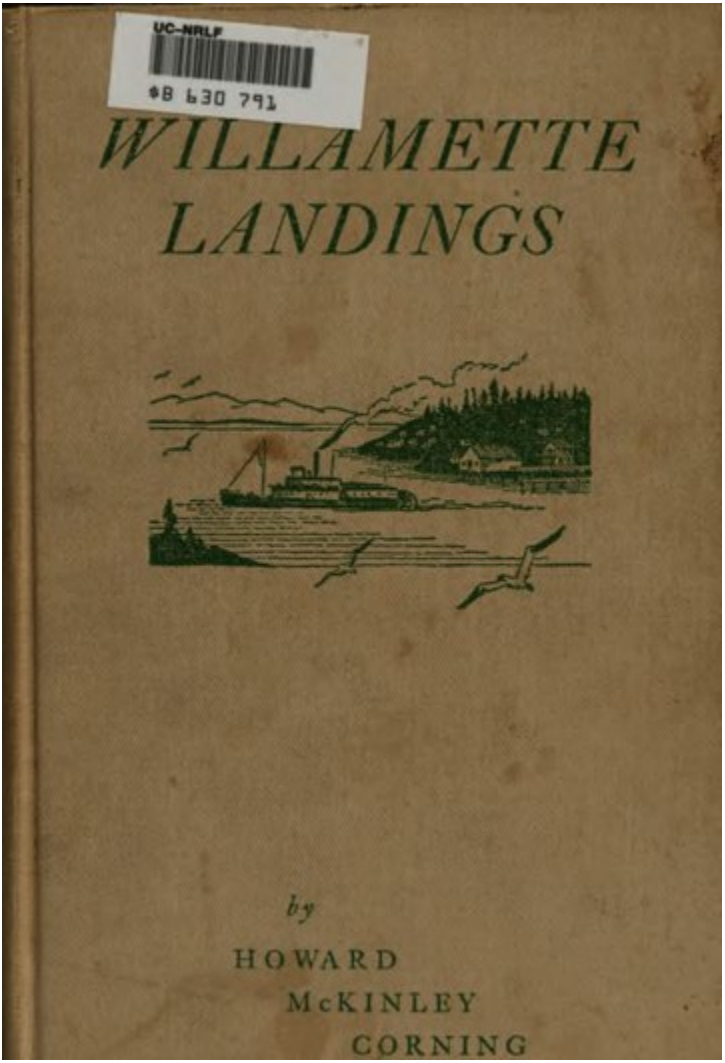
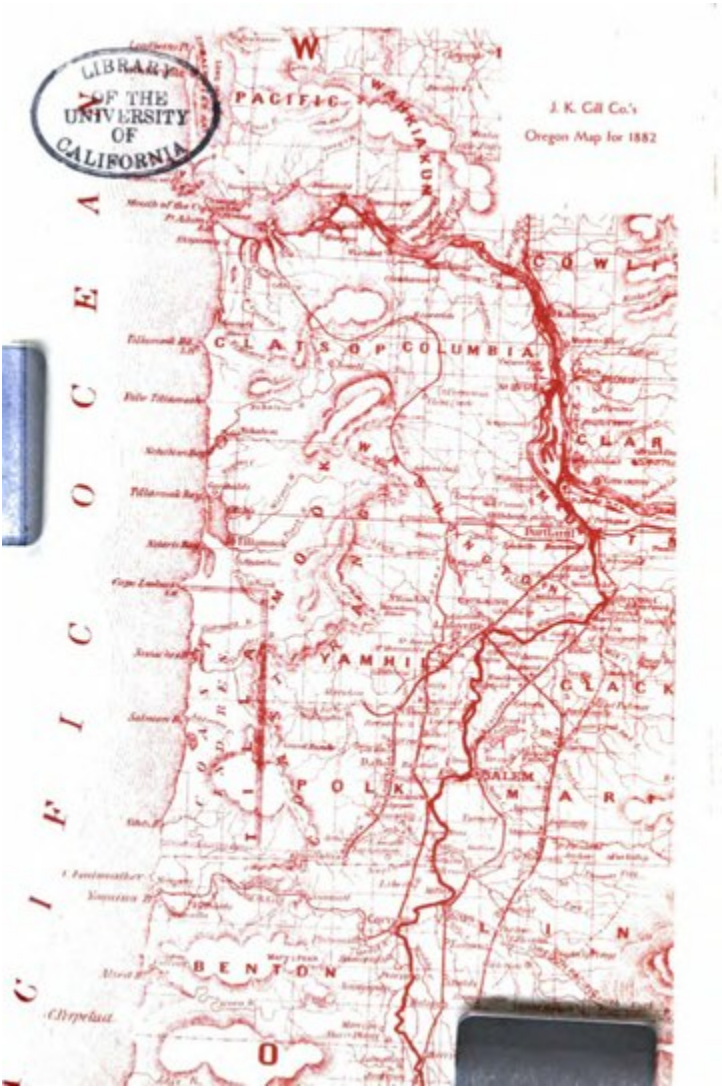
# Willamette Landings: Ghost Towns of the River

## Howard McKinley Corning

**1947**




(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)




(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)


(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)

# WILLAMETTE LANDINGS

## *Ghost Towns of the River*

*by*
Howard McKinley Corning

*An image should appear at this position in the text.*

*Published by*
BINFORDS & MORT
*for the*
OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRINTED AND BOUND IN
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# INTRODUCTION

WHEN the settlers along the Atlantic coast had disposed of the soldiers of George III, and forced a peace, and set up a nation to be known as the "United States of America," they promptly forgot about the Old World, so far as they could. They turned with all possible dispatch to home affairs. They thought, in particular, of the untold and virtually unknown riches to the westward, beyond Cumberland Gap, the headwaters of the Ohio and the other passes of the Alleghenies leading to the interior of the continent. And, since thought was the equivalent of action with these pioneer Americans, they promptly departed, by whatever means they could manage, through the mountain passes into the continent.

And this is something which we tend to forget, since so much intervenes to obscure our picture of that old migration: They did not fan out across plains and through forests when they made that crossing. There were no roads. There were no railways. And, coming from the seacoasts and the coastal rivers, they were used to water traffic. So they followed down the reaches of the Ohio and the reaches of the Tennessee, and followed up the tributaries of these and other rivers. They settled as close as possible to the banks, and once settled they used the network of rivers and streams for highways. This method of settlement and this way of life were so striking that in the final decades of the

Eighteenth century and the first decades of the Nineteenth century, the men of the migration into the interior of the continent were known as the "Men of the Western Waters."

First there were the flatboats, or scows, and the many varieties of rowboats and canoes. Sail was used at times. Then steam power. And the river flourished into greater and greater importance.

It was toward the end of this period of river greatness—but still in that period—that the westernmost of the pioneers began moving from the Mississippi Valley to the Pacific Coast; specifically, so far as most of the farmers were concerned, to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. During the 1840's, their wagon wheels dug the ruts of the Oregon Trail. In the latter years of that decade there was the California gold rush to deepen those ruts. And all through the 1850's, and after, the wagons rolled on and the ruts worked farther into the hard plain and the harder mountains.

But these travelers were still the "Men of the Western Waters." They had not yet accepted the plain. Entering the valley of the Willamette, they did as they had been accustomed to do. The first of them established their farms on the banks of the Willamette. The next followed up the tributaries. Those a little later, and so excluded from these choicer sites, nevertheless crowded as close as possible. And all promptly began using the stream for the transport of their crops to market, for their journeys to town, and for

their visits in the neighborhood. This was particularly necessary because of the sogginess of the land in the rainy season. Steam-use was logical, and, besides, romance just then surrounded the steamboat. So scores of landings were built along the Willamette, and many more along tributaries that today look unnavigable.

It is this story of development that is told in *Willamette Landings.* Here is the record of the boisterous and yet bucolic years of river traffic. And of course the story ends with the construction of railways and roads, over which produce and people could move swiftly and more directly. And so the old landings were left to fall into decay or to be carried away by the freshets.

The historian always finds it an adventure to come upon a good study, such as this, in some comparatively new field. But this book is more than just a good study. It has been done with due regard for the romance and the drama involved, and in admirable literary style. The layman will get as much pleasure as the historian in the reading of this book.

PHILIP H. PARRISH

CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RESEARCH for this book was begun by the WPA Oregon Writers' Project in 1936, under the general supervision of Dean Alfred Powers. Five or six persons worked on it until 1938 when Howard McKinley Corning was assigned to write the final draft. At the time the Writers' project was terminated, in 1942, the manuscript had not yet been published, and was sent with other material to the Oregon State Library at Salem. The manuscript was released to the Oregon Historical Society in 1945, and for final revision was turned over to Mr. Corning, who has thus prepared the present copy as well as doing much of the research. However, special acknowledgments must be made to the work done by Verne Bright, the book's first editor, and to Charles Oluf Olsen, Joseph H. McLaughlin, Curtis Merrick, Andrew Sherbert and Robert Wilmot. Credit is also due to Clare Warner Churchill, under whose direct supervision the work was carried on during 1937–41. Finally, the completed manuscript, as it here appears in book form, was read and helpful suggestions were made by Mrs. Lewis A. McArthur.

Permission to reprint in this revised form and under present sponsorship is by Luther H. Evans, Librarian of Congress.

LANCASTER POLLARD,
*Superintendent*
Oregon Historical Society

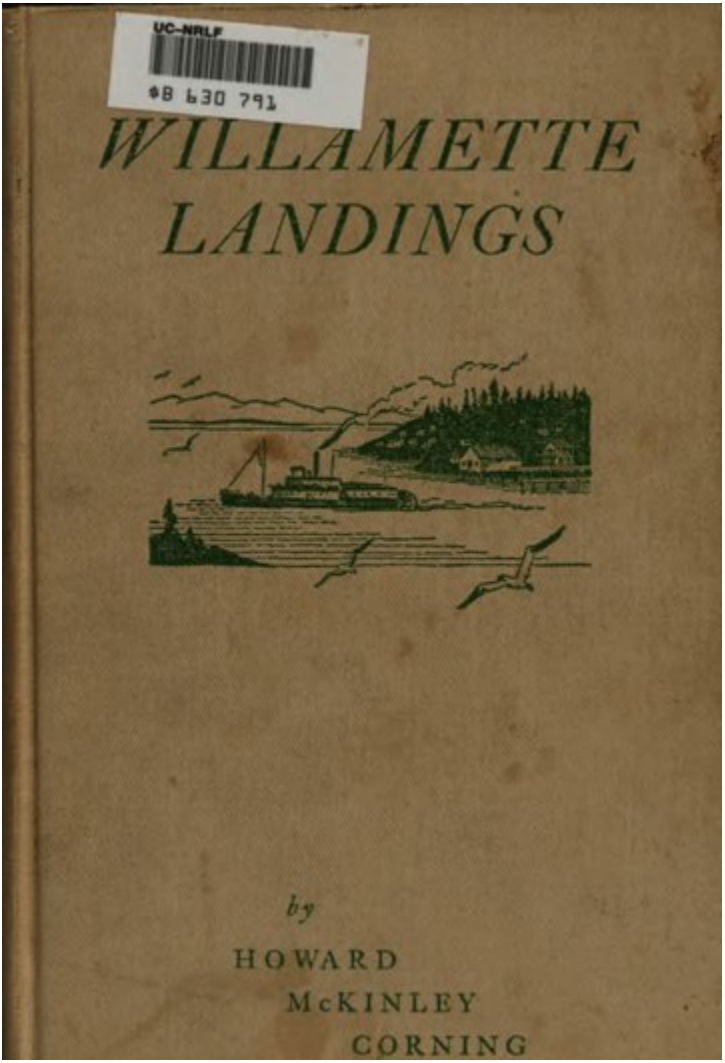
or 1975, *i.e.* between January 1st of the 27th year after publication or registration and December 31st of the 28th year. As this work's copyright was not renewed, it entered the **public domain** on January 1st, 1976.

---

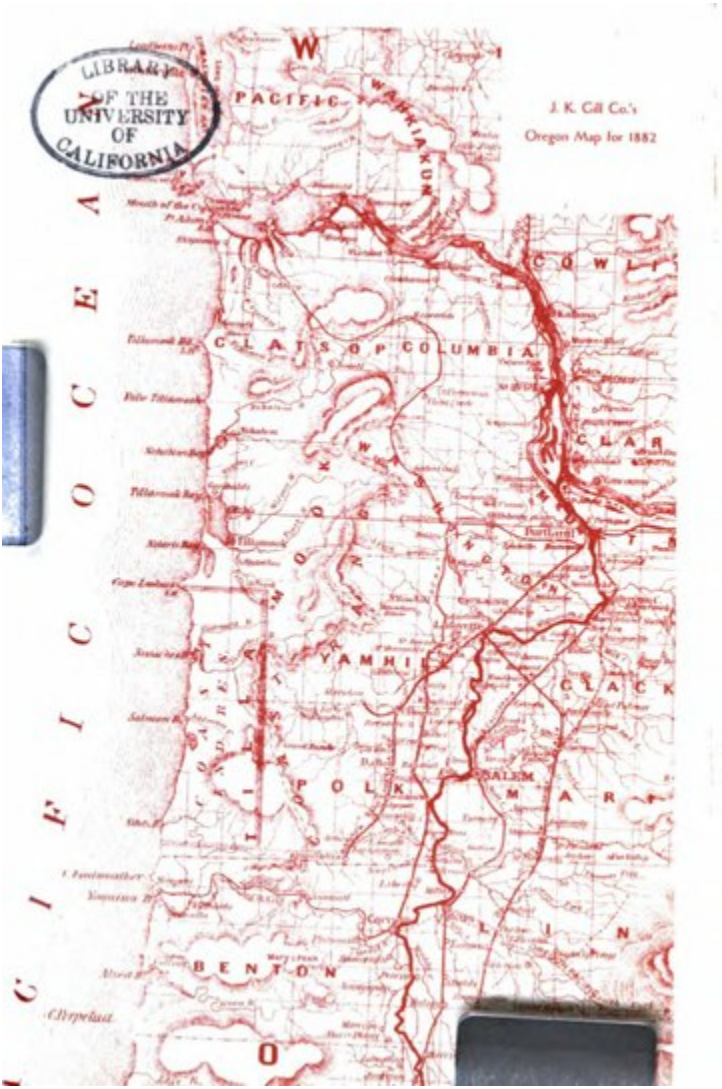
The longest-living author of this work died in 1977, so this work is in the **public domain** in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's **life plus 46 years or less**. This work may be in the **public domain** in countries and areas with longer native copyright terms that apply the **rule of the shorter term** to *foreign works*.

---

It is imperative that contributors ascertain that there is no evidence of a copyright renewal before using this license. Failure to do so will result in the deletion of the work as a copyright violation.




(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)




(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)


(Upload an image to replace this placeholder.)

# WILLAMETTE LANDINGS

## *Ghost Towns of the River*

*by*
Howard McKinley Corning

*An image should appear at this position in the text.*

*Published by*
BINFORDS & MORT
*for the*
OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRINTED AND BOUND IN
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# INTRODUCTION

WHEN the settlers along the Atlantic coast had disposed of the soldiers of George III, and forced a peace, and set up a nation to be known as the "United States of America," they promptly forgot about the Old World, so far as they could. They turned with all possible dispatch to home affairs. They thought, in particular, of the untold and virtually unknown riches to the westward, beyond Cumberland Gap, the headwaters of the Ohio and the other passes of the Alleghenies leading to the interior of the continent. And, since thought was the equivalent of action with these pioneer Americans, they promptly departed, by whatever means they could manage, through the mountain passes into the continent.

And this is something which we tend to forget, since so much intervenes to obscure our picture of that old migration: They did not fan out across plains and through forests when they made that crossing. There were no roads. There were no railways. And, coming from the seacoasts and the coastal rivers, they were used to water traffic. So they followed down the reaches of the Ohio and the reaches of the Tennessee, and followed up the tributaries of these and other rivers. They settled as close as possible to the banks, and once settled they used the network of rivers and streams for highways. This method of settlement and this way of life were so striking that in the final decades of the

Eighteenth century and the first decades of the Nineteenth century, the men of the migration into the interior of the continent were known as the "Men of the Western Waters."

First there were the flatboats, or scows, and the many varieties of rowboats and canoes. Sail was used at times. Then steam power. And the river flourished into greater and greater importance.

It was toward the end of this period of river greatness—but still in that period—that the westernmost of the pioneers began moving from the Mississippi Valley to the Pacific Coast; specifically, so far as most of the farmers were concerned, to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. During the 1840's, their wagon wheels dug the ruts of the Oregon Trail. In the latter years of that decade there was the California gold rush to deepen those ruts. And all through the 1850's, and after, the wagons rolled on and the ruts worked farther into the hard plain and the harder mountains.

But these travelers were still the "Men of the Western Waters." They had not yet accepted the plain. Entering the valley of the Willamette, they did as they had been accustomed to do. The first of them established their farms on the banks of the Willamette. The next followed up the tributaries. Those a little later, and so excluded from these choicer sites, nevertheless crowded as close as possible. And all promptly began using the stream for the transport of their crops to market, for their journeys to town, and for

their visits in the neighborhood. This was particularly necessary because of the sogginess of the land in the rainy season. Steam-use was logical, and, besides, romance just then surrounded the steamboat. So scores of landings were built along the Willamette, and many more along tributaries that today look unnavigable.

It is this story of development that is told in *Willamette Landings.* Here is the record of the boisterous and yet bucolic years of river traffic. And of course the story ends with the construction of railways and roads, over which produce and people could move swiftly and more directly. And so the old landings were left to fall into decay or to be carried away by the freshets.

The historian always finds it an adventure to come upon a good study, such as this, in some comparatively new field. But this book is more than just a good study. It has been done with due regard for the romance and the drama involved, and in admirable literary style. The layman will get as much pleasure as the historian in the reading of this book.

PHILIP H. PARRISH

CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RESEARCH for this book was begun by the WPA Oregon Writers' Project in 1936, under the general supervision of Dean Alfred Powers. Five or six persons worked on it until 1938 when Howard McKinley Corning was assigned to write the final draft. At the time the Writers' project was terminated, in 1942, the manuscript had not yet been published, and was sent with other material to the Oregon State Library at Salem. The manuscript was released to the Oregon Historical Society in 1945, and for final revision was turned over to Mr. Corning, who has thus prepared the present copy as well as doing much of the research. However, special acknowledgments must be made to the work done by Verne Bright, the book's first editor, and to Charles Oluf Olsen, Joseph H. McLaughlin, Curtis Merrick, Andrew Sherbert and Robert Wilmot. Credit is also due to Clare Warner Churchill, under whose direct supervision the work was carried on during 1937–41. Finally, the completed manuscript, as it here appears in book form, was read and helpful suggestions were made by Mrs. Lewis A. McArthur.

Permission to reprint in this revised form and under present sponsorship is by Luther H. Evans, Librarian of Congress.

LANCASTER POLLARD,
*Superintendent*
Oregon Historical Society

or 1975, *i.e.* between January 1st of the 27th year after publication or registration and December 31st of the 28th year. As this work's copyright was not renewed, it entered the **public domain** on January 1st, 1976.

---

The longest-living author of this work died in 1977, so this work is in the **public domain** in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's **life plus 46 years or less**. This work may be in the **public domain** in countries and areas with longer native copyright terms that apply the **rule of the shorter term** to *foreign works*.

---

It is imperative that contributors ascertain that there is no evidence of a copyright renewal before using this license. Failure to do so will result in the deletion of the work as a copyright violation.

## WILDERNESS RIVER

THE WILLAMETTE is one of the few American rivers of any volume flowing north. It is the largest river contained wholly within the state of Oregon.

"Lying like a cupped leaf dropped on the map of Oregon, with its veins the tributaries and its stem the main artery, wrote Verne Bright, the Oregon poet, in 1941, “the Willamette drains twelve thousand square miles of territory. Precisely confined by the snow-tipped Cascade Range, the ancient Clalapooyas, and the newer elevations of the Coast Range, it gathers moisture from the east, south and west, and in one tremendous north-flowing stream, pours it toward the Columbia. From the stem of the leaf where the Willamette enters the Columbia to the distant tip where the least faint stream fades in a mountain-side trickle, the veins are numerous and varied. Some, like the Tualatin, the Pudding, and the Long Tom are deceptively sluggish much of the year. . . Other branches, like the Clackamas, the Santiam, the Molalla, and the McKenzie are as unruly as the sound of their names. . ."

From the mountainous region at the head of the valley, the Willamette emerges as three forks. The Coast Fork bubbles from a mountain spring in a deeply forested wilderness. The Middle Fork flows from the base of Emigrant Butte, which towers over the pioneer road that threads through the

Calapooyas. These two streams join in the valley's upper reaches. At a second point, not many miles below and to the north, the third fork, the McKenzie, joins the other two. To this fountain-head stream, in 1812, came Donald McKenzie, of Astor's Pacific Fur Company, exploring the river's possibilities as a source of beaver skins; but not for at least fifteen years more was it given his name. The courageous Scotsman did not guess the origin of the swift waters, though he must have glimpsed the white crests of the Three Sisters, from whose base they rise, to the eastward in the Cascades.

The Willamette River had not one, but several discoverers, for no single man first saw more than a portion of its 190-mile length. Peering through the haze of late October, 1792, the English navigator, Lieutenant William R. Broughton, was first of all white men to sight the river's mouth. A member of the British maritime expedition of Captain George Vancouver, he had sailed up the "River of the West," the Columbia, beyond reach of his master's heavier-burdened vessel, and so entered the Willamette and its history.

Thirteen years passed before Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, overland trail-breakers to the unknown West, entered the Oregon Country. They and their men were destined to pass unknowingly the mouth of the river Willamette, both on the journey to and from the Pacific. Returning, their eyes intently eastward, they ascended the

Columbia River as far as the mouth of the Sandy before they were aware of their oversight. On April 2, 1806, Captain Clark, he of the red thatch and the nimble but poor-spelling pen, was informed by visiting Indians of a "river which discharges itself into the Columbia on its south side some miles below us," and "runs a considerable distance to the south between the Mountains." Clark thereupon took a small party and returned. He wrote in his *Journal:* "I entered this river ... called Multnomah ... from a nation who reside on Wappato Island, a little below the enterence.

The following day, the record shows, he proceeded a few miles upstream, but the mist over the gray waters was so thick he could see but a short distance up the bending river. Yet when he left he was "perfectly satisfied of the size of the magnitude of this great river which must water that vast tract of Country between the Western range of mountains and those, on the sea coast as far S. as the waters of California."

After the passing of Lewis and Clark over the curve of the continent, the name of the little-known river changed from Multnomah to Willamette—but sometimes with devious spellings; for so the stream was called by the trader-travelers, Gabriel Franchere, Alexander Ross and Ross Cox, all of whom left reputable records.

For the first dwellers along the Willamette—the native

races—the river had no name. Instead, areas of the greenbanked waterway were known after the tribes dwelling with in them. Multnomah, as the lower river was first called, was the name of the resident Indian tribe, dwellers on Wappato Island and in scattered camps along the west bank of the river southward to *Hyas Tyee Tumwater*, or "the falls," twenty-five miles inland. In like fashion the red inhabitants dwelling along the stream known as the Clackamas and which debouched from the east just below the falls, were of that tribal name. Above this area of brawling waters lived the Clough-we-wallahs, along the Willamette's eastern shore; but no geographical feature retains their name.

Spreading over the wide Tualatin Plains, westward of the Willamette waters, wandered the Tuality Indians, or the Atfaliti Tribe, giving their name to the meandering river that drains this beautiful expanse, and sharing, not too willingly, their "good hunting" with visiting Klickitats and Snakes from east of the Cascades.

Southward in the valley dwelt other tribes, the Molallas and Santiams to the east, the Yamhills to the west, and centrally throughout the wide prairies and into the foothills and mountains of the south, dwelt the wandering Calapooyas. All of these tribes had central camps by principal streams. Thus, from native tribes, most of the river tributaries of the Willamette acquired names, usually of white bestowal but of red origin.

Of the name Willamette itself, at least one historian of an early day claims that the term was first used to designate a place on the river's west bank—"green waters"—just below the falls. Probably no tribe bore the name. Undergoing various spellings, it crystallized into the present accepted form with the visit in 1841 of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition.

The native dwellers of the Willamette were greatly dwindled in numbers when the white settlers came. Historians attribute their rapid decline during the last of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries to epidemics directly or indirectly traceable to maritime traders into the Columbia, to smallpox and scarlet fever and other foreign ailments, and to the natives' usually fatal methods of combating illness by means of sweat-baths followed by cold plunges. Thus, with the advent of white homeseekers, the aborigines were already releasing, unwittingly and tragically, the land of their forebears. More than eighty per cent of their once large numbers had perished. As a consequence, the Indians put up little resistance to white occupation.

Along the tributaries, in the evergreen wilderness from which the Willamette emerges, are occasional waterfalls. But on the main river there is only the one great overleap, known as Willamette Falls. As early as 1838, in his *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains*, the Rev.

Samuel Parker wrote in somewhat romantic vein of this geographic feature:

“The river above spreads out into a wide, deep basin, and runs slowly and smoothly until within a half mile of the falls, when its velocity increases, its width diminishes, eddies are formed in which the water turns back as if loath to make the plunge; but it is forced forward by the water in the rear, and when still nearer it breaks upon the volcanic rocks scattered across the channel, and then as if resigned to its fate, smooths its agitated surges, and precipitates down an almost perpendicular. . . presenting a somewhat whitened column . . . The rising mist formed in the rays of the sun a beautiful bow . . . "

Of the extensive Willamette country, much of a descriptive nature appears in the accounts of early day travelers through the region. Joel Palmer, settler, mill owner and early Indian agent, in his Journal of Travels over the Rocky Mountains, 1845–46, makes this observation: “The Willamette valley, including the first plateaus of the Cascade and Coast ranges, may be said to average a width of about sixty, and a length of about two hundred miles. It is beautifully diversified with timber and prairie.” Of this diversity, Lieutenant Wilkes wrote in his Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition into the Oregon country in 1841: “The prairies are at least one-third greater in extent than the forest; they were again seen carpeted with the most luxuriant growth of flowers, of the richest tints of red,

yellow and blue, extending in places a distance of fifteen to twenty miles."

"Many of the prairies . . .," remarked J. Quinn Thornton, Oregon settler of 1846, "are several miles in extent. But the smaller ones . . . where the woodland and plain alternate frequently, are the most beautiful, although the prospect is more confined . . . The space between these small prairies is covered with an open forest of tall, straight evergreens . . . The clusters of trees are so beautifully arranged, the openings so gracefully curved, the grounds so open and clean, that it seems to be the work of art; and these beautiful avenues are calculated to cheat the imagination into the belief that they lead to some farmhouse or pleasant village."

There were, however, noticeable differences in the extreme lower and upper valley. The lower Willamette, from its mouth to the falls, was darkly covered with evergreens and had few openings. Only the cottonwoods and alders held their yellow torches against the autumn sky. Mountains stood closer. Of the upper valley, "the narrowing toward its head," observed Frances Fuller Victor, Oregon historian, in 1872, in *All Over Oregon and Washington*, "brings mountains, plains, and groves within the sweep of unassisted vision, and the whole resembles a grand picture. We have not here the heavy forests of the Columbia River region, nor even the frequently recurring fir-groves of the Middle Wallamet. The foothills of the mountains approach within a few miles of either side, but those nearest the

valley are rounded, grassy knolls, over which are scattered groups of firs, pines, or oaks, while the river-bottom is bordered with tall cottonwoods, and studded rather closely with pines of a lofty height and noble form.”

Settlement in the beautiful valley began about 1829–30, when released Hudson's Bay Company trappers, principally French-Canadians, located farms on the rich prairies above the falls. Soon thereafter came the first American settlers, a mere handful. In 1834, a group of Methodist missionaries, headed by the Rev. Jason Lee, arrived, building a mission station on the southern fringe of French Prairie. Father F. N. Blanchet and other Catholic priests came in 1838 and established a mission on the prairie. George Ebbert, Joseph Meek, Robert Newell, Caleb Wilkins, and other American "mountain men" out of the Rockies, entered the region with their Indian wives and half-breed children to make homes. By 1840 there were a few hundred settlers established in the area between the Willamette Falls and the Jason Lee mission on the central Willamette bottoms and across the river on the Tuality Plains to the northwest.

# THE LOWER WILLAMETTE AND THE TOWNS THAT GREW

CULTIVATION of the land, not the founding of towns, was the primary purpose of the pioneers. Many an immigrant, his last dollar spent to reach the fertile land of promise, could only turn to the soil for livelihood.

Most of them selected claims convenient to waterways which would furnish routes of travel not only on social and political errands but, most important of all, on trips to and from the centers of trade.

The earliest points of commerce were the Hudson's Bay Company stores at Vancouver, on the Columbia, and the fur station at Champoeg, a small supply depot operated almost exclusively for trappers of the company and ex-trappers turned farmers.

With the American invasion of the Pacific Northwest, Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, foresaw the early decline of the fur trade and the rise of agriculture and industry. Modifying the company's usual policy of non-assistance to settlers, the "White-Headed Eagle" of the Columbia district shared with some of the more needy the resources of the great fur company. Through that assistance many Americans were enabled to obtain and maintain a foothold in the new country.

Although there were a few exceptions, early Oregon settlements tended to be communal in character. There was the group of French-Canadian trapper-settlers on French Prairie, with Champoeg as its center; and the teaching unit of the Methodist Church to the south where the missionaries had established a school primarily to teach the Indian children-an event that actually stimulated the occupation of the Oregon County. But town-founding was not a motive of either group.

A few individuals, however, did envision towns in the wilderness. The first of those forest municipalities was a mere figment of fancy platted on paper in 1832 by Hall J. Kelley, a Boston schoolmaster. The "city" he proposed sprawled over the moist, sometimes flooded lowland peninsula that thrusts like a wet thumb between the Columbia River and the upper mouth of the Willamette. For several years Kelley made urgent appeal to East Coast dwellers, seeking to enlist west-bound settlers who would bring to reality his dream of an Oregon empire. This appeal served to fire the imagination of one Easterner, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, also of Boston, who in 1832 and again in 1834 led an expedition across the continent to set himself up in business as a trader in the new country.

Ignoring Kelley's townsite, Wyeth built Fort William (around which he hoped to establish a town) on the west side of Sauvie or Wappato Island. But circumstances moved

against him and he retraced his way eastward, never to return.

In 1829, Dr. John McLoughlin, anticipating needs not to be supplied by the soil or wilderness bounty, laid claim to the area immediately adjacent to the east shore of the river at “the Falls.” Because of settlement on French Prairie, where wheat-raising was begun, a flour mill was needed. To make the operation of one feasible, the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1832, blasted out sufficient rock from the fall's eastern fringe to clear a narrow but free-flowing mill-race. A flour mill and sawmill were soon in operation. In the middle 'thirties three log cabins were erected and a field planted to potatoes. McLoughlin, in 1840, found it expedient to establish a trading station there, for the receipt of furs and the issuing of supplies to the Hudson's Bay Company trappers.

Strategically situated on the main water artery up the Willamette Valley , the Falls soon became the principal trading point and overnight stop for travelers. Portage of boats and supplies around the falls was necessary; usually one night was spent in rest. There Jason Lee, and his companion missionaries, tarried for sleep on trips up and down the river in 1834 and after. There evangelizing members later returned to establish a mission.

In 1841 Lieutenant Wilkes wrote in his report: “We reached the falls about noon where we found the missionary station

under charge of Rev. Mr. Waller. The Hudson's Bay Company have a trading post there and are packing fish which the Indians catch in great quantities."

In the same year the Island Milling Company built saw and gristmills on an island in mid-stream at the falls. George Abernethy, a Methodist Mission settler of 1840, opened a Mission store and in competition with the Hudson's Bay Company bought wheat from the settlers and salmon from the Indians, and shipped these products to Honolulu to be traded for sugar, molasses and other needed commodities. A boat transported passengers from Clackamas Rapids, three miles below the Mission community, to the foot of the falls.

In 1842 a small overland migration of 137 persons under Dr. Elijah White arrived and began to build houses for winter shelter. The following year, Dr. McLoughlin, who from the first claimed the entire falls property but generously shared its advantages for settlement, hired Sidney Walter Moss to survey a townsite at the water's edge. He thereupon called the location Oregon City. It was the first townsite south of the Columbia River.

In 1843, following preliminary steps toward the formation of provisional government in the Pacific Northwest, Oregon City became the first seat of government. In 1844 the first legislature met there. In that year the town was replatted, the first brick house built—by Abernethy—and the first furniture factory opened. In 1846 the first issue of the

Oregon Spectator was pulled from a hand-press operated by William G. T'Vault.

From the very beginning the town had a significant life. There all civil and military action affecting the well-being of the new country was taken. There the majority of settlers rested after the long westward journey and there they re outfitted for the final miles of travel to permanent homesites in the Willamette and adjacent valleys. A few remained, however, to build the town. "As settlers advanced," wrote Eva Emery Dye in a sketch of Oregon City published in Joseph H. Gaston's *Portland, Its History and Builders*, in 1911, "the Indians moved their camps to the first bench, the second, and finally to the third. ... sixty feet back under the rocks the Indians used to lie in wet weather and look down upon the building of the settlement."

The Cayuse War east of the Cascade Range, in the late 'forties, and the capture and hanging in 1850 of the Marcus Whitman murderers, created great excitement in local life. Late in 1847, to avenge the deaths of the missionary, his wife Narcissa, and eleven others, the “Oregon Rifles” was organized at Oregon City. That was the second military force organized for the protection of Oregon Country settlers.

In 1849 the Mounted Rifle Regiment crossed the plains to Oregon, to provide Federal protection for the newly created

Oregon Territory. This regiment was stationed at Oregon City for more than a year.

The ’fifties were years of growth. A female seminary was opened in the town, and the Willamette Iron Works began the manufacture of sawmill parts. Oregon City found itself in competition with Linn City, a companion town with industrial ambitions, across the river. “Gold rush” money from California and from the southern Oregon mines stimulated commercial development. Finally, in 1864 Oregon’s first woolen mill utilized the power of the falls. Soon afterward a paper mill, the first on the Pacific Coast, began the manufacture of paper.

Down river, another small town was bidding for growth. Linnton, situated on the west bank of the Willamette just above Sauvie Island, was platted in 1844 by M. M. McCarver and Peter H. Burnett, immigrants of the previous year. McCarver had dreams of a city that would stand at this point near the Willamette’s mouth and where his only conceivable handicap lay in not securing nails soon enough to build his city before some other enterprising individual built one of promise elsewhere. But growing impatient, he departed for the Puget Sound country where he later founded Tacoma. Linnton, however, was not doomed, but struggled on as a shipping point through the decades and into another century, eventually to become a small lumber-mill town.

Of Linnton townsite, and another greater city to be, Jesse A. Applegate, son of Lindsay Applegate, wrote in *Recollections of My Boyhood*:

"Not long after passing Linnton we landed on the west shore, and went into camp on the high bank where there was little underbrush among the pine trees. No one lived there and the place had no name; there was nothing to show that the place had ever been visited except a small log hut near the river, and a broken mast of a ship leaning against the high bank. There were chips hewn from timber, showing that probably a new mast had been made there. We were at this place a day or two and were visited by two men from the prairie country up the river, then known as the 'plains.'"

"Where we should locate was the all-absorbing topic of conversation at this camp in the woods. It seemed to be difficult to decide where to settle down in such a vast unappropriated wilderness. We were then actually encamped on the site of the city of Portland, but there was no prophet with us to tell of the beautiful city that was to take the place of that gloomy forest."

Every townsite founder on the lower Willamette believed he had indisputable reasons why his chosen location would become the great city of Oregon. First, the lower river was the natural gateway to the expansive upper country. Along

the Willamette must pass much of the valley trade and from its mouth must go the deep-sea commerce of the entire region. Where then would the future great city stand? Surely at the head of navigation. And where was the feasible head of navigation? At the foot of Willamette Falls? Just below the rock-strewn mouth of the Clackamas River? Was Swan Island an obstacle in the channel? Was there any reason why ships should sail farther inland than the head of Sauvie Island where the Willamette divided its channel? Each town founder of the ’forties and early ’fifties, claimed the advantages of his location and invited public settlement.

“The situation of Portland,” reported the British officers Henry J. Warre, and M. Vavasour, visiting the country in 1845, “is superior to that of Linnton, and the back country easier of access.” That the site faced deep water added to its promise as a port. Conscious of these factors, A. L. Lovejoy and Francis W. Pettygrove surveyed the Portland townsite in 1844–45. The property had been obtained by them from William Overton, a destitute Tennessean, who late in 1843 landed there from an Indian canoe. Lacking the filing fee required by enactment of the provisional government, Overton interested Lovejoy and Pettygrove in the property, offering them one-half ownership if they would secure the title. The quick eye of Lovejoy saw the advantages of this spot where Indians sometimes camped, and the three men soon completed the transaction. But before improvement

could be made, Overton became restless and sold his interest to Pettygrove for fifty dollars.

Lovejoy, a native of Massachusetts, had read the glowing literature circulated in the East by Kelley, and under its influence emigrated to Oregon in 1842 with the Elijah White party. *En route* he was detained by Marcus Whitman at Waiilatpu, and with him made a return ride in the dead of winter. The following spring he joined the "Great Migration" and again set out for Oregon. This time he reached "the settlements." That same year of 1843, Pettygrove, a native of Maine, entered the Columbia River aboard the bark *Victoria*. With him came his family and a stock of merchandise. The latter he exchanged at Oregon City for a quantity of French Prairie wheat, which he then shipped abroad. With money thus obtained he built the first log cabin on his Portland claim.

A few lots sold before the town had any name. That name was ceremoniously chosen—not at Portland but at Oregon City—by the flipping of a coin. Lovejoy wished the new town to be named Boston, while Pettygrove wanted it to be called Portland. Two of three tosses fell in Pettygrove's favor, and Portland became the name of the new town among the fir stumps.

Growth started slowly. For nearly three years the majority of emigrants paused there only briefly, then passed on to

settle in the ample Tualatin Plains or around Oregon City, or on the broad prairies higher up the Willamette.

One of the first to linger was James Terwilliger, who erected a blacksmith shop. Pettygrove put up a store but for a time had little business. Sailing vessels, with growing frequency anchored in the river and enjoyed more trade exchanging imported cargo for furs and wheat, than did Pettygrove as a merchant. On an adjacent claim Daniel H. Lownsdale started a tannery. Presently a road mounted westward out of town.

Next, John Waymire came to build the first double log cabin and did also a small hauling business with a pair of oxen. He also started a sawmill with an overhead whipsaw brought from Missouri. In operating it the man beneath received a face full of sawdust each time he pulled the blade down.

The products of a shingle mill, begun about that time by William Bennett, were sold to the incoming settlers; among them were Col. William King, the town's first politician, and Dr. Ralph Wilcox, a physician, who, besides tending the local ill, became Portland's first school teacher. Another merchant, J. L. Morrison, dealt in flour, feed and shingles.

Meanwhile, a rival town was growing nearby. A few miles up the Willamette on the opposite shore, Lot Whitcomb had

platted Milwaukie in 1848. Whitcomb claimed loudly that his wharves stood at the all-time head of navigation. The towns above, he vigorously pointed out, were cut off from that advantage by the gravel bar which the inflowing Clackamas had dumped into the Willamette channel. Only a few deep-sea vessels had then ever negotiated that obstruction. The fall's towns hotly protested Whitcomb's claim, although finally acknowledged the "sand-bagging." Consequently, as a port, Milwaukie prospered for several years.

But there were shoals lying a few miles downstream, and with Portland harbor so readily accessible, Milwaukie was, in the early 1850s, abandoned by sea-going commerce. Thereafter her livelihood was maintained by riverboats and by her sawmills. In later years she became a town of moderate size, largely detached from river life.

Discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought increased business to Portland. Although many men left to seek their fortunes, enough remained to handle the extensive trade with the distant gold-fields. More and more vessels put in for cargo, with lumber the chief commodity for shipment. Gold dust augmented grain and peltry as mediums of exchange.

The arrival of Captains John H. Couch and George H. Flanders in 1849 gave Portland great impetus as a seaport. Couch was interested in several vessels, and was soon

doing a large buying and selling trade with the back-country ranchers who hauled produce to Portland docks for ocean shipment, principally to the Sandwich Islands. He also induced other craft to tie up in Portland harbor. Nathaniel Crosby who earlier had founded a "paper" town he named Milton, on Multnomah Channel, engaged in similar commerce, and built Portland's first commodious residence. New settlers staked claims and felled timbers. The town's perspectives widened.

In 1850–51 Portland townsite owners—her founders had been replaced by Stephen Coffin, William W. Chapman, and Daniel H. Lownsdale—began negotiations that led to the purchase in California of the sidewheel steamer *Goldhunter*. At Milwaukie, Lot Whitcomb, builder of the riverboat that bore his name, also acted as agent for a line of ocean vessels.

Portland was incorporated in 1851, and in the same year three brick buildings were erected. The advent of steam craft on the river added greatly to the town's prosperity. And as population increased, river commerce grew. Imports destined for distribution inland were unloaded at Portland wharves and transferred to riverboats. The Rev. Ezra Fisher of Oregon City, visiting the growing town in January, 1853, described it in unemotional but promising terms: "Portland is the principal port in Oregon. The present population is estimated at seven hundred souls. It contains thirty-five wholesale and retail stores, two tin shops, four public

taverns, two steam sawmills, one steam flouring mill, with two runs of stones, six or eight drinking shops and billiard tables, one wine and spirit manufactory, a variety of mechanic shops and from eight to fifteen merchant vessels are always lying at anchor in the river or at the wharves...This is the place where nearly all the immigrants by water land and from which they will go to their various points of destination."

In 1854 Portland became the seat of government of the new Multnomah County, created out of parts of Washington and Clackamas counties. The assessed valuation of property in 1855 was $1,196,034; the population was 1,209. Added settlement constantly expanded the town's boundaries. Covered wharves, privately owned, were built along the waterfront, and a public levee was constructed. Many merchants who became active in the municipality in those years rose to leadership in commercial and civic life. Henry W. Corbett, William S. Ladd, Josiah and Henry Failing, Cicero H. Lewis, John C. Ainsworth and others in time became sustaining pillars in the industrial structure.' The *Oregonian*, begun in 1850, became a lusty mouthpiece for the growing commonwealth. Its successive editors, Thomas Dryer, Simeon Francis, and Harvey W. Scott were widely known.

The discovery of gold in Idaho and eastern Oregon in the early 1860's, brought a second boom to Portland's commercial life. Freight and passengers for the upper

Columbia and many Snake River points, were taken aboard steamers at Portland's wharves. Rates of shipment, often exorbitant, were usually paid with little protest. Customarily, an empty wagon shipped aboard a riverboat was measured from tongue-tip to end-gate and assessed for the square feet it thus occupied; the tongue was then removed, placed under the wagon, and the wagon-bed piled full of a miscellaneous freight being paid for by another shipper. During that era the few villages east of the Cascades and on the route of the Oregon Trail assumed the aspects of towns, with much of their staple goods and building commodities coming from Portland merchants.

Oregon's first railroad—other than a few short portage lines—crept southward out of Portland in 1869, with the first locomotive laboring into Oregon City on Christmas Day and continuing to Parrott Creek. From there it slowly continued up the valley. This quicker route to market for Willamette Valley produce was destined to reshape the economic order of the towns located upon it. Increased prosperity came to Portland, although for some years yet the riverboats contributed greatly to the town's commercial leadership of the Oregon country.

"As we approach Portland," wrote Mrs. Victor in 1872, on a trip by boat up the river, "we observe its new, yet thrifty, appearance; the evidence of forests sacrificed to the growth of a town; and the increasing good taste and costliness of its buildings going up or recently built in the newest portions

of the city. A low, level margin of ground, beautifully ornamented with majestic oaks, intervenes between us and the higher ground on which the town is built. Passing by this and the first few blocks and warehouses, with their ugly rears toward the river, we haul up alongside a handsome, commodious wharf, and begin to look about.

"Portland is, we find, a cheerful-looking town of about 9,000 inhabitants; well paved, with handsome public buildings, and comfortable, home-like dwellings. It is at the head of ocean steam navigation, and owes its prominence as the commercial town of Oregon to the fact. Here the smaller steamers which ply on the Wallamet River have hitherto brought the produce of the valley to exchange for imported goods, or to be shipped on sailing vessels to foreign ports; and here have centered the commercial wealth and political influence of the State.

"The river in front of Portland is about one-fourth of a mile wide, with water enough for large vessels to lie in; and the rise and fall of the tide amounts to a couple of feet. During the winter flood in the Wallamet, which is occasioned by heavy rains, the water rises about eight feet. For this reason the wharves are all built in two stories—one for low, and one for high water. The great flood of 1861-62 and that of 1870, brought the water over the wharves and even over Front street, which is twenty-five feet above low-water mark. The summer floods in the Columbia, occasioned by the melting of snow in the mountains where it has its

source, back the water up in the Wallamet as far as Oregon City, which makes its necessary to abandon the lower wharves. These two rises keep the Wallamet supplied with water through the greater portion of the year. . ."

Portland was connected with the eastern states by transcontinental railroad, the Northern Pacific, in 1883. Henry Villard, leading spirit of this enterprise, feted the town in celebration of the achievement. Thereafter business increased and trade volume grew; heavy manufacturing established itself with an eye to the future in a town where the sputtering oil street lamps had already given way to sputtering gas jets. Before the 1880's closed, street railways — that in 1872 had begun as a single horse-drawn line along First Street—had fanned out, with tracks on Morrison Street and connecting laterals, all operating with electric equipment. Portland's first bridge spanned the Willamette in 1887, and the first California through-train arrived in town.

# About this digital edition

This e-book comes from the online library Wikisource. This multilingual digital library, built by volunteers, is committed to developing a free accessible collection of publications of every kind: novels, poems, magazines, letters...



Wikisource is constantly looking for new members. During the transcription and proofreading of this book, it's possible that we made some errors. You can report them at this page.

The following users contributed to this book:

- CalendulaAsteraceae
- Peteforsyth
- Uzume
- Jarekt
- Leonel Sohns
- Rocket000
- Dbenbenn

- Zscout370
- Jacobolus
- Indolences
- Technion
- Dha
- Abigor
- Reisio
- Blurpeace
- Dschwen
- Steinsplitter
- ToBeFree
- Boris23
- KABALINI
- Bromskloss
- Tene~commonswiki
- AzaToth
- Bender235
- PatríciaR