

OLD OREGON TRAIL HAS ROMANTIC HISTORY; IS ROUTE CHOSEN BY OX TEAM TOURISTS OF LONG AGO WHEN THEY SOUGHT HOMES IN WEST

Natural Highway Followed in Immigrant Days Now Being Made Right for Motorists.

By Walter Meacham, Secretary Chamber of Commerce, Baker, Oregon.

The history of the Old Oregon Trail is one full of mystery, romance, hardship, faith and endurance. Why so many people left comfortable homes to plunge into the wilderness known as the "Great American Desert" full of hardships and perils, no one can tell.

The history of the world does not record a parallel case of so many people traveling so great a distance as did the pioneers of 1852-3 over the Old Oregon Trail. A part of the Trail was traversed by Lewis and Clark in 1805. Then came the Hunt expedition in 1811-12.

Ten years later a party of trappers found and crossed the South Pass. Then in 1833 Nathaniel J. Wyeth built Fort Hall near the present site of Pocatello, Ida., near the junction of the Port Neuf and Snake rivers. For ten years Fort Hall was the extreme outpost and no wagon had ever ventured beyond that point. Finally in 1843 a thousand men, women and children under the guidance of Dr. Whitman blazed the trail clear through to the Willamette valley and demonstrated that wagons could make the journey.

In 1845-7, the Mormons made their celebrated pilgrimage to the Great Salt Lake. In 1849 came the great gold rush to California. But the greatest of all, the migration that has gone down in history as the greatest movement of people to a common destination, came in 1852 when three hundred thousand men, women and children traversed the length of the Trail from Independence, Missouri, through to the Willamette Valley, Oregon.

Pathway Marked by Graves. The pathway of this great army of homeseekers is marked with the graves of those who fell on the way, victims of cholera and fatigue. It is conservatively estimated that 5000 of

them perished in one year. The wagons stretched for miles, making a trail one hundred feet wide in places ten feet deep, the soil ground out by the iron tires of the wagons and the myriad feet of the cattle and blown away by the winds of the desert.

The dust was deep and stifling, the hardships were almost unendurable but patience, faith and perseverance won and the great Northwest was populated. It is well that we pause a moment and meditate upon the results of this pilgrimage and do honor to those who suffered and made history for our United States. A nation which does not preserve its history and honor the memory of those who did great deeds and helped to preserve the life of that nation, soon perishes from the earth.

It is well for us as Americans and a thinking people, to preserve the history of this great migration and settlement of a wilderness, by properly marking and permanently establishing the name of the Old Oregon Trail which has attached to it the greatest history and sentiment of any road in history.

The fur industry of the North was one of the chief commercial pursuits of the United States and Canada in the early history of this country. The Hudson Bay company was one of the largest fur trading companies on the continent.

In 1787 the Northwest Company was formed and grew very rich and powerful. Later on came the Mackinaw Company which also grew and prospered. The operation of these companies took in a wide scope of country extending far west into American territory. The United States government attempted to trade with the Indians and attended to supplying them all that they needed, but could not compete with the activity and shrewdness of the private companies which were not bound with government red tape. John Jacob Astor, an adopted citizen of this country, engaged in the fur business on a small scale and gradually built up a large and profitable business.

In 1809 he formed the American Fur Company with a capital stock of a million dollars, bought out the Mackinaw Company and formed the Southwest Company. The Northwest coast of America became a great fur gathering section and among the ships which traded along the coast was the Columbia in command of Captain Gray.

Pacific Fur Company Formed. In 1792 Captain Gray discovered the Columbia River, named after his ship. Then in 1805 Lewis and Clark traversed the continent, reached the headwaters of the Columbia and sail-

ed down to the mouth of the river. Mr. Astor conceived the idea of establishing a great trading post at the mouth of the river and tap all of the fur bearing country of the Northwest.

His idea was to establish a line of trading posts from the Missouri to the Columbia and have China as the great mart for the furs obtained. He interested with him Alexander McKay, Duncan McDougal, Donald McKenzie and Wilson Price Hunt. June 23, 1810, the Pacific Fur Company was formed with the above named men as partners of Mr. Astor.

Two expeditions were devised and set on foot, one by sea and one by land to reach the mouth of the Columbia and establish a trading post. The ship Tonquin, under command of Captain Jonathan Thorn, was fitted out for the sea voyage and the land expedition was placed under the command of Mr. Hunt.

Hunt Expedition Formed. Mr. Hunt proceeded to St. Louis, which was then the outpost of civilization, to fit himself out with a company to undertake the toilsome and perilous trip overland through a savage and unknown country.

He was greatly harassed in his undertaking by the Missouri Fur Company which did not relish the thought of a rival company coming into the field.

But by persevering, Mr. Hunt finally gathered together a company of boatmen and hunters with which to make the journey.

Included in his company were such men as Donald McKenzie, Joseph Miller, Robert McLellan, John Day, Ramsay Crooks, Pierre Morion, interpreter, John Bradbury, scientist, Mr. Nuttall, scientist and John Reed, cleric.

In October, 1810, the party left St. Louis and proceeded up the Missouri river in boats, where a winter camp was made.

Early in the spring of 1811, the start was made from Nodawa, there being twenty-six in the party. On the trip up the river great flocks of pigeons were encountered which at times blackened the sky, their numbers were so great.

Frequent desertions were made in the ranks of the little company but recruits were also received as they went along so that the party was enlarged rather than diminished.

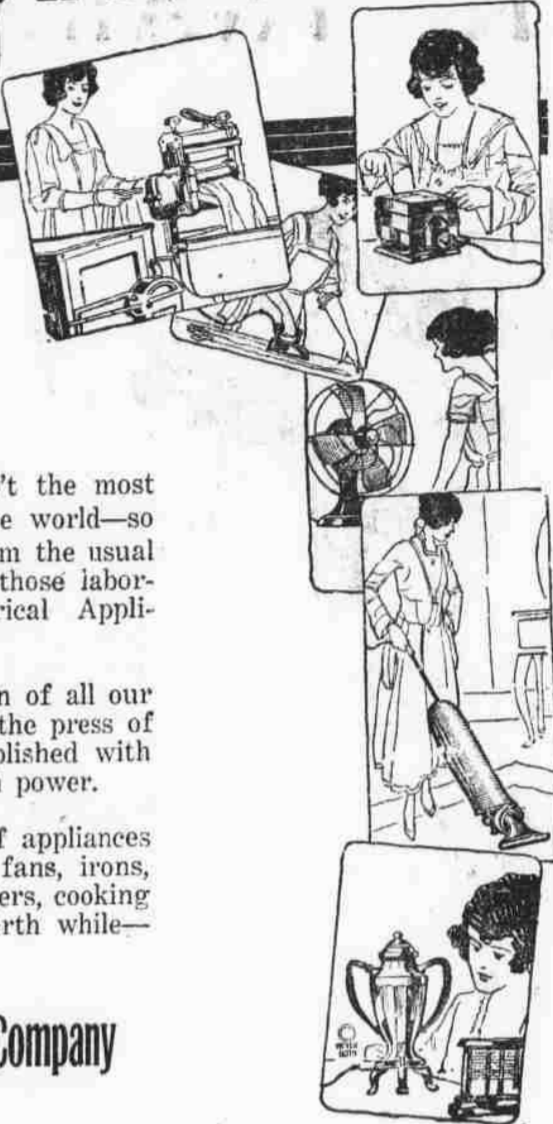
Various tribes of Indians were encountered on the journey up the river. The Omahas were very friendly and traded with the party for such things as both desired.

Benjamin Jones and Alexander Carson, two great hunters, were met and induced to turn back and go with

(Continued on page 11.)



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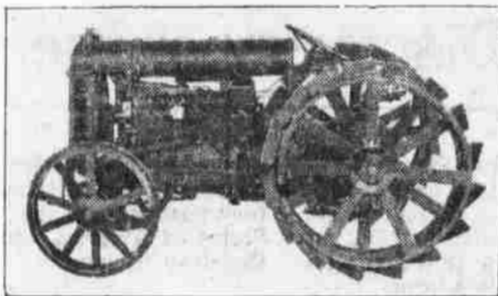
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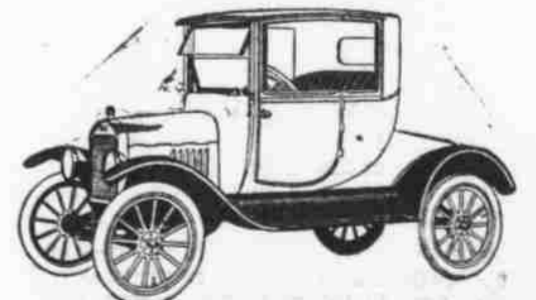
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