

1859

OREGON

1959

CENTENNIAL

Sherman County In 100th Year; First Resident Came In 1860; Toll Collector

This is a centennial year for Sherman county as well as for Oregon. For the state it is celebration of 100 years of political acceptance into the union; for the county it is celebration of 100 years of actual settlement. The years do not exactly coincide but do overlap.

A hundred years ago no one lived in what is now Sherman county; there was not a house in it, no person slept here unless overtaken by darkness and weariness along the trails.

Many had slept here. Emigrants had spent at least one night in the country between the John Day and Deschutes rivers for it was too far for them to travel in one day with the slow transportation of ox-wagon days. A few soldiers on the way to subdue the Cayuses at Walla Walla had spent a night in the county.

Grass Was Wonderful

The grass grew tall, bunch-grass (*agropyrum spikadum*) reached to the stirrups of wagon train scouts and cavalry recruits. Emigrants noted it in their diaries many of which tell of the wonderful grass that sustained and strengthened the oxen, that even in the fall when they traversed this land, stood high on the hills and waved in the winds. It looked like a planted field, as thick as sown oats in Iowa, as tall as wheat in Illinois, waving as did the millet in Germany. It was wonderful. But these emigrants in the tall covered wagons, pulled by tired oxen, had their minds set on the tall trees of the better advertised Willamette valley which were remarkable to the sons of the middle border who had lived their lives on the prairies and were unconsciously hungry for trees and shade.

They soon found the shade too oppressive, the trees too difficult to remove and in twenty years they were ready and anxious to come back over the high Cascades and look for gold in Idaho and the springs where the grass grew green and abundant and the sky was free of shadow and clouds.

Gold & Grass Were Lures

It took something to start them coming. Gold in some cases, elbow room in others, and for some merely love of the open sky.

On the first of 1860 William Graham moved his family across the Deschutes river to become the first man to live in Sherman county. He kept the bridge and his wife served meals to travelers. Travel was picking up. For some time a stage line had been operated desultorily between The Dalles and Walla Walla without much business for few wanted to go on that route.

But gold had been discovered in Idaho and gold was—and is—a lure that attracts. The foot-loose and fancy free came by the hundreds and the stage business expanded. George Masiker was hired to move to Sand Springs

and build a stage station to care for the horses and accommodate the miners going to the east. Drivers pushed their stage teams from The Dalles to Sand Springs where they changed horses before shoving on to the crossing of the John Day where another station was established. Masiker had horses harnessed and waiting and his wife had food ready and waiting for the drivers and passengers. Feed for the horses was cut from the grass on the hillsides or hauled from Gould's meadow to the south where Almon Gould had taken a home-

stead after President Lincoln had signed the homestead act in 1862.

The desire for gold drove most of them on, as the lure of the tall trees had lured them on before; instead of pressing to the west they pressed to the east in search of some easy fortune.

Stockmen Lasted 20 years

A few stockmen brought horses and cattle to the tall grass on the hills, some of them owned by the herders and some owned by business men who had money to invest. It was an interesting time for Sherman county, this period

between 1860 and 1880. Horses and cattle ran on the grass and grew fat and sleek on the spring growth and stayed strong through the winters when the grass was dry.

A few stockmen took up land, settling in the draws where the grass stayed greenest. Finnegan, Donnel, Helm, Pearson, Corum, Barnum, Engleman, Gordon, came to join Masiker and Jesse Eaton who had settled in Spanish Hollow in 1866. Their stock made little impression on the grass and they moved about at will, no restrictions being upon them.

Bridge Across River Appears On Way

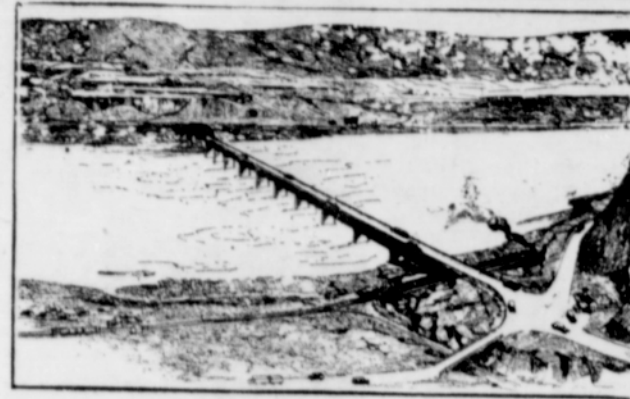
Since 1922 when the Sherman Highway was built from the Columbia river south through Sherman county there has been a great local interest in it which resulted in the Highway 97 association. It has not always been active but never dead. Included in its membership have been county officials and Chamber of Commerce directors from Weed, California to Canada. Lately it has been incorporated into the Caribou Trail association which feels interest in a highway from Alaska to Mexico and works actively for its completion.

That such a road should run the length of Sherman county is natural for the route through Sherman county offers by far the best way to reach the central Oregon highlands from the Columbia river. There are fewer hills and fewer turns on Highway 97 than on any other route, making it a natural truck route and a straighter, faster road for tourists.

Interest in a bridge across the Columbia river at Maryhill or Biggs comes naturally in the planning for an international highway. Years ago George Updegraff, Ed McKee and Zolo Brooks headed an organization for Maryhill bridge. It was too early to win success. But the idea prevailed.

In recent years with constant work being done by B. H. Roberson and Judge Vernon Miller a bridge at Biggs Rapids seems assured. The state of Washington has obtained a permit to build such a bridge from the U. S. engineers and the Washington Toll Bridge authority has planned a bond issue to pay for it with hopes to begin sale of bonds within a year and complete construction early in the next decade.

When it is done and the Sherman Highway realigned this coun-



This rather quaint drawing of the first projected Maryhill bridge proves the long time interest in the improvement.

Moro Motors

Repair

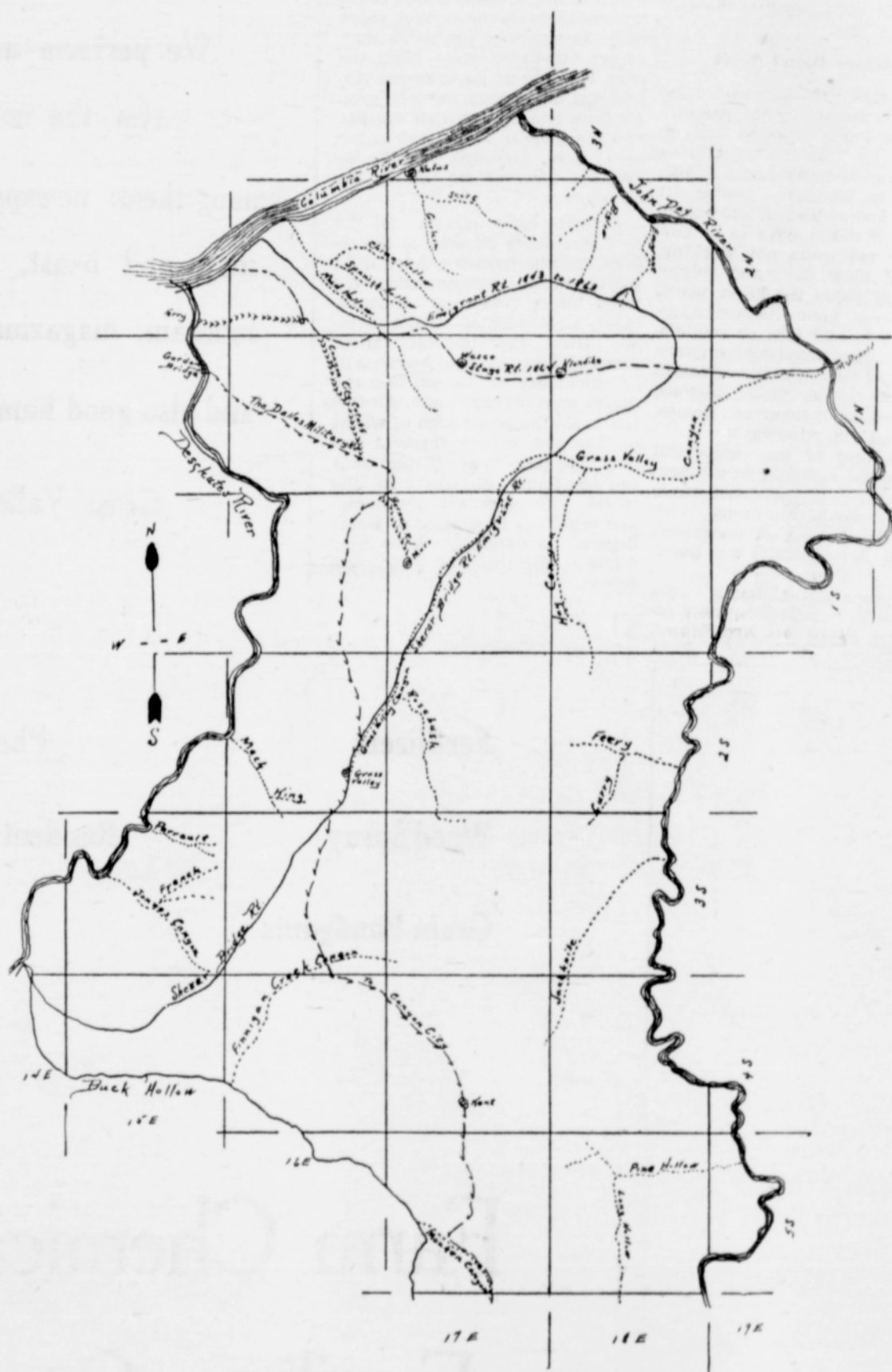
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