

Eugene Skinner

Skinner's Cabin - Eugene, Oregon

1847 September 18 (Saturday) - A Letter from Eugene Skinner was published in a Janesville, Rock County, Wisconsin newspaper.¹

"FROM OREGON.

"Mr. **Skinner**, who left the States in 1845, writes under date of April 8, 1847 -

"After a journey of nearly seven months he arrived at Capt. Sutter's in California, on the 25th of October, 1845, where he spent the winter. In the spring he visited the bay of San Francisco, and returned with a view of moving his family to that place. But owing to the unsettled state of affairs in California, the emigrants had concluded to remove to Oregon, and he concluded to accompany them.

"They left the rendezvous on the Sacramento on the 8th of May, and reached the settlement in Oregon after a travel of 32 days. After two weeks exploring the country, in company with two other gentlemen, he made a claim on the principal west fork of the Willamette, 125 miles above the falls and 30 miles from the nearest neighborhood, in latitude about 43 degrees.

"The road from Oregon to California, and the southern or Applegate route from Fort Hall, crosses Mr. S's claim. This southern route, Mr. S. says, will soon be the principal one from the States to Oregon.'

"Of Oregon Mr. S. says: -

"I do not like this country as well as California. As to climate, there is too much wet weather in winter. There are from five to seven months rain every year, with few exceptions, and these exceptions are worse than rain. One of them we experienced the past winter, 15 tracking snows, one of which was 15 inches deep, and remained five weeks, with the thermometer at zero; and I may safely say that over 2000 head of neat cattle died for want of feed in the Willamette valley alone, as no one prepares any kind of food for his cattle or horses. - Many horses died, and hogs without number - the Indians lost very many horses.

"Cattle will be very high. Cows and calves are worth from \$25 to \$30 in cash. Wheat is also high, owing to the amount fed to stock during the winter. Many, very many will be hungry before next harvest. I bought wheat last fall at 50 cents per bushel - now it is worth \$1 cash. Beef 3 to 5, Bacon 12 to 15 cents. Vegetables there are none in the country. Potatoes last fall worth \$1 per bushel. This is a poor country for all kinds of garden vegetables, as a general thing.

"There are some locations in the valley where good gardens can be made without irrigation, but not as a general thing. This is a fine grazing and wheat country, but when you say this you say all. It is and always will be the most unhandy country for a man to live in that ever was.

Eugene **Skinner** left the States (Wisconsin) one year following the death of his father, Joseph Skinner, who was born in East Windsor, Connecticut March 25, 1772, and died in Hawkingsmills, Canada January 4, 1844.

¹ The Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Rock County, Wisconsin, Saturday, September 18, 1847, page unk., cc. 3, 4.

"The Bays and Harbors are all in one end of the country, and the entrance to them bad for eight months in the year, which will always prevent this being a great exporting country; and since the U. S. Government have laid siege to our sister country, California, Oregon will settle but slowly until that beautiful and productive country is all settled. There they have one of the best harbors in the world - the Bay of San Francisco, with an open coast the whole length of the country, and two large navigable streams passing into the interior. With the best of soil for wheat and capable of supporting a greater amount of stock than any other part or portion of the continent of the same extent, and by irrigation will produce all of the necessaries as well as many of the luxuries of life. The climate is always mild in winter, but rather warm in the summer - that is, the Sacramento and St. Joachim Valley. In the coast country the climate is fine in summer, but very warm in winter

"Oregon is an iron bound coast the whole length south of the Columbia, has but one or two passes that you can reach the ocean, and no bays or harbors south of the Columbia. It is hot in summer and wet in winter, but not cold, as a general thing. The past winter has been the coldest known by any white man. The Columbia was frozen over so that loaded teams passed for some time! Where I have located, two degrees south of the falls, those that staid there last winter to take care of the stock (350 head left there by the emigrants last fall,) say that the snow was but eight inches deep, and laid only three days, and that none of their cattle died, although very poor when I left there in Nov. and Dec. It is fifty-five miles south of this settlement.* * * (*sic*).

"Should life and health be spared, I shall return to California, but never to the States. Here a poor man can live, and here a weakly man can live, as the little labor he is able to do, is for himself and family, not for his stock, as there is not one winter in twenty that cattle would eat the best of hay if they had it. Grass, as a general thing, is better in winter than summer. It commences growing as soon as the fall rains set in, and is ripe by the first of July, after which time, it becomes dry like hay, and continues so until the rains commence again, at which time cattle get very fat. -

"This country is well adapted for sheep, and was I coming from the States again, I should drive sheep instead of neat cattle. They are worth from \$5 to \$7 per head here, and but very few in the country, except Spanish which are very inferior in size and coarse wool.

"Bees would be a good article to fetch - I think they would do well here. - They could have been sold here for \$1000 per stand, as several are wanting to buy, and have said they would pay that, or more, rather than not have them. In fact, there is nothing that the emigrant can fetch with them, that is not worth from 1 to 200 per cent more here than in the States, and as they can just as well bring all the necessaries for house keeping, they do wrong in not bringing them. You can bring everything except chairs, bureaus, and cupboards, and it is desirable to bring a sufficiency

of crockery and tin ware, light castings, copper or brass kettles, as all these are very high here. The last year's emigrants, many of them brought clocks, looking glasses, crockery, securely packed (in light but strong boxes) in flour, safe and sound. The emigrants on the south route, brought all their kitchen fixtures.

"I think many might better themselves by a trip to the far west, say Oregon or California, and if any are in poor health they would be well paid by coming, as there are many, very many, women in this country, that had not been able to do any kind of work for years, are now hearty and able to work all the time - in fact, have never seen a sick day since they came to the country.

"The best portions of Oregon still lies south of me. The Umpqua, Rogues river, Clamet Valleys, all of the best quality of soil, and decidedly the best grazing portion of Oregon, being in latitude 42 and 43 degrees, it will never be so subject to cold weather as the part of Oregon that is already settled. It is good for wheat, peas and potatoes.

"The Hudson Bay company have a fort on the Umpqua river, some 40 miles west of the road, at which place they have a fine farm, with some 600 head of cattle. Last year they raised a great supply of wheat, peas, potatoes, garden vegetables. At this place persons wishing to settle in the valley can obtain (by order from the chief Factor, Dr. McLaughlin,) all their supplies for the first year, as well as all the seed wheat that they might wish to sow or plant." *(The end.)*