HARNEY VALLEY

Its Present, and Its Future Prospects as Presented to Home-Seekers by "The West Shore."

View of the Country that is asking to become a New County.

From The West Shore:

During its last session, Congress passed a bill establishing a new land district in Southeastern Oregon, and by designation of the proper authorities the land office has been located in Harney Valley. At the coming meeting of the Oregon Legislature an effort will be made to have the county of Harney created from the southern portion of Grant county. These facts render Harney Valley an object of special interest to those who are seeking a location in some new portion of the northwest. The valley has a total area of 2,400 square miles, nearly twice the size of Rhode Island, and somewhat larger than Delaware, all inclosed with high spurs of the Blue mountains.

The valley is a comparatively level plain, in the center of which lie two lakes, Harney and Malheur, only a few hundred yards apart and connected by a narrow channel, their united area being about 150 square miles. Into these lakes pour the waters of Silvies and Blitzen rivers, but they have no visible outlet. Their waters are nearly fresh, indicating that they are drained by subterranean channels. This fact seems to have a most beneficial effect upon the soil of the valley, as crops seem to find ample moisture in the ground even in the dryest seasons, and thrive, while other sections with a rainfall as great as that of Harney Valley require surface irrigation for the perfection of crops. One peculiarity of the region bordering immediately upon the lakes is the frequency and distinctness of the mirages pictured by its atmosphere, objects miles away being distinctly reflected thereon.

Silvies river rises in the mountains north of the valley, and flows a distance of eighty miles in a southeasterly direction through the valley, discharging into the lakes. It is a rapid stream, and abounds in fish, including the gamy trout. Blitzen, or Dunder-und-Blitzen, river is fifty miles in length, and flows into the lakes from the southward. With their tributaries and other smaller streams, they pour a large volume of water into the lakes constantly. Irrigation, so necessary in a large portion of the Snake river basin, of which this valley is a part, though having no surface communication by water courses, is not required here, crops reaching the highest perfection without artificial watering.

The soil is similar to that of the celebrated wheat belt at the northwestern base of the Blue mountains, in Walla Walla and Umatilla counties, and though little wheat has been raised as yet, those who have cultivated that cereal are satisfied with the result. Prices of farm products, such as wheat, oats, barley and hay, are high at present, the grain bringing from three to five cents per pound and hay from $12 to $18 per ton. With the advent of a railroad these conditions will be radically changed. There will then be a market for all the grain the valley will produce, but the price will be lowered to that of the general market. In addition to the native grasses upon which stock fatten and thrive, alfalfa, red clover, timothy and red-top grow finely and make an excellent quality of hay. Garden vegetables are large and finely flavored and produce in abundance. Especially the potato reaches great size and perfection. As yet experience has not fully developed the adaptability of the soil and climate to small fruits and berries, but as wild currants, strawberries, etc., are hardy and prolific, the cultivated varieties must necessarily thrive equally as well. Such is the experience of those who have initiated their cultivation. Fruit trees have been set out for more than a year, and as the young trees passed safely thro' the severest winter, last season, ever known in that region, and are thriving at the present time, the entire practicability of fruit culture is not doubted by any. The climate is pleasant and healthful. The winters are cold, and sufficient snow falls to protect crops and supply abundant moisture. The summers are cool and delightful.

Stock raising has always been the chief industry of that region, and was the only one until the past few years, when settlers began to take up homesteads and engage in small farming. As an adjunct to general farming, it will always hold a prominent place, and it will be many years before even the range industry will have been displaced. Cattle, horses, sheep and hogs thrive on the natural grasses and food of the hills and valleys, and, save in exceptional seasons, the cattle pass through the winter in such fine condition that the spring finds them fat enough for the block, while in flavor and texture the meats compare favorably with the best stall-fed beef that reaches the market.

During the past two years the increase in population has been very rapid, and the new comers are of the most desirable class, being farmers with families, men who by energy and good citizenship build up the country and develop its latent powers. They are erecting comfortable houses and barns, chiefly frame structures, and are using rails and wire for fencing. Wells of living water are made in any portion of the valley by digging to a depth of from six to fifteen feet, and the water is excellent for drinking and domestic use. Except along the water courses, which are fringed with a light growth of birch and a dense growth of willows, the valley contains no timber, but the adjacent mountains are covered with a dense growth of pine, fir, juniper, mountain mahogany, etc., and several saw mills there supply the settlers in the valley with lumber at reasonable prices.

At present the settlers of this region communicate with the outside world by means of a wagon road to Baker City, Huntington and Ontario, on the lines of the O. R. & N. Co. and the Oregon Short Line, goods and produce being transported in freight wagons. A tri-weekly mail service is maintained in four directions from Burns, the distributing point. At this place good general stores carry in stock all the commodities found in much larger towns. Here is published THE HERALD, the only newspaper in that region, a live local paper, devoted to the work of making the valley and its resources known to the thousands who are seeking such a place for a home. Harney is the name of another small but growing town.

It will not be long before the period of isolation from the world's markets will be terminated by the construction of a railroad through the heart of the valley. The Oregon Pacific is already pushing eastward through the Cascades from Albany, and within two years, at the latest, the locomotive's whistle will be heard in Harney Valley. When that day arrives, the valley will cease to be "way off" in the mountains, but will be as near market as many older and better known regions equally distant from Portland, but which have earlier enjoyed the good fortune of being reached by those great highways of commerce. Here is to be found the best opportunity now existing in Oregon to secure desirable vacant lands. Nothing but their distance from the usual routes of travel has kept them from being settled upon long ago, and now that the embargo of isolation is so soon to be removed, a great influx of settlers may confidently be predicted. In fact, the tide has already set in, and appearances indicate that when the railroad reaches the valley it will find the lands well occupied and prepared to give it a generous support. Stock and agricultural products will supply a large quantity of freight, and the road will be able to offer two seaports to shippers, one at Portland and the other at Yaquina Bay.

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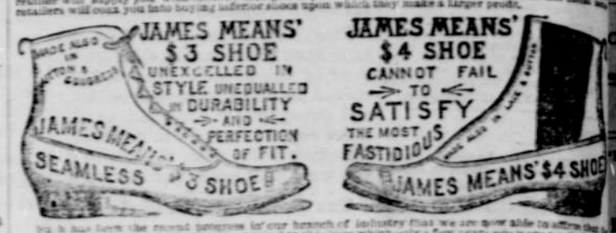

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