

RECORDS OF BAPTIST HOME MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN OREGON TERRITORY TO 1860

Introduction

Although Baptist missionary operations in the Pacific Northwest actually began with the arrival of Ezra Fisher and Hezekiah Johnson in Western Oregon in 1845, yet the attention of Baptists in the Atlantic States had been turned to that region as early as 1832. In 1830 Hall Jackson Kelley published in Boston a pamphlet entitled *A Geographical Sketch of that Part of North America Called Oregon*, and on June 22, 1831, he obtained from the General Court of Massachusetts an act incorporating the American Society for Encouraging the Settlement of the Oregon Territory. Of this society he became general agent.¹ In 1831 he published in Charlestown, Massachusetts, a second pamphlet bearing the title of *A General Circular to All Persons of Good Character, who Wish to Emigrate to the Oregon Territory*. The way was now preparing, it appeared, for the realization of Kelley's dream of planting a colony on "the delightful and fertile banks of the Columbia River."² The *General Circular* was a prospectus of a colonizing company; it announced that an Oregon settlement was to be commenced in the spring of 1832.

New Englander that he was, Kelley had no thought of leading a band of his fellow citizens into a region where the comforts and blessings of religion were wanting. The *General Circular* proposed that churches of different denominations be organized before the emigration began, and that these churches take with them their pastors. Also, it promised that encouragement would be given "pious and well educated" young men in the work of imparting moral and religious instruction to the Indians of Oregon. For the realization of the religious aims of the colony it was proposed that a "religious fund" and an "Indian fund" be raised by donations and subscriptions.³

The planting of a colony of Americans in the Pacific Northwest would open to missionary enterprise a field which would have a strong claim upon the American churches. Whether such a field,

1 F. W. Powell, ed., *Hall J. Kelley on Oregon* (Princeton, 1932), p. xii. In this volume the principal writings of Kelley have been reprinted. For a life of Kelley, see F. W. Powell, "Hall Jackson Kelley, Prophet of Oregon," in the *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly*, XVIII, nos. 1-3 (1917).

2 H. J. Kelley, *General Circular*, p. 3; also Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-92.

3 Kelley, *General Circular*, pp. 15, 26; Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 81, 89.

since the title of the United States to the Oregon Country was then in dispute, should be occupied by a home or a foreign missionary society might raise a nice question for legalists; but the question was not of much practical importance. Probably it never occurred to Kelley to make such a distinction. In any event, he appealed to the Methodist Episcopal denomination, and, as a result, two missionaries were enrolled to go from the New England Conference.⁴ Kelley appealed also to the Baptist denomination, but the available evidence does not show that Baptist missionaries were enrolled in the company. It is certain, however, that Baptist interest in the project was aroused; and, had Kelley's plan materialized, it is likely that Baptist missionaries would have been in Oregon at least ten years before Ezra Fisher and Hezekiah Johnson crossed the plains.

The presence near Boston of an important Baptist school, the Newton Theological Institution, suggested to Kelley an effective means of laying before the Baptist denomination his plan to establish a colony in Oregon. Whether Kelley presented his plan in person or merely opened a correspondence with members of that institution cannot with certainty be determined. But of the fact of his appealing to Baptists through this seminary there can be no question. On September 1, 1832, D. W. Elmore, a student at Newton, wrote to Kelley that he did not think it advisable for him to leave his studies at that time. But he expressed an interest in the proposed Oregon colony, and hoped that within a twelvemonth it would be supplied with "all kinds of useful instruction." Should the colony succeed, continued Elmore, Dr. Lucius Bolles, corresponding secretary of the Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, and Professor Irah Chase of the Newton Theological Institution believed that the "Board" should see to the establishment of a Baptist ministry in Oregon. If a year after this time Kelley should still be in need of help from the Board, Elmore thought it would be his duty to go to Oregon.⁵

When Elmore spoke of the "Board," he probably referred to the Executive Board of the Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, although it is possible that he had in mind the recently formed American Baptist Home Mission Society. This last named society had been organized in New York on April 27, 1832. Article II of its constitution declared: "The great object of the Society shall be to

⁴ Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. xii-xiii. For Kelley's appeal early in 1833, to the "patriotic and benevolent," see *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald* (February 15, 1833), VII, 99, and *New York Evangelist* (February 2, 1833), IV, 18.

⁵ Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

promote the preaching of the gospel in North America."⁶ The field of operation thus contemplated would include the Oregon Country; the name adopted for the Society was scarcely in keeping with the proposed sphere of operation. The declared purpose of the organization was to promote both home and foreign missions.

On November 1, 1832, Kelley left Boston for New York and Washington to complete arrangements for what proved to be an ill-fated trip to Oregon.⁷ While in New York, he discussed with the Reverend Jonathan Going, corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, his Oregon colonization project. A record of Kelley's meeting with Going and of the latter's interest in the proposed colony is preserved in a letter from Going to the Reverend J. B. Ballard, of Wintonbury, Connecticut. This letter, dated at New York, January 9, 1833, reads in part as follows:

"I have long been looking for you to return, and call, so that we might have a long confab on matters of Western interest. I this moment learned from Mr. Hall J. Kelly, [*sic*] that you are in Wintonbury, and also that you have expressed a disposition to emigrate to Columbia River, with the Oregon Colony of which Mr. K. is the projector, and factotum. Is that so?

"My own opinion is, after abating something for the enthusiasm of Kelly, that there is good land there and the prospect of a settlement of some importance. Already there are 600 men (now to be reinforced by something like 100 more,) besides *women* and children. It seems desirable that the institutions of religion should early be established among them. And if you seriously incline to go there, say so, and I believe that our Society would be ready to afford some aid if needed. Kelly proposes to leave in the course of ten days, but will not so soon effect his intention. Write, and speak fully and freely, on the subject."⁸

The failure of Kelley's colonization project removed the Oregon Country from the list of areas demanding the immediate attention of the Baptist Home Mission Society. Other regions of North America were settling rapidly, and upon these the management of the Society concentrated its attention. But the Pacific Northwest as a probable field of future activity was specifically mentioned in the *First Report* of the Executive Committee of the Society. In a

6 American Baptist Home Mission Society, *Proceedings of the Convention Held in the City of New-York on the 27th of April, 1832, for the Formation of the American Baptist Home Mission Society* (New York, 1832), p. 2.

7 Powell, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

8 Jonathan Going, *Letter Book*, 1832-1834. This is a treasured possession of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

general survey of the territory within the Society's sphere of operation is found this passage:

"In this survey, the view has been confined to the states and organized territories of the American Union. While there is yet much land to be possessed in the older states, the wide west presents immense tracts of wholly unoccupied ground, where the gospel of reconciliation is greatly needed and desired. The Committee cannot forget, however, that the field of their operation is North America. The British Provinces on our northern border demand attention. Throughout their extensive territories, there is a great want of an evangelical ministry. Florida, too, on the south is rapidly settling, and very destitute of the preached gospel; and if there be no islands of the sea fairly included within our limits, which demand our sympathy—our Western prospect includes a region large enough for a kingdom, almost wholly missionary ground. 'The star of empire westward bends its way,' and our enterprising population will soon reach the Rocky Mountains,—will cross them, and found a prosperous colony in the valley of the Oregon. Texas already sends her petition for missionary aid, and soon the whole of Mexico may be open to the exertions of Christian enterprise. Thus it is seen that the field is wide which the society is called to cultivate."⁹

From the time of the appearance of this *Report* until the Society began to form plans for a missionary advance into the Oregon Country, ten years elapsed. During this period the Mississippi Valley was the center of home missionary interest. Here was gathering a vast population; here was much spiritual destitution; here was a challenge to both Christians and patriots. The time could be foreseen when the expanding West would reach political maturity and give law to the nation. Was it not therefore a matter of concern to Baptists in the East that in the great Valley of the West the apostles of "skepticism and atheism" were at work, and that the emissaries of the "Man of Sin" were laboring "to sow over the vacant field their own bitter and poisonous seed?" Was it reasonable for American Baptists to send the gospel to the heathen and neglect their own countrymen who were in want? "Every tie which we have recognized, as binding us to seek the salvation of the heathen in foreign lands, attaches us with yet greater strength and closeness to these our compatriots," says the *Address of the Executive Committee to the Baptist Churches of the United States* (1832). "Their

⁹ A. B. H. M. S., *First Report of the Executive Committee . . . May 8, 1833*, (New York, 1833), p. 12.

nearness and the ease of access, the community of language, of institutions, of customs, and of government, afford to us advantages for the dissemination of the Gospel at home, in this territory, such as no other people under Heaven enjoy, and such as perhaps, were never before possessed by the churches of any age or land."¹⁰

Among the first men who went into the Mississippi Valley bearing commissions of the American Baptist Home Mission Society was the Reverend Ezra Fisher, who was born in Massachusetts on January 6, 1800, graduated from the Newton Theological Institution in 1829, and ordained a minister of the gospel on January 17, 1830.¹¹ Soon after his ordination, Fisher heard the call of the West. In the minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, on November 8, 1832, is found this brief entry:

"Case of Indianapolis considered & a letter read from Rev. Ezra Fisher.

"Resolved That Br. Fisher be appointed our missionary for 12 mos. to labour at Indianapolis. Salary \$300 together with \$50 outfit."¹²

Thus began the missionary career of the man who, in 1845, was to be a leader in the Baptist home missionary advance from the Valley of the Mississippi to the Valley of the Columbia. Between 1832 and 1845 Ezra Fisher labored as a minister of the gospel in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. He was also active in educational matters, assisting in the founding of Franklin College, in Indiana.¹³ By continued residence in the West he acquired the mental outlook and the restlessness of the frontiersman. He was not content to remain long in one place; in 1843 he frankly confessed that he had no desire ever to be settled in a church in one of the older states.¹⁴ He had become a man of the West. As many another man of the frontier moved from place to place, ever seeking to better his condition, so Ezra Fisher moved from place to place, ever bearing in mind the fact that he was an ordained minister of the gospel. It was not love of worldly gain that kept him forever on the move; in "the new and rising portions of his country, field after field was opened for

10 A. B. H. M. S., *Proceedings of the Convention . . . 27th of April, 1832*, p. 14.

11 William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia, 1881), p. 396. Cf. Ezra Fisher, *Correspondence* (n. p., n. d.), pp. 5, 7. *The Baptist Encyclopedia* is not always trustworthy; it was apparently compiled in haste.

12 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive Committee*, Ms., I, 34.

13 Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, pp. 412-413.

14 Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 120.

15 *Ibid.*

missionary labor.¹⁵ Here was Fisher's opportunity; he was a frontiersman of the kingdom of God.

By the spring of 1838, Ezra Fisher had caught the "Texas fever." "What would you think of the plan of my removal to Texas after this church get their meeting house so far completed as to be able to worship in it, say next fall or the following spring?" he inquired of the corresponding secretary in a letter from Quincy, Ill., dated March 23, 1838.¹⁶ On May 14, on August 14, and again on November 12 he brought up the subject of his contemplated removal to Texas.¹⁷ His desire to labor in that new republic was no passing fancy.

It has been intimated that there is no record of why Ezra Fisher did not go to Texas,¹⁸ but it appears to me that the explanation of his thwarted desire may be read in a Letter Book of the corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Under date of August 23, 1838, appears this brief entry concerning a letter written to Fisher:

"E. Fisher,

"As [David] Orr is going to Texas, the Com^e—advise that he shd. give up the project for the present. Told him that report says that he is tenacious of Yankee notions. The importance of assimilating to the people in things unessential."¹⁹

Fisher, it appears, was somewhat nettled and more than a little hurt when he received this letter. In his reply, dated November 12, 1838, he asserted that he had had it in his heart to go to Texas, and declared that the argument the corresponding secretary had advanced against his going, viz., that he was doing tolerably well at present, was the "strong argument which wise men" had urged against every removal since he was first settled in the ministry in Cambridge, Vermont. Then Fisher came to the heart of the matter in these words: "Put this reason beside the one furnished you by your *Reporter* 'That I *adhere tenaciously* to my *Yankee notions*' and see the paradox." He assured the corresponding secretary that he had had the confidence of the Indiana people, who were entirely Western, and asserted that Western Men of a neighboring church had pledged their support to him if he would become their pastor—

16 Fisher to Luther Crawford, in Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 87.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 93, 96-97.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

19 A. B. H. M. S., *Letter Book*, II (pages are not numbered).

and this they had done in full view of his course in relation to the subject of slavery.²⁰

Doubtless because of his strong anti-slavery views, Ezra Fisher was not sent to Texas. Soon after this time he went as a home missionary to Iowa, and there he caught the "Oregon fever." In a letter to the corresponding secretary, dated at Bloomington, Iowa, March 15, 1843, he announced his desire to go to Oregon and gave his reasons therefor. This was the year of the first great migration to Oregon, and Fisher could scarcely have escaped the excitement then rife on the Western frontier. Since he had been a pioneer for more than a decade, and had no desire to return to the East, it seemed to him appropriate that he should follow the advancing frontier beyond the Rocky Mountains. He believed, moreover, that it would be easier to persuade ministers to go to Iowa than to persuade them to go to Oregon. Finally, there was the question of his health. Because of the trouble he had with his lungs every winter, he longed for "the soft and salubrious climate" of Oregon Territory. But before setting out with his family on the long journey to Oregon, however, he wished to visit friends in New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts.²¹

Although two years passed by before Ezra Fisher and Hezekiah Johnson began their journey to Oregon, it is not improper to date the beginning of the Baptist home missionary advance into the Pacific Northwest from the year 1843. From that time until his departure, the subject was scarcely out of the mind of Ezra Fisher. A new chapter in the history of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and of Oregon, was beginning. If all the records of the Society had been preserved, the task of writing this chapter would be easy. But the records now available to the historian are exceedingly meagre. Save for the letters of Ezra Fisher to the home office, the correspondence of the Oregon missionaries has not been preserved. Hence it is almost impossible to write much about Hezekiah Johnson, Fisher's companion on the overland journey of 1845. It appears, moreover, that Johnson, unlike Fisher, was not a fluent writer. Fisher's letters were published a few years ago.²² The task of the historian is further complicated because the Home Mission Society has neglected to preserve copies of the letters from the office of the

²⁰ Fisher to Luther Crawford, November 12, 1838. Ms. in office of A. B. H. M. S. This letter, slightly abridged, appears in Fisher, *Correspondence*, pp. 95-97.

²¹ Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 120. This letter is also in the Oregon Historical Society *Quarterly* (March, 1915), XVI, 91-92.

²² Ezra Fisher, *Correspondence* (n. p., n. d.). Most of the letters in this volume were first published in the Oregon Historical Society *Quarterly* (1915-1917).

corresponding secretary to the missionaries in Oregon. The *Letter Books* of the Society do not continue beyond 1843. The essential business records of the Society are, however, extant. The *Minute Books* of the Executive Committee (after the annual meeting, 1844, the Executive Board) are complete; the first four volumes cover the years 1832-1865. Also a complete file of the annual *Reports* is available.

The documentary material which follows has been gleaned from the *Letter Books*, the *Minute Books*, and the *Reports* of the Society. This material, supplemented by Ezra Fisher's *Correspondence*, the records of the Baptist churches in Oregon, and what may be extracted from the Baptist periodical publications, constitutes the basic source material for the study of the early period of Baptist missionary activity in Oregon. The information which may be obtained from the annual *Reports* of the American and Foreign Bible Society and from the printed records of the Baptist Board of Publication is not extensive.

The purpose of this article is to make available to students of the early religious history of Oregon the principal source material in the office of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. For permission to examine the records of the Society I am indebted to Dr. Frank A. Smith and to Dr. Coe Hayne.

Letter Books of the Corresponding Secretary

In the *Letter Books* which have been preserved only one entry relating to the beginning of the Oregon enterprise has been found. It is a summary of a letter to Ezra Fisher, written in answer to his letter of March 15, 1843.

April 7, 1843:

"Ezra Fisher Bloomington I. T. Answer to 15th Ult. Above is as you request a draft for \$25.00. We are obliged, just now, to draw at a few days sight but we hope this will not be inconvenient to you.

"Your request about Orregon [*sic*] has been submitted to the Ex. Com. It is a subject which has engaged our thoughts some time ago; and if our countrymen are going thither we earnestly desire to do what we can, in the onset [*sic*] to provide them with the blessed gospel. We have done nothing thus far, because we have had neither men nor means. Of the last we have been so destitute as to be prevented from keeping all our old Missionaries in the field.

We hope for better times, however, & trust they are not far distant.

"It is possible that an interest may be awakened in behalf of Oregon sufficiently to sustain a mission there. If so we shall not only be pleased, but aid it all that is consistent. Our Ex. Com. have instructed me to say, therefore, that they encourage your plan of presenting to the churches, during your contemplated visit in this region, the cause of Oregon with the understanding that you report your success to them; but that your appointment as our missionary to Oregon must depend on your success in awakening an interest for such a mission. In this case your salary will be paid by the Com., & your collections will be paid to them. May the great Head of the Church guide you in your deliberations & decisions on this very important subject so that his glory as well as your good may be promoted by the measure."²³

Minutes of the Executive Committee (Executive Board)

From the *Minute Books* of the Society everything that I have found relating to the Oregon enterprise has been extracted and is reproduced below. The dates refer to the times of meeting of the Executive Board.

April 6, 1843:

"Resolved, That the Corresponding Secretary be authorized to encourage Br. Ezra Fisher to present the cause of Oregon to the churches while on his visit to this region, and to report his success to the Executive Committee; but with the understanding that all funds collected are to be paid into our Treasury, and that his appointment as Missionary to Oregon must depend on his success in awakening an interest in the subject among the churches; and that should such an appointment be made, his salary will be fixed by this board."²⁴

July 6, 1843:

Reappointments

"5. *Hezekiah Johnson*, Burlington, Iowa, to four churches in Iowa, one year from May 1. . . . Salary \$100, provided churches add \$200 to the amount."²⁵

November 3, 1843:

²³ A. B. H. M. S., *Letter Book*, II, new series, pp. 255-256.

²⁴ A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, II, 201.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222. Hezekiah Johnson was born in Maryland, March 6, 1799, and died in Oregon in August, 1866. Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, p. 604.

Reappointments

"3. *Ezra Fisher*, to Iowa Territory for six months from the 1st Novr. at a salary of \$50 for the time. The balance of his support to be raised on the field. His station to be selected in accordance with the advice of the Board of Iowa General Association."²⁶

June 27, 1844:

Reappointments

"Ezra Fisher, Rock Island & Mount Pleasant churches, Ill, 12 mo. from May 1. . . . Salary \$100 on condition those churches raise \$300 more."^{26a}

November 28, 1844:

Appointments

"Hezekiah Johnson to the Territory of Oregon for 12 months—to start early next spring at a salary and outfit of \$400.00 to be paid in advance. He to collect as much of the amount in Ohio and adjacent places as possible."²⁷

December 26, 1844:

"Corresponding Secretary's statement of correspondence &c.

"He had received a letter from Hezekiah Johnson Dec. 9th accepting appointment of Missionary to Oregon."²⁸

Appointments

"Ezra Fisher to Oregon for 12 months from time of starting for the field at a salary & outfit of \$300.00."²⁹

February 4, 1845:

"Resolved that the salary of brother Ezra Fisher missionary to Oregon, together with compensation for two months labor to be performed—be paid in advance."

26 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, II, 237. For some information as to the reason for this brief appointment, see Fisher to Benjamin M. Hill, dated at Syracuse, New York, October 18, 1843, in Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 123.

26½ A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, II, 282. "On March 15, 1844, Fisher wrote from Davenport, Iowa, to Benjamin M. Hill, stating that for several reasons he had decided not to go to Oregon in the spring of 1844. He announced that he had consented to take charge of the church at Rock Island, Illinois, and of another church nearby. He said that these two churches would give about two-thirds of a support, and that he would make application to the Society for a new appointment. Fisher, *Correspondence*, pp. 125-128. At this time Benjamin M. Hill was the corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

27 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, II, p. 322. Fisher to Hill, December 16, 1844: "Yours of Nov. 29th came to hand today informing me of the appointment of Br. H. Johnson to accompany me to Oregon. The intelligence rejoiced my soul." Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 142.

28 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, II, 324.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

"Resolved, That the salary of Hezekiah Johnson, missionary to Oregon be paid in advance."³⁰

June 26, 1845:

In the corresponding secretary's statement of letters received appears the following:

"Others from E. FISHER & H. JOHNSON, May 18th & 23d stating that they had reached St. Josephs on the Mo. river on their way to Oregon."³¹

July 30, 1846:

"Resolved, that *Ezra Fisher & Hezekiah Johnson* be reappointed missionaries to Oregon from the time of the expiration of their commissions at the same salaries as heretofore."³²

February 11, 1847:

"Resolved, That the salaries of Brn. Fisher & Johnson missionaries in Oregon be increased to \$200 per annum."³³

April 29, 1847:

Reappointments

"*Ezra Fisher*, Oregon, 12 mths. from April 1. Salary \$200 per annum."³⁴

November 26, 1847:

Reappointments

"*Hezekiah Johnson*, Oregon City & vicinity, Oregon, 12 mths., from December 1, 1847, salary \$200 per annum."³⁵

March 30, 1848:

Reappointments

"*Ezra Fisher* to Oregon 12 months from April 1, 1848. Salary \$200 per annum."³⁶

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365. Fisher's letter of May 23, 1845, contains the "constitution" of the emigration company of which the Fisher and Johnson families formed a part. Article eight of the constitution declared it to be the duty of the company to rest on Sabbaths, "except in cases of emergency." The letter continues: "Our company consists of 50 wagons, 214 souls and about 666 head of cattle . . . We have in our company 30 Baptist professors, including Br. Johnson's family and my own, 5 Methodists, 2 Presbyterians, 2 Cumberland Presbyterians, 5 Associate Reformed Presbyterians, 2 Seceders, 1 Anti-missionary Baptist, 1 Campbellite Baptist and 1 Dunkard Baptist." Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 161.

³² A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, III, p. 24¾.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

August 7, 1848:

Appointments

"*Vincent Snelling* to Oregon 12 mths. Salary \$150 per annum in addition to the amt. he receives on his field."³⁷

October 26, 1848:

The corresponding secretary stated that a communication had been received:

"From Am. & For. Bible Society with invoice of Bibles & Testaments granted & delivered for distribution by our missionaries in Oregon."³⁸

Reappointments

"*Hezekiah Johnson* to Oregon City & vicinity Oregon, 12 months from Dec. 1. Salary \$200 per an."³⁹

April 6, 1849:

"The Cor. Sec. stated that the appointment of Rev. E. Fisher missionary in Oregon had expired, & that it had been usual to renew his appointment previous to April 1, & that delay might occasion some inconvenience: Whereupon it was

"*Resolved*, That Rev. E. Fisher be reappointed as heretofore for 12 months from April 1, 1849, at a salary of \$200 per an."⁴⁰

June 28, 1849:

"The corresponding secretary reported letters received as follows: . . .

"From H. Johnson Oregon Dec. 1, asking that more missionaries be sent to the principal towns of Oregon. From E. Fisher Oregon, Sept. 20, Oct. 19, Feb. 2d & 3d—on various subjects and stating that on account of the importance of having a Baptist minister

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169. Vincent Snelling, the first Baptist minister on the Pacific Coast, was born in Kentucky in 1797. In 1844 he crossed the plains to Oregon. On May 25, 1844, a group of Baptists who had crossed the plains in 1843, met at the home of David T. Lenox, on Tualatin Plains, and organized the West Union Baptist Church, the first church of that denomination in the Oregon Country. In the *Minute Book* of that church is this entry: "The Church met on the 2nd Saturday in February, 1845, and after hearing a Sermon from from [sic] our beloved Brother the Rev. Vincent Snelling, being the first Sermon Preached to the Church by a Baptist Minister in Oregon, proceeded to business." On October 20, 1847, Fisher recommended that Snelling be appointed a missionary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. When his commission arrived, however, Snelling was in California, and it appears that he never filled the appointment. Fisher, *Correspondence*, pp. 209, 270, 280.

³⁸ The American and Foreign Bible Society was a Baptist organization formed in 1836-37 as a result of Baptist discontent with the rules prescribed by the American Bible Society for translating the Bible into foreign languages. See Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, p. 25.

³⁹ A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, III, 185.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

in California he was thinking of proceeding there to remain till a missionary should arrive."⁴¹

August 6, 1849:

"The Cor. Sec. stated that he had a letter from Rev. E. Fisher of Oregon on the importance of our denomination having an institution of learning in that Territory."⁴²

November 1, 1849:

Reappointments

"*Hezekiah Johnson* to Oregon City Oregon, 12 months from December 1, '49. Salary \$200 per an."⁴³

February 28, 1850:

Reappointments

"*Ezra Fisher* to Oregon for 12 months from April 1st. Salary \$200 per annum & permission to conduct a school till another person can be obtained."⁴⁴

August 29, 1850:

Appointments

"*George C. Chandler* to Oregon for 12 months. Salary and Outfit for trav. Expenses to be left for further correspondence."⁴⁵

September 26, 1850:

"*Resolved*, That Rev. G. C. Chandler be authorized to represent the Society & requested to promote its interests as far as may be in his power during his contemplated visit to this region."⁴⁶

Appointments

"*Vincent Snelling* to Willamette Asso. Oregon Ter. 12 months from Aug. 1, 1850. Salary \$200 per annum—the balance of his support to be obtained on his field."⁴⁷

October 31, 1850:

Appointments

"*Jas. S. Read* to Oregon, 12 mths.—with an appropriation of

41 *Ibid.*, p. 239. For some account of Fisher's sojourn in California, see Fisher, *Correspondence*, pp. 255-262.

42 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, III, 250. This probably is a reference to Fisher's letter of February 8, 1849. Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 243.

43 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, III, 264.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 294.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 340. Chandler had been president of Franklin College. For a brief sketch of his life, see Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, p. 200.

46 A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, III, 343.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 346.

\$175 for traveling expenses if he goes unmairried. \$275 if married. Salary \$200 per an.—after reaching the field.

“*Resolved.* That \$600 be appropriated for the traveling expenses of Rev. G. C. Chandler to Oregon to be paid him [in] advance, & a salary of \$200 per annum after he reaches the field.”

A committee appointed to make arrangements for the next anniversary reported, and recommendations of the committee were accepted as follows:

“*1st.* That the anniversary be held in New York or vicinity on Thursday, May 8th, 1851 . . .

“*2d.* That Grande Ligne, California, New Mexico, and Oregon be specially designated as subjects for afternoon reports & addresses. . . .”⁴⁸

November 28, 1850:

“*Resolved,* That the outfit voted G. C. Chandler be furnished him as his necessities require.”⁴⁹

May 1, 1851:

Reappointments

“*Hezekiah Johnson,* to Oregon City & Molalla, Oregon Ter. on condition he send us the information required by our printed directions to applicants, 12 months from December 1, 1850. Salary \$200 per an.—the churches to add \$100.”

“*Ezra Fisher* to Lynn City, Milwaukee, Portland & Oregon City, Oregon Ter. on the same condition as in the case of Bro. H. Johnson, 12 months from April 1st, 1851. Salary \$200 per annum.”⁵⁰

October 30, 1851:

“*Resolved,* That the Willamette Asso. Oregon be encouraged to expect a missionary as soon as we can find a suitable man.”⁵¹

November 26, 1851:

“*Resolved,* That the appointment of E. Fisher be changed from that of a missionary to that of Exploring Agent for Oregon.”⁵²

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 352, 353. James S. Read was a graduate of Franklin College; he taught school in Oregon City for one year, and then went to Southern Oregon; he returned to Indiana in 1854. Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 324, note, citing Mattoon, *Bap. An. of Ore.*, I, 13.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 350.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 386.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 427.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 443.

April 1, 1852:

Reappointments of Agents

"Ezra Fisher to Oregon 12 months from April 1st. Salary \$500 per annum & trav. expenss."⁵³

April 29, 1852:

"Resolved, That Hez. Johnson be allowed \$100 for 6 months services in Oregon."⁵⁴

September 30, 1852:

Reappointments

"G. C. Chandler to Oregon City Oregon Ter. 12 months from Sept. 1. Salary \$200 per annum—the church to add \$100."⁵⁵

February 24, 1853:

Reappointments of Agents

"Ezra Fisher, Oregon, 12 months from April 1. Salary \$500 per annum & traveling expenses."⁵⁶

April 28, 1853:

"Resolved, That the salary of Rev. E. Fisher be increased \$100 per annum from the 1st Inst.

"Resolved, That Rev. E. Fisher be instructed to make an Exploring tour to Puget's sound in the Ter. of Washington."⁵⁷

May 25, 1853:

Appointments

"J. D. Post to Oregon to supply outstations &c on the Sabbath. Bro. Post to be advised to go via Cape Horn,—provided a free passage for himself & family can be obtained in a ship of the Messrs. C. W. Thomas & Co. & further that Bro. P. be authorized to collect as large an amount of funds for this mission as possible & report the same to us."⁵⁸

June 30, 1853:

"Resolved, That J. D. Post receive \$300 or as much of it as may be necessary in addition to what he may collect to aid him to go to Oregon."⁵⁹

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 595.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

Sept. 1, 1853:

Reappointments

"James S. Read to Table Rock & vicinity Oregon Ter. 12 months from Aug. 1, '53. Salary \$400 per annum—the Church to add \$250."⁶⁰

Sept. 29, 1853:

"Other recommendations [of the Committee of Agencies and Finance] confirmed as follows:

"To appropriate \$240 designated funds to pay traveling expenses of J. D. Post to Oregon.

"To appropriate \$10 to Oregon College, Oregon City, for Female Education, designated for such purpose."

"Resolved, To encourage D. J. Freas of Salem, N. J., to expect an appointment to Oregon if the state of our treasury will permit it."⁶¹

December 1, 1853:

Appointments

"Augustus B. Cramb to Oregon City, Oregon Ter., 12 months, with traveling expenses to his field—and salary \$700 per annum—the Church to pay at least \$100 of it on our account."

"Resolved, That Rev. E. Fisher be allowed \$18.35 for damages to a box of clothing sent him."⁶²

February 23, 1854:

"Resolved, That \$100 (designated funds) be appropriated to Prof. J. D. Post for trav. Ex. to Oregon."⁶³

April 27, 1854:

"Resolved, That Ezra Fisher have permission to remain at Oregon City a few months."⁶⁴

November 29, 1854:

Appointments

"M. M. [N.] Stearns to Table Rock & vicinity Oregon, ½ the time, 12 mths. from Dec. 1. Salary \$200 per ann.—the church to add \$200."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-619.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 626, 631.

⁶² A. B. H. M. S., *Minutes*, IV, 12, 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

February 1, 1855:

Appointments

"*W. F. Boyakin* to Portland Or. Ter. 12 mths., from Feb. 1. Salary \$600 per ann.—\$200 to be added on the field."⁶⁶

March 1, 1855:

Reappointments

"*Ezra Fisher* Exploring Agent in Oregon 12 mths. from April 1. Salary \$600 per an, and traveling expenses."

"*Resolved*, That N. Alvord be encouraged to expect an appointment to Oregon when the state of the treasury will admit."⁶⁷

December 27, 1855:

Reappointments

"*Wm. F. Boyakin* to Portland Or. Ter. 12 mths. from Feb. 1, '56. Salary \$600 per an.—the church to add \$200."⁶⁸

June 25, 1857:

Appointments

"*J. T. Westover* to Oregon Ter. His Trav. Expenses to that Territory to be paid by this Society."⁶⁹

January 28, 1858:

Appointments

"*Resolved*, That the subject of J. T. Westover proceeding to Oregon as appointed, be deferred for further correspondence."⁷⁰

February 25, 1858:

"*Resolved*, That in consequence of the ill health of Rev. J. T. Westover his appointment as missionary to Oregon be annulled."⁷¹

Annual Reports

1844

"Early in the year, a brother of experience as a pioneer, offered himself as a missionary to Oregon; and a special subscription was obtained for his support. His departure is postponed for present,

66 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 228, 229.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 314.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 463.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 506.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 511.

but, Providence permitting, he will probably, in due time, proceed to that distant field."⁷²

1845

"Previous to the last anniversary, a missionary was appointed to proceed to Oregon, but, for satisfactory reasons, his departure was deferred. Another has been more recently appointed to accompany him to that new and far distant field; and, with a numerous body of emigrants, among whom are many Baptist families, they are now probably prosecuting their long and hazardous journey across the Rocky mountains. We are happy in believing that the physical, intellectual and moral qualifications of both of those brethren, together with great experience as pioneer missionaries, eminently fit them for the difficult service in which they have volunteered."⁷³

1846

"The last advices from the missionaries to Oregon represented that they had nearly reached their place of destination. They are now, probably, engaged in their appropriate labors at that far distant point."⁷⁴

1847

"Reports of a very encouraging nature have been received from our missionaries in Oregon. They arrived at their far distant field in safety, and immediately commenced their evangelical labors. In the last report received, dated in August, 1846, they speak of having organized churches at central points, and of having enjoyed special manifestations of Divine favor in the conversion of souls to Christ, and their baptism into the churches."⁷⁵

1848

"Within the ensuing year an addition of not less than thirty-five ministers of the gospel should be made to the number already commissioned, to be distributed at important stations, *now looking to this society for supplies*, in Canada, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Two or three should be sent to the North Western Territory and, if the policy of past years be continued, several more should be encouraged to proceed to more southern states. Should a territorial government be organized for Oregon, two more will be needed in that region; and should the treaty of peace now

72 A. B. H. M. S., *Twelfth Report* (New York, 1844), p. 10.

73 A. B. H. M. S., *Thirteenth Report* (New York, 1845), p. 11.

74 A. B. H. M. S., *Fourteenth Report* (New York, 1846), p. 12.

75 A. B. H. M. S., *Fifteenth Report* (New York, 1847), p. 11.

pending between our government and that of Mexico be ratified, two or three others should speedily occupy the territory that will then have been acquired."⁷⁵

1849

"... an additional missionary has been appointed for Oregon."⁷⁶

1850

"In Oregon our missionaries have suffered no small discouragement by the absence from the Territory of large numbers of the male population, who visited California for gold. Nevertheless the interests of the mission have been in a state of gradual progress. An association of ten [?] churches has been formed, and a convention had been held at which measures were adopted for the establishment of an institution of learning. Some of these measures have been carried into effect, and it is hoped that the foundation is laid for the promotion of education, on a basis which will prove beneficial to that Territory. At our last anniversary it was stated that an additional missionary had been appointed for Oregon, but before the commission reached him he had removed to another field."⁷⁷

1851

"In Oregon we have three missionaries who are laboring to much advantage. They supply eight stations and out-stations, besides performing much itinerant duty. They report the baptism of 2 persons. As a temporary arrangement one of the number devotes a portion of his time to teaching a school, which is intended as the foundation of an institution of an elevated order. Liberal arrangements have been made by the people of the Territory to carry forward this important enterprise, and it is hoped that shortly a regular collegiate organization will be given to it. In view of the probable success of such a plan, two additional missionaries have been appointed and are now prosecuting their journey to the field. One of the number, recently president of Franklin College in Indiana, will occupy a station where he can superintend the progress of this undertaking without detriment to his missionary labor, and eventually identify himself entirely with its interests."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ A. B. H. M. S., *Sixteenth Report* (New York, 1848), p. 17.

⁷⁶ A. B. H. M. S., *Seventeenth Report* (New York, 1849), p. 12.

⁷⁷ A. B. H. M. S., *Eighteenth Report* (New York, 1850), p. 15. There is evidently a mistake in this paragraph. Ezra Fisher says that the Willamette Baptist Association, consisting of five churches, was organized on June 23-24, 1848. Fisher, *Correspondence*, p. 229. See *Nineteenth Report*, p. 27. The reference in this paragraph to an "additional missionary" is to Vincent Snelling.

⁷⁸ G. C. Chandler had been president of Franklin College.

"In the condition and prospects of the churches of this Territory there is much to encourage the friends of missions. Having embarked in the labor at the earliest period of emigration to that country, our missionaries and other ministers associated with them have had opportunity of applying their energies to the work of special organization and improvement, from what may be considered the commencement of the settlement of the Territory. The fruit appears in the existence of 6 churches, which have been formed into an Association, enjoying the counsels and services of about the same number of ministers; an active agency in educational interests and the diffusion of useful knowledge; the distribution of Bibles and tracts; the promotion of temperance, order and respect for the laws; and in giving tone to public sentiment favorable to morality and religion.

"Numerous reinforcements to the self-denying band in this Territory are needed, but it is to be feared that the insufficient supplies furnished to our treasury will not immediately allow the Board to aid in sending them. It is to be hoped that some of the servants of God who pant for usefulness in his vineyard will be able to venture forward without relying on the Society for aid."⁷⁹

1852

"One of the three missionaries mentioned in our last report as being under appointment in Oregon decided to sustain himself, and has not acted under our commission. The two who were reported as prosecuting their journey thither over land, have reached the field and are engaged in missionary labors and forwarding the educational interests of that territory. One of the original missionaries has been appointed an exploring agent for that territory, but a principle [*sic*] duty of his appointment will be to itinerate generally as a preacher of the gospel.⁸⁰ Thus we have in Oregon at the present time four missionaries, unless, as is somewhat probable, one of the number may have decided to labor without aid from the Society.

"In either case the increased emigration to that territory and the multiplication of settlements require an addition of some two or three suitable missionaries as soon as they can be secured and sent.

"The missionaries have supplied ten stations and out-stations, and one person has been baptized."⁸¹

⁷⁹ A. B. H. M. S., *Nineteenth Report* (New York, 1851), pp. 26-27.

⁸⁰ Ezra Fisher was exploring agent and general itinerant for the Society.

⁸¹ A. B. H. M. S., *Twentieth Report* (New York, 1852), p. 20.

1853

"Various changes in our arrangements for Oregon have occurred since our last anniversary. The population which had concentrated in the villages, has been reduced by the operation of the law which gives a farm to those who actually occupy it for a series of years. To secure their title to those farms, many have removed from the villages.⁸² In the mean time the general population of the Territory has rapidly increased by immigration, and spread itself through the fertile regions of that far western country. This has created an unexpected demand for a large portion of the ministers to accompany the people to the valley and plains selected for their residences. To meet this demand, two missionaries who had bestowed their principal attention upon educational interests in Oregon City, have removed to other places. Another is laboring as an Exploring Agent and general itinerant in all the Territory.

"This field is one of the most inviting to experienced and faithful ministers. Many such would find their condition improved and their usefulness increased, by proceeding to it at once on their own account, and there are just claims on this Society for several others."⁸³

1854

"Our missions on the Pacific coast present enlarged claims on the attention of the Board. Their importance is in no degree diminished, but in every respect increased, and various causes will hereafter continue to increase it. The operation of the general land law in Oregon is favorable to the settlement of that Territory by an industrious and intelligent class of inhabitants, and such, in great numbers, have availed themselves of the large bounty of the general Government, in providing for themselves valuable and permanent homes. But owing to the limited extent of many of the valleys in which those homes are selected, the vast area over which they are spread, and the legal necessity for actual occupancy of the lands in order to a proprietorship in them, the local communities are very numerous, and often small and widely separated from each other. Due care for the religious interests of a people, under such circumstances, require a larger proportion of ministers than usual, and it is just cause of gratification to learn that several have accompanied the emigrants to that region. The number, however, is inadequate

⁸² This reference appears to be to the Oregon Donation Law of September 27, 1850. See *U. S. Stat. at Large* (31st Cong., 1st Sess., ch. 76), IX, 496-500.

⁸³ A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-First Report* (New York, 1853), p. 23.

to the demands of such a field even by itinerant services, and there are central positions of much importance, for the supply of which our friends look with earnestness to the Board. Two ministers have been appointed to that Territory during the year. One of them has reached it and entered upon his labors, the other was arrested in his journey by an afflictive Providence, which may delay his departure for some time."⁸⁴

1855

"On the coast of the Pacific Ocean the Board have not been able to enlarge their operations to the extent they desired.

"Two ministers, residing in Oregon, have received appointments for that Territory, and are laboring advantageously—one of them in Portland, the principal commercial city in the Territory, where there are encouraging prospects of rearing up a self-sustaining church in a few years. A minister appointed for Oregon City, and mentioned in our last report as being detained from embarking, on account of domestic affliction, has since lost his health, and abandoned the idea of proceeding."⁸⁵

1856

"The stations on the Pacific coast have shared, with all others, the sad effects of our overdrawn treasury. No new missionaries have been sent out to occupy any of those stations.

"Rev. Ezra Fisher, who has labored several years as an exploring agent in OREGON, has retired from the laborious duties of that position, and will enter some pastorate in that Territory, where, it is possible, he may not feel the necessity of relying on the funds of the Society for support. The Indian war has so unfavorably affected the interests of the people in the section heretofore occupied by Rev. M. N. Stearns, that he has also declined a renewal of his commission for the present. Only one missionary remains in the employment of the Society in that Territory."⁸⁶

1857

"Very little change has occurred in our arrangements for the supply of stations on the Pacific coast, though the consideration of that subject has recently been revived. The missionaries in California are performing their onerous duties amid difficulties peculiar

84 A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-Second Report* (New York, 1854), pp. 29-30.

85 A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-third Report* (New York, 1855), p. 26.

86 A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-fourth Report* (New York, 1856), pp. 20-21.

to a field inhabited by a heterogeneous and ever-varying population, but, generally, with more encouraging success than formerly."⁸⁷

1858

"In Washington Territory we have no missionary, but there should be one or two in that field. We have been for some time entreated to send a strong man to occupy one of the principal cities of Oregon. To supply all the points mentioned would require about thirty ministers, and an addition of some thirty per cent over the amount received last year from contributions and legacies."⁸⁸

The statistical tables published in the *Reports* for 1857, 1858, 1859, and 1860, show that the Society had no commissioned missionaries in Oregon during those years.

J. ORIN OLIPHANT

⁸⁷ A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-fifth Report* (New York, 1857), p. 20.

⁸⁸ A. B. H. M. S., *Twenty-Sixth Report* (New York, 1858), p. 26.