

Your views

Shearer: Measure 105 would rekindle racial profiling, make discrimination commonplace

To the Editor:

It is unfortunate Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen was among the 16 Oregon sheriffs across Oregon to add their signatures asking voters to vote yes on Measure 105. Notably, the other 20 sheriffs declined to sign the inflammatory letter authored by Clatsop County Sheriff Thomas Bergin. Bergin's letter claims law enforcement officers have too much "integrity" to racially profile.

Voter approval of the measure on the Nov. 6 statewide ballot would rekindle racial profiling in a way Oregon has not seen since the original law deterring it was passed in 1987. The campaign for Measure 105 is based on blatant bigotry. Measure 105 would overturn the decades-old law (Oregon Revised Statute 181A.820) protecting both immigrants and local law enforcement in our state. The law was passed in 1987 and has had bipartisan support, including among law enforcement, which recognizes that keeping Oregon communities safe means protecting all Oregonians, regardless of ethnicity, nationality or immigration status.

By overturning this law, Measure 105 would authorize state and local law enforcement resources for use in federal immigration activities instead of investing those resources in local crime prevention.

The group supporting Measure 105 calls itself Oregonians for Immigration Reform — a misleading name. Most OFIR money comes from outside Oregon, and OFIR is not about reform, but about rolling us back to a time when racial discrimination was commonplace in our state. OFIR is receiving thousands of dollars from far-right and white nationalist groups outside Oregon. OFIR is recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a nativist extremist group with ties to white nationalism.

Voting no on Proposition 105 is the decent thing to do.

Mike Shearer
La Grande

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only).

We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We will not publish poetry, consumer complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Thank-you letters are discouraged.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks. Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

MY VOICE

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Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

GUEST EDITORIAL JAYSON JACOBY FROM THE BAKER CITY HERALD

The legacy of Wilson Price Hunt, who helped blaze the Oregon Trail

Wilson Price Hunt ought to be famous.

It's true he died 176 years ago, which makes TV appearances and other forms of publicity troublesome.

But there are people of his vintage who remain widely known today but whose exploits, in my view, are inconsequential by comparison.

I admit my opinion is influenced by provincialism.

Hunt, who was in the employ of the fur-trading magnate John Jacob Astor, in 1811 led the first party of white men — and one very notable woman, about which more later — to pass through what would become Baker County 51 years later.

Perhaps because Hunt arrived in the West six years after Lewis and Clark, and perhaps because he was dispatched not by a president but by a businessman, Hunt is nothing like as well-known as that pair of explorers.

Yet Hunt was instrumental in blazing sections of what became the Oregon Trail, and even though he did so 32 years before the first major wave of emigrants, his role, or so it seems to me, is sometimes given short shrift in Oregon Trail histories.

Hunt's legacy shines rather brighter, though, in Baker County.

The summit that juts to the east from the main spine of the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Baker City, and is one of the more prominent peaks visible from town, is Hunt Mountain.

Hunt himself probably saw that mountain, which rises to an elevation of 8,232 feet, on Dec. 28, 1811.

Likely he was disturbed by the sight rather than entranced, however.

On that wintry day Hunt was struggling not only to fulfill his commitment to Astor, but also with the more pressing matter of merely trying to survive in a wilderness in which he and his party had been reduced, over the past month, to eat-

ing dogs.

And they were happy to have those.

I had been vaguely aware of Hunt's travels, but it was my recent reading of Peter Stark's fine 2015 history, "Astoria: Astor and Jefferson's Lost Pacific Empire," that both enriched my knowledge and piqued my curiosity about this somewhat obscure frontiersman.

Stark describes the two-pronged campaign — one by land, one by sea — that Astor bankrolled with a goal of establishing a fur-trading post on the all but unknown Pacific Coast.

The oceangoing side of the operation was the ship Tonquin, captained by Jonathan Thorn.

The chapters devoted to Thorn and his eventful voyage are compelling enough.

But in part because I'm no sailor, and in part because the overland trek has such a local connection, it was Stark's account of the travails of Hunt's party that had me turning the pages as rapidly as I could get through them.

I read many of those pages while sitting in a chair in a shady corner of my yard. As I relaxed there in the dry July heat I felt that uniquely human desire to not only read about history but to experience it, a compulsion all the more powerful, it seems to me, because it's apparently unobtainable.

(I use the hedging word "apparently" only because the physicists, with their inscrutable equations and fantastic theories, might eventually figure out that H.G. Wells was onto something more than science fiction.)

I tried to imagine what I would have seen and felt were I able to go back almost 207 years ago and to sit in this very spot, just a few miles from where Hunt and his party were trudging, their stomachs empty and the keen winter wind freezing their

cheeks.

They had struggled mightily over the previous two months, since Hunt decided to abandon his horses and float down the great river they called the Mad and we call the Snake.

Hunt believed the Columbia River, and thence the Pacific, might be only a modest distance away, and that he might arrive before winter settled in.

He was of course wildly off. After blundering into Hells Canyon during a snowstorm in early December, Hunt backtracked and was fortunate to convince a few Shoshone Indians to guide him through the Blue Mountains and on to the Columbia Basin.

The party was camping near a group of six Shoshone tipis on Dec. 30, 1811, when Marie Dorion, an Indian married to Pierre Dorion, who served as Hunt's interpreter, gave birth to her third child (her two other children, ages 2 and 4, were also with the group).

This historic birth happened near what today is North Powder, and the event is commemorated by a sign along Highway 237.

Marie's newborn — the baby's gender, curiously, seems not to have been documented — died about a week later.

The Hunt party fared better once it reached the Columbia. The group arrived at the newly christened Astoria in February 1812.

Hunt was neither a mountain man like Jedediah Smith nor an inveterate explorer in the mold of John C. Frémont, which perhaps explains his comparative anonymity.

Yet the history of the Oregon Trail, and thus of Baker County, owes a great deal to Hunt and to the party he led.

Stark's excellent book had the effect on me that works of history should have, which is to say it made me wish I could share in Hunt's experiences.

Well, at least some of them. I have no taste for canine casserole.

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