

PORTLAND—HOW IT CAME TO BE THE OREGON EMPORIUM.

Prior to 1849, Oregon City, then commonly called Willamette Falls, or The Falls, was the social, political and commercial metropolis of the country west of the Rock Mountains and north of California. Indeed, its supremacy might be said to have extended over San Francisco, then a straggling adobe village called *Yerba Buena*; where lived an enterprising merchant, C. L. Ross, who in April, 1848, advertised his country store in the columns of the Oregon metropolitan press, and referred to its principal merchants—Kilborn, Lawton, Abernethy and others.

But the discovery of Gold in California in 1848, soon changed all this, and the obscure *Yerba Buena* suddenly shot up into the famous San Francisco, and overshadowed the whole Pacific Coast. This discovery was soon followed by an active trade between San Francisco and Oregon, via the Columbia River, which brought prominently forward the question of where was the proper place for the future commercial town of Oregon. Although Portland had been located and named as early as 1844, it was yet a doubtful experiment, and much known, as only "a place twelve miles below Oregon City."

The trade and commerce of the country were based upon the agricultural products and the consumption of the Willamette Valley. The ox-team and the row-boat—particularly the former—were the principal, if not the only means of transport between tide water and the interior. The row-boat, carrying from 500 to 5,000 pounds, was a slow and laborious process of exchanging Oregon flour for Sandwich Island sugar and coffee. The people on the east side of the river could draw moderate loads to and from Oregon City with their teams, but owing to the height of the mountain range on the west bank of the river, it was difficult to get to it with wagons below the mouth of the Yamhill.

But Oregon City itself was above the head of ship navigation—and the passage of the Clackamas Rapids was then very difficult and tedious for even row boats, except for a few weeks in the June rise. While the annual cargo of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the occasional supplies of the Mission

and a few independent traders, constituted the merchandise of the country, it was not so material whether the place of trade or exchange was at or above the head of ship navigation. But now the external commerce of the country was growing so rapidly that it became a matter of the first moment to bring the prairie schooners and the ocean-going vessels together.

Of the northern part of the valley, the west side of the river was much the larger and more productive country. The Tualatin Plains and Yamhill District contained large bodies of arable prairie land, to which many of the earliest settlers of the country were attracted; while the corresponding section of the country on the east side was comparatively densely wooded and sparsely settled.

Various attempts had been made to establish towns on the west bank of the Willamette and the south bank of the Columbia, with a view of commanding the trade of this west side country. Besides Portland, there were, among others, Linnton, St. Helens and Milton. The first named was situated about one and a half miles below the site of Springville. It was commenced in 1843 upon the site of an old Hudson's Bay Company landing, by McCarver and Burnett. Great things were expected of it. In 1844 McCarter wrote back to "the States" that Linnton would soon be one of the largest cities in America—if they could only get nails enough. Poor Mac! What drafts he made upon the rosy future. Surely he was the *man* of whom the poet said:

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast—
Man never is, but always to be blest."

Within five years thereafter nothing remained to mark the site of this prospective city. But its hopeful projector and exalted prophet, through many mutations of fortune, still dreamed of the great mart he should build on the Pacific shore, and just thirty years from the announcement of the future greatness of the now forgotten Linnton, he breathed his last, some nine score miles to the northward of it, where he had founded another city of the future—the deep-water port and terminal town, Tacoma.

In 1846 a trail was cut through the woods from Portland to the plains along the comparatively low ridge between the Canyon and the Barnes' Road. This was the first direct com-

munication between Portland and the interior. Gradually this trail broadened into a wagon road, and the ox-team found its way to the ships at Portland, while Linnton, comparatively isolated from the interior by the height of the mountain in its rear, languished and died.

In the Spring of 1848 Lownsdale, who then owned the tannery back of town, discovered the pass to the Plains, now called the Canyon, and soon after Wilcox, Carter, and he explored it and ascertained that a good road could be made through it to the Plains at a comparatively small cost.

In the Fall of the same year, Lownsdale purchased the Portland Claim for \$5,000 in leather, and commenced working up the project of getting a road to the interior and up the valley through this Canyon.

The plank road furore had lately swept over the Western States, and the farther wave of it had now broken upon the Oregon shore. The "Stick-road," as the natives called it, was thought to be just the thing for the emergency. Accordingly, on January 29, 1851, an act was passed by the Legislature incorporating "The Portland and Valley Plank Road Company, for the purpose of constructing a plank road from Portland, in the county of Washington, to the town of Lafayette (via Hillsboro), in the county of Yamhill, to some point on Mary's River, to be determined by said Company."

On July 30, 1851, the Company was organized at Lafayette by the election of Hembree, Flanders, Carter, Chambers and Chapman as directors. Soon after the corner-plank of the road was laid at the mouth of the Canyon with due ceremony and much rejoicing. Even the great political leaders and rivals of the day—King and Dryer—fraternized on the occasion, and united in apostrophising the American eagle and lauding this first great internal improvement on the Pacific Coast. What followed is soon told. The wooden way was not laid through the valley. Sundry Portland subscribers failed to come to time on the assessments on their stock, and the farmers and others along the line of the route who took stock with a view of getting the road through their neighborhoods were compelled to make good the deficiency. But within a year the Canyon was