

Brooks Historical Society

Newsletter

2008 Vol. 3

We gather, preserve and make available material relating to the history of Brooks and neighboring communities having natural, economical and cultural affinity

1812-1840 The Period of Trappers and Missionaries Turned Farmers

Mid-Willamette Valley
Before Statehood

part three of four

The 1812 Astor Expedition under Wilson Price Hunt can be credited for having opened up the Oregon trail from the Missouri River to the mouth of the Columbia River. These men were trail breakers. Besides the Fort at Astoria, they built other sites for fur trapping and farming in the Willamette Valley, thus establishing the U.S. claim to occupation in the Northwest.

In 1812 the Willamette Post was set up three miles up the river from Champoeg. It was under J. C. Halsy who sent with William Wallace and 14 other men to select a site, erect buildings, trade for furs and provide provisions for Ft. Astoria. It was in operation until 1824.

In 1813 a small group under Wallace forged further south to near current Salem to do more hunting and particularly to farm for vegetables with more sustenance than the limited diet of fish and turnips grown in Astoria. This became known as Wallace Prairie.

The Stuart Party, part of the Astor expedition, returned to St. Louis in 1813 and reported that wagons could be brought across the continent.

Nathaniel Wyeth came west to Oregon in 1832 on a trading venture, but he is credited with establishing the claim of the U.S. in this country. In the 1834 trip he brought with him Rev. Jason Lee and his party of five who were looking for a location for a mission to administer to the local Indians. Dr. McLaughlin invited Rev.

Lee to travel on south down the Willamette River where land was available beyond the small farms of his former employees. Lee chose an open area of bottom lands where the river was fordable and the land easily tilled (Wheatland.) As soon as Lee's small party had erected a few buildings and cultivated enough acres to provide food, Lee returned East for re-enforcements to carry on with this mission of teaching and preaching, as well as building and farming. He needed these specialists and families in order to create a community and reach out to the natives and his French neighbors. A ship-load of men, their families and tools came in 1837 and a second in 1840.

In 1836 William A. Slacum, on a mission of the U.S. Government, held a meeting at Champoeg regarding bringing in cattle from California to alleviate the Fort Vancouver control over the farmers. He also addressed the advantages if the U.S. Government should take possession of the area. The result was a petition to the Congress of the United States requesting help with the protection of its code of laws and indicating a desire to become its citizens.

Filled with enthusiasm after hearing Rev. Lee's description of Oregon at a fund raising lecture in Peoria in 1838, a patriotic group of young men organized the Peoria Party to colonize and take possession of this fair territory for the American flag. After an arduous trip by way of the Santa Fe trail, four arrived in 1840, at the same time as the Methodist missionaries on the ship Lausanne. One of these four was Joseph Holman who joined the Methodist group as a teacher. He became a well-known business man in the development of Salem. Robert Shortress finished his trip from Peoria on his own thru' the winter, finally reaching the Willamette settlement in April 1840. He was a strong force in petitioning the U.S. Congress to support the American contingencies and drive out the British.

TRAPPERS TURNED FARMERS

Many of the Astorian trappers and hunters were familiar with the Willamette Valley's fertile soils and climate. When the supply of Beaver pelts grew scarce they asked Dr. John McLoughlin to be allowed to farm around Champoege rather than return to the winter rigors of Eastern Canada with their mixed-blood families. This land was open, easy to farm and accessible to the river. Wm. Cannon, Etienne Lucier and Pierre Belleque had picked out homesites earlier but only started farming in 1828. Joseph Gervais, George Gay, John Toupin with Marie Dorion were others who tilled the soil on their small farms. The Indian wives and mixed breed children, called Metis, settled in.

Champoege was important in the Metis destiny. The closeness of the Chinook Indian wives bonded the families of the former Astorians, such as Etienne Lucier, Pierre Belleque, Joseph Gervais, Andre Longtain, Louis Labonte, Jean Baptiste McKay. As settlements multiplied, the area was soon being called the French Prairie. French was also the commonly spoken language.

In 1833 there were 51 adult males living in the Valley, 23 were Canadian trappers, and 18 American settlers. Ten of these were Protestant Missionaries. Concerned with their influence, the retired Canadians sent petitions in 1834 and in 1835 to the Sea of Red River for priests. Two were sent, The Rev. Frances N. Blanchet and Rev. Domeste Demers, arriving in Oregon in November 1838. They started services in St. Paul in January 1839. The Catholic Missionaries began legitimizing long-standing marital relationships. As the fur brigades worked the rivers and steams westward it was common to take wives from the local tribes. They had played an important part in the fur business, providing for the men and curing the pelts as they were brought in.

Now it was important that the women add to their education and understanding of their religion. Educating the children (Metis) was imperative as their way of life was changing and new trades had to be learned.

As the white population increased and efforts were made to organize and establish rules of law, some of the French and their wives were not comfortable with the intrusion and dilution of their community. They were willing to sell their farms and return to communal tribal life.

The French men, their wives and Metis children who stayed were determined to integrate into the growing American community. With solidly established Catholic

churches as their foundations, they successfully resisted the social inundation and made their French names respected.

A HAPPY REPORT

It was a delight to see so many Aspinwall Families take the interest and time to visit the Brooks Historical Society on Sunday afternoon, June 22nd to honor the Aspinwall Pioneers. It was a true pleasure to meet such lovely people, all interested in this wide-reaching family. There were the local families of Britt who had a big persona in the Brooks community. It was too bad more of the Salem-centered family members were not able to come. But we were richly blessed with visitors from up and down the Valley and beyond.

Represented were not only the Brooks patriarch Ashley Marion Aspinwall with five branches of his 11 children, but offspring of his eldest sister and two of his brothers who also ventured west from Wisconsin early in the 20th Century.

They were all a delightful group of two or three generations who came to share information and get to know more of their long distance aunts, uncles and cousins. It was a very pleasant and successful afternoon after over a year of preparation. We are indeed proud of the Aspinwall Pioneer Family who pioneered in agriculture with berries, tree fruits, cooperatives and canneries/dehydrators, from marketing large scale to local produce stands.

Much more valuable information was learned from the visitors that helps complete the connection of the various branches of the family and their businesses. For anyone wishing information or has family information and photos to share, please contact Dorene Standish.



BY THE NUMBERS

On Sunday, June 22, the Brooks Historical Society celebrated its annual Pioneer Family of the Year. This year the honor went to the extended family of Ashley Marion and Ellen E. Aspinwall. The Family came to Brooks Oregon in 1902 from Wisconsin. The nine sons and two daughters, as well as three of the 10 siblings of Ashley who also came west soon after Ashley, made their contributions to the community of Brooks and then Salem. The farthest to come were the Ginns from Alaska and the closest just two miles north on Waconda Road.

Ashley was a farmer as were four of his sons. Within four years they had large fields of the newly introduced Loganberries, including their own berry dehydrator as the berries were both canned and dried for marketing. One berry field was over 200 acres, the largest in Oregon.

The berry and fruit producing continues today with produce markets operated by Clyde Aspinwall out on High-



way 22, 5152 Salem-Dallas Highway, and by Richard Jones at 10325 River Road NE.

The guests at the Aspinwall reception registered in the guest book according to the family tree, starting back with Delatus. Four children of Delatus and Lovina, who themselves never left Wisconsin, were represented here. There were five from No. 1 Emma Sias, 11 from #4 Joel, three from #7 David and 10 from #8 Ashley, 29 in all,

although some might not have registered. They came from Alaska (Astoria), Albany, Aumsville, Banks, Beaverton, Corvallis, Dallas, Jefferson,



Keizer, Lake Oswego, Portland, Unity, Vancouver WA and Woodburn.

Hosting the event were eight members of the Society - RaVerta Corbett, Frank Cunningham, Dorene Standish, Adele Egan, Marilyn Barner, Louis Sowa, Jane Anderson, Marie and Dan Madson. There was welcoming address by RaVerta Corbett, refreshments of cake, coffee and punch, and a loud speaker system courtesy of Louis Sowa so those enjoying the good weather outside could share the program. A genealogy chart along two walls helped us all keep the families straight, thanks to Sheryl Hughes. Coordinator of the family genealogy books and the celebration was Dorene Standish.

GREAT OREGON STEAM-UP

There was a very good article in the July 2008 issue of the *Northwest Senior & Boomers News* by Gloria Clark.

Some highlights from this article:

There are 13 independent museums at Antique Powerland Museums (APMA). Visitors get a history lesson in a fairgrounds atmosphere. APMA will be putting on the 38th annual "Steam-Up" on the last weekend in July and the first weekend in August.

Antique Powerland has the only Caterpillar museum in the world. Much of the equipment at APMA actually works unlike at the Smithsonian.

Circling the property is a railroad that the public can ride during the steam-up.

The 1890 Brooks railroad depot was moved here intact. The depot is painted a bright yellow which draws attention to the historic building.

Every summer 24,000 people attend the Steam-UP. Increasingly there are more families, baby strollers becoming common.

800 volunteers, many over 60, keep APMA in operation. Currently 14 organizations collaborate in bringing historically accurate activities to APMA.

I'm surprised at how many people I meet that have not been to Antique Powerland, many have not heard of it. So spread the word about APMA and especially the Brooks Historical Society.

Please welcome new members

Carolyn Jones
Bob Ginn
Sheryl Ginn

Brooks Historical Society

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MISSION STATEMENT

The objective of the Brooks Historical Society and Depot Museum is to be educational, to stimulate an interest in, and a knowledge of, the history of Brooks, Oregon, and the surrounding area.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Adult Member ----- \$12.00

Student Membership ----- \$ 5.00
(Elementary and High School)

Business Membership ----- \$30.00

Donation ----- \$

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/zip: _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Checks should be written to
Brooks Historical Society
Mail to: PO Box 9265
Brooks, OR 97305

OFFICERS and BOARD

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MEETINGS

The Brooks Historical Society meets at the Brooks Depot Museum at 10AM the first Saturday of the month.

Directions to the museum at Antique Powerland:
From I-5 - take Exit 263 -- go west approx. 1/4 mile
to: Antique Powerland 3995 Brooklake Road,
Brooks, OR 97303