OREGON ODDITIES
AND
ITEMS OF INTEREST

OREGON MARINE HISTORY
Number Two

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The Federal Writers' and Historical Records Survey Projects
of the
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION OF OREGON
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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; historical cemeteries; old manuscripts and imprints; old printing presses; monuments and relics; private diaries, letters, and memoirs; historic buildings; and Indian records and lore.

The Oregon Federal Writers' Project has already written and distributed the following books and pamphlets: Flax in Oregon, Builders of Timberline Lodge, Fire Prevention in Portland, History of Portland Fire Alarm System, and Oregon Oddities, a semi-monthly bulletin.

The manuscript for the Oregon Guide will be published this spring, under sponsorship of the State of Oregon. Tax-supported or non-profit bodies, such as teacher groups, parent-teacher associations, chambers of commerce, county courts, or similar organizations are eligible to become sponsors of Federal Writers' Project publications. Although sponsors have not yet signed for them, the following manuscripts are being prepared by the project for future publication: A Guide to Vancouver Island; Old Towns of Oregon; Oregon Ports and Battlefields; Willamette Valley Ghost Towns; Oregon Encyclopedia; Oregon Almanac; Dramas based on Oregon history, suitable for use by secondary schools.

SPECIAL NOTICE

Oregon Oddities Radio Series

Beginning early in February this radio series will be broadcast from transcribed programs over the following stations:

- KAST Astoria
- KTCLK Kelso (Longview)
- KSLL Salem
- KORE Eugene
- KLBM La Grande
- KOOS Marshfield
- KRNR Roseburg
- KFJL Klamath Falls
- KMED Medford
- KBND Bend

Also, over at least one Portland station

Although this series bears the same title as the semi-monthly bulletin, it is not except in rare cases, a dramatization of the bulletin material. Listen for announcements concerning the first of Oregon Oddities radio programs. Following are a few of the subjects to be dramatized:

The Santa Maria of Hobsonville--the fate of the town of Hobsonville hung upon a ship's captain's successfully crossing the Tillamook bar.

Sailor's Diggin's--sailors, who deserted their ship during the southern Oregon gold rush, lost themselves but found gold where they least expected it.

The Umatilla House--tells the story of a hotel, with a philosophy of kindness that paid dividends in an unexpected crisis.

Laughing Devil Canyon--the story of two prospectors who back in the 1850's decided to hunt for gold in the wilds of Curry County.

Madame Dorion--the story of one of the most courageous mothers in Oregon history.

Star of Oregon--six amateur seamen who sailed to San Francisco in a home-made ship.

Captain Robert Gray--tells of the discovery of the Columbia river.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mine--the story of the discovery of one of the most famous lost mines in the world.

The Barlow Trail--the story of the first party who crossed the Cascade mountains.

The Aurora Colony--the story of Oregon's communal organization that flourished in pioneer times.

Watch for announcements in your local paper.
Direct trade between China and Williamette River ports began in 1851. In that year the brig Amazon arrived at Portland Whampoa, China, with a cargo of tea, rice, sugar, syrup and other articles signed to Morris & Company. The same year the schooner John Alleyne brought a cargo to Allen McKinley of Oregon City. Regular foreign trade, however was not established until several years later, except from the Valley generally going only as far as San Francisco.

Lot Whitcomb, founder of the town Milwaukie, owned the first steamer built on the Willamette River. The vessel was launched, and christened after her owner, Christmas Day, 1850. Two days of festivities, in which the entire community partook, followed the launching. The Whitcomb began her regular run March 1, 1851. The vessel made the run from Milwaukie to Astoria without stopping at Portland. On May 30, 1850, returning the next day, the fare was 25¢ a couple. This was the first excursion from the pioneer towns Oregon City, Milwaukie and Portland.

Stephen Coffin placed the steamship Whitcomb on the Portland to San Francisco run because the Lot Whitcomb did not go to Portland. The Goldhunter carried cargoes of Oregon products to San Francisco which gave Portland such a boom that the Lot Whitcomb was forced to recognize its existence.

Indirectly, this first trip of the James Clinton to Eugene was of great importance to the Willamette valley. It resulted in the ultimate organization of the People's Transportation Company. Previously the merchants of Eugene and Harrisburg had been unable to induce steamers to come further south than New Orleans (a point near the present Corvallis). This made it necessary to haul goods by ox-team over rough trails to the upper Willamette towns. Since each stockholder did considerable shipping on his own account, the James Clinton enjoyed a good business on the upper Willamette route. Later, as business increased, other steamers were added to the line.

Steamboating on the middle Columbia was made hazardous for a few weeks in the summer of 1856 by hostile Indians. Swarms of militant red men gathered along the banks of the river and fired at passing steamers. The steamer Mary narrowly escaped being captured by the Indians.

The Carrie Ladd, named in honor of the Portland banker's daughter, was one of the finest stern-wheelers on the Willamette and Columbia rivers. She was launched at Oregon City in 1858. On her trial trip, February 9, 1859, she made the run to Vancouver in twenty-five minutes; to the Cascades in five hours and forty-five minutes; and back to Portland in four hours and thirty-eight minutes.

About 1860 a Corvallis man, deciding steam boats were too expensive to operate, designed and built a craft equipped with tread-mill machinery, using oxen as motive power. On the trial trip the boat was "walked" ashore at McCooglin's Slough where she remained until the oxen had eaten most of the cargo of hay. Finally the strange craft was pulled back into the river by the Steamer Onward and she paddled on down to Canemah. However, the "machinery" did not provide sufficient power to propel the boat back up the river. The owner sold the oxen and the scow went over the falls. As far as is known this method of competing with the steamboat has never been duplicated elsewhere.

The Oregon Steam Navigation Company was incorporated in 1860. The corporation, which grew in influence and wealth until
owners became powers in financial centers of Europe and America, had absolute control of all transportation to and from the portage that, it is reported, the steamboat Oregon paid her entire cost of construction on her first trip.

The price of freight from Portland to The Dalles was $40 per ton; from The Dalles to Celilo, 15 miles, $15 a ton; from The Dalles to Wallula, $55 a ton; and from Wallula to Lewiston, $120 per ton. All freight, excepting solids, such as lead, coal, etc., was estimated by measurement, cubic feet making a ton. The passenger fare from Portland to The Dalles was $5, 75 cents for meals. The fare from Portland to Lewiston was $50, with meals $1.00 each.

It is said that a penniless traveler, who were worthy of help, was never denied passage on an Oregon Steamship Navigation Company. Many deserving men were not only installed without charge but were given meals well.

Overland passenger traffic became an important factor in transportation along the Willamette River in 1864, when Ben Holladay's stage line competed with the Oregon Steam Navigation Company's steamers at Wallula and carried passengers, by the way of Boise, Idaho, to Portland and various points. Fare by stage from Wallula to Boise was $40; to Atchinson, Kansas, $225. Each passenger was allowed fifty-five pounds of baggage. The excess baggage charge was $1.50 a pound.

The Minnehaha, a small stern-wheeler 177 feet long, was built and launched on Lake Oswego (or Sucker Lake as it was known) in 1866. She ran between the mouth of the river and the forks of the Coquille for about a year. The undertaking was not profitable enough to continue the run.

The first steamer to run on the Coquille River was the Mary. This small vessel was built on that stream in 1871. She ran between the mouth of the river and the forks of the Coquille for about a year. The undertaking was not profitable enough to continue the run.

The completion of the Oregon City locks in 1873 was important to river transportation. Construction was finished in December, 1872, but the first steamer, the Maria Wilkins, passed through the locks on New Year's Day, 1873. She went on up the river, arriving at Harrisburg two days later, the first large steamer to reach a point so far inland.

The West Shore was one of the largest and swiftest sailboats constructed on the Pacific Coast. This vessel, 186 feet long, 22 feet wide and registering 188 tons, was launched at Coos Bay in 1874. In 1875, she left San Francisco a few minutes before the steamer Oriflame and arrived at Astoria two and a half hours ahead of the steamer, having made the trip in a little over two days. As far as is known no sailboat ever afloat on the Pacific Coast ever made such a remarkable record of speed. A year later she established a record by sailing from Portland to Liverpool in one hundred and one days. The next year she made the trip from San Francisco to the same port in one hundred and three days and returned in one hundred and ten. In addition to her sailing ability, the West Shore had an enormous carrying capacity. However, she was never considered a lucky ship. She was wrecked July 9, 1878, on Duxbury Reef.

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A new type of marine craft, the whale steamer, was introduced to the Pacific Coast with the arrival of the C. W. Wetmore in 1891. Built in Wisconsin, this craft carrying a cargo of 100,000 bushels of wheat for Liverpool made her way through the lakes and locks until she reached the sea. Then loaded with materials with which to construct other vessels of her type, she started on a long journey round the Horn to the Pacific Coast. Few vessels have ever appeared in the northwest which were more unlucky than the C. W. Wetmore. She lost her rudder along the California coast and drifted until the British steamer Zambesi started to tow her to the Columbia River. The hawser parted, the whaleback had a narrow escape in breakers before another line could be aboard. After the damage to her rudder was repaired at Astoria the C. W. Wetmore continued to Everett, reaching that port with her cargo in good shape.

The vessel was placed on the coal trade, scarcely made a trip without running aground, crashing into a wharf or colliding with another steamer. Every conceivable accident that could befall a steamer befell her on her way. Finally, when enroute from Astoria to San Francisco, September 8, 1892, went ashore during a thick fog on the Spit of Coos Bay. Distress signals were sent out as soon as she struck, but it was twenty-four hours before aid reached. The crew was rescued but nothing could be done for the C. W. Wetmore. The vessel was lodged her parallel with the beach and remained intact for several days before breaking up.

The first lightship on the Pacific Coast, the Columbia River No. 50, was put in service in 1892. She was built by the Union Iron Works of San Francisco and towed from there to her position near mouth of the Columbia River by the tug Sisset. The Columbia River No. 50 was 107 feet long, 25 feet, 7 inches beam, 12 feet 8 inches hold, and had a steel framed wood planking. The lightship had no blowing power except sails. She was equipped with two boilers to furnish steam blowing a twelve inch fog whistle in thick weather and for hoisting the lights in the mast.

The cruisers Baltimore and Charleston, the largest vessels to enter the Columbia River up to that time, arrived at Astoria on May 12, 1892, to participate in the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Columbia. After the festivities, which lasted three days, the cruisers were taken to Portland for a few days visit.

The steamer Chilkat, which Captain David Morgan constructed for shipping in connection with his cannery, was rebuilt in 1892 and equipped with passenger accommodations. She commenced running between Portland and Alaska where her owner's interest in one of the largest canneries furnished sufficient business to pay all her running expenses. Consequently, passenger rates in the Chilkat were reduced and as the steamer was speedy and comfortable, she made heavy inroads of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's revenues. Unlike any other competitive firms they had hitherto encountered the Chilkat's owner could not be bought off.

By 1895 the growing trade between the Orient and Northwestern ports furnished business for a large number of steamships. The Oregon Railway and Navigation Company and the North Pacific Steamship Company established a regular direct service with China and Japan with a vessel sailing every twenty-eight days. This service replaced the irregular Semuels line which had previously supplied the Orient run.

During the World War years, 1914 to 1918, shipbuilding became a major industry at Portland. Scores of ships slid into the Willamette from ways in that city, some of them never to be operated. The close of the war put an end to this thriving industry and very little ship building has been done since.

Within the last twenty years Portland has assumed the leading position in wheat distribution for the Pacific Northwest.

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