work. She often traveled to the northern reaches of British Columbia to the small mining towns dotting the Rocky Mountains. From the mining camps of Idaho and the Blue Mountains of Eastern Washington, to Montana's Alder Gulch and to the Cariboo Mines of Western Canada, she sought the miner's wealth to pay for her organization. Her travels covered the small villages and hamlets in the territories that produced twenty dollars on a good day, but the smaller mining towns netted from 2000 to 5000 dollars.

At the request of F.N. Blanchet, the Sisters of Providence considered establishing a hospital on the eastern side of Portland. Ben Holladay had offered a choice site, a good house, a physician and funds to start its construction. The sisters were also offered a block at Twelfth and Marshall, on the west side of the Willamette River, by the Society of

St. Vincent de Paul. Mother Joseph placed the question before God in prayer. The better offer had been made by a man who wanted to build-up the east side of Portland for his own personal profit. His efforts had created a small war in the city. On July 19, 1874, she chose the latter from St. Vincent de Paul Society which brought a bonus of a thousand dollars to help begin its construction.⁵⁰ The hospital opened on July 18, 1875. She also carved the wood statue of its patron saint which adorned the entrance of the hospital. The hospital was dedicated by Fr. F.N. Blanchet on July 19.⁵¹

Together these two French-Canadian giants of the Oregon missions stood as a symbol of the dedication of the many men and women who ventured to Oregon from Canada, France and Belgium for the love of true adventure and service for their God and their compatriots living in small isolated communities.

Following the 1859 admission of Oregon as a state, the need for French-speaking missionaries diminished. When A.M.A. Blanchet first appealed to the Sisters of Providence in Montreal, he often reflected how "The missions of Oregon are a wholly Canadian mission."⁵² Blanchet's establishment

⁵⁰ Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., A Chronicle of the Catholic History of the Pacific Northwest, 1743-1960 (Portland, Oregon: Catholic Sentinel Printery, 1962), 76.

⁵¹ Catholic Sentinel, July 22, 1875, and Antoinette, op. cit., V, 258.

⁵² Antoinette, op. cit., V, 21.

of the various women's religious communities in Portland and St. Paul kept the French families from sending their children to California for their education by providing them an identity for their French heritage. However, just as the community commenced to stabilize, the disastrous flood of December, 1861, crushed their dreams. Consequently, the role of the French-Canadian missionary diminished following first the great gold rush, second the tremendous American immigration and finally the tragic flood at Champeog. Ironically, the great flood symbolizes the close of an era for the French-Canadians of Oregon

CHAPTER FOUR

A French Heritage In Oregon

French contributions to Oregon's heritage are often overshadowed by either some larger social group or an historical event. Consequently, they appear insignificant and the historian has neglected telling their complete story. Usually the French community is seen either through fur traders or the minor participants in forming the provisional government at Champoeg. Their story of ethnic life and social leadership has never been researched before as a single topic. The fragments scattered throughout the historical journals and books coupled with various manuscripts needed to be gathered together for the purposes of historical research and analysis to illustrate their importance in Oregon's history. A graphic analysis of this material will perhaps better portray their character as community.

The French had represented an important foundation in Oregon's developing society. Perhaps the Americans would have established their political system anyway. Perhaps the fur trade would have been just as prosperous under the direction of the Pacific Fur Company. Nevertheless, Oregon's growth could not remain the same without the French influence.

French geographical names and their locations provide

an extant illustration of French presence in Oregon. These landmarks show the concentration of travels and settlements within the state. These names usually fall into one of four categories, French in origin, Indian words with a French spelling, Anglicized French words and those words which reflect a French past. There remains another linguistic area that the French language had affected, but which remains obscure because of the lack of proper records; that is, the Chinook Jargon. Early French and Indian contacts have influenced the Chinook Jargon, an Indian dialect. Today nearly 3.5 per cent of the state's geographical names are French in origin.¹

There are few geographical French names which have retained their original French spellings. Malheur is a fine example which has not been changed through the years. Meaning "misfortune," "bad luck," or "disaster," it first appeared when Peter Skene Ogden named the "Riviere du Malheur" because some Indians stole his cached goods and pelts. When the state created Malheur County on February 17, 1887, its name came from that river.² La Grande Ronde River (big round or bend), located in northeastern Oregon, and the Willamette

¹Lewis A. McArthur, Oregon Geographical Names (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1974), vi.

²Frederick V. Holman, "Oregon Counties: Their Creations and the Origin of Their Names," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XI (March, 1910), 60-1.

Valley illustrate two of the few examples where the "e" has not been dropped from the end of the word. At other times, the family names have not changed such as Langlois which lies on the southeastern coastline, named for Andre Langlois, an early voyageur.³

When the French first encountered the Indian tribes of Oregon their early attempts at communication resulted in a French influence upon Indian tribes and words. Names of tribes were altered from Eukshikni to Klamath, or Waiilatpus to Cayuse which originated from the French Cailloux, meaning "People of the Flint Rocks."⁴ "Willamette" best exhibits the merger of the two linguistic styles having altered the Indian word Wal-lant.⁵ Also, Coquille has an Indian spelling of a French word for shell. It is named for a river and a point along Oregon's southeastern shore. An early French voyageur probably coined its use amongst the Indians before it first became a written record. The question of its true origin appears in the Oregonian for January 7, 1854, which notes that it came from an Indian word for eel; however, no

³Oregon Journal, June 28, 1927, and July 1, 1927.

⁴Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, The Cayuse Indians: Imperial Tribesmen of Old Oregon (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, -1972), 3.

See also Merk's Fur Trade and Empire, 274, or 1928 edition of Oregon Geographical Names, 186, for Klamath.

⁵H. S. Lyman, "Indian Names," Oregon Historical Quarterly, I (1900), 316-326.

See also, David Thompson's Narrative, Toronto, 1916, 493, and Gabriel Franchere's Adventure at Astoria, 1810-1814.

evidence supports this claim.⁶

Anglicized words and those which honor French history are the least numerous, although they reflect a wide range of events. The Rogue River originates from the appearance of the earliest French-Canadian trappers. Many people believe that the river acquired its name from the red sediment which supposedly appears during the spring floods, except that it remains clear year-round. Another tale claims that a French map shows the Rogue River and Klamath Rivers as one stream, the Rouge-Clamet, but such a map has never been produced. Father Blanchet stated the "Les Coquins" (meaning rogue or rascal) and "La Riviere aux Coquins" were given to the two rivers by voyageurs, but no evidence supports his claim. Since the river's name existed before the arrival of the English fur traders, the likelihood that the English "rogue" had been substituted for the French coquins remains improbable. Perhaps a French discoverer merely could not spell correctly, thus a corrupt version of the French rouge meaning red.⁷

The Indian adaptation of various languages and dialects successfully enabled different tribes to communicate through the utilization of the Chinook Jargon. However, the

⁶Leslie M. Scott, "The Name Coquille," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIX (March, 1918), 73-4.

See also, Oregonian, October 25, 1938 and October 17, 1938, also Coquille Valley Sentinel, November 20, 1941.

⁷McArthur, op. cit., 626-627.

See also, Oregonian, November 15, 1883m and May 23, 1935.

statement from the Oregon Pioneer Association printed in 1879, mistakenly credits the French-Canadians as originators of the dialect.

There were very few of the old Canadian settlers who had received any book education, and as for that could not speak any English. The latter was in great measure owing to the formation by early fur traders of a dialect called Chinook Jargon, comprising words from the Indian, French and English languages.⁸

The greatest collection of French words and their usage in Oregon comes from the journals which they left behind. A summary analysis of them and their works will serve as a sketch of the French in Oregon.

Gabriel Franchere (1752 - April 12, 1863) came to Oregon aboard the Tonquin as a clerk. He acquired enough knowledge of the fur trade to manage the American Fur Company until its failure in 1848. During his Oregon adventure, Franchere kept the best documented account of the events including notes regarding the region's people, vegetation and animals. The varieties of vegetation amazed the young French-Canadian. Cedar, spruce, alder, oak, white spruce filled the forests including one

. . . tree, that had been topped and its upper branches destroyed by a stroke of lightning, was no more than a straight trunk, eighty to a hundred feet high and resembling a tall column. Seven of us stood around its trunk by extending our arms

⁸Frederick V. Holman, "A Brief History of the Oregon Provisional Government and What Caused Its Formation," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIII (June, 1912), 93.

See also, Oregon Pioneer Association Proceedings, 1879.

and touching only the ends of our fingers, we still would not embrace it. Later, we measured it in the regular manner and found its circumference to be forty-two feet.⁹

Franchere continued his report with a colorful portrayal of native culture and government. He noted an extant slave society governed by a single chief. The abundance of fruits vegetables and wild game allowed the natives to lead a somewhat leisurely life.

Many versions of Gabriel Franchere's journal have been published through the years. There exist four major translations by Michel Bibaud, Milo M. Quaife, J.V. Huntington and Hoyt Franchere. Although Bibaud's original manuscript of the French version, published in 1820, currently resides at the Toronto Public Library, Franchere's original journal had disappeared while on loan in Paris. Apparently Bibaud took too many liberties with the text, as noted in Milo M. Quaife's 1954 edition. Huntington's 1854 edition, published under the close supervision of Gabriel Franchere, gives the reader a more accurate concept of his impressions. There always remains the obvious danger that time may have altered the author's memory.

Hoyt C. Franchere, great-grandson of Gabriel, translated yet another version from the 1820 manuscript. He wrote a definitive edition in 1967 which notes any variances amongst

⁹Hoyt Franchere (ed.), Adventure At Astoria, 1810-1814. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 106.

the others. By stressing a modern English translation, he has improved the laborious Huntington translation of nineteenth century French which had used many Latin constructions.¹⁰ His scholarly efforts have rewarded the reader with an enjoyable account of an Adventure At Astoria.

Gabriel Franchere's impact upon Oregon's character emerges through his role in the fur trade industry. Although new to the business, he grasped enough essentials to help manage the home office in later years. His major concern appears to be the beaver trade and not a ruthless exploitation of the region's natural resources. Like the Hudson's Bay Company, he sought to retain the ecological pattern of the country which helped to ensure a prosperous beaver population for the future. He accomplished this process by seeking the cooperation of the Indians and avoiding unneeded desolation of the forests and wildlife.

Voyageur folk songs are one of the most colorful French remnants in Oregon. While paddling their batteaus, twenty to twenty-four Frenchmen often sang folk songs to pass the time and lighten their travail along the rivers of Oregon. Sir George Simpson remarked in 1841, "the men struck up one of their hereditary ditties and off we went."¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., xxx.

¹¹ J. Murray Gibbon, "Song of the voyageurs," Beaver, Outfit 258, No. 4, March 1928, 171.

Their verse varied in style and content, but they always sang either to forget the past or cement their friendship as voyageurs and as Frenchmen. These voyageur songs carried a note of improvisation followed by a series of repetitions. Other compositions came from old French folk songs carried over from the homeland which were found to be universal throughout the North American Forests. Many styles and types echoed through the Oregon forests. The first and most obvious were the working songs that kept time for voyageurs and broke the monotony of the day for fieldhands. An interesting example of a paddling song was the popular Rose Blanches and its narrative's meaning went like this:

One morning she awoke at dawn.
 Down the garden path she went
 To gather roses white.
 Holding the roses in his hand
 She saw her love before her stand.
 She asked him for the roses white.
 He gave three to her with a bow;
 She tripped on one, he knew not how.
 O, mercy me! adown she fell;
 She broke her leg, her knee as well.
 Oh, bring to me a doctor, dear!
 I fear that I shall swoon.
 O doctor dear, of you I beg,
 Whatever's happened to my leg?
 The way to mend it I will tell:
 Dew drops shall weave the magic spell,
 In dew drops bathe it well,
 Within a shining golden bowl.
 That alone shall make it whole
 With roses-white adorn'd
 Three roses white adorning.¹²

¹²Marius Barbeau, "Voyageur Songs," Beaver. Outfit 273, (June, 1942), 16.

FIGURE 7

ROSES BLANCHES^e

Par un ma - tin, je me suis le - vé, par un ma -
 tin, je me suis le - vé Plus ma - tin que ma
 tante, Eh là! plus ma - tin que ma tan - te.

^eMarius Barbeau, "Voyageur Songs," Beaver. Outfit 273,
 (June, 1942), 10.

The quarter and eighth notes kept its tempo light and merry. Another major type of song reflected reminiscence and lyrical songs about lovers, or drinking songs, such as "If you will come and dance with me." The verse follows:

If you will come and dance with me,
 If you will come and dance with me,
 A feathered cap I'll give to thee
 A feathered cap I'll give to thee.
 Come my lad a-dancing
 So far into the night
 Our feet must trip lightly, Lon la!
 We will forget time is a flight!¹³

The third type of song told elegant romances known as complaintes. The most famous tells about Jean Cadieux who, just before his death, wrote an epitaph on a tree telling the story of his last adventure. The song, "Epouser le voyage," came from a Northwest adventure; its second verse reads:

During the voyage
 The canoe may be wrecked.
 Our bodies are drenched with water,
 we're awakened by the birds;
 nowhere can we rest,
 neither by day nor by night.
 There's naught but weariness.¹⁴

Whatever the nature of the folk songs, they brought a rich heritage of the French culture wherever they traveled.

Another French observer, Count Eugene Duflot de Mofras (1810-1884), visited the Pacific Northwest in 1844 as an envoy of France. While traveling through Oregon, he compiled

¹³Ibid., 17.

¹⁴Ibid., 18.

a chronicle of recent events and observed the notable characteristics belonging to the region. Oregon's French community dominated the countryside with 3000 strong. Clearly one-third were former engagés for the Hudson's Bay Company. Duflot de Mofras saw the Frenchmen as highly gregarious and loyal to their past. They traveled miles to meet a fellow Frenchman, especially if he had come from France. French immigrants were the only ones held in higher esteem than themselves. The engagés never shunned work and, "When the current is treacherous, paddles and lines are used to propel canoes."¹⁵ Their sociable nature often found them singing working songs like, "La Claire Fontaine" (The Clear Spring), or "En Roulant ma Boule" (Rollin' Along In My World) while strolling through the woods or paddling a canoe. He records how . . . "Canadians, as they pull in unison, make the wilderness resound with ancient French airs. Frequently when traveling in a canoe up the Columbia River, our hearts beat faster upon hearing-often in the rain or snow-our oarsmen sing songs that recalled our own land, and upon meeting them here on this remote river coming these stalwart sons of New France, the courage and gaiety so deeply ingrained in our national character."¹⁶

¹⁵M. Duflot de Mofras, Exploration du Territoire de l'Oregon. (2 vols.) (Paris, 1844), 93.

¹⁶Ibid.

Most French-Canadians worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at one time or another as engagés. Such a position ranked below that of an apprentice or clerk. The 1763 treaty checked French advances across the continent, so their restriction within the company prevented their social progression. Once the Frenchmen arrived in the Pacific Northwest, the company controlled their futures as well. Although the engagé's contractual obligation ceased at the end of three years, the English gave them no choice but to continue working. They employed them for longer periods of time which counteracted company policy. By simply failing to pay their salaries, engagés continued with the company to obtain the supplies which they could not buy. And, if they desired to return to Quebec, the Hudson's Bay Company refused to provide them with any assistance.¹⁷ The "Honourable Company" created problems for the French by fostering a dependent population that settled along the Willamette Valley. The distrust between England and France had been carried to the far reaches of North America. The company lived peacefully with these "French-Canadian" provided that they kept their places, and this English company continued to be managed by Englishmen.¹⁸

Peter C. Pambrun is an exception to this rule-of-thumb.

¹⁷Ibid., 77, 86.

¹⁸Letitia Maria Lyons, Francis Norbet Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Missions (1838-1848) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1940), 16-7.

He served as a French-Canadian commandant of Fort Walla Walla for several years before his death in 1841. Although he spent most of his energies on the northern side of the extant border between Washington and Oregon, he maintained a high degree of influence amongst the French-Canadians and with the Indians. Joseph Tasse remarked about his great influence in bringing Christianity to the local Indians.¹⁹ Bancroft's History of Oregon called attention to the extraordinary role of Pambrun within the Honourable Company and the effects which he had with the Indians.²⁰ Washington Irving wrote:

The same gentleman had given them a code of laws to which they conformed with scrupulous fidelity Polygamy, which once prevailed among them to a great extent, was now rarely indulged. All the crimes denounced by the Christian faith met with severe punishment among them. Even theft, so venial a crime among the Indians, had recently been punished by hanging sentence of a chief.²¹

David Thompson, an early adventurer, briefly entered Oregon during the early nineteenth century. His journals helped to demonstrate this subtle contempt which the French

¹⁹ Joseph Tasse, Les Canadiens de l'Quest (Montreal, 1878), II, 314.

See also, Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., The Jesuits of the Middle United States (New York: America Press, 1938), II, 341. Clinton A. Snowden, History of Washington: The Rise and Progress of an American State (New York, 1909).

²⁰ Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft. Vols. 29-30: History of Oregon (San Francisco: History Company, Pub., 1886), Vol. 30, 689.

²¹ Andrew Dominique Pambrun, Sixty Years on the Frontier in the Pacific Northwest. (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1978).

were subjected to. He portrays the Frenchman as lethargic, "living on what his Master has," lacking a proper work ethic, and preferring to relax rather than seek his fortune.

A French Canadian if left to himself, and living on what his Master has, will rise very early, make a hearty meal, smoke his pipe, and lie down to sleep, and he will do little else through the day: to enumerate the large animals that had been killed, and I may say devoured by my men would not be credible to a man of a regular life, yet these same hardy Canadians, as future years proved to me, could live upon as little as any other person.²²

Duflot de Mofras experienced the company's prejudicial treatment of its employees during his travels. His allegiance to France threatened what information left the region. In the past the company held a very tight control over its inland activities. By acting as though he was uninterested in its commercial activities, the English became friendlier.

Father Francis Norbet Blanchet came to Oregon in 1838 by permission of the Hudson's Bay Company. His apostolate served both the French Canadians and the Indians. Most Frenchmen born Catholic lacked the opportunity to practice their faith while trapping furs. For years priests could not enter the Columbia Department because the company refused them. A log church waited for nearly three years before its first mass celebrated the Epiphany.

Despite John McLoughlin's conversion, the company merely tolerated the presence of the Catholic Church. Still the

²²Richard Glover (ed.), David Thompson's Narrative: 1784-1812, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), XII, 319.

Church and its community continued to grow in size and importance. Ironically, the French-Canadians held the balance of power for many years. Although American dominance was inevitable by 1844, it was the Frenchman that swung the opposition to the other side.

The development of the French community in Oregon affected the settlements' social growth. Economically, they made its fur trade into the first successful industry of the territory. Also, they farmed the Willamette Valley and sold their surplus to the Hudson's Bay Company. Their pleas for a priest brought Catholicism which became a significant driving force amongst the various missionaries. Coming from the French province of Quebec, the priest transported one of the most prominent features of French culture. The remnants of these social forces are visible today.

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with

Selected Annotation

When I began the compilation of this bibliography on the French-speaking Community of Oregon, it became apparent that very little published or manuscript material existed. However, after several weeks of hunting, a myriad of source materials were unlocked from a variety of archives and books. Locating these sources of information was just the beginning. Once I realized that the stories of these events had been told, I wanted to limit myself to a strictly French contribution to Oregon's heritage. This approach meant reading a vast amount of extraneous material. Towards the end of this research, discoveries of original source materials supported my earlier conclusions. The paper's direction began to relate to a more comprehensive view of the French contribution to the development of Oregon in America's western expansion.

The most interesting discovery in seeking out the source material for this paper was the discovery of 300 letters belonging to Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart. They are located in the Providence Sister's Archives in Seattle and are waiting for somebody to come along and edit them. They are written in both French and English over the forty

year period which she spent in the Pacific Northwest. She represents the female counterpart to Archbishop Blanchet. She came to the Pacific Northwest in 1856 and worked on a variety of Social projects until her death in 1902.

Note: The Bibliography Style

The Bibliography is subdivided into the categories that distinguish between primary and secondary sources of books, periodicals and the like. The bibliographical style is according to acceptable scholarly works; such as, Robert J. Loewenberg's Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and the Methodist Mission, 1843-44.

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