

## Oregon: A View of the 50's

14,000 People in Territory; Capital at Oregon City; First Railroad Yet Ten Years in Future; People Confined to Agriculture, Hunting for Livelihoods

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IN 1851 there were only about 14,000 inhabitants of Oregon. The census of 1850 gave the number as 13,294 including 1,201 who were residing in part of what was taken to form part of Washington territory. The capital was at Oregon City. The governor then was John P. Gaines, who had been appointed by President Zachary Taylor. Just two years preceding, on March 3, 1849, General Joseph Lane had proclaimed the territorial form of government as successor to the provision government.

In 1851 there were nine counties in Oregon—Yamhill, Washington, Clatsop, Polk, Benton, Clackamas, Marion, Linn and Lane. Clackamas, Marion and Linn counties extended from the Willamette river to the summit of the Rocky mountains.

Among the principal towns in Oregon Territory were Astoria, Vancouver, Portland, Milwaukie, Oregon City, LaFayette, Champoeg, Salem, Eugene, Albany, Corvallis, Empire, Port Orford, Lewiston and Boise. But this was ten years before towns in eastern Oregon like LaGrande, Baker, Huntington, Pendleton, Ontario and Vale were established.

It was also ten years before there was a railroad with iron rails in the Oregon country, the first being the portage railroad built in 1861 and 1862 by the Oregon Steam Navigation company on the Columbia river.

Oregon City, the capital was but a village; Portland was a little hamlet on the wooded banks of the Willamette; Salem was just being started on the Chemeketa plain; Marysville (Corvallis) was another young village on the river, which was the means of travel between communities. There were horses and wagons, but few or no roads. Persons and goods were transported on the Willamette and Columbia in keel boats or batteaux. In December, 1850, the Lot Whitcomb had been launched at Milwaukie, and in 1851 she began service as a river steamer. Soon steamers were running on all the navigable rivers.

The occupations of the people were agricultural. Settlers were coming in by boat from California, or overland by wagon or horse, and taking up the fertile lands of the Willamette valley.

The gold excitement of 1849 had well-nigh drained the valley of men. But by 1851 many were coming back, laden with precious gold dust. There was a strong demand for Oregon products in the California mining towns, and money in the form of gold dust and coin was abundant here.

### Rebellious Chief Took General's Name

There were no bridges across the Columbia or lower Willamette, and the new country was awaiting development. Indeed Oregon Territory was already astir. The Rogue River Indian war was in progress, and General Lane had already made a treaty with the tribe. When treachery was designed by the Indians, the Kllickitat Chief Quitley seized the Rogue River chieftain by the throat and with a dagger held him captive and made him prisoner. But instead of being a prisoner, the chief came to be General Lane's guest. The general won the chief who, in turn, took the name of "Chief Joe", in honor of the general.

Willamette university with its group of academics at that time was training congressmen, governors and educators.

Gold was discovered in paying quantities at Jacksonville in 1851 and within sixteen years the rich pockets and ledges of the Oregon country were discovered.

Most of the first subscribers of The Statesman paid their subscriptions in beaver coins minted by a company at Oregon City, when gold worth \$18 per ounce was obtained for less in coined money, there being much California gold dust in Oregon. It is probable that at the time The Statesman was founded there



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was more gold per capita in Oregon than ever before or since. The beaver coins were minted in \$5 and \$10 denominations and they contained about 8 per cent more gold than U. S. coins. Hence they disappeared as soon as government money came into sufficient circulation.

There were but few church buildings. Not unfrequently, families traveled 15 or 20 miles by ox team to attend religious services, in school houses or in groves, where the meeting was usually protracted. The camp meeting had its place in 1851, when it was greatly appreciated by the emigrants as an opportunity for social as well as spiritual refreshment. There was much joy and occasional shouting at camp meetings; and the shouting was inspiring when the right person shouted.

### Father Waller not Always Accurate

In country school houses there were no pianos nor organs to accompany the singing, which was generally pitched by guess and was frequently in the wrong altitude. In the Willamette Valley Methodist conference, so the

story ran, Father Waller, one of the chief promoters of Willamette university, usually started the hymns, and sometimes missed the correct pitch. At a certain conference session, the bishop asked Brother Waller in what letter he pitched the hymns? "Let'er rip", promptly responded Father Waller, to the delight of the bishop and the conference.

There were but few books in the early Statesman days, yet the books were well-thumbed. The late Job Minto, ancestor of the well-known Minto family of Marion county, was accustomed to take his wife and copies of Robert Burns and Shakespeare up a hillside on a Sunday afternoon where he and his companion read the lines of the Caledonian poet and the Barn of Avon, and thus acquired a masterful use of English that would have been creditable to a college or a university professor.

### Divorcee Then Considered As Disgraced Citizen

White women were comparatively scarce in the northwest in 1851, hence many young men went east to secure wives. Divorces were uncommon as it was a disgrace to be reported in the newspaper as a grass-widow or a grass-widower; and the title of "Miss" for a divorcee, was unknown in the early '50's. What are called "trial marriages" now, would have been termed "shot-gun marriages" then.

Early History Traced From Vast Areas

This provisional government of Oregon was organized at Champoeg, May 2, 1843, and on July 5 a comprehensive organic act was adopted. Oregon was divided into four judicial districts, later called counties. They were Twality (later Washington), Yamhill, Clackamas and Champoick (later Marion county). These districts were as vast as states. A legislative committee of nine and an executive committee of three were chosen to act independently of all nations and to proceed as Oregon was "No Man's Land," and to do nothing officially that would prejudice the rights or interests of any nation. In the language of a memorial of the provisional government, dated June 28, 1844: "By treaty stipulations the territory has become a kind of neutral ground, in the occupancy of which the citizens of the United States and the subjects of Great Britain have equal rights and ought to have equal protection." At the end of two years, Governor Abernethy and a legislature were chosen by the people, and Oregon continued under the provisional government until the coming of Governor Lane.

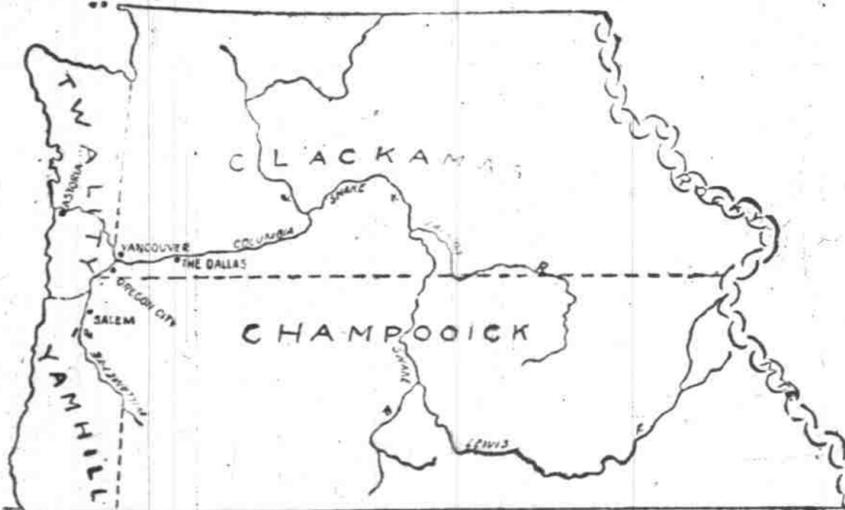
Upon the arrival of Governor Lane, the political attitude of the Oregon country was changed thoroughly. The government at Washington had given the country added recognition. Governor Lane found Oregon divided into eight counties consisting of Twality, Yamhill, Clackamas, Champoick (later Marion), Clatsop, Polk, Benton and Linn. He set the government in motion in this unorganized empire.

### Indian Tribes Pacified By General Lane

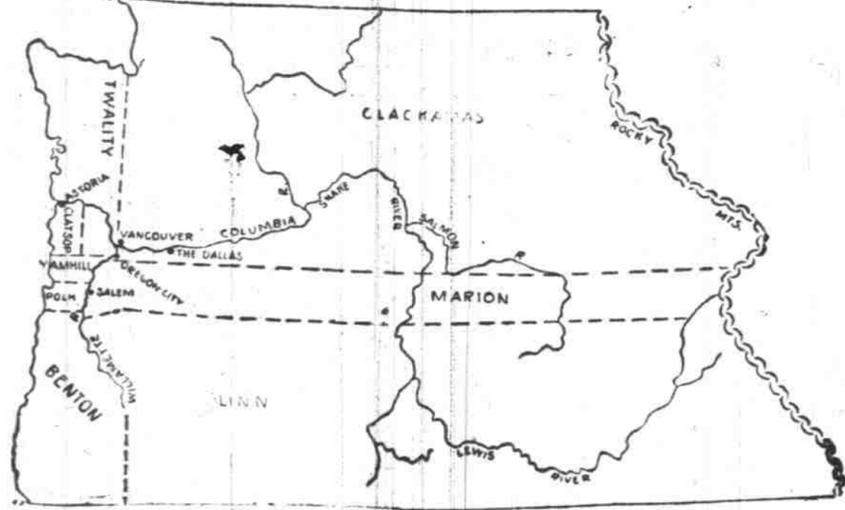
His next and possibly most exacting task was controlling hostile Indian tribes. He had long lived on frontier territory as a pioneer and understood Indians; hence he

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### MAPS REVEAL HOW OREGON TERRITORY BECAME FIVE STATES IN ITS EVOLUTION



OREGON UNDER PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT IN 1843—4 COUNTIES



OREGON TERRITORY, MARCH 3, 1849. GEN. JO LANE, GOVERNOR