

### FIRST AMERICAN SETTLEMENT ON PUGET SOUND\*

An Italian economist has declared that a colony is to history what a mountain is to geology: it brings past forms to view.

We read of the courage tested by hardship on the part of those who landed at Plymouth Rock, of those who first settled in the Ohio Valley and of those who braved the long journey over the plains and the mountains to settle the great western terraces, even these shores of Puget Sound. How surely are the past forms brought to view in those successive experiences! There are the same kind of log cabins for the first sheltering homes. There are very similar dangers from wild beasts and wild men, the same general series of hard knocks.

In one sense, the Puget Sound pioneers may be considered the last of the species. It is true that a similar fortitude was required of those who yielded to the lure of Alaska's gold and rushed into the new wilderness of the northland, but the pioneer there had advantages unknown to the one who first crossed the plains. I saw the Alaska pioneers packing up wire mattresses, collapsible stoves, desiccated eggs and evaporated fruits. He was to build a log cabin shelter and he was to have hard knocks aplenty, but somehow I feel that his pioneering, genuine in itself, was of a newer and different type.

Sometimes when you are in the great silent forest pause long enough to ask yourself a few questions. What would be the first thing you would do if you were landed there with a young wife and perhaps a baby or two? Unquestionably you would at once seek for your dear ones a shelter, fuel and food. The woods would quickly yield the shelter and the fuel. Perhaps, also, the woods and a nearby stream would add to the supply of food. In your mind you would be pioneering. If you would then add to your contemplations the ideas of great distances from your fellows, of loneliness, of dangers and of real needs, your mental pictures would be reproducing something of those past forms from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound. You would then have a greater respect for those who never faltered in carrying the frontier from sea to sea, those who laid the foundations of the greater American Republic, the land of opportunity, home of the brave and the free.

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\*The Pioneer and Historical Society of Thurston County held its regular annual meeting at Olympia on March 2, 1916. It had been planned to unveil a monument to the first American settlement on Puget Sound. The cost of the monument had been defrayed by the heirs of the late Leopold F. Schmidt. A severe and long continued snowstorm prevented the completion of the masonry work and the unveiling ceremonies were therefore postponed. Otherwise the programme of the meeting was carried out as planned. General Hazard Stevens, President of the Society, was in the chair and the address was given as here reproduced.—Editor.

Puget Sound was not wholly unknown or unsettled when the first American homes were established here. Captain George Vancouver, under the flag of Great Britain, discovered and named the region in 1792. The Northwest Company of Montreal had succeeded to the American fort at Astoria, changing its name to Fort George, during the War of 1812 and then proceeded to establish other fur trading posts in the lands drained by the Columbia and the Fraser rivers. A new impetus was given to these British efforts in 1821 when the Northwest Company was absorbed by the older and more powerful Hudson's Bay Company. Soon Doctor John McLoughlin arrived as Chief Factor and a new era dawned in the Pacific Northwest.

He moved the Hudson's Bay Company's chief post from Fort George to Fort Vancouver and soon thereafter, or in 1827, planted a post near the mouth of the Fraser river, calling it Fort Langley. The journey between Forts Vancouver and Langley was made by a voyage around by the Pacific or a more tedious trip up the Cowlitz river, a portage across the prairies to Puget Sound and thence in canoes to Fort Langley. Sailing vessels were not always available and the Cowlitz route came more and more into use. This soon showed the need of a dependable way station. Nisqually House was established in May, 1833, which became the first home of white men on Puget Sound.

Doctor McLoughlin and his associates in the Hudson's Bay Company were early impressed with the importance of Puget Sound and when the American missionaries began to arrive in 1834 he diverted them to the Willamette valley and to other sections south of the Columbia river. It is interesting to note that the Americans also realized the importance of Puget Sound from the beginning. William A. Slacum, an inspecting agent of the United States Government, crossed over the Columbia river bar on December 22, 1836, and remained in Oregon only until February 10, when he left for California. During that brief time he had made extensive observations. His report was published by the Government (United States Public Documents, Serial Number 314) under date of December 18, 1837. He showed how the Hudson's Bay Company was influencing the retiring employes to settle in the Cowlitz valleys so as to make more secure the British hold of the lands north of the Columbia river. He called attention to the work of the steamer *Beaver*, built in London the year before (1836), trading in and around the bays and rivers. He then declares:

"I beg leave to call your attention to the topography of Puget's Sound and urge, in the most earnest manner, that this point should never be abandoned. If the United States claim, as I hope they ever will, at least as far as 49 degrees of North latitude, running due west

from the Lake of the Woods, on the above parallel we shall take in Puget's Sound."

In addition to this eloquent urging by Mr. Slacum there was another interesting event when two American missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal church—J. P. Richmond and W. H. Willson—established themselves at Nisqually House in 1840. They remained but two years, still their temporary dwellings there constitute the first American homes in the Puget Sound region. The home of Doctor Richmond was blessed with the birth of a baby boy who was the first American child born north of the Columbia river. These homes were visited and highly praised by Commander Charles Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition in 1841, but soon after that visit the mission was abandoned and the missionary homes were burned.

If the Slacum inspecting tour was important to the United States the Wilkes Expedition was much more so. It resulted in the most thorough geographic survey of the whole region. Hundreds of bays, points, islands, passages, inlets and other features were described and named. The Fourth of July was celebrated with proper American vigor in the presence of our British cousins from Nisqually House. The reports were full and gave the United States all the information needed to tighten their hold on the region.

The whole nation had its attention drawn to the northern part of Oregon in 1844 when James K. Polk was elected to the presidency to the music of the famous cry of "Fifty-four, Forty or Fight." While that campaign was being fought out among the voters of the East, a train of ox teams was winding westward toward Oregon. Among those in the party was Michael Troutman Simmons, a Kentuckian who, Bancroft declares, was "unlettered though not unenlightened" and whose "courage was equalled only by his independence." This man was destined to be enshrined in memory as the first American leader to settle permanently on the shores of Puget Sound.

He decided to remain near Fort Vancouver during the winter of 1844-1845. It was there that his son Christopher was born and it was there also that he encountered something that aroused his Kentucky ire. He was informed that American settlers must not go north of the Columbia river. Now he had planned to settle in the Rogue river valley, but that opposition by the Hudson's Bay Company caused him to change his mind and he determined to have a look at the lands north of the Columbia river.

During that same winter with five companions (none of whom finally settled north of the Columbia river) he made a trip to the forks of the Cowlitz and returned to Fort Vancouver. In the following

July he started again, this time with eight companions, when the famous voyage was successfully completed. The eight companions were David Crawford, Charles Eaton, Niniwon Everman, John Hunt, David Parker, William Shaw, Seyburn Thornton and George Waunch. They were guided beyond the Cowlitz prairie by Peter Borcier, who had rendered a similar service for Wilkes in 1841.

Arriving at Puget Sound they made a canoe voyage of exploration to Whidbey Island but returned to the place where they had seen the Deschutes river tumbling over the falls toward tide water. Besides affording a fine water power, the place was not far from Nisqually House and Simmons decided upon that place as the site of his proposed settlement.

He returned to the Columbia river for his family and returned with them to his new location in October, 1845. Four other families came with him. These were the families of George W. Bush, Gabriel Jones, David Kindred and James McAllister. Two single men—Samuel B. Crockett and Jesse Ferguson—also joined the party. Those were the names of the men who, with Mr. Simmons and his companions of the former trip, constituted the important colony that began the permanent American settlement of Puget Sound.

How applicable to them was the song of Mrs. Hemans, written for the Pilgrims at New England:

“And the ocean eagle soared  
From his nest by the white sea’s foam  
And the rocking pines in the forest roared;  
This was their welcome home.”

The log cabin homes arose quickly and the pioneering began in real earnest. Each of the men and of the families no doubt bore a full share but Mr. Simmons seems to have sustained his leadership for the first years, organizing and building a grist mill and a saw mill. Later he began the first store in the town that was to receive the name of Olympia, on the claim of Edmund Sylvester, and still later he rendered most valuable service in his control of the Indians.

The Simmons settlement was first called Newmarket but a few years later the name was exchanged for the more beautiful one of Indian flavor—Tumwater. When those settlers first arrived, it was too late in the year to plant and mature a crop. They would surely be reduced to a diet of venison, grouse and clams unless they could secure supplies from Nisqually House.

We should here gratefully acknowledge the magnanimity of our British contenders for sovereignty in this region. Chief Factors McLoughlin and James Douglas sent orders to Nisqually House that the

Americans should be supplied with necessary food. The prices asked were very reasonable and the people to whom these favors were granted were the same ones who had so recently violated the orders not to settle north of the Columbia river.

For a long time it was the custom of American writers to claim that the British either did not know the importance of northern Oregon or else were frightened by the cry of "Fifty-four Forty or Fight" in 1844. Neither is true. A few years ago Professor Joseph Schafer of the University of Oregon published in the Oregon Historical Society Quarterly the Warre and Vavasour papers found by him in the archives at London. By these papers it was revealed that immediately following that presidential campaign of 1844 the British Government had sent those two officers in 1845-1846 on a tour of inspection and their reports showed just how the whole Oregon country could be seized and held for the British.

Forty years after the Polk campaign and while the Warre and Vavasour papers were still hidden at London the real reason of the British attitude was revealed by Doctor William Fraser Tolmie, last of the Hudson's Bay Company officers on Puget Sound. He was still living in retirement at Victoria when the Oregon Pioneer Association invited him to participate in their twelfth annual meeting. He did so by writing a letter which was published in the proceedings of the association for that year, 1884. From that letter I wish to quote as follows:

"True most part of the country sought for was lost, but it must be remembered that, between 1834 and 1846, the United Kingdom had—besides several fighting and other troubles in various parts of the world—great embarrassment in regard to Canada, during 1837-38 in a state of open rebellion. What seems more natural, in such a case than that apathy as to further acquisitions of territory in North America, should have prevailed in British councils? From this languid let-aloneism—not 'masterly inactivity'—the government was probably roused by the incessant, and not unnatural, nudging of the Hudson's Bay Co., and by Polk's loud crow of 'Fifty-four forty-or fight' at the time so captivating to the unreflecting of your people. But for these agencies all might have been yielded."

Here we have the real reason why the United States was permitted to win the great diplomatic triumph in the treaty of 1846.

Let me offer one more quotation from Doctor Tolmie's valuable letter:

"In 1845, Michael T. Simmons, George Bush, S. B. Crockett and a few others settled on the south end of Puget's Sound, calling their

settlement Newmarket, and by bringing cedar shingles to me for the Victoria and Sandwich Islands' markets, got useful supplies in return. To help them the more, the Hawaiian market was more than once by the company glutted with shingles."

In this same connection, I have recently had the opportunity of examining the original record known as the "Journal of Occurrences at Nisqually House." It is there made evident that Michael T. Simmons and others of Newmarket were frequent visitors at Nisqually House. Mr. Simmons, Mr. Bush and some others are always referred to with apparent respect while some other Americans are recorded as Yankees. One entry, on April 13, 1847, nearly a year after the treaty was signed the Hudson's Bay Company was trying to improve its chances for a generous settlement by spreading out and improving its holdings. The entry includes the following:

"Slocum and gang planting potatoes, shifting sheep parks, etc. Messrs. Simmons & Bush engaged for building claims houses for the company."

It might also interest some to know that the winter of 1846-7 was unusually severe. The records speak of twelve inches of snow and weather six degrees below zero.

While contemplating the treaty of 1846, it is well to recall the splendid sequence of diplomatic triumphs by which Oregon was held for the Americans from 1814 to 1846. The recent publication of the papers of James A. Bayard reveals the fact that the American commissioners at Ghent were informed that the British had sent the sloop-of-war *Raccoon* from Rio de Janeiro to conquer Astoria. The commissioners were instructed by James Madison, Secretary of State, to insist that Astoria be considered an American possession when the "status quo ante bellum" clause was written into the treaty. That was accomplished and the actual transfer of flags was made with appropriate ceremonies in 1818.

In that same year, 1818, the second triumph of the series was achieved in what is known as the joint occupancy treaty by which both England and America held equal rights in Oregon for ten years. In 1819, the Florida purchase treaty contained a quit-claim deed of Spain's remaining interest in Oregon to the United States.

In 1827, the joint occupancy treaty was extended indefinitely, either side being permitted to terminate it by giving the other side twelve month's notice. At this time the British were increasing their trading posts rapidly and the Americans had not a single settlement.

The American missionaries and pioneers began to flow into Oregon. The Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842 fixed the northern

boundary along the forty-ninth parallel but ending at the Rocky Mountains. The pioneers came in larger numbers and then came the climax in the sequence of triumphs when the treaty of 1846 divided the Oregon country and the great Puget Sound region was held for the United States. Three great Americans stand out conspicuously in this series of treaties—John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay and Albert Gallatin. Few yet realize the debt owed by the Northwest to the watchful and constant efforts of those leaders for more than thirty years.

And it is in the light of that long diplomatic struggle that such settlements as the one at Tumwater take on a new significance for Americans. Do we realize how well they wrought? Have we a tithe of their long vision into the future? We are reaping some of the fruits they sought to plant but are we thinking, acting and planning so that our heritage will pass undimmed to our children's children?

One characteristic of the pioneer was that his eyes were always looking forward. He was interested in the future. Less than ten years after the Simmons party landed at Tumwater, a pioneer legislature of the new territory of Washington assembled within a few miles of those first cabins to legislate for an area extending from the Pacific Ocean to the Rocky Mountains. To those pioneer law givers, Isaac I. Stevens, the first governor, spoke a wonderful note of prophecy as follows:

"The outpost of the great Northwest, looking on the Pacific and on Hudson's Bay, having the elements of a great and varied development, commerce, manufactures, agriculture and the arts, it has received the name of the Father of his Country, and has had the impulse of its life at a great era of American progress and civilization. Its name, its geography, its magnificent waters are known throughout the land. The emigrant looks forward to it as home; princely merchants as the highway of the trade of nations; statesmen and patriots as a grand element of national strength and national security. Our whole people have risen in their strength and are now reducing to subjection the vast wilderness between the two Oceans, and binding our people together with iron roads. The Eagle of our country's majesty has winged his course to the distant East, and Japan, China, Australia and Hindostan will be brought into fraternal and mutually beneficial communion with us. In this great era of the World's history, an era which hereafter will be the theme of epics and the torch of eloquence, we can play no secondary part if we would. We must of necessity play a great part if we act at all."

O, friends, lift up your heads in pride, pride in the achieve-

ments of your fathers. Let us, in profound gratitude, clasp the hands of the white haired remnants of that noble band of men and women, but above all let us press forward, carrying the torch of enlightened progress given us by the pioneers.

EDMOND S. MEANY.