

LOOKING AT OREGON TERRITORY THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS

"A glance over the advertising columns of a large morning paper shows reflected, as it were in a mirror, the whole active life of the people."¹ It is with this quotation that Miss Salmon introduces the chapter on "Advertisements" in her book, *The Newspaper and the Historian*—a chapter in which she discusses the ways in which the student of history may use advertisements in his attempt to reconstruct the life of the past. Oregon Territory did not, of course, boast of a large morning paper but in the columns of the *Oregon Spectator*, a bi-weekly news journal, one finds much of interest concerning the early life of the Pacific Northwest.

The *Oregon Spectator*, which began publication in January, 1846, gave the news of a pioneer community in the earliest stages of development. The paid advertising in the issues throughout the years 1846 and 1847 reveals much of the every day affairs of the people of the Oregon country, their occupations, their hardships, their common interests.

As one would expect, an important consideration in this new country is means of transportation. Saddle horses are in demand, also mules—though in moderation, we gather from the announcement of a merchant at Main and Third, Oregon City. "Horses bought and sold," he begins; then after the following tactful reference to finances,—“N. B. a little of the needful from those who know themselves indebted would be awful convenient,” he promises to pay “good funds for a few good Mules.” The days of the Pickwick Stages were anticipated by S. H. L. Meek,

TELEGRAPH LINE

(8 Ox Power.)

The subscriber begs leave to announce to the public that he proposes to run an express—rain or no rain—mud or no mud—load or no load—but not *without pay*—from Oregon and Linn cities to the Tuality Plains on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The “cars” will be covered and every accomodation extended to passengers. For freight or pas-

¹ W. Stead, Jr., *The Art of Advertisements*.

sage apply to the subscriber, proprietor, and engineer, at Linn City.

Where the river is an obstacle to the farmer seeking a market, owners of ferries offer to serve their countrymen at what seem moderate prices—wagons fifty cents per trip, man and horse twenty cents per trip, wheat two cents per bushel, etc., etc. Where the river is a highway, the owners of the "light draft and fast running boats, Mogul and Ben Franklin" plying between Oregon City and Champoeg modestly solicit a "share of the public patronage" on the ground that they keep "the best boats on the water above the falls." Their rates? "Passage *gratis* by paying 50c specie or \$1 on the stores. Former rules will be observed. The passengers can board with the Captain, by *finding* their own provisions." One must not think that such informality was extended to the time schedule. "N. B.", adds the owner, "punctuality to the hour of departure is earnestly requested. As time waits for no man, the boats will do the same."

Should any of the means of transportation carry one far from home, no need to worry about accommodations for the night, for the hotel keepers seem to have been a particularly amiable group of men. Nothing grudging about the welcome which they offer the traveller. On the contrary, our good hosts of Oregon Territory consider themselves fortunate to be allowed to serve their fellow men. The proprietor of the Washington Hotel, Linn City—the same Mr. Meek, by the way who runs the eight-oxen express—is "determined that every attention calculated to render his customers and patrons comfortable and happy shall be rendered on his part." "All who choose to favor him with a call will be cheerfully and gladly entertained." In order that there may be nothing lacking for the convenience of his guests, he provides "a large pasture only a short distance from the Hotel which will be appropriated to the use of his customers."

The City Hotel at Oregon City offers not only free ferriage and "every necessary attention" but promises that "the table will not be surpassed in the territory." The terms are fair enough—"Ready pay, 25c per meal. Price for horse over night 75c. All kinds of produce will be received for same." After such obsequious determination to please on the part of other tavern keepers, we are just a bit chilled by the plain speaking of Mr. Moss of the Main Street House, Oregon City, who says, "The undersigned will furnish the best accommodation in his power, to

both Man and Horse, and will *charge* nothing at *all*, as he will expect ready pay in all cases." Can it be that some who read this advertisement had not offered "ready pay"? We fear the worst, for Mr. Moss adds, "N. B. \$200 of Oregon script wanted in exchange for horses or payment of outstanding accounts." Possibly he has learned something from Mr. Knighton of the afore mentioned City Hotel who later states under the didactic heading, "The way to keep things straight," that he would like all those owing him tavern or ferriage bills to "call and settle."

Commission merchants, ship chandlers, millers, tanners, and one cooper urge the residents of the Territory to avail themselves of their services. John Travers and William Glaser will "supply their friends and customers with hats manufactured in Oregon. Although they admit that the profits are small they add that they hope by their prompt attention to business to be able to "furnish hats to the Oregon citizens at reduced prices. Wool, beaver, otter, raccoon, wildcat, muskrat, and mink skins will be taken in exchange for hats." Of this group of advertisers the blacksmiths seem most eager to catch the attention of the reader. Nelson and McDonald of Multnomah City will ferry their customers from the east side of the river free. Norris and Cutting of Clackamas City head their advertisement with the exclamation "Oh yes! Oh yes! Everybody!" and offer a long list of implements and "many other things too tedious to mention on as reasonable terms or a little cheaper than any other shop in Oregon." D. C. Ingles of Oregon City, with a recklessness that makes one suspect that he does not expect to be called upon to make good his offer, opens his request for patronage with this startling promise, "\$10,000 Reward for everyone to attend to his own business." Still more chatty is C. Sharp who might so fittingly have been a dealer in musical instruments, but who is, alas, a gunsmith. Says Mr. Sharp concerning himself, "Under the sign of C. Sharp he will be found ready to execute with neatness and dispatch all kinds of Gun Repairing;—Though in the present new state of the country, it is very difficult to obtain tools and materials in his line, yet he flatters himself he shall please most of his patrons and wants 9,999 guns to repair." After giving full directions as to guns sent to him for repair, he adds the caution that "it is best to come to the shop and then the job will be done in the right way,, for the 'agree' of 2 generally makes a bargain."

When we consider the offerings of merchants in the way of wearing apparel, we are prone to believe that there was nothing approaching equality of sexes in those early days. From "sewed boots" to headgear, the friendly merchant is bent upon adorning the ladies. Bonnets, silk for still more bonnets, Mousseleine de laine, Cashmeres, Cashmere de Écosse, Balzarines, Cassimeres. For accessories—summer shawls, scarfs, mohair mits, cotton and lace caps, silk handkerchiefs, lace edging and insertions. Contrast with this pleasing display of raiment the kind of thing the well dressed man is wearing in 1846 and 1847—Kentucky jeans, striped shirts, red flannel shirts, denim pants. The only approach to elegance is an offering of "gents fine boots" and "beaver hats." We suspect that the merchants have received "per bark Teulon" or "per Bark Janet" "store clothes" with a more modish and less utilitarian aspect than the habiliments advertised, but why the reticence?

Possibly the explanation lies in the fact that the merchants having a large stock of women's clothing, did not wish to test too severally the gallantry of husbands and fathers by "featuring" men's apparel at the same time, for surrounding these very advertisements are others that bespeak the pioneer community's usual shortage of money. The possessor of coin could always obtain reductions in prices. "An awful discount made for cash," says Mr. Joseph Watt, who wishes to dispose of "a few Fancy Metal Clocks" and who generously agrees that there will be no charge for examining the article. Store orders, orders on the treasury of Oregon, orders on individuals, Oregon scrip, orders on the trading post at Vancouver, due bills in Ermantinger money, "good merchantable wheat" delivered at some point, the last the most common of all,—all were currency of the Territory. But even this varied and rather convenient medium of exchange was apparently not within reach of everyone. Credit seems to have been necessary and was given rather freely. At a sale of farm equipment, stock, and household effects, the terms were "for all sums of 2 dollars or under—cash; for all sums over 2 dollars, credit of 12 months—, the purchaser giving note and approved security." Numerous notices in the advertising columns indicate that many were slow to pay. In the issue of June 25, 1846,— "All persons indebted to Dr. M. Whitman are requested to make payment of the same on or before the 1st of October next, when on such debts as remain unsettled, a legal course will be taken

for collection." Mr. Moss, who cannot have followed at all times the strictly cash policy announced for his hotel, after setting a date at which all accounts must be paid, assures his creditors that "failure to comply with this notice will make them acquainted with William Holmes."²

There is more than evidence of shortage of money to mark this a pioneer community. Mr. H. Burns, in announcing that the Postmaster General has contracted with him "to carry the mail from Oregon City to Weston in Missouri," rather delicately seeks patronage of his friends by saying in effect that now is the time to write. "As the mail sent east by Mr. Burns will reach Weston early in the season, it would be advisable," gently urges Mr. Burns, "for those wishing to correspond with their friends in the east to avail themselves of this opportunity. Postage only 50c on single sheets." There is a kind of thrill, a buoyancy of spirit in such notices as these,—

Roads

Over the Mountains.

The company to examine for a practicable wagon route from the Willamette valley to Snake River, will rendezvous at the residence of Nat Ford, on the Rickreall, so as to be ready to start on the trip on the first day of May.—A portion of the company will return after crossing the Cascade Mountains. It is hoped that several young men will be prepared to go on to meet the emigrants.—

The Clamet! the Clamet!

All persons desirous of visiting the Clamet valley this spring for the purpose of making a thorough exploration thereof, are requested to attend at Jefferson Institute in the Rickreall valley on the 1st day of April next, for the purpose of organizing themselves into a company for the above mentioned purpose and to fix upon a day for starting.

The advertisements not only reveal the limitations and picturesqueness of this western country, but also bear witness to the development of orderly political, economic, and social life on the farming frontier of the United States. Proposals for locating the seat of government are asked for, "said proposals to state the amount proposed to be given—the kind of property in which it is to be paid and the object for donation is intended."

² Sheriff of Clackamas County.

A. L. Lovejoy, who has consented to be a candidate for the office of Governor of Oregon Territory in the ensuing canvass, places himself "in the hands of his friends." The Secretary of the Territory "will be ready to test and seal all measures that may be presented to him for that purpose, on and after the 8th of February present." A public meeting is called "for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of suppressing the distillation, distribution, and use of ardent spirits in Oregon." John McLoughlin gives notice that he intends to petition the next legislature for "leave to erect a breakwater near the head of the rapids above the city with one or more locks for the safer and more convenient passage of boats." The stockholders of the Oregon Printing Association, owners of the *Spectator*, are summoned to their annual meeting. Methodists are reminded that "Quarterly Meeting will commence at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Oregon City on the first Saturday in April next." Masons are "respectfully requested to meet at City Hotel—to adopt some measure to obtain a charter for a lodge." From time to time appear notices that the Multnomah Circulating Library has a new librarian, that the Yam Hill branch of the library has received its share of the books, that the annual meeting of the shareholders is to be held for election of trustees and officers.

Schools are by no means neglected. In Jefferson Institute, located in the Rickreall valley, one mile from the residence of Colonel N. Ford, was not well patronized, it was not because of high tuition. "\$8 per scholar" for a term of 24 weeks is the modest tuition asked by J. E. Lyle, the teacher. The price is the thing with Mr. Lyle. He leaves the advantages of his school to be cried by his patrons. Not so Mrs. N. M. Thornton. She announces that she will open a Female School "in which all branches usually comprised in a thorough English education will be taught—together with plain and fancy Needle Work, Drawing, and Painting in mezzotinto and water colors." As though this were not sufficient for the most exacting parent, Mrs. Thornton promises at her second session that "Strict attention will be given not only to intellectual improvement of the pupils, but also to their morals and manners." Not to be outdone by the standards of a Female School, Mr. Carlos Shane of the Clackamas City School likewise promises that "particular attention will be paid to the Intellectual, Moral, and Physical habits of the pupils."

All in all it is a wholesome life that we glimpse in this community concerned with such commonplace essentials as wheat, livestock, improvement of farms. The humor is decidedly broad, but it grows out of a boisterous freedom that is sound at heart. Here and there a touch of quaintness lets us savor the simplicity of the daily round; in the rush of modern life we do not call meetings to convene at "early candle light," nor do we find many dentists who "flatter" themselves that they "will be enabled to give general satisfaction to those who may favor—with a call." Comparatively uniform occupations made most of a man's affairs an open book to his neighbor and permitted an easy going attitude no longer possible in crowded communities made up of people of innumerable callings and interests. The present day owner of a motor boat could hardly be as lenient as the "subscriber" of this advertisement.

Mogul and Ben Franklin

The above mentioned boats have been taken from the dock at this place, without the knowledge of the Captain or Lieutenant. We therefore offer a reward—if they will take good care of said boats and return the same in good order—our grateful thanks with interest.

We trust that the genial owner of these two boats with names connoting such widely different personal affectations but with gumming, caulking, greasing guaranteed to be of the same high quality, did not find his confidence misplaced. The picture of the community which the *Spectator* advertisers have sketched for us seems to warrant a belief that the ships were docked and the reward paid.

EDITH DOBIE