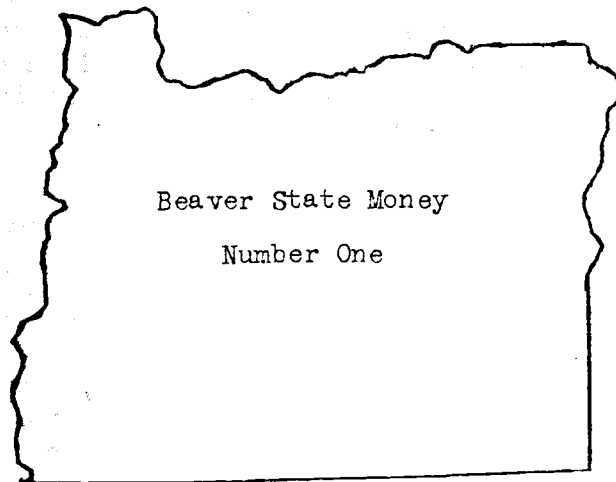


OREGON ODDITIES
AND
ITEMS OF INTEREST



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The Federal Writers' and Historical Records Survey Projects
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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION OF OREGON
409 Elks Building
Portland, Oregon

The items in this bulletin, selected from the material compiled by the Writers' Project and the Historical Records Survey of the Works Progress Administration, are representative of the significant collections being made by these nation-wide programs.

The Historical Records Survey is inventorying all sources of early Oregon history, including county and state records; town and church archives; historic cemeteries; old manuscripts and imprints; old printing presses; monuments and relics; private diaries, letters, and memoirs; historic buildings; and Indian records and lore.

The chief undertaking of the Works Progress Administration Writers' Project has been the American Guide Series of Books. In Oregon as in all other states the work includes the state Guide, designed to acquaint Americans with America and to present to the visitor the history, industry, recreational advantages and scenic attractions of the state. The Oregon Guide, now in the final stages of editing will soon be added to the list of those already published which includes Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture; Maine: A Guide "Down East"; Massachusetts: A Guide to its Places and People; New Hampshire: A Guide to the Granite State; Washington: City and Capital; Philadelphia: A Guide to the Birthplace of a Nation; Delaware: A Guide to the First State; Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State; Rhode Island: A Guide to the Smallest State; South Dakota: A South Dakota Guide; North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State; Vermont: A Guide to the Green Mountain State.

In addition to all the state guides, interesting publications now available include American Stuff; Cape Cod Pilot; Hoosier Tall Stories; The Hopi; Italians of New York; New Orleans City Guide; Whaling Masters; Who's Who in the Zoo; and Wisconsin Indian Lore.

Publications now in preparation by the Oregon Writers' Project include the Oregon Guide, an Oregon Almanac for 1940, Old Towns of Oregon, and Fire Prevention in Portland.

SPECIAL NOTICE

Oregon Oddities Radio Series

Beginning in January, 1939, on your local radio station. Further notice in forthcoming issues of Oregon Oddities and in your local newspaper.

INDIAN MONEY

In Oregon many objects have served as money. Long before white men had discovered this coast and set about methodically to plunder it of furs, Indians had their money. It was called hiqua by the natives, and subsequently has been called centalia by ethnologists, because it consisted of small conical sea shells, shaped like sharp teeth. These shells were strung on rawhide strings and used not only for money but for decoration of the person. He who owned many strings of hiqua was accounted a rich man and he who owned none was poor indeed. Hiqua was obtained from British Columbia and used by all the tribes along the northwest coast. Astucca Indians at Neskowin told that one of their tribesmen, by fasting, prayer and magical incantations, had been able to increase the amount of his hiqua, but most of them depended upon trade or war to provide them this coveted shell money.

When white men anchored first in Oregon bays, astonishing the Indians with white awning canvas on huge ships, they delivered to the natives, in exchange for gun, bright blue beads. These were so plentiful that within a short time they almost superseded hiqua. Lewis and Clark told that their starving men were unable to buy food from the Chinooks except when they offered the blue bead belt owned by Kacajawa. Astor's fur traders used blue beads, recording in their account books so many "fathoms of blue Canton beads" exchanged for peltries. Indian grave excavations not only yield many blue beads but often the metal tokens which were given out by the Hudson's Bay Company. These tokens were promises to pay or to redeem in merchandise from the company stores. The Northwest Fur Company, which preceded the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon and was eventually merged with the latter, issued metal tokens bearing the image of the beaver, the small animal on which the fur trade prospered. Their employees accepted these in place of money and used them in the same manner they would money.

PIONEER BARTER

Money facilitates trade, but it is not a requisite. It is merely a convenience. Money is not to be had men exchange products directly. This is called barter. Trade between Indians and white men in which a beaver skin was exchanged for a scarlet coat was barter. On the company

accounts, however, the business was entered in pounds sterling and shillings. In pioneer days Oregon settlers not only used this kind of trading, in which commodities were exchanged and money names figured, but they often resorted to true barter. A yoke of oxen might be traded for a cabin, a pair of buckskin gloves accepted for a scrap of iron, or labor taken for a quantity of grain.

One of the most interesting examples of true barter in Oregon is furnished by the diary of William Barclay, now owned by Mrs. E. L. Ryan of Junction City. In it is recorded:

Debit	Credit
1844-55 Account of F. L. Matthews	
6-1/3 bu. wheat-----	by making 1 axel
1 sythe blade-----	by fixing cradle
	for sythe
3 days harvesting----	making five shirts,
	1 pair pantaloons
one hog-----	six days harvesting
three dollars,	
shooting match-----	1855
54 pounds pork-----	two chairs

March
1 washing tub
making 1 pair pantaloons
making one axel

Terry Brown of Corvallis has in his possession an account kept by S. K. Brown in 1848. Part of it reads:

"Jan. 16, 1848. Michael Ridenour and Solomon K. Brown furnished one ox to the Callapooies Indians for land laying on the Willamette River between Mary's River and Long Tom Creek. \$25.00."

This, of course, did not establish title to the land, but was an effete barter, which indicated the value of that intangible quality so often figuring in property deals called "good will".

The necessity for barter is suggested in a promissory note executed in Jackson County in 1855 and now in the county clerk's files. It reads:

"Five months after the 28th day of October, A. D. 1855, we, Isaac Constant, William Allen, and John McCall, President, Secretary, and Directors of the Eagle Mill Company of Jackson County, Oregon Territory, promise to pay Thomas Brothers and Company or order the sum of Sixteen Thousand dollars---the same to be paid in Superfine flour delivered at the Eagle

all--in good merchantable order in quar-
barrel sacks--at the price of two dol-
and fifty cents per sack."

In recalling the use of barter in early
Oregon, Medorem Crawford said:

...At these places, especially at the
falls and Salem, many improvements were
made, and employment was given at
wages to all who desired to work. Pay-
was made in lumber and flour and from
mills at Salem, cattle and horses
their herds, and orders on the mis-
stores at the falls, kept by Hon.
George Abernethy. There was no money in
country, in fact I do not remember
a piece of money of any description
more than a year after my arrival. A
financial condition was based upon
cattle, horses, and credit on the
Hudson's Bay Co.'s or Abernethy's books.
these he could procure everything
was purchasable in the country.....
of our clothes came from the Hudson's
Co., and was all of one size and said
have been made to fit Dr. McLoughlin,
was a very large man."

of Crawford himself J. W. Nesmith gave
interesting account, telling of his as-
sociation with Newell and Cook in a monop-
of the transportation business around
falls at Oregon City.

Their jointly acquired wealth must
amounted to \$500 or \$600 in trade.
trade, because there was no money
the country. It consisted of beaver
skins, buckskins, wheat, shingles, hoop-
poles, salt salmon, and saw logs.

Until the latter part of the year 1848,
we began to receive returns from the
California gold mines, there was no money
circulation in the country. During
first five residences in Oregon, three
American dollars was all the money I re-
ceived or handled."

The universal use of barter is best ex-
plified by advertisements such as the
following, which were current in the Ore-
gon Spectator in 1846.

"The Subscriber, having permanently
located in Oregon City, for the purpose of
carrying on the tanning business solicits
the patronage of the citizens of Oregon.
Persons wishing to purchase sole leather,
harness leather, skirting, saddle rigging,
or bridle filling, will call at the tan-
nery. Merchantable trade orders of sol-
vent merchants, and beef hides, will be
received in exchange."

"John Travers and Wm. Glasco, having
associated themselves together in manu-
facturing hats at Oregon City, are now
ready to supply their friends and cus-
tomers with hats manufactured in Oregon.
Although profits are small, they confi-
dently hope, by their prompt attention
to business, to be able to furnish hats
to the Oregon citizens at reduced prices.

"Wool, beaver, otter, raccoon, wild-
cat, muskrat, mink, prairie wolf, and fox
skins will be taken in exchange for hats."

WHEAT MONEY

In 1845 the legislature of the Pro-
visional Government passed a law designed
to make legal tender of a variety of com-
modities. This was, of course, in addi-
tion to regular United States monies, men-
tion of which, was a courtesy, since, as
Nesmith and Crawford said, there was no
actual coin in the country.

The legislature ordered that "avail-
able orders, wheat, hides, tallow, beef,
pork, butter, lard, peas, lumber, or
other articles of export of this terri-
tory shall at their current value be
legal tender in payment of all demands
in this territory, where no special con-
tract has been made between the parties.

"Provided, the same be delivered at
such points on the navigable streams, or
such other places as may be established
depots for such articles."

This law, however, did not receive the
governor's approval. The next session he
addressed his reason to the assembly,
saying:

"Wheat, in my opinion, should be the
only article used in this country as
legal tender in addition to gold and sil-
ver. It is at present the staple article
of our country, can be procured by all
the settlers in abundance, can be readily
disposed of by the merchants and others,
and is not a perishable article."

According to this suggestion the leg-
islature did pass such a law. Wheat was
accepted as legal tender. Curious evi-
dence of this remains in a promissory
note given in October, 1846. It reads:

"I promise to pay Alex McKay 600
bushels of wheat in October, 1846 payable
to the Hudson's Bay Company. John
McPherson". Across the back of the note
is written:

"Please pay the bearer Dec. 18, 1845
Alexander McKay."

During the next year this note passed

one person to another until it came to the possession of Sidney W. Moss who had to collect on March 6, 1847. Although the record does not state the fact, apparently obtained a judgment against McPherson and attempted to collect. The appraisers enumerated McPherson's property and set a value upon it, not in wheat, but in dollars and cents, which Moss could not collect. It consisted of a silver watch, a wooden clock, a "rifle gun", and many cows and horses, but not one bushel of wheat.

Although it was abandoned as legal tender by repeal of the law in 1847, wheat was used to settle accounts as late as 1872 when John R. Wilson settled his debt to the Justice Mercantile Co., of Yamhill, with 2 bushel of wheat at 65¢ per bushel.

GOLD MONEY

The discovery of gold in California took hundreds of men from Oregon. Farmers, traders, and millmen deserted their work and rushed to the gold fields. If they struck gold they expressed it to their homes in varying quantities to pay their debts, or, after a few months, returned all-laden with it. Eliza Finley Brandon, whose father built at Crawfordville, the first grist mill in the vast territory between Oregon City and Sacramento, says of her father's experience:

"...On the day that the mill was completed he ground wheat in the forenoon, and in the afternoon he mounted a horse and rode away to the mines.

"Father was quite successful at the mines. Frequently he would send back gold dust to my mother to be used in paying off his debts. When the settlers first heard that she was receiving gold dust they were all anxious to see it. Each man who came could pour a little of the dust into his palm and finger it over, then pour it back into the pouch. This was very wasteful, for a little would always stick to the hand. At last my mother worked out a scheme to prevent this. She never kept the dust in her possession a moment longer than was necessary. Whenever she received a shipment of gold she would notify all the people to come and present their bills. Upon the stated day she would portion out the dust in equitable payments as long as it lasted. She made a rule never to keep any over from day to day. If a man failed to come at the appointed time he must wait until the next shipment to receive his pay. One man disregarded her rule, and came a day late, in-

sisting upon payment. She told him he must be there at the appointed time; that all the gold was gone. He was very much put out and went away complaining: 'Well, I'm just disappointed on every hand.'

Not all persons who had gold dust owned scales to weigh it. Giving or receiving value was often purely a matter of chance. In passing from hand to hand or from poke to poke, there was great loss. The demand for money made from the dust became so insistent that the Provisional Legislature passed a coinage act. In the meantime, however, the Oregon Exchange Company decided not to wait, but to provide coined money in five and ten dollar denominations. The design selected was, appropriately enough, the beaver, something like that used on the old Northwest Fur Company's trade tokens.

Dies had to be made, lathes prepared, and designs made. None of these things were to be had in Oregon. Scraps of old wagon tires were melted by Thomas Powell, a Salem blacksmith, to make the press. He also made the rollers and was paid \$60 for his work. J. G. Campbell drew the design for the dies. Hamilton Campbell made the five-dollar die and Victor M. Wallace the ten. Thomas Powell received \$40 more for helping to assemble the lathe, and the Oregon Exchange mint began to turn out pure gold coins. They contained no alloy and not less than eight percent more gold than United States coins of the same denomination. This was done so that there would never be any question of their redemption in legal tender. The coins were made and circulated just at the time Oregon became a territory, and consequently violated the provision against counterfeiting. Although Beaver coins were more valuable than federal money of the same denomination they were manufactured in direct violation of federal statute. The old saying that "Bad money drives out good money" from circulation worked quickly. Beaver coins were either collected or traded in at the mint and soon became museum pieces. These products of "pioneer necessity and ingenuity" were serviceable to the community at a time "when the new settlement was using, as a media of exchange, beaver skins, wheat, bills, drafts and orders, gold dust and silver coins of Mexico and Peru, all of changing and uncertain value."

Beaver State Money continued in next issue of Oregon Oddities.