

# Pioneer Houses and Homesteads of the Willamette Valley, Oregon 1841-1865



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by  
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Cover Images, clockwise from top left:

Cartwright House (also known as Mountain House), Lorane, Lane County, HABS image  
Daniel and Melinda Waldo House, Marion County, Brian Waldo Johnson image  
W.H. Finley House, Corvallis, Benton County, from *A Pictorial History of Benton County*  
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Unidentified house in Eugene, probably 1850s. From author's collection.

## Introduction

Oregon was the last frontier for many who settled here in the mid-nineteenth century. Enticed by the promise of free land, better health, or simply a new start, thousands of Americans left their “civilized” homes to make the often-grueling 2000-mile, months-long journey to the unknown of the Oregon Territory. Their success in this monumental effort was, and is, remarkable, and the sophistication of many of their buildings extraordinary. The dwellings made during the early years of settlement often reflected the structural methods, forms, and stylistic influences of those familiar in “the States,” with techniques adapted to the limitations imposed by the frontier environment.

Although non-Native people began colonizing the Pacific Northwest region in the early 1800s, known surviving buildings related to Euro-American settlement of the Willamette Valley, numbering approximately 255, date from 1841 to about 1865 with about half pre-dating Oregon statehood.<sup>1</sup> Many communities in the Willamette Valley harbor an early settler’s residence. All share a common link to the pioneer experience, yet each is unique in its specific story. In spite of their importance to Oregon history as tangible reminders of our collective heritage and the people who came before, little formal attention has been given to the conservation and protection of this particular group of fragile historic properties.

This document is far from a comprehensive work. It should be considered a reference overview, intended provide a better understanding of the earliest phases of construction in Oregon, and to form a basis from which to make informed decisions about the future preservation of Oregon’s settlement-period houses and farmsteads. Any number of additional studies could derive from this first-step effort. There are two parts: the first is the Historic Context and the second a discussion of Threats and Recommendations. The purpose of the Historic Context is to briefly describe the circumstances and environment in which Oregon’s earliest Euro-American dwellings were made, and to enumerate what remains and in what condition. The pre-settlement period is very briefly addressed, but the bulk of the study focuses on the 1841 to 1865 timeframe, the period generally acknowledged by local historians and architectural historians as the “settlement era” of the Willamette Valley, as reflected in remaining residential buildings.

The Historic Context is followed by a separate discussion of the threats facing these sites, and what actions can and should be taken to protect those that remain and avoid further loss or degradation of these dwindling and important tangible reminders of Oregon’s pioneer heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers are derived from raw data based on recent State Historic Preservation Office survey of the remaining residential buildings in nine Willamette Valley Counties pre-dating 1865. As more information emerges these numbers may change.

## Project Scope

### Setting

“Between the Cascades and the Coast Range, isolated from both the arid interior and the rainy coast, lies the Willamette Valley, heart of the Old Oregon Country. The broad structural lowland is approximately one hundred miles long by twenty to thirty miles wide, and is divided by low intervening hills...”<sup>2</sup> The valley is traversed by the Willamette River and its tributaries, and contains rich alluvial soils ideal for farming. The mild climate seldom reaches extremes of hot or cold, and rainfall averages vary from about 37 to 80 inches annually, with more precipitation falling in the southern and Cascade foothill regions.<sup>3</sup> In addition to “...a rich riparian forest of native ash, cottonwood and willow in many of the lower areas, and big-leaf maple on slightly higher elevations,” Douglas fir, cedar and western hemlock grow in abundance in the foothills.<sup>4</sup> Portland, located at the northern end of the valley, is the largest population center, although nearby Oregon City was established earlier. Eugene is the southernmost center of population, and the second-largest city in the valley.



Figure 1. Modern map of the Willamette Valley.

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<sup>2</sup> William Bowen, *The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 6.

<sup>3</sup> George Taylor, State Climatologist, “The Climate of Oregon, Climate Zone 2 Willamette Valley” (Corvallis: Agricultural Experiment Station, Oregon State University, 1993), 2 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> Koler/Morrison Planning Consultants, *Polk County, Oregon Historic Context Statement* (August 1991), 3.



## *Geographic Area*

Geographically, the study area encompasses nine of the Willamette Valley counties: Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Yamhill, Polk, Marion, Linn, Benton and Lane, covering an area of approximately 5,300 square miles.<sup>5</sup> The valley is bordered on the north by the Columbia River, on the west and east by the Coast and Cascade mountain ranges, respectively, and extends south to the Lane County-Douglas county boundary line.

## *Chronological Period*

The chronological period encompassed by this study spans from 1841 to 1865. The opening date corresponds to the construction date of the earliest known remaining dwellings in the Willamette Valley, the 1841 Jason Lee House and the 1841 Mission Parsonage in Salem. No buildings are currently known to remain from the period prior to 1841. The closing date reflects the generally-accepted ending date of the settlement period in western Oregon by local scholars who specialize in this historical period. While this date is somewhat arbitrary, it relates to architectural shifts (both stylistically and technologically) that were facilitated by improved transportation routes into and within the Willamette Valley, including the imminent completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869. It should be noted that there may be merit in considering other closing dates, such as the year of Oregon's statehood (1859), the beginning or end of the Civil War, the sunset of the Oregon Donation Land Act (1855), the enactment of the Homestead Act in 1862 or the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869.

## *Themes*

Using the Areas of Significance identified by the National Register of Historic Places, the two broad themes addressed in this document are Exploration/Settlement and Architecture. This study focuses only on pioneer-era dwellings and farm groups. This resource-type limitation was implemented in order to control the scope of the project, but it should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the importance of other building types related to early pioneer-era commercial, religious, educational industrial function or development.

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the historical background described in this study will also apply to the Clatsop Plain, portions of northeastern Oregon, and the Umpqua and Rogue River valley settlement stories. The limited focus on the Willamette Valley is intended to manage the scope of the project, and is not meant to diminish the importance of the settlement and related properties of those areas in western Oregon that are beyond these nine counties.

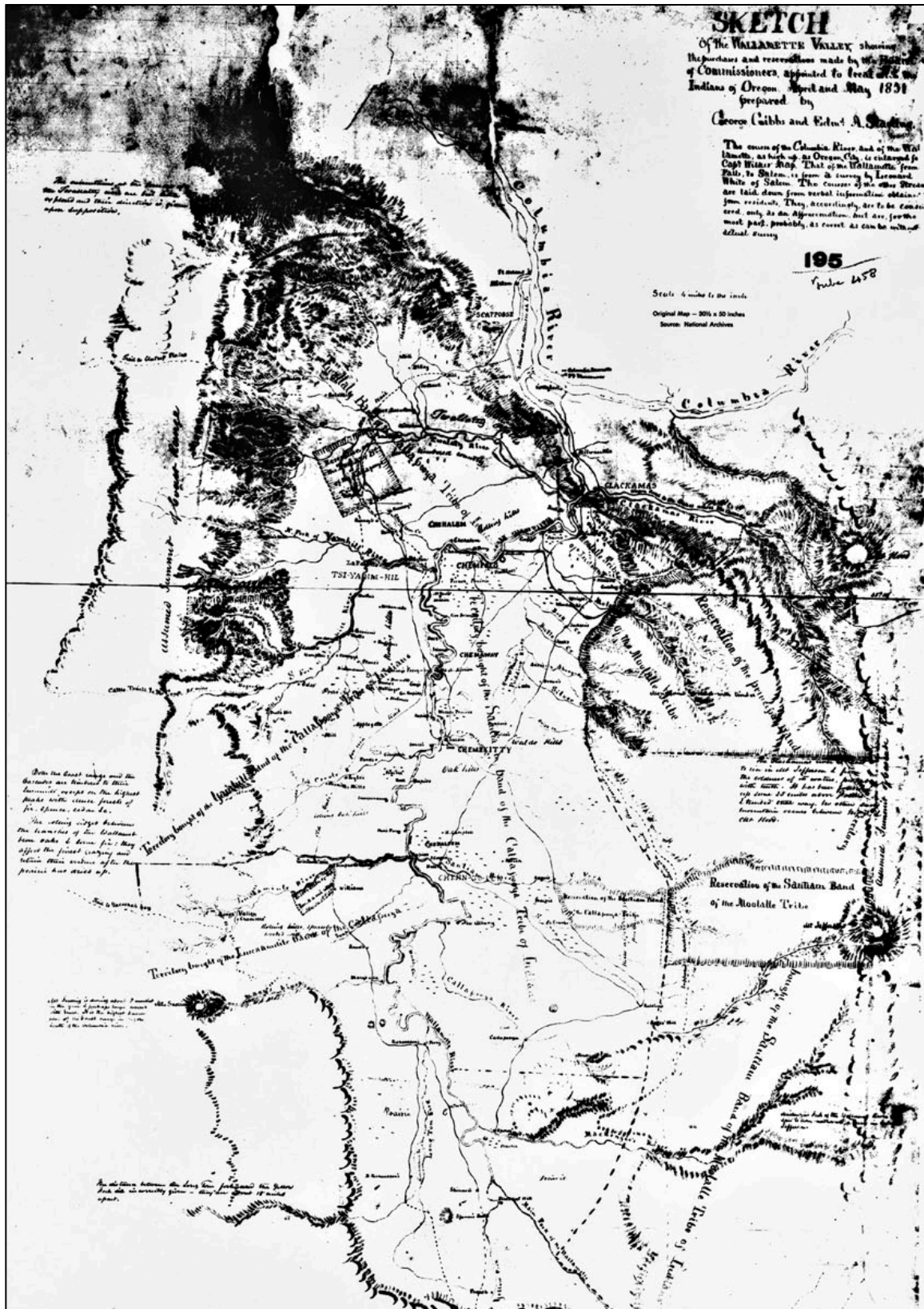


Figure 2. 1851 sketch map of the Willamette Valley. Image courtesy Oregon Historical Society, Oregon History Project (<http://www.ohs.org/the-oregon-history-project/historical-records/sketch-of-the-willamette-valley-1851.cfm>).

## Pioneer Houses and Homesteads of the Willamette Valley

### Historic Context

#### *The Natives' Landscape*

The landscape appreciated by the early settlers was not vacant, nor was it untouched by human activity. The sediment from the Missoula floods that took place between about 18,500 and 15,000 years ago covered the valley floor and created a rich growing environment for the open grassland and scattered oak groves. "The hillsides scattered with oak woodlands and openings provided good soil above the rivers, creeks and many intermittent streams. The abundant water supply in turn supported a rich riparian forest of native ash, cottonwood and willow in many of the lower areas, and big-leaf maple on slightly higher elevations."<sup>6</sup>

Native Americans occupied the Willamette Valley for thousands of years prior to Western settlement and expansion. "At the opening of the nineteenth century, Kalapuyan speakers occupied all of the Willamette Valley above the falls at Oregon City..."<sup>7</sup> By the time Europeans and Euro-Americans arrived, this landscape had long been altered and tended by the native people, who used prescriptive burning to encourage growth of desired food sources such as camas root and oak acorns, as well as to improve habitat for wild game. "The most reliable estimates put the Kalapuya population at 20,000 in 1770, but by the mid 1840s...population was estimated at less than 600..." due to devastating epidemics that ravaged the people and their culture.<sup>8</sup>

"The earliest writings of the valley describe an idyllic scene; Robert Stuart, an employee of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company, reported in 1811 that the valley was 'delightful beyond expression,' one of 'the most beautiful Landscapes in nature.'"<sup>9</sup> Later explorers and settlers expressed similar sentiment, and found that the fire management had created optimal grazing land and open prairie essentially tree-free and ready for the plow.

#### *Exploration*

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Pacific Northwest was being explored and its natural resources exploited by a variety of western powers. American, British and Russian fur traders had been plying the coast and trading with local Indian tribes for decades prior to any attempts at permanent settlement in what would later become Oregon, the expeditions largely supported by companies such as the British Hudson's Bay Company. Early western exploration and eventual expansion was predominately resource driven; little to no major settlement in the Oregon country is known to have occurred before the Lewis and Clark Expedition made the first serious American foray into the territory in 1805-1806, when the party overwintered at Fort Clatsop near what is now Astoria. Only a few years later, on the heels of Lewis and Clark's journey,

The first house on the Northwest Coast that was intended to be permanent was built on the south shore of the Columbia River in 1810. Nathan Winship of Boston warped his ship, the Albatross, forty miles up the river to Oak Point, a few miles northeast of

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<sup>6</sup> Koler/Morrison 1991, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Melvin Aikins, et al., *Oregon Archaeology* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2011), 286.

<sup>8</sup> Aikins et al 2011, 287.

<sup>9</sup> Aikins et al 2011, 284.



present-day Clatskanie...[and] set his crew to building a log house. [...] By early June 1810, the timbers on the house reached ten feet high.<sup>10</sup>

This early settlement didn't survive - Winship abandoned the endeavor, frustrated by the incessant flooding and the (understandably) aggressive Indians.

Within a year, in 1811, John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company established the first permanent American settlement at Fort Astor[ia], the site of the present-day community of Astoria. The Company was,

...an American firm that intended to have permanent headquarters in the Pacific Northwest and to trade with China and the orient. Established by Astor employees in 1811 (coming by land and by sea), the post became the first permanent white occupancy in the region. In 1813 the men sold to the North West Company; the then raging War of 1812 would have delivered the post as a military prize to the British in any event. The Treaty of Ghent technically restored the American claims at Astoria in 1814 and contributed to the Joint Occupancy agreements between Britain and the U.S. in 1818 and 1827. In 1821, with the merger of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, the post, then known as Fort George, became headquarters for the H.B.C. in the Pacific Northwest. It lost that position in 1825 with the construction of Fort Vancouver.<sup>11</sup>

The relocation of the HBC headquarters from Fort George (the former American Fort Astor) up the Columbia to Fort Vancouver, would be key to the eventual American settlement of the Willamette Valley.



Figure 3. Fort Vancouver in 1850. Image courtesy Oregon Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup> E.W. Giesecke, "Winship Settlement," Oregon Encyclopedia Website (Portland State University: 2008-2013) <<http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org>> Accessed March 2013. See also John Terry, "Comcomly: Chinook Nation CEO," in *Eminent Astorians*, Karen Kirtley, editor (Salem Oregon: East Oregonian Publishing Co., 2010), 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, "Fort Astoria," State of Oregon Inventory Historic Sites and Buildings (1974). Astor's was the Pacific Fur Company; the North West Company was British, as was the subsequent Hudson's Bay Company.

## *Movement Into the Willamette Valley*

Fort Vancouver, a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post, became firmly established on the north side of the Columbia River, with mills and extensive agricultural production on the site as early as the late 1820s and early 1830s. This extensive development was meant to provision other HBC posts in the Columbia District (the Pacific Northwest area within which the HBC was operating), thus saving significantly over the cost of shipping supplies from the East Coast. An 1832 account stated that there were "...several hundred acres fenced in, and under cultivation ...[producing] abundant crops, particularly grain ... and the various culinary vegetables, potatoes, carrots, parsnips...melons ... [and] apples. On the farm is a grist mill, a threshing mill, and a saw mill [and] in the vicinity of the fort are thirty or forty log huts."<sup>12</sup> An initial herd of ten cattle increased to seven hundred within a few years, and pigs and sheep were also part of the Company livestock holdings.<sup>13</sup>

With the decline in the fur trade (starting in the late 1820s), retired French-Canadian Hudson's Bay trappers began moving south of the Columbia River into the Willamette Valley, intending to settle with their families.<sup>14</sup> In the area known as French Prairie they established the first farms in the Oregon Country. Although it is not entirely clear who was the first to actually farm in the Valley, "...by the end of 1831 or early in 1832 there were at least three farms on the upper Willamette - those of [Joseph] Gervais, [Etienne] Lucier, and J[ean] B[aptiste] McKay. At least one other French-Canadian, Louis Labonte, was living as a farmer in the area..."<sup>15</sup> These four were reported by British Army officers as being the first to settle "above the falls," apparently in 1830; one source suggests there were eight or nine farms by 1833.<sup>16</sup>

Ewing Young, an American trapper who arrived in the valley in 1834 from California with a herd of horses, established himself on a claim "...near the mouth of Chehalem Creek [in present-day Newburg, Yamhill County], and he built a home on the bank of the Willamette almost opposite Champoege. This structure has been termed 'the first house built on the west side of that river by a white man.'"<sup>17</sup> Other Americans who settled in the 1830s, albeit in some cases temporarily, included John Ball "...the original settler of Champoege proper," and Webley John Hauxhurst, who had come in the company of Ewing Young and built a grist mill at Champoege.<sup>18</sup> American Nathaniel Wyeth, an independent trapper and tradesman from New England, had a farm southwest of present-day Butteville. He and the men who came with him, "in contrast to the Americans in the Astor enterprise, were the first

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<sup>12</sup> James R. Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country 1786-1846*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Gibson 1985, 34; Michael Leon Olson, "The Beginnings of Agriculture in Western Oregon and Western Washington," (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington Department of History, 1971), 26-29.

<sup>14</sup> "...Hudson's Bay Company servants were retiring there, partly because they were used to, and fond of, the lower Columbia, partly because they were aware of the agricultural advantages of the valley, and partly because they knew that their "country" [Indian] wives and children would be ostracized in the Canadas." Gibson 1985, 130. The Hudson's Bay Company strenuously discouraged this settlement - in fact they prohibited it - but were ultimately unable to keep their former servants away from the richness of the valley.

<sup>15</sup> J.A. Hussey, *Champoege: Place of Transition* (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1967), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Hussey 1967, 55; Gibson 1985, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Hussey 1967, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Hussey 1967, 65-76. According to Hussey, John Ball's farm was near that of J.B. Desportes McKay, on the south bank of the Willamette River, and "...there is probably substance to the local tradition which says that Ball's developments were on the present Zorn farm, directly east of the park [Champoege State Park]." Hussey 1967, 65. The circa 1860-1890s period Zorn farm is located on Champoege Road in Marion County.

United States citizens to till the soil in earnest and to establish permanent farms in the Oregon Country.”<sup>19</sup>

While these former trappers, traders and later capitalists aided in the early exploration and colonization of the Willamette Valley, Methodist missionaries played a crucial role in larger-scale settlement. Intending to Christianize and “civilize” the native people, the Methodist church in 1834 sent Reverend Jason Lee to establish a Mission in what became known as “Mission Bottom” just north of present-day Salem. Tragically, the exploration and early occupation of Oregon came at a heavy price to the indigenous people who were unable to fight the foreign diseases brought by the whites, and waves of sickness decimated the population in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> By the missionaries' arrival in the middle 1830s, the population was already substantially diminished.



Figure 4. An 1841 rendering of the log buildings of the Lee Mission (no longer standing) by Joseph Drayton, member of a federal government surveying expedition. Image courtesy Stephanie Flora (<http://www.oregonpioneers.com/missions.htm>) and the Oregon Historical Society.

Nonetheless, Lee persisted for nearly ten years in the largely unsuccessful attempt to Christianize the remaining native people. In an effort to gain additional support for his work, he returned to “the States” and enthusiastically promoted the Oregon country through a series of lectures starting in 1838, including talks at Peoria, Illinois and elsewhere in the Mississippi Valley and New England.<sup>21</sup> Painting a picture of the Willamette Valley as “...a fertile land, [with] a salubrious climate and an abundant water supply...” Lee attracted additional attention to the region and succeeded in drawing reinforcements to his missionary efforts.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, the Missionary Society finally recalled him in 1843, and Reverend Lee returned to his home in Canada, passing away in 1845.<sup>23</sup> Buildings related to the Lee Mission are the earliest remaining in Oregon. The 1841 Jason Lee House, probably Lee’s second residence in Oregon (his first being a log building) and the Methodist Parsonage of the same year still stand as part of Salem’s Willamette Heritage Center/Mission Mill Museum.

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<sup>19</sup> Hussey 1967, 71.

<sup>20</sup> American aggression toward the tribes in the mid-nineteenth century further diminished the populations (in Oregon and elsewhere in the United States).

<sup>21</sup> Hussey 1967, 126; Bowen 1978, 10; Cornelius J. Brosnan, “Jason Lee’s Part in the Founding of the Commonwealth of Oregon,” *Northwest Science* Volume 4, Issue 3 (1930), 68.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Gallagher, “Corvallis Historic Context Statement, Euro-American Presence 1811-1844,” 1993; Michelle Dennis, “Oregon City Historic Downtown Re-Survey Report,” (2001) 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Walton [Potter], “Lee (Jason) House,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (March 1973). Reverend Jason Lee’s remains were reinterred in the Lee Mission Cemetery in Salem in 1906. Lee Mission Cemetery website <<http://www.leemissioncemetery.com/LeeHistory1.htm>> Accessed May 2013.



Figure 5. Jason Lee House (left), and Methodist Parsonage (right), both built in 1841. Photos by author.

Between 1830 and 1840, the population of the Willamette Valley comprised a mix of native people, retired HBC employees (many of French-Canadian descent living with their Indian wives on French Prairie), a handful of American Missionaries (near what is now Salem), and a few American mountain men/explorers, most living and farming in the lower (northern) Willamette Valley. “Until the early 1840s, there were literally no more than forty Americans in the entire territory, which covered everything on the Pacific between the forty-second parallel north of San Francisco to Alaska.”<sup>24</sup> This population laid the groundwork for the hundreds of American pioneers that would arrive in the early 1840s, claiming land, establishing farms, building houses and organizing schools and churches. Log, hewn log, and sawn lumber buildings of French, English and American provenance were scattered in the landscape. Ewing Young had erected the first sawmill in the region in 1836 along Chehalem Creek.<sup>25</sup> Although short-lived (the mill was washed out in a flood in the winter of 1840-1841), it was an advantageous source of much-needed lumber for the early Willamette Valley occupants. By 1841 there was also a saw mill related to the Methodist Mission that provided the lumber for construction of the Lee House, the Mission Parsonage, and other lumber buildings of the period.

#### *American Settlement and Land Claims*

In the fall of 1842 the first substantial and organized body of American emigrants to reach Oregon arrived in the Willamette Valley after an overland journey from the Missouri frontier. It consisted of 125 men, women, and children under the leadership of Dr. Elijah White [formerly with the Lee Mission] and Lansford W. Hastings. A number of these newcomers settled at Oregon City, pushing it in a few months from a hamlet of three or four structures to a respectable town containing more than thirty buildings. Other members of the party found employment at the Methodist Mission, and the remainder scattered out over the Willamette Valley and to other settled localities.<sup>26</sup>

Several factors had converged to fan the ensuing “Oregon Fever” and prompt the first significant wave of migration. HBC reports, as well as those of American explorers, reached the east coast and described the Oregon country as mild and temperate, with rich soils and a climate so moderate that

<sup>24</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of the Right* (New York: Hill and Wang 1995), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Hussey 1967, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Hussey 1967, 104.

men could farm year-round.<sup>27</sup> The Panic of 1837 had led to a depressed economy in the east, and farmers suffered from record rainfall followed by flooding and then malaria outbreaks. Reverends Jason Lee, Elijah White and Marcus Whitman, among others, had been espousing the virtues of the territory in their promotional speaking circuits in the east, and were instrumental in bringing American families to the country. Perhaps more influentially, starting in 1841 Missouri Senators Lewis Linn and Thomas Hart Benton repeatedly proposed bills in Congress that would extend American jurisprudence to Oregon and offer a generous donation of land to those who would settle there.<sup>28</sup> The 1842 bill "...failed to pass Congress, but the idea had become fixed in the popular mind that settlers in Oregon might expect no less than a section of land free for the cultivation."<sup>29</sup>

Oregon's population grew significantly in 1843 with the first major settler migration of about 900 men, women and children to the territory, known as the "Great Migration." As these emigrants were making preparations and starting their journey across the plains, those already in Oregon were organizing a provisional government through a series of meetings at Champoeg. In the absence of any real support from the United States, residents felt the need for a legal framework for addressing problems affecting the settlers, particularly those relating to livestock protection and land ownership, and by July of 1843 they had passed a resolution to create a provisional government and had adopted a constitution.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to 1850, British and French-Canadian HBC retirees settled on the land according to the rules and laws of Upper Canada in the patterns of their respective traditions; in the 1840s, Americans were claiming land under the Preemption Act of 1841 and later the Organic Laws of Oregon, as revised and approved in July of 1845.<sup>31</sup> Article Two of the Organic Laws outlined the circumstances under which individuals could claim up to 640 acres of land (one square mile) by marking the boundaries, improving the property (with buildings or fence), and residing on the claim. If occupancy was not immediately possible, the claimant could pay the "treasury" \$5.00 per year to hold the land in their name.<sup>32</sup> The resulting patterns of land division and ownership are still visible today in some areas. Prior to government surveys of the 1850s and the division of land into the familiar square-grid pattern of township-range-section (each section being one square mile, or 640 acres), settlers chose and delineated claims based on optimal natural features with little regard for conformity to the cardinal directions. The result was an eccentric patchwork of polygonal and other irregularly-shaped plats of land. Later claims were more regular in shape, generally square or rectangular shapes that were in compliance with the cardinal directions, following the newly-established government land subdivisions. These patterns are still evident in aerial views of many rural areas of the Valley.

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<sup>27</sup> Gibson 1985, 127.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy O. Johansen, "The Role of Land Laws in the Settlement of Oregon," *Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims*, Volume I (Portland, Oregon: The Genealogical Forum of Portland, 1957), np; Hussey 1967, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Johansen 1957, np.

<sup>30</sup> A marker was placed on the site of this momentous event in 1901, and stands today in Champoeg State Park. A major factor in the desire to establish a form of government was the case of Ewing Young, who at the time of his death in Oregon in 1841 was one of, if not the wealthiest man in the territory. He died without a will, and with debts, and in order to deal with his estate equitably it was determined that some system of government was needed to facilitate fair decision-making. Charles H. Carey, *A General History of Oregon Prior to 1861* Volume 1 (Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, Publishers, 1935), 319.

<sup>31</sup> The laws of Upper Canada extended to the region south of the Columbia commensurate with the Hudson's Bay Company occupation of the region. The U.S. Preemption Act of 1841 essentially allowed "squatters" the right of ownership to public land on which they had been residing. The Organic Laws were published in the first issue of the *Oregon Spectator*: "Organic Laws of Oregon," *Oregon Spectator* Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 5, 1846), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.







## Market Centers

Most emigrants were farmers or ranchers. The fertile soil of the valley provided both ideal farming opportunities and lush grazing lands for those who preferred raising livestock. Although largely self-sufficient, there was at times a need for items that could not be made or grown on the land. Throughout the 1840s, market centers were limited to the well-established Fort Vancouver and Oregon City. Initially little money was exchanged and wheat was the dominant currency; valley farmers would sell their wheat crop to the HBC in exchange for credit. At Fort Vancouver in the 1840s was a "...sawmill, gristmill, dairies, blacksmith shop, carpenter's shop, cooperage, tanneries, shipbuilding and salmon processing facilities..." as well as significant large-scale crop production, grazing land, and orchards.<sup>34</sup> This level of development proved to be crucially important to the emigrants' survival. Although Fort Vancouver was a British outpost, its Chief Factor Dr. John McLoughlin was sympathetic to the needs of American pioneers. After months of overland travel, many arrived destitute, with little in the way of possessions, currency or even food. Against the wishes of his superiors, McLoughlin loaned, bartered and sometimes gave them desperately-needed supplies, tools and seed (which the HBC had in relative abundance), which allowed the American emigrants to gain a foothold in the Oregon country. Soon, smaller-scale grist- and sawmills were established, crops were planted, livestock began to flourish and American dependence on the HBC post diminished.



Figure 8. View of Oregon City in 1845. From Gaston, 1912.<sup>35</sup>

McLoughlin had also laid the groundwork for the future establishment of the Willamette Falls community (later called Oregon City) as early as the late 1820s by claiming land he believed to be ideal for industrial and commercial use. With the arrival of additional missionaries in 1839 and 1840, some of whom opted to settle at or near Willamette Falls, a church and store were added to the existing small cluster of houses and the millrace. In 1841, Methodist Reverend Alvan F. Waller "...established the Island Milling Company and by 1842 was operating a small sawmill and was making plans for a flour mill..."<sup>36</sup> By 1846, Oregon City was firmly established as an American community with a population of

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<sup>34</sup> Meredith J. Mullaley, "Rebuilding the Architectural History of the Fort Vancouver Village" (Portland State University Master's Thesis, 2011), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Gaston, *Centennial History of Oregon, 1811-1912* Vol. 1 (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912).

<sup>36</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XXIX, History of Oregon Volume I - 1834-1848* (San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1886), 207.

over 500 souls and a growing number of businesses, and Portland was soon to follow.<sup>37</sup> Supplies such as building materials (lumber, nails and window glass), household goods and foodstuffs became available through commerce with “local” merchants rather than the British HBC post.

### *Boundary Agreement, the Gold Rush and American Occupation*

The American hold on the region became more and more evident as increasing numbers of pioneer settlers made the journey west. In 1844 and 1845 the population of the Willamette Valley grew significantly with the migration of over 4,000 new settlers, nearly 3,000 in 1845 alone.<sup>38</sup> As the population increased, emigrants journeyed farther up the Willamette seeking land, venturing beyond the Mission into present-day Linn, Benton and Lane Counties. The earliest settlers in the southern Willamette Valley region arrived in 1845 and 1846, though the area had been traversed and explored years earlier.

Having operated under joint occupancy agreements since 1818, Great Britain and the United States finally settled their long-standing boundary dispute by establishing the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as the international boundary in 1846. This agreement gave Britain the region north of that line, and the U.S. the area south, extending to the present-day Oregon-California border. With this resolution of territorial boundaries the doors to American westward migration opened wide. Seduced by land, the possibility of greater prosperity, and for many a healthier living environment (free of the malaria typical of the Mississippi and Missouri valleys), American settlers began moving in droves. The trip from Missouri took some six months, challenged by desert and river crossings as well as hardships such as illness and mishap. The dangers of the last leg of the Oregon Trail, down the Columbia River rapids, prompted the establishment of the Barlow Toll Road in 1846 and the scouting of the southern route, or Applegate Trail in the same year. While each of these options held their own tribulations, both helped further open the way to the settlement and secure American claim to Oregon.

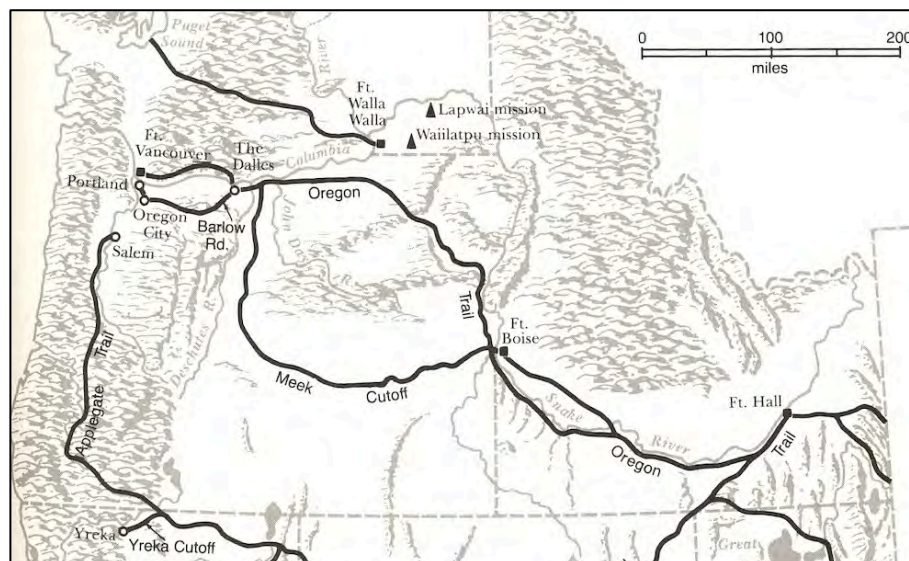


Figure 9. Map detail showing routes of Oregon Trail, Barlow Road and Applegate/Southern Route. Image from Unruh.

Once the country became a United States Territory in 1848, Congress continued promoting American settlement, and attempts to pass land laws legalizing claims persisted. The California Gold

<sup>37</sup> Dennis, 2001, 6; *Oregon Spectator*, February 5, 1846, page 3 advertisements.

<sup>38</sup> Bancroft, *Works* Volume 29, 1886, 448 and 508; Unruh 1979, 119.

Rush of 1849 diverted some Oregon-bound travelers to central California, and lured many others already settled in the territory away from their farms in the hope of finding riches through mining. Some were lucky to return with substantial wealth, enough to buy additional acreage and build more substantial lumber houses. Others were not as fortunate and returned from the adventure to farm their claims. Many who stayed in Oregon benefitted, as they suddenly found a seemingly-insatiable market for their wheat, lumber and agricultural goods, which were shipped south for sale to the burgeoning mining towns.

Finally in 1850 the Donation Land Act codified the disposal of public lands to settlers, and further promoted the American “Manifest Destiny” ideal by providing a “free” one-half to one square mile of land to “...every white settler or occupant of the public lands, American half-breed Indians included, above the age of eighteen years, being a citizen of the United States, or having made a declaration according to law, of his intention to become a citizen... .”<sup>39</sup> In order to receive title from the government, the Act stipulated four consecutive years of occupation and improvement on the claim, and proof of the same, a process that became known as “proving up.” Some 7,000 claim patents (deeds) were ultimately issued in Oregon, about 4,600 of those to Willamette Valley settlers.<sup>40</sup>

American emigration to the West occurred largely in close-knit groups of family members and neighbors. “Even young men or couples who came alone might have an acquaintance to contact upon arrival, someone else from Indiana or another Methodist. More than half of Oregon’s pioneers were accompanied by relatives or former neighbors and examples of extensive clan migrations are numerous.”<sup>41</sup> On arrival, settlers who had traveled together tended to stake claims near each other, reinforcing family and neighborhood ties by living in close geographic proximity.

The earliest phases of settlement in Oregon took place almost exclusively in the valleys of the western half of the state, primarily the Willamette, Umpqua and Rogue River drainages. The vastness of the Territory presented options with regard to choosing a claim, and it was not uncommon for early arrivals to move around before making a final decision:

...often there was an intermediate step between their arrival and their acquisition of a claim. Since most immigrants arrived in late summer and had used all of their provisions on the trail, they had to supply themselves with food and shelter for the ensuing winter. Some wealthier pioneers could buy provisions and rent rooms or cabins, but others worked for those already established in the country... Most settlers took their time selecting a claim. During the winter, while they worked, they could talk with others about the land and occasionally take trips to look at various sites.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This so-called “free” land was dependent on the native people having relinquished, abandoned or been driven off of their native homelands, often forcibly or deceptively by U.S. citizens. Under the Donation Land Act, unmarried claimants who arrived prior to 1850 were entitled to 320 acres, and married couples could claim 640 acres, with ownership of one half the holding recorded in the woman’s name. Those who settled after 1850 were entitled to half that quantity. This was one of the first laws in the United States that permitted married women to hold land in their own name. Donation Land Act of 1850, Section 4. <<http://www.ccrh.org/comm/cottage/primary/claim.htm>> Retrieved September 2011.

<sup>40</sup> These numbers are approximate. The statewide estimate of 7,000 is taken from Johansen 1957, np; the Willamette Valley number is based on an informal hand-count of claims, data derived from the Bureau of Land Management General Land Office records.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Dole, “Farmhouses and Barns of the Willamette Valley, in *Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America* (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society, 1974), 79.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Leon Olson, “The Beginnings of Agriculture in Western Oregon and Western Washington.” PhD Dissertation, University of Washington Department of History, (1970), 82-84.

Ideal claims included a water source and comprised a mix of prairie and timber. Prairie provided open land for grazing and wheat growing, and timberland supplied ample building material and fuel.

[To] gain access to as many resources as possible, settlers had to choose carefully from a large geographic area a single piece of property that could offer them various necessities for daily living. Euro-American settlers needed wood and water, which they obtained from the forests of the valley. They also needed land for grazing, which they obtained from the extensive prairies. In addition, settlers sought out well-drained lands for early planting.<sup>43</sup>

Some settlers opted to purchase squatters rights or partially developed claims. Those arriving after 1855 often did this, as the Donation Land Act expired in that year, and the option for free land in the Willamette Valley was no longer available.

#### *Advancing Settlement and Statehood*

The Donation Land Act was in force through December 1, 1855, providing vast acreage to any white male citizen willing to live on and work the land for several years. Government surveys continued through the 1850s, and a number of the large claims of the earliest (pre-1850) arrivals were divided amongst children or partitioned and sold. With the increased population in the Willamette Valley and throughout western Oregon, pressures on the native people and the disintegration of their life-ways caused significant strife between settlers and Indians. By the late 1850s, the U.S. government had forcibly relocated those that remained to reservations at Siletz and Grand Ronde. The military presence at Fort Hoskins (in Benton County, for the Siletz Reservation) and Fort Yamhill (in Yamhill County, for the Grand Ronde) was meant to quell disturbance of the Indians by settlers and vice versa, and for those farmers in the eastern regions of the mid-Willamette Valley, the military provided a market for their wheat, cattle and other goods.

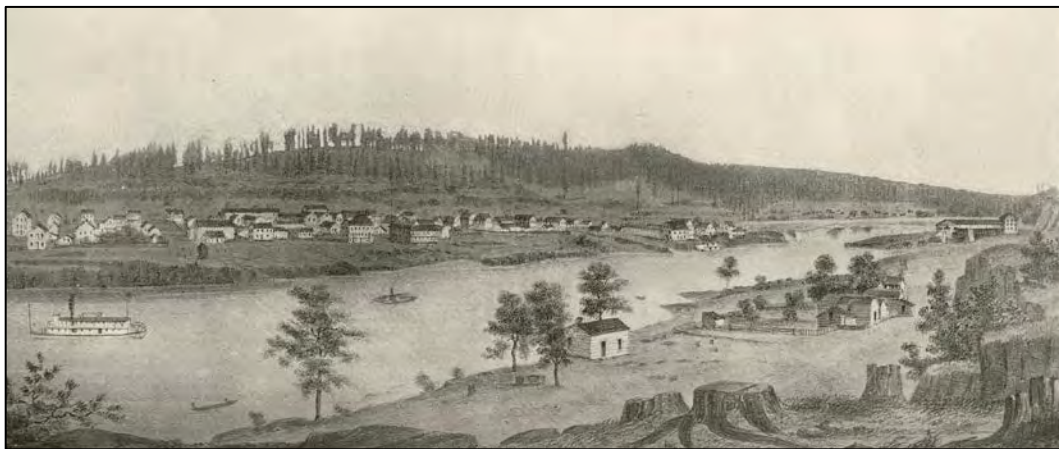


Figure 10. View of Oregon City in 1858. From Gaston, 1912.

Oregon's statehood was achieved in 1859, and only one year later the country was embroiled in the Civil War. Some Oregonians left to fight; most were satisfied to remain a physical distance from the conflict, though opposing political views were certainly voiced through local newspapers and at the polls. The transferral of lives left east of the Mississippi became more evident as communities

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<sup>43</sup> Peter G. Boag, *Environment and Experience: Settlement Culture in Nineteenth-Century Oregon*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1992), 73.



established schools, churches, road systems, industrial and shipping capabilities, and towns and cities firmly established themselves on the frontier landscape. Between 1850 and 1860, Portland's population had grown from about 800 to nearly 3,000, with the smaller communities of Oregon City, Corvallis and Eugene showing similar patterns of growth.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 11. View of Eugene City, 1860. From Gaston, 1912.

The railroad was a significant development for the state in the mid-1860s. Locally, the earliest railroad was a portage line along the Columbia River, constructed in the late 1850s, but not until the later 1860s did the Willamette Valley see the beginnings of the route that would later connect Oregon with California. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad to California in 1869 - not thirty years from the first American emigration to the territory - the West Coast, including Oregon, was linked with the eastern United States.

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<sup>44</sup> H.W. Scott, editor, *History of Portland, Oregon* (Syracuse, New York: D. Mason & Co., Publishers, 1890), 143.

## Architecture

Given the challenges of the frontier environment, the architecture of early Oregon was surprisingly varied, both in level of refinement and in terms of architectural styles. Tools and skills were carried over 2,000 miles to the frontier, where they were put to work creating buildings reflective of eastern regional types and nationally popular styles of the day.

Claimants were faced with two urgent tasks as soon as they had moved onto their claim: provision of shelter and food.

When a settler moved onto his claim he had two immediate concerns. One was to erect a shelter for himself and his family; the other was to begin tilling a patch of land... They may have abandoned the family furniture along the trail, but they usually brought their tools through. With them they built log houses with mud and stick chimneys, a typical first home for most pioneers in the region west of the Cascades.<sup>45</sup>

Depending on the circumstances (time of year, building skills and available assistance) some of the earliest dwellings were simple single-cell sheds, erected quickly to serve only as long as required to build the more substantial but still rustic cabin, perhaps several weeks.

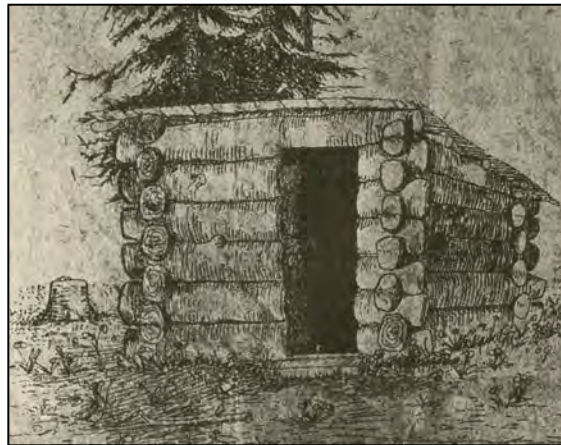


Figure 12. Early “shed” or “lean-to” cabin. Entitled “First Cabin in Albany,” from Gaston, 1912.

According to the work of former University of Oregon Professor Philip Dole, a noted expert on early Oregon architecture, building on a claim followed a predictable sequence:

On a typical claim three successive homes would be built, each an improvement over the preceding one. The last was, of course, the lumber house, but for almost every farm that ‘real’ house was at least six years into the future. A home of the first type...is characterized by: the speed of its erection; the use of rails or poles (round logs); the small size (the term ‘pen’ implies a single room); and what it was called, as ‘shelter,’ ‘rail pen’ or ‘log cabin.’ Partly on the basis of the quality of its construction, this pen or cabin might be used only a month or it might be used for years. Following it and preceding the lumber house was the second type - substantial, carefully built, emphatically distinguished from the first ‘log cabin’ by its designation as ‘hewn log house.’ The logs are squared to give a flat inner and a flat outer wall. Of one or two rooms, with a

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<sup>45</sup> Olson 1970, 85.



sleeping loft above, the house would have glazed sash windows, doors, a fireplace, a staircase and one or two porches. The building process would require at least a month's time and a 'raising' crew.<sup>46</sup>

Few examples, if any, of the earliest, original dwellings remain in the valley; in most cases they were either dismantled and the materials utilized elsewhere, or they were re-purposed as agricultural or storage buildings, and used until they deteriorated beyond service.<sup>47</sup> A rare few hewn log houses remain, but most of the extant houses from the pioneer period are examples of sawn lumber buildings.

### *Building Technology in Early Oregon*

Initially, little beyond tools, materials and skill was needed to build a serviceable dwelling. With more settlers came greater complexity in building forms and types, supported by increased technology (sash and lumber mills, availability of specialized tools) and "imported," recognizable architectural styles. Throughout the early period, building quality and construction method was largely dependent on the background and skill of the individual builder.

Several structural techniques were utilized in early Oregon dwellings, and the abundance of wood made it the preferred building material (one rare exception was the 1842 brick residence built by George Gay in Yamhill County). Round and hewn log, hewn frame, balloon and box (or plank) construction technologies were utilized throughout the settlement period. Apart from log building, all other methods were at least partially dependent on sawn lumber. Fort Vancouver had a lumber mill as early as 1828, and Ewing Young operated the first sawmill located in the Valley starting in 1836. "By spring of 1841 the first lumber milled by the missionaries was available, and the ambitious construction program began. First of the buildings to be erected with the new lumber was "Mill Place," [the Jason Lee House] adjacent to the sawmill. As headquarters of the principal station of the mission, it housed Superintendent Lee and three other families."<sup>48</sup> In Oregon City, saw- and gristmills were present by the early 1840s. Government surveyors who arrived in the early-to-mid-1850s to map the settlement landscape noted small private mills at various locations along creeks and rivers, providing neighborhoods with much-needed building materials.

Many, perhaps most, of the remaining early houses in the Willamette Valley make use of some hand-hewn elements. A few have entire hewn frames (sills, joists, posts, girts, plates and/or beams), notched and pegged together and combined with studs, interior walls, exterior siding and roof framing materials of sash- or circular-sawn lumber. Others contain fewer hand-hewn elements, maybe only the sills, and are made entirely of sawn materials. Accessibility of sawn materials, the skill of the builder and possibly the economic status of the family may have affected decisions regarding the construction methods and structural techniques employed. In all cases, the buildings tended to display a variety of architectural embellishments either hand-planed or sawn.

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<sup>46</sup> Dole, 1974, 82.

<sup>47</sup> The first cabin on the Daniel Waldo claim in Marion County (built in 1843) was occupied for about a year before being replaced with a rustic hewn log cabin that was extant on the site for 100 years, until the early 1940s. The hewn log building served as a storage structure before it succumbed to deterioration and eventual demolition. Mid-twentieth century sources reported that remnants of both the James Chapin (Lane County) and the Jeremiah Lamson (Yamhill County) cabins were visible on the landscape well into the mid-twentieth century, but both have now disappeared from surface visibility.

<sup>48</sup> "Mill Place" refers to the extant Jason Lee House, now located at 1313 Mill Street SE as part of the Willamette Heritage Center/Mission Mill complex. It is one of the two earliest extant building standing in the Willamette Valley, the other being the Methodist Mission Parsonage, also constructed in 1841 and sited within the same Mission Mill complex. Both buildings are listed in the National Register. Elisabeth Walton, "Jason Lee House National Register Nomination Form," 1973.

### *Round Log Construction: To circa 1860*

The first buildings constructed by newly-arrived settlers ranged from simple and very temporary lean-tos or pens, to more traditional log cabins usually intended to provide shelter for one winter or for several. References to dugout dwellings have also been noted in oral histories or diaries.<sup>49</sup> Log cabins of various types generally consisted of simple one- or one-and-one-half-story single- or double-pen buildings built with round logs, notched corners, dirt or puncheon floors, gable roofs and, at least initially, few window openings, if any. Chinking of mud, straw and other materials was used to fill the drafty gaps between the logs. "For most prairie farmers, fireplaces were made of sticks plastered with clay. There were few stoves. Cooking generally was done over the coals or in kettles swung on cranes in the fireplace."<sup>50</sup> It might be assumed that these were intended as short-term, temporary shelter until a house of sawn lumber could be constructed, but records indicate that many families resided in such cabins for years after their arrival - sometimes ten or more years - before graduating to a more spacious and sophisticated lumber house. Very few if any of these early claim cabins remain; none have been identified in historic site surveys in the Willamette Valley, though the former locations of several have been noted in National Register nominations and other documentation.<sup>51</sup>

A resident of the Tualatin Plains...described a typical frontier home in the following graphic terms: 'We are living, and have lived ever since we came to the country, ... in a rude log cabin without a single pane of glass. Our furniture consists of three chairs, three stools, a small pine table about two feet by three, two old trunks which have traveled with us about 20 years, and a very few cooking utensils... Indian mats often served for coverings for both floors and beds.'<sup>52</sup>



Figures 13 and 14. Images of typical log cabins of round logs. Left, depiction of one of first houses in Portland. Right, cabin in Umatilla County typical of claim cabins constructed by Oregon pioneers. Both images courtesy of Oregon Historical Society.

<sup>49</sup> One example is that of the Jeremiah Lamson family, who arrived in Yamhill County in 1848, and according to family tradition lived in a dugout for their first months or year. Liz Carter, "Lamson Ranch," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Hussey 1967, 117.

<sup>51</sup> Cabin locations have been mentioned in documentation for the Lamson Ranch (Yamhill County, 1847), the James Watson Farmstead (Benton County, 1848), the Daniel and Melinda Waldo claim (Marion County, 1843), the William Masterson claim (Lane County, 1851) and the Daniel and Catherine Christian House (Lane County, 1853). Southern Oregon examples include the Charles and Melinda Applegate House (Douglas County) and the Beeson-Foss Ranch (Jackson County). In none of these cases do above-ground building features remain evident. Locations of these cabins typically come to be known through family tradition, diaries, letters, or later reporting, which specify in varying detail the type and location of the early cabin.

<sup>52</sup> Hussey 1967, 118. Hussey provided no source for this quote.

### *Hewn Log Construction: 1830s-1865*

In some cases a hewn log house was made to replace the original pen or log cabin. As early as the 1830s, apparently, hewn-log houses were being built in the Willamette Valley: "A few of the French-Canadians lived in substantial hewn log or frame houses, neatly painted, surrounded by thrifty orchards, and generally displaying an air of 'rude plenty.'"<sup>53</sup> These one- to two-story buildings were more carefully constructed than their predecessors, with logs hewn (or in some cases sawn) square to make a tightly-fitted solid wall with flat surfaces on the interior and the exterior. Their form often followed the double-pen pattern, but there were variations in layout and scale. Hewn log houses frequently displayed glass windows (usually six-over-six paned wood sash), some architectural detailing and occasionally later layers of weatherboard or shiplap siding not easily applied to the earlier round log cabins. A few of these have survived, including the middle-1860s John Stauffer house (Marion County), the 1850s James A. Crabtree cabin (Linn County), and the circa-1856 Horace Baker log house (Clackamas County).<sup>54</sup>



Figures 15 and 16. Examples of hewn log buildings showing variability in size and quality.

Left: Baughman claim cabin, Lane County. Courtesy Lane County Historical Society.

Right: Stauffer-Will house, Marion County. Courtesy University of Oregon Libraries, "Building Oregon" collection.

### *Timber Frame Construction: 1845-circa 1860*

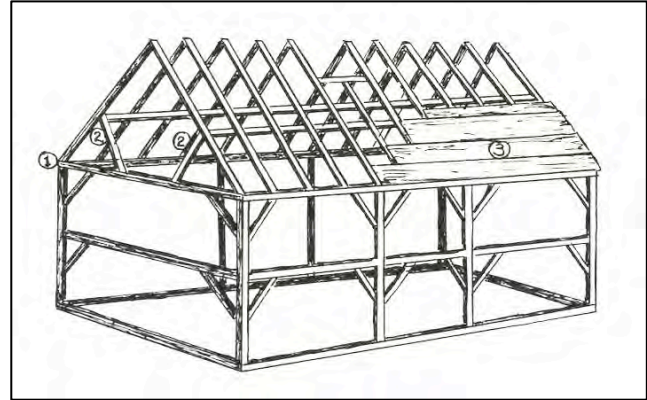
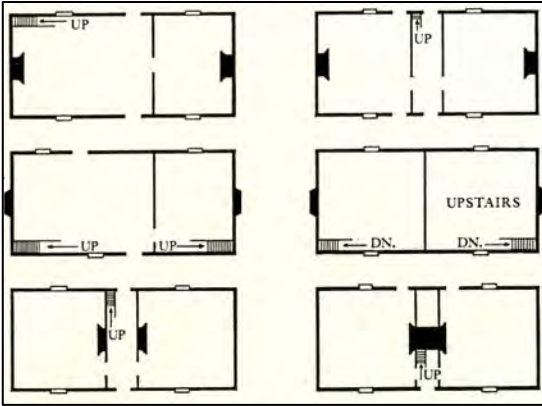
The timber frame house employs the earliest Euro-American construction method utilized in North America, the system having been imported to the American colonies from England to the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century.<sup>55</sup> While most early lumber houses in Oregon made use of some hand-hewn or sawn timber elements, a few have entire timber frames of (sills, joists, posts, plates and/or beams), notched and pegged together much in the way of colonial dwellings on the east coast. This framing system was sometimes combined with milled studs, roof framing and exterior siding. Adopting a one- to two-story form with a double pen, hall-and-parlor or center-hall plan, timber frame houses typically have multi-paned wood sash windows, central or end brick chimneys, horizontal weatherboard siding and any stylistic detailing chosen by the owner or builder.

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<sup>53</sup> Hussey 1967, 117.

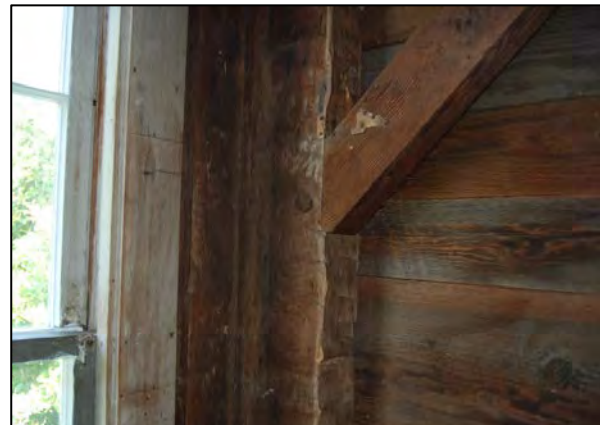
<sup>54</sup> Another in southern Oregon is the now heavily rehabilitated 1855 Birdseye house in Jackson County.

<sup>55</sup> More detailed information on the genesis of log and hand-hewn building in America can be found in H.R. Shurtleff, *The Log Cabin Myth: A Study of the Early Dwellings of the English Colonists in North America* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967).



Figures 17 and 18. Left: various building plan types, applicable to any structural method. From Upton. Right: depiction of timber frame construction. From Wilbur.

These buildings can be difficult to identify without some intimate knowledge of their histories, or access to sub-structures, walls or attics, as they may not present overt clues to their structural makeup. In some examples, the large structural members may project into rooms at the corners or at the ceiling, but in other cases the framing may be entirely invisible, enclosed within the walls. Extant examples include the 1848 Forbes Barclay House in Clackamas County; the Daniel and Melinda Waldo House circa 1853 in Marion County; the 1848-1849 Monteith House in Albany, Linn County, the A.T. Smith House, 1854 in Washington County, and the Commander's House at Fort Hoskins, Benton County.



Figures 19 and 20. 1856 Commander's House, Fort Hoskins, Benton County. Images courtesy of Dave Pinyerd.

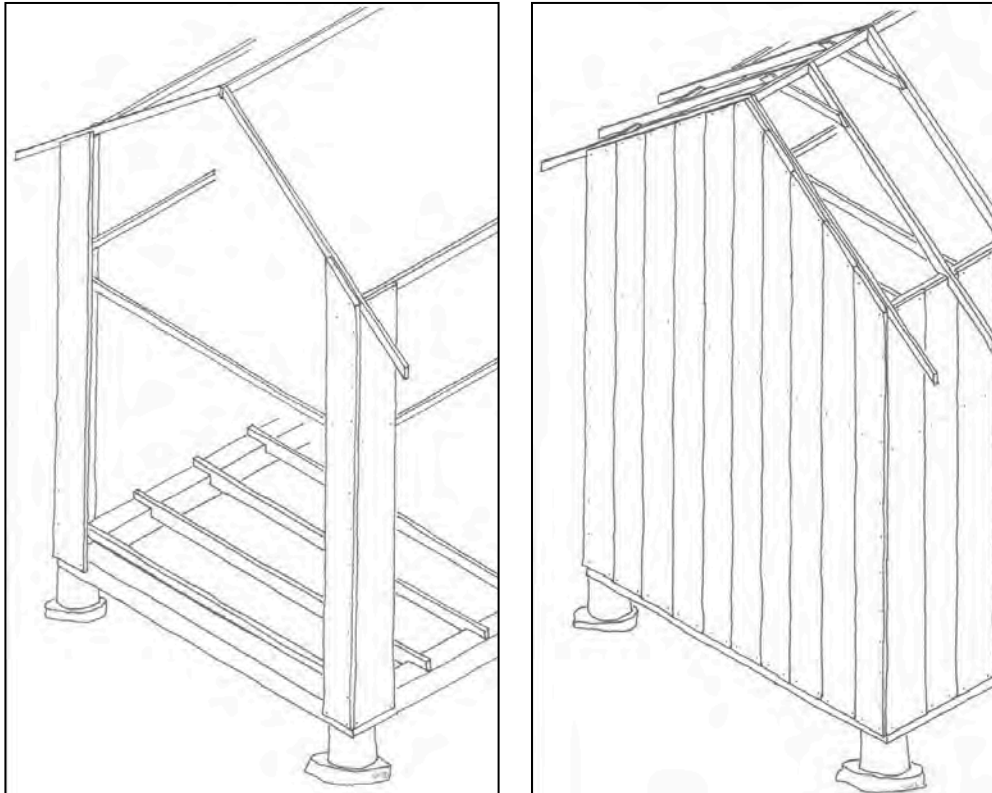
### *Box Construction: 1840-1865 and Later*

Box construction, also known as plank or single-wall construction, is an early method in which 1-2"-thick sawn boards are set vertically and connected to the sill and top plate without the use of studs. The solid board wall forms the structural makeup of the building, and much of the structural strength is dependent on the fasteners (nails). The resulting wall has no cavity (because there are no studs), and is in total two to three inches thick. "The vertical pieces...comprise the interior and exterior walls as well as the main structural system that transfers all of the activity and gravity loads to the foundations."<sup>56</sup> While difficult to discern from the exterior, box constructed houses can often be identified by the projection of window frames into the interior space, or by analysis of the substructure or attic space.

<sup>56</sup> Shannon Micah Sardell Bell, "The Preservation of Vertical Plank and Box Constructed Buildings in the Pacific Northwest. (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon Historic Preservation Program, March 2006), 9.



Box construction was quick and relatively simple, used for dwellings from the 1840s through about 1880. Utilized for a number of different house forms and styles during the early period, box-constructed buildings may display a variety of window types (primarily six-over-six, four-over-four or two-over-two sash), siding (including vertical board-and-batten, weatherboard, or later shiplap), and other architectural features typical of the period or style of the building. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this manner of construction was still used where expedient construction was desirable, such as on logging camp or mining sites. The 1852 James Watson house in Benton County, the circa 1850 George Cooley house in Linn County, and the William Masterson residence in Lane County of 1857 are examples of this mode of construction.

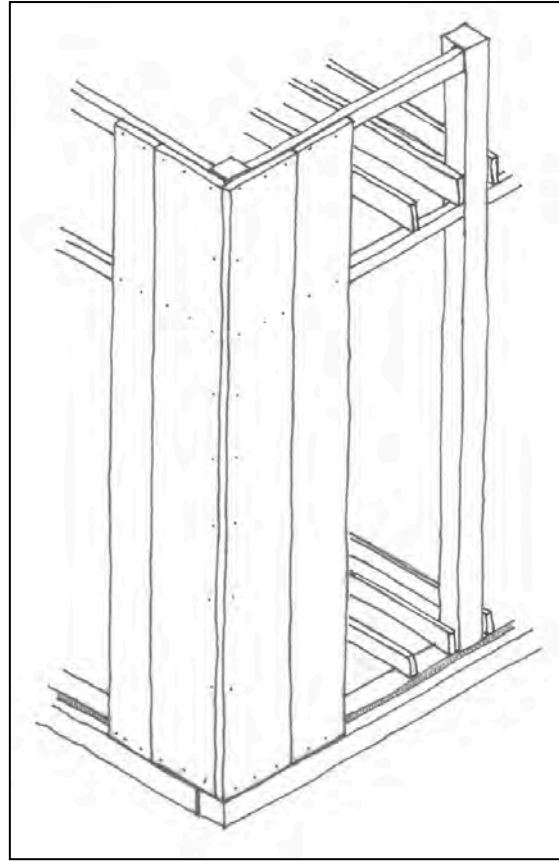
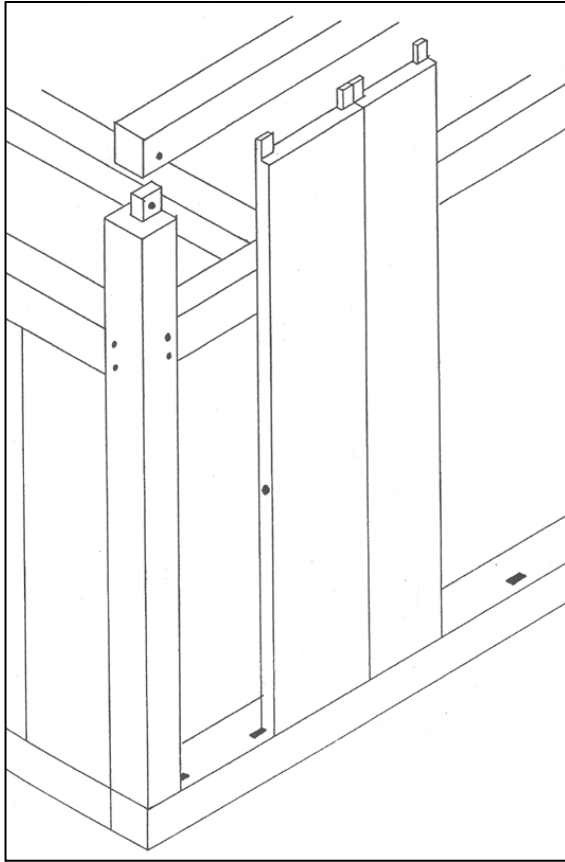


Figures 21 and 22. Box construction, showing wall section and proposed construction method. From Bell, 2006.

In some cases vertical boards or planks were applied in this manner to a heavy frame, and have been identified as “plank-on-frame.”<sup>57</sup> Examples of these somewhat hybridized buildings are also difficult to identify, but some include the Alexander Cooley house in Lane County built circa 1865, the 1856 Commander’s House at Fort Hoskins in Benton County, and the Francis Fletcher house in Yamhill County of circa 1863.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bell 2006, 16.

<sup>58</sup> A prominent southern Oregon example is the Charles and Melinda Applegate house constructed between 1852 and 1856. A portion of the nearby Baimbridge-Kanipe house dating to about 1860 also employs this hybrid system.



Figures 23 and 24. Corner detail views of a variant of box construction, known as plank-on-frame, illustrating the plank walls applied to a timber frame. From Bell, 2006.

### *Balloon Framing: 1850s-1900 and Later*

Balloon framing, made possible by the mass production of machine-cut lumber, was developed in the 1830s and was in regular use on the east coast by the time of Oregon settlement. “[F]reed of the complicated joinery of the traditional heavy timber frame, a mechanic of the mid-century, using a handbook, could assemble a house frame in a day. Such houses were said to have ‘balloon frames’ because of the speed with which they went up.”<sup>59</sup> In balloon frame construction, walls of sawn studs rest on hewn or sawn sills and are capped with sawn roof rafters, skip sheathing and split or sawn shingles. The characteristic feature of this method is the use of studs that extend uninterrupted from the sill to the top plate or eave, regardless of the height of the building. This technology was employed in Oregon as early as the 1850s (or perhaps earlier) and continued in use throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. The Daniel Christian house built circa 1855 and the circa 1865 James Chapin house, both in Lane County, use balloon framing, as does the John Phillips house, finished in 1853 in Polk County.

<sup>59</sup> Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 121.



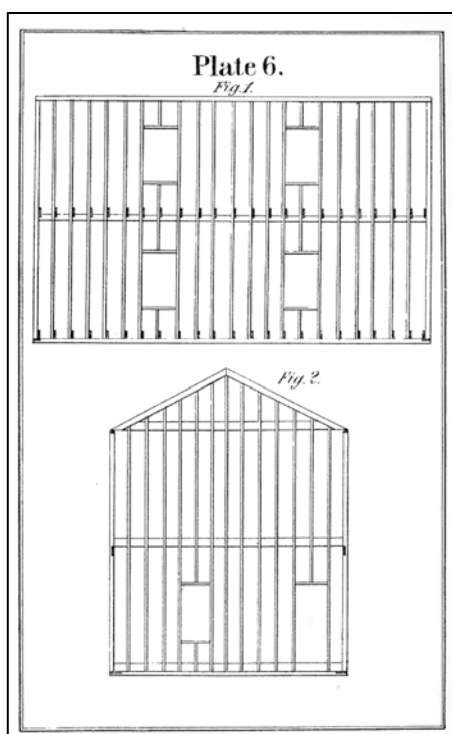


Figure 25. Balloon framing.  
From Bell 1857, Plate 6 following page 52.



Figure 26. "A balloon frame house under construction, Omaha Reservation, Nebraska, 1877," from National Building Museum online exhibit, 2012. William Henry Jackson / The National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

### Builders

A detailed discussion of early builders or architects is outside the scope of this project, but a brief word here is warranted. The nature of frontier life required many settlers to construct their own dwellings, and most were proficient in basic building or carpentry techniques, but teamwork was a matter of course. Skilled carpenters and building mechanics were among the earliest arrivals, and these men showed great ingenuity at plying their trade in limiting circumstances. Several of those known to have designed or built specific buildings include Absalom Hallock (generally acknowledged as Oregon's first architect), Hamilton Campbell, William Pitman, Dow Gilbert, Rice Dunbar, the Reverend James Wilbur, and William Kane.<sup>60</sup> There were no doubt many others about whom little is currently known; additional research on these individuals and their buildings would certainly serve to enrich the current body of knowledge on this period of Oregon's history.

### Types and Styles of Domestic Architecture in Early Oregon

"The first houses in Oregon to be constructed of sawn lumber often defy precise stylistic classification. Generally they were based upon architecture of the American colonies and were uncomplicated and unadorned."<sup>61</sup> Vernacular forms were common, perhaps embellished to varying degrees with the builder's interpretation of features from the Classical or Gothic Revival modes.

<sup>60</sup> Information on these and other builders was derived from National Register and HABS documentation, state historic building inventory data, family histories, and review of numerous other sources.

<sup>61</sup> Rosalind Clark, *Oregon Style: Architecture of 1840 to the 1950s* (Portland, Oregon: Professional Book Center, Inc., 1983), 26.

However, of the recognized styles, three dominated during this period: the closely-related Federal Revival and Classical Revival styles, and the Gothic Revival.

### *Vernacular Buildings*

The definition of vernacular architecture has been the subject of discussion for years. Generally, it is recognized as being traditional or folk architecture common to a particular people, place and time. Such buildings are largely dependent on local interpretations and functional needs, constructed by local builders using locally-available materials. They often take particular functional forms, many of which are carried with people as they move from place to place, and they often defy stylistic categorization. In Oregon, large numbers of emigrants came from both the New England region, and from Kentucky and Tennessee, so it is not surprising to find building forms derived from the traditional buildings of those areas.



Figures 27 and 28. Examples of vernacular buildings from the settlement period in Oregon. Left: Circa 1855 Angell-Brewster House (now demolished), a rare Oregon example of the salt box form, Lebanon, Linn County. National Register photo. Right: Circa 1856 house constructed by former slaves Hannah and Eliza Gorman, Corvallis, Benton County. Photo by author.

Many early Oregon settlers, influenced by the medieval and Georgian building traditions that the colonists practiced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, based many of their first houses on very old techniques and styles. Some pioneers were also familiar with the Federal style, popular in the East between 1776 and 1820, and built their first homes in this manner. Thus, in the 1840s and 1850s, Oregon architecture reflected building styles that had been evolving in America since the 1600s, but also included more recent styles.<sup>62</sup>

### *Federal Revival Style*

The Federal Revival style became popular on the East Coast during the Federalist era of American history at the turn of the nineteenth century. Its appearance in Oregon only lasted a few years, as it was quickly usurped by the Classical Revival. Characteristic elements of the Federal style in Oregon houses include a low-pitched roof (either hip or gable), symmetry in form and fenestration, horizontal weatherboard siding with corner boards, hand-hewn or sawn framing members, and simple mouldings around doors and windows, sometimes with more elaborate moulding features at the eaves. The Jason Lee house and the Methodist parsonage were "...built by lay missionaries recruited for their

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<sup>62</sup> Clark 1983, 26.

skills in carpentry and mechanical arts, were extremely simple versions of the Adam style of architecture, which had been fashionable in the East during the Federal period.”<sup>63</sup> Other examples of Federal-period type houses in Oregon include the 1845 Francis Ermatinger House and Dr. John McLoughlin’s House of 1846, both located in Oregon City.



Figures 29 and 30. Federal style buildings. Left: John McLoughlin House, 1856, Clackamas County. Image courtesy HABS. Right: Francis Ermatinger House, 1845, Clackamas County. Photo by author.

### *Classical Revival Style*

The Classical Revival (also known as Greek Revival) was perhaps the best-represented architectural style in Oregon’s early buildings. Borne of the rediscovery of the antiquities of Greece and Rome,

Greek Revival architecture first appeared in Europe in the mid-1700s...and crossed the Atlantic some fifty years later. The first representations – America’s high style phase – were, for the most part, created by professional architects who used the materials and sourcebooks of European designers.... Close behind the high style period of Greek Revival architecture, the vernacular phase exploded onto the American landscape and spread from coast to coast. Using pattern books and other buildings for guidance, and making use of the handiest or least expensive materials available, designers and builders crafted a remarkable collection of edifices.<sup>64</sup>

Intensely popular in the eastern U.S. in the early years of the 1800s, the use of the classical styles was declining at the time of Oregon’s most fervent mid-nineteenth century settlement. The style had traveled with emigrants from the eastern seaboard west to Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois in the 1820s and 1830s. Large numbers of early settlers came from these states to the west coast, bringing with them recollections of the architecture of their states of origin, and the Classical Revival appeared in a variety of forms in Oregon through the mid-1860s.

<sup>63</sup> Elisabeth Walton Potter, “Jason Lee House,” Oregon Encyclopedia entry (Portland State University, 2008-2013). <[http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/entry/view/jason\\_lee\\_house/](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/entry/view/jason_lee_house/)> Accessed March 2013. See also Elisabeth Walton, “Lee (Jason) House,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (1974). On file at the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>64</sup> Robert K. Sutton, *Americans Interpret the Parthenon: The Progression of Greek Revival Architecture from the East Coast to Oregon 1800-1860* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1992), 9.





Figure 31. The 1856 Sam Brown House, Marion County, a rare Oregon example of a Jeffersonian type Classical building, comprised of a two-story pedimented center with single-story wings on either side.<sup>65</sup> Photo by author.

Characteristics common to most iterations of the style include the use of often modest but classically-inspired details in the low roof pitch, full entablature, eave returns, suggestion of base and capital on porch posts, multi-paned (six-paned, nine -paned, or a combination) double hung windows, entrance doors accented with sidelights and transom, and horizontal weatherboard siding most often painted white. The overall impression of restraint and balanced proportion was evident in all Classical Revival buildings. "For the first decade, pioneer house cost, size and character must have felt restrictions due more to circumstance, location, available materials than to personal standards."<sup>66</sup>

Interpretations of the Classical Revival in Oregon hinged to some degree on the origin of the builder; building forms derived from both northeastern and southern traditions and exhibiting classical detailing were common throughout the Willamette Valley. Jamieson Parker, District Officer for the Civil Works Administration's Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the mid-1930s, surmised based on the buildings that he encountered in the course of his work in Oregon, that a large number of early Oregon settlers had come from or been exposed to the southern building types.<sup>67</sup> He further observed that "...the heaviness and bombast seen so often in southern Greek revival buildings..." was seldom suggested in the Oregon versions, which seemed to adopt a more refined interpretation of their eastern predecessors.<sup>68</sup>

Architectural features and detailing were very effectively produced using the skills, tools and materials at hand, though in many cases without the elaboration seen on contemporary east coast

<sup>65</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780, A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 31.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Dole, "Farmhouse and Barn in Early Lane County," *Lane County Historian* 10 no. 2 (August 1965): 24.

<sup>67</sup> Jamieson Parker, "Historic American Buildings Survey," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 35 vol 1 (March 1934): 38.

<sup>68</sup> Parker (March) 1934, 39.

buildings. “Most builders in Oregon...did not have an academic understanding of Greek and Roman architecture... Builders’ guides...enabled builders to handle the structural details of the classical orders. They superimposed classical elements...on conventional forms.”<sup>69</sup>

Several notable examples of the Classical Revival include the Sam Brown house of 1856, and the 1859 William Case House both in Marion County. The community of Brownsville retains an unusual number of buildings of this style, including the exceptional Hugh Fields House of circa 1859 and the George Cooley house constructed circa 1850. Many more modest examples remain throughout the Willamette Valley, the style comprising a large number of the remaining settlement-era dwellings.



Figures 32 and 33. Hugh Fields house, circa 1859 (left) and right, George Cooley house, circa 1850 (right), both in Linn County. Images courtesy “Building Oregon,” University of Oregon Library Digital Collections.

### *Gothic Revival Style*

By the mid-1860s the Gothic Revival style had begun to dominate new residential construction in Oregon, and the earlier Federal and Classical Revival modes were all but abandoned. Brought to the Oregon country with the settlers of the mid- to late-1840s, the style was inspired by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century picturesque movement, and in Oregon “...appeared in conjunction with the availability of pattern books by Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852).”<sup>70</sup> Gothic Revival houses were often less symmetrical than those built in the classical vein. The style is generally characterized by a more pronounced vertical emphasis than its immediate predecessors, with features including steep gable rooflines, central gables and wall dormers, elongated windows of two-over-two or four-over-four-paned sash, pointed-arch window and door openings, and jig-sawn decorative elements such as eave trim and porch details.

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<sup>69</sup> Clark, 1983, 33-35.

<sup>70</sup> Clark 1983, 45. Influential publications included his collaborative effort with Alexander Jackson Davis entitled *Cottage Residences* published in 1842 followed in 1850 by *The Architecture of Country Houses*.





Figure 34. Historic view of the Silas Jacob Beeks House, Washington County. The 1848 timber-framed portion of the house was enlarged by the circa 1860 Gothic Revival portion shown here.  
Image from National Register Nomination file, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.



Figure 35. Current view of the Silas Jacob Beeks House, Washington County. The 1848 timber-framed portion of the house was augmented by the circa 1860 Gothic Revival portion shown here. Image courtesy State Historic Preservation Office, 2013.

### *Settlement-era Farms*



Pioneers settling in rural Oregon sought to create a sense of permanence and “civilization” on the frontier through construction of a home, fencing of land, and creation of their working farm. The sequence of improvements followed a fairly predictable pattern throughout Oregon in this period. Once more or less permanent shelter had been established, enormous amounts of time were dedicated to plowing and fencing.<sup>71</sup> Not only was this labor necessary for survival (both for food production and in some cases growing crops for market), the Donation Land Act required improvements on the claim to show intended permanent residence. As the need arose and time and materials permitted, outbuildings such as springhouses, wood sheds, cellars, chicken houses, thrashing floors and other utilitarian buildings and structures were built. Typically livestock free-ranged, and barns were used for the storage of hay and grain, rather than exclusively for animal shelter. A good barn was a crucial part of a successful working farm. Requiring significant labor and resources to erect, and requiring several months to complete, the barn was not often built until several years after initial settlement, and in most cases it pre-dated the sawn lumber house. From the time of arrival, some five or ten years - or sometimes more - could pass before the lumber house was finally constructed.

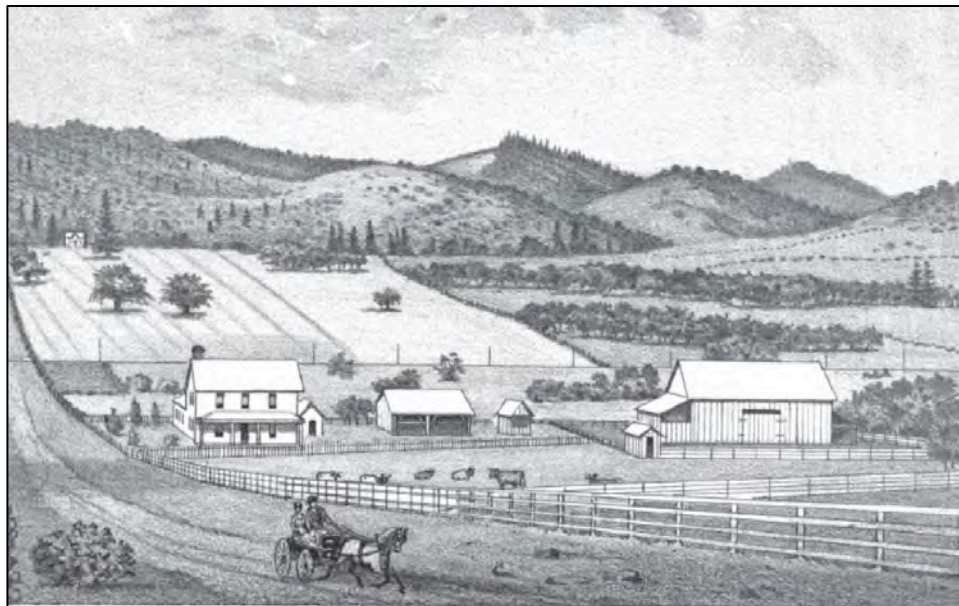


Figure 36. Lithograph view of the Read Farm, Corvallis vicinity. From Fagan 1885, 344.

Previous scholarship suggests that most farms could be divided into two groups, the house group and the barn group, each with its characteristic features and location.<sup>72</sup> The dwelling was and is considered the anchoring feature of the farm, located near a water source with working- and outbuildings arranged according to function, convenience, water availability and prevailing winds. In close proximity to the dwelling, perhaps within forty to fifty feet, were buildings and features associated with household use: woodshed, kitchen garden, springhouse, well house, wash house, summer kitchen, privy, chicken house, etc. These were oft-used, most likely by the women, and supported the continuous running of the household. At the outer edge of this group, buildings such as the blacksmith shop, smokehouse, secondary dwelling and multi-use sheds were arranged to provide convenient access to the main dwelling while avoiding potential fire danger or smoke/odor intrusion. The barn was usually

<sup>71</sup> Such activities were noted in a number of pioneer diaries, including those of Welborn Beeson (1851-1893), A.T. Smith (1841-1871) and Basil Longworth (1853).

<sup>72</sup> Philip Dole Papers, uncatalogued collection, University of Oregon Special Collections.

sited some 150 to 200 feet from the house, and along with it were working buildings such as the granary, livestock barns, machine sheds, etc. with fields and pasture beyond. Although a “good barn” was quite possibly the most important building on a farm and might be expected among the first on the claim, it was a significant investment and its construction was typically delayed for several years after arrival.<sup>73</sup> According to Dole, “The earliest we can expect a hewn frame barn to appear would be two or three years after the claim was taken.”<sup>74</sup> During the intervening years, numbers of smaller temporary but critical buildings were constructed in close proximity to the dwelling, many within the first six to twelve months.

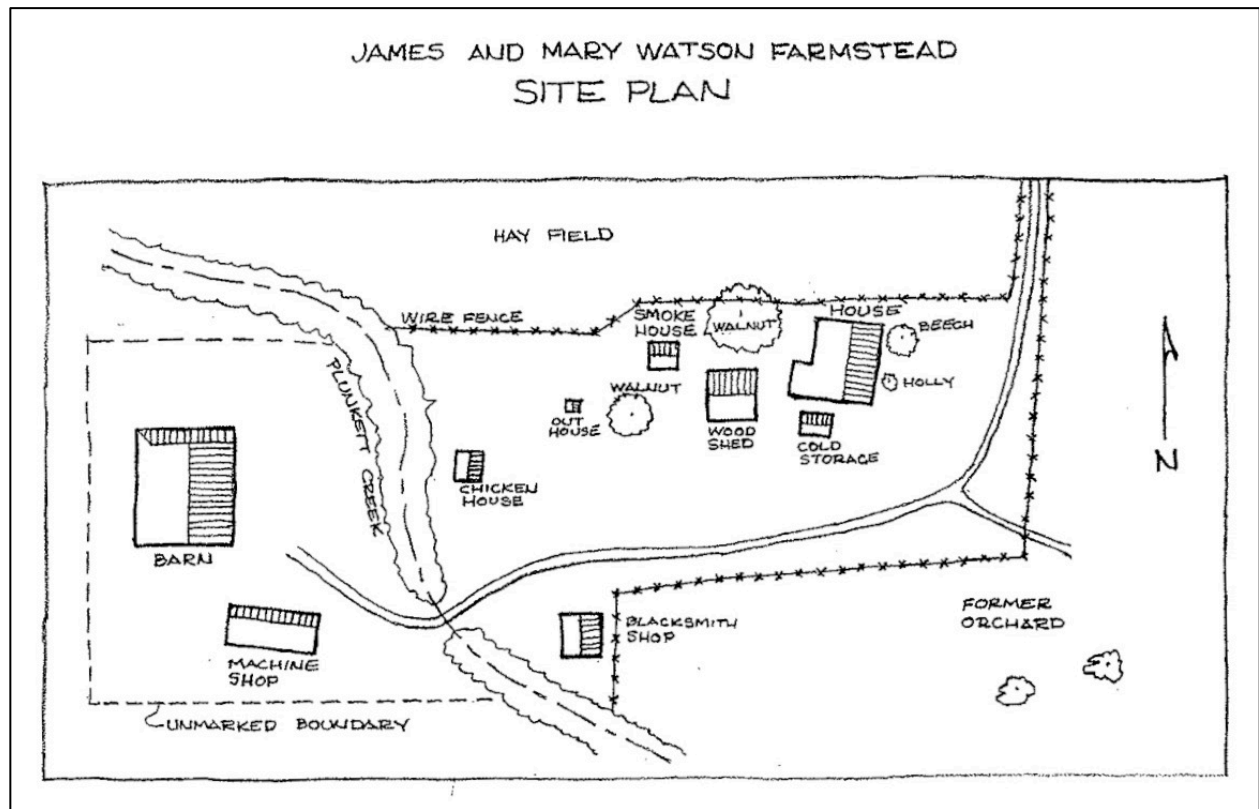


Figure 37. James and Mary Watson Farmstead site plan illustrating number, type and arrangement of house, barn and farm buildings. Image from Watson Farmstead National Register Nomination Form.

Pioneer farms were in a seemingly constant state of evolution, with early structures being built, altered, moved, deconstructed and re-purposed as settlement progressed. While their arrangement may appear haphazard, placement of outbuildings was determined not only by the family’s origins and the type of farm layout to which they were accustomed, but also with thought to location and protection of the domestic water source, avoidance of farm odors and fire danger, and relative location and distance from the main house. Dole suggested there were three typical farm layouts in Oregon.<sup>75</sup> The first consisted of the house, outbuildings, and barn arranged parallel to the main road. In the second, the outbuildings and barn were strung out behind the house in a pattern roughly perpendicular to the main road. The third, which was less common, had the house and domestic buildings on one side

<sup>73</sup> The term “good barn” was used by settlers to describe the large, permanent, hewn-frame barns that were constructed some years after initial settlement, and usually before the lumber house. Dole also used the term in his work on the buildings of this period.

<sup>74</sup> Dole, “Farmhouses and Barns of the Willamette Valley,” 86.

<sup>75</sup> Philip Dole Papers, un-catalogued collection, University of Oregon Special Collections, Eugene, Oregon.

of the road, with the barn across the road. As time progressed and the farm grew and changed, the basic layout was shifted or augmented as needs dictated.

Although farm groups were a common sight on the early Oregon landscape, very few from the pre-1865 period remain with any semblance of historical integrity. Nearly all have lost a majority of their earliest features, and many retain only fragments of the original group. Extremely rare is the farm that retains both the settlement-period house and the barn. The James Watson Farmstead in Benton County is one such rarity, with the 1848 barn, 1852 house, and a collection of smaller outbuildings in between. Another example is the circa 1860 Mosby Ranch in Lane County, which retains the lumber house, smokehouse and granary (which reportedly pre-dates the house). Several sites retain the house and later outbuildings but no barn (the circa 1860 David and Philesta Zumwalt house in Lane County, and the 1856 Sam Brown House in Marion County are two examples). A handful of barns remain standing but without the early dwelling (such as the circa 1850 Lamson barn in Yamhill County or the Isaac King barn in Benton County, dated circa 1852).



Figure 38. The Classical Revival-styled Isaac King House and 1850s barn in Kings Valley, Benton County, photographed in 1938. Image courtesy Wikipedia and Benton County Historical Museum.

### *Urban Dwellings*

By the close of the era of pioneer settlement, circa 1865, distinct towns were emerging that would become modern-day population centers of commerce, industry and education, including Portland, Milwaukie, Salem, Albany, Corvallis and Eugene. In all cases, the sites upon which these towns and cities are now located started as rural donation claims, but were fairly quickly platted and lots sold for the purpose of establishing town sites. In the Willamette Valley, many of the major centers grew in proximity to mill or ferry sites, where goods, particularly grain, could be easily shipped to larger markets in California or the east. Smaller towns were often initiated at the site of a grist or saw mill operation.



Figure 39. Circa 1857 Charles Gaylord House in Corvallis, Benton County, an early, modest, urban example of the Gothic Revival style. Photo courtesy State Historic Preservation Office.

Stylistically, the domestic architecture of early towns and cities did not vary greatly from that of houses built on farms. Towns started with log cabins, and when saw mills were established, lumber buildings were usually constructed in the form and style preferred by the builder or occupant. More convenient access to materials may have resulted in a somewhat accelerated transition from log to frame construction, but generally speaking the architectural styles of “urban” centers varied little from that of the surrounding rural areas. In form, however, there were some distinctions. In Portland, for example,

...some of these houses were the same as the farmhouses built throughout the region, [but] the majority adopted the asymmetrical side-hall plan typical of most cities. Any other arrangement would have required more than 50 feet of frontage and the purchase of two lots. A large number of residents lived in hotels, boarding houses or over shops in the business section of town... The fringe of the residential city held small farms and gardens...<sup>76</sup>

Smaller, less densely-developed communities, however, tended to start with clusters of houses of similar form and style as their farm counterparts, and the town grew up around them. Many more of these latter examples remain than the urban, side-hall dwellings.

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<sup>76</sup> Steven Dotterrer, “Cities and Towns,” in *Space, Style and Structure* 1974, 61.





Figure 40. W.A. Finley House, mid-1860s Corvallis (no longer standing). From *A Pictorial History of Benton County*, 2000.



## Statistical Review

To effectively illustrate how rare these remaining pioneer dwellings are, current data as well as a perspective on the population numbers and the houses that may have existed during the middle nineteenth century is needed. This component of the study is yet incomplete, but it is hoped that even this incomplete analysis, based on the data in hand at this writing, will provide some insights.

In April of 2013, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) completed a windshield re-survey of all residential properties in the subject nine counties pre-dating 1865 that had been identified in previous survey efforts between the mid-1970s and 2013.<sup>77</sup> The following statistical discussion is based on a preliminary analysis of the raw data as it was entered. This is a preliminary analysis of the data; some refinement, and slight changes in overall numbers in various categories, is expected as the information is proofed and finalized. The starting list contained 311 residential properties (identified as “single dwelling” and “farmstead” in the database) built prior to 1865. This information alone is valuable in hypothesizing the rate of loss of settlement-period buildings in the valley; of the thousands of houses that were constructed in the middle nineteenth century in the Willamette Valley, only 311 were thought to survive in some form at the outset of the 2013 survey.

**Table 1. Remaining properties by county**

COUNTY	INITIAL LIST (1970s-present)	# LOST / from initial list	% LOST / from initial list	NATIONAL REGISTER- ELIGIBLE
Benton	26	4	15%	23
Clackamas	52	6	12%	45
Lane	19	4	21%	16
Linn	94	16	17%	85
Marion	35	4	11%	29
Multnomah	8	0	0%	7
Polk	11	2	18%	10
Washington	26	7	27%	24
Yamhill	40	13	32%	35
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>274</b>

Field analysis revealed that 56 of the 311 surveyed buildings had been demolished since the mid-1970s, leaving a total of 255 extant properties.<sup>78</sup> A cursory evaluation of physical condition and historical integrity of those remaining was noted in the field. Careful review and correction of data, and a more detailed analysis of each site and its history, will be required in the coming months to determine actual physical condition, level of historical integrity and potential for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the information available to date is extremely useful for understanding approximately how many pioneer-era buildings have been lost, how many remain, and their general status with regard to condition and integrity. Table 1 describes these findings as broken down by individual county, total number within the initial data set, the number of buildings lost and remaining,

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<sup>77</sup> Although an early effort to identify and document historic buildings in Oregon was carried out by the Historic American Building Survey of 1934, a more comprehensive statewide survey project was undertaken in the mid-1970s by Stephen Dow Beckham for the State Historic Preservation Office. This work was the initiating point for the ongoing efforts of individual communities, counties, and the state to identify and document historic sites throughout Oregon, an activity that continues today. Data used for this study included all relevant information gathered from the 1970s survey to the present day.

<sup>78</sup> This number is being used for this report as it is the best information available to date. As the data is corrected and refined, this number (as well as others) may change.

the percentage of buildings lost and remaining, and of those that remain, the number that appear to be National Register-eligible.

In order to contextualize the above numbers, it will be helpful to know more about the number of people who came to Oregon and settled in the Willamette Valley, where they lived, and by deduction about how many dwellings may have existed at given points in time. There are several sources of population data that may help inform such an enumeration. Some data exists regarding the number of emigrants who made the journey to Oregon, either overland or by other means. It is imperfect, and generally is not broken down by county. Territorial, State and Federal census records provide information on population for the years 1842 (by Elijah White) 1845 (Territorial Census), 1849 (Territorial Census), 1850 (Federal) and 1860 (Federal). The census taken by Elijah White in 1842 is described as

“...a census of settlers in the Oregon Territory [that] included the numbers of men, women, and children and a summary of their crops for the 1841-1842 year. At the time, Oregon extended from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and from Canada to northern California. The people named in this census, however, were living in the Willamette Valley and at Wailatpu near present day Walla Walla, Washington. Most were in the area called French Prairie, north of present-day Salem. They were an eclectic mix of retired Hudson’s Bay employees, American Mountain men, Methodist Ministers, and Catholic priests.”<sup>79</sup>

**Table 2. Oregon Population per Census Data**

YEAR	OREGON POPULATION
1840	--
1842	790 <sup>80</sup>
1845	855 <sup>81</sup>
1849	1,837 <sup>82</sup>
1850	13,294
1860	52,465
1870	90,923

In addition to travel and census data, information on the number of donation land claims is available through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), but queries to several repositories and agencies suggest that the claim numbers have never been tabulated by county. A collation of the information from all of these sources would bring a better understanding of both population distribution

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<sup>79</sup> Connie Lenzen, compiler, “List of Settlers West of Rockies, 1842, By Elijah White, Indian Agent,” <[http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orspmhs/18421st.html?cj=1&netid=cj&o\\_xid=0001231185&o\\_lid=0001231185&o\\_sch=Affiliate+External](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orspmhs/18421st.html?cj=1&netid=cj&o_xid=0001231185&o_lid=0001231185&o_sch=Affiliate+External)> Accessed March and May 2013. Interestingly, several of the houses belonging to those present in Oregon for this 1842 census remain standing today (Amos Cook, Francis Fletcher, and John McLoughlin houses, and possibly the Alexis Aubichon house).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Based on transcription of original census taken in March, 1845, which enumerated men, women and children. <<http://files.usgwarchives.net/or/census/1845/>> Accessed January 2013. Original census data on file at Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon.

<sup>82</sup> This enumerates heads of households only; many households had more than one occupant. The entire 1849 Territorial census has been transcribed, but was not counted for this project. Data was compiled by Diane Besser, College of Urban and Public Affairs, Portland State University.

through the Willamette Valley, and some idea on the number of dwellings that may have existed at given points in time. While it certainly merits consideration, such a detailed study of these sources is outside the scope of this document. The following information should therefore be considered approximate.

According to John Unruh, an estimated 53,000 people emigrated to Oregon between 1834 and 1860. Some 35-40,000 more came between 1861 and 1870.<sup>83</sup>

**Table 3. Estimated Emigrants to Oregon<sup>84</sup>**

YEAR	NUMBER	YEAR	NUMBER
1834-39	20	1850	6,000
1840	13	1851	3,600
1841	24	1852	10,000
1842	125	1853	7,500
1843	875	1854	6,000
1844	1,475	1855	500
1845	2,500	1856	1,000
1846	1,200	1857	1,500
1847	4,000	1858	1,500
1848	1,300	1859	2,000
1849	450	1860	1,500
		<b>Total</b>	<b>53,082</b>

It is difficult to determine where these emigrants ultimately settled without a very intensive review of census records. It would be equally difficult to learn with any certainty how many dwellings existed in the valley at any point in time. However, in order for a land claimant to receive patent to a claim, it was necessary to “prove up” through improvements to the land, namely build a house, and reside on and farm the claim for a period of years. A preliminary hand count of donation claims suggests that approximately 4,630 claims were made in the nine subject counties under the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act. This could loosely translate into a similar number of dwellings, although a number of variables (such as the division of claims among heirs, or the sale of portions of claims) may make such a direct correlation hard to support.

However, it may be generally informative to provide a theorization of the ratio of the buildings remaining today relative to the potential building population of the period under study. In Table 4 this information has been arranged by county, and collated with the recent survey data on remaining properties to arrive at a very approximate percentage of extant residential buildings and farmsteads relative to the number of claims. Since not all remaining buildings were constructed in conjunction with proving up on a claim (some were built on established town lots), these numbers are mutable.

**Table 4. Donation Claims and Remaining Dwellings**

COUNTY	DONATION CLAIMS	# of KNOWN REMAINING	% of KNOWN REMAINING
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<sup>83</sup> Unruh, 119-120; see also U.S. census data, <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1870a-03.pdf>> Accessed January 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Unruh, 119-120. According to Unruh, “The accuracy of these observations is borne out by a daily analysis of the numbers of men and wagons passing the Fort Laramie station, where the army endeavored to maintain an exact count of westbound travelers.”

	(Approximate)	DWELLINGS	DWELLINGS
Benton	187	22	12%
Clackamas	701	46	7%
Lane	411	15	4%
Linn	636	78	12%
Marion	661	31	5%
Multnomah	336	8	2%
Polk	645	9	1%
Washington	467	19	4%
Yamhill	590	27	5%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4634</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>6%</b>

In addition to considering the original and current building population, locations, attrition, etc., it may be useful to understand this collection of buildings based on date of construction, style/type, style or type relative to location, or a number of other statistical perspectives. The re-survey helps provide some of that information; Table 5 below is an example, and others will be generated as data corrections and updates are made.

**Table 5. Date of Construction by Decade**

COUNTY	1840s	1850s	1860s
Benton	0	15	7
Clackamas	5	16	25
Lane	0	6	9
Linn	3	29	46
Marion	7	13	11
Multnomah	0	2	6
Polk	0	4	5
Washington	1	7	11
Yamhill	0	13	14
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>134</b>

The history of the settlement of Oregon is compelling, and it is significant not only to Oregon but to the Nation as representing arguably the story of the last American frontier. While numerous archival materials in the form of diaries, letters, photographs and reminiscences remain to tell the story, the physical remnants of the pioneers' efforts in the form of buildings are few. Each year the number of standing buildings shrinks, and once these relics are gone, they cannot be retrieved. They are not simply examples of architectural styles or building techniques; they demonstrate ways of living - and thriving - in physical circumstances many in the modern era cannot conceive. Social order, building traditions from throughout the eastern states, and responses to the natural environment are all reflected in these early pioneer houses.

# Pioneer Houses and Homesteads of the Willamette Valley

## Threats and Recommendations

### Introduction

The last tangible, visible remnants of Oregon's early period of Euro-American settlement, the houses that are the hand-made legacy of the Oregon pioneers, are vanishing from the Willamette Valley landscape. These buildings, which collectively reflect the broad diversity of origins and experience of their makers, are some of the last, best examples of the skill and ingenuity brought to the western frontier by the first generation of American emigrants to the territory. As markers on the landscape, pioneer houses and homesteads of the middle nineteenth century remind us where we have been. It would be difficult to overstate their importance to the Oregon story. They represent the final chapter of the Oregon Trail narrative that is unique to the region. Testament to the diverse cultural traditions of the Oregon pioneers, they reflect architectural forms from nearly all regions of the eastern United States, skillfully translated to fit the challenging circumstances of the frontier.

Once gone, these buildings cannot be retrieved or replicated; the circumstances of their making have passed, as have many of the skills needed to conceive and build them. At one time a common sight throughout the Valley, most of Oregon's pioneer dwellings have been lost. Many of those that remain are fragile and endangered, assaulted by neglect, time, weather and the ignorance of those who alter or raze them.<sup>85</sup> While documentation in the form of photographs, written description and drawings may serve to better understand such sites, nothing is more effective in demonstrating the visual and operational genius of these buildings than the "living" example: the buildings themselves.<sup>86</sup> Their significance, and the urgency of their need for preservation, merits the attention and support of all Oregonians.

For these reasons, a concerted effort to enumerate, evaluate, and promote the preservation of this group of Oregon's oldest remaining buildings is being initiated. This portion of the project, represents an effort to identify the threats to these properties, and develop a slate of recommended actions to help stem their loss.

### Project Description

As noted at the beginning of the Historic Context section, the parameters were limited to the study of residential buildings and farmsteads in nine counties in the Willamette Valley (Lane, Benton, Linn, Marion, Polk, Yamhill, Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas). The period of interest of 1841 to 1865 correlates to the date of construction of the earliest extant residences (the Jason Lee House and the Methodist Parsonage in Salem), and closes with the date generally accepted by local experts as signifying the end of the early period of western Oregon settlement.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, personal communication with author, May 2, 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Elisabeth Walton Potter, personal communication with author, May 14, 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Although the current study is limited geographically to the Willamette Valley, much of the historical context and many of the issues of threat and challenges of solutions will apply to future studies of areas along the Columbia, the Clatsop Plains and southern Oregon regions. Similar but separate studies for those areas will be important, as the buildings and sites in areas outside the nine subject counties are just as significant, and the threats to them are no less pressing.



Historic buildings in Oregon were first surveyed by the Historic American Building Survey in 1934, at which time 47 were identified and documented through photography and measured drawings. That effort focused on the oldest buildings in the state, and 35 of those properties were located in the study area.<sup>88</sup> Forty years later, in the mid-1970s, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) undertook the first statewide (but not comprehensive) survey of historic properties, and from that time through the present, cities and counties have made efforts to identify historic properties and compile varying levels of historical information, which is now housed digitally in the SHPO's "Historic Sites Database."<sup>89</sup>



Figures 41 and 42. 1934 HABS documentation of the James Nesmith House, Polk County.

A cursory review of the Historic Sites Database revealed that through previous surveys, perhaps 450-500 residential properties from this early period of development have been identified in western Oregon (including the Willamette, Umpqua and Rogue River valleys and the lower Columbia/Clatsop Plains area); 311 of these were located in the nine-county project area.<sup>90</sup> In 2013, a windshield, reconnaissance-level survey of those 311 properties was undertaken by the SHPO. Of those, 255 (82%) were extant and 56 (18%) had been demolished since the mid-1970s. Of the 255 remaining, 38 (12%) were evaluated as having lost physical, historical integrity to such a significant degree that they were no longer clearly recognizable as pioneer-era buildings. This leaves 217 buildings or farmsteads of the settlement era whose physical architectural characteristics remain sufficiently intact to convey their early construction date(s).

While 255 or even 217 buildings may seem reasonable numbers, it is important to consider how many there might have been during the period under study. Without engaging in a detailed statistical study, it is difficult to guess how many houses there were in the Willamette Valley at any given point in time. For some perspective, note that,

By 1857 an estimated 6,000 [donation claim] notifications were on file at the Oregon City land office [and] according to the surveyor-general's estimate in that year 'the

<sup>88</sup> Jamieson Parker, "Historic American Building Survey Final Results," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* Vol 35, No. 2 (June 1934), 177-178.

<sup>89</sup> The database is available online at <http://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic>.

<sup>90</sup> The total number for western Oregon is only an approximation due to the mix of pre-1865 property types produced by the search, including commercial buildings, cemeteries and agricultural buildings. It is also unclear whether properties located in historic districts are also listed in the database individually.

whole number of settlers claiming lands under the donation laws in Oregon is not far from 9,000.

Eventually however, 7,437 patents [deeds] covering 2,500,000 acres were granted in Oregon. By 1900 few of the Donation Land Claims were owned by the families of the original claimants.<sup>91</sup>

An informal count of the donation claim patents issued by the General Land Office for properties in the study area suggests that a total of approximately 4,634 patents were issued under the Act.<sup>92</sup> Given that occupation and improvement of the claim were legal requirements for receiving the patent, one might expect a roughly commensurate number of dwellings. If that number is used, and is compared with the number of extant buildings from before 1865, the percentage of loss would be calculated at approximately 94%. This calculation does not account for urban buildings that may not have ever been tied directly to the receipt of a donation land claim.

In terms of urban properties related to this period of Oregon's history, the numbers may be even more stark. In Portland's urban and sub-urban areas within Multnomah County, of an unknown number of pre-1865 dwellings, only eight are known to remain.<sup>93</sup> The town of Brownsville is somewhat unusual in that it retains a relatively high number of settlement-period residences, many of which were constructed not as farm houses but as town dwellings. However, most communities in the Willamette Valley, large or small, are not as rich in domestic architecture from the settlement period.<sup>94</sup> Regardless of specific location, the fact that this discussion is focused on the fate of the last 255 pioneer houses in the Willamette Valley speaks volumes about their rarity and importance.

## Methodology

Two meetings were held, on March 13<sup>th</sup> and April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at which individuals with varying perspectives yet similar passion for the settlement period in Oregon gathered, and a list of threats and recommendations was developed.<sup>95</sup> Formal and informal conversations, by phone and in person, have also contributed to this effort.

Simultaneously with the preparation of this report, Kenny Gunn of the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office was engaged in the re-survey of the 311 previously-identified properties and entering data in the State's Historic Sites Database, using the grouping title "Settlement Era Homesteads of the Willamette Valley." That information is available on the Historic Sites Database.

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<sup>91</sup> Dorothy O. Johanson, "The Role of Land Laws in the Settlement of Oregon," *Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims*, Volume I. (Portland, Oregon: The Genealogical Forum of Portland, 1957 (?); 1992, 2001 and 2005 (reprint dates) np.

<sup>92</sup> Claim data was derived from the Bureau of Land Management website <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>. Patents issued under the authority of the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, from any General Land Office, at any time, in each of the nine subject counties were included in the count. Removed from the count were individual lots in Oregon City that were sold by Dr. John McLoughlin.

<sup>93</sup> A review of the Federal census of 1860 and the Portland City directory of 1863 may provide at least a general idea of the number of individual dwelling houses were in the city at that time.

<sup>94</sup> This admittedly unscientific analysis is worthy of further study. Perhaps 200 of the 255 identified properties are or were farm-related at the time of their construction; the remainder were constructed in a more urban setting and were not necessarily related to a farm.

<sup>95</sup> Many thanks to Roz Keeney, Don Peting, Elisabeth Walton Potter, Bill Hawkins, Gregg Olson, George Kramer, Stephen Dow Beckham, Shannon Applegate, Kenny Gunn, Chrissy Curran and Roger Roper for their contributions to this effort.

## The Threats

Current threats to settlement-period sites are not unlike the threats to other historic resources, except that the dwindling number of Oregon's earliest buildings makes each loss more keenly felt, while elevating the importance of those that remain. Development pressures, economic challenges, perceived obsolescence, weather, age, neglect and a lack of understanding of their importance to the Oregon story all contribute to the loss of these treasures. The array of identified threats and challenges, of which there are many, have been loosely organized into four general categories, each discussed in more detail below:

- *Identification/Information Distribution/Education*
- *Land Use and Planning*
- *Building Use/Obsolescence and Maintenance*
- *Incentives/Disincentives.*

### *Identification/Information Distribution/Education*

This report identified that there is inadequate (or inadequately distributed or inadequately accessed) identification and mapping of these properties. Further, local jurisdictions (cities and counties) often do not avail themselves of what information is available. Planning staffs and historic commissions are not always aware of the existence or status of the earliest buildings standing in their jurisdiction, and in some cases this blind spot has resulted in the loss of the resource. Additional identified threats related to the identification of these resources, distribution of that information, and education of those who may have some influence in their preservation included the following:

- The lack of a unique list or register specifically for settlement-era properties has been missing, though current work by SHPO staff now organizes the survey data into such a grouping.
- Overall knowledge about the rarity, significance or stories embodied by these sites seems to be generally lacking.
- Owners, real estate agents and property buyers often are not aware of the age or significance of these buildings.
- In many cases the public, planning staff, commission members, museum staff and volunteers are not aware of the significance of the sites to their local and our collective history.
- The importance of sites and properties from the settlement era are not prioritized as compared to all other historic properties; they are not valued more than other historic properties, though their age, dwindling numbers, and historical significance suggests they should be.

### *Planning and Land Use*

While Oregon is known for having developed one of the most progressive statewide land use policies and programs in the nation, these earliest pioneer properties often have no protection, and land use policies can work at cross-purposes to their preservation. Land use roadblocks can frustrate even well-intentioned owners, and increasing population and development pressures threaten the buildings and their surrounding contexts.

- One of the most obvious threats to these buildings, most of which are rural in nature, is expanding urban sprawl, which may impact the buildings themselves or their historic agricultural setting.

- Exclusive Farm Use zones tend to disallow more than one residence on large agricultural parcels (in an effort to preserve farmland), and some counties also do not allow partitioning of property in order to preserve historic sites. Partitioning would allow historic dwellings to remain in place and in use, or be sold to a new occupant, rather than being abandoned or demolished in order to allow the construction of a new residence.
- Some counties have not acquired Certified Local Government (CLG) status through the SHPO, and therefore have not codified the protection of any historic properties, including National Register or local landmarks (such as in Lane County). In these cases, demolition or alteration permits may be approved with little or no consideration for the historical significance of the property.
- Code requirements (building/fire/life safety and ADA) are difficult to meet in buildings constructed in the middle nineteenth century, without resulting in damage to or removal of characteristic features such as staircases, porch rails, windows, doors, etc. Without an appreciation and recognition of the importance of these buildings and their inherent features, it is difficult (or impossible) to request or receive any leniency on certain code requirements during the rehabilitation or updating process.
- Most local jurisdictions do not have on staff planning professionals with any training in historic preservation or local/public history.

#### *Building Use/Obsolescence and Maintenance*

At an age of over 140 years, these buildings are often seen as obsolete or redundant. Many owners prefer a new house to the old one, or find modern living in an old house too challenging for a number of reasons. Even if owners are interested and willing to keep these buildings, appropriate maintenance and repair can be economically challenging or even prohibitive. Current trends in building upgrades and maintenance promote the use of new materials and features, which negatively affect the historical integrity of settlement-era buildings. Ongoing care of 150-year-old buildings can be particular or expensive (or both), and their upkeep is sometimes simply more than an owner wants to accept. Buildings in the Willamette Valley all face, to slightly varying degrees, the common threat of water infiltration, making good roofs imperative to their preservation. Other common issues related to the use or maintenance of these buildings in particular include the following:

- Often, owners are unable to envision a reasonable use for the buildings, or don't recognize their property's historical value.
- If the buildings are not owner-occupied, finding the "right" tenant can be challenging.
- In rural areas in which there are historic outbuildings remaining, the cost of maintaining an unused or functionally obsolete building or structure such as a barn or smokehouse can be viewed as unreasonable, especially if the building no longer has a dedicated function.
- Many early dwellings are small, and not desirable for today's living standards.
- Box-constructed (or single-wall) buildings have no wall cavity in which to insulate, making energy efficiency difficult to achieve.
- Poor or failing roofs accelerate deterioration, making future rehabilitation or restoration both more challenging and more expensive, yet because nearly all of these dwellings are constructed of wood, good, well-maintained roofs, gutters and downspouts are critical to their continued survival. Roof replacement costs can be high, depending on the materials used. Replicating early or original wood shingle roofs, which is in itself costly, is virtually impossible due to the lack of high-quality (i.e. old growth) shingles available. Metal roofs, which are not usually materially

or visually compatible, do have their place and have a lifespan that nearly doubles that of other more historically sensitive materials.

- Original siding, and particularly original (usually hand-made) window sash, are character-defining for this classification of building, and the loss of these materials and original workmanship is irreversible. The marketing of vinyl siding and windows can be very aggressive, as these products are perceived as being maintenance-free. Vinyl siding needs no paint, and vinyl windows are, at least initially, easily operable and also are perceived as needing no maintenance. These historically incompatible products, which often require the removal of original and significant building features, can be attractive to homeowners looking for economical ways to update and/or maintain their house.
- Concerns about lead paint have scared owners of older properties into whole-cloth removal of historic, character-defining features such as windows, doors, trim and siding. Less-destructive alternatives to this extreme approach to “lead abatement” are often not explored.
- There is a dearth of qualified craftspeople with an understanding of the particular needs of these buildings. General contractors tend to take the “path of least resistance” which is not typically the best choice in terms of sensitive updating or appropriate repair.
- Encroaching vegetation can not only damage the building by encouraging moisture and bug infestation, but implies a certain level of abandonment or apathy which can result in vandalism

#### *Incentives/Disincentives*

Sources of funding for the maintenance and repair of historic buildings is lacking. This particular category of buildings, many of them hand-made, have specific needs with regard to their upkeep, which in many cases is more expensive than the requirements of later buildings. Incentives, in the form of financial assistance or code relaxation for example, in exchange for retaining and utilizing pioneer-era buildings are deficient. In fact, there seem to be more disincentives for demolishing these buildings than there are incentives for keeping them.

- Outright grants for maintenance or repair are virtually non-existent for private owners.
- Appropriate rehabilitation that retains original, hand-made features such as windows, doors, siding, stairs and porch railings can be more difficult and more expensive.
- Educational opportunities that delve into the architectural significance, construction methods and social histories of these sites exist, but are piecemeal and not broad-based.
- Pragmatic educational programs that help owners plan for and feasibly carry out proper maintenance and utilization of 150-year-old buildings (houses, barns or outbuildings) seem not to exist.
- In many counties owners/farmers are taxed on the number of buildings they retain on their property. Owners are in fact taxed *less* if they demolish unused or deteriorating buildings or structures, regardless of their historical significance.
- Programs such as farm deferrals or assessments seem to outweigh the benefits of preservation-related programs like Oregon’s Special Assessment, which freezes property taxes for ten years on eligible historic properties in exchange for appropriate maintenance and repair.



## **Actions / Recommendations**

A broad spectrum of potential solutions to these challenges was identified throughout the course of this project. Two actions have already been taken in advance of the completion of this study. One is the re-nomination and approval of “Pioneer Houses and Homesteads of the Willamette Valley” to the Historic Preservation League of Oregon’s (HPLO) Most Endangered Places list. Placement on this list will allow the HPLO to focus some resources (funds and staff time) in an effort to raise awareness and hopefully implement some on-the-ground assistance for property owners, planners, preservationists and others concerned about this property category. The second action is the support of the State Historic Preservation Office in the preparation of a National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPD). This will provide the over-arching contextual background for National Register listing of properties that meet the requirements set out in the MPD. Although 81 properties are already listed in the National Register, 174 are not, and a large number of those appear to be potentially eligible. While National Register listing is not of itself a protective measure, it provides some measure of opportunity for tax benefits and some grant funds that are not available to owners of non-listed properties. In some counties, listing also carries with it at least a minimal level of attention in the form of alteration review.

Broad themes that arose from the group’s April discussion included a need for dedicated funding for the treatment of this specific property category (including education, identification and protection, or hands-on maintenance or rehabilitation). Engaging the public’s imagination and passion about these few remaining buildings and sites was touched upon numerous times as a key step toward getting financial support for their preservation. Elevating and illuminating the stories the resources embody through an education campaign aimed at all generations/age groups, backgrounds and geographic locations was seen as critical to the success of this project. Eventually, ideas were distilled down to four basic categories:

- *Education & Promotion*
- *Networking & Outreach*
- *Expertise*
- *Resources.*

Note that the ideas listed below are not organized in any particular order. Many could be re-stated in multiple categories, but in the interest of clarity they are not.

### *Education & Promotion: “We have to make people LOVE these buildings!”*

Many ideas were presented revolving around raising awareness and increasing people’s emotional connection to these sites. Additionally, growing a sense of “ownership” and public responsibility toward these properties, however challenging, would help provide a more stable support system for saving buildings and helping owners find solutions to specific challenges. Methods for accomplishing this elevated awareness and buy-in include utilizing the sites’ inherent characteristics and histories to compel public interest. Giving properties “personality” through highlighting their individual construction and ownership stories and their relationship to local and state history would bring Oregon’s heritage into the present, providing the people with a tangible link between themselves and their history.

The use of media in its various forms will be an important tool for reaching the public. This type of broad-based “education” could start laying groundwork for increased public interest and empathy for these endangered buildings and sites. Some strategies might include:

- Development of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for public and local television stations. The Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation runs PSAs promoting and educating about historic and archaeological places in that State.<sup>96</sup> This could be a low- or no-cost and high-impact approach, particularly if collaboration is sought with local college and university media or graphics departments.
- Engaging local news stations or Oregon Public Broadcasting to produce short programming about this aspect of Oregon history. Medford journalist Ron Brown hosts short 5-6 minute features entitled “Oregon Trails” on the local KDRV news cast, covering a variety of history topics.<sup>97</sup>
- Promoting the good work of individuals or groups who are actively engaged in the successful and/or creative use of settlement-period sites, through awards, television or newspaper publicity or other highlighting methods.
- Creation of distributable Powerpoint or video presentations for use in schools, by HPLO, local landmarks commissions, etc. as part of educational efforts.
- Production of, or facilitation of the production of engaging graphic/infographic depictions of what was and what now remains, perhaps in the form of looping slide shows or interpretive panels, for use in libraries, city halls, local events and schools.
- Development of resource-specific walking, cycling or driving tours would allow people to explore at their own pace. These could be produced either as take-away brochures with maps, or as audio tours for use with smart phones or other portable devices. Audio tours have been successfully created by graduate students at the University of Oregon, and such collaboration could be educational for both the students who create the tours and the public who utilizes them.

Supporting K-12 teachers and encouraging curricula that address this period and these properties specifically would not only help ignite young imaginations but could provide them with a tangible link to a past that seems impossibly long ago.

- Facilitate the use of these properties coupled with “Teaching with Historic Places” approach, which would start building multi-generational support for our pioneer heritage.<sup>98</sup>
- Promote, support and facilitate access to sites for broad educational purposes at many levels that could include history, architecture, politics, horticulture/landscape studies, and social studies. Examples of sites poised for or engaged in such activities include the Bybee-Howell House on Sauvie Island, Oregon City’s Ermatinger and McLoughlin Houses, and GeerCrest Farms in Marion County.

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<sup>96</sup> These can be viewed at <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=49\\_JbvZH6xM#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=49_JbvZH6xM#!)> and <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bav8nKcnZDA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bav8nKcnZDA&feature=player_embedded)>.

<sup>97</sup> An example can be viewed at <<http://www.kdrv.com/oregon-trails-stage-road-trails/>>.

<sup>98</sup> Information on the Teaching with Historic Places program is available at <<http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/>>.



The Hanley Farm in Jackson County. Owned by the Southern Oregon Historical Society, the farm operates using horsepower, has established a successful CSA, and provides a number of educational and entertainment opportunities for the public, including their lecture/dinner series “Origins: A Discovery of Place.”

Tapping into college and university student interests, as well as providing coursework on the subject of Oregon settlement and architecture, would further expand the realm of education while possibly providing an avenue for completion of some of the items listed in this document.

- Fund/support the development of a university-level course addressing Oregon’s pioneer properties, and culminating in final projects such as PSAs, short informational films or PowerPoint presentations, interpretive materials, tour guides, detailed property studies, updated survey information, or even hands-on assistance to property owners to provide both an educational experience for the students, and a public service component.
- Promote the deeper investigation of pioneer building-related topics suitable for thesis and terminal project work would advance the current scholarship on these properties.
- Collaborate with local planning divisions on their needs with regard to the early sites in their jurisdiction, and connect planning and historic preservation students with such projects.



The historic Geercrest Farm in Marion County offers rich educational opportunities, including overnight stays, allowing visitors to learn about rural life through its “Farm-Life Education” programs.<sup>99</sup>

## Networking & Outreach

<sup>99</sup> Visit [http://www.geercrest.org/GeerCrest\\_Farm/Education.html](http://www.geercrest.org/GeerCrest_Farm/Education.html) for more information.

Creating face-to-face opportunities for networking and outreach at various levels would engage (and educate) a wide spectrum audience. It is possible we already have unrecognized allies willing to aid us in our efforts. Many churches, granges, genealogical societies, tribal organizations, museums, and the archaeological community, many of which have an established commitment to heritage in some form, could help strengthen the network of interested and concerned citizenry.

- Collaborate with other organizations and conferences to help educate those with parallel interests. Examples include the Oregon & California Trails Association, which is holding their 2013 National Convention in Oregon City, with the theme “End of the Trail and Beyond” and the Marion Dean Ross Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, whose conference is taking place in October 2013 in Salem.
- Set up an HPLO task force that could facilitate an ongoing conversation about settlement-period resources statewide, as well as start to implement some of these recommendations
- Actively engage with, and encourage communities (individuals, schools, organizations, business owners) to embrace the National Trust’s “This Place Matters” campaign as a way of highlighting and promoting settlement-period properties throughout the Willamette Valley and Oregon
- Establish a Speakers Bureau, with speakers able and willing to talk to various audiences about Oregon’s remaining pioneer heritage as it is manifest in buildings
- Organize, host or sponsor a symposium on pioneer sites and relevant topics, targeted to a broad-based audience
- Create a non-governmental “Pioneer Buildings” list similar to the Century Farm and Ranch program (honorific only) to celebrate and elevate the visibility of early Oregon sites
- Create or support the development of traveling 1-day workshops on topics such as historic window repair, building assessment, historical research, etc.

### *Expertise*

There is a lack of expertise in the building trades, planning, real estate and other professions with regard to Oregon’s earliest buildings and sites.

- Create, support, engage and grow a network of contractors and trades people with skills relevant to hand-made buildings
- Create, support, engage and grow a network of interested experts outside the building trades who are willing to donate time and expertise in particular areas such as building assessments, historical research, landmark listing, documentation, grant writing, etc.
- Create a network of owners of pioneer-era houses
- Help guide interested property owners who want to work on their own buildings; pair experts with interested owners
- Through education, ensure that planners, real estate agents, and others have an understanding of what these buildings are and why they are important
- Facilitate the integration of current survey data into city and county GIS systems
- Determine, county-by-county, the level of protection and support currently offered to pioneer-era buildings and their owners in the form of alterations review, code relaxation, availability of landmark status, grant programs, or use of land use aids such as partitions. Educate and encourage jurisdictions in the implementation protective strategies that are available under current planning and land use laws and frameworks.



Participants at the Pacific Northwest Field School learn valuable skills in the repair and preservation of a variety of historic building types.

### *Resources*

None of the above recommendations can happen without resources: money, time, energy, expertise and the will to make things happen.

- Expand this study, or fund similar studies that would address northeastern and southern Oregon, and regions east of the Cascades.
- Promote legislative tax relief was successful in the 1970s because the buildings were presented as ancient and important. Another attempt now, over forty years later, is warranted. Although most of these buildings are in private ownership, they are public assets as markers of Oregon's collective history. State-level tax relief aimed at this group of buildings specifically could take the form of benefits for the appropriate care and maintenance of these buildings, or creating (and enforcing) more flexible land use laws where settlement-period buildings are concerned.
- Explore the establishment of a roof program that would provide owners with funding and/or assistance for repairing or replacing roofs on pre-1865 buildings.
- Explore the possibilities for establishing an aid program that could fund or provide seed money for repairs necessary to save buildings
- More strenuously promote HPLO's easement program to all remaining buildings that retain integrity
- Once the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form is in place, actively encourage National Register listing (which can open doors to protection, funding, etc.)

Not all buildings of this period are in dire straits. The following list presents several that are presently in personal, commercial or non-profit use, and their examples may provide frameworks for the successful use or adaptation to a new function of those that are currently endangered. Note that not all of these examples are located in the Willamette Valley. It will be necessary, and useful, to look beyond the study area (elsewhere in Oregon or in other states) to find successful examples.



Ralph and Mary Geer House, Marion County  
([http://www.geercrest.org/GeerCrest\\_Farm/Welcome.html](http://www.geercrest.org/GeerCrest_Farm/Welcome.html))

Hanley Farm, Jackson County  
(<http://www.sohs.org/properties/hanley-farm>)

Applegate House Heritage Arts and Education  
(<http://applegatehouse.wordpress.com>)

Monteith House, Linn County  
(<http://albanyvisitors.com/historic-albany/museums/monteith-house/>)

Joel Palmer House, Yamhill County  
(<http://www.joelpalmerhouse.com>)

Rock Point Stage Stop/Del Rio Vineyards  
(<http://delriovineyards.com/history.html>)

It may not be possible to save all of the remaining pioneer houses in the Willamette Valley. However, through continued conversation and concerted effort an elevated awareness and appreciation of their importance to the social and historical fabric of Oregon can be cultivated. With that foundation, on-the-ground preservation becomes infinitely more achievable.

Success in saving these few remaining Oregon treasures will require the attention and action of many. It will not happen quickly and some buildings will be lost. But all Oregonians have something to offer in this endeavor, and it is hoped that this preliminary step will provide impetus to future action to save what is left of Oregon's earliest buildings.

This list of threats, recommendations and actions reflects the ideas recently discussed, but the list is not comprehensive. Each of the remaining pre-1865 properties that have been identified is unique, with its own set of characteristics and challenges. In order to illustrate the types of situations that these sites are facing, several brief "case studies" follow. The basics of the property's history, its issues and potential solutions or positive actions are presented as a way to depict real-life scenarios.

## **Case Studies**

Sam Brown House, Gervais, Marion County

Bybee-Howell House, Sauvie Island, Multnomah County

Dibble House, Molalla, Clackamas County

Daniel Waldo House, Macleay, Marion County

Angell-Brewster House, Lebanon, Linn County

## Sam Brown House

CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1856-1858  
LOCATION: Gervais, Marion County  
STATUS: National Register-listed  
PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION: HABS 1934, NR listing 1974  
OWNERSHIP/USE: Private/Single-family Residence

### *History*

The Sam Brown House and its collection of historic outbuildings are all sited on 140 acres of the original Brown Donation Claim. The property has remained in the Brown family since the original claim was made in 1850. According to the National Register documentation,

In 1846 the Browns and their nine-month old son joined a wagon train bound for Oregon. At Fort Hall in Idaho they were persuaded by Jesse Applegate...to take the more 'easily possible' Southern Immigrant Road, or Applegate Trail, into Oregon rather than follow the remainder of the Oregon Trail. At a subsequent point the Browns left the Applegate-Scott party and headed south for California... With the discovery of gold in 1848, Brown...decided...to try his hand at placer mining. He was successful. In 1850, the Browns, \$20,000 richer, embarked by sea to visit a relative of Mrs. Brown's in Oregon. They decided to stay, filed for a Donation Land Claim of 640 acres, purchased 1500 acres more, and lived in a log cabin until the first part of their house was completed about 1856.<sup>100</sup>

Sam Brown was trained in carpentry and cabinet making, and is credited with the construction of the existing dwelling. The property has been passed down for generations of Brown family members, and in March of 2013 was listed for sale. Although its physical condition appears to have deteriorated somewhat in the last twenty years, the house retains a remarkable degree of historical integrity, and is widely recognized as one of Oregon's premier examples of a finely crafted and somewhat unusual Classical Revival house of the 1850s.

The threats that face this property are several, but the unknown future it faces as a result of its recent sale is perhaps the most acute. While the real estate agent assigned to the sale appeared to be somewhat astute to the importance of the property (having reached out and notified both the Oregon Historical Society and the State Historic Preservation Office), their "first duty is to the seller in securing a purchaser and completing the transaction in a timely manner." The new owner and their intentions are not yet known.

### *Recommendations/Lessons Learned*

- Promote and implement HPLO's Historic Property Easement Program
- Explore EFU zone property partition to preserve both farmland and the historic site
- In future similar circumstances, engage a network of preservation/conservation-minded parties to find a sympathetic new owner, preferably BEFORE the property hits the open market
- Inform the community of real estate professionals about
  - National Register-listed properties and their importance
  - The existence of the preservation "network"

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Hartwig and D.W. Powers, "Sam Brown House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1974.



Sam Brown House, no date. Image courtesy Wikipedia.



Sam Brown House, Historic American Building Survey images, 1934



Sam Brown House, 2006. Photo by author.

## Bybee-Howell House

CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1856  
LOCATION: Sauvie Island, Multnomah County  
STATUS: National Register-listed  
PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION: HABS 1934, NR listing 1974  
OWNERSHIP/USE: Public/Regional Government/Vacant

### *History*

According to National Register documentation, the Bybee-Howell House, also known as the James F. Bybee House, "...is one of the finest examples of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Classic Revival in Oregon, if not the West Coast."<sup>101</sup> The Bybee-Howell House was in very poor condition when it was acquired by the Oregon Historical Society in 1961. It subsequently underwent a careful restoration and was listed in the National Register in 1974.

James and Julia Bybee and their children came to Oregon from Kentucky in 1847 and settled on Sauvie Island. "With the discovery of gold in California, Bybee headed south, where, according to a contemporary source, 'he made a fortune.' Returning in 1854, he claimed 642.21 acres on Sauvie's Island..." (Hartwig and Powers, 1974) According to National Register documentation, the house is an unusually lavish and rare example of the Classical Revival style in the Pacific Northwest, with plaster walls, oak, redwood, ash and white maple interior woodwork, seven fireplaces, and nine rooms arranged around a central stair hall.

Only two years after its completion, in 1858, the Bybees sold the house to Dr. Benjamin and Elizabeth Howell, owners of an adjoining land claim. The house remained in Howell family ownership until 1961 when it was sold to the Oregon Historical Society.

Today the property is owned by Metro, the regional government serving the planning, transportation and parks needs of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington Counties. Under Metro's stewardship, the surrounding land remains a public park, but the house has languished and is no longer open to the public. Today a sign in the window declares that the house "will not be open." It is unclear whether the house is heated, cleaned or repaired on a regular basis.

### *Recommendations*

- Spotlight the history of building, its current state/use, and its potential use(s) through public outreach
- Engage Metro by offering potential uses (including revenue-generating); provide them with examples of other successful, publicly-owned rural/park properties
- Assist in the formation of a use framework utilizing successful examples of reuse. This could take the form of creating an on-site educational curriculum (for local schools, heritage organizations for preservation/history workshops), considering the use of the property for for-profit events (weddings, meetings, workshops, etc.), or exploring the possibility of a collaborative community garden or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture.

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Hartwig and D.W. Powers, "Bybee-Howell House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1974.





James Bybee-Benjamin Howell House, Historic American Building Survey images, 1934



James Bybee-Benjamin Howell House, 1964. Both images Courtesy Building Oregon/Marion Dean Ross.



Bybee-Howell House. Image courtesy Wikipedia, dated 2010.

## Horace L. and Julie Dibble House

CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1856-1859

LOCATION: Molalla, Clackamas County

STATUS: National Register-listed

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION: HABS 1934; NR listing 1974; 1984 Inventory; 1990 Inventory

OWNERSHIP/USE: Local non-profit/House Museum

### *History*

The 1856-1859 Horace L. and Julia Dibble house is, according to National Register documentation, "...a rare example of a salt box house in Oregon. Furthermore, it is a rather late example of the post and beam framing system. [As such], it represents a conservative vernacular building type, both in style and method of construction, transplanted possibly from New England..."<sup>102</sup>

The Dibbles emigrated to Oregon from Iowa in 1852. The Dibbles made a claim in the early 1850s, but later acquired the land on which this house is located. Sources vary on the method by which they acquired the property and relinquished their first claim, but it seems some 360 acres was purchased from an earlier claimant, Rachel Larkins, the widow of William Larkins. Dibble may have arranged for a former seaman named Phillips to build the house, construction taking place between 1856 and 1859.<sup>103</sup>

The Dibble family retained ownership of the property until the twentieth century when it was sold to Dudley and Goldie Boyles sometime after 1909.<sup>104</sup> Ruth McBride Powers purchased the house in 1969, and later sold it to the Molalla Area Historical Society (MAHS) who retains ownership of the house today. This house was one of forty-seven receiving the attention of the 1930s Historic American Building Survey effort, and was listed in the National Register in 1974.

Today the Dibble House is operated as a local museum, and "...houses a collection of local furniture, clothing, and kitchenware that is pertinent to the area."<sup>105</sup> Museum staff nominated the house as one of Oregon's "Most Endangered Places" in 2013, citing a number maintenance needs and a lack of funding with which to rectify the problems. As a non-profit organization, the Museum is entirely dependent on grants and donations for its operations and site maintenance, and "...most of our support would be considered unskilled, in terms of awareness of the special needs of a building of this age." While the City of Molalla has provided some support in the past (grounds maintenance and no-cost water and sewer service), the City "...no longer has the funds or inclination..." to continue with this support.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Hartwig, "Dibble (Horace C.) House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1974.

<sup>103</sup> Hartwig, 1974; Iris Riley, HPLO Most Endangered Places Application, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Riley, 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Riley, 2013.

<sup>106</sup> Riley, 2013.

### *Recommendations*

- Network with other non-profits, specifically those related to house museums (Monteith, Applegate, John McLoughlin/Ermatinger)
- Educate volunteers on appropriate treatment in repair and maintenance
- Educate community on the importance of the house to their collective heritage
- Explore private partnerships or lease possibilities
- Seek financial support for heating the house



Horace Dibble House, Historic American Building Survey photos, 1934.



Horace Dibble House, image courtesy MAHS.



Dibble House, current view, image courtesy MAHS.

## Daniel and Melinda Waldo House

CONSTRUCTION DATE: Circa 1854  
LOCATION: Macleay, Marion County  
STATUS: None  
PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION: Inventory 2013  
OWNERSHIP/USE: Private (corporation)/Vacant

### *History*

Daniel and Melinda Waldo and their family were among those who made the trek to Oregon with the 1843 “Great Migration.” Their circa 1854 two-story house is the third or fourth dwelling on the Waldo Hills property, and had, until several years ago, gone largely unnoticed by the preservation community. The house was only recently added to the Oregon Historic Sites Database, is not listed in the National Register, and was not the subject of any previous survey or identification efforts, including HABS.

The Waldos were originally from Virginia (Daniel) and Tennessee (Melinda), but migrated west to Missouri where they were neighbors of the Applegate families before continuing west to Oregon. On the 640-acre donation claim, Daniel built a small log cabin in 1843, followed by a more substantial hewn double cabin in 1844. Ten years later, the current hewn-frame house was constructed. The Waldos were well-known and well-respected during these early years of Oregon’s growth, and were actively involved in state and local politics.

The house left Waldo family ownership in the early years of the twentieth century, and was used as a rental for some years. In the mid-1990s occupants accidentally started a fire that damaged the southern end of the building, and from that point on the house remained unoccupied and unmaintained. Within the last fifteen years, the property was sold to Winemakers LLC, an out-of-state corporation that is utilizing the large tract of agricultural land surrounding the house for growing grapes. No maintenance or care of the house ensued, and its condition continued to deteriorate as a result of fire damage to the roof and south endwall, both of which were open to the weather.

In 2012, a small group of concerned citizens and HPLO supporters converged on the house in an effort to close the end wall and prevent further water infiltration. However, threats to the building remain acute, as the owner are not investing in maintenance or repair of the building.

### *Recommendations*

- Publicize house history through local newspapers, journals, etc. to elevate visibility and generate neighborhood and local interest
- There has been positive response from efforts to preserve the nearby pioneer cemetery (on the original Waldo claim and part of the Waldo family heritage); capitalizing and building on this could have a favorable effect on attempts to save the building
- Explore land partition possibilities
- Engage directly with the owners to bring them the site’s compelling story along with concrete possibilities for use and reasons for saving the building





Waldo House, pre-1900. Image courtesy of Brian Waldo Johnson.



Waldo House, mid-twentieth century. Both images courtesy of Salem Public Library.



Waldo House, December 2011. Photo by author.



## Angell-Brewster House

CONSTRUCTION DATE: Circa 1855

LOCATION: Lebanon vicinity, Linn County

STATUS: Demolished; formerly National Register-listed

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION: Inventory 1988; County Register 1990; NR listing 1992; historic archaeological site 2011

OWNERSHIP/USE: Private/Demolished

### *History*

The circa 1855 Angell-Brewster House, at the time of its National Register listing in 1992, was an early and rare surviving example of the New England salt box form in the Willamette Valley. The construction of the house, formerly located east of Lebanon, is attributed to its first owner and occupant, Thomas Angell.

New York native Thomas Angell proved the donation land claim he made jointly with his wife in 1852 after a succession of improvements beginning with a log cabin. The Angells remained on the land until 1858. The New England heritage of both Thomas and Susan Angell up to the generation of their respective parents...[explains] the persistence of the New England salt box and its appearance on the Oregon frontier. [...] In its finish elements, the house embodies, in the words of early Oregon building expert Philip H. Dole, the 'simple technology, fine craftsmanship and plain detailing' of the frontier settlement period.<sup>107</sup>

In 1858 the Angells sold their claim and moved into the nearby town of Lebanon; by 1861 they had relocated to Wasco County to ranch. After several sales transactions, the property in 1885 came into the long-term ownership of William and Susan Peterman Brewster, who remained on the property until their deaths in 1906 and 1918, respectively.<sup>108</sup> The Brewsters and their descendants retained ownership of the property for ninety-four years until selling in 1979.

In early 2010, the County issued a demolition permit to the owner of the Angell-Brewster House. The circumstances of the issuance are not entirely clear, but according to County planning staff and members of the Linn County Historic Resources Commission, it was not made clear that the building was listed in the National Register or had any historic or cultural significance. Despite last-minute efforts to save the building through sale and relocation (an interested party had been identified), the owner was ultimately unwilling to release the building and it was demolished in late summer of 2010. In 2011, the property was surveyed and documented as a historic archaeological site.

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<sup>107</sup> Elisabeth Walton Potter, SHPO Comments, "Angell-Brewster House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1992.

<sup>108</sup> Lisa Teresi-Burcham, "Angell-Brewster House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1992.

### *Recommendations/Lessons Learned*

Because this resource is no longer standing, these recommendations are provided as guidance for avoiding similar situations in the future.

- Ensure that local jurisdictions (staff and, where applicable, landmark boards) are informed of the pioneer sites and buildings within their purview.
  - Distribute survey/inventory information
  - Provide educational opportunities on these properties as needed
- Publicize house history through local newspapers, journals, etc. to elevate visibility and generate neighborhood and local interest
- Explore land partition possibilities
- Engage directly with owners to bring them the site's compelling story along with concrete possibilities for use and reasons for saving building
- Engage network of potential interested parties to either encourage new use or occupancy, find a buyer for the property, or determine feasibility of and carry out building relocation



Angell-Brewster House, National Register image.



Angell-Brewster House, Summer 2010

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