

Writer stakes a claim for Tibbets as 'Oregon's first pioneer'

Cuxtux articles grow into book about Clatsop Plains resident

By **PATRICK WEBB**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Labeling anyone “the first” is a dangerous business.

Fact checkers make a habit of nailing any writer who makes such a claim.

But Jerry Sutherland is willing to take that chance and back it up with research.

“Calvin Tibbets: Oregon’s First Pioneer,” highlights a man who the author believes fits that description — the first person who traveled to Oregon specifically to settle there and make it part of the United States.

If his topic sounds familiar, it’s because Sutherland’s research appeared in two editions of *Cumtux*, the quarterly magazine of the Clatsop County Historical Society. The group allowed him to publish his material, in a modified form, in his book and helped with photo editing and ideas.

Sutherland has an Associate Degree in business from Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, and a Bachelor of Science in psychology from Portland State University. In 2013, he retired from a career designing and selling heating and air conditioning systems. His previously published work was an article about ductless heat pumps published in the *Journal of Light Construction* the year before.

Sutherland’s mother’s maiden name was Tibbetts.

About 10 years ago, his father saw the pioneer’s name in an historical article. Although the families are not related, the initial interest morphed into general historical research. Son Jerry, who was nearing retirement, offered to help.

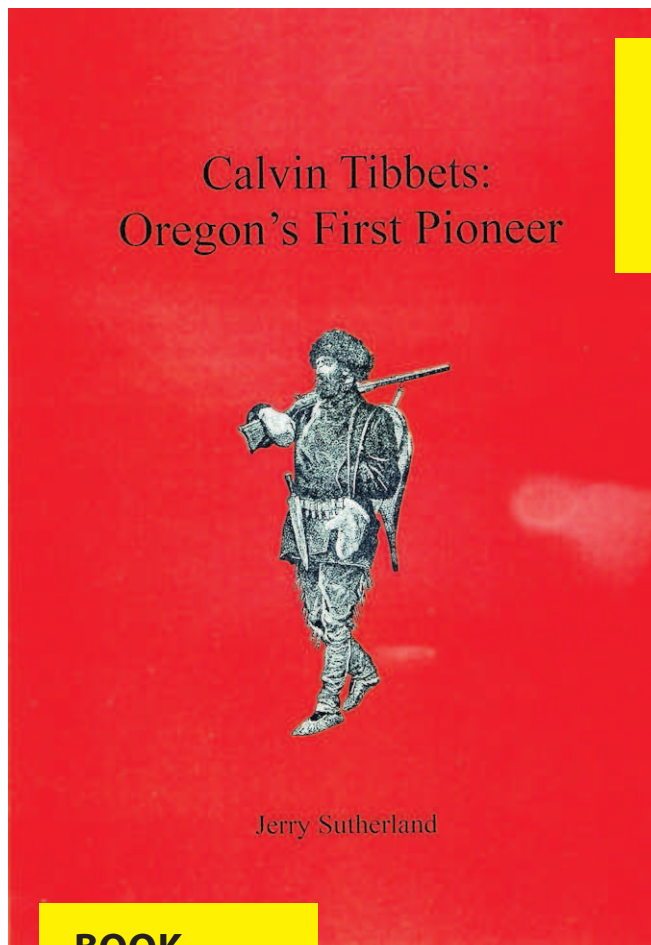
Name spelling was a problem.

Tibbets’ name appears on a monument at the Champoege State Historical Area commemorating those who voted in 1843 in favor of forming the first American government on the Pacific Coast. However, in stone “Tibbets” is spelled with two Ts, a problem the Sutherlands encountered when they delved into archives hunting their quarry.

“Tibbets’ name was spelled many ways by many people, most commonly as ‘Tibbetts’ and ‘Tibbits.’ This made searching for information about him challenging,” Jerry Sutherland said. “It wasn’t until I found documents signed by him that I knew what the correct spelling was.”

The Sutherlands decided that Tibbets deserved public recognition. “The fellow seemed to have been everywhere at just the right time to help take Oregon through each event that led to American statehood,” Sutherland said. “He was never the dynamic leader, but he was there to support those who were. As they came and went, he was a common factor.”

The book begins with Hall Kelley and Nathaniel



Calvin Tibbets: Oregon's First Pioneer



Jerry Sutherland

BOOK READING

Jerry Sutherland will read from “Calvin Tibbets: Oregon’s First Pioneer,” at the Astoria Public Library at 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 19.

Wyeth, leaders in the movement to make Oregon part of the emerging nation.

When Fort Vancouver leader John McLoughlin greeted Wyeth in 1832, he realized he had some competition for the region, which was the subject of a dispute involving the British, Sutherland wrote.

SUBMITTED PHOTO
“Calvin Tibbets: Oregon’s First Pioneer” by Jerry Sutherland.

Kelley was the force behind the American Society for Encouraging the Settlement of the Oregon Territory, soliciting interest in Eastern states. One taker was Tibbets, a stonemason from Maine who was lured West as Wyeth and Kelley were digging in with their respective schemes.

“Eventually, both men would fail in their ventures, but one of the men they brought to Oregon — Calvin Tibbets — stayed to make it his home and pave the way for other Americans to follow,” Sutherland wrote. “In doing so, this obscure fellow would

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— Jerry Sutherland

author describing Oregon pioneer Calvin Tibbets



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Portlander Jerry Sutherland researched historical figure Calvin Tibbets and makes the case for him being Oregon’s first pioneer in his new book.

become Oregon’s first pioneer without anyone — including himself — realizing it.”

Tibbets spent a winter at Fort Vancouver then moved south to Champoege to farm. His North Coast connection begins when another pioneer, Solomon Smith, who was married to a Clatsop Indian princess, Celiast, moved to Clatsop Plains. Tibbets joined them and staked a claim on land adjoining the site for Clatsop Plains Presbyterian Church. He married a Clatsop and they had two children.

He worked as a guide, helped set up a mill and

served as a judge. Tibbets died of cholera on an 1849 voyage and was buried at sea. His son John and daughter Grace were assisted by other families, but his \$7,000 estate reportedly spared them a difficult life.

Sutherland’s work includes 16 pages of reference notes, reflecting his travels viewing the Hudson’s Bay Company’s records in Winnipeg, Canada, researching at a library in Berkeley, California, and being aided by the Oregon Historical Society. He especially commended Liisa Penner and Sam Rascoe at Clatsop County Historical Society for help with research and publishing.

Once he began, Sutherland was soon hooked on historical research. “I love uncovering new information about past events and people, and reading manuscripts gives me a wonderful sense of connection with people in the past who wrote the words,” he said.

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“*Calvin Tibbets: Oregon’s First Pioneer*,” by Jerry Sutherland, 62 p, 2016, CreateSpace Publishing, North Charleston, N.C., Amazon, \$9.95. The book was first published as articles in the Fall 2014 and Winter 2015 editions of *Cumtux*, the quarterly publication of the Clatsop County Historical Society. www.calvintibbets.com