

OREGON'S EARLY PIONEERS.

Those Who Prepared the Way for Northwest Civilization.

Special Correspondence, Portland, Oct. 18, 1896.

The misty haze of the past surrounds the period in Oregon history known as the "Pioneer Era." Relocated to the shadowy domain of memory, many of the incidents that were of vast importance in the narrow lives of the frontier settler have become dimmed by time and change, until in some instances the pioneer himself has become bewildered in the attempt to recreate the real from the unreal, of a period widely divided, and constantly receding from the present. Pioneer life in Oregon was indeed a simple drama simply enacted. It had for its stage the broad expanse of hills and valleys; of woods and streams that went to make up the fair proportions of a beautiful wilderness. A genial climate; a fertile soil; a lovely, varying landscape, broad streams and hazy mountain tops, and over all the monotony of isolation such was the Oregon of half a century ago. It cannot be said that the conditions of life in these peaceful wilds were hard. Certainly, as compared to those which confronted the pioneer in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and other states of the middle West, they are plenty—as to privation—as balmy, humid airs are to the biting breath of the bitter frost. The difference between the middle and the West, far before civilization established her methods therein, was that which might be expected to prevail between an inland region where the carriers of commerce were compelled to make their toilsome way over a rude country destitute of highways, and a coast region to which adventurers early made their way, laden with the products of an older civilization. It was thus that immigrants, having made the journey across the continent with ox-teams forty years ago, found in many of the lonely homes of the settlers who had preceded them articles of household furniture such as had not yet reached the portions of the Mississippi valley whence they came; books from Boston, Philadelphia, New York and even from London publishers, and fabrics from the mills of the Atlantic and foreign cities. Money was at first the comparatively plentiful among Oregon pioneers, a statement that while it may be heard with incredulity—is yet well attested by those who bore a part in the border life of both sections. The cabin of the average "donation claim" settler was a primitive structure, patterned after its predecessor in that line in other portions of the country, except that much less care was taken in its construction than was necessary in the colder climates. Primitive as it was, it often did duty for a dwelling long after its owner was, or by the exercise of ordinary thrift should have been able to build a much more commodious structure.

The writer remembers one of these pioneer houses of the thirtieth century visited in 1864. It had been established a number of years previous and was surrounded by a vigorous orchard of "seedling" apple trees, and though the family yet lived in it a new house was nearing completion. Of logs partially hewn, the spaces between well filled with mortar, a wide fireplace of the same material, interwoven with sticks; a single room with a loft overhead, which the children by means of a ladder in one corner, a "lean-to" which served as a kitchen during the milder portion of the year—such were the simple outlines of the building to which one of the early ministers and educators of Oregon brought a young wife from her far eastern home. Here children were born and cradled; across the rude threshold some of the little band were taken by sympathetic neighbors to the graveyard in the stillness of a grave close by, and from thence, just as preparations were almost completed for occupancy of the "new home," the body of the pioneer who had faithfully performed his share of his duty and generation was, to its yet narrower home. There is much that is pathetic in the life that was led in such days and years in the primitive cabin, but hunger never crossed the threshold; want never pined the faces of the merry group of children that called this cabin "home," and there is no evidence that the yearning known by the suggestive name of "homesickness," was greater here than that which has shadowed the hearts of persons who have resided in the order of things as it stands in this instance and exchanged a rude cabin in the wilderness for a mansion in the heart of civilization.

The early settlers of Oregon, however, though blessed in the lines indicated above the pioneers who preceded them and from whom they largely sprang, in the middle West were yet victims of an isolation that was dreary and at times oppressive in the extreme. The "donation land law," framed to induce the settlement of this then more fertile region, was in a degree responsible for this isolation. In giving to the settler 640 acres of land he was obliged the same regulations, scattered markets of those those times, while it made homes a dreary distance apart and schools an impossibility, except in the most primitive sense. The women, from the fact that their lives were more circumscribed, suffered the deprivation of society to a much greater extent than did the men. An illustration in point was furnished by a woman who during five consecutive months spent in a cave, but some twenty miles above the city, in the winter of 1852 could not see a member of her own sex, and was frequently left alone with her 6-year-old child in the solitude of the great forest by which her cabin home was enveloped for several

days together, while her husband and older boys were at work at a distance that would not permit them to return home at the close of the day. Referring to this experience years after she said: "The loneliness of that time was something dreadful, and in looking back over my past life I can recall no moment of greater pleasure than that of one mild, sunny morning toward the close of March, when I looked out and saw a pink bonnet waving through the trees and realized that a woman was coming to make me a visit." She related further that this pleasure was clouded by the reflection that she had to get "dinner for company." So they served baked potatoes with no seasoning but salt, bread without butter, tea without milk or sugar, and for desert, syrup

that had in some manner become sour. The meal really looked so tempting, after an arduous day, so that hunger might make up the lack of seasoning, that no apology for lack of variety in the viands was offered; and as to the rest, there was an abundance that mocked at a hint of want. That it would be a grievous hardship for the people who are reaping what these early settlers sowed to accept the conditions of life that prevailed in pioneer times in Oregon, is doubtless true, but it is equally true that the surviving actors in that far away drama turn with loving thoughts to the scenes in which they bore a brave yet humble part and proclaim the "old days," the happiest of their lives.

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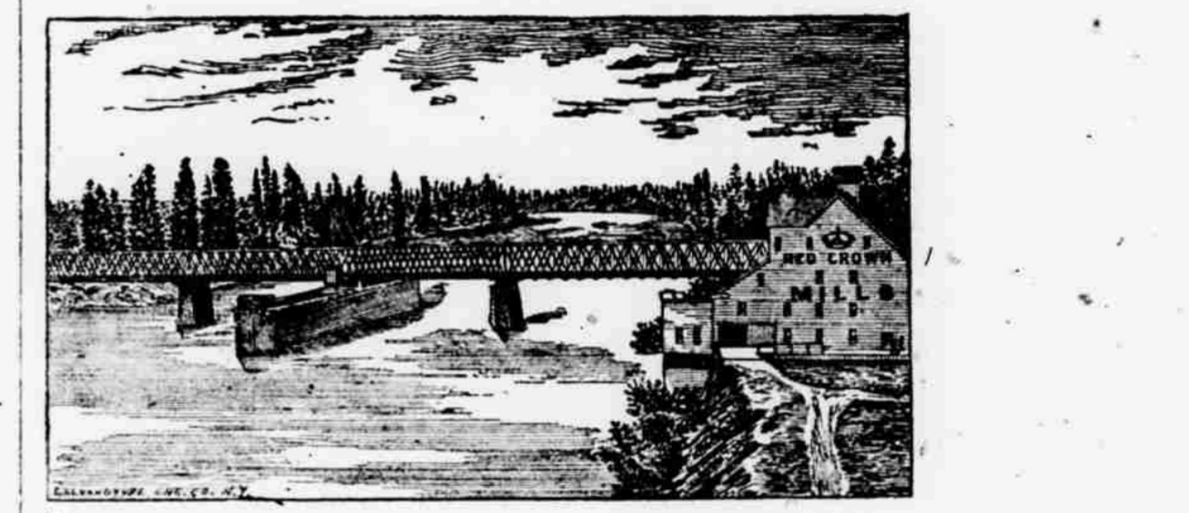
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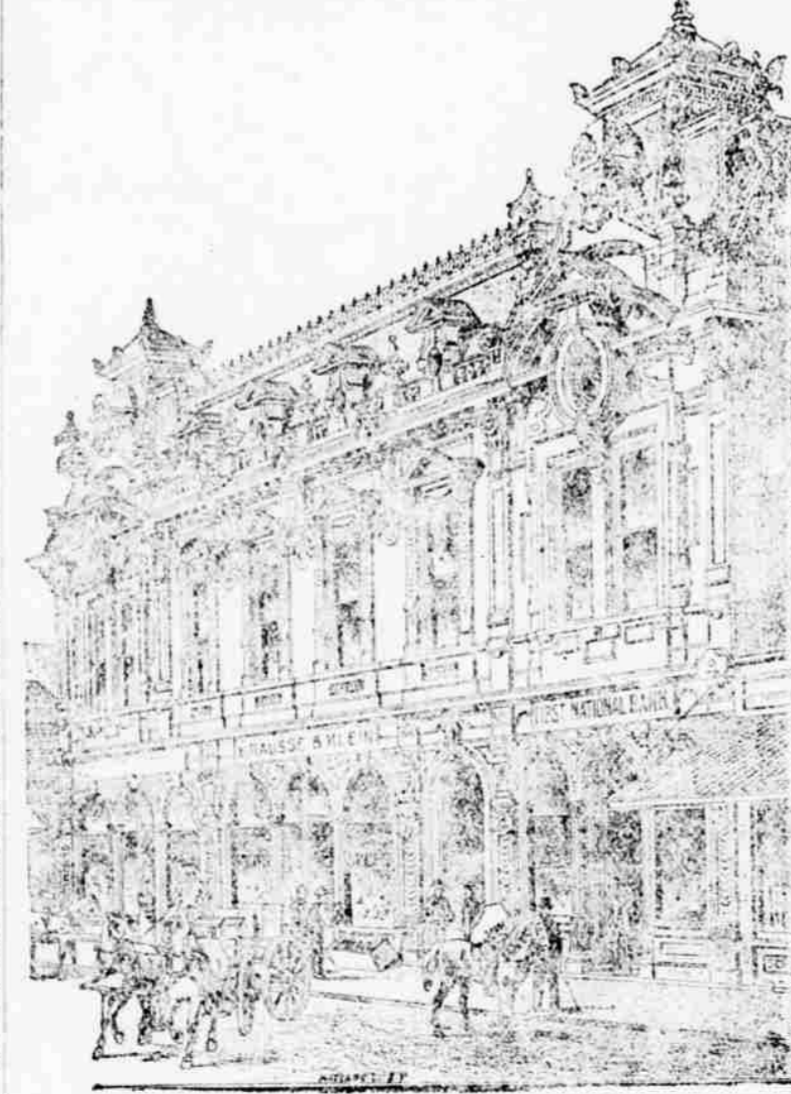
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