

Making Place and Nation: Geographic Meaning and the Americanization of Oregon: 1834-1859

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Fall 2012

Abstract

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“Making Place and Nation: Geographic Meaning and the Americanization of Oregon: 1834-1859” examines the ways colonists worked to counteract the problem of Oregon’s complicated geographic situation in order to naturalize the territory’s membership in the nation between the first American missionary settlement and admission as the union’s thirty-third state. Driven by their desire for national inclusion, colonists ascribed national meanings to local actions while also adapting national narratives to fit their immediate experience. This study uses two key concepts to spatially reconstruct the colonial experience: mental maps and vernacular geography. Colonists relied on mental mapping to navigate and to organize geographic knowledge, and this cognitive practice became part of the spatially focused community discourse dubbed vernacular geography. Locally produced geographic discourse united under one rubric the twin objectives that defined the conquest of Oregon: to civilize the landscape and eliminate the Indian presence therein, and to concurrently rewrite the map of the United States with Oregon squarely within its borders. Thus, “Making Place and Nation” asserts that the conquest of Oregon is best understood as a recursive process of making both place and nation.

The dissertation relies on a wide variety of documentary materials, including personal and official letter correspondence, diaries and travelogues, pioneer reminiscences, petitions to local and federal government entities, newspapers, and official reports to agents of the central government. These sources reveal that colonists read both the physical transformation of Oregon’s environment and the amount of independence enjoyed by native groups as indicators of the territory’s potential for national incorporation

The following chapters reinterpret a series of key events in the history of Oregon’s colonization. Chapter One traces the role of mental mapping in establishing an American colony. Chapter Two explores colonists’ conceptual tools to manage anxiety about sharing territory with independent Indian groups and their destruction in the 1847 Whitman Massacre. Chapter Three scrutinizes the production of local geographic knowledge as a method of wresting spatial control from Indians during the California and Southwest Oregon Gold Rush (1848-1853). Chapter Four analyzes the territorial dimensions of a colonial program of ethnic cleansing toward Indians in the Rogue River War (1855-56). Chapter Five investigates the extinguishment of Indian title and its relationship to the uneven implementation of the Oregon Donation Land Act during the era of removal (1856-1859).

*To my magnificent wife Lucy
Who nourishes my spirit,
Makes life fun,
And inspires me to push forward even when I am afraid.*

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Acknowledgements

Reflecting on all the help I have received to complete this project convinces me that I am the most fortunate person in the world, and fills me with abundant gratitude.

Many friends and colleagues have generously given their time to read portions of this study. Anna Armentrout, Lucy Brosgart, Laura Ferguson, Diana Gildea, Beatrice Gurwitz, Anya Hankin, Deborah Kory, Melissa Levine, Pablo Mitchell, Jason Moore, and Aaron Welch all provided useful and constructive comments that helped me improve my work. The Dissertation Divas (Michele Lee Rossi, Dena Marie, Tiffany Linton-Page, Annie Hill, Laura Carrier, and our fearless leader Sabrina Soracco of UC Berkeley's Graduate Division) have aided me more than I can say. Dinner club (Julia Cosgrove, Emma Batten-Bowman, Eleanor Mayer, and Lucy Brosgart) sat through practice conference presentations and provided needed encouragement. Special thanks as well to the members of the Antebellum History Dissertation Group at UC Berkeley: Bill Wagner, Michelle Branch, Ariel Ron, Kathryn Eigen, Amy Lippert, Jacqui Shine, and David Henkin. Stephen Dow Beckham corresponded with me and provided valuable insights about the history of Oregon's Native people, and Stafford Hazelett supplied indispensable help making sense of the geography of the Southern Route and Southwest Oregon in general.

The members of my dissertation committee, David Henkin, Kerwin Klein, and Nathan Sayre have been wonderfully helpful. They are all brilliant scholars with whom it has been an honor to work. Also many thanks to James Vernon and Tyler Stovall for helping me through Orals and encouraging me to think creatively. Michael Cohen's magnetic teaching reinvigorated my passion for history at a crucial moment, and his wide stores of knowledge have helped me create better courses for my own students. I especially want to thank my Chair David Henkin, whose kindness has greatly eased my way.

Special acknowledgment should go to two excellent teachers. Firstly my fourth-grade teacher and dear friend Nancy Ingham introduced me to the wonders of Oregon's history, especially the Whitman Mission. Second, Pablo Mitchell of Oberlin College inspired me to study American History, encouraged me when I needed it, and guided me through my first big research project. He also taught me valuable lessons about the importance of transitions and the beauty of a well-written page.

I have met some of the most helpful people in the world in my research forays into local and state historical societies and libraries. The assistance provided by the Oregon Historical Society Research Library, especially Geoff Wexler and Scott Daniels, has been invaluable. The same goes for Mary Gallagher at the Benton County Historical Society (man, is she good at her job), and the staffs of the University of Oregon Special Collections, the Polk, Linn, Marion, Jackson, and Douglas County Historical Societies, and the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. The Bancroft Library Gunther Barth Fellowship program provided needed dissertation funding, along with the Graduate Division Summer Grant Program at UC Berkeley, the Dean's Normative Time Fellowship program, and the Department of History at UC Berkeley.

I cannot imagine getting through graduate school without Anna Armentrout and Beatrice Gurwitz. They both unselfishly supported and encouraged me on countless occasions. Even more, their friendship created a space for honesty without any hint of competition. I am blessed to have had them as colleagues and to count them among my friends.

The acceptance and openness that define my friendships with Deborah Kory, Aaron Welch, Stephanie Mackley, and Jonah Mackley-Welch has fortified me in developing the

courage needed to face my post graduate-school life head on. They can also always be counted on to provide laughter, fun, and healthy perspective.

Miso, Ifhe, and Clove have provided cozy and often hilarious company on a daily basis. To anyone thinking of writing a dissertation, I recommend getting a cat first.

I have deep appreciation for my brother Jason Moore and sister-in-law Diana Gildea, who have encouraged me to widen my horizons for nearly twenty years. My relationship with them has opened up whole worlds of knowledge and experience that I may otherwise never have accessed.

The generosity of my in-laws Carol Brosgart and Joe Gross is truly one of the wonders of this world. Knowing that I can always turn to them for anything from a wonderful meal to a place to live is a great blessing and constant comfort. Likewise, my aunt and uncle Melissa and Robert Moore have provided me with unconditional love and constant support my entire life; I am so happy to have them in my family and so thankful for all they have done for me since the loss of my father, John W. Moore.

My mother Constance Lee's constant love, humor, and patience have sustained me throughout my life. Through my mother's eyes I can see myself as a unique and gifted person, which is always with me even when I am struggling the most. I want to thank her for believing in me and always taking the time to talk when I need it.

And lastly, I must shower appreciation upon my wife Lucy, who has provided me with essential metaphorical and literal sustenance throughout my dissertation-writing process. When I need a song, she sings one; when I need a hug, she delivers; when I need breakfast-for-dinner, she cooks it. Living with me has not been all puppies and rainbows the past year as I finished this project. No matter what, she always makes me feel loved and urges me to believe in myself. Everyone should be so lucky.

Introduction

“Making Place and Nation” springs from a simple question: How did Americans achieve consensus that Oregon was fully a part of the United States, and what role did Oregon’s colonists play in creating that consensus? Of course, in the early twenty-first century, Oregon is unquestionably within the United States. So how did it get here? As late as the 1820s, many Americans believed that Oregon’s geographical location on the west side of the continental divide would prevent the territory from ever becoming a part of their nation, even if American citizens settled there. The Pacific location seemed to render Oregon’s interests permanently distinct from the United States. When Virginia Congressman John Floyd introduced a measure in 1822 that would have firmly established U.S. intentions to colonize Oregon by making it a territory, Congressional lawmakers balked at the idea of encouraging a settlement that would “inevitably be lost to the nation.”¹ Many were convinced that such a settlement could result only in one of two things: a colony or an independent country. Very few believed that the result could be a coequal state. Congressmen based these conclusions on the location and environment of Oregon, which combined to make it appear impossible to incorporate into the nation. Oregon was too far away, too likely to identify with Asia and the Pacific, and its internal terrain of unnavigable rivers and dense forests too impenetrable to fully join the national body. For many in Washington D.C., the geographical characteristics of Oregon territory placed insurmountable obstacles in the path of national expansion.

The following decades witnessed a dramatic uptick in national enthusiasm for annexing far-reaching territory, as demonstrated by the popularity of Jackson’s Indian Removal Act, the rise of Manifest Destiny rhetoric, and the exuberant mobilization for the Mexican American War.² Yet, remnants of the widespread conviction that their new home was simply too far away to ever be absorbed by the United States continued to haunt Oregon’s colonists. In 1847, members of the territory’s Provisional Government drafted a memorial to Congress, arguing that Oregon deserved to become an official United States territory despite its location on the “distant shores of the Pacific.” They requested extension of U.S. material and legal institutions, infrastructure for commerce and transportation, and military protection. Finally, they requested the power to extinguish Indian title to land and to prove up their claims in the Willamette Valley.

Of equal importance were their requests that the United States stop ignoring Oregon in less tangible ways that echoed concerns over Oregon’s distance that emerged during the 1822 Floyd debate. The colonists wanted America to stop neglecting their “most pressing needs,”

¹ Ray Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 435. Floyd’s bill was also noteworthy in that it represented the first American application of the name “Oregon” to the Pacific Northwest territory. William Cullen Bryant had used the word “Oregon” in his famous poem “Thanatopsis” in 1817, but only to refer to the Columbia River, not the territory as a whole; Carlos A. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

² By 1840 eight new states had formed in trans-Appalachia (Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, and Michigan) and three more from the Louisiana Purchase (Louisiana, Missouri, and Arkansas). In 1790 the federal census counted less than 100,000 people west of the Appalachians; in 1840 more than 7 million, or 40% of the population of the United States, Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 159; John David Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 14–15.

many of which were concerned with making Oregon *feel* or *seem* less foreign and more a part of America. They aspired to enjoy the “paternal care of their government extended over them,” to look up and see the American flag “wav[ing] above them, a visible sign that they had not been forgotten in their distant homes.” Disappointed to find themselves occupying the “extraordinary and in every way anomalous position of a people who, without having either renounced their country, or been renounced by it, were nevertheless without one,” colonists took pains to express how “ardently” they wanted “to have their names and their destiny connected with that of the republic...” and to never again be “pierced to the heart by the thought, which would sometimes, unbidden, obtrude itself upon the mind, that they were the victims of their country’s neglect and injustice....”³

As this emotional plea demonstrates, the thousands of Americans who crossed the continent and settled Oregon wanted unquestioned and unquestionable national incorporation, for themselves and for their new home. Abstract political or imperial status as American would not satisfy Oregon’s colonists. They sought to naturalize Oregon’s membership in the United States so that it became inarguably true according to common sense.⁴ Yet the problem of geographic setting continued to hamper the achievement of the enigmatic national embrace that Oregon’s colonists so desired. Throughout the years between the first American settlement in Oregon in 1834 and official statehood in 1859, the question mark surrounding Oregon’s potential to be fully integrated into the national body remained. “Making Place and Nation” investigates how colonists worked to counteract the problem of Oregon’s complicated geographic situation in order to naturalize the territory’s membership in the nation.⁵

This was a real concern for colonists because Floyd’s opponents had not been entirely incorrect about the problems posed by Oregon’s remote location. Geographic distance and detachment indeed cast a shadow on hopes for national integration. Cultural fallout from the problem of noncontiguous geography persisted even after Oregon achieved official political status as a territory and then a state.⁶ Historian Stephen Aron, in two in-depth studies of the

³ J. Quinn Thornton, “Historical Letter,” *Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association* (1882): 57, 53; Colonel J. W. Nesmith, “Letter to JQ Thornton from Nesmith”, May 20, 1847, James Willis Nesmith Papers, MSS 577, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁴ Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony is useful for understanding the way representations play a part in the making of social and cultural orders. The struggle over the meaning of Oregon as a place took place in the realm of cultural politics that was fundamental in the making and remaking of identity and difference throughout the history of western expansion. The so-called L.A. School of urban theorists of urban space have explored these issues in postmodern Los Angeles and influenced my thinking on contests over spatial meaning. See Antonio Gramsci and Joseph A Buttigieg, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Books, 2006); Michael Dear and Steven Flusty, “Postmodern Urbanism,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 50–72; Michael J. Dear and J. Dallas Dishman, *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

⁵ For a theoretical discussion of the interaction between contests over space and the construction of a changing nation, see Don Mitchell’s critique of Benedict Anderson, who urges attention to “practices and exercises of power through which these bonds [of nation] are produced and reproduced. The questions this raises are ones about who defines the nation, how it is defined, how that definition is reproduced and contested, and, crucially, how the nation has developed and changed over time...The question is not what common imagination exists, but what common imagination is forged.” Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 269.

⁶ David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner, *Many Wests: Place, Culture & Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997). This edited volume has a section on what they call the “noncontiguous west” in which they

transformation of western territories into the states of Kentucky and Missouri, uses the term “consolidation” to denote the final stage in the process of western conquest and national incorporation. Consolidation meant economic privatization (especially in the market for land and in currency), political integration, material incorporation via internal improvements, and the hardening and centralization of geographic boundaries. The services of politicians, speculators, surveyors, and bankers were required to enact the transformation. Colonists assumed all of these processes of national consolidation would be included in any bona fide expansionist program, and Oregon’s geographic distance from the United States directly hampered all of them. The extension of markets and the implementation of land law and the American property regime through efficient survey, the ability of speculators and bankers to operate profitably, the extension of American currency, the fluid incorporation of political structures into national ones, and the extension of “canal and turnpike” projects central to nation-building, all came up against the obstacle of distance.⁷ Though the standard political progression from disputed territory to unorganized Indian Country to United States Territory to State could be implemented on paper from Washington D.C., consolidation of United State hegemony required more material, social, and cultural back-and-forth than Oregon’s location readily allowed. Hence, colonists’ focus on the more intangible elements of American membership was grounded in very real geographic threats.

At the same time, simply by settling the Pacific Northwest, Oregon’s pioneer colonists opened up an “Oregon Question” in American politics, culture, society, and economics.⁸ But they could not control the availability of material modes to connect Oregon to the westernmost states in the Mississippi Valley, such as the construction of railroads or stage routes or the frequency with which ships docked in the Columbia. They were unable to make such

explore Hawaii and Alaska. Those editors, like the author of the present study, were driven to stretch the limits of the English language to come up with a descriptor for the status of territories that did not enjoy direct physical contact with the rest of the nation to which they belonged.

⁷ Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 192–199; Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), xvii. He finds that complete national consolidation was difficult to achieve even in Kentucky, which he argues “established patterns” of “conquest, colonization, and...consolidation” for “successive American Wests.” It was all the more difficult for a far-flung territory like Oregon. On internal improvements and nation-building see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Charles Grier Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), chap. 5, 6.

⁸ The phrase “Oregon question” is used throughout historical writing on early Oregon. It refers to the question of whether the United States was going to incorporate Oregon into the nation, most often with reference to political definitions of the territory. For some authors, the resolution of this open question came when the Oregon Territory was organized in 1848 and for others it continued into the 1850s. See for example James M. Bergquist, “The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (March 1957): 17–35. Others have noted that Washington D.C. politicians expected American settlers to solve an Oregon question opened by the Treaty of Join Occupation with Great Britain, signed in 1818. The term was also used in the antebellum period to refer to the diplomatic and domestic political issues (angering Great Britain and the question of slavery and the territories, primarily) prompted by the question of annexing Oregon for the United States. See Albert Gallatin, *The Oregon Question* (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1846); David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation; Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973); Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

revolutionary changes in the relationship between space and time. The next best thing was to use conceptual means to translate their actions into cultural forms with the potential to revise the way the nation imagined itself so that it inarguably included Oregon.

To do this Americans in Oregon worked with what they had at hand to engender connectedness to the nation. These actions took place daily and fell into two main categories: material and linguistic. First, colonists acted locally to change the domain of Oregon in ways that made it seem more American and therefore more like home. This included a program of civilization and elimination against Native Americans in addition to fencing fields, building roads, planting crops, and other actions typically associated with settlement.⁹ Second, they adopted linguistic practices to create and transform the meanings associated with Oregon's landscape and geography and render them more compatible with national membership. This type of action ranged from adapting old narratives to fit Oregon experiences to naming and renaming landmarks. A dialectical relationship between material action and linguistic interpretation produced the Oregon landscape; together they constituted the locus of colonial Oregon's cultural world. Driven by their desire for national inclusion, colonists ascribed national meanings to local actions while also adapting national narratives to fit their immediate experience.

They imagined that relationship primarily through maps. Oregon's colonists, like all humans confronting unfamiliar environments, relied heavily on various strategies of cognitive or mental mapping to navigate, structure, and articulate human meanings attached to space.¹⁰ These maps should not be thought of as static two-dimensional paper representations. Rather, they were "productive arrangements of relationships used to navigate both physically and metaphorically" and to construct the links among elements of social and physical landscapes.¹¹ Further, in Oregon this reliance on mental mapping became part of a spatially focused community discourse or loosely routinized way of thinking manifested in language.¹² This geographic discourse encouraged and valued the production of geographic knowledge, legitimated geographic or spatial reasoning as convincing and plausible, and tethered important collective mores and values to spatial imagery and metaphor. It also became a source of power *vis-à-vis* native Oregonians. Colonists created, revised, circulated, and promulgated this worldview in a wide variety of ways on a daily basis. Locally produced geographic discourse united under one rubric the twin objectives that defined the conquest of Oregon: to civilize Oregon's landscape and eliminate the Indian presence therein, and to concurrently rewrite the map of the United States with Oregon

⁹ Environmental historians have demonstrated the way that these typical settler actions were not neutral, but were rather an integral part of complex processes of conquest, which included the ecological and the spatial in addition to the cultural, social, and political. See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Images and Mental Maps," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65, no. 2 (June 1975): 205–213. Tuan is one of a group of cultural geographers who stress the importance of sensual, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of space. They argued that place is created and maintained through 'fields of care' that result from people's attachment. Place is, for these scholars, subjectively defined, and could be individualistic, but attachments and meanings were often shared. See also E. C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

¹¹ Patricia Kay Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 178.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For an example of the production of a local, alternative, and demotic discourse see Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

squarely within its borders. In other words, the conquest of Oregon is best understood as a recursive process of making both place and nation.

Geography formed the nucleus of this worldview. Defined as the practice of interpreting and representing, often using abstraction, the spatial arrangement of natural and human communities, geography united Oregon's colonial community around the task of rejoining the nation from which its members had emigrated.¹³ Colonists' knowledge about the nature of Oregon's geography came from a wide variety of sources including booster tracts, guidebooks, travel journals, maps (drawn by both settlers and professional cartographers), personal letters, literature, newspapers, hearsay, rumors, and direct experience among others. Colonists interpreted all of this information through narrative and mental mapping. More, they organized this dizzying variety of data according to its level of abstraction, and measured it against the standard of direct experience. Abstract representations of geography could not be considered true unless they were verified by local understandings of direct experience in the terrain. Colonists were more concerned that verbal or pictorial representations of the landscape reinforced their desire for predictability than they were about objective accuracy. Thus each colonist became a geographer who measured local experiential information against abstract knowledge in a constantly revised community repository imagined using mental maps, and herein dubbed vernacular geography.¹⁴

"Making Place and Nation" relies on a wide variety of documentary materials, including personal and official letter correspondence, diaries and travelogues, pioneer reminiscences, petitions to local and federal government entities, newspapers, and official reports to agents of the central government spanning the fifteen years between initial American settlement and Oregon's statehood; they come from across the American community in Oregon and from the pens of colonists from varying class locations and levels of civic involvement. These sources contain myriad references to colonial attitudes about the landscape and its transformation from foreign to domestic space. Despite being produced for a variety of purposes, the sources share a preoccupation with Oregon's geographic isolation and remoteness; colonists' language consistently leaned toward the spatial. Especially when read against the grain, these documents reveal that colonists related changes they made to the environment to shifts in the territory's potential for national incorporation as well as to the shifting power and freedom of movement enjoyed by native groups. A similarly geographic perspective came through in the pages of Oregon's locally published newspapers. As textual artifacts, the newspapers represented the isolation Oregon faced by—both consciously and unconsciously—reporting delayed and incomplete national news and near-constant corrections to inaccurate reports based on minimal and inefficient communication within the colony and with California, Hawaii, and the United States. They also contained articles that described geographical implications for the major events

¹³ Alastair Bonnett, *What Is Geography?* (London and Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2008), 6.

¹⁴ My thinking here is influenced by Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), xxii. Carter calls official forms of geographic knowledge "imperial history" as seen with a "satellite eye." The local, he calls "spatial history" or "inhabiting the country." Carter's critique revolves around the argument that "the spatiality of historical experience evaporates before the imperial gaze," which results in a sort of "legitimacy, but at the expense of a world of experience." In arguing that one has to choose between imperial history (with its theatrical nature, heroic biography, and nationalist plots) and a truer, less ideology-tinged spatial history, though, Carter himself obscures the way imperial discourses and narratives shape the experience of regular people. This is perhaps especially obvious in the history of settler colonialism, when highly motivated, adventurous people mobilize powerful national or imperial ideologies to justify their dramatic colonial adventures and carry them along on their spatial explorations.

of the day, and belabored debates about the spatial aspects of colonization: advantageous areas to establish farms, the easiest travel routes, and the latest development in transportation, to name a few. The geographic focus of extant primary sources regarding early Oregon demands that historians come to terms with the geographic proficiency of the colonists as well as their penchant for geographic thinking, metaphor, and description.¹⁵

The following chapters recount a series of key events in the history of Oregon's colonization from 1834 until its statehood in 1859. Establishing an American colony, responding to the violence of the Whitman Massacre and fighting a war in its wake, participating in the California Gold Rush, fighting a brutal Indian war in the Rogue River Valley, and enacting the removal of nearly all of the Indians in Western Oregon—all can be understood from the perspective of colonial experience of phenomena as they appeared in the course of everyday life. Seeking out what Paul Carter has dubbed “life as it discloses itself” helps free us from the subtle predestination that pervades histories of the American West and allows us to reconstruct Westerners' worldviews with more nuance and in greater detail.¹⁶ By using documentary sources to reconstruct rather than deconstruct the experience of conquest, we discover both the primacy and the indeterminacy of space and spatial thinking, as well as its complex relationship to mobile national identities. The Americanization of Oregon was not, as some historians have suggested, a foregone conclusion.¹⁷ Nor was it a simple matter of settling enough bodies on the banks of the Willamette. Rather, it depended entirely on how successfully its colonists could inscribe Americanness onto the geo-cultural terrain.

The Standard Narrative of Oregon's Conquest

Frederick Jackson Turner began a long tradition of presenting Oregon's importance principally in terms of international diplomacy. Subsequent historians have centered their discussion of Oregon on the negotiations between Britain and the United States that resulted in the Oregon Treaty of 1846. This treaty ended the Oregon boundary dispute and the period of British and American joint occupation that had been in place since 1818. It gave the United States sole claim to the area north of California, south of the forty-ninth parallel and west of the Rocky Mountains (except for Vancouver Island, which remained with the British). The treaty did not mention Native American claims. Following Turner, historians of the United States and its expansion have explored the question of the incorporation of Oregon into the United States by

¹⁵ Overland migrants bought maps from previous explorations to help guide their trips. Common maps came from London mapmaker John Arrowsmith, who published a continually improving set from 1832-1844 based on reports of Peter Skene Ogden and other Hudson's Bay Company employees. Some of these are reprinted in Derek Hayes, *Historical Atlas of the United States: With Original Maps* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 236, 280. See Stafford Hazelett, “‘Let Us Honor Those to Whom Honor Is Due:’ The Discovery of the Final Link in the Southern Route to Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 222, 246n4.

¹⁶ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxii. Richard White has articulated a similar approach by encouraging historians to ask what White calls “operational questions,” or those that have multiple possible answers. If we do this we can access a new perspective on history of colonialism and colonists in addition to that of Indian peoples. This new perspective reveals not the history of what colonists discovered, which was essentially what they “believed was already constituted but rather colonists' “movements themselves, of why they went where they did, of how and why they created boundaries. They turned space into place. They constituted a world and as they did so they often revealed another world...” Richard White, “Indian Peoples and the Natural World: Asking the Right Questions,” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 94–95.

¹⁷ See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 711–722.

retelling the story of the debates between Washington and Great Britain and the Hudson's Bay Company over the ownership of the Oregon Territory.¹⁸

In recent decades, the colonization of Oregon has held a more marginal place in the historiography of the United States, and especially in the cultural history of the nineteenth century. Colonized by a relatively homogenous and demographically insignificant group of farmers amid what has generally been assumed to be an inconsequential contest with Oregon's native groups, Oregon's transformation from alluring wilderness to American state has been largely taken for granted.¹⁹ The story tends to go like this: first, missionaries traveled to Oregon and failed to convert Indians who had and would continue to suffer immense losses due to disease. Then, colonists drawn to the fertile valleys of Western Oregon created a community of republican-minded family farms. Once enough emigrants made it across the continent in their covered wagons they established a territorial government.²⁰ They hated slavery only slightly less than they hated African Americans and thus their official statehood was delayed by fights over

¹⁸ See Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rise of the New West, 1819-1829* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 91–104; Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision, 1846*, 1943, 5–7; Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own:" *A History of the American West*, 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 77; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 721; Billington, *Westward Expansion*, 431–452; Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 159–197, 202. In this recent Pulitzer Prize-winning synthesis of the antebellum era, Daniel Walker Howe focuses his attention on the demographic aspects of Oregon's settlement, and in the process ends up ignoring Oregon after the resolution of the boundary dispute with Great Britain in 1846. After this event, Oregon all but falls out of his narrative, even though his discussion of western expansion continues through the first half of the nineteenth century. Specialists in the history of Oregon also center focus on the boundary dispute as the most decisive moment in the incorporation of Oregon. See David Peterson del Mar, *Oregon's Promise: An Interpretive History* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2003), 47. In the main synthesis of the history of the Pacific Northwest historian Carlos Schwantes, did assess the aftermath of the Boundary Treaty, noting the lack of change after the boundary issue was resolved, whereby Oregon's colonists "continued to be treated as Uncle Sam's stepchildren." But he went no further in discussing the impact of such treatment on the process of Americanizing Oregon over the next fifteen years before Oregon became a state, Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 117–119.

¹⁹ One notable recent exception is Gray Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee: U.S. Empire and the Transformation of an Indigenous World, 1792-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Whaley takes seriously the contests with Native Americans and their centrality to the transformation of Oregon before 1859; which he characterizes as a struggle between the imperial metropole and the colonial periphery. He argues compellingly that an imperial understanding of Oregon is necessary to overcome the sanitized and mythologized treatment the region's history often receives. The current study seeks to understand the conceptual relationship between nation and colony.

²⁰ On the impact of disease on Oregon's native communities on the Northwest coast see Robert Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline Among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). On Southwest Oregon Indians and disease see Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 190–195; Thomas Edwin Tetzlaff, "Settlement and Landscape Transitions: The Coquille Valley, Oregon", n.d., 12. On the Willamette Valley Indians and disease see Robert Bunting, *The Pacific Raincoast: Environment and Culture in an American Eden, 1778-1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), chap. 1; Mathias D. Bergmann, "'We Should Lose Much by Their Absence:' The Centrality of Chinookans and Kalapuyans to Life in Frontier Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (Spring 2008). On the journey overland see Unruh, *The Plains Across*; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). In Oregon's unique brand of republicanism see Bunting, *The Pacific Raincoast*, 47; Peter Boag, *Environment and Experience: Settlement Culture in Nineteenth-Century Oregon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Gray H. Whaley, "Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843–1858," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 1; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 203.

whether to exclude them.²¹ Finally, in 1859 Oregon became a state and its settler colonials became U.S. residents, fully reintegrated to the nation they had left behind.

This narrative, based mainly upon demographic concerns (who went to Oregon, when, and how many of them) is not incorrect, yet neither is it complete. From a certain angle of vision and level of abstraction it aptly tells the story of the incorporation of Oregon into the United States.²² But with a closer look at the experiences and attitudes of those who enacted this demographic shift the story takes on a different hue. The following chapters will demonstrate that Americans who conquered Oregon understood their actions as leading to a transformation of the very nature of the land from something foreign to something American. They sought also to transform the shape of the American nation-state and expand its boundaries around their new home on the Pacific. These projects, as colonists understood them, did not hinge on the number of Americans who lived in Oregon. Rather they hinged on the transformative capacity of the American spirit (defined exclusively and ethnocentrically) to conquer distance and transform and permanently implant new meanings and associations into the landscape of Oregon. In John O’Sullivan’s 1845 words, Oregon had to be transformed from “pays” to “la patrie” or from a “mere country on a map,” to being “within the dear and sacred designation of Our Country,” and this required cultural work in addition to the physical acts of settlement.²³ Colonists in Oregon attempted to fill in the empty spaces on their national mental maps in order to transform them into distinctly American places.

Key Concepts

Space and Place

The current study is centered on the idea of making place. Many scholars in the fields of human and cultural geography have examined the question of how humans make place.²⁴ Beginning in the 1970s, cultural geographers who wanted to understand the geographical side of human values and belonging began to explore the importance of place as created through experience, perception, and feeling. In order to do this, they posited the existence of an abstract, empty, and blank space, which Yi-Fu Tuan has called “undifferentiated space” that lay outside

²¹ On the issue of slavery in Oregon politics, see Paul Bourke and Donald A DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

²² William A Bowen, *The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978). Bowen tells the story of the settlement of Oregon using primarily demographic descriptions of which Americans and how many moved to Oregon, and by plotting how many lived in the different areas of the Valley, is a good example of the presumed importance of demographics to the history of Oregon settlement.

²³ John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (August 1845): 5–10.

²⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Relph, *Place and Placelessness*; David Lowenthal, “Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory,” *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1975): 1–36; David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John A. Agnew, *The United States in the World-Economy: A Regional Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. Nicholas Entrikin, *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997); R. J. Johnston, *A Question of Place: Exploring the Practice of Human Geography* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

the purview of human history and construction.²⁵ From this beginning, they set out to explore the way humans make place from space in the course of their lives. They argued that the creation of space was a local occurrence that was essential to human life. Drawing on the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger, they argued that dwelling, or being-in-the-world was a process of place making, and asserted it was impossible to understand human *being* without making sense of the way individuals and groups created place through emotionally and subjectively interacting with their environments.²⁶

Using historical methods to trace the way particular groups created place is a valuable endeavor. Yet problems arise for historians who want to borrow from this intriguing set of ideas for use in historical scholarship. They arise because the idea of space as an empty, limitless, and blank foundation of human life is problematic. It is difficult use the concept of undifferentiated space to investigate encounters with unknown territory without slipping into regrettably familiar ethnocentrism of the kind that dominated scholarship on expansion and colonialism until the middle of the twentieth century.²⁷ The concept of blank space has two main problems that must be addressed before adapting the idea of making place to a study of American colonization of Oregon. The first is a logical paradox that emerges when one tries to find, or even imagine, an example of space that is truly blank. It is impossible because, once a spot on the map enters the consciousness of a certain group of people, it ceases to be truly unknown or absent of meaning, but is instead heavily constructed according to the characteristics of a deeply meaningful category: blankness. This act of imagination itself meant that the spot on the map was no longer blank in any real sense. It was, instead, known or constructed as blank, and this tendency to map territory as blank or empty was itself an act of cultural construction.

The second problem is a familiar one to students of Native American history. Since the inception of European colonialism in the fifteenth century, and possibly even before, the act of constructing a spot on the map as blank, unoccupied, or empty has been a deeply troubled one, used to justify the dispossession and conquest of indigenous people across the globe. Native American historian Robert Berkhofer has explored the way Europeans used two overlapping terms to assign Indian land the status of unoccupied in order to justify taking it. The first, *Terra nullius* could be applied either to land totally vacant of people or merely not inhabited by people possessing religions and customs Europeans recognized as equal to their own. The second, *vacuum domicilium*, was a legal dictum that allowed Europeans to take up both land title and political jurisdiction if land was “vacant of any human occupancy.” As Berkhofer explains, Europeans and Indians did not necessarily agree on what constituted occupancy, and the former used differences in land use practices to define Indian land as empty in order to justify co-opting it.²⁸

²⁵ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6; Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 225. For two works that provide excellent introductions to the major debates on place and space, see: Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); Phil Hubbard, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London and Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2004).

²⁷ For a synthesis of such scholarship see Ray Allen Billington’s *Westward Expansion*. For a discussion of the way ethnocentrism and racism similarly pervaded scholarship on European interaction with Africa and Africans during the same period see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

²⁸ Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 120. See also Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). Later American expansionists used to envision Indian-occupied land.

Despite problems of logical inconsistency and ethnocentrism, there is value in the idea of making place as a central expression and locus of individual and collective identities. But the question becomes how to define the process of making place if we have abandoned the notion of blank space from which to make it. Without empty space as a starting point, what is place made of, how is it constructed, and what is its role?

The idea of blankness remains important for the study of the discovery of new territories, not because it represents objectively empty space, but because Euroamericans in North America believed in empty space west of the “frontier.” It was frightening to them, but it was also alluring. It appeared to be open and available as a fount of limitless resources. This was an ideal, not a reality. Westerners who lived and moved in western frontier areas of North America did not experience the land as empty space. They could not ignore evidence of previous human occupation, use, and place making, because it was everywhere and they relied upon it for survival. They traveled on Indian and fur trappers trails, they slept in clearings created by native people, they communed with and fought against the people who called western places their home.²⁹ Yet, Euroamericans, be they explorers or settlers, often did not experience western spaces as fitting into either of these extremes. The ideal type of wilderness may have been blank and empty of a history of human habitation or a semblance of geographical systems, while the reality of their experience may have been rich with ever-present material evidence of the depth of occupation and place that preceded them. Westerners experienced the West not according to the ideal of blankness or the reality of their experience with place. Rather, they lived in the West in a way that combined the two. Geographer Edward Soja’s theory of “lived space” or “Thirdspace” is helpful in explaining the way abstract ideas and geographic knowledge combined with immediate and concrete lived experience to produce the space in which westerners lived out their daily lives.³⁰

Soja argues that making place is not the end result of a one-way process of transforming the raw material of space into the particular and meaning-laden human “home” that is place.³¹ Rather, he expands on Henri Lefebvre’s idea of spatial triectics and Michel Foucault’s notion

This idea is certainly key to Frederick Jackson Turner’s understanding of free land, as well as 18th and 19th century conceptions of “wilderness” and the “frontier.” See .

²⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); William Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West*. (New York: Knopf, 1971). Jonathan Raban’s fascinating work of travel writing *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings* (Vintage, 2000) uses primary resources to show how European explorers of the coast of Alaska benefited from the knowledge and navigational systems of Native Alaskans.

³⁰ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*; Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

³¹ Debates abound regarding the use of the term “home” in cultural geography. Tuan and Relph’s uncritical masculinist use of “home” as an assumedly safe and nurturing environment presupposes a male subject according to Gillian Rose in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). bell hooks has added another layer to the debate by arguing that home is a place of resistance for people of color living in a racist society in her *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1999). Annette Kolodny and Katherine Morrissey have both explored the idea of home in the creation of place in the American West, while Mary Ryan has demonstrated the importance of the domestic sphere as a site of social change and the creation of gendered class identities. See Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Katherine G Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mary P Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

of heterotopias to argue that space is experienced on multiple levels, each of which is socially constructed.³² This notion of Thirdspace breaks down the binary oppositions so common in social thought by including the material and the mental, the objective and the subjective, and both real space and imagined space. This idea enables historians to explore the perspective of experience, to borrow Tuan's phrase, without positing a blank or pure starting point. This is because Soja has demonstrated that experience is always in space and that lived space is constantly created by the relationship between the elements of those binaries (commonly thought to be mutually exclusive). While Soja has been criticized for including everything in existence in his idea of Thirdspace, the term is useful for historians who seek to go deeply into questions of a spatialized cultural history. That is, to understand the "stories people tell about themselves and their world" not only in their idealized versions but also as grounded in the experience of living in a spatial world that is both abstract and concrete, real and imagined, material and mental all at once all the time.³³ "Making Place and Nation" posits, through the example of the conquest of Oregon, that frontier experience is best understood as playing out in a constantly revised Thirdspace.

Nation as Lived Space

Using the concept of lived space to study history reveals the way direct experience (of the real or immediate) and imagination (of the abstract) are in constant dialogue and cannot be understood in isolation from one another. This idea is helpful for understanding colonial Oregonians' relationship to the nation. The modern construct of nation itself ruptures the dualistic thinking about space vs. place espoused by Tuan and Relph. Nations are at once abstract constructs akin to Soja's idea of conceived or mappable space, and also deeply felt and emotional places around which human communities are created and through which they are sustained and defined. Nations, if we think about this internal balancing of the abstract and the immediate, are best understood using Soja's concept of Thirdspace, or lived space. Modern nations themselves reinforce their own existence by converting space into place. They create imagined communities that exist—and can be directly experienced—on both the abstract and concrete levels.³⁴ This coexistence of immediacy and abstractness within nations had particular implications for the grass-roots agents of American expansion.

Oregon's settler-colonists undertook to expand the nation's abstract boundaries by moving into territories (often popularly understood as blank) that continued to be experienced as foreign even after Americans' arrival. This incongruity was a central problem of national expansion, whereby conceptual spatial definitions that defined Oregon as claimed by America

³² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1991); Michel Foucault, "Other Spaces: the Principles of Heterotopia," *Lotus International* 4849, no. 48/49 (1985): 9–17.

³³ I borrow this phrase from the preface of Eric Avila's book on Los Angeles, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, New Ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). He defines cultural history as the history of those stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and the world around us.

³⁴ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006). In the words of geographer Tim Cresswell: "Nations have been constructed as imagined communities each with their own place in the world, their own homeland, some as 'fatherland,' others as 'motherland.' By combining state and nation in nation-state, sovereign territory has been merged with sacred homeland to convert a space into a place" and unites the "abstraction of space with the deeply-felt emotions of place." *Place*, 99. See also Peter J Taylor, *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

did not line up with the direct experiences of it as foreign. It could also be reversed at times when Oregon seemed to be more American than the federal government would allow it to legally become. Faced with this conundrum, colonists used the characteristic of the nation as both abstract and concrete as a solution. Through the language of meaning, they fostered the creation of the nation by fashioning their immediate actions and vice versa. They continually attempted to merge shared national ideals with direct experience and create a version of national narrative that could add plausibility to an Oregon-inclusive America. This became vital to the formation of local cultures and also to ideas of the nation within which they developed.

Symbols were the central tool American colonists in Oregon used to immediately experience the nation. Through symbols, the abstract nation became deeply felt place. These include the more obvious examples of national symbols such as flags, army uniforms, and national holiday rituals.³⁵ Importantly, symbols could be any object or ritual in the cultural field. In Oregon, the entirety of the landscape was a potentially potent symbol of either national membership or national exclusion and foreignness. And since symbols themselves rely on a combination of abstract ideas and concrete materiality for their meanings, the creation of national meaning through symbols in the landscape was a dialectical process of linguistic and material action.³⁶

One of the most important symbols analyzed in the pages below is also one of the most complicated. American colonists in Oregon read symbolic meaning into the thousands of native Oregonians they encountered upon arrival in the Pacific Northwest. The practice of seeing Indians as flexible clusters of symbols rather than as real people has a long history in the United States, which has been expertly explored by historians and anthropologists.³⁷ These works have demonstrated that Americans had, by the middle of the nineteenth century, developed a set of cultural tools and stories that allowed them to separate Indianness from real Indian people and use it to create their own, exclusively white, American identities. To construct these new national selves, Euroamericans used Indianness to symbolize independence and rebellion (the Boston Tea Party costumes are an example), a just and unquestionable right to the land, a long history, nobility, manhood, and freedom among other things.³⁸ The very native people whose dispossession was enabling the building of this new nation were treated as cultural inkpots into which American identity-builders could dip for inspiration.³⁹

³⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 2 (April 1975): 160.

³⁶ Denis Cosgrove has analyzed symbolism of the landscape, and by demonstrating how meanings shifted during the long transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, argued that symbols were conditioned by material relationships between society and the land. Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

³⁷ Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*; Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996).

³⁸ For fascinating accounts of the complexity with which the tendencies to separate Indians from Indianness can be hidden in the cultural and intellectual forms and practices of colonial societies see Patrick Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 2 (1991): 197; Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999).

³⁹ This cultural practice has continued into the present day. Americans often coopt the image of Native Americans to represent a multitude of causes ranging from New Age religion to environmentalism. Deloria and Berkhofer discuss these trends in detail. See Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 187-194; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 155-180.

Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest were not, of course, the collection of symbolic traits that Euroamerican colonists may have wanted them to be. Indigenous Oregonians were active agents in their lives, and as such, challenged colonists to deal with them as social actors with powerful claims on the territory rather than read them as symbols. Indeed, scholars have explored the social and cultural history of Native Americans and their relationship to colonists in the Pacific Northwest, demonstrating its significance to the history of the region as a whole.⁴⁰ The reality of Indians' presence in the colony of Oregon created a situation that mirrored that of the nation itself. Abstract generalizations about Indians—the imagined essential traits Europeans used to construct them as important symbols of the nation—contradicted yet somehow coexisted with experiences of traveling and living among Oregon's native peoples. Interaction with Indians complicated both positive and negative stereotypes about them and vice versa.⁴¹ But this situation did not prevent Oregon's colonists from attempting to interpret Indian action, land use, spatial habits, and cultural and economic systems of thought as symbolic of either national inclusion or exclusion, as they did with almost everything they encountered in Oregon. Colonists expressed an understanding of Indianness—as symbolic of valued national characteristics—that was separable from the reality of Indian people. This notion became incorporated into vernacular geographic discourse in order to create national meaning from local experience.

The idea of alienating Indians from Indianness can be traced to Early Modern European theories of the ordering of humanity that assumed Indians were ripe for Christian conversion and had no real connection to their land. For instance, Enlightenment-based ideas of monogenesis and universal humanity led many to believe that heathen Indians could be fully assimilated into colonial or American society, if only they adopted the habits of civilization and convert to

⁴⁰ Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities Around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*; Nathan Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon, 1820s-1860s* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002); Robert T Boyd, *People of the Dalles: The Indians of Wascopam Mission: A Historical Ethnography Based on the Papers of the Methodist Missionaries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Terence O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1991); Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen*, 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Stephen Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua: A History of Douglas County, Oregon* (Roseburg Or.: Douglas County Commissioners, 1986). Additional works focus primarily on the history and culture of the Pacific Northwest Indians. See Stephen Dow Beckham, *The Indians of Western Oregon: This Land Was Theirs* (Coos Bay, Or: Arago Books, 1977); Stephen Beckham, *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries*, 1st ed. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2006); Laura Berg, *The First Oregonians*, 2nd ed. (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 2007); Robert H. Ruby, *The Cayuse Indians: Imperial Tribesmen of Old Oregon*, Commemorative ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); William N Bischoff, *The Yakima Indian War, 1855-1856: A Problem in Research* (Spokane: Gonzaga University Press, 1950); Richard Scheuerman, *Finding Chief Kamiakin: The Life and Legacy of a Northwest Patriot* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2008); Eugene Hunn, *Nch'i-wána, "The Big River:" Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); Jennifer Karson and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, Oregon.; Tamástslikt Cultural Institute., *Wiyáxayxt Wiyáakaáawn = As Days Go By: Our History, Our Land, and Our People--the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Pendleton, Or.: Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, 2006); Elizabeth Heckert, *The People and the River: a History of the Takelma Indians of the Upper Rogue River Country* (N.A., 1977); Clifford Trafzer, *Renegade Tribe: The Palouse Indians and the Invasion of the Inland Pacific Northwest* (Pullman Wash.: Washington State University Press, 1986); Clifford Trafzer, *Yakima, Palouse, Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Wanapum Indians: An Historical Bibliography* (Metuchen N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992).

⁴¹ On the historical underpinnings for American racism as it related to westward expansion in the nineteenth century see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Drinnon, *Facing West*; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*.

Christianity. This idea obviously supported the notion that Indian people could be separated from their Indianness, which consisted of habits, culture, practices, and religion. The example of groups like the Cherokees, who appeared to do just this, encouraged and reinforced this belief. Debates over the mutability of Indianness continued to play out among American missionaries in Oregon in the 1830s. The diaries of Protestant missionaries in Oregon reveal that they struggled internally with whether a rigidly racialized view of Indian difference or one based on an ethnic model that allowed for movement between categories was most appropriate for the Oregon context.⁴²

Attitudes toward land in the British colonies and the Early Republic also underwrote the idea that Indianness could be separated from Indian people. From the beginning of European presence in North America, Indians and the land had been seen to share fundamental characteristics of savagery, brutality, nobility, authenticity, and wildness. Environmental theories of racial difference, which held that humans' environment determined their place on the ladder of human difference, and also had a place in antebellum racial thought, clearly support such a notion.⁴³ This belief led to the development of a powerful discursive practice among Euroamericans of using not just the same adjectives, but the same conceptual categories to understand Indian people and the American landscape. Removing Indians from the landscape did not, though, necessarily do anything to remove the Indianness from it. From the perspective of

⁴² Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 144. On the ABCFM mission's history and significance see Clifford Merrill Drury, *First White Women Over the Rockies; Diaries, Letters, And Biographical Sketches of the Six Women of the Oregon Mission Who Made the Overland Journey in 1836 and 1838*, 3 vols. (Glendale, Calif: A. H. Clark Co, 1963); Clifford Merrill Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, and the Opening of Old Oregon* (Glendale, Calif: A. H. Clark Co, 1973); Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Narcissa Whitman: The Significance of a Missionary's Life," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 2–15. For published diaries and letters of the missionaries see Clifford Merrill Drury, *Nine Years with the Spokane Indians: The Diary, 1838-1848, of Elkanah Walker*, Northwest Historical Series 13 (Glendale, Calif: A. H. Clark Co, 1976); *The Mountains We Have Crossed: Diaries and Letters of the Oregon Mission, 1838* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Henry Harmon Spalding, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Percé Mission, 1838-1842* (Glendale, Calif: A.H. Clark Co, 1958); Mary Richardson Walker, *On to Oregon: The Diaries of Mary Walker and Myra Eells* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Genevieve Long, "Laboring in the Desert: The Letters and Diaries of Narcissa Prentiss Whitman and Ida Hunt Udall" (Ph.D, University of Oregon, 2002); Narcissa Prentiss Whitman, *The Letters of Narcissa Whitman* (Fairfield, Wash: Ye Galleon Press, 1986).

⁴³ While the blend of Primitivism and Romanticism that developed in the first half of the nineteenth-century constructed a new, cultish obsession with the American wilderness and with Native American people, Americans were also juggling scientific theories to help them account for and organize people according to their racial characteristics. The notion of a "Chain of Being" was defined by a belief in a continuum of creation from the lowest brute to the highest man. Historian Winthrop Jordan observed that The Great Chain "remained a readily available, even tempting way of ordering Nature's differences, but not an intellectual imperative" into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Jordan argues that the Great Chain could serve to "soothe an itch." Its intrinsic order "was enormously attractive to anyone who for whatever reason felt that his social community was going to pot," which was especially plausible in an era when "a people's and a nation's identity were undergoing assessment." Environmental theories of race also engaged the attention of Antebellum Americans, many of whom felt constrained by the notion of a static Chain of Being. Environmentalism explained racial difference as the result of causes such as climate or elevation, highlighting human plasticity and asserting the primacy of wild, conquerable land within the changing definition of America. Nineteenth-century Euroamericans mobilized environmental thought – like they did romantic primitivism – in order to better imagine themselves as the rightful occupants of American wilderness. Through this lens, whites could have been "as much savage as Cherokees" if they spent enough time living the primitive lifestyle. Winthrop D Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: Norton, 1977), 484–485, 514, 516. For a clear and compelling discussion of early environmental thought and its links for scientific racism see Cohen, *The French Encounter With Africans*.

the Euroamerican colonizer, those characteristics that made Indian land Indian could remain in the terrain even if Indian people ceased to occupy it. A flexible signifier, Indianness could be applied to non-Indian people, alienated from Indian people, and define a landscape even after it was conquered.

Thus, when Oregon's colonists experienced the land as divided between themselves and Indians, they incorporated those meanings into their mental maps and collective vernacular geographies. This meant that the categories of "settled," "wild," or "Indian Country" were fundamental to the process of constituting Oregon as both a familiar place and as a natural part of the nation. Imbuing the landscape with more or less Indianness became part of the naturalization of the territory's Americanness; it also rendered relationships with real Indian people even more volatile and complicated. This is in part because colonists saw real Indian people, for better or worse, as carrying the characteristics of Indianness and possessing the capacity to Indianize or de-civilize the landscape. This set of beliefs about Indians and Indianness took on particular and powerful meanings in the context of the geographically centered settler colonial outlook in Oregon. Thus, though the story of Indian policy in Oregon may appear to be a cookie-cutter duplication of those from other American territories, in actuality it revolved around the production of meanings specific to Oregon's geographic situation on the continent.

In Oregon, as the chapters below demonstrate, the symbolic field was very flexible; the meaning ascribed to symbols often switched, and certain objects or places became more and less significant as symbols over time. The indeterminacy of Oregon's national membership, especially in the early years of colonization, led to consistent struggles over the definition and redefinition of symbols, which often took their meaning in a spatial schema that privileged geographical description and metaphor. Colonists used their ability to transform and manipulate the symbolic meaning of local landscapes, landmarks, communication networks, settlements, and other spatial entities into undeniably American ones. By accessing the nation in its abstract and concrete forms through varied symbols which themselves contained both abstract and concrete elements, Oregon's colonists endeavored to influence the national character of Oregon even in their most immediate and concrete actions. This struggle over the varying meanings of a wide variety of symbols was not a straightforward process. In order to understand the way Oregonians created national meaning by defining local symbols, it is important to understand two important elements of their experience of lived space: mental mapping and vernacular geography.

Mental Mapping

Pacific Northwest historian Katherine Morrissey has called for historical investigations focused on the way perceptions and experiences in a given environment became a shared "sense of self grounded in place."⁴⁴ "Making Place and Nation" shares this goal, and in addition examines the way such a place-centered sense of self coexists with one centered in nation. A major tool it uses to achieve this goal is the mental map.

According to cultural geographers, mental maps are "spatial mnemonic devices" that like physical maps "are a means to structure and store knowledge," used by all people to make sense of and move through space. They can be defined as value-laden cognitive structures that gave meaning, predictability, and familiarity to surroundings. Colonists in Oregon attempted to fill in

⁴⁴ Morrissey, *Mental Territories*, 7; Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

the empty spaces on their mental maps in order to transform them into distinctly American places. Some, like cognitive anthropologist Charles Frake, argue that mental mapping is emic, or culture-specific. For Frake, culture does not provide a map to follow but rather a “set of principles for mapmaking and navigation” which are created inside the contingency of historical development and the material world. It is this definition of mental mapping that is most important to the current study. Colonists’ cultural background delineated their approach to space. Abstract narratives and ideologies colored colonial maps, which were then challenged and revised with new information gained from experience. The form and content of colonial mental maps influenced how Oregonians acted in the world and how they saw themselves within it, just as they were colored by broader cultural cues. Colonists’ cognitive geographies were complex and multifaceted, making up a collection of “rough, improvised, continually revised sketch maps.”⁴⁵ Thus, mental maps contained more than logistical information, but included the constantly changing priorities, values, dreams, hopes, and prejudices, of their creators.⁴⁶

Novelist Angus Wilson’s evocative description, taken from his 1963 autobiography, aptly exhibits the way mental maps integrate the minutiae of experience-based knowledge (stressed by Tuan’s work on mental maps) with abstract national and global scales of geographic awareness.

If I remember at some moment a particular object that I have seen, say the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, then the natural tendency of my mind, if unchecked... is to place this building in relation to other famous Istanbul mosques that I have seen, and these in turn I see visually on what I remember from the whole map of Istanbul in my Blue guide. If I am tired and idle the picture will begin automatically to expand. Istanbul will appear on a map of Turkey beside the other Turkish towns I have visited, which will in their turn acquire visual details. This map will also be marked with the towns I failed to see, in feebler pictured of details that I have only read of.... On the edges of my consciousness waiting to slide into vision...is a whole world map, appearing something like those demographic charts in which densely populated areas are heavily studded with black dots, Antarctica largely a blank. My map, however, has black dots of experience and grey dots of imagination, and, in between, varying shades to mark literary associations, historic events, the home of towns of people whom I have met when they were travelling abroad, and so on. Thus on my mental map the London area is a black splodge, Provence richly black, Antarctica (the scene of many of my ice fears) a heavy grey, Tehran lightly marked by my view of the airport in the early morning hours, overshadowed because it is the residence of an old friend.... Above this world map with its overlays or shadings and collections

⁴⁵ Tuan, “Images and Mental Maps,” 210; Charles Frake, “Plying Frames Can Be Dangerous: Some Reflections on Methodology in Cognitive Anthropology,” in *Language and Cultural Description: Essays by Charles O. Frake* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 58. For other takes on mental mapping see Roger M. Downs and David Stea, *Maps in Minds: Reflections on Cognitive Mapping* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (London: Psychology Press, 1986); Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

⁴⁶ Morrissey, *Mental Territories*, 30. Morrissey’s argument centers on the way a mental map of a new region called the “Inland Empire” was devised by boosters and other power-holders in order to increase the cache of emerging economic networks connected to Spokane, Washington. She argues that over time and primarily through conflict and debate over meaning, the majority of local residents came to accept some version of that map of the region, and to self-identify with it.

of dramatis personae, time spirals upwards so that each place too has its historical chart either dating personal experiences or bringing into mind its historic past.⁴⁷

Wilson's description of his mental map contains both abstract geographic knowledge gained from paper maps and formal geographies as well as deeply subjective and personal knowledge based in experience. His account reveals the extent to which these two levels of understanding are interwoven to form a meaningful image of Wilson's world. Oregon's colonists wove their mental maps in a similar fashion, yet in a context that was complicated by national expansion. An agricultural settler who began her overland journey in a farming community in Iowa might have black splodges over her hometown, and lines tracing her long journey to Missouri where she and her family bought supplies and departed the United States for the trip across the continent. It is very likely that she or her immediate family had first migrated from someplace farther east or South, and her memories of those places could also be represented on her map. The place she grew up may have been darkened with memories, stories, and imagined changes since her departure. Likewise, Washington D.C. may have been marked on her map of the United States, or perhaps the capital of her own state or territory, or the land office. It is quite likely the western boundary of the United States would have been marked on her map, especially after she left it behind on her trip to Oregon. It seems reasonable to assume that on the eastern side of the Mississippi River the black dots and splodges would have been numerous. Many would have been the result of personal experiences and others of second-hand or historical knowledge. Oregon, especially before her arrival, may have been grey, Wilson's color for imagined places. It is also likely that west of that great river there would have been almost no black markings save the line she and her family followed and the few forts at which they stopped for supplies on the way.

Once in Oregon, she may have strong associations with certain places such as the Whitman Mission and others where she could have received succor on her journey, and saw the first signs of recognizable settlement. The cities and settlements where she landed may have had a small dot, and the rivers upon which they traveled lightly sketched. Of course, the land where she and her family had finally settled would be the darkest spot on her mental map of Oregon. It would have been connected to the claims of neighbors, friends, and relatives. These local communities sustained Oregon's settlers, but they were small specks on a vast expanse of and lightly detailed territory. The thick forests and uncharted valleys to the south may have been colored grey. This is a static snapshot of what was, in actuality, an ever-changing process of geographic interpretation, plotting, and meaning-making that was constantly revised through experience and exposure to new ideas. But it does demonstrate the way mental mapping and the geographic discourse that made it public, united awareness of local and personally meaningful places, people, and experiences with large-scale and abstract entities like nation or empire into one spatial field.

Mental mapping was integral to the colonial project of integrating abstract images of the nation with local experience to render Oregon American. Geographic knowledge can be organized on a spectrum from experience-based and individual to abstracted from everyday life but shared by a large group of people. Colonists used mental mapping to compare experiential knowledge to more abstract knowledge, and to imagine one impacting the other. By

⁴⁷ Tuan, "Images and Mental Maps." The Wilson quote comes from his *The Wild Garden; or Speaking of Writing*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 119–120.

incorporating their own experiences in Oregon's terrain into their mental maps, they were able to measure them against other scales of geographic meaning also mapped in their minds. This allowed them to interpret experiences as though they had significance for questions of national incorporation, even when they were local or individual in nature.⁴⁸ Colonists were particularly focused on constituting Colonial Oregon as naturally and inevitably a part of the United States. This was difficult considering the fact that their direct experience living and traveling in Oregon often reinforced the territory's distance and separation from the nation. By weaving together mental maps of multiple scales, they could interpret local experiences of isolation as signs leading toward Oregon becoming American, and America incorporating Oregon. Mental mapping was therefore a strategy to make place and nation simultaneously in Oregon. In this way mental maps and the geographic knowledge and discourse surrounding them helped colonists to maintain their American identities while they struggled for Oregon's incorporation into the nation.

"Making Place and Nation" also employs mental mapping as an analytical tool to help situate aspects of the historical world of colonial Oregon in spatial relationship to one another. For instance, my research revealed that colonial attitudes toward the inevitability of Oregon's membership in the United States varied. I organized those sources according to their level of abstraction from the realities colonists faced on the ground. Accordingly, I associate communications with the federal government with other ideas that required a high level of abstraction to understand, like legal concepts of land ownership that were implicitly or explicitly compared to the property regime of the United States. Other examples would include letters in which colonists talked about the length of the overland journey or a newspaper article projecting the transformations to be wrought by a fabled transcontinental railroad.⁴⁹ At times, colonists expressed doubt about the seamless incorporation into the nation, often in reaction to experiences in their immediate environment. These worries could be mapped onto a more precise area, at a lower level of abstraction. These, then, are tethered to other concerns at the same level, like attending a wedding in the next county or petitioning the local government for more passable roads, and reveal new associations.⁵⁰ By mapping the source materials in my own mind, I am

⁴⁸ The sub-field sometimes called "New Western Regionalism" has emerged to try to understand the relationship local regions as part of the study of the entire West as a region encouraged by the "New Western History." Their goal is to paint a more accurate picture than the mythic image of settlement posed by followers of Frederick Jackson Turner. For a critical discussion of the way attempts to create a New Western Regionalism has revealed the limitation of a place-only perspective on Western history in general see Stephen Aron, "Lessons in Conquest: Towards a Greater Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 2 (May 1, 1994): 125–147; Susan Rhoades Neel, "A Place of Extremes: Nature, History, and the American West," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 489–505. Examples of this work include Wrobel and Steiner, *Many Wests*; Morrissey, *Mental Territories*.

⁴⁹ For examples of an overland diaries' treatment of distance see "Oregon Pioneer Records", n.d., MSS P-A 337, Bancroft Library; Dale Lowell Morgan, *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992). One such newspaper article, anticipating the glory of a connective railroad is "Rail-Road to Oregon," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], September 3, 1846).

⁵⁰ This approach was influenced in part by Samuel Truett's ambitious and creative work. By using mental maps as an analytic tool in his own investigation of the sources from late 19th century Arizona-Sonora borderlands, and by reconstructing the landscapes—and the experience of living in them—spatially he uncovers the persistence of concrete realities that complicate and at times contradict typical abstract narratives of economic development and modernization in this time and place. See Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes*. Other works in Borderlands history have also challenged the mental maps that historians use to select their units of analysis, and which in turn reify the

able to find patterns that a purely temporal method may not have revealed, and to bring seemingly disparate issues into relationship in a way that, I argue, more accurately reconstructs the experience of living in the world of the American colony in Oregon.

Thus, mental maps recorded the way Oregon colonists and their environments mutually constituted one another, as well as how the colony as a whole changed the nation and was changed by it. They involved the negotiation of preconceived ideas of nation and place and self with those gathered through day-to-day experience in Oregon's terrain. The character of mental maps at any given moment reflected that process of negotiation and can give historians a complex picture of it. They also ensure a groundedness and specificity that other modes of analysis cannot, even while allowing historians to examine broad-sweeping, abstract, and macro level trends. Their most enlightening use is as a way to connect experience and concept and analyze their mutually transformative dynamic, even when they exist in different spatial and conceptual realms. They did this for Oregon's colonists, and they do this when historians employ them as tools to look at sources as well as when they use them to reconstruct cognitive strategies to trace the transformation of space-based realities (all realities are, after all, spatial in nature) and how they change over time. Thinking spatially allows historians to understand the cultural history of human communities more deeply and with a richer context.

Vernacular Geography

Oregon was the first American colonial settlement on the Pacific Coast, and the only noncontiguous territory to be claimed for America and settled by American expansionists in the 1830s and early 1840s. This uniquely isolated position underwrote the development of a local discourse, or vernacular geography. The creation of this discourse has been accurately described by landscape writer J.B. Jackson as "identified with local custom, pragmatic adaptation to circumstances, and unpredictable mobility;" it was an entity that was subject to a continual incremental adjustment to circumstances over time.⁵¹ Jackson's definition captures the local and immediate dimensions of what was, in Oregon, a more complicated cultural and linguistic system. This local, incremental geographic knowledge was reinforced by broader and more abstract ideological traditions and geographic knowledge. Colonists shared in the creation and revision of this local language of geography, which was in constant dialogue with their general geographic orientation as well as national narratives and cultural traditions. Geography was a common topic of discussion, geographic metaphors were common and mutually meaningful, and public issues of political or national import often took form as the organization, control, and imagination of space.

Vernacular was not the same as individualistic or fragmented. The colonial community synthesized disparate and often barely reliable information into a shared sense of local geographical legitimacy. Colonizers used this ever-changing body of vernacular geographic knowledge to draw and redraw mental images of their new home because they needed to be able

discipline's conception of legitimate places. Notable examples include, Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Andrew R. Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

⁵¹ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xii.

to imagine and predict conditions in the territory in order to survive. However variable and volatile the struggle over codifying geographic knowledge, colonists needed to make reliable predictions in order to navigate, to communicate, or to utilize resources in their labors. In doing so, they contributed to the constant production and reproduction of a collective sense of local geographical knowledge.

In many ways the creation of vernacular geography in Oregon was an unending cooperative project with colonists borrowing and building off one another's discoveries, narratives, and place names. Oregon's precarious connection to the rest of the nation united residents against two common enemies: distance itself and landscape elements that could be coded as foreign. This included Indians and Indianness as perceived in the landscape. Oregon's settlers participated in vernacular navigation and utilized vernacular geographical knowledge, but they also sought to become the standard bearers of a permanent and official geographical system. Since nothing close to this would exist in Oregon until the late nineteenth century (and later, one might argue), the years before Oregon's statehood were defined by a constant struggle but no crowning victory. In this context the line between reliable prediction and legitimate and official knowledge was blurry. Legitimizing a claim to geographic knowledge often took no more than a rumor of one or two successful trips along a given route; legitimacy could just as easily be erased by a washed-out wagon road or word of Indian hostility. The struggle to establish a unified, unchanging, and official geography, rather than the achievement of this goal, defined the creation of American identity in colonial Oregon.

Geography and geographical thinking, then, permeated colonial life. As new investigations and explorations garnered new information about the land and how to navigate it, the local discourse of geography changed; colonists ascribed and interpreted new meanings from the ever-changing spatial organizations within Oregon. This imperfect science of establishing a body of reliable geographic information from an unstable web of spatial experiences was vital to the survival of the American colony in Oregon. Thus, "Making Place and Nation" seeks to pin down a somewhat evasive entity. Place, as geographer Tim Cresswell has written, "seems to speak for itself" and is "wrapped in common sense."⁵² Its power in shaping human life is also its camouflage. The same can be said for the vernacular geographic discourse that colonists fashioned to create an American place in colonial Oregon. When we narrate the creation of place through mental mapping and vernacular geographic discourse, we can understand more fully the spatial dimensions of conquest as it played out in the Pacific Northwest.

Broader Scholarly Significance

These key concepts are central to comprehending the cultural mechanisms that developed in order to transform western territory from "*pais*" to "*la patrie*." Historians of the American West have wrestled with defining the nature of the relationship between western places and the nation as a whole since Frederick Jackson Turner's groundbreaking 1893 essay established a direct correlation between the frontier experience of white male pioneers and the advent and persistence of a uniquely American democracy.⁵³ As the field grew up around Turner's ideas,

⁵² Cresswell, *Place*, 1.

⁵³ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Does the Frontier Experience Make American Exceptional?*, *Historians at Work* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 18–43. On the ethnocentrism and sexism of Turner's thesis see Glenda Riley, "Frederick Jackson Turner Overlooked the Ladies," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 2 (July 1, 1993): 216–230. Over the course of his career, Turner grappled with

and, more recently around refuting and/or un-refuting them, American Western History has struggled to transcend an out-of-date understanding of space and nation as static categories that formed the backdrop against which historical change happened in the West.⁵⁴ Currently historians in the field continue their efforts to unite place and process.⁵⁵ In order to progress successfully toward this important goal, which will allow the diversity of western communities and environments to be included in historical narratives that recognize the importance of broader processes and dynamics of conquest, historians must begin to account for the production of space, place, and nation in more complex ways.⁵⁶

the difficulty of the relationship between place and nation. This is reflected in later work on section and its potential for dividing the nation. Ultimately, as Kerwin Lee Klein has demonstrated, he used a Hegelian-inspired metaphysical argument to solve what he identified as a very real conflict between the sheer size and geographic complexity of the North American continent and the power of American nationalism to maintain unity. It was the “American Spirit” fostered on the frontier, which trumped all geographical challenges to national unity. “Making Place and Nation” recognizes a similar geographical problem to the one Turner laid out, but seeks a new type of solution. Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of Sections in American History*, (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932); Frederick Jackson Turner, “Western State-Making in the Revolutionary Era,” in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932); Frederick Jackson Turner, “Problems in American History,” in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932); Frederick Jackson Turner, “Geographic Sectionalism in American History,” in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932); Frederick Jackson Turner, “Sections and Nation,” in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932); Frederick Jackson Turner, “Geographical Influences in American Political History,” in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932).

⁵⁴ In the 1980s and 90s a group of historians arguing that the West was better understood as a place than a process began a movement that came to be known as the “New Western History.” Founding and central works include, Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1987); Patricia Limerick, “What on Earth Is the New Western History?,” in *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 81–88; Patricia Limerick, *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Donald Worster, “New West, True West: Interpreting The Region’s History,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (April 1, 1987): 141–156; Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington*, 1st paperback ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992); White, *It’s Your Misfortune*. In response, a new generation of western historians began to argue that to rid western history of any idea of frontier process was to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Strong statements to this effect appeared in Kerwin Lee Klein, “Reclaiming the ‘F’ Word, or Being and Becoming Postwestern,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May 1996): 179–215; Aron, “Lessons in Conquest”; William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, “Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); John Mack Faragher, “Afterword: The Significance of the Frontier in American Historiography,” in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994).

⁵⁵ Important accomplishments in this area include White, *The Middle Ground*; Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Macmillan, 2011); Aron, *How the West Was Lost*; Aron, *American Confluence*; Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814–841; Samuel Truett, “Neighbors by Nature: Rethinking Region, Nation, and Environmental History in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” *Environmental History* 2, no. 2 (April 1997): 160–178; John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Hine and Faragher, *The American West*; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*.

⁵⁶ Samuel Truett has incisively argued that environmental and western historians must think beyond the nation-state, and that to do so they must incorporate the historical construction of the nation into their assessments of historical

If space and place are assumed to be static and represented as such, even tacitly, in historical narratives of the West, conquest can take on a dualistic and oversimplified, even instrumentalist, tack, where empowered subjects make change while passive objects (people and ecosystems) bear the brunt of that change or watch from the sidelines. This type of historical progression ultimately denies agency, excludes marginalized groups, and has a tendency to ignore the role of extra-human nature. It can also ultimately drive scholars who are interested in the human side of Western History to stay ensconced regional approaches that underemphasize process, while encouraging those interested in global trends to use methods that minimize the importance of place.⁵⁷ Ultimately, treatments of place, space, and nation as uncomplicatedly stable encourage the ghettoization of Western History as a sub-field rather than its incorporation as a central part of United States history as a whole.⁵⁸

The emerging sub-field of settler colonial studies seeks to complicate the relationship between nation, territory, and colonial subjects. It stresses territoriality as the center of a precise definition of settler colonialism as occurring in places populated by permanent family settlement rather than mobile, predominantly male cadres of colonial managers, and distinguished by their “inherently eliminatory” nature. This invariably eliminatory trajectory emerges because colonists and indigenous peoples are engaged in a struggle over control of territory that only one of them can ultimately win.⁵⁹ Many debates in this field have relevance for the current study, especially

change, “Neighbors by Nature.” In a later article, Truett returned to these concerns by arguing that the continuing instable process of constructing space itself is what defines the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and connects it to its frontier past. See Samuel Truett, “The Ghosts of Frontiers Past: Making and Unmaking Space in the Borderlands,” *Journal of the Southwest* 46, no. 2 (July 1, 2004): 309–350. Steven Aron and Jeremy Adelman have argued that the frontier was a place in which geographic and cultural borders were not fully defined, and a frontier study as one where the development of and struggle over such a definition can be traced over time, “From Borderlands to Borders,” 815–816.

⁵⁷ Richard White has defined the relationship between human and extra-human nature as constitutive of what humans consider to be “nature.” He stresses both the social construction of nature and also calls attention to an all-important element of natural systems that exist outside the realm of human construction. I argue that the creation of place and nation is the result of a similar dialogic process between the stories and values colonial people explicitly espouse and the challenges that western colonization and landscape pose to those stories: White, *The Organic Machine*, 1–10.

⁵⁸ For a diverse discussion of the state of the field, see Virginia Scharff et al., “Claims and Prospects of Western History: A Roundtable,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 25–46. In this piece, western historians with a variety of specialties agree that Western History needs to come to terms with place in its particularity and its historical contingency. For a compelling argument in favor of expanding the geographical boundaries of early American history to include regions segregated into Western History see Elizabeth A. Fenn, “Whither the Rest of the Continent?,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 167–175.

⁵⁹ The phrase colonial encounter has come to signify the dynamic of continued interaction between colonizer and colonized that is assumed by most post-colonial theorists and historians to be the fundamental relationship of colonialism, “a determination to exploit sustains a drive to sustain the *permanent* subordination of the colonised.” Lorenzo Veracini, “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 2. For instance, see Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Yet, Veracini has argued that for settler colonialism there is a “non-encounter,” a circumstance fundamentally shaped by a recurring need to disavow the presence of indigenous “others.” Lorenzo Veracini, “On Settlerhood,” *Borderlands E-journal* 10, no. 1 (2011): 1–17. See also Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388. According to Veracini, the essential difference between standard colonialism and settler colonialism is that the former demands of the colonized, “you, work for me,” while the latter demands, “you, go away.” These essentially different demands translate into “patterns of relationships” between colonizer and colonized and distinct ways of resisting the colonial order. For a subject of classical colonialism resistance often takes the form of depriving the

those surrounding how local struggles over the control of territory have led to the creation of new nations with distinct and complicated identities, cultures, myths, and social systems. More, the comparative nature of this new field stresses the centrality of the struggle over territory not in the sense of abstract lines on a map or rights of discovery but in the daily contest of use, division and cultivation in places where Euroamerican settlement formed the foundation of a colonial society.⁶⁰

Yet another pertinent insight to be gained from the literature on settler colonialism is the paradoxical relationship between the permanence of settlement and the impermanence of the settler colonial entity itself. A settler colony is always in the process of extinguishing indigenous alterities and therefore it is always in the process of extinguishing itself as a settler colony.⁶¹ Oregon colonists' determination to become a part of the United States seems to fit this mold. Settler colonial scholars' observation that the permanence of settlement translated into the impermanence of indigenous inhabitation also resonates with the Oregon story. As Veracini argues, "indigenous and exogenous alterities *and* metropolitan control are all understood as progressively disappearing" in a settler colonial context. The following chapters complement this dynamic of constantly impending transformation by arguing that Oregon's colonial culture was defined by unending endeavors to cease to be a colony and instead be included in the nation. This desire, moreover, determined in large part the way Oregon's colonists carried out the project of eliminating native presence, which they did in a wide variety of ways common to settler colonies including extermination, expulsion, incarceration, containment, and assimilation for indigenous peoples (or a combination of all these elements).⁶² This notion contrasts sharply with post-colonial scholars, like Albert Memmi, who see colonialism as defined by a permanent

colonizer of the labor he/she wants. In settler colonialism, "it is indigenous persistence and survival that become crucial." Thus, agreeing to work for the colonizer in order to survive could be read, in a settler colonial context, as resistance to the system's main goal of elimination of the native.

⁶⁰ Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies."

⁶¹ The permanence of settlement has led to dynamics of cultural and legal domination and disenfranchisement that have formed the core of the national and regional identities central to these new nations. On the way federal Indian policy has continued to maintain the domination of Indian peoples see, George Castile, *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); Francis Prucha, *Indian Policy in the United States: Historical Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); Robert A. Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and The Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975); Patrick Wolfe, "After the Frontier: Separation and Absorption in US Indian Policy," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 13-51; Walter Echo-Hawk, *In the Courts of the Conqueror: The 10 Worst Indian Law Cases Ever Decided* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2010); Lindsay Robertson, *Conquest by Law: How the Discovery of America Dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Their Lands* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*. On the application and adoption of federal Indian policy in the Pacific Northwest, see Bergquist, "The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy"; Charles Coan, "The Federal Indian Policy in the Oregon Country, 1849-1855" (M.L., 1914); Charles Coan, *The First Stage of the Federal Indian Policy in the Pacific Northwest, 1849-1852* (Portland, Or: The Ivy Press, 1921); E. Schwartz, "Polaklie Illahee (The Dark Land): The Siletz Reservation and U.S. Indian Policy, 1855-1925" (M.A., University of Missouri Columbia, 1988); Clifford E. Trafzer, *Indians, Superintendents, and Councils: Northwestern Indian Policy, 1850-1855* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); M. Susan Van Laere, "The Grizzly Bear and the Deer: The History of Federal Indian Policy and Its Impact on the Coast Reservation Tribes of Oregon, 1856-1877" (M.A., Oregon State University, 2000). On the way early relationships with Native Americans within the context of settler colonialism have formed the foundation for American national identities see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

⁶² Veracini, "On Settleness."

relationship of entrenched contact and exploitation between colonizer and colonized.⁶³ Settler-colonists sought not only to extinguish indigenous others and thereby clear the way for their total dominion over contested land, they also sought to extinguish the colony itself in the process. Thus, the expectation and experience of transition and transformation distinguishes settler colonialism from other types of extractive colonialism.

Yet there is one important way that Oregon does not fit the mold described by students of settler colonialism. Oregon's transformation in the form of extinguishment did not manifest as a movement for independence from the metropolitan power. It did fit the model insofar as it was eliminatory, and assumed to be temporary in its colonial state. It also formed what one scholar has aptly called an "inherently temporary triangulation" between indigenous people, settler-colonists, and the central government.⁶⁴ The end game of Oregon's brand of triangulation, though, was to incorporate the very territory over which settlers and native peoples fought into the metropole, rather than to separate from it.⁶⁵ Oregon's colonists endeavored not to develop a new national identity, but to perfect a familiar version of American identity to which they were most attached and inscribe it into an unfamiliar landscape.

Overlooking this important distinction, many scholars interested in settler colonialism simply include westward expansion under the rubric of the United States as one big settler colony. Even so, there are significant reasons to consider Oregon a settler colony in its own right rather than as one moment in the settler colonial history of the United States. Geographic distance from the rest of the country recreated many of the same characteristics of South Africa, Australia, Argentina, and the United States itself before their independence from their respective metropolises. While their treatment of Indians did not significantly differ from the United States or from other settler-colonies, Oregonians were often at odds with colonial agents due to their frustration with the resources being provided by the metropolitan government. They experimented with separate government institutions and land arrangements that persisted as their political status changed.

By presuming the inevitable and unproblematic incorporation of Oregon into the United States, historians of Oregon have obscured some obvious comparisons to other settler colonial

⁶³ Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," 3; Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965). For a recent examination of the utility of Memmi and other post colonial scholars see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ Veracini, "On Settlerliness"; Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 5–6. Onuf makes a compelling case that, while the United States fought for political independence from Britain, revolutionary leaders remained invested in joining a culturally defined European community. This desire to join European civilization as equals was, he argues, "the pinnacle of provincial ambition."

⁶⁵ Founding works in the settler colonial studies movement have in fact defined settler colonies in part by their universal possession of a distinct sovereign capacity. They are described as including an "ultimate affirmation of settler control against metropolitan interference." Settler colonies included under this newly developing scholarly rubric are described as having effectively dominated indigenous societies and revolted against metropolitan rule to become independent nations. Settler colonial scholars are, in fact, just as interested in the persistence of settler colonial traits beyond independence and the ostensible extinguishment of the colonial arrangement. Hence their interest in the United States and many parts of Latin America. Originating in dynamics of settler colonialism has shaped such nations, and given them certain common characteristics, including continued dominance over indigenous peoples and general heterogeneity. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); M. Alison Kibler, "Settling Accounts with Settler Societies: Strategies for Using Australian Women's History in a United States Women's History Class," *The History Teacher* 37, no. 2 (February 1, 2004): 155–170.

societies. But Oregon's goal of national incorporation does differentiate it significantly from other colonies of its type. The colony's unshakable determination to become a part of the nation is a testament to the power of American nationalism and its growth during the early national and antebellum periods.⁶⁶ The power and resilience of the nationalism espoused by American colonists in Oregon resulted the emergence of a different triangulation, which beset the process of colonizing Oregon. In Oregon's version, the colonists found themselves engaged in a triangular struggle to Americanize the territory in relationship to the nation and the Native Americans. They considered themselves to be fully and unchangeably American—the one unchanging element in the inherently transformative process of eliminatory settler colonialism. It was the other two elements of landscape and Indians who would have to change around the rigidity of colonial Oregonians' allegiance to the nation.

"Making Place and Nation" argues that Oregon was a settler colony, but one whose desire for national incorporation created a dynamic of conquest that focused on the transformation of territory itself more than on the transformation of colonists into a new type of national subject, while still carrying out the tragically typical campaign to eliminate indigenous inhabitants. This new perspective complicates the typical narrative of Oregon's conquest as well as the at times oversimplified story told by settler colonial scholars who desire to create a portable concept that can be applied through time and space. Its focus on a meaning-centered transformation of western territory, rather than the development of an independent national consciousness, allows us to understand the angle of vision necessary to incorporate the construction of space and place into understandings of Western History. Colonists in Oregon could not have constructed place without constructing nation, and vice versa. This shaped their treatment and interaction with native people, their new landscape, and with the national body politic.

Chapter Overview

Each of the following chapters explores the creation of national meaning from local experience in the years 1834-1859. Chapter One begins in the late 1830s, at the moment when American enthusiasm for migration to Oregon blossomed, and argues that potential migrants constructed complicated mental maps of Oregon and its relationship to the rest of the United States. They plotted these maps with information garnered from the few first-hand accounts of journeys to Oregon Country. It explores a central dynamic tension in these maps: Oregon as both connected and separated from the United States. After settlement, isolation enhanced this tension. Oregon was not only distant but largely unmarked by recognizable places, landmarks, or narratives that could have bound it to an American tradition. A tradition of stories like Daniel Boone's in Kentucky could have rendered the territory more recognizable to American colonists, but were absent.⁶⁷ Early settlement experiences also increased settlers' investment in Oregon's

⁶⁶ The sharp contrast between Oregon's colonists' unflappable devotion to American membership despite decades of benign neglect, and the Revolutionary Generation's break from Great Britain at the end of the eighteenth century is apparent to students of American History. On the growth of a national feeling during these years see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*; Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

⁶⁷ For historical accounts of the life and legend of this mythic pioneer see Faragher, *Daniel Boone*; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*. Major cultural exemplars of popular narratives associated with western territories include Daniel Boone, Humphrey Marshall, and John Filson, *Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon, one of the original settlers of Kentucky containing the wars with the Indians on the Ohio, from 1769 to the present time, and the first*

future membership in the nation. Colonists used mental mapping and vernacular geography to try to convert experiences within Oregon's landscape into meanings that could justify and reinforce its ultimately natural membership in the nation. The chapter concludes by examining an extended visit from a United States vessel called the *USS Schooner Shark* in 1846. This episode demonstrates the interrelationship between meanings attached to local landscape and aspirations to national membership, which were made poignant because the schooner's visit took place during the controversy over the status of Joint Occupation of Oregon with Great Britain in 1846.

Scholars have established the importance of Protestant missions, the subject of Chapter Two, to the growth of political institutions and to the establishment of American empire in Oregon.⁶⁸ This chapter examines instead the missions' geographic significance for colonists looking for signs that Oregon's landscape and Indian population could be controlled and domesticated. Protestant missions formed a network of predictability along the Columbia River and its tributaries that reached into the seemingly unmarked interior of the Indian Country. Their ability to render the interior predictable came from their role as sources of needed aid to travelers and as centers of civilization that appeared to fix Indians in space. In this way the experience of traveling through and interacting with mission stations allowed colonists to imagine that Oregon's "nomadic" Indians were not as threatening as American cultural traditions would have had them believe; by association, they saw the territory as less dangerous. The Whitman Massacre and the subsequent war against the Cayuse Indians resulted in the destruction of this mission network and forced a redrawing of colonial mental maps. Vernacular geographic discourse gave legitimacy to the mission network and also facilitated the recovery from its destruction. In the wake of this event, colonists began to attempt to control space and Indian movement in new ways including the earliest Indian treaties in the Pacific Northwest.

Just as colonists were reformulating their mental geographies, the news of California gold turned their attention to Southwest Oregon, and triggered a significant spatial shift. The rush made this territory more desirable than ever before, but did nothing to ameliorate the hostile relationship between whites and the "Rogue" Indians, as Euroamericans called the powerful

establishment and progress of the settlements on that river. (Printed at Windsor [Vt.]: By Alden Spooner., M, DCC, XCIII. [1793], 1793); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder, or the Inland Sea* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1840).

⁶⁸ Historian Clifford Drury devoted his career to exploring the history and implications of the American Board Missions, of which the Whitman Mission was the most famous. He personally edited many collections of primary documents, facilitating further scholarship on the missionary groups. Significantly, he established as exaggerated and inaccurate the once-prevalent story that Whitman "saved" Oregon for the United States on his 1842 trip back east by convincing lawmakers to fight for America's claim to the region and that the overland journey was possible for westering families. See Drury, *First White Women Over the Rockies; Diaries, Letters, And Biographical Sketches of the Six Women of the Oregon Mission Who Made the Overland Journey in 1836 and 1838*; Drury, *Nine Years with the Spokane Indians*; Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, and the Opening of Old Oregon; The Mountains We Have Crossed*; Spalding, *Diaries and Letters of Spalding and Smith*; Walker, *On to Oregon*. Gray Whaley has convincingly argued that Protestant Missionaries in Oregon operated within and were essentially complicit in a broader project of imperialism in the Pacific Northwest, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee: "Trophies" for God*, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (Spring 2006). Robert Loewenberg's work somewhat unsuccessfully places the philosophical leanings of the Methodist Missions in the Willamette Valley at the center of negotiations over the creation of Oregon's Provisional Government in 1843, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and the Methodist Mission, 1834-43* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976). General works on Protestant Missions in the American West include Robert F Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (New York: Atheneum, 1976); C. L Higham, *Noble, Wretched & Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

peoples who dominated this area. Colonists used material and linguistic means to forge a vernacular geography that assured white access to resources and their dominance over travel corridors. They also interpreted those local acts as capable of transforming Indian Country into American territory. The result was a communal system of vernacular navigation, whereby colonists mapped space and coded it as American by finding their way through it. These practices were always influenced by, and in turn influenced, struggles with native people over the division, control, and meaning of space. By viewing this process of initial settlement and exploitation of mineral resources through the lens of perception and manipulation of geographical space, Chapter Three reveals the subtle cultural, perceptual, rhetorical, personal, sometimes subjective, and always-contested nature of transforming an assumedly hostile landscape into one deemed hospitable to American settlement.

The Takelma, Shasta, and Athapaskan people of Southwest Oregon consistently challenged the legitimacy of vernacular forms of geographic knowledge colonists used to inscribe American sovereignty, and in 1854 this resistance turned into a widespread military conflict called the Rogue River War. During the war colonists began to look beyond vernacular geographies as a method of regulating the cohabitation of Indians and white Americans. They turned to elimination—either through extermination or removal—and argued that sharing Southwest Oregon with Indian people would jeopardize American control over the area. Thus, Chapter Four explores the territorial dimensions of this shift from tolerating cohabitation to enacting a campaign to eliminate all traces of Indian presence in the land. It focuses on the conflict over the material significance and symbolic meaning of Oregon's first Indian Reservation at Table Rock on the Rogue River, arguing that struggles over the meaning of this significant place were at the heart of the larger conflict. The murky legality of property ownership that had underwritten vernacular divisions of space based on negotiations rather than war persisted, but colonial responses to them intensified according to local experience and local geographic symbolism attached to Table Rock itself.

American victory in the Rogue River War in 1856 enabled Territorial officials to formally extinguish Indian title to the land of western Oregon. This in turn allowed for the legality of settlers' Donation Land Claims to be firmly established, six years after the passage of the path breaking legislation in 1850. Colonists had long awaited the legal transfer of property from Indian to American ownership; Native Americans had long resisted it. Chapter Five considers the geo-cultural dimensions of this legal transfer of property. American lawmakers who drafted the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) assumed the extinguishment of Indian title was a foregone conclusion. Yet, colonial rights in property were complexly interwoven with Indian property rights via the overarching vernacular geography through which colonists conceived of and interacted with the landscape. In order for the DLCA to achieve local legitimacy and therefore facilitate anything more than theoretical land ownership, Indian title had to be extinguished not only formally but also in the mental maps and vernacular geography of the colonial community. Thus, the symbolic process of extinguishing Indian claims to land was necessary in order for Oregon to be imagined as incorporated into the property regime of the United States, which was a vital step toward truly meaningful national membership.

Finding Oregon:
Distance and Connection in a Promised Land, 1834-1847

In the 1830s and 40s it was common for proponents of Oregon's incorporation into the United States to invoke, as Judge Jesse Quinn Thornton did in a memorial he presented to Congress on behalf of the territory's provisional government, a few lines from William Cullen Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis:"

The immigrants...flattered themselves that in forming settlement upon the distant shores of the Pacific, that they would be made the honored instruments, in the hands of the Great Ruler of nations, for establishing the institutions of Christianity, civilization and liberty in 'the continuous woods/Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sounds/Save its own dashings.'¹

The poem was considered the most famous of its day and was a beautiful reflection on death, nature, and the afterlife. Bryant used the image of the Oregon (or Columbia) River to convey the "grandest conceivable idea of silence and solitude" to his reader, as part of a stanza that considered the possibility that after death, our souls do not travel to heaven, but instead inhabit the landscape itself.² For Bryant, the Columbia was so empty of human life and so separate from human civilization, that it was an evocative and effective setting for such an idea. Why, then, would Thornton and other Americans quote the lines while trying to make the argument that the territory was ready to be absorbed by The United States of America? Most likely because they wanted to underscore that the Columbia River and its surrounding country already belonged to America's cultural life and its emerging literary canon, of which "Thanatopsis" was a celebrated centerpiece. They meant to demonstrate that Oregon was not a remote and isolated backwater, incapable of actively engaging in the life of the antebellum nation. It is interesting, though, to consider the other messages these lines might have communicated to readers. Yes, Oregon had entered the American cultural lexicon, but it had done so by being equated with the very isolation and remoteness that Thornton and others sought to counteract. The quandary posed by Oregon's geographic distance and isolation from the eastern United States was not new in 1847 when Thornton wrote his petition to Congress. On the contrary, it had long shaped the contours of the debate over the future of this rich and tempting land on the Pacific Coast.

Thornton's attempt to use "Thanatopsis" to affirm Oregon's prospective place in the American nation brings to light a prevailing tension between two opposing images of Oregon. On the one hand, it was a remote and foreign region separated from the United States by an enormous uncharted wilderness. On the other hand, its territory might be considered intrinsically

¹ Thornton, "Historical Letter," 53. "Thanatopsis" by William Cullen Bryant was first published in 1817.

² New England Society in the City of New York, *Annual Report of the New England Society in the City of New York* (New York: The Society, 1864), 33.

a part of the United States by virtue of its continental connectedness provided by the interior of the North American continent. Oregon's colonists balanced these preconceived notions with their experience traveling to and colonizing Oregon. Colonists directly experienced geographical distance and discontinuity, and interpreted it as a threat to their national belonging. In response, they developed strategies to translate their experiences into viable images of national membership through the development of vernacular geographic discourse.

In the 1830s, large-scale colonization of the Pacific Northwest was still a distant dream. The tension between imperial distance and colonial connection had already begun to take shape via public debates about Oregon. Potential emigrant-colonists, who consumed this debate, began creating mental maps of Oregon. Once those who chose to emigrate arrived in Oregon, their experiences enriched and complicated those preexisting maps, which became the basis for a collective geographical discourse. Examining key moments in the developing relationship between the United States and the new Oregon colony from the perspective of changing maps reveals a new side to standard elements of the Oregon story, especially the 1846 Oregon boundary dispute with Great Britain, including the visit of the USS Schooner *Shark*.³ To fight distance and discontinuity and the imperial vision that tolerated them, colonists used local knowledge based on experience to construct aspects of the landscape, such as the tumultuous and symbolically rich Columbia River, as symbols of connection to the United States.⁴

Imperial Beginnings, Contradictory Maps

The continent and the continental form played a significant role in the development of American identity during the early republic, as Martin Brückner has demonstrated. The idea of the United States as a continent does much to explain the magnetic pull with which Oregon held onto their imaginations. During the course of the American Revolution, rebellious colonists required something with which to create a legitimate political persona, as well as a dramatic sense of identity. Hence, this period saw the initial adoption of the identifier "American" and along with it an explosion of feverish celebrations of the continental form. Its shape, its impressive size, and its richness all made it the perfect symbol to inspire enthusiasm for the new nation. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, geography had become the primary language with which easterners thought, spoke, and imagined the American nation as well as the

³ For examples of typical interpretations of 1846 see Hine and Faragher, *The American West*; White, *It's Your Misfortune*; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

⁴ In some ways these two aspects of Oregon's geography mirror differences in perspective between the empire and the colony. The frustrated relationship between colony and empire, aptly described by Gray Whaley in his recent book *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, originated in part in distinct but overlapping mental pictures of Oregon's geographic relationship to the United States. The Empire sought to spread Anglo Protestant culture and republican institutions, provide land for a growing population, control Oregon, and to use it as a strategic economic and political outpost in the Pacific. The colony wanted to make it home for Americans, to transform Oregon and the meanings associated with it from foreign to American—to drive the specters of distance, isolation, and savagery from their own mental maps and those of their fellow American citizens. These two cultural-geographic perspectives each depended on Oregon's unique location both undeniably far from the United States while remaining solidly connected to it. But, they each valued and highlighted different aspects of Oregon's location on the Pacific Northwest coast. The imperial image relied on continental connectedness to legitimate America's claim, but valued distance because it made Oregon useful to the empire strategically and because the distance rendered the project of spreading American culture more impressive and inspiring. The colonial image recognized emigrants for conquering vast spaces and for bringing the United States to the shores of the Pacific, but celebrated connection because it was the basis for colonial claims to full membership in the American body politic.

continent, which had become in their minds, one and the same. It follows that this partnership between geographical thinking and a nation imagined as already continental became a powerful tool to rationalize and naturalize western expansion. Geography and cartography were systems of thought and representation, though, which had rules of their own. And when a western territory did not conform to those rules, contradictions could arise. For instance, Oregon could be considered rightly a part of the United States because of its location on the North American continent, but at the same time, its incorporation into the body politic prior to the vast territory lying to its east did not lead to the creation of a coherent national map (see Figure 1.1). And this posed a threat to the system of nationalistic thought that the symbol of the continent helped to usher in to begin with. So, Oregon’s geographic location tested the limits of continental thinking for Americans whose identities were intimately linked to the geometric form of the contiguously expanding American nation.⁵



Figure 1.1 – The lands of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) lay between the politically incorporated territories of Texas and Oregon and the rest of the United States in the 1840s.

From the perspectives of Americans thinkers on Oregon in the 1830s and early 1840s (before emigration began in earnest) the same vast continent appeared both to link and separate

⁵ As Brückner puts it: The continent was “an emotionally moving figure that evoked public interest and, more important, a sense of patriotic affection.” Additionally, its “expansive girth more or less served as rational evidence when making a case for western expansion, and its collective persona ultimately declared the existence of a new body politic of imperial proportions.” See his, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 90, 96. See also Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 9. Nash hinted at what Brückner has explained: “with the achievement of American Independence, the belief in a continental destiny quickly became a principal ingredient in the developing American nationalism.”

Oregon and the United States. Among these writers, explorers, and missionaries the Pacific Northwest evoked seemingly contradictory reactions. They found themselves inspired by the notion of its future incorporation into the United States, which they thought possible because the interior of the continent provided a terrestrial bridge that connected them. This conviction led them to believe in the possibility of political, social, economic, and cultural ties in the future. On the other hand, these same Americans remained preoccupied with the sheer distance to Oregon and worried that the wide plains and Rocky Mountains would perpetually divide it from America. The same Pacific territory could appear inevitably and intrinsically a part of the United States, completely foreign, or somewhere in between.

From the time that Lewis and Clark's famous expedition had made the Oregon Country a household name, its remoteness from the United States distinguished it from other North American regions of interest. The widely read diaries of the expedition established the distance to Oregon as upward of 4000 miles. This was an unfathomably long way at the time. As one participant in the fur trade wrote in 1832, many would never have believed that Americans would, "during the present generation, or the next, attempt the exploration of the distant *Oregon Territory*...at an immense distance from us of about four thousand miles [emphasis in original]."⁶

Yet as diarists stressed the distance dividing the U.S. from Oregon, they also created powerful representations of the terrestrial bridge that linked them. A chart printed in the diary of Lewis and Clark participant Patrick Gass communicated to its readers not only the large distance between Oregon and Missouri, but also their essential connectedness. According to the chart, for example, it was only 23 miles "to Fishing Creek, after leaving the river" and then another 41 "To Flathead, or Clarke's river at Fish Camp" (see Figure 1.2).⁷ This daily chronicle of small

⁶ John B. Wyeth, *Oregon, or, a Short History of a Long Journey* (Fairfield, Wash: Ye Galleon Press, 1970), 2, 86. Patrick Gass, a participant in Lewis and Clark's famed 1804-1806 expedition, included in his diary a detailed chart recording the distances between each point described in his diary. The grand total: 4096 miles from the head of the Missouri to the mouth of the Columbia. Patrick Gass, *Lewis and Clarke's Journal to the Rocky Mountains in the Years 1804,-5,-6; As Related by Patrick Gass, One of the Officers in the Expedition* (Dayton: Ells, Claflin, & Co., 1847), 155. Of course, the overland route was, by most accounts, about half of this number. The first and most influential of the books about Oregon were the ones that emerged out of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Most Americans viewed Nicholas Biddle's 1814 edition as the original text, indeed, John B. Wyeth specifically named Biddle's edition and deemed it "substantially correct" while referring to it as "the journal of that expedition," even though it was heavily edited and abridged. Gass and other participants released their own diaries piecemeal in the years following the expedition.

⁷ This chart is published in the 1847 edition of the diary. Gass, *Lewis and Clarke's Journal to the Rocky Mountains*, 155. The earliest published version of Gass' diary the author has been able to locate is: Patrick Gass, *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery, Under the Command of Capt. Lewis and Capt. Clarke of the Army of the United States, from the Mouth of the River Missouri Through the Interior Parts of North America to the Pacific Ocean, During the Years 1804, 1805 & 1806, Containing...* (Pittsburgh: David M'Keehan, Publisher and Proprietor, 1807), <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/>. This version does not contain this chart. There is, however, a similar chart in the 1843 Biddle edition of Lewis and Clark's journals, which indicates that it was written during the expedition and omitted from the 1807 edition. Perhaps it became more interesting to editors as the possibility of American overland travel to the region became more immediate in the 1840s. Historian Richard Stillson has argued of books about Lewis and Clark that they "set the stage for later literature about the West" by "framing the epic nature of the story" as painting Oregon as an "alien land" that was difficult to settle, but also by painting it as nonetheless possible to cross. I argue that this idea of reinforcing Oregon's distance impacted not only literature on the Far West, but the approach Americans in the settled part of the United States would take to considering the possibility of the incorporation and Americanization of the Oregon territory. Richard Stillson, *Spreading the Word: A History of Information in the California Gold Rush* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 7.

distances between specific places, all named, rendered the Great Plains as more of a sort of horizontal ladder than a desert-like chasm. With patience, this land ladder could carry one to an Oregon that was firmly geographically linked to the United States.

Each new instance of contact between the eastern United States and Oregon provided an occasion to explore this tension between distance and connection. Jason Lee's Methodist Mission, established in the Willamette Valley in 1835, provided one such opportunity. Lee became a favorite topic of secular and religious publications alike; they represented him as the personification of the geographical tension posed by the vastness of the North American interior. The missionary played with this tension in his letters to the press, which constructed Oregon as a domestic zone at one moment and then later emphasized Oregon's geographic distance and foreignness to dramatize his own story.⁸ In 1835, Lee sent a letter eastward in which he constructed Oregon's distance as inconsequential to the level of civilization one could find there. He stressed the helpfulness of John McLoughlin, the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, explaining that he could "even supply some of the comforts of civilized life" and lauding the "fine musk melons, water melons, and apples" the Chief Factor "served up at dinner." These cultivated fruits had the power to metaphorically transport Lee and his party across vast distances. The missionaries, according to Lee, were led "almost to think that we were in our own native land."⁹ A few years later during an 1838 recruitment and publicity tour through the United States, Lee changed courses and stressed the Oregon's distance. "Permit me through the medium of your excellent and widely circulated paper," he wrote, "to inform my friends...and the public, of my safe arrival from the farthest west to your highly favored city."¹⁰ By focusing on his safe arrival from the "farthest west," Lee highlighted the distance between Oregon and the United States. While seeking to recruit new missionaries and then return to Oregon, Lee also presented himself as a metaphorical bridge between the two distantly situated places.

⁸ On the power of geography as a tool to evoke patriotic action, see Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*, 90.

⁹ Jason Lee, "Missionary Intelligence," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, October 30, 1835.

¹⁰ Jason Lee, "Missionary," *Zion's Herald*, November 28, 1838. *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, and possibly others, also published this letter.

MEMORANDUM.

Of the computed distance in miles to the furthest point of discovery on the Pacific Ocean, from the place where the canoes were deposited near the head of the Missouri, which from its mouth is 3096

From the place of deposit to head spring,	-	24
To first fork of the Sho-sho-ne river,	-	14
To first large fork down the river,	-	18
To forks of the road at mouth of Tour creek	-	14
To Fishing creek, after leaving the river,	-	23
To Flathead, or Clarke's river at Fish camp,	-	41
To the mouth of Travelers-rest creek,	-	76
To the foot of the great range of Mountains,		
east side,	-	12
To ditto ditto ditto	-	130
west side,	-	3
To the Flathead village in a plain,	-	18
To the Koos-koos-ke river,	-	6
To the Canoe camp, at the forks,	-	60
To the Ki-moo-ee-nem,	-	140
To the Great Columbia, by Lewis's river,	-	162
To the mouth of the Sho-sho-ne, or Snake river,	-	6
To the Great Falls of Columbia,	-	3
To the Short Narrows,	-	3
To the Long ditto	-	3
To the mouth of Cataract river, north side,	-	23
To the Grand Shoot, or Rapids,	-	42
To the Last Rapids, or Strawberry island,	-	6
To the mouth of Quicksand river, south side,	-	26
To Shallow Bay, at salt water,	-	136
To Blustry Point, on north side,	-	13
To Point Open-Slope, below encampment,	-	3
To Chin-Ook river at bottom of Haley's Bay,	-	12
To Cape Disappointment on Western ocean,	-	13
To Capt. Clarke's tour N. W. along coast,	-	10
	miles	4133

Figure 1.2 – Chart of Distances from the diary of Patrick Gass, who traveled with Lewis & Clark

When Lee died on a subsequent trip east in 1845, obituary coverage continued to represent the missionary as brave enough to traverse the vast wildness of the western portion of the continent, while also stressing the inherent similarity and closeness of the Pacific Northwest to the eastern part of the country. Lee's obituary incorporated the life cycles of his entire family into a narrative memorializing the deceased missionary as an embodiment of the linkages between Oregon and the United States, and portrayed him as a man equally tied to his childhood home in the East as he was to his new home in Oregon. It began by stressing that Lee had left, and even buried, his family in Oregon soil. With two wives and one child buried in the Willamette Valley, and one living child "now a lonely orphan in Oregon" Lee died with visceral connections remaining in the Far West, both in the form of the resting places of his deceased loved ones and his own living child. Even on his deathbed, "on his own home pillow, mid the scenes where his childhood played," the author reminded his readers, "His mind seemed to be in Oregon most of the time. He was only divided from it by death. 'Death only could cut the knot.'"¹¹ These florid descriptions of undying connection used narrative to situate Lee on a spatial plane that united New England and Oregon.

After his death, Lee was remembered to have lived his life with one foot firmly planted in both Oregon and New England. In describing the missionary's funeral the author underscored the

¹¹ "Death of Rev. Jason Lee," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan's Journal*, April 30, 1845.

long history of connections he had to his home in Stanstead, Quebec, a tiny border village adjacent to Derby Line, Vermont.¹² “His body was committed to the dust in the grave-yard around which we have often played, near the school house, where our gentle youth was cherished. How mysterious that he who had been exposed to death in so many forms, in the wilderness and in the deep, should escape them all, and return to die in the embrace of his own kindred!”¹³ His story enabled potential migrants to imagine and plot Oregon and the U.S. on the same map, despite the uncharted swath of territory that both connected and divided them.¹⁴

Travelogues, which claimed to be able to help solve the quandary posed by the miles of land between Oregon and the United States by providing detailed information about the overland route based on first-hand experience, actually did little to clarify things for their readers during the early years. Robert Greenhow’s books were among the most influential of these guides during the 1840s. Greenhow acted as librarian to the Department of State, and his histories were widely distributed among lawmakers in the 1840s. His books, and others like them, contained detailed, and abstract, latitudinal and longitudinal information meant to help the reader understand the information not simply as adventure story, but as a useful guide to the geography of the area described. This is pointedly evident in Greenhow’s companion volume to his *History of Oregon, The Geography of Oregon and California, and the Other Territories on the North-West Coast of North America* (1845). It was common for travelogues to situate themselves explicitly as a tool for understanding the landscape. In the 1847 edition of Patrick Gass’s diary, the publisher communicated his hope, “the curiosity of the reader will be in some degree gratified; that the information furnished will not be uninteresting; and that some aid will be furnished those who wish to acquire a geographical knowledge of their country.”¹⁵

During the period when Americans were wrestling with the meaning and implications of Oregon’s distance from the United States, they had access to few tools with which to calculate the length of their journey.¹⁶ Knowing the exact distance to Oregon would have been extremely

¹² It appears that, though Lee was born and raised in Quebec, he passed easily between the United States and Canada. Longtime New Englanders who only left the country long after the Revolutionary War raised him. In fact, his father did not even necessarily mean to relocate to Canada, as the boundary line was not yet decided upon his settlement. When the border was finally established some residents’ homes were divided such that the parlor was in one country and the kitchen in another. Lee appears to have traveled with ease in the United States, and attended seminary at the Wilbraham Academy in Massachusetts in 1829; Roy Widing, “Oregon’s Jason Lee: The Untold Story” (Oregonbiographies.com, n.d.), <http://auroraoregon.com>.

¹³ “Death of Rev. Jason Lee.”

¹⁴ It seems that the location of Jason Lee’s body continued to hold symbolic importance for Americans long after his death. In 1904 an interested Methodist named Mrs. French Smith contacted residents of Derby Line, Vermont. She petitioned the Methodist Church for Lee’s body to be disinterred and moved to Salem. In 1906 the Methodists approved the move and in June of that year church and gravesite services were held to celebrate the burial of Jason Lee’s remains in Jason Lee Cemetery in Salem; Widing, “Oregon’s Jason Lee: The Untold Story.” Americans watched the movements of Marcus Whitman, another famous Oregon missionary, through the press as well. For example, the *New Orleans Picayune* (July 17, 1843) printed a detailed account of Whitman’s trip, along with 990 migrants, back to Oregon after a visit to Washington D.C. Other travel accounts, like Francis Parkman’s *The Oregon and California Trail* were serialized in periodicals and newspapers like the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 712–714.

¹⁵ David Rankin Barbee, “Robert Greenhow,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (July 1933): 182–183. Robert Greenhow, *The Geography of Oregon and California, and the Other Territories on the North-West Coast of North America; Illustrated by a New and Beautiful Map of Those Countries* (New York: M.H. Newman, 1845), viii.

¹⁶ Americans had little more than the estimated, and exaggerated figures from the Lewis and Clark expedition on which to base any attempts and quantification. As mentioned above, since the expedition traveled on the Missouri

valuable for Americans trying to decide whether to go to Oregon, but objective and quantifiable distances remained elusive. Though Greenhow attempted to present a calculation of the distance that was factual and measurable, he was unable to avoid a description of the distance as relative and changing. After he described the overland route utilized by the earliest American settlers in Oregon, he moved to a description of the longer and more circuitous water route taken by Hudson's Bay Company employers across the continent through Canada. This was a different route, and so it appeared logical for it to be "about twelve hundred miles greater than from the westernmost point in the States of the American Union." But even this nice, neat number expressed in miles did not, at the time of Greenhow's writing translate into shorter travel times. He explained it actually was "indeed performed at present, in less time, by the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, than the caravans of men, women, and children, from the United States, employ in their passage along the Platte, and the Lewis." At this point, it appeared that the difference in miles traveled meant very little to the prospective Oregon pioneer. Yet, he mitigated this result by explaining how changeable the overland journey was. He explained, "the road for the latter [Americans] will be constantly improving, and the journey must annually become less in actual distance, and much less laborious and tedious; whilst the more northern route will forever remain in its present condition, scarcely passable by any, except the hardy and experienced traders, and voyageurs of the British Company." So, while Greenhow attempted to clarify and quantify the distance to Oregon for his readers, his descriptions of the route only added to the impression that the, in his words "actual distance" to Oregon was impossible to concretely establish.¹⁷

Furthermore, while appealing to stereotypes of American ingenuity and adaptability as opposed to British intractability and entrenched tradition, Greenhow painted a picture of the geography of the North American continent as simultaneously unchanging and static in the case of the Canada's water route, and flexible and improvable, in the case of the U.S.'s overland route. Greenhow's assessment characterized the measurement of the distance between the east and Oregon in relative terms – and he, like many others on the American scene, manipulated that distance to privilege the U.S. over Britain. Clearly, this assessment of the distance did little to help potential migrants decide whether the distance was too much to conquer, or whether the vast territory between the Mississippi River and Oregon was more a barrier or a bridge to settlement.¹⁸

Throughout the third decade of the nineteenth century, Americans spent substantial time and energy considering the Oregon country and its potential as a part of the United States of America. In the course of these ruminations, they more often than not puzzled over the great

River for much of their journey, the numbers meant little to families considering the trip overland with wagons. They surely agreed that the distance was large, and this was culturally significant.

¹⁷ Greenhow, *Geography of Oregon and California*, 35.

¹⁸ This might at first glance appear to be a case of common sense: it is easier to change a land route than a water route. But, when one considers advances in technology of river travel, as well as ongoing surveys and explorations that could increase the speed and distance for portage as well as the possibility of Canadians adopting an overland route, the prejudice becomes more clear. In other moments of his geographical study, Greenhow treated the geographical realities limiting water travel through the American portion of North America as a liability in terms of connecting it to the contiguous United States. He argued that communications between Oregon and California and the states "are effected entirely by land; for, although the unoccupied territories of the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains, are traversed by the Missouri, and its great tributaries the Yellow Stone, the Platte, the Kansas, and the Osage, and further south, by the Arkansas and Red rivers emptying into the Mississippi, these streams afford few facilities, either for travel, or for the transportation of goods;" *Ibid.*, 34.

distance that separated them from it. They also wondered at the great land bridge that connected them. This quandary challenged, and would continue to challenge, their conception of the United States and its continental destiny.

Fighting Distance and Cultivating Contiguity: 1846

Colonists who moved across the continent to make new homes in Oregon became acutely aware of the tenuous relationship they had to the United States. Though they imagined Oregon as connected to the eastern states, and anticipated it becoming fully incorporated into a continental nation, they faced daily reminders of the distance and isolation of the territory and the stress it placed on their connection to home.

They set out to minimize distance and forge connections to construct Oregon as inherently connected to and part of the United States. By engaging in these acts of place making, they sought to create an identity that was at once local and American. Colonists mentally mapped these experiences alongside the already complex national map of connection and separation represented in Oregon promotional materials. This process of mapping helped transform Oregon into a meaningful home and to help it fit into an expanding imperial nation.¹⁹

Daily experiences reinforced a sense of isolation among Oregon's colonists. The following description, by Lansford Hastings, of his party's arrival in Oregon captured the heavy and all-encompassing sense of isolation settlers encountered at the end of their journeys:

... We had now, arrived at our place of destination; and were about to locate in the wild forests of Oregon. Here we were, cut off almost entirely, from all communication with our connections and friends; in a wild uncultivated region; more than two thousand miles from the land that gave us birth; with no promise of support or protection from our government; exposed to the inclemencies of a dreary rainy season, of about five months, of almost incessant rain, hail, sleet and snow; without houses, without a sufficiency of clothing, or provisions; entirely destitute of the means of agriculture; and surrounded with innumerable savages, with whose disposition as to peace or war, we were entirely unacquainted.²⁰

As this list illustrates, settlers viewed everything from the weather to the disposition of the Indians as component parts of an overarching problem; they felt unmoored from the markets, people, and government of their former homes. In the course of their daily lives, settlers saw signs of isolation everywhere. Concerns over lack of goods, difficulty of navigation, and the inaccessibility of communication contributed to the unavoidable sense of isolation that consistently vexed Oregon residents in the first years of American settlement.

Colonists repeatedly commented on the dearth of consumer goods and materials as they endeavored to make their homes in the Willamette Valley. As one settler complained, without a lumber mill, "we had to go with ax and cross cut saw and hang a boy to each end of that saw and cut the timber into proper lengths and then with maul and wedge split" it into boards. A lack of

¹⁹ On regionalism and national identity as it applies to the Pacific Northwest see Robin W. Winks, "Regionalism in Comparative Perspective," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. William G Robbins, Robert J Frank, and Richard E Ross (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1983).

²⁰ Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), 21–22.

supplies further complicated the project of building a house, cabin, or barn. They built, “not by nailing [boards] together for the reason that we had no nails.” Isolation augmented women’s workloads as well. One pioneer wife recorded making buckskin clothes and moccasins for her family; “it was some job keeping the children in moccasins, when you had to take time from your other work to make them.” Money provided little relief. As one pioneer descendant reflected: “what good was money when there was nothing to buy....” Each time colonists developed strategies to replace tools common to households in the States due to their unavailability in Oregon, they were reminded of the isolation that defined their new homes.²¹

Transport within Oregon—even within the Willamette Valley—was equally troublesome, providing a daily reminder about the limits to Oregon’s incorporation into broader economic, social, and political networks. Soon after his family had finished his wheat harvest in 1847 John Champion Richardson and his older brother traveled 60 miles in over one week to take the crop to the nearest mill, even though they drove nearly all night the last night.²² And even these trips were limited by the weather. One pioneer remembered that trips to Oregon City from Linn County were impossible until “the coming of Spring and the drying up of the muddy roads, scarcely more than trails,” and even then took “two weeks and what ever time was needed to gather the supplies and load them, were added days.”²³ Constant delays, unsuitable roads, and scarce resources made Oregon’s isolation very real and immediate for Oregonians.

With transportation and markets so hindered by Oregon’s geographic location, it is no wonder that communication was also extremely limited. Wilson Blain, whose goal was to build a thriving Presbyterian congregation in Oregon after his migration in 1848, vowed not to let the “limited supply of exchanges, from which to enrich our columns with articles on literary and scientific subjects,” unavailability of “foreign and domestic news...” deter him.²⁴ But determination alone could not prevent geographic isolation from hindering communication. As one pioneer remembered, “We didn’t have any post office” and communicated with the eastern states by giving a letter to “someone who was going back there.” As a consequence, news was unreliable: “We didn’t learn about the Mexican war until the war had been over for some time.”²⁵ Throughout the early period of American settlement, colonists remained keenly aware of Oregon’s isolation from the United States. Benedict Anderson has shown how vital membership in the reading public was for the maintenance of nationalism. The absence and delay of news from the United States limited colonists’ sense of national membership.²⁶

Two characteristics of the Willamette Valley settlement experience caused colonists to imagine the landscape to be one of solitude and foreignness: the distance dividing Euroamerican settlements and the proximity of native people. Oregon’s early colonists defined solitude as well

²¹ John Champion Richardson, “A Biography Written by John Champion Richardson,” *Lane County Historian* XIII, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 25; Fred Lockley, “Aged Pioneer Gives Early History,” *The Daily Gazette Times*, October 8, 1913; “A History of the Hugh L. Brown Family”, n.d., Brown Family Geneology File, Linn County Historical Society.

²² Richardson, “A Biography Written by John Champion Richardson,” 27.

²³ “A History of the Hugh L. Brown Family.”

²⁴ Mary Izora Marks Eccleston, “The Pioneer Parson” (Eastern Shore Times Press, n.d.), 9, Blaine Family File, Linn County Historical Society. Eccleston Quotes Blain Wilson’s editorial article in the first edition of the *Spectator* he edited on October 4, 1849.

²⁵ Fred Lockley, “Grandma Stewart, Pioneer of Pioneers, Tells of Corvallis,” *The Daily Gazette Times*, September 15, 1913, Vol V, No. 113 edition, 1.

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

as community in terms of nation and race in a constant calibration of the relative foreignness of the landscape. One settler commented on the fact that even the nearest neighbors were too far to maintain regular contact. “James McHargue who had been here a year or so and a near neighbor, who only lived 6 or 7 miles away, that was considered near at that time...”²⁷ John Richardson remembered Eugene Skinner, who worked the adjacent land claim (and in whose honor the city of Eugene, Oregon would be named) but did not categorize him as a neighbor because “a neighbor 25 miles away, no bridges, and no roads, is little better than no neighbor.” Richardson’s mental map was empty of neighbors, because the nearest American settlers to his home were inaccessible for community or fellowship. This colonist’s definition of the term neighbor as well as the status of aloneness was racially delimited. Richardson considered himself “alone so far as white people was concerned,” but acknowledged there were “quite a good many Indians” around his claim “stalking about as naked as a summer bird.”²⁸ When colonists complained of being alone, they were describing an experience of solitude that was shaped by dominant cultural ideas of race and civilization. They transformed this experience, by no means pure, into a mental map of Oregon as empty, sparsely populated, lonely, and foreign. Experiences of solitude may appear neutral and purely local, but they were in fact deeply intertwined, via colonists’ mental maps, with colonial conceptions of Oregon’s relationship to the United States. Local geography became continental and national geography.

It was impossible for colonists to ignore the fact that their chosen home was isolated from the United States. Transportation, communication, social life, and markets all regularly reinforced this fact. Though they were aware of their minimal ability to bring about major infrastructural projects that could annihilate space and bring Oregon closer to the United States, colonists mentally constructed connections between their new home and their homeland through the development of community geographic discourse based on mental mapping. These became the foundation of a regional identity that constantly reached for greater inclusion in the nation.²⁹

Patriotic rhetoric surrounding 1846 typified the interrelationship of national narrative and local experience in colonial mental maps. When William Green T’Vault, the editor of the *Oregon Spectator*, delivered an Independence Day address in Salem he assured his audience, “ere long, the inhabitants of the beautiful and productive valleys of the Columbia will be ingrafted into the great republic.” “Ingraft” was a more apt metaphor for the way contiguous territories already sharing a border with the United States might have been incorporated into the nation upon statehood. T’Vault’s rhetoric subtly appropriated that geographical relationship and tapped into commonly held mental pictures in order to imaginatively insert Oregon and not just

²⁷ “A History of the Hugh L. Brown Family.”

²⁸ Richardson, “A Biography Written by John Champion Richardson,” 25, 28.

²⁹ Many, both inside and outside of Oregon, advocated for a transcontinental railroad in the mid-1840s. In an article reprinted from the *New York Sun*, the *Spectator* publicized this fact: “A railroad ought and must be built to the South Pass and the sooner it is commenced the better for the country and its interests. A correspondent suggests that the government take the job itself. Thousands of mechanics and laborers would go on with the different branches of the work, under the protection of the government, and *they* could be paid in land, and thus there would be a *continental settlement* along the whole line of the road sufficient to protect it and instead of making one man *independent* ten times over, thousands would be placed beyond want and made happy. Five hundred thousand people emigrate from the east and north, to the west or south, every year, and our territories are now ready to become states, with the single exception of Oregon. It is therefore the policy and duty of the government to guide this emigration in the most advantageous direction, and no time should be lost in pushing on a work upon which we hope to carry our Atlantic cities the valuable productions of the Asiatic world” [emphasis in original], “Rail-Road to Oregon.”

its inhabitants into the nation.³⁰ (It is indeed telling that rather than using the political name of the territory “Oregon” he chose to imagine the landscape itself, in the form of the “valleys of the Columbia,” unifying with the Republic.) His choice of words exemplified how rhetoric T’Vault’s language painted a decidedly physical picture of the process by which he hoped Oregon would become a part of the United States. The word “ingraft” usually referred to the process of inserting a shoot or twig of one tree into another, or incorporation of a thing into a previously existing system or unity, as in an alien into its adopted society. T’Vault chose this word with full awareness that the interior of the North American continent separated Oregon from the westernmost boundary of the United States, making the type of absorption that the word “ingraft” implied impossible in 1846. The only incorporation T’Vault could realistically hope for would be a political and legal one, not a geographical and physical merging of “the valleys of the Columbia” with the United States. He chose this term, laden with connotations of physical, material absorption, in order to rile up an Independence Day crowd who desired Oregon to overcome the geographic distance and separation that plagued them. This rhetorical flourish is representative the way colonists used local geographical discourse to share mental maps to create national meanings out of local experience.

The stakes of such talk were high in 1846 at the apex of the Oregon boundary dispute between the United States and Great Britain. The dispute revolved around where the boundary between British-controlled Canada and United States territory would lie. It was a battle over abstract political and imperial boundaries discussed via the even more abstract notion of latitude and longitude. Oregon’s national future hinged on how this conceptual conflict played out. The *Spectator* summed up high stakes of the situation by declaring, “if...no satisfactory compromise upon the subject of the northern boundary line of Oregon could be effected, war between the two nations would be the inevitable result.”³¹ Oregon’s fate in such a conflict appeared uncertain. During the months immediately before and after the ratification of the Oregon Treaty in June 1846 (in typical fashion news of the treaty did not reach Oregon until October of 1846) American colonists attempted to create symbolic connections in place of the material and political ones they lacked. The events of 1846 encouraged colonists, like T’Vault, to use mental mapping to translate their concrete experiences of disconnection into symbolic geographies that encouraged incorporation into the nation.

One such catalytic event was the visit of the U.S. Navy Schooner *Shark*, whose arrival in the Columbia River on 15 July 1846 focused colonists’ awareness on the geographic limitations of their national membership, while also providing opportunities to symbolically connect to the Republic (see Figure 1.3)

³⁰ “[William Green T’Vault Addresses 4th of July Celebrants at Salem, 1846],” *Oregon Spectator*, July 13, 1846.

³¹ As cited in Gregory Paynter Shine, “A ‘Gallant Little Schooner.’ The U.S. Schooner *Shark* and the Oregon Country, 1846,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (2008): 545.



Figure 1.3 - A copy of artist Francois Roux's watercolor painting of the *Shark* is one of the few extant images of the schooner (Courtesy of the Naval Historical Center, taken from Shine, "A Gallant Little Schooner").

The *Shark*, captained by Lieutenant Neil M. Howison, arrived in the Columbia River on 15 July 1846, at the height of the boundary dispute between the United States and Great Britain. Howison described the atmosphere as one where "excitement prevailed among all classes of residents on this important subject," and commanded his sailors to "refrain from engaging in arguments touching the ownership of the soil."³² The schooner's official orders were to travel to Oregon, gather information about the nature of the country, and "to cheer our citizens in that region by the presence of the American flag." Colonists desired, especially, to see the flag waving above the Oregon landscape.³³ The colonists responded to this gesture of unity.³⁴ "Filled with a thousand glorious memories which clustered about the emblem of their country's

³² Howison also pointed to the source of much frustration for Oregon's colonists. That is, the fact that the ultimate ownership of Oregon territory was "a question which no power hereabouts could settle." Neil M Howison, *Oregon: Report ... to the Commander of the Pacific Squadron; Being the Result of an Examination in the Year 1846 of the Coast, Harbors, Rivers, Soil, Productions, Climate and Population of the Territory of Oregon. February 29, 1848. Ordered to Be Printed* (Washington: Tuppin & Streeper, printers, 1848), 3.

³³ As cited in "Navy History", n.d., <http://www.howison.us/milhistory.htm>. Not a year later Oregonians would describe the meaning of the flag in a memorial to Congress requesting the extension of the Territorial status. In it, a messenger sent by the Provisional Government to appeal to Congress wrote, "the people very generally looked forward with honest pride and hope to the time when the flag of their country would again wave above them, a visible sign that they had not been forgotten in their distant homes." Thornton, "Historical Letter," 57. It is perhaps possible to read this combination of the national and local transformation of Oregon's landscape with the symbolism embodied in the flag as what Simon Schama described in his book *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). It should be acknowledged, Schama argues, "that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery," 61.

³⁴ The *Shark* was not alone. Also anchored were three Hudson's Bay Company vessels and one Royal Navy vessel the MHS *Modeste*. This boat "undoubtedly dwarfed the *Shark*." This is of interest because it demonstrates that it was not just any boat from 'civilization' that inspired and excited the American colonists, but boats from America. Shine, "A "Gallant Little Schooner" The U.S. Schooner Shark and the Oregon Country, 1846," 547.

nationality,” they shouted and cheered in joy as the American flag was raised above the docked ship.³⁵

The *Shark* also had another assignment: to assess the “disposition” of the residents of Oregon “friendly to The United States” and to compare them to those “friendly to Great Britain.” This language recognized the citizenship of Oregon’s emigrants but did not assume it equaled commitment to the nation. It indicated that Howison was assigned not just to support Americans in Oregon but also to look for evidence that emigration to distant Oregon had, as feared, severed the ties of national fraternity.

Thus the excited colonists had every reason to be suspicious of the *Shark’s* ability to manifest long-desired connection between Oregon and the United States. As the schooner’s visit unfolded, colonists would subject the ship, its crew, its cargo, and its mission to public scrutiny. The net result of these examinations was that, despite being a positive sign for future American commitment to the colony, the *Shark’s* visit, in the end reinforced the distance and disconnection that colonists experienced on a daily basis. The signs of connection were not strong enough to achieve plausibility within Oregon’s geographic discourse.

Colonists’ nervousness about the boundary dispute increased the level of scrutiny to which they subjected the *Shark*, examining it closely for any sign that the United States was committed to the ownership of the Oregon Country. They enthusiastically celebrated these signs attempted to use them to inscribe a sense of home into Oregon’s visual and cultural landscape. At other times they discovered details relating to the ship that highlighted Oregon’s remoteness and other limits to national unity. In these cases colonists responded by aiming to reinterpret those aspects as signs of connection and Americanness in any way they could. Thus the *Shark* came to represent the tension between abstract (but strongly desired) connection and concrete disconnection that defined the experience of colonization before 1847.

The *Shark* ultimately failed to provide plausible evidence of connection even though it carried, in the form of mail, obvious connection to home. One of the first announcements of the ship’s arrival focused on, as the headline in the *Spectator* excitedly put it, the “Overland Mail!!” in the ship’s hulls. The mail delivery contained artifacts from home, and in many cases settlers also received seeds with which they could transform the landscape into one that grew the flowers and fruits representative of civilization and which evoked the sights, smells, and tastes of home.

Later in the history of Oregon settlement, the sending, and sowing, of seeds to develop varieties from home would play a significant role in cultivating both place and nation in Oregon.³⁶ In the years before 1850, though, as Oregon historian William Bowen has argued, fruit and flower cultivation was largely a failure in the Willamette Valley outside of the largely French Canadian-inhabited district of French Prairie. Thus, even receiving seeds from the *Shark* delivery would have most likely ended in disappointment as trees failed to survive. They would have represented an ambitious hope more than a concrete connection.³⁷

³⁵ Thornton, “Historical Letter,” 57–58.

³⁶ Manuscript sources abound with examples of letters from home containing seeds, for example Elijah Lafayette Bristow, “Copies of Letters 1857-1864”, n.d., Vol. 14, MSS P-A 337, Bancroft Library. On fruit’s importance for a feeling of home in early Oregon see James Robert Cardwell, *Brief History of Early Horticulture in Oregon* (Portland: Oregon State Horticultural Society, 1906); Ralph C Geer, “The Pioneer Nurseryman in the Waldo Hills: Salem, Oregon”, n.d., Bancroft Library. On the importance of cultivated flowers and fruits for domesticating the West see Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*; Jason Patrick Bennett, “Blossoms and Borders: Cultivating Apples and a Modern Countryside in the Pacific Northwest, 1890--2001” (Ph.D, University of Victoria, 2008), <http://proquest.umi.com/>.

³⁷ Bowen, *The Willamette Valley*, 93.

That the Oregon paper described mail delivered via ship from the East Coast of the United States as “overland” is the first clue that colonists conceived of their disconnection from home in ways the *Shark* would have trouble mitigating. The headline reveals that in addition to providing communication from distant communities, mail had symbolic value due to its ability to signify overland connection with contiguous United States. This reveals the continental bias of their mental maps, and their focus on “ingrafting” into the United States. The content of the mail, moreover, consisted mostly of news regarding the abstract conflict over the boundary between Oregon and Canada. Of special interest in this delivery was a snippet from a Washington D.C. paper containing relatively recent reporting on the ongoing negotiations between Oregon and Great Britain. The local paper printed an abstract of that clipping in full, despite its lack of significant news.³⁸ It described high-level negotiations about the boundaries that had, for the time being failed. Overall, the sea-delivered mail was not matching up to the expectations of those who so anxiously awaited the schooner’s arrival.

Colonists also studied the crew of the *Shark*, investigating for signs of connection to America carried by American visitors. Again, colonists homed in on characteristic American elements of the crew in the hopes of cultivating a meaningful connection to home, only to be disappointed. Though one letter-writer identified “an undefinable something” with “Uncle Sam about it” that differentiated the *Shark’s* officers and crew from those of other nations, which excited the colonial community. The crew’s tendency to take advantage of the distant and largely lawless territory to jump ship and desert their duties instead highlighted the isolation and separation of Oregon from the American community and its social and legal systems.

The sailors, like the ship they manned, the flag they flew, and the mail they delivered, represented the possibility of an American home in Oregon, and also the disappointment of seeing how unlikely that possibility remained. The “undefinable something,” in this case gave the impression of being, also, unattainable. The possibility of the *Shark* delivering that “undefinable something” was outweighed by less plausible images embodied in the American schooner. The news that several members of the schooner’s crew had deserted their duties in the hopes of settling in Oregon is one such example. Desertion challenged colonists because it originated in other aspects of Oregon that made it appear to be exterior to the United States, namely lack of established legal authority and lack of United States government institutions. In other words, the problem of desertion (a widespread problem not specific to the *Shark*) appeared to highlight the fact that Oregon remained in many important ways, foreign soil.

Desertion from American vessels in Oregon ports was in many ways a legal problem. Without an enforceable law against desertion, and with free land and high wages, it is no wonder that sailors abandoned their duties for a life on land. These alluring factors all sprung from Oregon’s most fundamental characteristic, geographic distance. This is what created the environment that drove desertion. The remoteness of the Pacific Northwest meant that Oregon was sparsely settled, which in turn created the opportunity for any man, even a known deserter, to secure a choice piece of land. Relatedly, the land was free due to the fact that the provisional government had no accountability to D.C., and means and even less desire to charge and be charged for their land claims. Such a small settlement had minimal need and few resources to devote to law enforcement or the communication networks it required, so deserters had little to fear from the authorities. Federal military presence was minimal, and the territory’s geographic location and the navigational problems posed by the Columbia’s mouth meant that visits from

³⁸ “Overland Mail!,” *Oregon Spectator*, July 4, 1846.

the Navy were few and far between, further lowering the odds that a deserter would be successfully hunted and taken back into service. Desertion from the armed forces was common in most frontier areas, where law enforcement was inconsistent, but Oregon's geographical location enhanced the temptation to desert and also augmented the importance colonists placed on the problem.

These characteristics had, in fact, given Oregon a reputation as a port where one was likely to lose crewmembers to desertion, a fact lamented by vocal colonists. As Howison noted in his report, "The few American merchant vessels which had visited the Columbia, suffered the greatest inconvenience from the loss of their men in this way, and it is now customary for them to procure a reinforcement of Kanakas [laborers from Hawaii] in passing the Sandwich Islands, to meet this exigency."³⁹ This problematic reputation meant that many merchant vessels hesitated to make the stop in Oregon. This in turn caused shortages in goods which colonists, as discussed above, perceived as an everyday reminder of Oregon's remoteness and isolation.

The desertion problem underscored the problems of geographic distance that colonists sought to minimize and counteract through their interpretive narration of the *Shark's* arrival. One concerned colonist argued that desertion in "a country like this," which was "far from home" and had "few inhabitants," was even more "immoral and unjustifiable" than it was in other ports because in Oregon, "the vessel has no power or opportunity to employ other good hands." The desertion issue forced colonists to face the fact that their territory was qualitatively different from others associated with the United States at this moment. It was nearly empty and, no matter where you came from, it was far from home.⁴⁰

In the face of this uncomfortable truth, newspaper correspondents sought to craft a response to the desertions as a way to demonstrate their Americanness and that of Oregon itself. They did this first by emphatically calling for legal remedies to the problem, despite knowledge that the community and its provisional government had close to no resources for law enforcement. Colonists called on their peers to work together and "do all in their power to arrest the evil," an act to which "duty compels us." Another urged Oregon, "[l]et us secure vessels from the danger of desertion." Another writer was more specific, calling for a law to prevent deserters from holding land claims, voting in elections, and urging citizens to "consider...them in every sense outlaws."⁴¹ To do so would encourage more frequent contact with the eastern states because "we all know that it is our *highest interest*, that ships may visit our parts with safety (emphasis in original)."⁴² The calls for legal remedies to the socio-geographical problems that encouraged desertion can be interpreted as attempts to imagine into being a more familiar and Americanized Oregon, which would then encourage material connections to the United States⁴³

Inspired by that desire to inscribe national meanings in the local landscape, colonists created one of their first broadside advertisements offering a thirty-dollar reward for each of the deserted soldiers. Echoing the words in the newspaper, it called on "the good citizens of Oregon" to aid in "the apprehension and delivery on board the *Shark*" of any of the men, while describing

³⁹ Neil M. Howison, *Oregon* (Tippin & Streeper, printers, 1848), 4.

⁴⁰ M. M. McCarver, "Desertion of Seamen," *Oregon Spectator*, August 20, 1846.

⁴¹ "Deserting Seamen," *Oregon Spectator*, August 6, 1846.

⁴² P., "Desertion of Seamen," *Oregon Spectator*, September 6, 1846; McCarver, "Desertion of Seamen."

⁴³ Colonists also used other means to encourage more migration to the United States. In 1846 the *Oregon Spectator* identified, according to their own experience, various routes into Oregon available to overlanders and sent it with the eastbound travelers to distribute to the 1847 migrations. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 29.

them by their physiques and vocations.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether this circular was posted, distributed as a handbill, or both. In either case, it was a novel form of communication in Oregon, but one with limited efficacy in a scattered rural settlement (indeed, only two of the ten deserters from the *Shark* were ever returned to their duties). Handbills and posters have been mainstays of urban communication since the seventeenth century, and had taken on even more importance in the rapidly growing northern cities of the antebellum United States.⁴⁵ The broadside seems somewhat misguided as a mass communication technique in a territory where most settlers lived on isolated land claims. This indicates that it served purposes other than bringing in the deserters. It would have reminded colonists of home because of its stylistic and typographical resemblance to the modern posted bills prevalent in the urban north. For Southerners its resemblance to fugitive slave advertisements also would have been familiar.⁴⁶ This form of public rhetoric superimposed the sensibilities of a dense urbanized community over a diffuse agricultural settlement in an attempt to render the visual landscape more familiar and modern. The broadside as a primary document, represent a moment in the process whereby colonists aimed to transform experience with desertion, which took on local meanings particular to Oregon, into a symbol of national membership. It is an artifact of a colonial culture that revolved around the struggle to overcome geographical distance by changing the local landscape in a way that plausibly rendered Oregon as a meaningful member of the expanding United States.

⁴⁴ Shine, "A "Gallant Little Schooner" The U.S. Schooner Shark and the Oregon Country, 1846," 551. The broadside was reproduced in full in this article.

⁴⁵ David Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ See David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2, Third Series (April 1, 1999): 243–272.



Figure 1.4 – Broadside distributed in Oregon as part of the effort to minimize the negative impact of desertion (taken from Shine, “A Gallant Little Schooner”).

The Columbia River perhaps presented the most serious challenge to colonists’ attempts to read the *Shark* as a symbol of Oregon/American connection. From the schooner’s initial arrival, the hostile waters and treacherous bar of the Columbia River obstructed the colonial vision of continental unity. In fact, debate about just how much of a barrier the Columbia was to “commercial communication” erupted after the *Shark* episode. A series of local news articles argued that popular claims exaggerated the danger of the river and that it could actually be navigated safely and easily if only ship captains used a “proper degree of prudence.” The series’ author set out to disprove the widely held belief, both in Oregon and in “our general government,” that the Columbia was a significant barrier to communion with the United States.⁴⁷ This widely held belief was based in large part in colonists’ experiences, both traveling down the river in their final, harrowing, leg of the overland journey and with the impact of numerous crashed ships entering or leaving the mouth of the river. The first of these, which belonged to the United States Exploring Expedition of 1841, was called the *Peacock* and wrecked on the

⁴⁷ “Columbia River, Again,” *Oregon Spectator*, December 24, 1846.

unpredictable bar. A picture of the wreckage by Alfred T. Agate, who traveled with the Wilkes expedition, was included in the official report and demonstrated to Congress the problematic nature of the mighty river. Captain Charles Wilkes recorded his own impressions as well, that one could “scarcely have an idea of its flow how swollen it is, and to see the huge trunks of think gigantic forests borne like chips on its bosom astonishes one.”⁴⁸ The *Shark*’s navigational problems underscored the Columbia’s internal contradiction—reminiscent of Bryant’s “Thanatopsis”—as a powerful symbol of Oregon’s value as a part of the United States, and as a hostile port whose dangerous waters inhibited U.S./Oregon connection. When the *Shark* first arrived in the Columbia River, no pilot was available save one man, “a negro man (a deserter himself, from the USS *Peacock* of Wilkes Expedition fame) found living at the cape, who undertook to pilot her over to Astoria.” During this attempt the ship ran aground on the Chinook Shoal and was stuck for hours.⁴⁹ Such a close call reminded settlers of the Columbia’s duplicitous nature before the schooner even reached the Willamette Valley settlements.

And entering the river was the easy part. On 23 August 1846, after Howison and his men had completed their assessment of the area and relayed all the news it had at its disposal, they determined to depart for the Sandwich Islands, as per their orders. The only known skilled pilot, a man named Indian George, had taken a job piloting another ship (The *Toulon*, which would also run aground and require assistance from the *Shark* three miles downriver from Fort Vancouver, despite the presence of the seasoned pilot on board). So, Howison made the fateful decision to attempt crossing the bar without a pilot. He crashed. On October 1st the *Spectator* reprinted a letter by Howison himself giving a detailed moment-by-moment account of the shipwreck and all his efforts to avoid it. His ship, he wrote, was “swept to destruction by the overwhelming strength of the tide, for want of thorough acquaintance with which, I did not make due allowance.”

The details surrounding the schooner’s demise, many of which were published in the local papers, all highlighted the danger and unpredictability of the Columbia. In preparing to navigate the bar without the aid of a pilot, Howison relied heavily on the maps and charts made in 1841 by Captain Charles Wilkes and his United States Exploring Expedition (see Figure 1.5). In his own reports, Howison declared that Wilkes’ charts were as good as useless because the season’s rains and snowmelt as well as the Columbia’s powerful currents changed so dramatically from year to year. Ironically, the most useful and reliable landmark he found to help him navigate the mouth of the mighty river was the wreckage of one of the Exploring Expedition’s vessels, the sloop-of-war *Peacock*, which ran aground in 1841 but remained visible.⁵⁰ The captain described the Columbia’s overwhelming power as it destroyed the ship after he and his crew escaped: “the wreck was entirely untenable an hour after she was finally abandoned, and by 3 P.M. not a vestige of the poor *Shark* was visible.”⁵¹ Also sunk, it seemed, was the *Shark*’s power as a symbol of connection to the United States.

⁴⁸ White, *The Organic Machine*, 4.

⁴⁹ Shine, “A “Gallant Little Schooner” The U.S. Schooner *Shark* and the Oregon Country, 1846,” 555; M. M. McCarver, “The U.S. Schooner *Shark*,” *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], August 6, 1846).

⁵⁰ Howison, *Oregon*, 5, 8–9.

⁵¹ “Loss of the U.S. Schnr. *Shark*,” *Oregon Spectator*, October 1, 1846. The present-day community of Cannon Beach is named for the *Shark*’s cannon, which was later found upon its shores.



Figure 1.5 – Howison used a chart similar to this one to navigate the mouth of the Columbia, based on the U.S. Exploring Expedition led by Charles Wilkes (taken from Shine, “A Gallant Little Schooner”).

The *Shark*'s story did not end when its mast sank below the surface of the bubbling surf. After the wreck, the boat's shipless crew huddled pitifully in a shack used by the Lewis and Clark expedition, and colonists feared the *Shark* would be remembered as a symbol of the Columbia's fearsome nature and as a source of anxiety that the river would doom Oregon to perpetual isolation. But the story shifted after a chance encounter with the *Toulon* brought the news that the boundary dispute with Great Britain had finally been resolved. They delivered this news and offered colonists a chance to resuscitate the schooner's visit as a symbol of connection to the nation. Colonists celebrated this abstract victory, and tried to inscribe its national significance into Oregon's landscape.

In honor of this momentous occasion, Howison presented an American flag, “one of the few articles preserved from the wreck of the Schooner *Shark*,” to Oregon's provisional governor George Abernethy. The American flag, which somehow survived the wreck, had been a potent symbol of home, and an important tool of landscape transformation, since before the *Shark*'s initial arrival. Now colonists used ritual and language to try to reinterpret this specific flag that had contained so much promise when the *Shark* arrived, as a symbol of the resilient bond between Oregon and the United States. Along with the flag, Howison sent a letter memorializing the *Shark* by celebrating the extension of United States jurisdiction over the region, which appeared in the *Spectator*. In it he described the flag as a “memento of parental regard from the General Government.” In Abernethy's reply, he acknowledged what was “(to us) a very valuable present.” In many ways the solution of the boundary dispute was the result of a diplomatic and political process involving the United States government, Great Britain, the Hudson's Bay

Company, and the complicated nature of an expanding popular democracy in a nation divided over slavery.⁵² Yet, the barrier of geographic distance and isolation still needed to be conquered for the area and its residents to experience the full and meaningful incorporation they desired. The flag Howison gave to Oregon's governor represented the political successes of the Oregon Treaty, but also, having been rescued from the wreckage of a ship thought to be heralding a new era of connection, it represented the ongoing struggle against distance, discontinuity, and isolation in the Oregon territory. The *Shark's* colors would be "the first United States flag to wave over the undisputed and purely American Territory of Oregon." It served also as a reminder of the Columbia's continuing status as a barrier to the United States meaningfully expanding her boundaries around the Oregon Country.⁵³

The schooner *Shark* (the symbolic power of these types of boats was to continue to be conspicuous in the aftermath of the Cayuse War) gave settlers the opportunity to enjoy the possibility of Oregon as home and to imagine its membership in the Union. It provided the territory with what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has called a "focus of meaning," whose "visual and conceptual prominence" was central to the conception of Oregon as a meaning-filled place. Whether colonists saw its tall masts waving the flag high above Oregon City's buildings or only read about it in the paper, the *Shark* provided hope of national inclusion to Americans living in Oregon.⁵⁴ After its departure and even after Oregon became an official Territory in 1848 colonists continued to agitate to the central government for funds and infrastructure to recreate this focused meaning. In a political tract authored not long after receiving news of the Oregon Treaty, colonists quoted words from Howison's report summing up the high stakes of making the Columbia passable. The Schooner captain identified Oregon as a "feeble and distant portion..." and described it as "vainly struggling to escape from burdens which, from the nature of things, must long continue to oppress it, unless parental assistance comes to its relief." They then implored Congress for two pilots and the money to pay them, a steam tug, beacons and a light house, in an effort to connect to Oregon with more ease, and also to restore the sense of place and possibility that the schooner had provided.⁵⁵ As their struggle for full incorporation continued, colonists repeatedly asked Congress to provide them with these same navigational aids in the hopes of bringing connectivity beyond the treacherous Columbia bar. For example, in 1849 an article published in an Oregon paper reasoned, "with the aid of a steam tug boat the mouth of the Columbia will be at all times easy and safe of entrance, and its bar now more dangerous in imagination than otherwise will be no longer feared."⁵⁶ The *Shark* episode reveals the extent to which Oregon's colonists recognized the challenges posed by geographic distance, and actively sought to counter that distance by constituting, through mental mapping and building a locally-maintained geographic discourse, connections to the United States and transforming the foreign landscape of Oregon into one recognizable as home. It also highlights the way tension between distance and connection shaped Colonists' view of their part in a broader project of nationalist expansion during the mid-nineteenth century.

⁵² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 711–723.

⁵³ "Howison Abernethy Correspondence," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], March 4, 1847).

⁵⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 157–158. On the power of buildings and architecture as symbols of imperial sovereignty and ownership of territory in the British tradition, see Patricia Seed, "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49, no. 2, Third Series (April 1992): 200.

⁵⁵ Thornton, "Historical Letter," 71–72.

⁵⁶ "Wants of Oregon," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], February 22, 1849).

“That Undefinable Something”

The jubilation Oregonians felt at the news of the Oregon Treaty’s ratification died out soon after, when they learned that Congress had not moved to organize a Territorial government as expected. It seemed Oregon had moved from one ambiguous status to another. In an oversight interpreted as evidence of neglect, Washington D.C. failed to send word of the treaty at all. Only a newspaper carried by the *Toulon* had arrived as evidence of the change.⁵⁷ After the treaty resolution, colonists expected to receive full protection of the US government. “It was with grief and astonishment,” one colonist described, “that the people were informed by the immigrants who arrived in September, 1847, that your honorable body had adjourned without having done anything to relieve them from their peculiarly embarrassing, and, considered with reference to the Indians, even dangerous position.” While free from the fear of being separated from the United States forever, colonists still had to worry about their lack of resources, protection, commercial and navigational support, and land title.⁵⁸

The federal government had a simpler take on the situation. Many policymakers figured that the influx of American settlers did enough to secure the Oregon Country for the United States.⁵⁹ From their perspective, settling the boundary dispute was the major objective in relationship to Oregon. This is where the perspective of the settlers drastically departed from that of the general government. For settlers, time was of the essence. They strongly desired secure land rights, to make treaties with Indians, government protection, and regular communication with the United States. Even more, they coveted—to borrow from the *Oregon Spectator*—the “undefinable something” that, to them, signified truly meaningful American membership. The following chapters contain an exploration of colonists’ quest to achieve the elusive mixture of qualities required to make their new home truly a part of the American nation.

⁵⁷ David Sievert Lavender, *Land of Giants* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 257.

⁵⁸ Thornton, “Historical Letter,” 53.

⁵⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 717.

Unfettered In a Boundless Waste: The Whitmans, the Cayuse, and the Struggle for Predictability, 1847-1849

In narrating the 1847 Whitman Massacre, historians have emphasized its role as a catalyst to U.S. expansion and a defining factor in how the region has been mythologized and remembered in the popular imagination.¹ While valid, these interpretations recreate the Massacre through the eyes of Easterners and the federal government, neglecting the particularities of its local cultural importance, which revolved around the linguistic and material project of Americanizing the territory. At the time of its destruction, the Whitman Mission was the lynchpin of a vernacularly defined network of missions that provided highly valued predictability to Oregon's interior. The Massacre was more than a political trigger or a local tragedy. It amounted to the destruction of a vital element of colonial geo-cultural self-understanding.

After the *Shark* incident concluded and the boundary dispute settled, Oregon's colonists remained in an uncertain state. No longer jointly occupied by Britain, they did not have to worry about being severed from the United States, becoming part of the British Empire, or an impending imperial war. In the next few years, though, other sources of unpredictability—both abstract and immediate—persisted. Even after the treaty, Oregon was not granted territorial status that would have put it on the official path to statehood. This failure left Oregon's eventual national incorporation in question. Meanwhile relations with independent Indians on the Columbia Plateau and trouble with navigation continued to plague the colony and engender unpredictability in everyday experience.

The generally unreliable environment heightened the value of anything that provided predictability, and raised the stakes of its loss. Among the most important local sources of reliability to develop in the first decade of American presence in Oregon was a network of American missions that dotted the interior of the Oregon Country along the Columbia River and its inland tributaries (See Figure 2.1). The missions provided predictability not only to emigrants as they passed along the upper Columbia, but also to those already settled in the Willamette Valley. Colonists understood that they had made their homes in an isolated valley thousands of miles from the U.S., and had a tenuous connection to the United States. They understood also that areas known as Indian Country surrounded them, and that they were not altogether welcomed by local Indian groups.² The mission network enabled these farmers to imagine the interior of Oregon as more similar to the Willamette Valley than it was similar to the wasteland to the east known as the Great American Desert. It could hold an in-between status of not quite settlement but also not quite desolate unmarked wilderness. This mental map of the interior's relationship to the Valley and the continent as a whole undergirded the impression that Oregon was safe and could be domesticated.

¹ Cameron Addis, "The Whitman Massacre: Religion and Manifest Destiny on the Columbia Plateau, 1809-1858," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 2 (2005): 245-254.

² There were also Indians living within the Willamette Valley, as well as missions. Yet their numbers had been drastically reduced by disease epidemics as recently as the 1840s. The people who remained in the Willamette Valley were small in number and, as historian William Bowen put it, they "posed no threat" in the area of settlement by 1850. Bowen, *The Willamette Valley*, 50. For a detailed account of the disastrous effects of introduced disease epidemics among Northwest Coast Indians, see Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*.

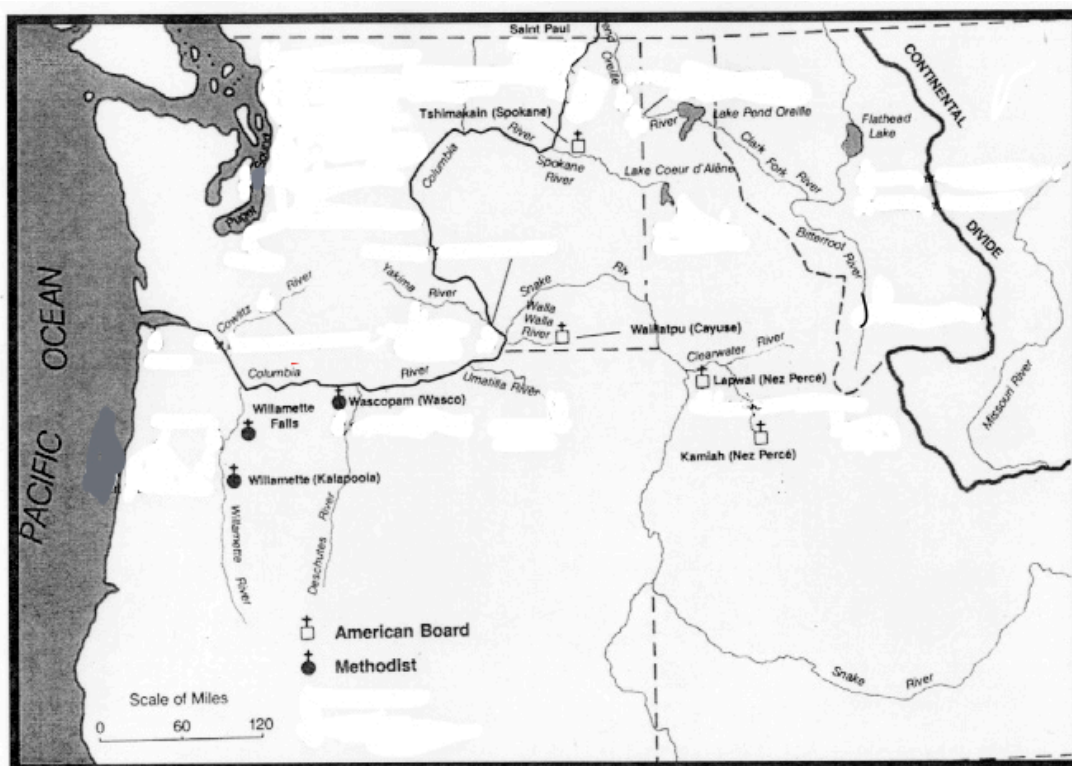


Figure 2.1: Protestant Missions of the Columbia Plateau

The November killings at Whitman Station, and the subsequent war against the Cayuse Indians, spurred a major transformation in the collective mental maps through which colonists made sense of the relationship among the interior of Oregon, the Willamette Valley, the Great American Desert, and the nation as a whole. Before the killings at the Whitman Station near modern Walla Walla Washington (also known as Waiilatpu), American missions dotted the interior and formed a network that rationalized the area, even though it was largely free of white settlers. After the Massacre, mission administrators closed down the Oregon Mission program, and left a landscape that appeared indistinguishable from the Great American Desert to the east, and stood in stark opposition to the growing agricultural landscape of the Willamette Valley.

The destruction of this mission network did not only affect those who wished to travel in Oregon's interior. Rather, the Massacre triggered pre-existing fears throughout the colony about Oregon's distance from the United States and about the safety and stability of the overland route through Indian Country. Thus, after the Massacre, the territory as a whole appeared to Euroamericans as the home of unfettered Indians who roamed without rhyme or reason and whose movements or actions could not be anticipated, and this seemed to threaten Americans' desires for the future of the Pacific Northwest.

Colonists were dedicated to restoring a sense of control over the spatial character of Oregon. In addition to seeking punishment for the individuals who carried out the killings, Willamette Valley settlers focused their energies on fortifying the overland trail and limiting the movement of Columbia Plateau tribes to prevent their alliance with the Cayuse. All of these goals reflected settler fears of the interior becoming boundary-less and uncontrolled.

Historical Context of Whitman Massacre and Cayuse War

The so-called “Whitman Massacre” involved Cayuse Indians who took up arms against Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, who, with the help of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), had established a mission at Waiilatpu 1836. The missionaries ministered to the Cayuse and Umatilla who lived in the area, and sought, with little success, to convert them to Christianity and teach them to adopt a sedentary agricultural lifestyle. The Whitman Mission was the most famous but not the only institution of its kind on the Columbia Plateau. Over eleven years, Whitman’s group organized, and the ABCFM funded between three and five missions within 100 miles of Waiilatpu. These missionaries were some of the first Americans to settle in the Oregon Country, and by the eve of the 1847 Massacre, the immigrant population had increased to 9,000, mostly in the lower Willamette Valley. That fall Cayuses and Walla Wallas returned from the Sacramento Valley with measles. This epidemic, which spread far beyond the Cayuse dwellings surrounding the Whitman Mission, killed nearly one tenth of all Indians between Fort Hall and Puget Sound.³ Up to thirty Cayuse near Whitman Station died within two months, while only one white man succumbed to the disease. The Indians suspected Dr. Whitman, who was either unable or unwilling to help the native people, of spreading the disease on purpose in order to gain control of the Cayuse Lands.⁴ This disease was destructive on its own, but was made more so because it came on the heels of the 1847 migration from the United States that “trampled the Cayuse grazing lands, burned the Indians’ fuel, [and] killed their game.”⁵ Scholars agree that the Indians were aware of the missionaries’ growing prosperity garnered from their devotion to serving the white newcomers rather than the native people on whose land they lived and farmed. Narcissa Whitman admitted to this shift in priority in a letter to an eastern relative, writing “I had rather try to induce my friends to come and see me and seek a home in Oregon” than continue efforts to save the Indians for Christ.⁶

And so, on November 29th, the Cayuse attacked the mission, killing thirteen and taking upwards of fifty captives. Whether the Cayuse saw the attack as a customary act of retribution for those lost to disease and starvation or an act of revenge, we will never be sure. Their anger at the Whitmans was obvious. Narcissa Whitman was the only woman whom they murdered, “a choice that the Cayuse underscored by mutilating her body.”⁷ American colonists interpreted the incident as a brutal and unprovoked massacre. The *Oregon Spectator* printed a document that notified Congress of the incident, saying the Cayuse had “shouted the war whoop and crimsoned their tomahawks on the blood of our citizens.”⁸

When provisional governor Abernathy heard about the attack, he responded immediately by calling the Provisional Government together to discuss the appropriate course of action. By the end of the first week in December, Abernathy notified local lawmakers that war was

³ William G Robbins, *Oregon: This Storied Land* (Portland, Or: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005), 47–48.

⁴ Peterson del Mar, *Oregon’s Promise*, 57–58.

⁵ Ray Hoard Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars: The Cayuse War of 1848, the Rogue River Wars of the “50s, the Yakima War, 1853-56, the Coeur d’Alene War, 1857, the Modoc War, 1873, the Nez Perce War, 1877, the Bannock War, 1878, The Sheepeater’s War of 1879* (Portland, Or: Binfords & Mort, 1953), 6.

⁶ Peterson del Mar, *Oregon’s Promise*, 57; Whitman, *The Letters of Narcissa Whitman*, 176. This letter was written May 18, 1844.

⁷ Peterson del Mar, *Oregon’s Promise*, 58.

⁸ Lovejoy, “Memorial to Congress from Lovejoy to Senate and House of Representatives of the United States”, 1846, MSS P-A 55, Bancroft Library.

imminent. Indignation ran high; some saw the Massacre as a bitter reminder of the failure of the United States to protect Oregon despite their many requests. Others pondered their supreme isolation or debated the rivalries among the Methodist, Catholic, and Presbyterian missions.⁹

They agreed to try to avoid an all out war, provided that the hostages were released and the guilty individuals turned over to the Provisional Government, and sent Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company to negotiate with the Cayuse. Much to the relief of Oregon settlers, he secured their release on 10 January 1848. Colonists read about the resolution weeks later in the *Oregon Spectator*. One Willamette Valley settler recorded his relief, "News reach us today this the 18th of January 1848 stating that the priseners that was taken by the cioose Indians... was brought the other day in to Oregon city" and were now "all Safe in the valleys."¹⁰ This was not before the government had moved to raise 500 troops to guard The Dalles (and therefore fortify the entrance to the Willamette Valley), and to accompany a "peace commission" to urge the Nez Percés and other tribes of the Columbia Plateau not to form alliances with the hostile Cayuse.¹¹

Volunteers continued to be recruited through the first months of the year, and in March 250 new enlisted men were added to the roles, mostly in response to rampant rumors regarding the consummation of a union among the Indians of the interior.¹² The Deschutes fought alongside the Cayuse but the region-wide alliance that the Oregon settlers feared never emerged. By May the undersupplied soldiers had crops maturing at home, so military leaders decided to leave men at Fort Waters and Fort Lee (which was the military fort established at The Dalles), awaiting arrival of United States Regulars who would never come.¹³ The rest returned to the Willamette Valley to harvest and market their wheat crops. At this time they escorted the last of the Indian Agents and Protestant missionaries out of the region, emptying it almost completely of Americans. There had been a few relatively major battles—with casualties on either side, including one in February at the Whitman site.

In August, Congress enacted a bill making Oregon a Territory of the United States of America. It did not reach Oregon until five months later. By October, the *Spectator* reported that the last of the Riflemen who had stayed at Forts Lee and Waters had come home and been discharged and that Indians in those two districts were quiet. Even though soldiers were discharged, the Cayuse War could not be widely considered over until the murderers were apprehended and tried. This did not happen until early summer of 1850, when five Cayuse men were tried after turning themselves in. Scholars are unsure why they surrendered when they did, or if they knew they were to be tried rather than simply have a council with the Americans. After a two-week long trial the men were found guilty and sentenced to death.¹⁴ Governor Lane was absent from Oregon City at the time of the executions because he had travelled to Rock Point in the Rogue River Valley to treaty with Rogue Indians who were making travel difficult for Americans on their way to the California Gold Fields. Thus, as the Cayuse War ended—

⁹ Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 11–12.

¹⁰ Absolom B. Harden, "Diary and Letters of Absolom B. Harden", 1847, MSS 11, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. Harden's diary also supports the claim that this shift in concern to the Valley as an important geographic symbol retained the gendered implications previously attached to the missions. He noted about the rescued: "they was 13 old or in other words married woman though they was 52 woman and Children...."

¹¹ Ruby, *The Cayuse Indians*, 116; Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 23. Glassley notes that soldiers assigned to accompany this peace commission were upset that they did not get to fight Indians.

¹² Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 32.

¹³ Ruby, *The Cayuse Indians*, 122.

¹⁴ Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 36–37, 42, 48.

dissolving the missionary paradigm that once lay at the center of the American image of Oregon's promise and acted as the main organizing principle for Indian-occupied space in the Far West, new and drastic changes were afoot due to the beginning of the California Gold Rush.

A Network of Predictability

To understand the way colonists perceived, interpreted, and collectively constructed a network of missions, it is necessary to begin in the years preceding the Whitman incident. Potential Oregon migrants relied on information sent back by earlier pioneers when deciding whether to take the plunge and go to Oregon. In these documents, which migrants sent home to help their families and friends make the trip, Waiilatpu and Wascopam played a central role in the descriptions of Oregon's geography. The purpose of these descriptions was to try to give the land through which they would travel and with which they were totally unfamiliar some predictability. In trying to achieve this goal, writers painted verbal pictures of the arrangement of landmarks, trails, and pitfalls for their readers, based on their own experience and the current state of vernacularly legitimated geographic knowledge. Potential migrants read these descriptions and translated what they learned into mental pictures of that geographical arrangement. Reading and utilizing guidebooks, letters, and diaries of overland travel, then, constituted one instance in the longer process of creating mental maps by layering new information onto old narratives, experiences, and data.

Overton Johnson and William Winter's 1843 account of their journey to Oregon was a widely read example of travel narratives cum guidebooks. This account demonstrates how missions grounded descriptions of Oregon's interior. At times the missions were the only man-made landmarks in a standard description of the area. In describing Waiilatpu, the authors relied on the classic navigational tool of the river to establish the location of Waiilatpu. "Thirty miles from the Umatilla [River]," they wrote, "we came to Whitman's Mission, situated on the Walawala River, twenty-five miles from its junction with the Columbia. The buildings are of unburnt brick, and are neatly and comfortably finished. The Missionaries have a Mill, and cultivate a small piece of ground"¹⁵ These two travelers also spoke to Whitman's fellow-missionary Henry Spalding and reported on the location of his mission, near present-day Lewiston, Idaho. In this description the priority of river and mission were reversed, and they used the location of the mission to help pinpoint the location of the Clear Water River. The Clearwater was "in the neighborhood of his Mission... it contained many rich valleys, of considerable extent; and...the portion of country laying between Snake River and the main branch of the Columbia, will in the course of time, be inhabited by a civilized people' as it doubtless contains some good valleys of land." Johnson and Winter then described "Wascopin" as the next main stop on their journey, and supplied an image of the "small farm attached to the Mission..." to make it recognizable to their readers. They then landed at Fort Vancouver and described it in similar terms to the missions, starting with the farms, then describing the animals and production of farm products. This is significant because one would assume that Fort Vancouver would have been considered an aberration, totally unique among places in the Oregon country. In some ways it was. Johnson and Winter paid attention to the massive number of cattle, the huge buildings, the large settlement and workforce, and the trading agreements the Company

¹⁵ Overton Johnson and William H Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains: With a Description of Oregon and California, Their Geographical Features, Their Resources, Soil, Climate, Productions, &c., &c* (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1982), 36.

held with Russians in Alaska. These things all made Fort Vancouver unique. But on another level the guidebook presented Fort Vancouver as one point in a larger network of mission stations that played a particular role for migrants by giving them something they could predict and rely on as they traveled through such unfamiliar terrain.”¹⁶

Joel Palmer, like Johnson and Winter, included information on Henry Spalding’s mission at Clearwater, located in modern-day western Idaho, even though this mission lay hundreds of miles from the most commonly followed overland trail.¹⁷ Palmer went so far as to include a letter from Spalding in which he affirmed “that the Mission station at this place, and at Waiilatpu, have been in the habit of furnishing provisions to immigrants. We are willing to do so as long as there are no other sources of supplies in this vicinity, and therefore seems a duty.”¹⁸ Spalding’s assurance that travelers would receive sustenance from Clearwater as well as Waiilatpu is curious considering its location far from the main trail. It may indicate that travelers in the Oregon Country generally were aware of not only Waiilatpu but also Spalding’s even more remote station, and they sometimes benefited from his generosity. Some of these travelers, like Palmer and Overton and Winter, traveled to Clearwater mission because they were purposefully touring the area and gathering information to later share with others. These men’s journey to Clearwater did not represent the typical migrant experience. It did result in the publication of a description of Clearwater mission, which then had the power of plotting it on the mental maps of travelers in relation to Waiilatpu. Palmer mentioned Whitman’s mission at least twenty times, and Clearwater and the Dalles another ten, in his account of the interior. Through these books, the mission network became a part of the imagined Oregon for travelers considering the big move.

Migrants’ expectations of a mission network were confirmed by their experience arriving in Oregon. The missions on the Columbia Plateau, most notably Whitman Station near present-day Walla Walla and Wascopam at The Dalles, but also some of the other missions dotting the Columbia Plateau together provided a measure of predictability to travelers arriving in this in this uncharted area of Oregon. Able to anticipate their arrival at places with reliable and familiar characteristics after traveling for months on the open plains, colonists plotted these missions on their mental maps. In several ways, the missions’ presence allowed for the eastern portions of Oregon territory to seem less foreign. First, they existed as a haven of safety, rest, and sustenance in the minds of travelers who anticipated arriving there and trusted in what they would find. Second, missions allowed Willamette Valley settlers to be able to give their friends and family back home some sense that they could know what to expect and rely on these missions during the final and most difficult leg of their journey. And third, the missions appeared to fix Indians in space. The belief that the missions anchored the Plateau Indians (Cayuse, Nez Percé, Walla

¹⁶ Ibid., 36–38, 41. See also *Oregon Free Press* from April 22, 1848 for a vision of Fort Vancouver’s power to determine the cultural geography of the Willamette Valley, also Greenhow, *Geography of Oregon and California*.

¹⁷ Karen Bassett et al., *Oregon Historic Trails Report* (Salem: Oregon Trails Coordinating Council, 1998), 27. This compilation of maps and defining information about a variety of trails taken by emigrants traveling to and through Oregon has been invaluable to the current study.

¹⁸ Joel Palmer, *Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains, to the Mouth of the Columbia River: Made During the Years 1845 and 1846, Containing Minute Descriptions of the Valleys of the Willamette, Umpqua, and Clamet; a General Description of Oregon Territory, Its Inhabitants, Climate, Soil, Productions, Etc., Etc.; a List of Necessary Outfits for Emigrants; and a Table of Distances from Camp to Camp on the Route* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1847), 297–298.

Walla, Yakima, and others) even during Indians' seasonal migrations mitigated the threats posed by the fact that the interior was legally Indian Country.¹⁹

The Whitman Mission was the most important point in this network of predictability because of its closeness to the typical route taken by Oregon immigrants. In fact, the Whitman Mission was so important to overland migrants that the main stem of the Oregon Trail went northward from the base of the Blue Mountains to the Whitman Mission (the route being called the "Whitman Mission Route") and continued to the Columbia River on the "Upper Columbia River Route" from the Mission.²⁰ Marcus Whitman's fame, garnered during two trips back East during which he gave several public speeches, probably augmented the Mission's significance as well. Its importance as a stop on the way to Oregon is demonstrated even by the moniker "Whitman Station," commonly used by migrants, Hudson's Bay Company affiliates, and missionaries to refer to the four structures, garden, grist and small mill near the Walla Walla River. As migrant Elizabeth McGary Lovejoy remembered, she "arrived in the valley west of the Blue Mountains, it was thought best to stop and let the teams rest for a few days and some of the men go to Dr. Whitman's Mission and secure a supply of fresh provisions."²¹

Waiilatpu signaled to travelers that they had arrived in a place different from the plains and recognizable as home-like, despite the fact that the journey was only becoming more difficult in the final push through to the Willamette Valley. The first sign of white American 'civilization' in many months, the Whitman Mission provided Oregon migrants something to look forward to and trust in just when their energy and supplies were most depleted. In his widely-read 1845 guidebook Lansford W. Hastings noted Waiilatpu's importance as a place where people and resources came together and could be bartered: "We spent a few days at his place, during which time, we were enabled to exchange many horses with the Indians, as well as, to purchase many, and also, to obtain our additional supply of provisions...."²² Elijah White, having stopped at the Walla Walla Valley, he notes. "The missionaries at this and the other Missions have raised fine crops of wheat, corn, potatoes, etc., so that provisions can be procured here upon as good or better terms than in the lower settlements at present."²³

For many, like T.J. Farnham, the Mission symbolized home: "When the smoking vegetables, the hissing steak, bread white as snow, and the newly-churned butter graced the breakfast-table, and the happy countenances shone around, I could with difficulty believe myself in a country so far distant from, and so unlike my native land in all its features."²⁴ Hastings reinforced Waiilatpu's symbolic value to as an outpost in a wilderness over which they had no control. After spending the Sabbath and hearing Whitman preach, in both the Cayuse tongue and in English, Hasting commented, "This scene was the more interesting to us, as we had then, for

¹⁹ Beckham, *The Indians of Western Oregon*.

²⁰ Maps and descriptions of these two routes are available in Bassett et al., *Oregon Historic Trails*.

²¹ A.C. Gowdy, "The Pioneer Life Story of Elizabeth McGary Lovejoy, by Elizabeth McGary Lovejoy", n.d., 4, Benton County Historical Society.

²² Hastings, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*, 21.

²³ Jesse Looney, "Instructions for Preparations to Make the Trip Across the Plains", October 27, 1843, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

²⁴ "An Indian Family in the Oregon Territory," *Littell's Living Age*, October 16, 1847; Deborah Lynn Dawson, "'Laboring in My Savior's Vineyard': The Mission of Eliza Hart Spalding" (Bowling Green State University, 1988), <http://proquest.umi.com/>.

the last four months, heard nothing but the terrific howl of wild beasts of prey, and the furious midnight yell, of a hostile and barbarous foe.”²⁵

At times the trying conditions of the overland journey forced migrants to trust in the Whitman Mission as a safe haven in a dangerous land. In 1844 Naomi and Henry Sager departed Missouri for Oregon along with their six children, with a seventh due to be born before they reached their destination. After reaching South Pass, first Henry and then Naomi died of fever, leaving all seven children orphans. On her deathbed, Naomi asked Captain Shaw of the train to look after the children until they reached the Waiilatpu, at which point she asked Shaw to see if the Whitmans would take the children. A runner was sent ahead to ask the Whitmans, who agreed. This dying woman, who had never met the Whitmans, specifically requested that they take her children. This testifies to the degree that overland migrants placed trust in the presence of this mission in the wilderness. Catherine Sager later wrote about her and her siblings experience on the remainder of the trip, imagining what was to be their new home, “For weeks this place had been our talk by day and formed our dreams at night,” she wrote.²⁶ The children remained at the Mission until the Massacre in 1847, when the two boys in the family were killed.

One historian has observed that it appeared to be “destiny” that the orphaned children were placed, “on the empty breadth of the Oregon frontier, on the very site of an Indian attack.” Yet, the Sager children did not end up at Waiilatpu by coincidence. Mrs. Sager requested her children be taken to the Mission because she knew it was an important station on the trail. She knew there would be food, water, and Christian white family values to be found there. These are the very same characteristics that brought on the Massacre. Whitman’s tendency to turn his charity, attention, medical expertise and teachings toward aiding migrants rather than helping Indians is part of what made Waiilatpu such an important stop on the trail for migrants and the heart of the missionary network of the Columbia plateau. It is what put Waiilatpu on the mental map of Mrs. Sager before she died on the plains just as it is what drove the Cayuse, two years later, to attack that mission and kill two of her children.²⁷ The Sager story is not evidence of a destiny nor was it coincidence. It indicates the power of the shared vernacular geography and its importance for guiding action in colonial Oregon.

Another important point on the mission network of the Columbia Plateau was Wascopam, a Methodist mission situated at The Dalles (whose name derived, according to one Oregon settler, from the French word for a stone used to flag gutters), one of a series of rapids in existence along the Columbia River along the boundary of present-day Oregon and Washington states. The Dalles itself was an important economic, social, and cultural location for Native Americans and migrants alike. Because of its incredibly powerful rapids, The Dalles had long been a central gathering and fishing spot for the Wascopam Indians and others. Known by anthropologists as the Wascopam Cultural Area (defined by the limits of the Wascopam missionary circuit) this was a place where different people came together and interacted and mixture and cultural exchange occurred. Ideas and material culture were exchanged and dispersed through The Dalles.²⁸ Methodist Missionary Daniel Lee described the drama of the

²⁵ Hastings, *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California*, 21.

²⁶ Catherine Sager, *Account of Overland Journey to Oregon in 1844, Life at the Whitman Mission at Waiilatpu, and the Whitman Massacre* (New Canaan, CT: Readex, 1844). Though the Whitmans only initially agreed to take the girls, once the children arrived they were convinced to take all the children until spring. Yet, they remained at the mission until the Massacre in 1847.

²⁷ Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries*, 41.

²⁸ Boyd, *People of the Dalles*.

scenery in 1844, "...at the Dalles, the whole volume of the river, half a mile wide, rushed through a deep narrow channel, which the action of the water has formed in the course of ages, through an extended tract of the hardest basalt.... A mile brings us to the head of the chasm, which, diminishing in breadth to this point, is heard only from thirty to fifty yards broad.... More than one thousand Indians, of all ages, pass from May to September on these rocks."²⁹ And Overton and Johnson recorded in their account of an 1843 plains crossing that emigrants later used as a guidebook that to pass the Columbia "requires the most dexterous management, which these wild navigators are masters of, to pass the dreadful chasm in safety. A single stroke amiss, would be inevitable destruction."³⁰ Methodists chose this location for their mission because of its centrality to the local Indian community. Dangerous conditions, missionary aid, and access to Indian guides undergirded the mission's continued importance to migrating American colonists, and gave it prominence in colonists' mental maps of the route to Oregon.

Migrants consistently noted how The Dalles marked a turning point in their journeys, where they abandoned methods of transport that had carried them from the Mississippi Valley in favor of new ways to use the river to travel the remaining distance. Joel Palmer not only equated the Mission with The Dalles itself, but also noted how travel before reaching Wascopam sharply diverged from travel after. "This day we traveled about five miles, which brought us to the Dalles, or Methodist Missions. Here was the end of our road, as no wagons had ever gone below this place."³¹ The adjustments required by the geology of Oregon's powerful waterway often involved Wascopam, and increased its significance in migrants' mental maps. 1845 migrant Betsey Baley and her family, for instance, sold one of their wagons and a yoke of oxen at The Dalles in order to pay the guides to take them to the Willamette Valley on the river.³² 1847 migrant Isaac Pettijohn's family chose to take the Barlow Road, a newly discovered route around Mt. Hood that allowed migrants to avoid the river passage.

On this route, too, The Dalles remained a major turning point because it was there that parties turned onto the Barlow road, and "[t]ook] leave of the rolling roaring foaming dashing splashing rumbling tumbling smooth gentle Columbia" that had at that point been their traveling companion for weeks.³³ Pettijohn's attachment to the Columbia and his sentimental description as he turned away from it, represent a glimpse into the way migrants etched their mental maps from their experiences with the land around them. This phenomenon was especially pronounced at The Dalles because a number of notable experiences converged there such as leaving the river or attempting to travel down it, encountering the resources of Wascopam, and embarking on the final leg of the trip to the Willamette Valley.³⁴

²⁹ Lee's description quoted in *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 158.

³¹ Palmer, *Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains, to the Mouth of the Columbia River*, 119.

³² Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1890*, vol. III (Spokane Wash.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1991), 33.

³³ Isaac Pettijohn and Missouri Council for the Social Studies, "Isaac Pettijohn Diary", n.d., Banc MSS P-A 336, Bancroft Library.

³⁴ Jesse Looney's description paints a picture of the rhythms associated with arrival in Oregon: "It is a long tiresome trip from the states to this country." Half of the emigration of 1000 people "have traded off their stock at Walla Walla, 25 miles below here, and are going by water; the balance went on by land to the Methodist Mission, 175 miles below this [at The Dalles], intending to take water there. I have stopped here in the Walla Walla Valley to spend the winter in order to save my stock. This is a fine valley of land, excellent water, good climate, and the finest kind of pine timber on the surrounding mountains; and above all, a first rate range for stock both winter and

Similarly to Waiilatpu, many overland migrants found needed support at Wascopam as they weathered this final obstacle on their way to the Willamette Valley. By 1841 Wascopam was becoming an important stopover spot for travelers and in 1842, 125 migrants passed through the mission, a large proportion of the total migration estimated to be fewer than 200. By 1843 over 1000 people took their wagons over the Oregon Trail and “most of them passed through Wascopam,” including Jesse Applegate (Sr. and Jr.) Overton Johnson and William Winter, Peter Burnett, and James Nesmith and future Oregon statesmen Asa Lovejoy and General Morton McCarver, as well as John C. Fremont. Head Missionary Perkins described the way large numbers of migrants “have been constantly sweeping by.... Our station has the usual aspect of a hotel or camp.”³⁵ The missionaries furnished migrants with food and other supplies. In the words of missionary H. Brewer, “They draw heavily on our little supplies, but we could not see them pass hungry & starving.”³⁶

James Clyman, who traveled in 1845, remembered the Methodist Mission at The Dalles as offsetting the difficulty presented by such a formidable obstacle as the rapids so late in the journey to Oregon. “Along and near the Columbia River nothing can look more discouraging [than] the river running in a deep chasm of nearly perpendicular rocks Black and frowning with a scanty supply of grass and not a stick of timber to relieve the continual monotony of Frowning rock or water with now and then a Field or mountain of sand to pass through. Now having arrived at the Dalles where you may rest a day or two with Mr Waller who is superintendent of the Methodist Mission at this place and is an accommodating man if he can be well paid....”³⁷ 1843 migrant Sara Hill also remembered The Dalles as a stop after the danger of the nearby rapids had been passed. After she described a harrowing journey down the river where three men were drowned transporting a skiff with her family’s feather beds inside, she described the respite they received at “the Dalles here was a missionary station, run by a man named Perkins....”³⁸ Throughout the 1840s, migrants received needed material aid from the mission at Wascopam at a time when the difficulty of the final section of the journey had almost become too much. In this way the experience of receiving aid from Waiilatpu and from Wascopam had similarities. Travelers arrived at Waiilatpu after the incredibly difficult passing of the Blue Mountains, and the vision of the mission was a relief. Similarly, travelers counted on the presence of Wascopam after passing through The Dalles, an experience that was often accompanied by the loss of valuable belongings, provisions, and even the lives of family members and traveling partners.

In a December 1845 letter submitted to the Washington D.C. paper the *Weekly Union*, Willamette Valley settler Elijah White demonstrated how settler narratives furthered the creation of the social space of the mission network, which in turn seemed to change the character of the otherwise wild and chaotic interior of Oregon. Settlers like White anchored their navigation through the Columbia Plateau around the missions, which in turn became the focal points of their

summer. The Indians are friendly and have plenty of grain and potatoes, and a good many hogs and cattle.” Looney, “Instructions for Preparations to Make the Trip Across the Plains.”

³⁵ Boyd, *People of the Dalles*, 23–24. The main Missionary Perkins was an avid recorder of observations and amateur ethnographer, much more so than Marcus Whitman. Thus, his detailed descriptions of individuals and overall numbers of passersby should be considered as representative of both the missions’ history rather than as a sign that they differed.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ James Clyman and Charles L. Camp, “James Clyman: His Diaries and Reminiscences (Continued),” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1926): 58–59.

³⁸ Sarah Hill, “Recollections”, 1890, 15, MSS 1508, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

travel narratives. These narrations and others like them reproduced the experience of traveling through an interconnected network of missions. White described how “in the midst of winter,” he was “obliged to travel many hundred miles in the central and north easterly part of this district.” He traveled “from the Dalles of the Columbia to the Walla Walla and from thence to Waiilatpu, Dr. Whitman’s station, among the Kayuse Indians, and onward to the clear-water station occupied by Rev. Mr. Spalding among the Nez Percés tribe.”³⁹ Colonists like White created and maintained the social space of the mission network through a dialectical process of experience and representation in the years before the Whitman Incident. His assessment of a journey, later published, is typical of the body of experiences and representations and demonstrates the way Wascopam, Clearwater (or Lapwai), and Waiilatpu not only served as symbolic and practical landmarks individually, but together formed a socially constructed space in the form of a network, through which American colonists changed their mental pictures of Oregon’s interior.

The relationship between missions and Indians, as experienced and imagined by colonists, formed another facet of the mission network so important to Oregon’s colonists before 1847. The migratory habits of the interior Indian groups, who moved seasonally in order to access different food resources, increased settlers anxiety about Oregon’s interior. Each mission appeared to draw native people to it, and therefore in colonial minds provided a sort of home base that provided comfort to colonists who feared the chaos and unpredictability of any territory that was home to independent Indian peoples. This observation was an inaccurate understanding of the relationship between Indian seasonal migrations and mission sites. But it was based on a version of the observable truth. Resources did draw native groups to camp around the missions at Lapwai, Wascopam, and Waiilatpu for a part of the year, but only after missionaries chose to locate their missions near large villages or campsites in the first place. Thus, the convergence of native and mission was mutually supported, and in fact representative of Indian independence. In June of 1836 when the first group of missionaries set out to select their location, they considered the its safety, suitability for cultivations, and, significantly, its proximity to traditional foods, noting, “They raise many horses and live on deer, elk, and smaller game, together with fish, roots, berries, and moss from the pine trees. They have fertile vallies capable of good cultivation and the location of missionaries among them would be free from hostile attacks from other tribes.”⁴⁰ Missionaries adapted their own choices to Indians’ lifeways, not the other way around. The network became a powerful image that enabled colonists to read Indian presence around missions as evidence of colonial control and power, and to imagine all the major Indian groups along the upper Columbia as recipients of the domesticating influence of the American colony.

Historians and anthropologists have established that the Indians of the Columbia plateau were in fact seasonal migrators. There is evidence that seasonal migrations continued after the establishment of missions. The Cayuse, Walla Walla, Yakima, Nez Percé, and Umatilla people moved through a vast interior from British Columbia to Central Oregon. They lived in permanent winter villages and moved the rest of the year, traveling through varied ecosystems in spring to gather bitterroot and other starchy foods and to fish in places like Celilo Falls and the Long Narrows when Chinook were running in the Columbia River. In summer families travelled to mountain meadows where women collected berries and burned fields to maintain good production while men hunted for game in the high country. Salmon made up a very large portion

³⁹ Elijah White, “Letters: 1842-1862”, 1862 1842, MSS 1217, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. This letter written December 20, 1845.

⁴⁰ Archer Butler Hulbert, *Marcus Whitman, Crusader* (Colorado Springs: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College, 1936), 157.

(one third to one half) of the diet of plateau people, considerably less than those who lived west of The Dalles on the lower Columbia. Additionally, the seasonal and reliable salmon runs provided a social space near Celilo Falls and along the Long Narrows, which fur-trader A Ross called “the great emporium...of the Columbia” in 1811. Upwards of 3000 people gathered at the runs according to witnesses, and evidence indicates that these salmon-centered gatherings predated horses by several generations; the missionaries were aware of migrations and the large get-togethers on the Columbia, and sought unsuccessfully to dissuade Indian peoples from continuing these practices.⁴¹

The Cayuse, Flathead, and Nez Percé did not stop utilizing their seasonal subsistence patterns altogether when, at the urging of Protestant missionaries, they adopted the cultivation of grain. At no time while the Whitman Mission was in operation (1836-47) did the Cayuse cease travelling between salmon, buffalo, and camas grounds with the seasons, even though they had started to sow wheat and corn, keep small fields, and mill their grain at the Whitman Mission mill by 1839. Undoubtedly, the presence of the mission and increasing numbers of settlers disrupted the buffalo and game populations, salmon runs, and relationships with neighboring tribes. But by in large they remained in place throughout the mission era.

Protestant missionaries in the plateau network were aware of Indians’ migratory habits, and focused on encouraging them to settle into sedentary agriculture, which they saw as integral to the civilized Christian lifestyle they hoped to impart to their native charges. To Spalding, agriculture was the best imperative to stop roaming. He described his rationale: “while we point them with one hand to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, we believe it to be equally our duty to point with the other to the how, as the means of saving their famishing bodies from an untimely grave.”⁴²

Spalding and his colleagues had detailed knowledge of the subsistence practices in which the Indians engaged. In a letter written in April of 1843, Whitman demonstrated his knowledge of “the migratory habits of the people.” He described when they were at the station, when they left, and what foods they collected, noting that they took salmon in May, sowed their crops, and then left to go after buffalo in the last week of June. In late July a portion of the community returned to tend the wheat. Then, between 50 or 60 remained after the camas and potato seasons ended and most departed for winter quarters, to return in February or March to their camps near the mission.⁴³ The female missionaries were also aware of the persistence of, as they called it “wandering,” and criticized in particular the refusal of women to stay at home, instead opting to continue their vital role as food producers by harvesting camas, preparing berry grounds, preparing meat and tanning hides.⁴⁴

Non-missionary colonists brought with them notions that Indians in Oregon were migratory and had no consistent tie to any one territory and associated this unfettered lifestyle with a lack of civilization. Lansford Hastings revealed this bias when he registered his surprise to learn what his missionary contemporaries also had: that the Willamette Valley Indians moved seasonally, but remained tied to a home base and home territory. He described how, contrary to his expectations, the coastal and Willamette Valley Indians, “thought to be migratory...wandering tribes” actually remained “within their own proper territories.” And

⁴¹ William G Robbins, *Oregon: This Storied Land* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005), 11.

⁴² Spalding, *Diaries and Letters of Spalding and Smith*, 250.

⁴³ Hulbert, *Marcus Whitman, Crusader*, 297.

⁴⁴ Long, “Laboring in the Desert,” 86.

though they sometimes could be seen “passing and re-passing...from fishing to fishing” or “hunting to hunting ground...their usual haunts are seldom, if ever, entirely abandoned.”⁴⁵ A few years earlier Wilkes noted the migratory habits of the Cayuse, and contrasted them with what he saw as the superior and more civilized habits of other tribes of the Columbia Plateau. He associated their movement across the landscape with lawlessness, a mutually reinforcing position that became the core of a prejudicial view of “roaming” tribes among Oregon colonists. He understood the “lawless bands of Cayuses roaming through the upper valley of the Columbia” as catalyzing the conflict in the region while others, who “abandoned their roving habits” were “on good terms with the whites.”⁴⁶

It was common for local colonists to observe and categorize the different Indian groups of the area according to how mobile their lifestyle appeared. 1848 migrant E.L. Bristow, for instance, remembered that the [Klickitat Indians] were a roaming tribe, noting, “They frequently passed up and down through this country.”⁴⁷ Ex-missionary and colonist Josiah Parrish worked as a traveling minister on what was called the Yamhill Circuit on the west side of the Willamette Valley from 1847 until 185; he commented, “The Indians were roaming about hither and yon, as they always had done.”⁴⁸ Others, he noted, had changed: So far as I know on this coast the Indians that have had any inducement to work have become as laborious as the whites, as willing to work, and as willing to give up their roaming disposition.”⁴⁹ It was not only missionaries, who lived in relatively close quarters with Indians and whose purpose in the territory revolved around them, who recognized Indian mobility and incorporated it into their mental pictures and descriptions of the nature of the territory as a whole. Non-missionaries who visited or settled in Oregon also noticed the migratory habits of Oregon’s Indians.

The third main way that the missions formed a network of predictability in Oregon’s interior was by appearing to fix Indians in space. Colonists, who experienced anxiety at the thought that Indians were so independent as to have their actions be completely unpredictable, looked to missions to comfort them. At times they perceived the missions as exerting a powerful influence over surrounding Indians. As a network, the missions exerted an even more expansive influence in the eyes of the colonists.

When writers considered the landscape of the interior of Oregon in guidebooks or letters and diaries intended for potential migrants, they described the “habits” of Indians (where they were and when they were where they were) as cyclical movements. They placed special emphasis on the times they could be expected to spend time congregated around the mission stations. These moments of predictable presence around the missions provided structure and legitimacy to these descriptions of Indians. It gave the impression that the writer was able to understand and manage the Indians whose country any potential immigrant had to pass on their

⁴⁵ Hastings, *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California*, 60.

⁴⁶ John Jenkins, *Voyage of the U.S. Exploring Squadron Commanded by Captain Charles Wilkes, of the United States Navy, in 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842: Together with Explorations and Discoveries Made by Admiral D’Urville, Captain Ross, and Other Navigators and Travellers; and an Account of the Expedition to the Dead Sea, Under Lieutenant Lynch* (Auburn, N.Y.: J. M. Alden, 1850), 418.

⁴⁷ E.L. Bristow, “Encounters With Indians, Highwaymen, and Outlaws”, 1878, MSS P-A 7, Bancroft Library. See also Ronald Spores, “Too Small a Place: The Removal of the Willamette Valley Indians, 1850-1856,” *American Indian Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 171–191. He notes this reputation of the Klickitats as roamers.

⁴⁸ Josiah L Parrish, “Anecdotes of Intercourse with the Indians: Salem, Oregon”, n.d., 34–35, MSS P-A 59, Bancroft Library.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

way to the Willamette Valley, thus minimizing commonly held fears about surprise Indians attacks.⁵⁰

In 1846, missionary and settler Elijah White lauded the success of Protestant missions in converting upper Columbia Indians to the agricultural lifestyle. His comments were representative of settlers who interpreted the activities they witnessed around the missions as evidence that agricultural practice exerted a controlling influence over the unrestricted movements of plateau peoples. He noted that the Nez Percés, Cayuse, and Flatheads grew “corn, peas, potatoes, beans, and all other common garden vegetables, [in addition to wheat] not only sufficient for their own purposes, but have annually considerable quantities to barter with the emigrant whites.” Migrants who were grateful for the opportunity to purchase vegetables common in the United States would have undoubtedly been equally impressed by the transforming power of the mission project to turn wandering and roaming tribes to agriculturists. White also observed a sort of ripple effect, whereby these rapidly “advancing” groups influenced surrounding Indians, and therefore continued the civilizing work of the missionaries beyond their immediate purview. “It may be said of the above mentioned tribes,” he wrote, “that in light, strength, and influence they may justly be denominated the Roman citizens among the aborigines of Oregon and from them an influence is going out abroad among the aborigines favorable to civilization.”⁵¹ Whitman also recognized the power of mission teachings to reach far beyond the immediate vicinity of the mission buildings when he observed, “As many are benefited by this station who seldom if ever bring their families to the Station as there are who migrate to & from it.”⁵²

Catherine Sager’s remembrances exemplify the way emigrants categorized Indians as belonging to missions, and also saw the area around the missions as representative of control over Indians. “We were now in the country of Dr. Whitman’s Indians, as they called themselves. They were returning from the Buffalo country, and frequented our camps. They were loud in their praise of the missionaries, and seemed anxious to assist the emigrants all they could; and frequently an ox that had given out and had been left would be brought to camp by them, and returned to the owner”⁵³ Sager and her party categorized the Indians they met on the trail according to the mission with which they were associated. The fact that, once aware that the Indians were “Dr. Whitman’s” their fear evaporated, evidences the important role missions played in aiding migrants to rationalize the landscape and imagine it as hospitable to their incursions. Others also shared this view. Missionary Mary Richardson Walker wrote that the Nez Percé “belonged” to Spalding. The control was geographically defined and grounded; Indians who congregated around Spalding’s mission became “his Indians.”⁵⁴

Other Americans in Oregon painted pictures of their encounters with Indians and missions that stressed the mission’s ability to impact Indians for the better. For instance, Joseph

⁵⁰ Long, “Laboring in the Desert,” 86.

⁵¹ White, “Letters: 1842-1862.” Quoting a Letter from this collection to the *Weekly Union*, July 27, 1846. This sense that Indians could influence one another would turn to general fear of a union among the tribes of the plateau after the killings at Waiilatpu.

⁵² Hulbert, *Marcus Whitman, Crusader*, 297.

⁵³ Sager, *Account of Overland Journey*, 7.

⁵⁴ For another example of the use of this common phrasing, see Walker, *On to Oregon*, 128. This understanding did not reflect a real coordination between Indians and Missionaries. Sources indicate that the majority of the Indians of the Columbia Plain traveled according to their own schedules, and switched their affinities frequently, according to their individual and collective desires. See Ruby, *The Cayuse Indians*.

Williams, who toured Oregon Country in 1841, made note of the success of the ABCFM missionaries in settling and “learning the Indians to farm.” He lauded the missionaries’ focus on agriculture and settling (despite conflict with the Indians) as superior to the Methodist model which allowed the Indians to remain in a “scattered condition” while not doing enough to help them become a “more settled people.”⁵⁵ Emigrant Elizabeth McGreary Lovejoy remembered receiving a direct benefit because of the civilizing work done on the Wascopam mission, when a “bright Indian boy...dressed in American costume” helped her and her family avoid an angry group of Indians who wanted free passage downriver. She was careful to note that this boy’s American affect was the result of teaching at Wascopam Mission, where he had learned English.⁵⁶ All of these descriptions focused on the power of missions to alleviate problems associated with the mobility and migratory habits of Indian groups, and they illustrate that colonists discerned the relationship between missions and Indians in the 1840s, and conceived of it in geographical terms. These details of colonists’ everyday perceptions contributed to an overall sense that the missions contributed predictability to a landscape with many unpredictable elements. Moreover, this predictability facilitated migration and the Americanization of Oregon.

Whitman Massacre and the Destruction of Predictability

Because the Whitman Massacre led the ABCFM to close all its mission stations along the Columbia and throughout Oregon’s interior, it had far-reaching implications for the perceptions of these areas and the native people within it. The sense of predictability missions had previously provided broke down after the Massacre; in its wake it left only chaos. More, colonists had lost a major tool with which to imagine controlling the landscape of Oregon. The Massacre abruptly dismantled their mental map of the territory, and in the immediate aftermath they scrambled to find a new way to construct the environment as safe, controllable, and as a potential home.

In the aftermath of the Massacre descriptions of the interior focused on the disorder that pervaded the region and became part of the public discourse on the changing nature of the landscape east of the Cascades. William Craig, sub-agent for the Nez Percés, reported to his superior in a letter published in one of Oregon’s newspapers, and painted a vivid picture of the chaotic nature of Indian spatial arrangement now that the missions were closed and hostilities had opened. “The Indians appear unsettled—the Walla Walla especially,” Craig reported. Some had died of disease; others had disappeared and gone unseen for weeks. Others showed signs of allying with the hostile Cayuse while others were in shambles since their leaders had been killed or deserted them. He summed up the overall situation in the interior in a way that triggered

⁵⁵ Le Roy Reuben Hafen, *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842; with Diaries and Accounts by Sidney Smith, Amos Cook, Joseph Holman, E. Willard Smith, Francis Fletcher, Joseph Williams, Obadiah Oakley, Robert Shortess [and] T. J. Farnham*, The Far West and the Rockies Historical Series, 1820-1875 (Glendale, Calif. A. H. Clark Co, 1955), 248.

⁵⁶ Boyd, *People of the Dalles*, 149–150. A similar set of observations referred to Fort Vancouver. It was also a site of Indian inculcation and “civilization” most whites believed to be necessary in order to whites and Indians to cohabitate in Oregon. Herbert Beaver described Fort Vancouver’s significant influence in 1837: “Nearly two hundred of the Klickatack Tribe of Indians have congregated, for agricultural purposes, on a large plain about fourteen miles distant from the Fort, during the last summer, when I have paid them several visits...their visit attempts at cultivation being made, this year, with potatoes, Indian corn, and peas, furnished them by Chief Factor McLoughlin. Having no place in which to store it, they have brought hither several bushels of the last named product to be reserved for seed till next year. Their little gardens are well fenced, and altogether do them great credit. Indeed I was surprised at the regularity and cleanliness of their potato rows....”

colonists fears of an unfettered Indian population by observing, “It is not known how they will act.”⁵⁷ This type of description made its way into the newspaper and strengthened the connection in Willamette Valley colonist’s minds between the Whitman Massacre and the loss of all control in the interior.

As mentioned above, Indians who perpetrated the violence known as the Whitman Massacre took numerous hostages after killing the Whitmans and others. Many of these hostages were children, including the daughter to Henry and Eliza Spalding and the Sager children. The provisional government and the HBC took action to negotiate the release of the settlers, but until then colonists were deeply concerned about the fate of the hostages. What is more, they interpreted the hostage situation that followed the killings as evidence that without the missions to moor them, Indians were beyond the control of the settlers, and posed an immediate threat to American lives.

Colonists who experienced the interior following the Massacre mirrored these impressions. The campaigns against the Cayuse Indians required settlers who had made their home in the Willamette Valley to travel through the arid and unsettled eastern portions of the state without the comfort and certainty once provided by the mission stations. One participant in the Cayuse War summed up the geographical context of mobilization for the conflict: “There was then no settlement beyond the mountains, except the mission at The Dalles and the Whitman mission, and all the volunteers came from the Willamette Valley settlements.” Settler Cornelius Deffendorf punctuated the effect of losing the missions on his perception of the interior and those who lived there, describing them as “numerous in number, barbarous in principle, transient in their very nature,” with “homes ...unfettered by civilization, with almost a boundless waste before them to cover their retreats...”⁵⁸ Without the safe havens of the missions, the landscape of the eastern portion of Oregon would have been difficult to distinguish from the wasteland of the Great American Desert they crossed on their way out West. Now, in place of an interior ordered by the network of missions, they saw only seemingly unfettered Indians, a ramshackle group of underfed farmer-volunteers, and the seemingly never-ending expanse of space meandered all the way back to Independence, Missouri. Indeed, Peace Commissioner and soldier Robert Newell and his men suffered many similar privations during their tenure in the army that they and their fellows consistently suffered during their trip across the plains, which could have increased the sense that they had traveled back in time to their overland journey. His diary at times could be mistaken for that of an overland journey. Newell recorded, “about sunset we moved a short distance and camped no water to day and where we slept no water or wood.” On marches during the war, just like when crossing the overland trail, colonists constantly complained about the lack of water and wood.

Newell’s journal provides another point of contrast between the experience of traveling through the interior before and after the Massacre. That is, the experience of encountering the mission itself. Settlers had welcomed the appearance of Waiilatpu in the distance as an oasis, relishing each detail of the mission. They interpreted the buildings, women, food, the garden and orchard, as symbols of safety and of home. After the Massacre, Newell recorded how strongly the smoldering mission site evoked the loss of all semblance of hospitality to the surrounding environment. “Today a Nez Perce came to camp we saw the smoke and dust of the Kayuse Camp they are going from the Uvilla up above Dr. Whitman’s place and we hear to make an

⁵⁷ “Latest Intelligence,” *Oregon Free Press*, April 15, 1848.

⁵⁸ Bill Simmons, “In Early Days: How Western Oregon Looked in the Forties; The Story of the Cayuse War by One Who Was In It,” *Oregon Daily Statesman*, January 25, 1891.

attack on us.” The image of being surrounded by Indians while at the mission site had now become a chaotic one, starkly opposed to the comforting descriptions of how the Indians “congregated” around the missions. He described, “enemies are near we saw two come on a hill near by when we were there....” and felt it imminent that “the Nez Perces are moving this way and will join the Kayuses.” Without the missions, soldiers in the Cayuse War had no way of knowing through whose territory they might be traveling, and lacked any points on their mental maps to help make the landscape more legible. Newell wrote in his diary that during a long day of travel with little water, “we was surrounded by the Indians all day.” A few days later he noted: “No sooner had we started than we discovered swarms of these people on the hills.” These experiences contributed to the sense of foreignness and unpredictability that dominated colonial mental maps after the destruction of the missions. The contrast between a “swarm” and a “congregation” of Indians was indeed stark. It motivated them to contemplate new methods to create a sense of home in the Pacific Northwest.⁵⁹

Colonists like Newell imagined themselves to be surrounded by Indians while traveling through the interior during the war, and they also began to imagine the Willamette Valley as being dangerously surrounded by uncontrolled and unpredictable Indians. Imagining the Indians surrounding each mission and benefitting from the civilizing influence emanating therefrom had once comforted colonists. Now the Valley appeared to be surrounded by expanses filled with enigmatic and unpredictable Native Americans. A month after the Massacre, Abernathy wrote to the governor of California Territory and described his fear of “the Indian tribes surrounding us.”⁶⁰ This description, found in a letter requesting aid for the entire Oregon Country, reflected a mental map that encompassed all of the Pacific Northwest. In the wake of the Massacre, the same sense of chaos and disorder that colored Newell’s descriptions of the upper country drove Abernathy to conceive of the Willamette Valley as a whole as surrounded by Indians.⁶¹ This comment reflected a changing geographical image of Oregon; it was safe for Americans in the Willamette Valley and hostile everywhere else.⁶² In December 1847 the *Spectator* also used the image of a swarm to describe the vulnerability of Oregon’s colony: “The number of the white population in Oregon is alarmingly insignificant compared with the swarms of Indians which swarm its valleys.” The fear of an Indian alliance contributed to this shift in perception of the relationship between the Willamette Valley and the rest of the territory, and an increasingly polarized understanding of the relationship between Americans and Indians in the Oregon

⁵⁹ Robert Newell, *Memorandum of Travel to the Kiyuse War*, n.d., 19–20, 23. On the typical overland experience see Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*; “Oregon Pioneer Records.”

⁶⁰ George Abernathy, “Letter from Abernathy to R.B. Mason, Governor of California”, December 28, 1847, Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars Papers, Bx 047, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

⁶¹ There are other examples of colonists describing themselves as “surrounded” when they felt threatened by Indians whose actions and movements they could not predict. Captain Tichenor recorded being “surrounded by these hostile Indians” on an 1851 trip to the Umpqua River. Parrish, “Anecdotes of Intercourse with the Indians,” 54. Also in 1851, the language of being surrounded evoked strong responses in settlement communities. When news reached Jacksonville that Indians near Tule Lake had surrounded a company of emigrants, a group of colonists immediately set out to help. John E Ross, “Narrative of an Indian Fighter: Jacksonville, Oregon, and Related Materials”, n.d., 11, Bancroft Library. In a memorial to the federal government in the wake of the Massacre, J. Quinn Thornton also used the image of being surrounded to describe the situation. Settlers were distant from home and, now, “surrounded by restless tribes of Indians”, and therefore urgently needed the assistance of their central government. Thornton, “Historical Letter.” From the battlefield, H.A.G. Lee also painted a picture of the valley being surrounded by hostile Indians; H.A.G. Lee, “Letter from H.A.G Lee to Abernathy”, January 20, 1848, George Abernathy Papers 1833-1905, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁶²“Memorial to Congress,” *Oregon Spectator*, December 23, 1847.

territory resulted.⁶³ These types of spatial images are evidence of the shift in Oregonians' mental maps that occurred after the Massacre and war ruptured previous modes of thought.

The violence threatened to undermine the security of Oregonians' main source of connection to the United States: the overland trail. This triggered anxieties associated with the perceived distance of Oregon from the United States. Without active missions at Waiilatpu and The Dalles the final legs of the trip to the Willamette Valley were markedly different. In addition, the increasing image of unpredictability now associated with Columbia River Indian groups heightened fears about the safety of traveling along the trail at all. By calling the assumption of safe passage to and from the United States into question, the Massacre increased the stakes of Oregon's distance from the United States and made the terrestrial connection less of a comfort. Because of the symbolic significance of Waiilatpu and the mission network, settlers understood the Whitman Massacre as more than just an example of Indian savagery. It was a blow to the cultural, political, and geographic status quo in the region.

Oregon newspapers reported on the increased insecurity along the emigrant trail after the Massacre. This began with the printing of a memorial to congress written by the Provisional Government and published in the *Spectator* in December of 1848. The memorialists paid special attention to describing the nature of the distance that divided Oregon from the rest of the United States while attempting to convince the general government to send aid in the Indian War. They described Oregon colonists as "separated from [their] native land by a range of mountains whose lofty altitudes are mantled in eternal snows" and by a road of "three thousand miles—nearly two thirds of which is a howling wild."⁶⁴ Another memorialists to Congress requested the presence of armed military posts at strategic points along the trail that were previously guarded by mission stations. The most noteworthy was at Grand Ronde, a valley crossed by the Oregon Trail and nearby the former Whitman site. This spot was described as unique: "There is no place upon the whole line of communication so important for the establishment of a military post," as the Grand Ronde Valley.⁶⁵ The *Spectator* from October of 1848 reported that the Oregon Riflemen "have given the emigrants upon the northern road considerable aid, by way of teams and personal assistance." They comforted readers by reporting on the success of the Riflemen's efforts to prevent crimes by the now unfettered Cayuse, Nez Percés, and Walla Walla Indians.⁶⁶ While this article painted a rosy picture, the necessity of armed guards to accompany the immigration was unprecedented and represented the level of anxiety settlers placed upon the safety of the overland route.⁶⁷

Robert Newell's diary also reflected anxiety that communication with the United States would be compromised due to the Waiilatpu killings. He wrote, "On the 2nd of March Col. Gilliam took 2 companies and went to the place where the massacre took place." Newell went along to view what he called "the remains," which "looked horrible." In describing the property destroyed during the attack, he focused on "Papers letter pieces of Books Iron" and "waggon

⁶³ George Abernathy, "Letter from Abernathy to Major H.A.G. Lee", December 30, 1847, Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars Papers, University of Oregon Library Special Collections. Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*, 46.

⁶⁴ "Memorial to Congress."

⁶⁵ Thornton, "Historical Letter," 78.

⁶⁶ "Oregon Riflemen-Immigration," *Oregon Spectator*, n.d.

⁶⁷ Though the U.S. Army supplied guards for the overland route in the Great Plains, I found no evidence until after the Whitman Massacre that volunteers traveled alongside emigrants west of the Snake River. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 169–73.

wheels,” all objects obtainable primarily via the trail from the distant United States. The house itself was filled with such valuable property before it “was set on fire.” He encountered evidence of the destruction of letters, observing, “many lay about in the water.” The symbolic power of these letters were likely highlighted by the sheer length of time—over a year in some cases—required to send or receive a missive from back home. The destruction of letters called to mind the vulnerability of the overland route since the Massacre. Even with the route open and information flowing at its most efficient, the Oregonians felt isolated, alone, and vulnerable. Letters floating around the destroyed mission seemed to jeopardize communication systems, already so slow, and hint that they may be further disrupted. In this way, the Whitman Massacre seemed likely to increase the isolation of the American settlement in Oregon.⁶⁸ Governor Abernathy tapped into this shared anxiety among American settlers when after the Massacre he ordered his men to do all they could to “have the lives and property of our fellow citizens that may hereafter be traveling through the Indian Country, preserved.”⁶⁹

To resolve the problems caused by the destruction of safe space as a result of the Whitman Killings, settlers became more and more focused on the necessity of American presence in the Pacific Northwest. They connected their own isolation to the lack of official governmental protection from the United States after the Massacre, especially since it had been almost two years since the United States had gained sole right to the Oregon Country, and no material aid had arrived. The killings at Waiilatpu led to the replacement of all the Protestant missions in the interior with Catholic missions (considered foreign by most American settlers) or militarized posts (which reinforced the sense that eastern Oregon was a war zone).⁷⁰ Geographic isolation heightened settlers’ sense of their own weakness in relation to the Indians of the

⁶⁸ Newell also recorded that the Indians “hacked down the orchard and burned the fences.” For an illustration of the toll taken on settlers who waited so long to hear from loved ones see Whitman, *The Letters of Narcissa Whitman*; Newell, *Memorandum of Travel to the Kiyuse War*; Thomas R. Garth, “The Archeological Excavation of Waiilatpu Mission 1947 Report,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* XLIX, no. 2 (June 1948): 117–136.

⁶⁹ George Abernathy, “Letter from George Abernathy to the Commissioners to Treat with the Nez Perces Indians, and Other Tribes”, February 3, 1848, Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars Papers, Bx 047, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

The Massacre also heightened fears that Oregon’s distance would prevent the US from extending control over Oregon. When colonists heard of the Whitman Killings, they were already in a state of distrust of toward the federal government because they had expected to be given the protection of the US government in the form of territorial status after the resolution of the treaty with Great Britain. As one petitioner of the general government stated, “It was with grief and astonishment, therefore, that the people were informed by the immigrants who arrived in September, 1847, that your honorable body had adjourned without having done anything to relieve them from their peculiarly embarrassing, and, considered with reference to the Indians, even dangerous position.” The Massacre seemed to represent these fears coming true: “...they were again left to the serious inconveniences arising out of their extraordinary position, and to the perilous circumstances in which they were involved by being without arms and ammunition in the midst of savages clamorously demanding pay for their lands, and not unfrequently committing the most serious injuries by seizing property and by taking life, in consequence of the people having neither the ability nor the right to buy;” Thornton, “Historical Letter,” 78. “Having called upon the Government of the United States so often in vain, we have almost despaired of receiving its protection, yet we trust that our present situation, when fully laid before you, will at once satisfy your honorable body of the of the great necessity of extending the strong arm of guardianship and protection over this remote but beautiful and valuable portion of the United States dominion;” Lovejoy, “Memorial to Congress from Lovejoy to Senate and House of Representatives of the United States.”

⁷⁰ “The Late Engagement,” *Oregon Free Press*, April 15, 1848. This article read, “Some three or four hundred head of [Cayuse horses], in obedience to orders given, were herded by our troops, to be driven to Waiilatpu, or Fort Waters, as it is now called.”

Columbia Plateau. Without it, one settler argued, the settlers, “far removed from the arm of protection,” had no hope of winning against the Indians of the upper country. They used the hostage situation as evidence in their argument for an increased federal presence in Oregon, without which they believed there could be no safety. Thus, in the context of the Whitman Massacre and the Cayuse War, we see an increase preoccupation with the absence of protection from the United States government. This was articulated as the central component of their isolation under the circumstances of the moment.

Many colonists believed the Massacre would not have happened at all had the government already extended its protection over the territory. After the Massacre Daniel Young, who worked with his family at the Waiilatpu saw mill, testified to his own assumption that territorial status would have prevented the Massacre. A month before the killings, he heard “Dr. Whitman say at the mill, that the Catholics were evidently trying to set the Indians upon him, but he thought he could keep it down for another year, when he would be safe. I supposed he expected safety from the government being extended over the country.” When asked why he was nervous while traveling between the mill and the mission even before he knew of the Massacre, he replied, “Because we were in an Indian country, and I remembered what I had heard the Doctor say at the Umatilla...” In another instance we see increased focus on federal intervention as a result of the Massacre. In a letter asking the Hudson’s Bay Company for a loan to fund the military campaigns, settlers insisted: “the Unites States Government will consider the murder of the late Dr. Whitman and his lady, as a national wrong, and will fully justify the people of Oregon, in taking active measures to obtain redress for that outrage, and for, their protection from farther aggression.” This response must be read as part of broader colonial understandings about the nature of Oregon’s isolation. Colonists hoped to turn local experience of Whitman Massacre into a more meaningful incorporation into the nation, by painting it as a “national wrong.”⁷¹

Painting the Massacre as a “national wrong” was useful when asking the British-controlled Hudson’s Bay Company for material aid. But a more complicated geographic image was required when asking local American businesspeople for money to fight the Cayuse. In a letter penned by members of the Provisional Government to request wartime funding from the “merchants and citizens of Oregon,” colonists used a more fine-toothed argument to describe the distinction between different types of Oregon space and their relationship to the federal government. The writers of this letter recognized, no doubt, that the merchants of Oregon did not consider it their role to fund military campaigns. “Though the Indians of the Columbia have committed a great outrage upon our fellow citizens,” they began, “that duty more particularly devolves upon the government of the United States, and admits of delay, we do not make this the strongest ground upon which to found our earnest appeal to you for pecuniary assistance.” The writers knew that they would need another angle to secure the assistance of Oregon’s merchants. Thus, they argued that each Oregonian had personal responsibility for the events at Whitman Station. “It is a fact well known to every person acquainted with the Indian character, that by passing silently over their repeated thefts, robberies, and murders of our fellow citizens they have been emboldened to the commission of the appalling massacre at Waiilatpoo.” For Americans living in Oregon, the strongest motivator to take action against the Cayuse murderers was an appeal to the vulnerability of the Willamette Valley. Oregonians would be “destitute of the hearts and courage of men and if we allow this wholesale murder to pass by as former aggressions, who

⁷¹ Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 11.

can tell how long either life or property will be secure in any part of this country, or what moment the valley of the Willamette will be the scene of blood and carnage.”⁷² In appealing to the widespread fear of the invasion of the Willamette Valley, the writers also painted a geographical picture of the Oregon Country that separated the Willamette Valley from the rest of the territory by implying that it was the responsibility of Oregon’s citizens to protect the Valley from Indian attack, while the responsibility to handle the Indian problems east of the Cascades lay with the Federal Government. This implication was an attempt at redrawing of lines of sovereignty and signification as a result of the geographical scramble that accompanies war. It is an image that would have been unthinkable before the Massacre, when a network of missions rendered the interior and upper Columbia as part of the same whole as the Willamette Valley settlements.

Remapping Indian Country

After the Massacre, the mapping of space in eastern Oregon included attempts at ordering, rationalizing, and labeling the territory inhabited by the Native Americans of the region. American efforts to concretize and fix Indian groups into particular territories can be discerned in the treaty the Peace Commission drafted in its council with the Nez Percé on 7 March 1848. In its first section, the Nez Percé agreed not to allow any Cayuse who participated in the Waiilatpu killings “to flee into and remain within their territory in order to escape proper punishment,” and to “respect the person and property of the whites who are not within their territory, and such others as shall be sent by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to live amongst them...but no other white man shall be permitted to intrude upon their lands without their consent.” In the same document, the whites agreed not to make war on the Nez Percé nor “intrude upon their rights by settling upon their lands without their consent.” In the interests of reinscribing safe travel routes through the Plateau, the whites specifically retained “the privilege...to pass through the Nez Perce country at pleasure.” In the hopes of fixing the Indians within their own territories and delineating Indian from Euroamerican territory, the Nez Percé were assured only the privilege of “passing through the settlements of the whites for purposes of trade.”⁷³ The Treaty reflected settlers’ desire to replace the ordering system previously provided by the mission network with a new one. They hoped to create a new spatial schema that could facilitate and regulate trade and intercourse between whites and Indians, delineate the separateness of white territory and Indian territory, and inscribe the normativity of geographic fixedness as a way to ease settlers’ fears of a nomadic Indian population.

This determination reflected colonists’ anxiety over whether the boundaries they sought to distinguish their settlements from the “Indian Country” could be relied upon following the violence at Waiilatpu. In order to shore up as many of the Valley’s borders as possible, the governor requested “The presence of a sloop of war,” arguing it “would go a great way towards preventing [Indians] from uniting.” The utility of a warship for an Indian war fought on

⁷² Loan Commissioners, “Letter from the Loan Commissioners to the Merchants and Citizens of Oregon”, December 13, 1847, Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars Papers, Bx 047, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

⁷³ Joel Palmer, Robert Newell, and H.A.G. Lee, “Treaty of Peace Between the Americans and Nez Percés; Concluded at Waiilatpu by Joel Palmer, Robert Newell, and H.A.G. Lee, Commissioners on the Part of the Oregon Government, and Chiefs of the Nez Percés”, March 7, 1848, Cayuse, Yakima, and Rogue River Wars Papers, Bx 047, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

horseback 200 miles inland is difficult to grasp; it made sense when one remembers that the boundaries Oregon settlers were constructing were largely ideological. The sloop would represent a powerful message regarding who held the ultimate sovereignty over the Valley. As Abernathy explained to the Commander of the Pacific Squadron: “A sloop of war anchored in the Columbia River at Vancouver or near the mouth of the Willamette river, would exert a powerful influence in our behalf, the Indians would be led to believe that our Chief of whom they have often heard, was ready to examine into and punish any wrongs they might inflict on American Citizens, a supply of ammunition could be furnished to repel any attacks they might make on us, and would also let the citizens of the United States dwelling on this distant land know that they were not neglected.”⁷⁴ Disoriented after the Massacre, settlers sought to fill the vacuum of geographical meaning by erecting new geographical markers of sovereignty. An American warship docked at the intersection of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers was an effort to reinscribe safe space in an Oregon community whose sense of it had been severely destabilized. With the visible aid of the United States representing the promise of membership in the nation, colonists hoped the Willamette Valley would appear to be a secure home for the budding colony.

⁷⁴ George Abernathy, “Letter from Abernathy to Mason”, January 26, 1848, Oregon Territory Archives: Letters, Reports, Messages, Memorials, and Other Papers Not Published in the Office of the Secretary of State, BANC MSS P-A 55, Bancroft Library. Other letters mentioning a sloop of war include: Abernathy, “Letter from Abernathy to R.B. Mason, Governor of California.” Abernathy, “Letter from Abernathy to Mason.” R.B. Mason, “Letter from R.G. Mason to Abernathy”, December 28, 1847, Oregon Territory Archives: Letters, Reports, Messages, Memorials, and Other Papers Not Published in the Office of the Secretary of State, Bancroft Library.

A Vastly Important Region: Gold Rush and Vernacular Geography in Southwest Oregon, 1848-1853

Late in July 1848, about six months after the initial discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, vessels from Honolulu arrived in the Columbia with news of the strike, and began a Gold Rush story that historians have left largely unexplored.¹ Carried by travelers on horseback and on foot from claim to claim, the news spread quickly. By some estimates nearly half of the 10,000 white inhabitants left for the diggings before winter fell. The enthusiasm drove Oregon's settler-farmers far afield, and their movements had a dramatic impact on the human geography of the Pacific Northwest.² Economic consequences also resulted, as gold seekers returned to the Valley with enough specie to transform the previously cash-poor economy and California's demand increased the markets for agricultural goods.³ Most importantly for the cultural history of Oregon's conquest, the rush for gold prompted American colonists to expand permanent settlement into Southwest Oregon, an area they previously avoided because they feared the region's Indian inhabitants. While leaving the security of the Willamette Valley and expanding into areas coded as dangerous and foreign, colonists reconceived of their relationship to Oregon's landscape, to the United States, and to Native Americans. They managed the

¹ Historians have convincingly established that the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada in 1848 transformed the Pacific Coast and had major impact on the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the United States. The best scholarship on the subject includes: Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Rodman Wilson Paul and Elliott West, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001); Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); J. S. Holliday and William Swain, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Stephen Fender, *Plotting the Golden West: American Literature and the Rhetoric of the California Trail* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12, 57. Fender has called attention to the gold rush as an impetus for the creation of large bodies of knowledge and narratives, in his case focusing on the "explosion of vernacular autobiography." But comparatively little research has looked specifically at the impact of the Gold Rush on the American colony in Oregon. Some examples of the available scholarship on this topic include: Marion D. Ross, "Jacksonville, an Oregon Gold-Rush Town," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12, no. 4 (December 1953): 19-25; Ralph J. Roske, "The World Impact of the California Gold Rush 1849-1857," *Arizona and the West* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 187-232; Rodman W. Paul, "After the Gold Rush: San Francisco and Portland," *The Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (February 1982): 1-21. On the disastrous consequences of the Gold Rush for California's Indians see Albert L. Hurtado, "California Indians and the Workaday West: Labor, Assimilation, and Survival," *California History* 69, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 2-11; Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Robert Fleming Heizer, *The Destruction of California Indians: A Collection of Documents from the Period 1847 to 1865 in Which Are Described Some of the Things That Happened to Some of the Indians of California* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Robert F. Heizer and Alan J. Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination Under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

² Roske, "The World Impact of the California Gold Rush 1849-1857," 193.

³ Schwantes' definitive textbook of Pacific Northwest history contains no mention of the California Gold Rush. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*. It is only briefly mentioned in Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 194; Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 40-45.

challenges posed by these experiences using tools developed over the course of the first fifteen years of colonization. They interrelated daily experiences with powerful narrative abstractions as part of the dialectic process of making place and nation through vernacular geography. In this new environment, though, they were only just beginning what would be a long and violent process of conquering Southwest Oregon.

It would be more difficult to transform Southwest Oregon than the Willamette Valley. It was even emptier of recognizable landmarks, named places, or geographic markers than the Valley with its missions, trading posts, and forts. Emptiness alone was challenging enough, but legendary narratives of hostile, violent, and barbarous Native American inhabitants also populated Southwest Oregon. These narratives were the basis for colonial mental maps of the area, and coded the entire area as dangerous and hostile. Even more, real Native American people inhabited Southwest Oregon's valleys, mountains, and coastal regions who, unlike the Kalapuyan residents of the Willamette Valley after the late 1830s, lived in independent, numerous, and powerful groups. These Takelma, Shasta, and Athapaskan people presented a formidable obstacle to American hegemony in the area south of the Willamette Valley.

To manage these new variables, colonists tapped into their linguistic and experiential conventions—centered on conceptions of space—in two interconnected ways between 1848 and 1853. First, they honed a workable system of vernacular navigation, which had its origins in a local tradition of wayfinding dating back to the 1840s. Southwest Oregon encouraged the development of this system of vernacular navigation and increased its centrality to colonists' self-identities. Second, Oregonian gold seekers used narrative means to create a sense of shared history in the land and inscribe their versions of history and reality into the landscape, while simultaneously reshaping their surroundings through navigation, road building, place naming, and acts of domination against local Indians. In all these acts, colonists sought to magnify their power through geographical means, and then to wield that power against Indians whose legal claim to the land had not been fully nullified, legally or culturally.

That Indian claims remained intact in the eyes of the law did not differentiate Southwest Oregon from the rest of the territory, but the character and history of Indian/white relations did present a stark contrast. What distinguished Southwest Oregon was that Native American populations there had no history with European missions and had never been successfully incorporated into the Hudson's Bay Company as fur traders; they had generally remained independent of and unimpressed by external power in the early nineteenth century.⁴ With official legal title evasive, colonists sought other means to legitimize control over space in Southwest Oregon. "Gold Fever," raised the stakes of controlling space and establishing defensible and locally respected claims to control territory.

"Rogue" Indians and a Changing Region

In December 1851, just as Oregonians adjusting to the impact of California gold, another discovery of the precious metal took place on two small tributaries of the Rogue River, right in the heart of an area identified in settlers' minds with legendarily hostile Indians. As news spread, the rush was on in the first months of 1852 and the colony expanded its permanent settlement for the first time beyond the confines of the Willamette Valley. That summer the town of Table Rock City (in 1853 renamed Jacksonville) was surveyed and established as the seat of the first

⁴ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 16.

Southwest Oregon County. Jacksonville and Yreka became the two main gathering points in a new gold mining region that spanned the northern reaches of California and the south of Oregon, and a road that was alternately called the “Indian Trail,” the “Portland-San Francisco Trail,” the “Siuslaw Trail,” the “Eugene Florence Trail”, the “Old Trail,” the “Trapper’s Trail,” “California-Oregon Trail” or the “miner’s trail” connected the Willamette Valley to Yreka, passing through these two cities.⁵ The next year, when gold was discovered along the Southwest Oregon coast due west of the Rogue River mines, Scott’s Valley near the mouth of the Umpqua River became the center of shipping for this new region, while immense pack trains fanned out in a somewhat chaotic network of paths, carrying supplies into the mining towns, settlements, and camps.⁶

Legends about the Indians who lived in Southwest Oregon colored colonists’ mental maps of this newly settled region. Since they began exploring the area in the 1820s, Euroamericans had referred to the numerous bands of Shastas, Takelmas, and Athapaskans of southwestern Oregon as “les conquin” or Rogues. Through 1851 called the area “Rogue’s river” or the “Rogue’s Valley,” reflecting that whites understood this “largely unknown region to be in the possession of rogues.” It was only after 1852, with increased Euroamerican presence in the area that the Indians became defined “in terms of the landscape” as “Rogue Rivers” or “Rogue River Indians.” The name remained in use and, in the words of historian Gray Whaley, “contributed to the fervent hostility against these people, including, by the late 1850s, calls for their extermination by settler colonists.”⁷ The incident that did the most to originate this reputation was the famed massacre of the Jedediah Smith party in 1828 by Kalawatsets on the lower Umpqua. The violence broke out, it was told, when each side perceived themselves to be violated by the other (a Kalawatset man stole an ax and took a horse on a joyride, and one of Smith’s men tried to rape a Kalawatset woman). Then, a group of Kalawatsets attacked Smith’s camp and killed most of his men.⁸ This story, and others about the hostile nature of these Indians, passed through word of mouth, newspaper coverage, guidebooks, and correspondence. The hostile nature of the Rogues and their territory became accepted as fact as early as 1846, when Overton Johnson and William H. Winter, as well as longtime Catholic missionary Father Blanchet defined them as such in widely printed volumes.⁹ Jesse Applegate, who explored the Umpqua Valley in 1846 while seeking a southern route into the Willamette Valley, remembered signs in the landscape that evoked these myths. He wrote that his horse trail was littered with broken arrows and other signs of a previous battle, and assumed it was fought between Umpqua Indians and Euroamerican travelers. In April of the following year the *Spectator* printed a letter

⁵ On Jacksonville’s early history, Marion D. Ross, “Jacksonville, an Oregon Gold-Rush Town,” 19. For the changing names of the road connecting the Willamette Valley to the Northern California gold region, Loris Inman, “The Road Across Lane County, Oregon, To California. Known as the Old Trail 1836 and Before the Applegate Trail 1846 Territorial Road 1854,” *Lane County Historian* 12, no. 1 (Spring and Summer 1967): 3; John Gulick, “John Thomas Gulick Papers”, 1841, 13, Bancroft Library.

⁶ Arthur Loreston Throckmorton, *Oregon Argonauts: Merchant Adventurers on the Western Frontier* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1961), 164. The coastal rush fizzled by 1854 but some mining continued along the coast for a time; Marion D. Ross, “Jacksonville, an Oregon Gold-Rush Town,” 19.

⁷ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 80, 195.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹ Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains*. Francis Norbert Blanchet, *A Comprehensive, Explanatory, Correct Pronouncing Dictionary, and Jargon Vocabulary: To Which Is Added Numerous Conversations, Enabling Any Person to Speak the Chinook Jargon* (O.T., S.J. M’Cormick, at the Franklin Book Store, 1853).

of advice penned by Charles G. Pickett that reflected a similar tendency to conflate the mythic barbarity of the Southwest Oregon Indians with the nature of the land itself. Pickett isolated the “character of [Rogue River Indians’] country” as “preclud[ing] the idea of making peace with them, or ever maintaining treaties if made...”¹⁰

Knowledge of these legends provided the backdrop for early encounters between colonists and Southwestern Oregon’s landscape and native inhabitants. The characteristics colonists assigned to the Rogue Indians and those they assigned to the Southwest Oregon landscape—independence, hostility, and wildness—tended to slip and merge in settlers’ minds.¹¹ This slippage between territory and inhabitants would continue to influence colonial images of Southwest Oregon throughout the 1850s.

Local History of Wayfinding

When colonists moved into Southwest Oregon in search of gold they traveled, armed with a local tradition of wayfinding, into a landscape defined by the legend of the Rogue Indians. This tradition emboldened them to make initial forays into hostile territory. It emerged from experience in local terrain, and therefore earned legitimacy according to local geographic discourse. When gold was discovered in California and Southwest Oregon, these traditions of vernacular navigation and the cultural modes that accompanied them continued to define the process of expansion into the hostile space of Southwest Oregon.

Since the earliest large migrations in the 1840s, overland migrants commonly attempted to establish better routes, or “cutoffs,” creating new routes between two previously known points. They were so named because they promised to cut off distance (the constant enemy) from the trip, and tempting because they promised to shorten travel times and reduce the difficulty of journeys to the Pacific Coast. The Donner Party, delayed in 1846 by its ill-fated decision to take the Hastings Cutoff, is perhaps the most famous group of migrants to attempt one of these shortcuts. Oregon migrants were eager to embark on cutoffs because the standard route, while enjoying a measure of legitimacy because fur traders, missionaries, and American colonists had used it widely over the previous decades, also had a reputation for being extremely dangerous. It took travelers through the steep inclines of the Blue Mountains (by far more difficult for wagons to cross than the famed Rockies) and along the treacherous Columbia River and through The Dalles before it entered the Willamette Valley.¹²

Colonists, whether they took the standard route or risked a cutoff, continually confronted unknown landscapes without the aid of stable geographic knowledge. Every route was up in the air. Migrants were likely to face the uncertainty and stress of being propositioned by men vowing to lead them on a more efficient and quicker route. 1846 migrant Lucy Deady expressed settlers’ shared experience when she commented on “the confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the emigrants as to which was the best route to take. There were so many people who claimed to know all about it that gave such contradictory reports that the emigrants did not know whom to believe....”¹³ Cutoffs called for moving into unmarked and seemingly history-less territory. They

¹⁰ Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 39, 41.

¹¹ For another eerily similar tale of exploration from the Coast into unknown Southern Oregon see Caspar Hopkins, *Caspar T. Hopkins Autobiography*, 1885, 9–10; Parrish, “Anecdotes of Intercourse with the Indians,” 44–54.

¹² “Joel Palmer Narrative (Interview with Bancroft, 1878)”, June 14, 1878, 4, MSS 114 - Joel Palmer Papers, Box, 1, Folder 9, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹³ Lucy Deady, *Recollections*, 1923, 4–5.

also meant breaking off from the security provided by other trains, giving up the possibility of receiving news from the “Roadside Telegraph” or from travelers returning east or who had turned around before reaching Oregon.¹⁴

An examination of early wayfinding in Oregon shows that experiences navigating through unknown land generated cultural mores and community values. These were kept alive through the repetition of stories depicting famed, or infamous, cutoff journeys. The near-tragic story of Meek’s Cutoff (1845) exemplifies the way community values forged during the wayfinding experience became standards for legitimate geographic knowledge (See figure 3.1). These standards became fundamental to the discourse of power settlers would later use to wrestle control of Southwest Oregon spaces from Native American owners.

Stephen Meek (brother of famed mountain man Joe Meek, who played an important role in colonial response to the Whitman Massacre) convinced 1,000 emigrants to break from the main train just after Fort Boise, Oregon, and follow him into spaces that were at best only sparsely plotted on their mental maps.¹⁵ Faced with the option to take such a risk, colonists tried to fill in maps with any available information. Meek claimed to have located a surefire route through the “unmapped interior,” and confidently signed contracts and vowed to “give his head for a football” if the train did not reach The Dalles in thirty days or less, with 200 miles cut off the normal trip. Despite these assurances, the prospective emigrants sought to corroborate his story, using information available through oral communication and personal contact.¹⁶

¹⁴ Unruh has written about a system of communication overlanders called “Roadside Telegraph” or the “Bone Express” (because people carved messages into animal bones and human skulls), the name given to the practice of leaving notes and messages at conspicuous places (including river crossings) along the trail, often at places where the trail forked and it was difficult to know which way to go. These messages proved important in making the choice of whether to follow a less tested route. At these spots there were often so many messages posted that they became known as “prairie post offices,” and some would decide to take a cutoff only after reading the posted reports that well-known and respected trail leaders had previously taken the cutoff; *The Plains Across*, 131–135.

¹⁵ When Samuel K. Barlow successfully established his toll road around Mt. Hood in 1846, he also ran into problems. The new route allowed emigrants on the northern route to avoid the treacherous rapids. But, that first group still suffered due to the fact that they were too late in the season to complete the trip around the snow-covered peak. Many had run out of food before they stored their belongings and turned back toward The Dalles after realizing the trail was blocked by snow; and they too relied on a relief expedition to get them through to the safety of the Willamette Valley settlements; *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁶ Bassett et al., *Oregon Historic Trails*, 201–203; Francis Haines, *The Applegate Trail: Southern Emigrant Route*, 1976, 2. The Provisional Government had already funded an expedition to explore this route as an option to reach the Willamette Valley, without success; Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 292. The Meek cutoff story was often mentioned in contemporary diaries. For example see Mary Osborn Douthit, *Souvenir of Western Women* (Portland, Or: Presses of Anderson & Duniway Company, 1905), 27–28; “Joel Palmer Narrative (Interview with Bancroft, 1878),” 123. The story recently inspired a feature film, *Meek’s Cutoff*, Director Kelly Reichardt, 2010. Contrast my interpretation of the way migrants legitimized trail information to Stillson, *Spreading the Word*, 85–118.

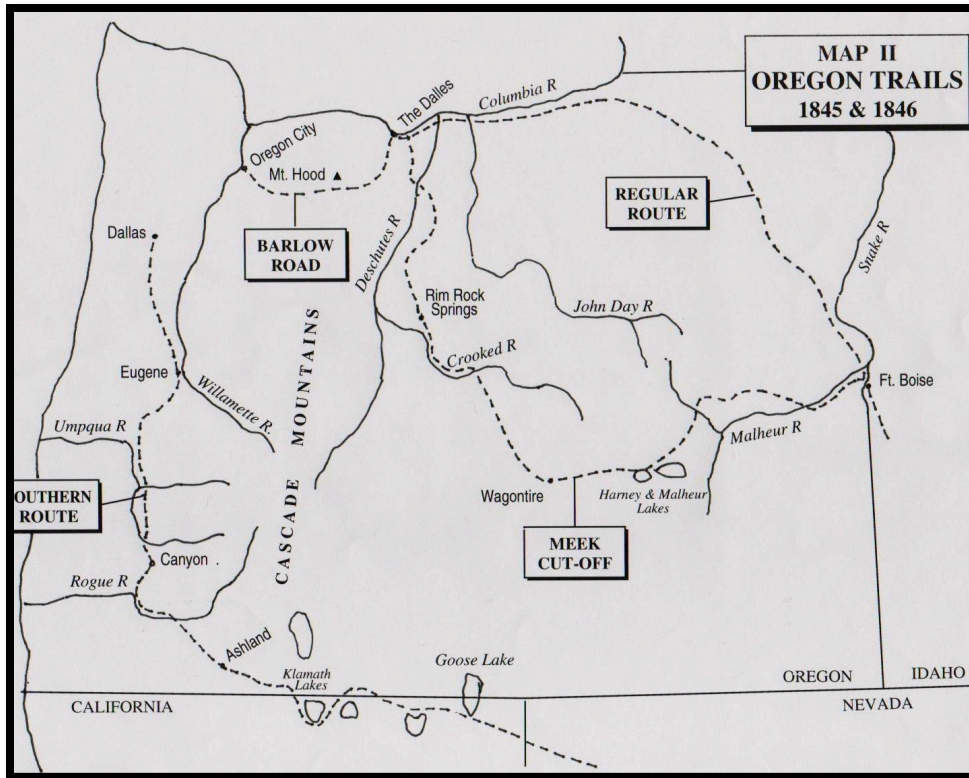


Figure 3.1 – Major cutoffs of the mid-1840s (taken from www.oregonoverland.com)

When migrants checked out Meek’s claims to be a highly qualified guide, they were not simply trying to verify Meek’s character, but also to piece together available information about the details of the landscape to verify the plausibility of his claims and his knowledge. They sought to gather information that could fill in the blank spaces on their mental maps in the otherwise empty and desolate-seeming “Oregon Desert,” as colonists called it.¹⁷ 1845 migrant Samuel Hancock’s reminiscences record the process some members of Meek’s train undertook to gather geographical information. He remembered that Meek had approached his train and claimed to have “traveled the country between his point and Oregon many times and was quite familiar with the route....” Before agreeing, Hancock and his fellows “consulted with the Manager [Mr. Craigie] at Fort Boise, in relation to this and he informed us that Mr. Meek had passed the Fort three times to his knowledge, and also that he knew that there was a pack trail, through the country that Mr. Meeks designed going, so the most of us decided to follow him; after going down the river for a few miles we turned up a creek, leaving the old road that was traveled by the trappers.”¹⁸ Hancock remembered two pieces of information that led him to follow Meek. First, he learned that Meek had not been lying about traveling over the route numerous times. He also remembered learning that the manager of the fort had stored, in his own mental map, knowledge of a pack trail along the route Meek had described to his potential customers. This provided an image of the territory through which the migrants would pass, painting it as having been previously traversed by humans, unobstructed, and therefore capable

¹⁷ Leah Menefee, “Cutoff Fever,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* Vols. 77-79 (1976 1978): 309. Menefee uses the term “Oregon Desert” to describe central Oregon through which the Meek, Elliott, and Macy parties traveled.

¹⁸ Bassett et al., *Oregon Historic Trails*, 203.

of sustaining them until they reached their destination. Thus, it represents a moment where the process of the creation of vernacular geographic discourse is visible. The manager used community standards to assess the validity of Meek's claim to valuable knowledge based on certain types of experience in the region. While being interviewed by Hancock, he transferred this knowledge to the members of Meek's party, who used it in their efforts at wayfinding in an unfamiliar place. In turn, the outcome of this foray into the unmapped "Oregon Desert" would continue to circulate on the networks of communication through which colonists created knowledge and darkened the lines of their mental maps as part of their efforts to Americanize Oregon's landscape.

It turned out Meek had drastically overestimated his knowledge of the proposed route, and it was not long until many "were reduced to eating berries with dried grasshoppers provided by area Indians."¹⁹ Being forced to subsist on foods considered suitable only for Native Americans must have highlighted the precariousness of the party's position. The final members of the company arrived in the Willamette Valley in late January, four to five months later than they planned. As many as 30 people died en route, and another 25 or so died once they reached The Dalles, including one who perished from overeating. Those who did survive owed their lives to the residents of The Dalles who, after a small group of lost travelers forged ahead to find aid, met them, provided them with food and water, and guided them to their settlement.

Meek's story highlighted the fallibility of specific pieces of vernacular geographic knowledge, but it colonists remembered it as reinforcing the legitimacy of vernacular navigation as a method of civilizing the landscape. By focusing on Meek's culpability for the party's hardships, and on the residents of The Dalles for heroically and devotedly running supplies to the stranded emigrants, colonists used the Meek episode as a symbol of the colony's growing geographical mastery. Applying the moniker trailblazer to those who followed men like Meek and survived celebrated this particularly geographical facet of territorial conquest.

It also demonstrates that, in the absence of reliable and predictable geographic knowledge, trails, or roads, vernacular modes of establishing the legitimacy of routes prevailed. Meek's dishonorable behavior angered colonists who knew they had little more than a community-maintained vernacular standing between themselves and tragedy. Meek had breached a community standard that was especially important given the precariousness of overland travel, and especially of navigating formerly unknown routes. By promising on his life that he could get the party to the Willamette Valley safely, misleading the party during the trip as supplies ran low, and stealing away at night rather than facing the consequences of his actions among the cutoff party and their rescuers in The Dalles, Meek had acted at the height of dishonor.²⁰ Indeed,

¹⁹ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 292; Ira Poole, "Canyonville: A Pioneer Town 1828-1868," *Pioneer Days in Canyonville*, August 1968, 5. In one of those ironies of history, Meek had only just completed a job guiding Lansford Hastings from the Willamette Valley to California; this only a year before Hastings would guide the ill-fated Donner party on a "cutoff" of his own. Members of Meek's party did not forget this when they wrote their stories. W.W. Walter remembered: "Had we still followed [Meek] on the course, not one would have lived through it, would have been another case like the Donner party." W.W. Walter, "Recollections, Ca. 1880", n.d., 2, MSS 739, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁰ Haines, *The Applegate Trail*, 2. Meek's cutoff was not the last attempt at finding a cutoff across the middle latitudes of Oregon into the mid-Willamette Valley. In 1853 a man named Elijah Elliot led a group of wagons a route almost identical to what would later be known as the "Free Emigrant Road." Elliot's group almost starved on the way, and they also were called a "Lost Wagon Train." The next year, in 1854, William M. Macy tinkered Elliott's route and led a train without incident into Lane County. That route was the called the Free Emigrant Road

Oregon's colonists did not forget Meek's breach of conduct in 1845. Survivors blamed Meek for the tragic series of events and his cutoff was remembered as "the lost wagon train." It was the dishonor of Stephen Meek that remained the center of the telling and retelling of this story of the "lost wagon train," both directly after the event and in the ensuing years.

The Applegate Trail carried a more celebratory, but not entirely dissimilar, legacy. The efforts to explore the Applegate Trail, or Southern Route, were the result of a colony-wide desire to find an alternative to the Columbia River route.²¹ In 1845, colonists enthusiastically sent Jesse Applegate, Levi Scott and thirteen other Oregon colonists on a trip to explore a new route to connect the Willamette Valley to the Oregon Trail from the south (see Figure 3.1). They envisioned it as fully American in character and free of the influence and rules of the Hudson's Bay Company. It seems the whole of the community was tracking the company's progress. In a private letter to HAG Lee, a friend described the determination of the southern route explorers: "The party left the Rickreall on the 22nd of this month in fine spirits and in high hopes of bringing the [next] immigration in at the head of the Willamette Valley. They left with firm determination never to retrace their steps, never to abandon the noble and philanthropic enterprise until they shall have found a good wagon road if such a thing be possible."²² Newspapers tracked the party's progress eagerly. And on 1 October 1846 the *Spectator* reported with excitement when Applegate reached Fort Hall and convinced migrants to follow the new road with him. "This achievement is a great piece of public enterprise on the part of Captain Applegate, and we hope he will be rewarded accordingly."²³ The route enabled Oregon's emigrants to enter the Willamette Valley from the south after breaking off from the traditional northern route shortly after Fort Hall. It was also later adopted as part of the "Miner's Trail" upon which colonists moved from the Willamette Valley into Southwest Oregon. The first party to travel on this newly discovered cutoff, though, ran into difficulties similar to Meek's route and likewise required rescue from Willamette Valley communities.

Immediately after the arrival of this first party, six months late in February 1847, some colonists began to accuse Applegate of breaking the code of vernacular geography. Jessy Quinn Thornton, a particularly irate emigrant "began filling the columns of Oregon newspapers with diatribes against the Applegates and their trail." The explorers and their supporters retaliated in kind. The whole affair reached a fever pitch closely followed in the local press when James Nesmith, a major supporter of the Applegate faction, went to Oregon City vowing to kill Thornton, who evaded Nesmith by refusing to receive any communications from him. Nesmith retaliated by posting a handbill all over the city calling Thornton a "reclaimless liar, an infamous scoundrel, a blackhearted villain, an arrant coward, a worthless vagabond" and, last but not least,

and was later to be used to facilitate the exploration and settlement of central and eastern Oregon. See Menefee, "Cutoff Fever."

²¹ Hazelett, "'Let Us Honor Those to Whom Honor Is Due:' The Discovery of the Final Link in the Southern Route to Oregon," 222; "[Unknown Title]," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], March 19, 1846); "[Unknown Title]," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, O.T. [i.e. Or.], April 2, 1846). For examples of accounts of families who lost people on the Columbia portion of the northern route see Theodore Stern and Oregon State University Press, *Chiefs & Change in the Oregon Country: Indian Relations at Fort Nez Percés, 1818-1855*, vol. 2 (Oregon State University Press, 1996), 367n20; Lindsay Applegate, "Notes and Reminiscences of Laying Out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road into Southern Oregon in the Year 1846," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1921): 13-14.

²² H.A.G. Lee, "Letter from [Nat Ford?] to H.A.G. Lee", June 25, 1846, Box 1 Folder 2, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

²³ Haines, *The Applegate Trail*, 12.

an “imported miscreant.”²⁴ Others who traveled on the trail’s inaugural trip agreed with Nesmith, believing that Applegate purposefully misrepresented the length of the southern route. One such emigrant remembered her first encounter with Applegate: “At Fort Hall three or four trains were decoyed off by a rascally fellow, who came out from the settlements in Oregon.”²⁵

This very public kerfuffle over Applegate’s honor was based in anxieties about Oregon’s ability to achieve predictability using only limited locally available tools. Misleading migrants and taking them on a dangerous trip through uncharted territory called into question the viability of community-based, vernacular navigation in Oregon. And colonists had little else to render the territory predictably navigable. Without workable navigation, Oregonians were in trouble and their project of Americanizing the territory appeared potentially untenable.

Just as colonists saw opening the Applegate Trail as a way to increase the predictability and familiarity of landscapes in Oregon, they also interpreted their experience building and traveling the trail as a way to strengthen their own claims, as Americans, to a Southwest Oregon otherwise strongly under the control of Indian groups. A “cutoff” was just an idea until a group of people did the hard work of clearing land, marking directions, discovering the most convenient way across rivers, canyons, and mountains and smoothing rough terrain to make it passable for wagons. By doing this labor, colonists cultivated the notion that they owned the land.²⁶ Scott, Harris and the Applegates had only “viewed” the trail and ascertained that it was possible to pass; it was the migrants themselves who turned that possibility into a reality. On the Applegate road, trailblazing sometimes included heavy labor more commonly associated with settlement than with travel. For example, some migrants worked with Applegate to enlarge the natural springs at Black Rock Desert so that more water could be accessible to travelers.²⁷

Colonists framed their memories of the trip on the cutoffs to construct themselves as trailblazers who opened the country to Americans. The difficulty of traveling the trail was often associated with the fact that they were the first to open the route for wagon travelers. As one migrant remembered, “The going was terribly rough. We were the first party to take the Southern cutoff, so there was no road.”²⁸ Many used the word “rough” to describe the experience of traveling on a cutoff, by examining a selection it is possible to narrow in on its meaning. Lindsay Applegate described the roughness by calling attention to the slowness of travel, noting that at times it took two to three weeks to travel the 11 miles of the “historic Umpqua Canyon.” He also described heavy labor required to cross this canyon, including dismantling wagons and moving them downstream. Evidence of the difficulty of crossing the canyon remained on the trail after it was blazed by those first pioneers, he remembered, “Both the Canyon and the flat at the north

²⁴ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 295.

²⁵ Haines, *The Applegate Trail*, 25. Quoting Tabitha Brown.

²⁶ On the cultural importance of the labor theory of value to mid nineteenth-century Americans see James L. Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor: The American Concept of Wealth Distribution, 1765-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); *Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 105. On the way an ecological perspective on history reveals the limit of the labor theory of value as explained by Karl Marx, see William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 140–150.

²⁷ Haines, *The Applegate Trail*, 12.

²⁸ Charles Davis, *Scott-Applegate Trail, 1846-1847, Atlas and Gazetteer, Southern Route to Oregon, Marys River to LaCreole Creek* (North Plains, Or.: Soap Creek Enterprises, 1995), 12; Deady, *Recollections*, 6; Poole, “Canyonville: A Pioneer Town 1828-1868,” 4. The Applegate party camped at the entrance to the Umpqua Canyon, now the site of Canyonville, Oregon. The canyon was rough. Sometimes it took two to three weeks to travel the 11 miles of the canyon. Many places required dismantling wagons and moving them downstream.

end were sometimes littered with abandoned equipment.”²⁹ Another example comes from Lucy Jane Hall’s memory of traveling on Meek’s cutoff. In describing the trail on Meek’s cutoff as “rough beyond description” she followed it up by noting, “the women and children walked most of the way.”³⁰

Events that occurred in the course of wayfinding also became incorporated into vernacular geographic discourse. The story of Grave Creek was part of the larger Applegate legend that held particular resonance for Oregon’s settlers during later years. It was common for the diarists who traveled in 1846 to record something about the tragedy at a creek involving the death of 16-year-old Martha Leland Crowley and the history of her grave. Lucy Deady, whose recollections are especially detailed, wrote, “They buried her beneath a big pine tree on the banks of a small stream which they christened Grave creek, and which still bears that name. The oxen were corralled over her grave so the Indians would not dig her up to get her clothing.” By burying Crowley on this new trail and seeking to protect her resting place from Indians, the settlers were inscribing the place with a deep sense of ownership. Deady stressed the importance of the fact that Grave Creek kept its name throughout the nineteenth century. This was especially important because, in 1848, Crowley’s grave was reported to have been “opened and that a number of human bones were scattered about. The bones were reinterred and the grave again filled in.” Efforts to reinter the remains the grave after this destruction evidence the significance of this particular grave as a landmark to Oregon’s colonists, as do the numerous usages of the name “Grave Creek” during the Gold Rush and subsequent Indian Wars over control of the territory.

That Crowley’s death connected Oregon migrants to a history of heroic wayfinding sanctified by the death of a white woman (rare treasures in Oregon at the time) explains the lasting popularity of Grave Creek as a place name.³¹ Deady remembered how a stage station previously called “the Bates stage station, on Grave creek, near where Miss Crowley was buried...was later renamed the Grave Creek tavern.”³² In 1854, a Southwest Oregon newspaper covered the survey of a military road along part of the route first opened by Applegate’s party. It mentioned Applegate himself being hired in 1854 to “complete the road through the Grave Creek Hills.” And in his 1856 diaries, kept while implementing the removal of Southwest Oregon’s Indians to reservations, Joel Palmer indicated that there was a band of Indians called the “Grave Creeks” as well. So, whites named first the creek, then a stage station, and finally a group of Indians all after this single incident. This renaming reflects a conscious attempt by Oregonians to capitalize on the symbolic power of the events of Crowley’s death and burial on the way to Oregon in 1846 in order to legitimize their own presence in the area.³³ By replicating the name

²⁹ Poole, “Canyonville: A Pioneer Town 1828-1868,” 4.

³⁰ Douthit, *Souvenir of Western Women*, 27.

³¹ On social interpretation of place names and its relationship to memory and identity see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1996); Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); Cresswell, *Place*.

³² Deady, *Recollections*, 6. Grave Creek House was owned and operated by James Twogood as a hotel and restaurant through the 1850s. James Twogood, “Reminiscences of the First Settlements of Southern Oregon Early Times in Idaho and a Few of Idaho’s Pioneers,” *Boise Evening Capital News* [?] (Boise, Idaho, n.d.).

³³ “Untitled,” *Umpqua Gazette*, December 23, 1854; Joel Palmer, “Joel Palmer Papers”, 1784, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. For numerous instances of the name’s use during that conflict see also Frank K Walsh,

colonists juxtaposed Margaret Leland Crowley's martyrdom to the wayfinding cause with its inverse, Indians' savage disrespect for the dead and their solemn resting places, to legitimate American claims to Southwest Oregon.³⁴

Creating the Roads

Armed with their tradition of wayfinding, colonists moved into an unmarked Southwest Oregon. They physically transformed the land while also filling in their mental maps by interpreting the meaning of those changes. With each journey, travelers collected information and constructed new narratives, and their accounts reflect the interactive experiences they had with the landscape of southwestern Oregon. Since traveling along the "miners' trail" was synonymous with bringing it into being, one could not make the journey without engaging in vernacular geographies and using them to navigate. Thus, the character of the human geography in Southwest Oregon encouraged the development of vernacular ways of knowing the land.

Colonists were aware of the fact that they were creating their route as they traveled through unmarked territory. Asa Lovejoy remembered this uncertainty: "I went to California in 1848, by land...a wild goose chase. We went in wagons to California. We had to make our road and get there the best way we could."³⁵ Palmer, who traveled through the region in 1848 as well, described the way his party of travelers chose an unexpected route to Northern California. His party, "went through with teams by way of Goose Lake, and we did not go over to the Humboldt but we took the mountains." After traveling an experimental trail, they arrived at the mines where "there was no one living," and remained keenly aware that they had pioneered a route to California, writing, "Those were the first wagons that ever went through by that route."³⁶

A similar difficulty existed for the more heavily traveled thoroughfares through Oregon. The exact location of roads was difficult to know, even while they were in use. Traveling Oregonians often recorded their routes in minute detail in an attempt to make them useful to future travelers. For instance, Joel Palmer described the way he paid attention to the road during his trip across the plains. "I took notes of the road and the distances we traveled. Some days I measured the road taking the time we traveled so as to get the distance from camp to camp. I did so all across the plains. When I went back the next Spring I took more notes and wrote a journal

Indian Battles Along the Rogue River, 1855-56, One of America's Wild and Scenic Rivers (Grants Pass, Or.: Te-Cum-Tom Publications, 1972). The popular usage of this name is especially interesting considering that, according to Deady's recollections, "the territorial legislature changed the name of Grave Creek to Leland creek and the Hotel's name was changed to Leland house in 1854." It seems colonists continued to use the name Grave Creek even after this change was made.

³⁴ The commemorative practices associated with Grave Creek can also be seen as an instance of *memento mori* whereby colonists invoked their own mortality in order to heighten the meaning attached to certain events. If the specter of death was always present, the momentousness of each individual action was enhanced. This was certainly the case in the retelling of the story of Meek's cutoff, above and it continued into discussions of the Applegate Trail as well.

³⁵ A. L. Lovejoy and Henry E. Reed, "Lovejoy's Pioneer Narrative, 1842-48," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (September 1930): 250n34. "The route was in western Oregon, to Rogue River; thence up the river to a branch coming in from the southeast to the foot of the Siskiyou Mountains; thence across the Cascade Range to the upper end of Upper Klamath Lake; thence along the west boundary of the lake, along the Applegate or southern route to Oregon, to the south end of the lake; thence southerly to the Pit River, sometimes called the Upper Sacramento."

³⁶ "Joel Palmer Narrative (Interview with Bancroft, 1878)," 17-18.

and had it published as a guide to emigrants. It was published in book form in Cincinnati.³⁷ This practice created a situation where a distinct vernacular geography based on collective experience became the lingua franca of navigation. Even surveyors used such descriptions. One, commissioned to survey the East-Side Territorial Road in 1848 described the road's path in a seemingly unscientific fashion. The road "touched 'a point of timber,' went 'through a field' and 'to an ash tree,' and was often 'meandering along hills.'" Historian Peter G. Boag compared this description with that used by regular settlers in their everyday lives, exemplified by Thomas Bird Sprenger, a resident of the Calapooia, who recalled "'When we wished to start for town...we just headed off across the country in the general direction...avoiding low places in winter as best we could.'"³⁸

Trail builders used old trails to build new ones and renamed them often; roads may or may not have borne permanent names to begin with. Some settlers called the Applegate trail, or Southern Road the "Old Trail." What had been called the "The 'Indians' trail became the 'trappers' trail' the latter became the 'Oregon to California' route, a portion of which became the Applegate Trail." Some claim that Applegate and his fellows followed this "old trail" as far as the Rogue River when they were seeking the new Southern Route, and the rest was new.³⁹ One settler qualified his naming of the road: "I finally located in Lane County on what was then known as the main road from Portland, Oregon, [t]o California, about 33 miles south of Corvallis."⁴⁰ The names, locations, passability, and utility of roads were constantly in flux in colonial Oregon. The practice of traveling and navigating in these unstable circumstances reinforced the local tradition of wayfinding and framed colonists' mental images of the territory. They relied on a shared geographic discourse, in the absence of a reified system for organizing physical space, to provide the predictability they craved.

Colonists took the few recognizable structures or landmarks they found in Southwest Oregon, and used them to create the skeletons of a vernacular geographical system. Robert Earl traveled to California in 1851, and described his route: "first we come to was Sporses ferry we crossed the fery and went up to the Calipooia mountains and croosed over on the old Aplegate road [Applegate Trail] into umqua we crossed the north umpua the creek was murtel creek thence South umpua thence to Cayounville went up canyon creek there wasent any road only the natrual road."⁴¹ He painted a picture of an area where only a natural road, most likely a game trail wide enough only for horses, was all that connected the geologic features of the landscape. The Applegate trail, which embodied the tradition of Oregon wayfinding, was the only manmade item he remembered using to ground his navigation. When John E. Ross, a Cayuse War veteran, self styled "Indian fighter," and early Southwest Oregon settler and miner, described the arrangement of settlement during the early Rush, he stressed the sharp contrast between the settlement north of the Calapooia River (near Corvallis) and the emptiness of the landscape to the south of it, and described the way houses became part of his own mental map of the

³⁷ "Joel Palmer Narrative (Interview with Bancroft, 1878)." This may not have been the only reason for Palmer to take notes, share his experiences, or publish his narrative. For the connections between these practices in western locales and an emerging antebellum ideal of pioneer masculinity see William Wagner, "Composing Pioneers: Westering Men, Personal Writing, and the Making of Frontier Opportunity in Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, n.d.).

³⁸ Boag, *Environment and Experience*, 67.

³⁹ Inman, "The Road Across Lane County," 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7; Parrish, "Anecdotes of Intercourse with the Indians," 34–37.

⁴¹ Robert Earl, "Recollections, Ca 1900", 1900, Mss 793 Folder 3 of 5, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

otherwise empty areas. “Scott’s house was the only house at that time on the south side of the Calapooya Mountains until you reached Readings in the Sac Valley,” he wrote. He translated the distance between houses into days of travel with no support or guides to help him select the route: “There was fourteen days travel between houses.” Likewise, he described the location where violence erupted between his party and a group of Indians without the benefit of any concrete landmarks. “Indian trouble began at the north end of the Canyon, where Canyonville now is. Shots were given and returned. The gold-hunters fought them at every point they met them until they passed Shasta Valley.” It is unclear what “road” Ross was referring to when he noted “No wagons had been over the road at this time.” His description of periodic fighting “at every point” between Canyonville and Shasta Valley seems a way to plot an experience-based map upon which the road was marked by the path Ross’s wagon train happen to take (since they were the first to do it) and the violence with the Indians.⁴²

Ross’ account hints at the importance of a fear of Indian attack to the construction of local geographic knowledge in Southwest Oregon. Robert Earl conveyed the role of this fear in a story about his return journey from the California gold fields to the Willamette Valley. He and some of his traveling partners fell sick with the fever and chills, and a few men refused to ride their horses and then stopped to lie on the ground. Earl motivated them with fear to keep moving: “if they didnt git on there horses and keep up with the crood we would leave them for the indians to Scalp...that would raise them we kept them all up till we got through the ca[n]yon.” They soldiered on until they arrived “in the settlements,” slowed by having to repeatedly rouse one man who had trouble staying on his horse. They finally “left him as Soon as we got out of the Indian country and the folks went after him.”⁴³ This description is interesting because it indicates that flexible, unofficial, but nonetheless meaningful boundaries guided Earl’s actions on his journey. It is clear from Earl’s description that his friend was afraid of being left alone in a zone he called “Indian Country,” but not as afraid in “the settlements.” It is also apparent that “the settlements” encompassed a large area, since he left his sick friend there, but the “folks” still had to travel back to retrieve him. This is not a case of dropping his friend off in the front yard of a home. “The settlements” easily could have encompassed an area many square miles in size, since a single land claim was likely to be at least one square mile, and “settlements” likely referred to a concentration of a number of such claims. Earl could not have specified exactly where the line between “Indian Country” where his friend would surely have been scalped if left alone, and non-Indian country where it was safe to leave him behind to be retrieved later. But, he operated with certainty in practice, and was able to perceive when he crossed from one zone to the other. This scenario demonstrates as well the way vernacular notions of geography were transferred between people; Earl sent the sick man’s family to retrieve him, an act that likely reinforced the popular designation of the area as safe or domesticated.⁴⁴

⁴² Ross, “Narrative of an Indian Fighter,” 11.

⁴³ Earl, “Recollections, Ca 1900,” 42–44.

⁴⁴ Another noticeable sign of the reality of this borderland sub-region was the ever-present pack trains, taking goods between the Willamette Valley, Scottsburg, Jacksonville, Yreka, and Crescent City, California, to mines and settlement throughout the area. These trains were daily reminders of the network of economic and social connections between Oregon and California and drew lines of connection from as far north as the Columbia River all the way to the California mining region, crisscrossing the region and disregarding political boundaries. See Mary Halladay, “Early Days in Canyonville,” *Pioneer Days in Canyonville*, August 1969, 30; Edward Otho Cresap Ord, “The Rogue River Campaign, 1856 (the Diary of Capt. E.O.C. Ord, with Introduction and Notes)”, 1922, 15, Bancroft Library; Throckmorton, *Oregon Argonauts*.

Creating Southwest Oregon

When moving into Southwest Oregon to stay, colonists used these legendarily forged roads to fashion a network of landmarks by investing particular locales with shared meaning through descriptive and interpretive language. They used experiences, their local history of wayfinding, and mental mapping to begin to build a world that resembled America in Southwest Oregon. Ferries at river crossings earned a significant early place on colonial mental maps due to their importance for travel and navigation.

Ferries were generally scows, or flat boats, though Native Americans often operated river-crossing businesses using canoes of their own making. Where there were no ferry operations, travelers like Lucy Deady's party made due. She remembered crossing a Southwest Oregon river by tying two canoes together and putting the wagons on them and ferrying them over."⁴⁵ Where ferries did operate, ferrymen propelled their boats across rivers with various means. Some pulled them across using ropes of rawhide, others used sticks and oars to guide the boats across. One used mules on an inclined treadmill on the ferry to turn paddlewheels. Some could hold only people, whose wagons and stock were floated across or forded streams, while others could hold an entire wagon and livestock. Only anecdotal evidence exists regarding Indian ferry operations, so it is difficult to know how completely they once controlled the ferry business, or how completely they were excluded from it over time. This anecdotal evidence is common enough, however, and it is fair to say that Native Americans played a significant role in American navigation and travel within Oregon by operating ferries, and that their ferry operations were key points in wider commercial activities they conducted with the Euroamerican newcomers to the region.⁴⁶

Whether one was traveling on horseback, with mules, with two wheeled "Red River wagons" (as many early settlers to the Southwest Oregon gold country did) or with covered wagons, river crossings were dangerous and potentially expensive.⁴⁷ The presence of ferryboats and operators made the trip less perilous and also lessened the sense of the landscape's emptiness. A ferry was likely, in the early years of American exploration in Southwest Oregon, to be the only non-Indian site of human presence travelers would encounter in a long stretch of what they considered to be wild country. River crossings could also become landmarks and gathering places along the way to California. Upon returning from the gold mines with a nice haul of cash, the Reverend Kendall of Oakville, near modern-day Shedd, built a bridge across the Calapooia river on his Donation Land Claim, one of the first in the county. "This crossing of the Calapooia was a well known camping place for travelers, gold-seekers, and emigrants passing up and down the valley."⁴⁸ A large proportion of travelers' diaries and recollections paid special

⁴⁵ Deady, *Recollections*, 8.

⁴⁶ Charles Floyd Query, *A History of Oregon Ferries Since 1826* (Chuck Query, 2008). George Miller West remembered a scene involving a ferry operated by Indians: "When we reached the river the ferry boat was about midstream and there were several Indians fishing from it.... Here we had our first taste of fresh salmon." George Miller West, "Recollections, Ca. 1910", n.d., 12, Overland Journeys to the Pacific Collection, Mss 1508, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁴⁷ Tetzlaff, "Settlement and Landscape Transitions," 19.

⁴⁸ For examples see Mary Louise Williams McWilliams, "Interview, Principally Concerned with Her Grandfather, Rev. Thomas Simpson Kendall D.D.," October 3, 1938, Haskin Family File, Linn County Historical Society.

attention to the crossing of rivers.⁴⁹ Ferry crossings became significant places because by necessity migrants congregated to cross the river; they became hubs of commerce, communication, and community on the trail. The presence of ferries also influenced the layout of roads. As Oregon ferry historian John Query has noted, “A ferry...initially may have found that the trail leading to it became a road of increasing use and the ferry then became a source of revenue.” Later, some of these roads became public roadways and the ferries themselves taken over by the territorial or state government.⁵⁰

In addition to providing the straightforward benefit of helping to ease dangerous and expensive river crossings and providing community on the trail, ferries played complex roles in colonists’ mental maps of a changing Southwest Oregon. As travelers moved along the north-south trail connecting the Willamette Valley with the Northern California mines, Ferries were the most basic mark of progress, both toward a destination and also in the transformation of a wild or savage area to one of Americanized civilization.⁵¹ John Gulick’s diary of his trip south to the gold mines in 1849 or 1850 described the road through the southern region as an “Indian Trail” to indicate the lack of civilized settlement in the region. During his three-week trip from Salem in the mid-Willamette Valley to Redding, California, he described five river crossings, noting when ferries were present and when they were not, and what kind of difficulty he had on the crossing. When the ferry crossings went smoothly, they marked the incursion of civilization into the area that travelers otherwise saw as empty of such influences.⁵²

The importance of ferries as focal points for inscribing the transformation of the landscape from savage to civilized also comes through in the stories attached to ferries as places. John Champion Richardson described the way, around the time of the Gold Rush, his family got into the ferry business to take advantage of the increased traffic along the north-south trail: “Now money became plentiful, everybody had money. My father kept trail and a little grocery store, also a ferry boat to cross the Long Tom, when that creek was not fordable. This work fell to my lot. Some days I would work from early morning until late in the evening. It was hard work. A mule of all animals is the meanest on a ferry boat of any. Not unfrequently I would take in 25 dollars a day. My oldest brother pulled out and went to the mines, which left me the brunt to bear. He returned sometime in ‘fifty’ and selected for himself a home. Shortly afterward I took my place on Spencer Creek, 6 miles west of Spencer’s Butte. This was in 1851.”⁵³ Champion’s account reveals the power of a ferry as a tool through which colonists could unite many transformations, both to the landscape and to the self, into a unified story. Here, the ferry represented the transformation of the Long Tom Creek from un-fordable to fordable and its connection to Richardson’s own personal transformation from a boy to a man. This short description of a ferry crossing and business managed to encompass the transformation of Southwest Oregon as a whole. From the initial influx of specie, through the damming of the Long Tom and other creeks as part of mining operations, and finally to a settled landscape capable of supporting agricultural claims for Richardson and his brother.

⁴⁹ As examples: West, “Recollections, Ca. 1910”; Herman Francis Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962); Twogood, “Reminiscences of the First Settlements of Southern Oregon Early Times in Idaho and a Few of Idaho’s Pioneers”; Deady, *Recollections*; L. J. C. Duncan, “Settlement in Southern Oregon: Jacksonville, Oregon”, n.d., Bancroft Library.

⁵⁰ Query, *A History of Oregon Ferries Since 1826*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1–13.

⁵² Gulick, “John Thomas Gulick Papers,” 13.

⁵³ Richardson, “A Biography Written by John Champion Richardson,” 12.

Thomas Smith, an early settler in the Umpqua Valley, also treated a ferry description as a narrative of socio-geographical landscape transformation. He obtained his ferry during the initial chaos of the Rush, after frenzied miners abandoned it for the diggings. He decided to take charge of the ferry, leaving it only for the winter of 1849 and 1850, when he “left the boat in charge of the Indians they kept it until the following March, at the time so many soldiers deserted from Fort Vancouver, and they took the boat from the Indians to the opposite side of the river, where it was swept away by high water.”⁵⁴ In Smith’s account, the ferry witnessed the passage of an era when Indians controlled river navigation and crossings and also the end of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s strength in Oregon by telling the story of the runaway fur company employees deserting to the California mines. In the process, it was they who dispossessed the Indians of their hold of the ferry, symbolically purging America’s two major rivals for control over Southwest Oregon space.

Ferry crossings had significance to travelers because they repeatedly aided in navigation and travel and encouraged the proliferation of stories that represented the transformation of Southwest Oregon into a more familiar, American place. Because colonists came upon them numerous times in the course of a trip, they lent the landscape a vital amount of predictability from the earliest days of the Gold Rush. Repeated encounters with ferries encouraged a sense of comfort and familiarity and also encouraged colonists to inscribe these crossings with narratives that created and grounded colonial identities in place.

Multiplicity and repetition was not necessary for places to become culturally significant along the Oregon-California Trail. One way for unique sites to gain significance was by tapping into powerful narratives of wayfinding. A prime example was Yoncalla, the small valley where Jesse Applegate and his clan made their home. The Applegates, especially Jesse, were associated in the public mind with the navigation and conquest of Southwestern Oregon and with connecting Oregon and California. The name Yoncalla was itself significant; it was first used in Euroamerican circles for the Post Office at Jesse Applegate’s claim, near the mountain that the Indians are said to have called by the name “Yonc-alla-alla.”⁵⁵ By combining the newly established post office, representative of increasing connection among geographic regions within Oregon and with California, with the supposed authenticity of the Indian name and Applegate’s legendary pioneer past, Yoncalla projected a multifaceted image of American control over Southwest Oregon.

The result was the cultivation of a place that colonists treasured and celebrated. Applegate sold provisions to settlers, miners, and travelers, and the so-called “House by the Side of the Road,” as the way station was called, became a gathering place for neighbors and travelers to gather and discuss literature and affairs of state with the “sage of Yoncalla” as Applegate came to be known⁵⁶

Travelers used their common awareness of Applegate’s home and store to orient themselves and their readers along their recorded journeys. On his way to the mines in 1851, E.M. Moore wrote of his travels with a Mr. Chadwick through the Willamette Valley as far as

⁵⁴ “Obituary of Thomas Smith,” *Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association* (1890): 78–79. He wrote about this thin population in 1849: “My nearest neighbors at this time were Robert Cowen and family, who were residing in the Yoncalla Valley, twenty-three miles distant to the north, and Reading Springs, where Shasta City now is, a distance of nearly three hundred miles to the south.”

⁵⁵ Yoncalla Historical Society, *Yoncalla Yesterday* (Yoncalla Historical Society, 2001), xxiii.

⁵⁶ Oliver Cromwell Applegate, “Great Detour of 1846: Trail Takes Toll of Lives,” *Oregonian* (Portland Or., December 1, 1846); Marion Lay, “Old Applegate Farm Near Yoncalla Once Home of Pioneer Oregon Sage”, n.d.

“Applegate’s” and at another point he used it as a landmark, telling a story about a time when they found a field of ripe strawberries.⁵⁷ By including Yoncalla in his diary, he propagated its status as a landmark for others. The place held significance as a symbol of the power of Oregon settlers to navigate this area; and the letters from the Yoncalla Post Office remained as a reminder in travelers’ pockets well after they had continued their journeys.⁵⁸

Over time this process of experience-based place making led to the creation of a shared sense that Southwest Oregon and Northern California formed a recognizable sub-region. This sub-region came into being when colonists interpreted their direct experiences traveling and living in the area. They then translated that lived perceptual space of the borderland sub-region into nationally relevant meanings. Namely, into a belief that connecting Oregon to California signified a future connection to the United States, and into power over Native Americans that colonists believed to be a prerequisite for meaningful American membership.

In the first few years after the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill, settlement began to take hold in Southwest Oregon, and regional boundaries began to appear on colonial mental maps. With the deepening of American roots, which included the establishment of landmarks imbued with shared meanings, the Miner’s Trail no longer connected the dichotomous Willamette Valley to California, but rather ran through a moderately settled and heavily explored area that blended characteristics of the two. Oregonians had to contend with this area, peopled by both Americans in towns and on farms and native people still living independently of white control, as they attempted to match their cognitive geographies to the environment in which they lived. This settlement changed the geographic relationship between Oregon and California and also the significance of the road that connected them. Southwest Oregon could no longer be relegated to the category of wasteland, wilderness, or “Indian Country” and therefore could not be dismissed in discussions of the geographical home of Oregon’s American identity.

This new region took on (and was partly created by) characteristics distinct from those associated with Oregon and with California. Given the ubiquity of the belief that Oregon and California were inherently different, it is surprising to see that colonists paid little attention to which mines lay on which side of the Oregon/California border. Robert Earl’s recollections demonstrate the frequency with which miners crossed from one side to the other with little thought. “Me and old Basye fixed up and went over where they were at was about 80 miles and over the SisScou mountain to Stoney Point” on the other side of the border. He then returned to Oregon and soon after “went to Yreka in one day about 80 miles.” Reinhart normalized the journey between a California and an Oregon landmark in similar fashion: “From the summit of the Siskiyou Mountain I was nearly three days to Jacksonville.”⁵⁹

Another factor that made Oregon and California appear to be more similar and united than distinct was the prevalence of Chinook Jargon, a trade language used by Indian peoples throughout the northern trans-Mississippi West. Reinhart, who used his own knowledge of

⁵⁷ Lillie Lela Moore, “Sketch of the Life of Edwin Marshall Moore, California Argonaut of 1849 and Oregon Pioneer of 1850”, 1915, 125, Mss 727, Lillie Lela Moore, Folder 1 and 2, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁵⁸ Yoncalla Historical Society, *Yoncalla Yesterday*, xxiii–xxiv. In the 1850s the government established 19 post offices in the Umpqua watershed. March 14, 1851 was the first, called Yoncalla. One year later six others were established: Myrtle City, Gardiner City, Umpqua City, Elkton, Scottsburg and Winchester. Seven routes were specifically identified, two of which ran from Astoria to Portland and South through the Willamette Valley to the south of the Umpqua River. The other ran from the Umpqua Valley to Sacramento City in California.

⁵⁹ Earl, “Recollections, Ca 1900,” 57–59; Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier*, 39.

Chinook Jargon to negotiate with Indian laborers in the Southern California mines, noted “The Indians of Oregon, Northern California, Washington Territory and Idaho and Montana had all learned to speak Chinook Jargon to trade with the HBC.” This was of note because, in his words, “The settlers of Oregon and all the Pacific States had many of them learned this jargon of Chinook talk or tongue and all the young folks tried to speak it as a secret way of sly speaking because so few could speak it...I became quite a proficient at it and we talked it to all the Indians around us who had learned it.” When colonists used Jargon to speak slyly and also to negotiate with Indian laborers and traders both north and south of the border, they subtly reinforced the existence of a region that encompassed Northern California and Southern Oregon.⁶⁰ Experiences traveling in Southwest Oregon underpinned Reinhart’s claim. West recorded an instance when, after running “into some charging Indians” he “used Jargon to avoid a violent altercation.”⁶¹

The visual and geographical field that included both Mount Shasta (at the south end of the Cascades in modern Siskiyou County, California) and the Siskiyou Mountains (whose highest pass is just north of the Oregon-California border) may have united the region across state lines, further reinforcing the notion that the border was inconsequential.⁶² Samuel Clark remembered, “We reached the gold mines, which lie not far from the base of the Shasta Butte, whose broad sides and towering peak is clad in enchanting snows, a landmark that guides the traveler for more than 100 weary miles, and impresses him with an interest that never flags.”⁶³ 100 miles is approximately the distance between Jacksonville and Mt. Shasta, meaning that Mt. Shasta was in view and in travelers’ consciousness from the center of Southern Oregon’s mining district. Another miner’s comments confirm it was common knowledge that Mt. Siskiyou was in fact in Oregon. While crossing Mount Siskiyou they noted that it was “the dividing line between Oregon and California. At the summit a large rock is supposed to be the exact line.” While atop, he made note of the grandness of Mount Shasta, which after choosing to go south to California they were now headed right toward.

This awareness of the line between the two states did not seem to signify a solid division in the eyes of the miners. Rather, shortly after landing in California, Reinhart decided to take the advice of a stranger and to leave Yreka for Southern Oregon to mine in Cluggage and Pool’s newly discovered mines on the Rogue River. Reinhart remembered the way he decided on his route to the Rogue. He decided to take a “cut-off” and avoid Yreka and “some forty miles in a little over one day.” In describing his route he demonstrated the constant movement and haphazard wayfinding that eager miners employed. This type of mobility encouraged the development of an experience-based region connected by footpaths, border-crossing streams, and marked by ferry crossings, springs, and mining claims more than by any political boundary. In Reinhart’s attempt to beat the rush to the Rogue River his path took him “right down Humbug

⁶⁰ Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier*, 57–58. And yet, in the hard Southern Oregon winter of 1852–53, Reinhart noted that the miners escaped the cold and lack of provisions by going to the Willamette Valley, not to California.

⁶¹ West, “Recollections, Ca. 1910,” 27. In the case of Chinook Jargon and colonial usurpation of control of ferries and riverine navigation, we see examples of the native geographic conception of Oregon (which Gray Whaley has referred to using “Ilahee,” the word in Chinook Jargon for home or land) overlapping and conflicting with the American conception of “Oregon.” Despite the overall trajectory in Southwest Oregon toward conquest and dispossession of Native Americans, there remained moments of nonviolent coexistence, and “creative misunderstandings” that could at times benefit both colonists and Indians. For an uneven attempt to apply Richard White’s concept of the middle ground to the conquest of Southwest Oregon see Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*.

⁶² Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier*, 36–39.

⁶³ “Samuel A. and Harriet T. Clarke Papers, 1845–1914”, n.d., Mss 1156, Folder 6, Oregon Historical Research Library.

Creek till I got to the mouth where it emptied into the Klamath River, and then went up the Klamath River.... [I] struck for the Klamath Ferry (where the road from Yreka came in and crossed the Siskiyou Mountains) and where I expected to stay overnight the first night. The Indians on the Klamath were considered dangerous but by good luck I got along without being seen by them.”⁶⁴ This description affirms that vernacular navigation was more helpful than the abstract, official border between Oregon and California. Though he recognized when he crossed the Siskiyou Mountains that he was moving from California to Oregon, his mental map contained much more useful information for successfully finding gold and staying alive in the mines: cut-offs, awareness of dangerous Indians, and knowledge of ferry locations.

Economic and commercial concerns also elided the border as a meaningful geographical marker. Economic and commercial lines, it seems, crossed the border freely and therefore acted to unite Northern California and Southwest Oregon into a commercial unity. Scottsburg, on the Umpqua River and about 200 miles (as the crow flies) north of the California Border, was a town founded by Levi Scott, one of the viewers of the Applegate Trail. During the 1850s it was the only port between San Francisco and Portland and served as a supply point for all of Southern Oregon and Northern California during that period.⁶⁵ When we think about the fact that all the goods that crossed the border as part of this supply network were carried, bought, and sold by human beings for whom each contact would reinforce the normalcy and similarity of the two territories, the importance of economic relations for building cultural-geographic realities becomes clear.

Colonists employed strategies for moneymaking that depended on doing business in both Oregon and California. Thomas Smith recruited friends to obtain a Donation Land Claim with an express plan to sell the produce of the farm on the other side of the Oregon-California border on the Yreka River.⁶⁶ And in an 1854 series of articles for the Yreka Mountain Herald entitled “The Mines of the North,” one miner gave an overview of the mines in the “north” which included those around Yreka and Jacksonville areas. In not a single instance did he mention the fact that some mines were in California and some in Oregon. When he ranked Jacksonville as behind Yreka and “already the second inland in importance in the north,” he treated the two cities as comparable members of the same sub-region. In conclusion, he again affirmed the existence of such a region: “This review of the mines of The North we have hastily condensed. It contains, however, the principal features of the mines of the extreme north. We obtained our information from a three year residence in this part of the country.”⁶⁷ Moreover, he cited his own experience working in this “part of the country” (in the singular), as the basis for his geographical expertise. His narrative exemplifies the use of language to translate on-the-ground experience to a tacit argument for the connectedness of Oregon and California.

Using linguistic and material means to connect Oregon and California, colonists mentally plotted Oregon as less isolated from the United States, and therefore enhanced the American

⁶⁴ Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier*, 35.

⁶⁵ “Untitled,” *Lane County Historian* XXXII, no. 1 (Spring 1987).

⁶⁶ Thomas Smith, “Rogue River Indian Wars of 1853 and 1855: Ashland, Oregon”, n.d., 3–4, MSS P-A 94, Bancroft Library.

⁶⁷ “Siskiyou County Affairs: Extracts from Yreka and Portland Papers”, 1853, MSS P-A 59-68, Bancroft Library. And some who traveled overland with the intention all along of going to the mines, like George Miller West, went to Oregon first anyway. “As soon as we were in Oregon, as we called it, had crossed all mountains, the young men commenced deserting the train and when we had left Salem all had gone but myself and Codington.” West, “Recollections, Ca. 1910,” 13–14.

character of their adopted homeland. They used similar means in the first years of Southwest Oregon settlement, to cultivate a sense of superiority and dominance over the independent and much maligned Indians of Southwest Oregon. This cultivation of power over Native Americans occurred in the realm of mental mapping and local geographic discourse and was expressed in violent and non-violent interactions. Settlers were aware of the tenuousness of their hold on the Oregon country and the fact that they still needed the federal government to step in before they could gain legal title to the land. Despite, and perhaps because of this lack of legal title in Southern Oregon, small-scale acts of dividing and labeling space were fraught and highly contested. Dividing space was a key preliminary step in conquering this area and gaining control over Indian land; it was achieved through a combination of individual conflicts and agreements between Euroamericans and Indians and actions of a rather disperse government.

Localized violent conflicts between whites and Indians were common in the years before the Rogue River War. The tragic massacre of twenty-six unarmed Indians, including three women, at the Chetco River ferry in Southwest Oregon in February of 1854 is a prime example. More, it exemplifies the significance of place-specific meanings to the contests over control of Southwest Oregon.⁶⁸ When colonist A.F. Miller arrived to establish a township under the auspices of the Territorial Government in 1854, he found a ferry operated by local Indians who transported miners, Indians and other travelers between the native villages on either side of the river. Miller started his own alternative ferry and insisted that the Indians stop using their canoes to transport white men. They continued to do so, and resisted Miller's efforts to appropriate their ferryboat. In response Americans attacked and murdered twenty-six unarmed Indians, including three women on 15 February 1854.⁶⁹

Superintendent of Indian Affairs Joel Palmer reported on the violent incident, but also included details evidencing the cultural and geographic foundation of the ferry takeover. Palmer wrote that the miners had recently convinced the Indians to sell them their guns promising that violent conflict between them was over. It was this "agreement" to sell the guns that tipped the balance of power toward the white ferrymen. This very well may have increased Miller's confidence to instigate violent conflict in order to gain exclusive control over the ferry crossing. Unfortunately, there are no records to indicate just how freely the Indians agreed to part with their weapons. We can assume that this incident was nested within larger power shifts triggered by colonial encroachment. Intertwined economic, legal, and ecological changes may have made it necessary for the Indians to sell their goods to pay for food or other necessities unavailable through channels disrupted by mining or other colonial activities.⁷⁰ A colonial court that would

⁶⁸ The mouth of the Chetco River is near modern Brookings, just north of the California-Oregon border. The exact location of the ferry crossing is unknown.

⁶⁹ Query, *A History of Oregon Ferries Since 1826*, 3; O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 165–166. O'Donnell reprinted Palmer's report on the incident: "Nine well-armed men, attacked the village, and as the Indians came from their lodges twelve of them were shot dead by these monsters. The women and children were permitted to escape. Three men remained in the lodges, and returned fire with bows and arrows. Being unable to get a sight of these Indians, they ordered two squaws, pets in the family of Miller, to set fire to the lodges. Two were consumed in the conflagration; the third, while raising his head through the flames and smoke for breath, was shot dead."

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the cultural/ecological factors of transformation during colonialism see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003); Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*. On the far-reaching nature of colonial impacts on indigenous communities. Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001). For a dynamic account of the detailed, everyday foundations of social and cultural transformation

not hear testimony from Indian witnesses acquitted the killers. As Palmer sadly reflected, “arrests are evidently useless, as no acts of a white man against an Indian, however atrocious, can be followed by a conviction.”⁷¹

These factors certainly shaped the incident at the ferry. The sequence of events that resulted in the Indian ferry operators being unarmed, though, resulted from local interactions regarding who would ultimately control the river crossing and all that came with it. It was clearly important to Miller and his cohort that Indians not control the crossing or profit from its use. And the incident reflected a geographically specific transfer of power over a place vital to travel and the creation of colonial mental maps and vernacular geography. It is perhaps also significant that the ferry ran between two Indian villages, undoubtedly a powerful geographic location that may have threatened colonists. It is one of many spatially transformative incidents through which Americans weakened Indians’ claims to the territory through a combination of material and conceptual actions. It is also noteworthy that the survivors fled to “the mountains” in the words of Palmer, after the fighting ended and their villages were burnt. Leaving not only the villages but also the valley for the far reaches of Southwest Oregon was a symbolically important end to this event.⁷²

E.M. Moore, who worked as a mediator of land disputes, recorded a telling instance of the way micro struggles over space played out in this context. There was an Indian camp near his claim in Douglas County, an area traversed by Indian trails connecting villages to fishing grounds. The “trails followed the tops of ridges and high lands” and were used by Euroamerican settlers as well. Somehow, Moore’s field of corn blocked one of these trails. There is no indication in his recollections whether he purposefully planted the corn across the trail in order to demonstrate his ownership of his claim, or if he did so unknowingly. Either way, the trail Indians used to travel to and from their fishing grounds passed through Moore’s field of corn, and he refused to tolerate the resulting damage to his crop. He “wanted to stop it” and “stationed” himself by the stake that marked the corner of his cornfield. The Indians came and he told them to go around; according to Moore they were not happy about the idea of changing their route, but were considering it when a neighbor came upon them with a shot gun and they quickly agreed to forge a new trail “around the corn.”⁷³

This story demonstrates the small ways that the landscape was gradually transformed by relatively inconsequential conflicts among inhabitants in Southern Oregon. It also brings up another interesting point about the nature of sovereignty in the early years of Euroamerican settlement in the region. Moore, it should be noted, did not insist that his Indian neighbors stop walking through his claim. It was only the cornfield that he insisted they avoid. Of course, if he planted the cornfield across the Indian path on purpose then his motive might have been to disrupt the Indians’ use of an entire network of trails, of which he had a working knowledge because, as he noted, he and other white settlers also used the trails for transit through the area. In fact, he recorded his memory of trying to find a better trail between French settlement and Riddle and being unable to do so. But, even if he did have a more grandiose scheme of which the cornfield was a part, he did not use the language of property lines to assert his control. Rather, he

as a result of colonial contact see Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷¹ O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 165–166.

⁷² The importance of the Indian retreating into the mountains will be explored in detail below in Chapter 4.

⁷³ Moore, “Sketch of the Life of Edwin Marshall Moore, California Argonaut of 1849 and Oregon Pioneer of 1850,” 143–144, 147.

used the idea of respect for his crops as the rationalization for convincing the Indians to change their behavior. This tells us that Donation Land Claims were not yet defined by exclusive conceptions of property, and that the landscape of Southern Oregon remained fluidly organized between Indian and Euroamerican sovereignty into the 1850s. Also, the Donation Land Claim boundaries are here shown not to be quarantined areas of fenced land that was enclosed and therefore exclusive of native use and habitation.

Colonist E.L. Bristow provides another example of the way individual Euroamerican settlers asserted their control over the geographical organization of Southern Oregon and cultivated their power in relation to Indians. Bristow recorded a story about the way his father dealt with Klickitat Indians (a group who tended to move throughout colony) during the summer of 1849, when many men had left for the mines and he and his father were the only ones who stayed “in a circuit of 12 or 15 miles.” Bristow’s father was a blacksmith and gunsmith, and repaired some of the Klickitat’s guns when they were traveling through their Southwest Oregon neighborhood. He became convinced that the Klickitats had used their guns to kill his “work oxen for beef” and so he “declared war on the Klickitat tribe generally.” The next time the Klickitats, or people who Bristow thought were Klickitat, camped near his house, he ended up whipping one of the Indians who he believed had tried to trick him. The Indian man returned the next day with others ready to deal with the elder Bristow for the whipping. Both Bristows drew their weapons and the father intimidated the Indians into leaving, even though there were 14 of them and they were all armed, by attacking them with a “handspike,” according to the younger Bristow’s story. They all retreated and Bristow “followed them over the brow of the hill. “They were then a quarter of a mile away, & we lifted our guns and fired just to give them a scare. They went on to their camp six miles above, & broke camp, & passed a neighbors’ house 12 miles below the same evening. They told their story of what old man Bristow had said & done, & left that part of the country.” Bristow’s assessment of the impact of his and his father’s actions that day among the Klickitat were far-reaching and dramatic. According to Bristow, this action had had the impact of blocking out an entire area of land as inaccessible to the Klickitat Indians: “We did not see a Klickitat Indian for two years when another band came there.” Then, they treated the area around Bristow’s claim as a sovereign zone belonging to the elder Bristow and “sent a runner ahead to ask permission to travel through that portion of the country. They were going to the Umpqua to hunt. Their messenger stipulated the terms and Father allowed them to pass there.” Moreover, this sovereignty lasted for years: “Those were the only Klickitat Indians that showed their heads in that section of the country for ten years. My father established quite a reputation among the local tribes.”⁷⁴

Though Bristow’s account is likely exaggerated, it reveals a preoccupation with the idea that individual action against Indians could translate into control over territory. When considered alongside Moore’s story, we see that land claims and official ownership did little to determine colonists’ spatial horizons. E.M. Moore attempted to gain control over one corner of a trail network by insisting that Indians not walk through his cornfield. Though his actions may have been part of a broader strategy to clear Indians out of a larger area by cutting off their transit routes, they were focused on an area smaller than the size of his land claim. Conversely, Bristow remembered one conflict between a bold and violent Euroamerican and a group of traveling Indians as capable of creating a little kingdom, much larger in size than the Donation Land Claim that Bristow believed he would someday own, where no Indians dared enter without

⁷⁴ Bristow, “Encounters With Indians, Highwaymen, and Outlaws.”

express permission. Moreover, control over space in Southern Oregon was changing and flexible, and it was the job of the individual to maintain that control, even when it was tenuous. E.M. Moore walking out to sit at the edge of his cornfield all day demonstrates the importance of these small battles in the absence of reliable government-protected landownership. Efforts like Moore's and Bristow's changed the way Indians and colonists divided and assigned use to various spaces and were part of vernacular systems to increase the American hold on the land of Southwest Oregon.

By 1853, colonists' mental maps included substantially more information in the form of boundaries, landmarks, and the narratives that sustained them than they had only a few years before. Each of these expansions, though, meant more potential conflict over the sharing of space and resources with the Native Americans of Southern Oregon. Before the widespread outbreak of military conflict in 1854, whites and Indians were already engaged in small-scale battles over the organization and assignation of space within Southern Oregon. These conflicts were to become full-scale warfare before long, in another stage of the geographical reorganization of Oregon that was so central to the conquest of this new territory.

Exterminating Indian Country: The Rogue River War, 1855-1856

In October of 1855 American colonists styling themselves “exterminators,” under the command of James Lupton, killed 25 men, women and children in two Takelma villages on Little Butte Creek, near Upper Table Rock off the mighty Rogue River. They sought to “instigate a final solution to the Indian problem,” in the words of historian Gray Whaley.¹ In response to this attack, which has been called the “Lupton Massacre,” Takelma residents of the Table Rock Indian Reservation (founded by an 1853 treaty between Governor Joel Palmer and Takelma Chief Apserkahar) fled the reservation and moved southwest through the settled parts of the valley, attacking colonists as they went. Thus began what has been remembered as the Rogue River Indian War (1855-1856).² It was a bloody and brutal conflict during which both American colonists and United States Army troops carried out a take-no-prisoners campaign against Indian combatants and non-combatants alike. The conflict had important consequences, resulting in the removal of thousands of Native Americans who as recently as seven years earlier had enjoyed full ownership, use, and independence in the valleys of the Rogue and Umpqua Rivers and the Southwest Oregon coast. In addition to comprising a significant episode in the history of American settler colonialism, the Rogue River conflict is noteworthy because over the course of the war, a growing proportion of the colonial population adopted the goal of exterminating all of Southwest Oregon’s Indians, and those who did not became convinced that all Indians needed to be removed to reservations far away from American settlements in the Willamette Valley and Southwest Oregon. In the summer of 1855, one colonist expressed the increasingly popular position in a petition to the Territorial governor George Law Curry, in which he requested aid to “*expel from our midst these hostile Indians and give us that security of our lives and property which is the birthright of all American citizens* [emphasis in original].”³ During the Rogue River War, colonial attitudes toward whether and how to share space with their Indian neighbors underwent a dramatic and swift transformation from being relatively tolerant of cohabitation to unswervingly committed to the elimination of all traces of Indian presence in the land. This shift is best understood by examining its territorial dimensions through the lens of vernacular geographic discourse.

Just how colonists defined “hostile Indian” requires deeper examination than historians of early Oregon have given it. Scholars have explored the question of how and why an exterminationist movement came to dominate interactions between Indians and colonists in

¹ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 205.

² At the time and among specialists, it is referred to as the second Rogue River War because it was preceded by a smaller conflict that ended with the signing of the Table Rock Treaty and establishment of the Table Rock Indian Reservation in 1853. Historians of Oregon tend to refer to the latter conflict as The Rogue River War. Nathan Douthit, “Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Cultural Divide,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 95, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 472–515; Nathan Douthit, “Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border, 1851-1857: Benjamin Wright and Enos,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 100, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 402–433; Nathan Douthit, “The Hudson’s Bay Company and the Indians of Southern Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (April 1, 1992): 25–64; Walsh, *Indian Battles*.

³ As cited in Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 203.

Southwest Oregon in the 1850s.⁴ This chapter differs because it explores the growth of exterminationist impulses and rhetoric as interrelated with changing conceptions of territory. Colonists used mental mapping to define territory in a way that was intimately related to how they defined Indians; together these definitions played a key role in legitimating exterminationism in the name of American freedom. Thus, the racism that lay at the heart of this tragic period of Oregon's history was not simply a duplicate of anti-Indian hatred from other places and times, though it clearly had its antecedents. Rather, it developed through a web of geo-cultural practices that had characterized the American settlement since its inception. Exterminationist campaigns can be distinguished from genocidal ones because they are typically acts of ethnic cleansing that seek primarily to destroy all traces of a given group on a particular land.⁵ In Southwest Oregon, colonists exhibited the signs consistent with ethnic cleansing. So in order to understand the origins and consequences of the colonial movement to exterminate Native Americans in Southwest Oregon, the focus must be on colonists' beliefs about land, including their perceptions of borders, proximity, contiguity, and indigenous connection and claim to territory.

Throughout early Oregon, settlers identified particular places, and types of places, with danger. They also identified certain Indians as particularly dangerous or threatening. Colonists had a tendency to let the reputation of a place color their perceptions of certain people, and vice versa, even when it did not comport with the course of events. Through mental mapping, colonists consistently identified people with places and places with danger in a complicated web of associations that was built through perception while also shaping it. This process, though consistently a part of the cultural world of colonial Oregon, is especially evident in the story of the Rogue River War. During 1855 and 1856 colonists came to identify Table Rock Reserve—located on a deeply meaningful site for both Native and European Americans—with Indian threats to the existence of an American colony in Southwest Oregon. This association developed despite the fact that the Takelma Indians who lived on the reserve were not the most hostile to American settlements at the time.⁶ More, this basic linkage guided colonists' actions, and their interpretation of those actions, in ways that became the basis for an increasingly hegemonic idea that Americanization depended on the cleansing of all Indians from Southwest Oregon's landscape.

To understand how and why this association developed, we have to look at the way vernacular geographies were constructed through mental mapping, and shared through language,

⁴ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*; O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*; Beckham, *Requiem for a People*; Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*.

⁵ Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe has examined the connection between settler colonialism and programs of genocide in a recent article; he argues, "Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal;" Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387.

⁶ In the spring and early summer of 1853, according to Douthit, things were quite peaceful between whites and Indians in Rogue River Valley. Indian chiefs Sam, Joe, and Topsy were frequently seen in Jacksonville. Indians were even invited into private houses, and according to pioneer historian Walling's pioneer informants "Nearly all the Rogue Rivers were in the habit of coming into Jacksonville, where they begged food, fraternized with the lowest whites, and were friendly to all." Freedom of movement was prevalent: "Rogue River Valley Indians moved freely between their villages and white settlements—talking with whites, working for them, gambling with them, and sometimes living among them..." Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 94–95. They also did work for farmers in return for clothing; Palmer had to supply blankets after the reserve was established, because being unable to leave the reservation and work for farmers, their normal source of clothing and blankets and fabric was unavailable. O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 155.

in such a way that strengthened the perceived connection between violent and hostile Indian people and the Table Rock Reserve. As will be discussed below, this foundational association did not match the sequence of events in the way that Lupton and his men insisted they did at the time of the Massacre. Moreover, the Lupton Massacre cemented the linkage between hostile Indians and Table Rock, uniting them on colonial mental maps. It simultaneously destroyed the Reserve, injecting the threat of unfettered Indians in the settlements into an already tense situation. Native mobility then became a flashpoint of colonial anxiety and defensiveness for the rest of the war, and encouraged the development and spread of exterminationist thought. This geo-cultural cocktail translated into one of the bloodiest Indian Wars in the history of the American West, which was perceived, conceived, and justified in territorial terms.

In its creation Table Rock had symbolized the possibility of Indian/White cohabitation. Its destruction encouraged the legitimization of exterminationist and eliminatory rhetoric and a program of territorial ethnic cleansing. The net result was a mental geography that excluded Indians not only from the vicinity of colonial settlements, but also from deep into the mountain valleys and wide over the entire area south of the Willamette Valley and west of the Cascade summit. This continued until, by the end of the war in 1856, nearly all American colonists imagined not one acre or distant corner of Southwest Oregon as appropriate living space for Indians. The conflict transformed colonists' mental maps of American sovereignty, with real-world consequences for Native Americans who would be removed from their ancestral homes to unfamiliar and isolated reservations.

While exclusive opposition between civilization and barbarism defined American visions of landscape at the close of the Rogue River War, they were not unique to the colonists of Oregon or new on the American scene.⁷ Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to infer that mid-century Americans automatically assumed that Indians and Euroamericans would be forever separated. Cultural and political trends regarding Indian policy on a national scale were in the midst of transforming from one of assimilation and uplift to one of long-term separation. But this transformation was far from complete in the 1850s. There were plenty of voices on the national stage that still espoused the idea of assimilation for the native people of the growing nation.⁸ And, as demonstrated above in Chapter 3, colonists shared space, however tensely, with Indians in the Willamette Valley and in Southwest Oregon in the first years after the discovery of gold. Reservation advocates within Oregon, especially Anson Dart and Joseph Lane, also argued that assimilation should be the ultimate goal of Indian policy, and on the federal level the debate over this point was very much an open one.⁹ No federal or local consensus determined that Oregon's

⁷ David Svaldi, *Sand Creek and the Rhetoric of Extermination: A Case Study in Indian-White Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Drinnon, *Facing West*; Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).

⁸ Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*. Trennert discusses the debates on federal Indian policy within the BIA and they were all focused on separation with eventual assimilation as the stated goal.

⁹ Luke Lea, the US commissioner of Indian affairs, expressed the view that assimilation was absolutely vital to Indian policy, while Joseph Lane and other prominent Oregon-based members of the Territorial government insisted that assimilation was a waste of time and energy. This translated into recommendation for strict spatial segregation of whites and Indians. These divergent perspectives were representatives of broader debates on the subject. Debate was polarized from the beginning of Indian relocation as part of federal policy with the Removal Act of 1830. That decade saw the emergence of a more pessimistic view of the possibility for Indian assimilation. Lively debate continued among monogenists and polygenists in the 1840s. Reservation proponents could represent either side of

colonists would enact a reservation policy that rejected assimilation. Therefore, the transformation from tense cohabitation to exterminationist separation must be explained in other ways.

An analysis of this transformation must begin with a cross-cultural picture of a place known to the Takelma as *Titanakh* (Little Indian Plums) and to Euroamericans as Upper and Lower Table Rock.¹⁰ During negotiations surrounding the end of a short conflict in 1853, Indian and colonial visions of Table Rock exhibited the traits Richard White has called “creative misunderstandings” and resulted in the establishment of a reserve on a spot that was symbolically important to both groups.¹¹ This convergence provided the basis for the creation of the Table Rock Reservation for Rogue River Indians in the heart of the Rogue River Valley—an anomalous instance of reservation without removal. This location was even more surprising given the long history of prejudice against these particular Indians. Ironically, its position in the midst of colonial settlement would later unmake the reserve and the cohabitation it manifested and represented, unleashing a war that transformed the way colonists viewed the racial possibilities of habitation on the landscape itself. Thus, the war—whose epicenter was the Table Rock Reservation—consisted of a series of events that pushed colonists to begin to see the landscape in a more uncompromising and rigid fashion. The period between the establishment of the Table Rock Reserve and the end of the Rogue River War holds the key to understanding this transformation in attitude regarding assimilation versus separation and the Indian problem in Southern Oregon.

Reservation without Removal: the Making and Unmaking of Table Rock

Table Rock Reserve was located at the center of the Takelma homeland and the rocks themselves were of great symbolic importance to the many bands that lived in the area. They held significance for colonists as well, who valued the geologic structures as key landmarks in a new country where navigation was difficult. The reserve, then, had a number of surprising characteristics. First, it was established close to the centers of white colonization, mining, and settlement in Southern Oregon. Second, it was established in the center of Takelma ancestral homeland. And third, it included familiar, meaningful, and obvious landmarks; this made the reserve itself hard to ignore.

Establishing a reserve amidst the American settlement on such symbolically important ground was an unusual choice; it amounted to reservation without removal. A consistent feature

that debate. For instance, Lea’s successor George Manypenny, which whom Joel Palmer agreed on most important questions, believed that reservations would be a way to facilitate future assimilation. Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 93. See also, Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Alban W. Hoopes, *Indian Affairs and Their Administration: With Special Reference to the Far West, 1849-1860* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1972); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); E. A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 51–52; O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 140–141, 145.

¹⁰ Or *Di’tani* (Rock Above) or possibly *Kwenphunkh*. Chris Reyes, *The Table Rocks of Jackson County: Islands in the Sky* (Ashland Or.: Last Minute Publications, 1994); Dennis Gray, *The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors: A New Ethnographic Synthesis for the Upper Rogue River Area of Southwestern Oregon* (Eugene: Dept. of Anthropology at the University of Oregon, 1987), 76.

¹¹ Richard White, “Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1, Third Series (January 1, 2006): 9–14.

of reservation policy, whether motivated more by assimilation or separation, was that it sought to put significant physical distance between whites and Indians. The reserve at Table Rock remained a conspicuous reminder of the persistence of Indian people and their confinement, in large part because the Table Rocks themselves were prominent aspects of the mental landscapes of both native and colonist, and the creation of the reserve around them enhanced its notoriety.¹² In addition, Indians living in their ancestral lands so close to settlements were regularly tempted—by old habits and employment opportunities—to leave the reserve. The resulting porousness of the reservations’ boundaries triggered fears that it was an unpredictable threat to the American colony. In the context of the war, this porousness became a major factor convincing the vast majority of white residents that Indians and colonists could not share Southwest Oregon at all.

From the time of its creation by a treaty signed on 10 September 1853, demographic and legal realities shaped the Table Rock Reservation. The 1853 treaty was ratified by President Franklin Pierce and signed by key chiefs of major bands of Takelma Indians of the upper Rogue River, Joe (Apserkahar), Sam (Toquahear), and Jim (Anachakarah), and John, Limpy, and George’s bands on the Applegate River (a tributary of the Rogue).¹³ This treaty, the first in Oregon to be ratified by the president, carried legal weight and resulted in the transfer of land rights from Indians to American colonists.¹⁴ The Table Rock Treaty differed from previous informal agreements between Takelma people and American colonists, one of which had recently put an end to scattered hostilities along the Rogue, in that it was an official treaty between agents of the United States government and Indian leaders that resulted in the transfer of land in addition to the cessation of hostilities.¹⁵ It was also accompanied by the establishment of Fort Lane on 28 September 1853, located just outside the reserve and staffed with about 100 men. In some ways colonists’ actions foreshadowed what we have come to accept as common legal dealings between American government representatives and native groups. They used threats of devastating military violence to convince the Indians to agree to unfavorable terms—the treaty was signed just as a company of volunteers and regular army troops rolled into the valley accompanied by their twelve-pound howitzer. This added to an impressive show of force for Indians who only recently negotiated the end of hostilities with their new neighbors. The fact that the territory given for the reserve was mostly non-arable and dramatically smaller than the

¹² Based on informal inquiries conducted by the author, Table Rocks can be seen from some parts of Jacksonville, Oregon and not others. For those living and traveling in Rogue River Valley, views of the Table Rocks could have been intermittently captured depending on one’s elevation. It is important to remember that Table Rock had a certain visual notoriety. Other evidence also indicates this. For instance, in July 1877 issue of *West Shore* magazine the following description of Lower Table Rock, stressing the vision of seeing the rocks from a long way off. “Viewed from a distance, on the southern and southeastern side, it resembles a vast fortress with crowning battlements and insurmountable walls. Its top has the appearance of a level surface, which is more striking because it is seen without background, except the clear sky, at this season of the year.” Kay Atwood, “Oregon Places: ‘As Long as the World Goes on’: The Table Rocks and the Takelma,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 95, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 530.

¹³ United States, George Minot, and George P. Sanger, *The Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America from ...* (Dennis, 1855), 1020. Colonists were apparently aware of the land upon which the Reserve had been placed. In 1857, after removal was completed, a group of colonists submitted a document to request that the lands formerly included on the Reserve be opened to Euroamerican settlement and purchase. They described the land as “three townships of the best arable land in Oregon. “Request to Open Indian Lands”, 1857, <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/>.

¹⁴ The complicated nature of applying land law to Oregon, whether based on treaties or legislation, will be discussed at length in Chapter 5, below.

¹⁵ Ord, “The Rogue River Campaign,” 17.

area ceded by the Indians fits with the overall pattern of land selection for reservations. The Takelma people ceded all lands from a mile below the mouth of the Applegate River west to the Cascades and from the Siskiyou Mountains to a line just north of Upper and Lower Table Rock.¹⁶ In exchange, they received installment payments of 60,000 dollars in goods (less fifteen thousand for indemnities) and established a reserve of land upon which they were allowed to live, hunt, fish, and farm. Reservation residents were required to provide safe passage through their reserve, and to allow representatives of the United States government to reside upon their land. In these characteristics the Table Rock Treaty was typical of those signed in the 1850s and others that came later in the century.

The treaty also contained atypical stipulations. Perhaps most striking was that while the reserve was described and delineated in the treaty, it was not considered permanent in the original document. This created a strange situation where infrastructure was to be built, in the form of houses for each of the principal chiefs, dwellings for agents, and Fort Lane, and the expense and hardship of removal was to be undertaken, but with the express possibility that the Indians would be removed again. As the treaty described, the “tribe shall be allowed to occupy temporarily that portion of the [ceded] tract of territory bounded as follows.”¹⁷ According to historian E.A. Schwartz, the Indian negotiators may have been misled on this point. Toquahear would complain four years later that he was told in 1853 that the Table Rock Reservation would belong to his people permanently. “General Lane is now here,” he said. “He knows what was told to us; that we would have to leave it for awhile; but we never sold it.”¹⁸

Table Rock’s location on the ancestral lands of the Rogue River bands had significance for the way the reserve would be perceived and experienced by the inhabitants of Southwest Oregon. There is evidence that these bands lived on the reserve, but continued to hunt, fish, and gather according to long-held patterns, including occasional thefts of food and property from white colonists. The army regulars stationed at Fort Lane were charged with inhibiting such activities and keeping the Indians on the reserve, but their efforts yielded uneven results. The Takelma had long kept a large winter encampment near Lower Table Rock, which now lay on the reservation. Allowed to continue to use this identical seasonal camp after signing the treaty, the Takelma bands may have believed that the rest of their yearly migrations could remain intact as well.¹⁹ Thus, the geographic location of Table Rock Reserve meant that the boundaries of the reservation would remain porous.²⁰

Porous boundaries were also encouraged by the fact that the treaty itself did not call for all the Indians of the Rogue River to be confined to the reservation. Confusion arose because many Indians who colonists considered to be of the same tribe or nation as Reservation Indians were in fact not included in the treaty and had not ceded their land. The leaders of the major Indian bands of the upper Rogue River signed this treaty, ceding all lands from a mile below the mouth of the Applegate River west to the Cascades and from the Siskiyou Mountains to a line just north of Upper and Lower Table Rock. These were the lands belonging to bands whites had long considered to be “hostile” to Americans (Chiefs Sam, Joe, and Jim’s people on the Rogue

¹⁶ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 101, 106. It “increased white ability to retaliate against Indian attacks.”

¹⁷ States, Minot, and Sanger, *The Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America from ...*, 1018.

¹⁸ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 59. One writer has characterized the situation during the existence of the Table Rock Reservation as a time when the Takelma were hostages in their own country, Atwood, “Oregon Places,” 516.

¹⁹ Reyes, *The Table Rocks of Jackson County*, 7.

²⁰ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 108.

River, and Chiefs John, Limpy, and George's people on the Applegate River). Other bands (Chief Tipsu's Shasta band and others farther west down the Rogue River and along the Illinois River) did not sign the treaty and did not move onto the reserve.²¹ Thus, only a portion of the Indians of Southwest Oregon were legally supposed to be confined to the reservation (about 400 in total), with other bands (500 total, with 75 or 100 considered fighting men) remaining independent. Colonists with varying knowledge of the terms or signatories of the Table Rock Treaties, may have assumed that Indians living off-reservation after 1853 were in violation of their agreement whether they were or not.

Table Rock sat in the middle of Takelman and Athapaskan territory, and held special importance to these bands' vision of the world and explanation of their own origins; it lay at the center of the Indian mental landscape. In a creation story that has been recorded by local Oregon storyteller Thomas Doty, it is clear that the Table Rocks were seen as the originators of the Takelma way of life. Doty narrates the journey of the "Daldal Brothers," two dragonflies who journeyed up the Rogue River creating shelter, salmon, berries, and the other resources Takelma people would depend on, before becoming the flat-topped mountains known as Upper and Lower Table Rock. In Doty's words, "through the eyes of the Takelma people, the earth's body is a great animal. The neck is to the east at Boundary Springs, the ribs alongside the Rogue River are the Table Rocks, and the tail at Gold Beach where the river flows into the ocean. The river is this animal's lifeblood, pulsing and throbbing through the Takelma world."²²

These assertions find support in the words of Takelma people. One Takelma woman named Frances Johnson, who was a young girl at the time of the Rogue River War, described the Rocks as landmarks in relation to which her community placed other significant locations such as Grizzly Peak, Kelly Slough, and Bear Creek. Mary Orton, another Takelma informant oriented her descriptions of the broader territory by referring to the Table Rocks, explaining, for instance, "No more river east side of Table Rock."²³ The Table Rocks marked the approximate boundaries of the Lowland, Upland, and Northern Takelma dialect groups. "Their sheer, vertical cliffs formed brooding barriers, and from the broad, level surfaces of the Rocks one could see across the sweep of country, scan the trail that sound through the valley, and survey snowcapped mountain peaks on the horizon."²⁴ Indeed, according to Frances Johnson the name of Bear Creek Valley, "Sa'thkawkh," signified an area whose boundaries were defined by Table Rock, "the big open place across the river from Table Rock on the south side of the Rogue River."²⁵ There is also evidence that Takelma people felt the potential loss of connection to the Table Rocks keenly as they faced the reality of removal to the Coast reservation. One Takelma headman, Cholcultah ("George"), as quoted in a report filed with the Department of the Interior, said of Table Rock, "If we could be even on the borders of our native land, where we could sometimes see it, we would be satisfied."²⁶ The Table Rocks held deep meaning for the Takelma and Athapaskan

²¹ Ibid., 101–102.

²² Thomas Doty, *Ribs of the Animal: Native Views of the Rogue River and the Table Rocks* (Ashland: Upriver Downriver Productions, 2004), 1; Atwood, "Oregon Places."

²³ Atwood, "Oregon Places," 519–520. See also, Gray, *The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors*. For a sensitive interpretation of the role of place name in American Indian culture see Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*.

²⁴ Atwood, "Oregon Places," 521.

²⁵ Gray, *The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors*, 77.

²⁶ Atwood, "Oregon Places," 516.

people who lived in their shadows and viewed the expanse of their home from the impressive plateaus.²⁷

Indian inhabitants of the Rogue River Valley were not alone in viewing the Table Rocks with reverence and as a safe haven. Some of the earliest recorded impressions of the Rocks by Euroamericans described it as such. For example, James Clyman, who led a fur expedition in 1845 into Rogue River country, described his approach to “a Table rock of considerable High the top level and [said] to contain an Indian village,” which he assessed as a likely “place of safety in seasons of danger.”²⁸ Nor were they alone in placing significance on the Table Rocks through place-naming and other evidence of their prominence on mental maps. Colonists repeatedly stressed the incredible vista achieved by climbing the rocks. They provided a view, from 800 feet above the valley floor, of the expanse of the Rogue Valley, Bear Creek Valley, Mount McLoughlin, Mount Ashland, Wagner Butte, and Pilot Rock. This was a splendid and useful view and colonists placed value on it, especially since the Pliocene-era plateaus were easily climbed. Colonists also recognized that native people would continue to capitalize on these strategic benefits as long as they resided near the rocks.²⁹ Euroamericans named noteworthy places after the rocks, the visual impact of which distinguished Rogue River country. Jacksonville, the largest and most important town in Southwest Oregon and the center of the Gold Rush settlement, was known as Table Rock City from 1850-1853, before it was changed to Jacksonville as a statement of support for the Democratic Party. There was also a distinct community in the area between Bybee Bridge and Lower Table Rock known as the Table Rock Community, which boasted a Table Rock Post Office as early as 1872.³⁰ Other institutions also warranted the name of Table Rock. For example, in the fall of 1854, a Rev. Kendall organized the “congregation at Table Rock in Jackson County.” The congregation, according to family stories remembered by Kendall’s granddaughter, lapsed soon after creation because of Indian troubles. Kendall’s granddaughter remembered being told “Table Rock was in the very center of the Rogue River Indian troubles.”³¹

Table Rock’s location also associated it with the recent conflicts that prompted the negotiation of the treaty in the first place. A history of Indian/colonist warfare centered at Table Rock increased its association with warfare. The first instance took place in 1851, as a reaction to scattered violence between miners and settlers and Takelma and Athapaskan Indians living in the vicinity of Jacksonville and Table Rock. This early skirmish sets the pattern of Table Rock’s centrality to the stories of violence during what some scholars call the “First Rogue River War.” Major Kearney of the United States Army traveled to Table Rock after hearing reports of Indian/white fighting in the valley and that the Indians had assembled there. Upon arrival, he found that the Indians had taken the top of formidable Table Rock. Knowing he could not storm

²⁷ There is some evidence that Indians who lived along the Rogue River saw and viewed the Table Rocks as a sort of safe haven. John Beeson, who was a settler in the Rogue River Country during the height of Indian hostilities and who was an outspoken critic of colonial treatment of native groups in the area, recorded an instance when two women and a man “had taken refuge upon Table Rock...and it was reported they had killed themselves by jumping down its steep and craggy sides.” Reyes, *The Table Rocks of Jackson County*, 11. The fact that the Takelma maintained a winter camp on the Rock may also be an indication that they viewed it as a place of safety during a period of the year when resources were scarce.

²⁸ Atwood, “Oregon Places,” 521–522. Some credit Clyman with the first use of the name Table Rock for the structures.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 516.

³⁰ Reyes, *The Table Rocks of Jackson County*, 27.

³¹ McWilliams, “Interview, Principally Concerned with Her Grandfather, Rev. Thomas Simpson Kendall D.D.”

the place because of the wide view it commanded, Kearney was forced to halt his march and await reinforcements. After his reinforcements arrived a battle ensued. The creek running north into the Rogue River at Table Rock, previously called Bear Creek, was renamed Stewart Creek after one of the men who died, and a camp used by Kearney along this creek dubbed Camp Stewart.³²

In June 1852, another violent incident placed Table Rock on the radars of American colonists in Rogue River Valley. During a period of truce, a sub-chief named Taylor was accused of killing seven colonists. He denied the charge to the chagrin of the colonists. Then, a rumor that the “Rogues were holding white women captive at Table Rock” further enraged them. In response, some colonists in Jacksonville formed a posse, captured Taylor and three of his warriors, and hanged them. The posse then traveled to Table Rock to rescue the white women. Not finding any, they killed six Indians instead.³³ These dramatic events caught the attention of the public and increased the notoriety of Table Rock as a place of warfare where hostile Indians might fight shelter and launch attacks. As the fighting escalated in August of 1852, it continued to be focused around Table Rock, a fact that was known in the valley among the settlers, miners, and other colonists who lived in the area. The diary of America Rollins Butler, who migrated with her husband and cousin on the Applegate trail in 1852 and settled on a land claim along Stewart or Bear Creek in February of 1853, exemplifies the centrality of Table Rock to the conflict and also suggests that common colonists knew and disseminated this information that reinforced the association of the rocks with Indian/white warfare. Mrs. Butler reported on the war in great detail, reflecting what must have been a strong communication system among colonists in the valley. Butler reported seeing pack trains traveling through the valley from her house—perhaps her proximity to the pack trains allowed her to be privy to more information. If this is the case it is likely she shared it with neighbors and friends, with whom she and her husband and the other members of their household traded letters frequently.³⁴

Butler’s Diary contains accurate information about the location and timing of events. She notes Table Rock as a central location for the conflict. On August 15th she reported “Monday the Co. Of men have just returned from Aplegait. They lost one man and several others wounded. The troup numbering 300 start for Table Rock after dark expect an engagement to tomorrow.” By 11 September, the day after the signing of the treaty, Mrs. Butler already was privy to the details: “The two Johns for head quarters of Indian affairs A treaty is about to be closed paying 60,000 \$ for their land in this valley.”³⁵ Her assessment of the circumstances leading to the treaty mentioned Table Rock as the setting on numerous occasions, a point that will be returned to below during the discussion of the treaty negotiations themselves.

Her perspective is corroborated by other sources that indicate that the conflict was centered on Table Rock, which lay at the center of narratives about the war as well as a geographic center of the fighting.³⁶ The rocks were often described as a type of rendezvous for

³² Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*, 54.

³³ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁴ Oscar Osburn Winther and Rose Dodge Galey, “Mrs. Butler’s 1853 Diary of Rogue River Valley,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (December 1, 1940): 354.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 352, 156.

³⁶ Mrs. Butler’s timeline and impressions about the beginning of the war, the way it proceeded, and the circumstances of its end are also corroborated by other sources. Captain Alden wrote up his beliefs about the Indian forces concentrated at Table Rock, claiming there were about “250 warriors, 150 of this number being armed with rifles and...ammunition.” He also noted in this same report to his superior written in October 1853 that these men,

the Indians.³⁷ B.R. Alden was told to have made haste to the vicinity of Table Rock in order to meet groups of hostile Indians who were corralling their resources under the protection of the rocks. In a reaction similar to Kearney, he dropped everything and despite the fact that his regiment was very ill, made his way to Camp Stewart, about ten miles from Table Rock and seven miles southeast of Jacksonville, along with about 200 volunteer soldiers he had picked up along the way.³⁸ Alden and his men then sought out the Indians, organized a pack train, and “made every preparation to pursue the Indians wherever they were to be found.”³⁹ This involved sending one detachment up Evans creek, which would later form the western boundary of the Table Rock Reserve, while he and the rest of his men explored north of Table Rock along another trail. About fifteen miles north of Table Rock, Alden found the trail the Indians had used to flee into the mountains. He led his command through a country he described as “exceedingly mountainous and almost impassable for animals, and as the Indians had fired the country behind them, the falling of the burning timber, and the heat delayed our progress.”⁴⁰ The stories record the process of searching on and around Table Rock in the search for the enemy, and then engaging again with the same landscape during the battle itself. Table Rock was deeply embedded in the stories of the violent altercations that preceded the Rogue River War.

The end of this early conflict was also set at Table Rock. The process of negotiating peace began after the battle north of Table Rock. According to Joseph Lane who participated in the battle, the Indians approached him, told them their heart was sick of war “and that they would meet me at Table Rock in seven days, where they would give up their arms, making a treaty.”⁴¹ Mrs. Butler also knew that the idea for holding the treaty negotiations at Table Rock came from the Indians noting on the third of September that the Indians now “want the white men to come to them” at their Table Rock village.⁴² Another famous event of this story occurred in the environs of Table Rock. The Indians, after agreeing to the treaty negotiations, volunteered to help the American army and volunteer troops; they carried water and cleaned the wounds of wounded soldiers, and helped carry litters with wounded men the 25 miles to Camp Alden, the outpost that would later be repurposed as Fort Lane and occupied by soldiers whose job was to enforce the terms of the Table Rock treaty.⁴³ From the beginning to the end of this much-discussed conflict the action was centered at Table Rock, which added to the visual and mythic notoriety already attached to the Rocks.

In the days after the truce, Indians, army regulars, and volunteers began to gather at Fort Alden and on 1 September the Americans decided to hold a military parade in the shadows of Table Rock, perhaps as an attempt to reassert their own victory and dominance over the

as Butler reported, headed back to the valley to protect settlements after hearing of attacks there, and then returned on August 15 and 16 to Table Rock, and there separated into small groups and chased the Indians. Alden had heard a report that the Indians had gone into the mountains, so he organized a pack train and “made every preparation to pursue the Indians wherever they were to be found.” Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 97; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 55. Schwartz is quoting Alden in a letter to the Adjutant General from 18 October 1853

³⁷ Ord, “The Rogue River Campaign,” 5–6.

³⁸ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 55.

³⁹ Quoting Alden in a letter to the Adjutant General from 18 October 1853; *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴² Winther and Galey, “Mrs. Butler’s 1853 Diary of Rogue River Valley,” 355.

⁴³ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 57.

vanquished and surrendered Indians who had just helped them round up their dead and care for their wounded. The choice of the so-called Crescent City Guard as the guard of honor in this parade supports this assessment. The volunteers had already marched through Jacksonville earlier in the day “waving a flag on which was inscribed in flaming colors *Extermination* [emphasis in original].” After marching, several volunteer commanders made speeches and General Lane presented gifts of banners to each regiment, sewn by women in the settlements. After this celebration of the genocidal element within the colonial community and of colonists’ manhood (symbolized by the tokens sewn by the women they claimed to protect) Chief Joe was allowed to speak to the assembled crowd. He said his band did not start the hostilities, and stressed that he only led his men to war after whites had killed fourteen of his people, many of which were servants in Jacksonville.⁴⁴ These statements challenged the narrative preferred and proffered by the colonists, and may have highlighted the Indian claim to the land around Table Rock. Three days later the whites and Indians crossed the river and went to a village site in the foothills surrounding Lower Table Rock to negotiate a treaty of peace. In late September, after Indian/white violence continued in distant hills and meadows along the Illinois River, Captain Andrew J. Smith established Fort Lane about a mile below Table Rock at the site of Camp Alden’s festivities.⁴⁵

The meetings to negotiate and sign the Table Rock Treaty imbued the agreement with the impression that Table Rock was Indian home turf, despite the recent military defeat. Colonists paid particular attention to the location of the meetings: an Indian village directly under Table Rock known as the “rendezvous” for hostile Indians during the recent war. By the end of the negotiations the village, the dramatic geological structures above them, and all the history embedded in that landscape would be included within the boundaries of the Indian reserve. For colonists, this situation constituted a threat to hopes of American sovereignty in the region. It also opened the possibility for a deeper and more powerful sense of conquest to be achieved. If colonists could wrestle Table Rock from the Indians who had managed to maintain it as “home turf” through settlement, gold rush, military conquest, and surrender, then they could feel a significant step closer to freeing the landscape of Southwest Oregon for true and irrevocable incorporation into the American body politic.

At the conclusion of a bloody battle north of Table Rock at the end of August 1853, Indians had requested, as a condition of their surrender, that the negotiations take place at their village on Table Rock. And so, after the peace, Indians and colonists traveled together to Fort Alden and then crossed the river and went to a village site in the foothills surrounding Lower Table Rock to negotiate a treaty of peace. After holding the celebratory but not uncomplicated military parade, the colonists agreed to enter the village unarmed, their only protection an outfit of dragoons laying in wait a quarter-mile from the negotiation site. On 5 September 1853 Joel Palmer commented on this geographical dynamic, writing that the negotiations were held “On the slope of the hill back to Table Rock 6 miles from Camp Alden” with “Smiths company of Dragoons is here 1/4 mile distant” on the opening day but on subsequent days “at a spring, on Table Rock.”⁴⁶ They agreed to go unarmed despite the fact that Indian men had bows and arrows. The dragoons sat along the hillside and “on the broad plain below Table Rock” and

⁴⁴ Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁶ Joel Palmer, “1853 Diary Typescript”, n.d., Joel Palmer Papers, MSS 114, Box 1 Folder 8, Oregon Historical Research Library.

“armed dragoons strained to observe any sign of trouble at the treaty site above.”⁴⁷ Straining from below to see up the Rock to the sphere where they were not allowed to defend their countrymen would have reinforced the sense that the territory upon the rock belonged to the Indians.

Many other participants in the negotiations also took note of the unique setting. Eyewitnesses recalled the beauty of the sunlit meadow with the lovely mountain stream below. Matthew Deady, for example, recalled that the treaty council was held “on a narrow bench of a long, gently sloping hill, lying over against the noted bluff called [Lower] Table Rock.”⁴⁸ Others remembered the setting in military terms, perhaps reflecting their recent experiences in war and the way Table Rock resembled, and at times acted as, a sort of fortress. Others like Judge Deady, remarked on the grandness of the setting as well, noting it was “worthy of the pen of Sir Walter Scott.”⁴⁹

Palmer had budgetary reasons to hold the negotiations on Table Rock, and perhaps did not realize the symbolic implications of holding the treaty council on such a fraught site. He had only just written to Bureau of Indian Affairs director George Washington Manypenny, describing his intention to abandon “pomp and display” and great expense with which Anson Dart had undertaken his negotiations with Willamette Valley Indians. The “miserable bands and remnants of tribes in the region,” would be better treated with little fanfare in their “...usual places of residence...let them be collected at places as contiguous to their homes as possible and there treated with, not with a view of indulging their savage whims and fancies but with an eye to their real and permanent good and if possible their elevation in the social scale of humanity.”⁵⁰ Palmer certainly paid less for the simple meeting on a hillside near Table Rock in September 1853 than Dart had lavished upon banquets he held in Champoeg in 1851. But it is also possible he had a further goal in treating with Indians close to their home, based on the belief that Indians would be more likely to be agreeable if in their own setting. But it seems Palmer underestimated, in the case of the Table Rock Treaty, the danger posed by reinforcing indigenous claims to land, based both on ancestral knowledge and also on more recent histories of conflict and accommodation.

It seems Palmer’s reasoning did not take into account the way holding the treaty negotiations on Indian land and then creating a reservation on that same land could play in the minds of Oregon’s colonists; threatened by a subjugated people as only white American men can be.⁵¹ Perceiving a threat to their colonial goals, Americans in Oregon responded by setting Table Rock in their sights, despite the fact that its residents in fact caused very few problems. Destroying it would become the preoccupation of exterminationists from within Southwest Oregon. And the consequences of that destruction, the “Second Rogue River War,” (typically called “The Rogue River War”) would convince the vast majority of Southwest Oregon that no Indians could remain in the region if it was to be satisfactorily Americanized.

⁴⁷ Atwood, “Oregon Places,” 525–525.

⁴⁸ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 104.

⁴⁹ O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 152.

⁵⁰ As cited in C.F. Coan, “The Adoption of the Reservation Policy in the Pacific Northwest,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* XXIII, no. 1 (March 1922): 31.

⁵¹ Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*.

Extermination and Table Rock Reserve

While exterminationist rhetoric was common among Southwest Oregon colonists in 1853, the conviction that expunging all Indians from Southwest Oregon was necessary for full Americanization had not reached the level the hegemony it would after the “Second Rogue River War.” A cursory look at the Oregon’s newspapers in the weeks leading up to the Table Rock Treaty could lead to an exaggeration of the popularity of exterminationism at this moment. While it is true that many colonists were openly hostile to signing this or any treaty with Indians they believed ought to be hunted down and killed, it was the political significance of the Treaty rather than deep social consensus that led exterminationists to be so outspoken in the press. Palmer was a Democratic appointee of President Franklin Pierce. Thus, his movement for negotiating treaties with Indians was often under attack by his Whig political opponents.⁵²

Whig papers like *The Oregonian* and *The Spectator* repeatedly published editorials that argued for the futility and folly of negotiating treaties with the native people of the Rogue River. For example on 3 September 1853 (7 days before the Table Rock Treaty was signed), the *Oregonian* editorialized “The whole Indian race in southern Oregon will be exterminated,” and argued that direct experience being “subjected to the ruthless had of savages” would drive any man, even the outspoken “self-styled philanthropists” who opposed the program of ethnic cleansing to the same conclusion. Since treaties, according to the paper, meant nothing to Indians, “one course only is left for the whites, and that course will inevitably be adopted.” Similarly on 2 September the *Spectator* opined, “the extinction of the entire race in that region is almost unanimous sentiment,” and, “no treaty with the southern Indians can be entered into that the whites will feel safe under after it is made.”⁵³ Those with Democratic political leanings used their own papers to present an opposing view of the Table Rock Treaty. A spring 1854 article, exemplified the Democratic position of the *Statesman*. This article described the reining peace in Southwest Oregon since Palmer’s heroic work negotiating with the local Indians. It reported flourishing agriculture on the reserve and few problems of law and order, and enthusiastically anticipates Palmer’s plan to explore the country throughout Southwest Oregon to find more convenient reserves within the region.⁵⁴ Each of these perspectives was undoubtedly politically motivated; the idea of exterminationism would later reach a new level of dominance that crossed party lines.

Not only did a significant portion of Southwest Oregon’s colonists criticize the idea of exterminating the Indians in 1853, but also many were confident that they could successfully share the territory with Takelma and Athapaskan people on the reserve. Their support and optimism regarding the Table Rock reserve attest to this belief. This became apparent immediately after the treaty was signed. Initially, a group of citizens in Jacksonville planned a meeting to protest the document, but quickly changed their tune and instead gathered to

⁵² O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 151, 154. The “exterminators, the Whigs, and the *Oregonian*” were the most unhappy. They used gendered language typical of antebellum partisan rhetoric. In the *Oregonian* in the weeks after the treaty was signed, Lane was called the “Gassy Ann” of the Rogue River War where he had been the “Mary Ann” of the Mexican war. The paper also called the treaty “bumbuggery.” It also reported that, in Jacksonville, a drunken miner went about town seeking money to buy General Lane a petticoat.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 151, 158. Palmer himself recognized the mixed messages caused by political mobilization of the Treaty issue, writing to the Agent Culver in the Rogue River, “The report from Rogue River are very confusing. Sometimes it is reported that you are in a state of war,” and other times not.

⁵⁴ “Indian Affairs in Oregon,” *Umpqua Gazette*, Winter 1854.

announce that the rights of Indians must be remembered and that they would “look upon any person who would attempt to violate any of the provisions of this treaty, as unworthy of the esteem of his fellow man, and undeserving of the rights and privileges of citizenship.” Both the Indians on the reserve and Jacksonville residents upheld their end of the treaty during difficult times later in September when two reservation residents allegedly killed a colonist. The Indians turned over the culprits despite them being beloved relatives of Chief Joe. The colonists in turn refrained from lynching the men, as some among them proposed, and instead held them prisoner awaiting the circuit judge.⁵⁵ Neither was Mrs. Butler convinced that extermination or expunging was necessary. She supported the treaty and expressed derision for whites who acted treacherously toward Indians.⁵⁶ Other colonists living in Southwest Oregon were explicitly optimistic, like one who wrote in May of 1854. “The Indian troubles are no doubt at an end,...and the efforts of our efficient Indian agent, Mr Culver, are untiring to keep them so.”⁵⁷ These voices came from a broad segment of the population of Southwest Oregon who found the presence of a reservation in the midst of settlements as compatible with Americanization.

Holes in the Plan: Table Rock as Impetus to Total Separation

Soon, challenged to this spatial tolerance emerged from the proximity of Table Rock to American towns and settlements. The porous boundaries of Table Rock—an unavoidable consequence of establishing a poorly supplied Indian reservation in an ancestral Indian homeland w on which only a part of the native population was required to remain—began to cause problems that increased the appeal of total separation as the only solution to Indian/white problems. The treaty of 1853 was based on the principle of separating Indians and whites, but did little to enforce such separation. In fact, by consistently undersupplying the reservation, the federal and territorial government actually encouraged Indians to challenge the treaty by engaging in hunting and gathering forays off reservation. These sometimes led to theft of food and property from colonial farmers and miners, and thus increased talk among colonists of removal and extermination.⁵⁸

A lack of food on the reserve drove Indians to leave Table Rock. In April 1854 Palmer arrived during a Southwest Oregon tour and found that the sickness, hunger, and severe winter had killed large numbers of people on the reserve; the death rate was as high as twenty percent.⁵⁹ In Palmer’s words, “Consternation and dismay prevailed.” He also found that many Indians had fled the reservation, and others were preparing to go to the mountains. Palmer went to find Tipsey, who was leader of a band who had fled Table Rock. This band tellingly stood accused not just of violating the Treaty, but also of violating the homes of colonists along the Rogue River in other, more disturbing ways: killing a settler and his dog, and leaving the corpses of both on the settler’s own house. These crimes, if they were indeed committed by Tipsey’s band, could be interpreted as intended to communicate a disdain for the integrity of colonists homes. This would not be too surprising given the lack of respect colonial farmers and miners had shown for the homes of Native Americans. If American fabricated such stories centered on the

⁵⁵ O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 155.

⁵⁶ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 100; Winther and Galey, “Mrs. Butler’s 1853 Diary of Rogue River Valley,” 354.

⁵⁷ “[Letter from Jacksonville],” *Umpqua Gazette* (Scottsburg, Oregon Territory, May 12, 1854).

⁵⁸ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 108.

⁵⁹ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 205.

violation of domestic space, they are important as representations of the perceived threat the presence of Reservation Indians posed to the American colonial project of domesticating and Americanizing Southwest Oregon. Tipsey, who ran from the accusations whether they were accurate or not, hid so well in the mountains of Southwest Oregon that Palmer was unable to find him in five days of searching.⁶⁰

It seems the Takelma, whom Palmer remembered as being afraid to enter the reservation, had good reason to hesitate before trusting the United States government to assure their health and comfort. They agreed to remain separate from whites and to remain within the boundaries of the 100 square miles of the reserve trusting that they would be provided adequate sustenance. When the government failed to adequately supply the reservation, Table Rock residents were forced to choose between starvation, disease, and exposure and inciting the racist wrath of the colonists and settlers they had just finished fighting. Their quests for food did not just bother the colonists, though. They challenged the geographical arrangement that inspired the Treaty itself, and the idea that reservations could be situated in native land and near white settlements became the target of colonist's anger and frustration.⁶¹

Meanings associated with Table Rock Reserve fed an increasingly aggressive exterminationist minority and triggered the wrath of the segment of the Southwest Oregon population who had espoused extermination of Indians since the beginning of the 1850s. The climax of this growing sense of victimhood and accompanying thirst for revenge among white colonists was the Lupton (named after a self-titled "Major" and newly elected representative to the territorial legislature, James A. Lupton), or Butte Creek Massacre of 8 October 1855, in which between 30 and 40 Indians of Chief Sambo and Chief Jake's bands, camped near Fort Lane just outside the boundaries of the Reserve, were killed.⁶² At least half of these were women, children, or old men. This act of unprovoked brutality began the Rogue River War, the experience of which would draw the vast majority of Southwest Oregon's residents into the fold of exterminationism and total removal of Indians.⁶³

Scholars of the Oregon wars have noted that Table Rock connects the Lupton Massacre and the Rogue River War, but they have not scrutinized the importance of geographic meaning and its connection to the sequence of events.⁶⁴ The period between the establishment of the Reserve and Lupton's Massacre has been described as "an uncertain peace," with violence breaking out between Indians and whites who had recently discovered gold and established mining community near the mouth of the Rogue and Umpqua rivers. During this period the

⁶⁰ O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 165–166, 170. In the years of the Table Rock Reservation's existence similar instances of violence erupted from conflicts over key navigational points like ferries, or spaces coded as home or domesticated space like, cabins, farms, and enclosed fields. O'Donnell recounts an early 1854 massacre and skirmish where both sides focused their destruction on the homes of the opposing side. For analysis of the significance of home in another colonial/Indian conflict, see Lepore, *The Name of War*, 74–76.

⁶¹ Palmer wrote in his diary of the groups who had agreed to enter the reserve: "We visited them and convinced them of the folly of their fear and they started to the reserve a portion had fled to the mountains and a messenger [sic] was sent for them and directed to bring them on to the reserve." Palmer, "1853 Diary Typescript."

⁶² Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 79.

⁶³ Tom Engelhardt has written convincingly about this somewhat incongruous pairing victimhood and triumph at the center of American self-identification in relation ship to war. "From its origins" he writes "this war story was essentially defensive in nature, and the justness of American acts was certified not only by how many of *them* died, but by how few of *us* there were to begin with," *The End of Victory Culture*, 5.

⁶⁴ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 136–137; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 203–205; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 71–74; Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 129–130.

Takelma and Athapaskan bands that were party to the Table Rock Treaty remained largely peaceful, despite the thefts that resulted from poor supplies on the reserve discussed above. In summer of 1855, though, conflicts again broke out between the off-reservation bands and white colonists along the upper Rogue River. Then, on September 26th, colonists heard news of a major Indian attack on the Siskiyou Mountains. Nervous colonists who had spent the last two years in a tenuous peace with Table Rock Reserve Indians and their off-reservation cousins, while reading of violence taking place to the west, responded to this news with alarm. Before long, an unsubstantiated rumor spread that “Rogue River Indians from the Table Rock Reserve” along with Klamath Lake Indians were to blame for the Siskiyou attack. “Major” Lupton began to gather colonists together in Jacksonville and to encourage them to attack the Table Rock Reserve, demanding the accused be turned over for punishment. Contemporaries and historians agree that this group’s fixation on Table Rock Reserve as the source of the Siskiyou violence was unfounded.⁶⁵ The same exterminationist element continued to blame Table Rock Indians for problems throughout the valley. For instance, they became even more agitated by the story of a man called Mr. Jones who lived about seven miles down the Rogue from Table Rock that Indian men were encamping on his farm and would not leave (no one seemed to care that apparently their wives and daughters had been taken by a party of white men camped another seven miles downstream from that). After being advised by the Indian Agent George H. Ambrose to tell the Indians to leave and if they would not to shoot them, Jones and many others joined Lupton’s militias in order to exact revenge for these wrongdoings.⁶⁶

Lupton’s success in recruiting a wide variety of men to join him in an explicit campaign to kill Indians, focused on the reserve at Table Rock, reflects the increasing hold of extermination triggered by Table Rock’s geographic location. At a 7 October community meeting held by Lupton to gain followers, there were ‘two Methodist preachers and other leading men’ in attendance. John Beeson, who was becoming outraged by the white brutality toward Indians and the language of extermination and would become an outspoken proponent of Indians, publishing a book entitled *A Plea for the Indians* (1858) from his exile after being expelled from Southwest Oregon by angry mobs, spoke out against the planned campaign, urging people to follow a “living Gospel of love.” He found no one responded, which he ascribed to the fact that “no one had independence enough to speak his thoughts,” in a Southwest Oregon increasingly controlled and dominated by the language of extermination. It seems these volunteer militiamen were growing as intolerant of dissenting voices as they were to the presence of Indians anywhere in the region.⁶⁷

The colonial attack on the Table Rock Reserve reinforces the point that Lupton’s Massacre was about more than simply getting revenge for the violence and violations. Research has been unable to uncover any reasonable indication that colonists actually believed Table Rock Indians to be guilty of the attacks on the Siskiyou. They blamed those Indians because Table

⁶⁵ Gray Whaley argued that Lupton’s trackers claimed to have tracked those guilty of the killings in the Siskiyou back to Table Rock, but that the accompanying regular army officer disagreed with their assessment of the trail, specifically their claim that the trail led back to the Table Rock Reserve. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 204.

⁶⁶ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 113, 128–132. The rumor originated with Charles S. Drew, territorial representative and quartermaster general of the territorial militia throughout the 1850s. Drew was well-known for his paranoia, which drove him to sift through the trash at Table Rock Reservation and filter out any metal for fear the Indians would use it to make bullets.

⁶⁷ Beeson, John Beeson, *A Plea for the Indians* (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1982), 48.

Rock appeared as a threat that needed to be eradicated. It is no coincidence that the other precipitating event in the build up to the massacre involved Indians, nearby the Table Rock Reserve, who were disrespecting the property rights of a colonial farmer, Mr. Jones. The presence of Indians was becoming more and more anxiety producing and more difficult to tolerate as violence broke out at the outer reaches of Southwest Oregon. Exterminationists whose message was achieving a higher level of traction may well have targeted the Table Rock Reserve because it fit their goals of annihilating indigeneity within the region.

Exterminationism and its concomitant assumption that all Indians needed to be erased from the Southwest Oregon landscape went from being an extreme position held by a small portion of the community to a solution either actively promoted or tacitly approved by the vast majority of white settlers by the end of the Rogue River War. The Democratic *Statesman*, which had previously glossed over the problems on the reservation in support of Palmer's policies for political reasons, now seemingly abandoned partisan loyalty on the issue of Southwest Oregon Indians, joining their political opponents in calling for extermination. "...[I]t matters not what may have been the immediate or remote cause, or the occasion; it is no less a matter of *necessity* now to subdue and destroy--exterminate, so far as that is possible--all the Indians in arms in Rogue River. There can be no more safety for life and property there until that is done, and there should be, as there is, but one opinion about this duty. Whatever it *was*, it has *become* an absolute necessity now, and the work cannot be either omitted or deferred with safety to that valley. It cannot be performed in a day, or at a blow-but it will require time and patience."⁶⁸ Those involved in the Lupton Massacre and those who supported the unbridled murder of Indians in Southwest Oregon had been seen as die-hards and radicals in the past, but were now finding appeal among those who had been stalwart defenders of treaties, and who had supported the particularities of the Table Rock Treaty. Table Rock symbolized native ownership of the soil and now became a focal point for the anger, hatred, racism, and colonial patriotism that had been festering under the surface in Southwest Oregon. Exterminationists in Southwest Oregon interrelated with a desire to kill all Indians with a desire to eliminate Indians' territorial presence in the form of Table Rock Reservation.

Palmer had hoped to use reservations to stabilize and normalize the Indian land base before these passions exploded. He did not foresee that placing a partially inclusive reservation on deeply meaningful land amidst colonial settlements and then failing to supply that reservation with ample food and other necessities threw gasoline on the embers he had meant to extinguish. It also set the stage for the Lupton Massacre and subsequent fighting to transform colonial beliefs about what was possible and impossible, tolerable and intolerable about the arrangement of space and distribution of land and people in Southwest Oregon. Previously fluid and flexible arrangements of space were to be replaced with zero-sum, exclusionary, and rigid ones. This was to have disastrous consequences for the Indians of Southwest Oregon.

Rogue River War Experiences

After the Lupton Massacre, a large segment of the Indians living on Table Rock left the reserve and engaged in warfare against the colonists of the Rogue River Valley. One band alone, that of Chief Jake, left the reserve and were reported to have killed 20 colonists (men, women, and children) living along the Rogue River between Evans Ferry and Grave Creek. Most bands

⁶⁸ B. F. Dowell, "Scrapbook, 1858", to 1896 1850, 3, B.F. Dowell Papers, MSS 209, Folder 3, Oregon Historical Research Library.

that had not signed the Table Rock Treaty and entered the reservation refrained from fighting and sought refuge at Fort Lane, while the “hostile” bands consisted of Rogue River Valley bands that had never signed a treaty. The reserve Indians numbered 314 people, 81 men and boys over twelve and 233 women girls and boys under twelve. A census of the hostile bands was taken in November 1854 showing a total of 522 persons, of whom 147 were men, 200 women and 175 boys and girls. Different groups had their own particular reasons for choosing to join the fighting or to avoid it. The reservation bands may have been too weakened by disease and hunger to muster troops. Others, like Old John’s Applegate river band (who had close ties to Klamath River-Shasta Valley Shastas) joined the hostilities after witnessing the double standards colonial justice. John was recorded as saying that he fought because colonists freely hanged Indians for killing whites, while they did nothing when the situation was reversed. Euroamerican colonists who went unpunished had murdered members of his family.

It seems there was consensus one point: it was not safe for Indians to remain on Table Rock after the fighting began. Certainly the Indians, who fled the reservation to seek refuge at Fort Lane even though they wanted nothing to do with the war, demonstrate this fact. Indian Agent Ambrose wrote to Palmer on 9 October 1855: “The whole [white] populace of the country have become enraged...and I apprehend it will be useless to try to restrain those [hostile] Indians in any way, other than to kill them off. Nor do I believe it will be safe for Sam and his people [The Takelma on the Table Rock Reserve] to remain here.”⁶⁹ The rage of the white population was deeply enflamed by the acts of Indian warriors after the attack at Butte Creek by Lupton and his men. As Ambrose’s words establish, the combined events of the Lupton Massacre and the subsequent violence by Native Americans along the Rogue River amounted to a significant turning point in the relations between whites and Indians in Southwest Oregon. Significantly, these events also spelled the end of the Table Rock Reserve.

Another consequence of the dissolution of Table Rock Reserve in the context of open warfare was the emergence of a new way of categorizing Indians based on location. It resulted in a new division among Indians, defined by location. Before the destruction of the reserve there were, in colonial eyes, three basic categories of Indian living in the Rogue River Valley. The first was a treaty Indian who lived on the reserve. Having signed the treaty and agreed to reside on the reserve, these Indians had a particular relationship with the local Indian agents and federal government and were expected to adhere to particular rules regarding movement and land-use. Second, legitimately independent Indians who had not signed the treaty but were not considered active enemies of the American colony, even though Palmer and others anticipated their being confined to Table Rock or another reservation in time. Third, there were hostile Indians who were seen to be either in violation of the Table Rock Treaty or another agreement with whites, or to be guilty of illegal or violent acts like raiding, theft, vandalism, or murder. All of these categories, it should be noted, assumed a certain relationship with movement and occupation of territory, and certain acceptable and unacceptable geographic locations. Once the war began, the first category ceased to exist. Now, there were two kinds of Indians: friendly ones who lived under the control of the government (at camps assumed to be way stations en route to the Coast Reservation) and hostile ones who defied that control and lived outside the direct control of the government and military. Colonists equated freedom and movement with illegality in a discursive move, based on mental maps of the region, which vastly increased the scope of legitimate colonial action *vis-à-vis* Native Americans.

⁶⁹ As cited in Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 135–136.

This new reality was exemplified in an order Palmer sent to his employees in the Indian sub agencies on October 13th, enjoining them to regard all Indians who joined the hostile bands as an enemy (and to deny them reservation sanctuary).⁷⁰ Palmer used even harsher language in a letter to the Commissioner of Indian affairs on 9 October 1855, stating that that he needed “a peremptory order, requiring every Indian belonging there to remain constantly upon the reservation, and declaring every Indian found outside an outlaw,” even as he criticized of the white “murderers, robbers, horse-thieves, and vagabonds” that were illegitimately violent toward the Indians. Palmer reported on his efforts to maintain the division between these newly established categories, by counting all the male Indians over twelve, and initiating a daily roll call at the temporary camp. Any man who was absent without a recorded reason “be regarded as a person dangerous to the peace of the country.”⁷¹ Under this new rubric of Indian categorization, the area of land native people inhabited defined them. Any Indian found off reservation was considered to be illegal, and the only way to be considered a “friendly” Indian was to be confined to a government-sponsored and guarded camp. Where an Indian located him/her self defined his/her political, legal, military, and existential status. It also was true in reverse. Areas inhabited or occupied by Indian people were invaded by renegade outlaws, and in danger of being lost. This new territorial configuration formed a major component of the emerging zero-sum relationship between Southwest Oregon and American colonists. It occurred in the realm of mental mapping it centered labeling and re-labeling particular pieces of territory as identified with certain characteristics imbued into the land itself or transferred from the characteristics associated with the people who occupied it. This context influenced the way colonists experienced the Rogue River War.

Geographical Perception and Forting Up

After the establishment of a state of warfare between all independent Indian people and the American colony in Southwest Oregon, colonists worried about how to protect themselves from unfettered, mobile, and hostile Indians. One main strategy they employed was known as “forting up.” This meant preparing a protected building or site and hiding out inside, and was hardly new.⁷² The practice took on a set of meanings specific to the mental and physical

⁷⁰ As cited in *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷¹ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 84–86. It is significant that, after the Indians fled the reservation, the volunteers stayed nearby rather than taking chase (which might have had something to do with the federal Captain Smith refusing his support) they stayed close and went to the reservation and killed any Indian they could find.

⁷² Robert Earl also described a place during an account of his travels through Southwest Oregon in the spring of 1851, which was used as a fort during previous altercations with Indians. He placed it among a network of spots on the Settlers’ vernacular geography mentioned in the above discussion of the California Gold Rush, including Spores Ferry, Grave Creek, and Six-Bit House. The story he associated with this forting up location painted the occupants as victims even as it described the family’s ultimate survival: “they got [to] making a fort in every neighborhood they would cut timbers about 14 ft long and dig trench 2 feel teep and Set the timber on end and would build them out on the corners So they could rake the walls the Harriss famely the Vidy famely all in Same house in one of brak outs and the men fougth til they got killed then the women hell the house and Saved them Selves and family.” Earl, “Recollections, Ca 1900,” 48–49. In a letter to Lieut. Stephen Longfellow, volunteer in the second Rogue River War Samuel Handsaker provided evidence of the ways soldiers used places that had prominence in the peacetime vernacular geography of Southwest Oregon during the war. They anchored the landscape amid the chaos of war, and became the raw materials of a wartime vernacular geography. Handsaker wrote: “you will recollect we reached the ‘six bit house’ on the evening of the 2d, just as they were coming in with the wounded men from ‘Hungry Hill,’

geography within Southwest Oregon and the mental geographies through which colonists interpreted the experience of war. Forting up contributed to the construction of a powerful narrative of persecution that ran parallel to the narratives of American superiority and inevitable victory over Indians. This parallel narrative told of the threat posed to the American colony in Oregon by the unfettered mobility (and this is what linked the Rogue River War to the destruction of Table Rock Reserve) and indigenous knowledge and claim to the land of the Rogue River peoples. This set of stories emerged from experience with fear and horror during war and was grounded in the vernacular geographies of Southwest Oregon, made up of a constantly shifting set of associations between people, ideas, and places.

The scattered nature of settlement within Southwest Oregon, encouraged by the large 640 acre claims allowed 1850 Oregon Donation Land Act (DLCA), as well as the arrangement of waterways in the Rogue River watershed, left colonists feeling especially vulnerable to Indian attack.⁷³ Two major colonial victories (control over significant acreage and the Federal passage of the DLCA) ironically increased the sense of vulnerability they experienced when forced to fort up during the war, because fortng up required them to abandon large sections of the landscape between settlements. The only way colonists could protect themselves was to leave miles upon miles of what they saw as American territory empty of Americans. This encouraged them to associate the empty territory with their own fear of attack. Forting up meant that it was easy to imagine most of Southwest Oregon as being under the control of mounted Indians moving through the territory and decidedly controlled by men, women, and children crowded into makeshift shelters. The act of fortng up, intended to augment feelings of security and safety, nearly always seemed to increase the sense of being at the mercy of the highly mobile Indians. Thus, the act of moving into forts awakened colonists' fears that the Indians had the power to reconquer vast swaths of territory simply by swooping in and staging an attack. Often just a rumor of such an attack was enough to spur people to move into their fortifications, for in Southwest Oregon the reputation of the Rogues had long had the ability to "generate the perception of danger even when it was absent."⁷⁴ In turn, the experience of fortng up could reinforce the belief that all Indians outside the temporary government encampment were hostile, and even more, that all territory across which mobile Indians traveled has been reconquered and no longer belonged to American colonists in a meaningful sense.

Colonists were threatened by images of Indians in movement across the landscape they had been forced to vacate. Their association of mobile Indians with a loss of control over the territory came through in newspaper coverage describing scenes from the war. Indians were often described using words that evoked motion such as "marauding," or "broken out" and more often than not were described as doing things like "chasing," "escaping," "fleeing."⁷⁵ What is more, even when Indians were taking refuge in a singular defined location, an action similar to

where a number of our brave comrades had laid down their lives in defense of their frontier homes;" Samuel Handsaker, "Samuel Handsaker Autobiography, Diary, Reminiscences", 1854, Oregon Pioneer Records MSS P-A 337, Bancroft Library.

⁷³ Tetzlaff, "Settlement and Landscape Transitions," 15; Duncan, "Settlement in Southern Oregon," 8; Ord, "The Rogue River Campaign," 54; Throckmorton, *Oregon Argonauts*, 164; Wallace D. Farnham, "The Development of an Oregon County, 1852-1890: Mines, Farms, and a Railroad," *The Pacific Historical Review* 25, no. 1 (February 1956): 30.

⁷⁴ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 25.

⁷⁵ Walsh, *Indian Battles*, 5-6; "Indian Depredations in the South," *Umpqua Gazette*, April 28, 1854; "Another Indian Murder," *Table Rock Sentinel*, January 3, 1856; "A Man Shot by the Indians," *Table Rock Sentinel*, January 3, 1856.

“forting up,” they were presented in narratives as still being active warriors on the offensive. In one Southwest Oregon newspaper article, the reporter described Indians “in possession of three miners cabins—one stockaded—a few miles above Starr Gulch, on the south side of the Applegate.” Even from inside this cabin, it appeared as though the Indians were expansive and active in their power: “They are such marksmen,” the journalist noted, “that on Wednesday at a distance of over two hundred yards they had wounded four men, one very seriously if not fatally.”⁷⁶ Colonists, in many moments, combined these two observations and saw themselves as fighting against a highly mobile foe with a seemingly inborn relationship to the land. From within their forts, they imagined the worst; they could be ejected from Southwest Oregon, civilization could be defeated by barbarism. This spurred a strong reaction and led many settlers to begin to assume that Indians and colonists could not continue to share the same space if colonists were to maintain control over the territory.

Forting up triggered both facets of Americans’ fears—Indians’ claims to land and unfettered mobility. In at least one known first-hand account fortng up presented the illusion of remaining in control of one’s property, but actually only made one more directly aware of and privy to the lack of control they had when warfare came into their neighborhood. Robert Earl wrote about a set of ruins he saw while traveling through Southwest Oregon in 1856. In his diary, he told the story of the ruins, which occurred during an instance of fortng up during the fighting in 1855. Two men had just started out from home on their way to Scott’s Valley to sell some livestock and other agricultural products when they received fire from Indians. They began to fight back but then retreated to Cow Creek “where [a neighbor named] Smith lived [who] had a fort.” The two men, now fortified up, waited out the violence and returned “in two or 3 days” to find “the Indians killed all of the oxen and the hogs and cut up the plows wagons ox yoks destroid eve[ry] thing... the man that got killed was laying there they [had] raised his hair there.” The men reacted by scalping an Indian whose body they found near the ruins of their home. The scalp was still hanging from a tree the next year when Earl and his fellow Volunteers passed by the site.⁷⁷ These men, though they chose to stay close to their agricultural claim during a time of great danger, were still powerless to stop the destruction of their property. Fortng up may have saved these men’s life, but it seemed to exacerbate the experience of powerlessness, since they had to hide away while knowing their property was being destroyed. So, it seems that even if colonists believed that they would be able to protect their property by fortng up nearby rather than vacating their claims altogether and traveling to a town like Jacksonville, the very act of fortng up meant that they would not be present to protect their property, and this gave the acts of destruction carried out by the Indians a sense of having been carried out right under the colonists’ nose. The ability of the Indians to maintain mobility while colonists hid away made it appear to colonists as though they had a tenuous hold on their own claims and property.

Abandoned districts represented triggered fears of a complete reconquest. While looking for a claim along Bear (Stewart) Creek, the Beeson wagon train of 1853 witnessed the emptiness that resulted when a whole neighborhood took to the fort while traveling along Bear (Stewart) Creek, just upstream from Table Rock. They came across a place called “Mountain House” from whom they learned the news that Indians and whites were fighting in the valley. Welborn Beeson, the son of John Beeson, remembered: “We passed several houses and farms, they were all deserted having fled to the Fort for protection from the Indians the Fort is just across the little

⁷⁶ “The War,” *Table Rock Sentinel*, January 3, 1856.

⁷⁷ Earl, “Recollections, Ca 1900,” verso of 76, “77”–78.

creek from Alberts, owned by Mr Jacob Wagner, all the Citizens of this part of the Valley are collected in it.” Despite the threat of violence, the Beeson family chose to settle in a farm adjacent to the Wagner farm. Perhaps they were drawn to living next door to the local “Fort.”⁷⁸ Seeing an entire abandoned district as a result of the threat of Indian violence made an impression on young Welborn Beeson, as it surely did on others who would bring those memories to bear during later conflicts farther afield from the Table Rock Reserve.

Larger districts were emptied during the escalated fighting of the Second Rogue River War. In October and November of 1855, the customs collector at Port Orford reported that the residents of the coastal town of Randolph, Oregon (located north of Port Orford and slightly inland) “had cached their efforts and were leaving for protection: all down the coast the same excitement existed, and now there is but two white men between here and Coquille—all have come to Port Orford for safety.” An even more extreme example occurred during what has been called the Gold Beach Uprising, named after the town where it took place. When warfare finally reached the town six months after the Lupton Massacre, it was in the form of a dramatic battle at Big Bend, 40 miles inland from the coast. On 22 February 1856, bands from the lower Rogue River engaged the white settlers and miners in open battle. A constable heard the battle and sent messengers to alert the residents of an impending Indian attack. The majority of the town’s residents made their way to the town’s fortification one-and-a-half miles north of the Rogue River. It was unfinished but consisted of two log buildings enclosed by a high earthen embankment. On 25 February 50 Indian warriors tried to storm the fort, but the town’s militia protected it. The Indian troops enacted a siege rather than attack the building again. The uprising was disastrous for settlers. Indians killed 23, including famed Indian fighter Ben Wright and burned 60 houses along the Rogue River and the coast. The colonists of Gold Beach remained fortified up for 27 days until Captain Augur of the US Army, due to impassable roads, traveled to Gold Beach instead of his intended rendezvous with another commander on the Illinois Rive and helped lift the siege.⁷⁹ The conditions inside the fort for such an extended time were not pleasant. Americans confined to the fort vividly remembered the view from inside, and recall watching the Indian leader, Enos, through a spyglass as he rode a “white horse up and down the lines of the Indians violently haranguing them.” Starving and trapped inside Fort Miner, waiting for aid from the inland settlements after sneaking one lone messenger, and watching the enemy commander berate his troops as they starved them out, it appeared that the Indians had reconquered the entirety of the lower Rogue River.⁸⁰

Other accounts capture the contrast between mobile Indians immobile colonists inside forts. Other colonists experienced the failure of forting up in another way. One group decided to use what Frances Fuller Victor described as a “fortified miners camp” near the mouth of Galice Creek in order to block the progress of hostile bands moving downriver from Table Rock. This rag-tag group, who “constituted themselves a volunteer company,” hoped to use this camp for defense as they launched an offensive against the Indians as they moved down the River. Instead, the fighting resulted in the “volunteers” being killed inside their “fort.” The Indians used lighted arrows and burned all the buildings at the camp, save the ones occupied they killed one third of

⁷⁸ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 108–111. After settlement, the Beeson’s son Welborn attended several school meetings at a place he called “Wagner’s Fort.” This speaks to the multi-purpose uses of these buildings.

⁷⁹ Walsh, *Indian Battles*, 5–6; Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 138; Ord, “The Rogue River Campaign,” 20.

⁸⁰ Orvil Dodge, Pioneer and Historical Association of Coos County, Or, and Capital Printing Company, *Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties, Or. Heroic Deeds and Thrilling Adventures of the Early Settlers* (Salem, Or: Capital Printing Co, 1898), 76, 78.

the men before resuming their journey downriver.⁸¹ This story paints the “forted up” amateur soldiers as sitting ducks, ready and waiting in stillness for destruction to rain down upon them. This is the viewpoint fostered and encouraged by experiences and representations of forting up.

Images of mobile Indians and immobile colonists proliferated during the war, even registering in national print media. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published the personal account of a Sargent Jones from the Third Regiment of U.S. Artillery ordered to help win the Rogue River War. Jones told the story of coming across the bodies of some Oregon Volunteers which told a similar story of the danger of being forted up against a swiftly moving enemy, knowledgeable of the landscape. The men “had been shut up in a sort of pen, only two or three logs high,” in an attempt to protect themselves “and these were stuck full of arrows and bullets.” One man was dead inside, and the others informed Jones that the Indians had stolen all their horses and “kept up a constant firing from behind a row of sandy-hills, fifty yards off.” The Army unit kept moving, and came across a group of miners’ cabins that had been abandoned. The miners had been attacked by surprise, and those who had escaped crossed the river and built a mud fort “where they held out against the savages.” Jones’ description was gruesome in its descriptions of the potential consequences of forting up. “All around lay the proofs of attack: mangled and putrefying bodies, half devoured by crows and gulls. Some had been tied fast, and their throats had been cut; the heads of others had been crushed in by blows from hatchets; the bodies of others were riddled with bullets.”⁸² Here, the Indian enemy was mobile, as indicated by its ability to steal all the Volunteer’s horses, and to keep surprising the volunteers from behind the sandy hills. The immobility of the fort itself was evidence; it sat bearing the evidence of the weapons used against it, a passive recipient of these violent blows. The dead bodies, just across the river from the mud fort, exemplified the impotence with which the American colonists imagined themselves against an enemy with indigenous knowledge and unlimited mobility.

Native Land

Throughout the depictions of forting up, indigenous knowledge of and claims to the landscape formed a major component of the narrative of weakness and vulnerability, centered in territorial associations that developed among American colonists Oregon during the Rogue River War. Colonists tended to take the identification of landscape and Indian enemy so far as to conceive of the landscape itself as posing a threat to American interests in Southwest Oregon. As the Oregon Volunteer regiments and the U.S. Army regular troops began to meet the Indians of Southwest Oregon on the field of battle, colonists—either from the battlefield or the fireside—often described the altercations by highlighting the way Indians used aspects of the land itself for battle strategy. Aspects of the landscape like mountains, rivers, lakes, valleys, prairies, confounded American troops but appeared to support the efforts of Indians at war.

Accounts of the war often contained evidence of the trouble the landscape posed for travel to American colonists and Army regulars. In January 1856 the *Table Rock Sentinel*

⁸¹ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 93. While many refugees streamed into Jacksonville, other miners and settlers refused to abandon their claims and instead built palisades and dug trenches around cabins. Some of these makeshift quarters are remembered as “Fort Birdseye, Fort Vannoy, Six Bit House, and Fort Bailey,” Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 154.

⁸² “‘Miserable War’ in ‘Jungles’ of Oregon Irked G.I. of 1856,” *Oregonian*, October 9, 1966. This article was printed originally in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Volume, 13 Issue 76 (September 1856), “Soldiering in Oregon,” 522-527

reported on the death of a prominent citizen, Martin Angell, at the hands of Indians. The article exemplifies the way the landscape frustrated colonial efforts to fight the Indians. “Indians from the brush” killed Angell while accompanying his force of volunteers from Fort Lane to the Applegate, howitzer in tow, and by the time his fellows found his body “the Indians, springing into the undergrowth, escaped.” The small company sought assistance, but when it arrived, “the enemy had fled up a precipitous mountain, inaccessible to horses.” The volunteers returned only with “the body of Mr. Angell.” The same issue of the paper told the story of further problems encountered by this same regiment further along on their trip to encounter the Applegate Indians. It described an accident, whereby “a mule belonging to the howitzer train, and loaded with ammunition for the piece, lost its footing and fell down a steep bank into the river, and thus the ammunition was lost, and a necessity produced for obtaining another supply from the Fort.” This delayed the anticipated “destruction of the band of Indians on the upper Applegate.”⁸³ In other instances, newspapers accounted for this difficulty by reporting that Oregon’s colonial troops and US military would enlist the aid of friendly Indian groups to follow trails and track Indians.⁸⁴ While it was common for colonists to express confidence that they could pursue and locate hostile Indians, it was clear that the landscape posed problems for successful searches to take place. When Alden declared he would make “every preparation to pursue the Indians wherever they were to be found,” he was perhaps trying to counteract the problem of Indians’ knowledge of and claim to the land that found support in the reports from the trails and roads connecting battlefields.⁸⁵

In some instances, the sense of the land as supporting the Indian enemy was subtly interwoven into battle narratives. This is the case for the narrative given by Samuel Handsaker, an Oregon Volunteer soldier who wrote to a former commander in March 1856. He reported that the Volunteers all marched to Big Meadows, on Rogue River, where most of the Indians had camped for winter. His description highlighted the advantages given the Indians by their location in the timber and ensconcement on the north side of an uncrossable river. “Their camps were, however, on the opposite side in the heavy timber, and we had no way of crossing, so it goes without saying that during the many fights we had with them, they had the advantage of seeing us in the open, while they were sheltered by the timber.”⁸⁶ Handsaker’s description focused on the location of the Indians and the way the curve of the river and location of the timber influenced the fight, rather than in the actions of the Indians themselves during the fight at Big Meadows.

At times, colonists retold the stories of key moments in the history of the war a way as to that stressed the importance of Indians’ propensity to use their knowledge of the land to conduct cowardly, unmanly, or dishonorable acts, thereby uniting widespread racist stereotypes about Indian warfare with local vernacular beliefs about the land’s role in the conflict. One anonymous participant in the war told the story of the death of George Lupton. “At the close of the battle,” the story began, “Lupton remarked to his companions, ‘that an old tree which had fallen near and was half covered with vines’ was the very place an Indian would seek to hide in. He stepped

⁸³ “More Indian Murders,” *Table Rock Sentinel*, January 3, 1856; “The War.”

⁸⁴ For example, the *Umpqua Gazette* wrote, “We believe it is the intention of Lieut. Bonnycastle to take the track of Topsy where the recent murder was committed on the mountain, which he will be able to follow by the aid of the Dochute [sic] Indians.” “More Indian Difficulties,” *Umpqua Gazette*, June 9, 1854.

⁸⁵ Quoting Alden in a letter to the Adjutant General from 18 October 1853; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 55.

⁸⁶ Handsaker, “Samuel Handsaker Autobiography, Diary, Reminiscences.”

forward parted the vines with the muzzle of his rifle and as he did so, a concealed brave shot him with a poisoned arrow. He lived but a few days.”⁸⁷ Whether or not this is in fact the way Lupton died is unknown, but the story of his death demonstrated that American soldiers had few defenses against Indian tactics that relied on enmeshing themselves in the landscape.

Colonists were rather obsessed with the Indians’ tendency to hide in the mountains in between battles. Their active and panicked descriptions of this habit often included the term “mountain fastnesses” to designate where the Indians hid. The word fastness connotes a remote and secret place, and this is what was most disturbing to colonists about the Indians’ habit. To colonists it seemed that Indians possessed secret knowledge of these nooks and crannies of Southwest Oregon’s mountains, as well as an ability to travel to and from them easily that the colonists lacked.⁸⁸ Able to hide and launch quick attacks from these obscure locales, native Oregonians were able to call into question white Americans’ ability to protect territory they considered to be their property. Moreover, Indians often launched successful attacks on dispersed, and at times abandoned, settlements. Colonists attributed this success to Indians’ strategic command of mountain geography.

Many Americans in Oregon commented on the Indians’ tendency to escape pursuit in the mountains. US Army regular G. Wright reported to his commanding officer how “The enemy fled in every direction, hotly pursued by our troops; but being well acquainted with this rugged country, they soon concealed themselves in their mountain fastnesses.”⁸⁹ An undated newspaper editorial echoed the sentiment: “The danger in that quarter [the South] is more imminent than in the north, for the Indians occupy a country over which are scattered feeble settlements, wholly exposed to their ravages, and the opportunities presented for their rapine and cruelties are far greater than in the North. Indeed, it is thought by many that the Indians in the latter quarter will flee to the mountains, and ere the troops can be sent in pursuit of them, few will be found to fight.”⁹⁰ And in 27 October 1855, another newspaper editorial reported, “We look for repeated massacres and murders by the hostile Indians of the south—They have fled to the mountains adjacent to the settlements, and there is great cause for apprehension that, as opportunities offer, they will sally out on unprotected neighborhoods, and persons, and, after burning and murdering, return to their hiding places—always hostile, it is hardly possible that they will fail to ravage and murder, whenever they can do it with safety to themselves. And their immediate proximity to scattered settlements, will afford such opportunities.”⁹¹ Colonists identified escape to the mountains, and the “fastnesses” themselves, with Indian danger, hostility, and duplicity.

What is more, colonists began to describe this tendency among Indians to hide in the mountains as an imminent threat to the continued survival of American settlement in Southwest Oregon. It became a sign of the “us or them” thinking that achieved dominance in Oregon by

⁸⁷ Mrs. Reverend Nichols, “‘Scenes from the Rogue River War, The First Battle:’ In Notes on Indian Affairs In Oregon”, 1879, Bancroft Library.

⁸⁸ In a letter from 21 March 1854 to the chiefs of the Tualatin Band of Calapooia Indians, who lived in the northern Willamette Valley and had just refused to sell their lands in exchange for goods and move to a federal reservation, Palmer equated living the mountains with being like an animal. “The whites are determined to settle your land.... Then what will you do? Will you live in the mountains like wolves?”, O’Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 167.

⁸⁹ “Indian Hostilities in Oregon and Washington Territories”, n.d., 8, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>.

⁹⁰ Dowell, “Scrapbook, 1858,” 72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

1855.⁹² In October of 1855, a reader of the *Oregon Spectator* complained in a letter to the paper that, because “the Indians will soon scatter and hide away,” there were too few men in the valley to conduct what he thought was a necessary “scouring of the whole country from the tops of the Cascade range to the coast.” He argued that if this “scouring” did not occur, “there will be no security for life or property” in Southwest Oregon.⁹³ The editor of the *Statesman* agreed that Indians’ use of mountain hiding places posed a major problem for the war effort: “To reach [the enemy Indians] they must be pursued into the mountain fastnesses, trailed and hunted down at a lamentable risk and sacrifice of life. With such warfare, the killing of one Indian is a task more difficult and dangerous to be performed than the killing of a score, where they can be met in open fight, on equal terms.”⁹⁴ Mountain fastnesses, coupled with Indians’ preternatural knowledge of the landscape, together came to define the problem of the Rogue River War for colonists. Americans’ lack of knowledge of these same hiding places led them to view the only solution to be purging or destruction of Southwest Oregon Indians. The *Oregon Statesman* issued an editorial in 1855 that demonstrated that this logic, of vulnerability linked to aggressive exterminationism, ran rampant through the colonial community during this conflict, “[The Indians’] proximity to the scattered settlements, the ease with which they can make a *sortie* upon them and then retire to their mountain hiding places, renders them doubly dangerous, and makes them doubly dreaded. Imminent and constant danger calls for vigorous pursuit and destruction of them.”⁹⁵

This editorialist called for soldiers to do what was generally agreed to be impossible: find and kill the Indians hiding in the mountain fastnesses. The *Statesman*’s editor, perhaps unknowingly, advocated the ethnic cleansing of Indians in Southwest Oregon. These articles used the mental image of a “mountain fastness” concealing unreachable enemy Indians to demonstrate that the land was, to put it crudely, fighting on the side of the Indians. Doing this while at the same time denying the possibility of coexistence in Southwest Oregon (as Gray Whaley has put it: “Settler colonialism did not allow for the incorporation or continued existence of Indians who challenged the birthrights of “white” citizens”) Bush and others created a discursive paradigm where no other outcome but utter erasure of Indian bodies from the Southwest Oregon landscape could preserve the American presence in the region.⁹⁶

Sargent Jones of the Third Regiment U.S. Artillery and disgruntled U.S. veteran of the Rogue River War expressed this notion in his wartime diary. Through the use of sarcasm and exaggeration, Jones argued that the geographical relationship between people and the land meant that Indian and Euroamericans could not cohabitate in Southwest Oregon. In his account the indigenous connection between Indians and the Southwest Oregon land was unbreakable so long as the Indians occupied the area. Therefore it was prudent for “Uncle Sam” to “end the war by putting all the gold-hunters on a reservation, and paying them roundly to stay there, leaving this God-forsaken country to the Indians.” He argued against the propriety of federal intervention because the conflict could be blamed on “a few adventurers” who went “so far ahead of all

⁹² “Still, by 1855, the ranks of the extermination-minded Euroamericans swelled, counter-discourse waned, and no colonist did much to prevent the massacres of Native people,” Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 203.

⁹³ Dowell, “Scrapbook, 1858,” 56. This particular man was making a specific case for extermination. He continued: “I say now that I never will sanction any more treaties with them. Extermination is my motto, and I trust it will be adopted by every man in Oregon that can pull a trigger.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁶ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 194.

civilization, and scatter[ed] themselves through the labyrinths of these mountain fastnesses, where the elk, the grizzly bear, and the Indians have retired to make their last stand against gold-hunting, bear-shooting, and Indian-killing white men.” He claimed that this act of colonizing a place as distant as Oregon negated any “right to expect Government to send soldiers to war against such an awful country and such well-wronged Indians.” By saying that soldiers were sent to war *against* such an awful country he revealed that he saw the land, as well as the Indians, as the enemy, working against an American victory in the war. To defend his unfathomable (and facetious) stance that valuable, gold-filled land should be left to the possession of the Indians, the soldier described the geography (both natural and manmade) of Southwest Oregon. “No one who has not traveled there can imagine the wilderness of mountains, jungles, and forests that covers all the country for hundreds of miles between the valleys of the Sacramento and the Willamette and the Pacific Coast. Fremont had to go around it. They have spent months cutting a track just wide enough for pack-mules. The names of some of the places will indicate the character of the country. There are “‘Devil’s Gulch,’ and ‘Devil’s Staircase,’ and ‘Jump-off-Joe,’ and other break-neck designations.”⁹⁷ By drawing attention to familiar themes like the passability of roads, the history of wayfinding, and place naming, Sergeant Jones reflected a mental map of Southwest Oregon, borne of the experience of fighting the Rogue River War, that reinforced the notion that Southwest Oregon could belong to only one group of Americans. In this instance the sergeant’s literal words were that Indians should receive Southwest Oregon, but the underlying message of his reprinted diary was that whites and Indians could not share Southwest Oregon. To readers in the 1850s, the implication would have been clear that Indians needed, somehow, to be erased from the region.

The significance of the Rogue River War has been assessed in many ways. Some have argued it was the ultimate expression of racism, others have focused on the political motivations behind its fighting, and still others stressed the heroism of the few colonists who acted tirelessly to protect Indians from extermination. This chapter has focused on a previously unexplored aspect of the conflict. That is, the way spatial imagination and mental mapping influenced colonial perceptions and actions. It has explored the way colonial and native understandings of the importance of Table Rock as a place influenced the negotiation of the end of the First Rogue River War by acting as a valuable bargaining chip in Treaty negotiations. It has examined the way the significations attached to Table Rock influenced the implementation of a reservation policy still in its early stages. It has argued that rich meanings associated with Table Rock influenced the characteristics colonists identified with the landscape and the people who lived on the reserve that was established there. These associations continued to influence the way colonists interpreted the relationship between Indians and the territory upon which they lived, and for which they fought. This complex process of interpretive mental mapping encouraged the vast majority of Euroamericans in Southwest Oregon to become convinced that no Indian could remain in the region if it were to become a part of the United States. Table Rock, Southwest Oregon, home, The Wild; all these real and imagined places were redefined in some fashion during the Rogue River Wars. And with them the realm of meaning and self-definition created by people who related with the world through their physical and mental landscapes.

⁹⁷ “‘Miserable War’ in ‘Jungles’ of Oregon Irked G.I. of 1856.”

Owning Oregon: Official Title and Vernacular Geography, 1856-1859

Victory in the Rogue River War empowered colonists to negotiate treaties that would extinguish Indian title to western Oregon and remove Indians to reservations, an act they had been legally authorized to carry out since 1850.¹ Also in 1850, Congress had passed the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) ratifying previous Provisional and Territorial land claims and granting large plots to any naturalized or native-born American citizen who migrated to Oregon. The relationship between these two fundamental shifts in the nature of legal land title has remained underexplored in the historical scholarship on Oregon. Historians have recognized that the Federal government took contradictory actions in 1850 when it validated colonial land claims while almost simultaneously directing representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to negotiate treaties with Oregon Indians whose title to land endured intact. Specialists on Oregon settlement have explored the way power dynamics in the early 1850s, and subsequent Indian conflict, delayed the treaty negotiations from being completed until after the end of the Rogue River War. In doing so, they have also overestimated the extent to which the DLCA was implemented between its 1850 passage and the end of the Rogue River War in 1856. While many colonists took out claims in these years, either in previously claimed areas or on Indian land colonists now assumed to be available for settlement, few were able to finalize their claims. Many claimants failed to fulfill the law's requirements of continuous occupation or formal survey. Early claims taken under the DLCA, then, were not all that different from previous legally unstable ones under the Provisional or pre-DLCA Territorial governments. Thus, transferring ownership of western Oregon from Indians to the federal government and from the federal government to American colonists occurred in overlapping fashion during the years 1856-1859.

This transfer of ownership from conquered, marginalized, politically disenfranchised Native Americans to white American colonists was a complicated process wherein abstract legal concepts and definitions collided with the lived reality of Oregon's residents.² The text of the DLCA reflected Congressional lawmakers' assumption that extinguishing Indian title in Oregon was a mere formality and Indian title a legal fiction that could simply be erased with the stroke of a pen. This is perhaps how Congress justified calling for the extinguishment of title and the opening up of all land in western Oregon for settlement at the same time. On the ground in Oregon, though, Indian title was more than a formality. It had tangible social and symbolic meanings that were woven into the culture and society of colonial Oregon through years of negotiation and interaction around the division of space and the creation of place. Indian title constituted a key part of Oregon's vernacular geography.³

¹ The law that authorized a commission drawn from Bureau of Indian Affairs officials in the Oregon Territory to negotiate treaties to extinguish Indian title to all the land West of the Cascade Mountains was not assigned a proper name by lawmakers. For the readers' ease it will be referred to here as the Indian Title Law and shorted as ITL.

² Legal historian Stuart Banner has recently written an entire book on the considerable grey area between "conquest and contract." See Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*.

³ This local sense of Indian title as significant is backed up by a long history of American commitment to and contradictory application of the concept of Indian title. Legal scholar Walter Echo-Hawk has observed that the habit of buying land from Indians perpetuated the idea that Indian title was legitimate more firmly in the American legal

It would take more than what the Federal Government treated as a sort of “legalistic alchemy that transformed indigenous homelands into ‘public domain,’” as Gray Whaley has called it, to rid themselves of the unmistakable presence of Indian rights in the land.⁴ Having mentally mapped distinct Indian rights to land, colonists now needed to erase those rights from the same mental geographies before they could make good on the promise of incorporation presented by the passage of the DLCA. They sought to replace older maps created through negotiations with native peoples with new maps of a rationalized and commodified landscape aligned with the property regime of the United States. This transformation from vernacular to official did not happen overnight. It would only be unevenly achieved, and that after a transition period defined by contests and conflict over the meaning and definition of space.

Removing Indians from their land was the material corollary to the abstract notion of extinguishing Indian title.⁵ The DLCA, a federal law, symbolized the incorporation of Oregon’s landscape into the United States in a whole new way. This chapter argues that these two transformations were deeply intertwined, and can only be fully understood in relation to one another. Thus, though Whaley’s formulation aptly characterizes the abstract terms in which policymakers understood extinguishing title and transforming the land into “public domain,” on the local level the transfer of property rights also involved remaking social and cultural categories central to colonial worldviews.

Contradictory Federal Land Law and Indian Policy

The contradictory combination of laws enacted for Oregon in 1850, but not enforceable until after the Rogue River War, triggered significant changes to Oregon’s vernacular geography. The situation resulted from a phenomenon called “backwards settlement.”⁶ This all-too-common situation reversed the ideal order of actions in preparation for settlement first laid out in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.⁷ In the ideal model the government would extinguish title to a

system, *In the Courts of the Conqueror*, 57–59. Francis Paul Prucha has argued that the practice of using diplomacy and negotiation to create treaties “gave foundation and strength” to the notion that tribes were independent nations with rights of sovereignty. This idea, despite being contradicted by abstract legal acts and decisions, became “so firmly established in practice that it could not easily be shaken off.” Francis Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1780-1834*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 142–144. Stuart Banner has concluded, in a more general sense, that there was a mutually constitutive dynamic between abstract legal doctrines and their implementation on the ground, stating that “some subtle long-run effects” of legal doctrines to shape American attitudes and actions in relationship to Indian title. Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 4, 6, 208. Transfers of property, rather than directly reflecting the laws on the books at a given moment, were constantly evolving entities with “elements of *law* and elements of *power* [emphasis in original].” This power was limited by Indian geographic expertise and colonists’ perceptions of it, and by Americans’ need to think of themselves as Americans and republicans, not conquerors. They went to the trouble of drawing up treaties because they “believed they were buying land from the Indians in the same way they bought land from each other.”

⁴ Whaley, “Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic,” 165.

⁵ Stuart Banner has argued convincingly that the transfer of property from Euroamericans to Indians reflected a somewhat fuzzy and flexible intersection of legal and effective property and sovereignty rights. In some ways property contracts were “transfers of effective sovereignty as well as conveyances of property.” He points out, though, that even when they were experienced as such, “Anglo-American governments were not acquiring new *claims* to sovereignty. They were merely beginning to exercise in practice a sovereignty they had asserted in principle all along [emphasis in original].” Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 8.

⁶ Whaley, “Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic,” 159.

⁷ Robert F. Jr. Berkhofer, “Americans Versus Indians: The Northwest Ordinance, Territory Making, and Native Americans,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 84, no. 1 (March 1988): 96–97. Public land historian Paul W. Gates has

new area, remove the Indians according to those treaties, survey the land, then sell it—empty and neatly gridded—to settlers. In backwards settlement colonists claimed land first and then worried about the legal Indian title and the problem of survey after. In Oregon, Euroamericans, fulfilling the dream of squatter sovereignty, skipped the first two steps by colonizing an unorganized and unsurveyed Indian Country (that had not even been formally categorized as such) and demanded that the federal government pay the Indians for their land after the fact.⁸

The DLCA's language left gaping holes regarding the extinguishment of Indian title, which reflected this general context of backwards settlement. Most notably, it failed to mention Indian title even though U.S. law required it be extinguished before DLCA title could be formalized. Two statutes specifically recognized the persistence of indigenous title: the 1848 Organic Act creating Oregon Territory and a June 1850 law expressly authorizing the negotiations of treaties "for the extinguishment of [Indian] claims to lands lying west of the Cascade Mountains" (hereafter referred to as the Indian Title Law or ITL).⁹ Therefore at the time lawmakers filled the DLCA with language presuming that western Oregon's land lay in the public domain, none of it was in fact eligible for private ownership.

Colonists recognized this situation. In 1850 an Oregon newspaper declared, "up to this time the Indian title to a foot of land in that territory never has been extinguished. Consequently no man owns a foot of land in Oregon, but all of us are comparatively trespassers upon the soil."¹⁰ The DLCA created a gap between sanctioning the immediate seizure of any piece of Indian land and the legal extinguishment of title required for the finalization of patent. By 1855 the results were obvious: more than 9,200 land claims to 2.6 million acres of Indian lands in the

compared the DLCA with land policy in Florida. Local Oregonians also made these connections, like Charles Drew who was a major advocate of extermination during the Rogue River War, who twice compared the situation in Rogue River Valley with the Seminole Wars of Florida. This comparison also made press locally in the *Oregon Statesman* and nationally in the *Army and Navy Journal*. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 177.

⁸ An 1841 Congressional Act further codified this procedure; the same year Congress passed the Preemption Act. David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 42. Residents of Oregon continued to reach for this ideal model of colonization and consolidation. When considering the extension of the DLCA into the interior of Oregon east of the Cascades, Surveyor General John S. Zieber stressed to his Federal administrators, "the surveys should precede the settlements" even though he noted that some settlements had already taken root around The Dalles, Whitman's Station, and on the Umatilla. Senate, United States Congress, "Senate Documents, Otherwise Publ. as Public Documents and Executive Documents", 1856, 389-390.

⁹ Howard P. Roy, "The Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw," in *The First Oregonians: Second Edition*, ed. Laura Berg, 2nd ed. (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 2007), 71. The Organic Act establishing Oregon Territory in 1848 had explicitly affirmed the Northwest Ordinance and stipulated that no acts applied in Oregon "shall be construed to impair the rights of persons of property now pertaining to the Indians...so long as such rights shall remain unextinguished by treaty between the United States and said Indians." On the federal government's motivations for such clauses see David Wilkins E, "Tribal-State Affairs: American States and 'Disclaiming' Sovereigns," in *The Tribes and the States: Geographies of Intergovernmental Interaction* (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Francis Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 81. Treaties rested on the assumption of Indian sovereignty and status as nations, and maintained their power through practices that reinforced those beliefs even when legal theory, supreme court cases, statutes, and federal action denied that sovereignty.

¹⁰ "Congressional," *Oregon Spectator*, July 11, 1850; Bergquist, "The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy," 18; Paul Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington: Public Land Law Review Commission, 1968), 18.

Pacific Northwest were fenced, plowed, and removed from native Oregonians “inventory of places” before treaties had been made.¹¹

The ITL had another important element that also reflected the consequences of fifteen years of backwards settlement. It extended the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts into Oregon Territory. First passed in 1790 and repeatedly renewed through the nineteenth century, the Intercourse Act was national legislation that regulated the interaction of Indians and White Americans, limiting the rights of whites to enter into or settle in a changing zone it defined as “Indian Country.” Its extension to Oregon introduced the legal concept of “Indian Country,” and added weight to the term, already used colloquially among colonists to denote an unknown area presumed to be under the control of Indians.¹² Over time, Indian Country came to be seen as the land where the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts were in effect, and vice versa.

By extending the Intercourse Act into Oregon, this law “declared all of the Pacific Northwest to be ‘Indian Country’ and stipulated that the Indians must sign treaties agreeing to abandon their homelands before the settlers could have title to their provisional land claims” four months before the DLCA opened the entirety of the territory to free-for-all land claims.¹³ Even this was a watered-down version of 1834’s Intercourse Act, which dictated a 1000-dollar fine for anyone who “made a settlement,” “surveyed or attempt[ed] to survey” or even so much as marked trees in Indian Country.¹⁴ The Treaty Commission established in June 1850 by the ITL had no chance to do the necessary work to negotiate treaties before it was disregarded by the DLCA. Despite being overshadowed by the DLCA, the act extending Indian Country to Oregon remained in effect, and the Indian Superintendency continued to negotiate treaties.

Thus, the DLCA was enacted despite the continuance of indigenous title and native occupation in western Oregon, but was limited in its application until after the Rogue River War. Congress recognized this anomaly when, in contrast to contemporary legislation regarding the disposition of public lands in Kansas and Nebraska territory in 1854, they omitted section 10 of the 1841 preemption law from the Oregon legislation, thus nullifying the required chronology of

¹¹ Roy, “The Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw,” 71; Robert Kentta, “The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians: Diverse Peoples Brought Together on the Siletz Reservation,” in *The First Oregonians: Second Edition*, ed. Laura Berg, 2nd ed. (Oregon Council for the Humanities, 2007), 163.

¹² The concept of Indian Country was affirmed in the Supreme Court decision of *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) Beckham, *Oregon Indians*, 126. In the American lexicon “Indian Country” was as much a reference to experience as it was to legal definition or lines on maps. Legal and social elements of the concept were intertwined and speak to the “life of their own” quality with which legal categories became categories of meaning in the context of colonizing and conquering the West. The Intercourse Act officially withdrew all support for unauthorized claims in Indian country and authorized the use of military force to remove such settlers. Prucha has demonstrated the way debates of the passage and renewal of this law intersected with the full spectrum of Indian policy in his *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years*, 152, 261–262. On the origins of the Intercourse Act see Tim Garrison, *The Legal Ideology of Removal: The Southern Judiciary and the Sovereignty of Native American Nations* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 17.

¹³ Beckham, *Oregon Indians*, 126; Stephen Dow Beckham, “Federal-Indian Relations,” in *The First Oregonians* (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 2007), 212; Bunting, *The Pacific Raincoast*, 97; Lavender, *Land of Giants*, 276. For a discussion of federal control in the DLCA see Bergquist, “The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy,” 29.

¹⁴ “If any person shall make a settlement on any lands belonging, secured, or granted by treaty with the United States to any Indian tribe, or shall survey or shall attempt to survey such lands, or designate any of the boundaries by marking trees, or otherwise, such offender shall forfeit and pay the sum of one thousand dollars,” Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years*, 264.

treaties and government surveys before settlement.¹⁵ Thanks to the tenacity of Oregon Territory's representative in Congress Samuel Thurston, "Congress acted as if the Indians and their claims were a mere formality to be accounted for on paper." Oregon should have been legally Indian Country, but colonists nonetheless acquired title preemption to Indian lands. The situation paralyzed the ability of Indian agents to do their job, driving one to observe that Oregon was both "...an Indian country and it is not." This "sovereignty swamp," as Whaley has called it, affected life on the ground in ways unknown and quite possibly unimagined by federal lawmakers and local policymakers.¹⁶ For instance, some colonial towns were located on unceded land, making the Intercourse Act's prohibition of alcohol in Indian Country impossible to enforce. This was just one of a multitude of problems caused by the contradiction in land law, the most important of which surrounded the contradiction between abstract and local meanings of Indian rights to occupy and own the land.

The Local Meaning of Indian Title

The vernacular significance of Indian title was grounded in social interaction between Indians and colonists; both groups relied on the legal concept as a tool to negotiate their relationships on the ground.¹⁷ Native Oregonians and American colonists both needed to manage the contradictions inherent to backwards settlement in Oregon, and they both relied on the promise of extinguishment, treaties, and payment for the land to manage contests over land. Willamette Valley colonist E.M. Moore applied abstract legal concepts to social interaction when confronted by an Indian who came to his door and said, in Chinook Jargon, "nicus illahee" or "my land." He affirmed the Indian man's claim by replying "yes, but the US government will pay you for the land." He placated the Indian by validating his claim to the land, and also by relying on the promise that the United States government would remedy the problems inherent in backwards settlement.¹⁸ This short interaction indicates that colonists, not just Indians and Indian agents, understood and accepted the notion of Indian title and saw its extinguishment as an important step in the process of incorporating Oregon into the United States and perfecting settler land claims. Indians also rested their claims to fair treatment on a shared assumption that Indian land title was valid, living, and meaningful. Red Blanket, a Willamette Valley Indian, used a document given to him by Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs Anson Dart to

¹⁵ Whaley, "Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic," 165.

¹⁶ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1858, 234, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/>. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 183, 186, 225.

¹⁷ A tension between two contradictory legal doctrines, the Doctrine of Discovery and native sovereignty, has led to contradictory federal policy and action from the birth of the republic. Lived application of and interaction with federal law and important Supreme Court decisions has further complicated the situation. For an argument that Doctrine of Discovery was preeminent see Robert J. Miller, *Native America, discovered and conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 60. For a discussion of the Doctrine's origins see globally see Robert Williams, *The American Indian in western legal thought: the discourses of conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 230–231. On the attitudes of Jefferson and other founding fathers toward the doctrine see Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years*, 140–44. For the impact of Indian title as an opposite tendency in American law see Garrison, *The Legal Ideology of Removal*, 14. Garrison discusses early British colonial precedent and its enduring impact in the new nation. For a detailed discussion of the bases the persistence of British precedent see Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 107.

¹⁸ Lillie Lela Moore, "Sketch of the Life of Edwin Marshall Moore, California Argonaut of 1849 and Oregon pioneer of 1850," 142.

demonstrate the history of colonial recognition of his right to negotiate a treaty and sell his land as part of a sovereign entity. As recorded in a translator's diary, he stood up and told the crowd at an 1855 treaty negotiation, "I was long in Oregon. Here is my heart. I would speak as the man advised me, who gave me this paper (showing a card from Anson Dart)." ¹⁹

While the DLCA's ostensible authorization of unbridled settlement damaged the legitimacy of Indian title as constructed through such interactions, it could not fully erase it. By the time the Rogue River War ended and Indian removal was imminent, colonists had developed mental geographies that contained and relied upon their Indian neighbors in many ways. Negotiations with Indians necessary for removal continued to indicate the centrality of Indian title to colonial worldviews, as well as the underdeveloped sense of rationalized or official geographic knowledge.

From a colonial perspective Indians both transcended and defined geographical boundaries within Oregon. Colonial perceptions of Indians, themselves colored by broader cultural traditions, became the basis for a social construction of native connection to the land. In some cases it appeared to colonists as though Indians themselves formed part of the mental maps with which colonists understood their new homes. In response to an 1857 federal order to combine the Oregon and Washington Indian Departments, Superintendent J.W. Nesmith, requested that each of his newly (re)appointed Indian agents provide a description of the area covered by their agency. E.P. Drew, the sub-agent for the Umpqua Sub-Agency, described the geographical parameters of his district in terms of the Indians bodies, revealing that his sense of the agency's geographic area could be defined only in terms of the Indians themselves. His territory was "bounded as follows, viz: The coast from the mouth of the Coquille river northward so far as to include the Siuslaw band of Indians; thence eastward to the summit of the Coast Range of mountains; thence southward so as to include all the bands of Indians below Umpqua valley proper; thence to the headwaters of the Coquille river; thence to the coast (the place of beginning) so as to include all the bands of Indians residing along the waters of the Coquille." ²⁰ Others, like W. W. Raymond of the interior of Oregon Territory, also defined his territory around Indians, this time based on which lands were still in Indian hands at the time, writing that his agency embraced "that portion of territory lying on the south of the Columbia river, to New Stucker river, and up to the Columbia river to Oak Point, a portion of territory not yet treated for by the United States." ²¹ Sub-agent Craig in the Walla Walla Valley combined Indian groups and natural features in the assessment of his area, but he also included political boundaries dividing Washington and Oregon, "I have in my charge the friendly Cayuses, that live in Washington Territory, and the Nez Percés tribe. The Nez Percés country is bounded west by the Palouse river, which lies north of the Snake river, and the Tucannon, which lies south of Snake river; on the north by the range of mountains between Clear Water and the Coeur D'Alene; east by the Bitter Root mountains; on the south they are bounded near the line dividing the two Territories." ²² Colonists relied on both native and modern geographies to imagine and make sense of Oregon.

These and other moments when colonists relied upon Indian knowledge for their own geographic bearings, even as they were negotiating documents that would leave the land entirely

¹⁹ James Doty, "Journal, 1855-1856", 1856 1855, MSS 1179, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁰ *Annual Report of the Commissioner for Indian Affairs*, 1857, 359, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 354.

²² *Ibid.*, 353.

under colonial control and custodianship, underscored their perception that Indian and Euroamerican versions of space were key to understanding Oregon's geography. These experiences also made colonists aware that Indians' knowledge of the landscape was not a vestige of the past, but reflected their continued connection to Oregon as a place. This dynamic is exemplified by the role of topography and geographic expertise during the 1855 Council of Walla Walla, conducted between representatives of the Nez Percé, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Yakama, and Palouse, who held millions of acres in Washington and Oregon Territories, and Joel Palmer and Isaac I. Stevens, representing the United States government.²³ Indian geographic knowledge was vital to these negotiations. This comes through in the transcript even though Palmer and Stevens tried to hide it behind the scenes.

Before the proper talks began, the commissioners and their secretary James Doty went to visit "the Lawyer [a prominent Nez Percé man] at his lodge" and he "explained a map of the Nes Perses country which he had drawn for Gov. Stevens."²⁴ The transcript does not relate the details of this interaction, but the increasing detail with which the commissioners came to describe the landscape over the course of the council indicates that they incorporated Indian knowledge transferred in this or other meetings during the course of the talks. This claim is also supported by lapses in the meeting transcripts, during which major changes occurred that redirected the course of negotiations. For example on Saturday 9 June (two days before the closing of negotiations), the meeting commenced late in the day, and somehow during the interim major issues regarding the boundaries of proposed reservations had been ironed out. This indicated that meetings had been conducted that were not included in the transcript.

Some transfers of geographic knowledge were captured in the transcript and reveal the collaborative nature of decoding and dividing the landscape. The result was an increasingly detailed hybrid geography made up of native and local vernacular geographic knowledge set against the rationalized variety. The participants in the council, both Indian and Euroamerican, referred to maps used as visual aids multiple times in the course of debate, and at times Indian negotiators drew lines on maps used as visual guides for the negotiations. During the closing day of the Council when final signatures were being affixed, Nez Percé chief Looking Glass responded negatively to a mapped version of the reservation boundaries, saying that the map did not reflect what he had previously agreed to: "I said yes to the line I marked myself, not to your line," he said through an interpreter. Maps used to create the boundaries of these reservations were collectively drawn and revised with native geographical knowledge challenging formally sanctioned territorial boundaries.²⁵

It also appears that native contributions increased the detail and accuracy of the maps over the course of the meetings. For example during his first presentation to the body of Indians (of which there were hundreds in attendance, see Figure 5.1), Stevens vaguely located one of the

²³ Beckham, *Oregon Indians*, 141.

²⁴ "Record of the Official Proceedings at the Council in the Walla Walla Valley, Held Jointly by Isaac I. Stevens Gov. & Supt. W.T. and Joel Palmer Supt. Indian Affairs O.T. on the Part of the United States with the Tribes on Indians Named in the Treaties Made at the Council", June 9, 1855, 2, Confederated Tribe of Siletz Records; Mss 442 Series A, Box 6, Folder 3, Oregon Historical Research Library.

²⁵ Other comments indicated that Indians opined on the maps in use, like this one from Lawyer, who, in response to the initial speeches given by Palmer and Stevens introducing the idea of reservations for the Indians remarked, "It was not for nothing I have been listening to you. My country is poor it is a trifling country. You see the map the marks of our country, one stream runs one way another runs another way, it is all rock." And so it is fair to assume that treaty negotiators and Indians discussed the nature of the maps on more occasions than this one behind-the-scenes visit to Lawyer's lodge. *Ibid.*, 20, 40, 43.

reservations in “Nes Perses country” and another in the “Yakama country,” which “extend[ed] from the Blue mountains to the spurs of the Bitter Root, and from the Palouse river to part way up the Grande Ronde and Salmon River.”²⁶ Later on in the talks, after benefiting from an unknown number of after-hours map consultations with Indian participants, Stevens limned a more detailed map of the proposed reserve area. Stevens consciously pointed to areas on the map in a collaborative fashion while addressing the council:

There is the Snake River. There is the Clear Water river. Here is the Salmon river. Here is the Grande Ronde river, There is the Palouse River. There is the El-pow-wow-wee. We commence where this river, the Palouse, comes from the mountains, and down the river to the mouth of the Ti-not-pan-up, then to the Snake river 10 miles below the mouth of the El-pow-wow-wee, then to the source of the El-pow-wow-wee, Thence along the crest of the Blue Mountains to the Grande River below the Grand Ronde, thence along the ridge between the Wall-low-low river crossing the Snake River 15 miles below the mouth of the Powder River, thence to the salmon river a little above the crossing, thence by the spurs of the mountains to the source of the Palouse river at the place of beginning.²⁷

And again for the Yakama reservation:

Here is the Yakima Reservation, commencing with the mouth of the Attanum river, along the Attanum river to the cascade mountains, thence along the Highlands separating the Pisco and the Sattass river from the rivers flowing into the Columbia, thence to the crossing of the Yakama below the main fisheries, then up the main Yakama to the Attanum where we began... We propose to place there the Colvilles, the O-kin-a-kunes and Pisquouse Indians (they now send their cattle and horses there in winter)...²⁸

Colonial reliance on Indian’s geographic expertise while creating reservations reveals how cursorily the rational survey-based system represented by the DLCA could be applied to life in Oregon in 1855. Colonists relied on Indian to piece together the accurate and dependable mental maps needed to precisely locate reservations.

²⁶ He used similarly general language describing “The second reservation for the Yakama, Colville, “O-kin-a-kunes,” Palouse, Posquose, Klikatats was “to extend from the Attanum river—to include the valley of the Pisco river—and from the Yakama river to the Cascade Mountains.” *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷ Doty described the map referred to here as “a draft on a large scale.” *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27. Similarly, Indian Agent R.R. Thompson reported on his progress locating a spot for the proposed Warm Springs Reservation in 1856. While “exploring” a previously unknown area for the reserve, he traveled with a party of 21, 17 of whom were Indians, “the chiefs and principal men of the bands included in the Wasco treaty.” The group found promising territory in “a place about eight miles south of the Warm Springs, known to the Indians by the name of She-tike.” His description revolved around the Indian-named place She-tike, as he described the valleys as situated “one on the north, about three miles from the She-tike,” and the other connected with “the She-tike, coming in from the south, forming a junction with the valley about two miles from the mouth of the river.” Thompson continued to use the Indian name for the place, and commented that the Indians were “very well pleased with the selection,” which they helped to choose. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1856*, 1856, 208, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep56>.



Figure 5.1 – Hundreds of tribal members attended the 1855 Walla Walla Treaty Council and participated in collaborative mapmaking during the talks. (Taken from Beckham, *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries*)

The local meaning of Indian title played a significant role in earlier treaty negotiations organized in response to the 1850 passage of the ITL. In the spring of 1851, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Anson Dart took on the task of obtaining agreements from western Oregon's Indians to cede their land and move east of the Cascades, but it proved more difficult than anticipated. The Chinookan and Kalapuyan peoples of the Willamette Valley were powerful negotiators who not only refused to move east of the mountains but also managed to maintain a toehold in their ancestral homes. Congress tabled the treaties rather than ratify them.²⁹ Dart's failure to obtain ratifiable agreements further undermined the immediate applicability of the DLCA and noticeably inscribed valid Indian title into the social and cultural geography of the region.³⁰

²⁹ Dart negotiated 13 treaties in spring and summer of 1851, none of which were approved. Historian Terence O'Donnell attributes this to three causes: First, technical objections to how the treaties were negotiated; second, settler complaints that the reservations in the valley conflicted with land claimed under the Donation Land Claim Act; and third, rumored objections from Joseph Lane at the idea of leaving the Indians in the Valley. O'Donnell, *An Arrow in the Earth*, 137.

³⁰ In some ways the DLCA created the circumstances of its own ineffective implementation. Colonists who interpreted the DLCA as meaning they could settle anywhere took to claiming land still un-extinguished, which ultimately slowed the process of establishing the cadastral survey finalization of those claims required. Beckham has written about an instance when DLCA claims pressured treaty-makers. Stephen Beckham, "We Do Not Want Any Other Piece of Land'," in *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2006), 116–125.

As Dart began to negotiate treaties with the tribes of the Willamette Valley, he ran into an unforeseen problem. The Chinookan and Kalapuyan peoples of the Willamette Valley were keenly aware of and able to capitalize on shared assumptions of Indian title in order to cede only what had already been taken from them and to retain pockets of their ancestral homelands (in the case of the Clatsops) and access to their traditional fishing sites (in the case of the Chinooks), and even to get Dart to agree to remove settlers from Indian land. In his official report of these negotiations, the subagent (and former missionary) for western Oregon H.H. Spalding described the Indians' attitude toward moving east of the Cascades as an "indescribable dread" and declared that they were "everywhere willing to sell the larger portion of their countries, if they may be permitted to reserve small, detached portions for future residence." Another man assigned to negotiate with the Willamette Valley tribes similarly reported on their unwillingness to move: "Before entering into these treaties we exhausted every argument and availed ourselves of every means of persuasion which we were authorized to make use of to induce the Indians to remove east of the Cascade mountains but the Indians without any exception manifested a fixed and settled determination not under any circumstances or for any consideration to remove."³¹

Congress tabled the Dart treaties after their 1852 submission, thereby placing colonial Oregon in geo-cultural limbo. Colonists continued to interpret the DLCA as permission to settle anywhere and everywhere, while Indian title coupled with Indian occupation continued to form a significant obstacle to legal title for those claims. Had colonists agreed that Indian title was illegitimate or fictional, the situation could have resulted in widespread violence. Instead, colonists saw themselves as trapped between two legitimate legalities. This recognition prevented one disgruntled Willamette Valley colonist from acting out the most extreme eliminatory ideals of squatter sovereignty. In 1853 (while Oregon waited to see if Dart's treaties were ratified), he wrote to newly instated Superintendent of Indian Affairs Joel Palmer and described his internal conflict after encountering an Indian man on his claim. In an action typical of settler-colonists, he armed himself "as quickly as possible, thinking to shoot him down." Then, in an act that demonstrates the salience of legal categories validating Indians' continued occupation of the land he stopped himself since he "did not know whether I should be justified or not. I want to know of you whether I shall take the law into my own hands and shoot them down or shall I wait a little longer expecting to have them moved. I want you to write and let me know."³² Confronted with the reality of Indian perseverance in the face of the DLCA's assurances that all of western Oregon was unequivocally available for Euroamerican fee-simple ownership, this colonist sought clarification before acting according to one of the two competing legal realities present in Oregon at the time. This farmer's letter illustrates the tension between the DLCA's decree that Indians were a formality, and the persistent understanding that Indians still had some legal right to possess land.

More, Dart's plans to establish reservations within the Willamette Valley in accordance with the treaties (before he knew they would never be ratified) were foiled by settlers who were operating under the impression that the passage of the DLCA opened all land to settlement. These settlers moved into the small reserves the Dart treaties set aside for Willamette Valley tribes, destroyed Indian villages and fences, and further depleted fisheries and game. Without ever becoming subject to ratified treaties, the land of the Willamette Valley technically returned

³¹ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 166; John Gaines, "Gaines, Et. Al. to Lea, in Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1850)", April 19, 1851. Spalding quoted in Spores, "Too Small a Place," 176.

³² Spores, "Too Small a Place," 179-180.

to its original Indian owners. All the while the DLCA continued to sanction new and old claims on Indian land.³³

By the time Joel Palmer took over as Superintendent of Indian Affairs (after Dart's resignation in December of 1852) the limbo of Indian title had left the colonial and Indian communities "demoralized [and] confused" due to many unresolved conflicts between whites and Indians over the status of land. Conflicts continued to result from colonists' encroachment onto the reserves that had been set-aside in the Dart treaties. In a June 23rd 1853 letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Washington Manypenny, Palmer described the credibility gap caused by the delay in ratifying treaties with Oregon's Indians. "The settlement of the whites on those tracts which they regarded as secured to them by solemn treaty stipulations," he explained, "results among the Indians of the Valley in frequent misunderstandings between them and the settlers and occasions and augments bitter animosities and resentments." Indians became increasingly "distrustful of all promises made them by the United States and believe the design of the government is to defer doing anything for them until they have wasted away."³⁴

That Indians whose lands had been coopted by illegal squatters were resentful was not surprising. Especially considering that Indians' claims to the land had, again and again, been reinforced through common, everyday interactions between them and the Euroamerican colonists with whom they lived and worked. They had been reassured, just as E.M. Moore vowed to his surprise visitor, that the United States would make good on Indian land claims with proper payment. They had been reassured that their land claims had real value by the experience of negotiating beneficial treaties with Anson Dart. When Congress tabled the treaties but left the DLCA intact, the Indians and the colonists were left in a liminal space where neither could achieve full legal title, and where the incongruity between legality and experience continued to create anxiety. For the Indians this revolved around ever receiving fair compensation for their lands, and for the colonists around ever achieving full membership in the American nation. For the colonists, to achieve this would require significant remapping to replace a relatively integrated land-sharing system based on locally meaningful areas of territory with a highly abstract, rationalized, and federally implemented system of land division and geographical understanding introduced by the DLCA.

DLCA vs. Indian Title, of "The Anomalous Condition of Things"

Between the summer of 1852, when Congress tabled the Dart Treaties, and 1858, when Indian removal was essentially completed, the contradiction between the DLCA's assumptions and the reality of Indian land complicated efforts to peacefully negotiate treaties. The language of the DLCA encouraged settlement on Indian Land, which made the enforcement of federal laws like the Intercourse Act difficult and cohabitation more challenging to manage. Meanwhile, the DLCA's occupation and survey requirements were difficult for claimants to meet. This prevented the DLCA from facilitating the fee-simple ownership that colonists so craved. The combination of these two policy failures blurred the boundaries between legal and illegal actions in relationship to both Indians and land. Thus federal law complicated rather than clarified the definition and coding of land within Oregon. This situation, characterized by blurred boundaries and unclear definitions, entangled Indian Removal with DLCA-style national incorporation.

³³ Lavender, *Land of Giants*, 276–277.

³⁴ Spores, "Too Small a Place," 179.

Superintendent of Indian Affairs (1856-1859) James Nesmith summed up this situation aptly in 1857, calling it “the anomalous condition of things.”³⁵

Nesmith’s complaints centered on the way DLCA-induced settlement on recently delineated “Indian Country” made it difficult to govern Indian/white relations. The Intercourse Act defined all unceded lands as Indian Country, and therefore compelled Indian Agents to enforce the act on any such land. In Oregon colonists not only occupied much of this “Indian Country,” but they did so under the rubric of the DLCA. Thus, according to federal law their settlements, including some major Oregon towns, were both legal and illegal. Unable to discern Indian Country from territory legally claimed by colonists, Nesmith described his inability to enforce one of the major tenets of the Intercourse Act, preventing Indians from buying alcohol. There was no way, he stated, to “accomplish this discontinuance so long as the whites and Indians occupy the entire country in common.” At fault were the “the land laws which permit the occupation and settlement of both Washington and Oregon Territories, regardless of the rights of the Indians,” and which “render the intercourse laws, practically, a nullity...” Even more, he argued, it was impossible to pacify the Indians or end conflict until Indian “rights to the soil...recognized by the government” were formally extinguished.³⁶ Unable to control the contradictions in federal Indian law, Nesmith and others isolated the problem at hand to be the cohabitation of Indians and whites on the same territory. This provided another argument in favor of spatial segregation as the solution to a host of problems in colonial Oregon, ranging from Indian/white conflict to implementing the long-awaited DLCA.

This lack of clear legal definitions led to problems when applying the DLCA’s survey and occupation requirements. Many colonists were unwilling or unable to meet the requirements for legal title as defined in the federal act. Therefore the law fell short of providing the basis for commodifiable and saleable land title colonists wanted and which facilitated a new level of membership in the nation. Instead, it encouraged a partial rationalization of (and alienation from) the land itself through cadastral survey while resulting in a continuation of inchoate, unofficial land titles that remained outside the dominant American property regime.

Cadastral survey was not successfully implemented to the extent necessary to tip the scales to a mostly fee-simple land system, but it did have the effect of transforming what had been, at least in one corner of the Willamette Valley, a previously attentive, close-knit relationship to the land. The act required colonists to replace their old system of metes and bounds survey (in which colonists laid out their claims according to landscape particularities, such as timber stands and springs), to one based on professional surveyors using the cadastral method based on the recently charted Willamette Meridian. This change attenuated the previously intimate relationships between colonists and the landscape of the Willamette Valley, and replaced them with more rationalized and distant approaches to the environment. Vernacular modes of geographic marking like swales, creeks, and blazes on oaks lost legitimacy and were replaced with more abstract markers like latitude, longitude, and numbered plots and townships. This new system gained its legitimacy from the power of the federal government, rather than from community-maintained, local geographic discourse.³⁷

Across the settlements, though, an insufficient number of colonists conformed to the legislation’s requirements for survey to become, in practice, the law of the land. When the

³⁵ *ARCIA*, 1857, 179.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 317.

³⁷ Boag, *Environment and Experience*, 117.

Surveyor General, John B. Preston arrived in spring of 1851, he offered free cadastral survey only to those whose claims were located in the principal lower-Willamette Valley settlements surrounding Portland and Salem. The majority of claimants, then, had to pay for the service at a rate of \$8 per mile. This had obvious effects. Out of 1,079 colonists who filed “notifications” (statements of occupation and requests for survey) in 1852, by the end of 1856 only 420 claims had been examined and certified. The large number of initial filers represented a hope that official, federally sanctioned land ownership provided by the law would play a major role in the process through which Oregon gained meaningful membership in the American nation. The second number, so much lower, represents the failure of the law to fulfill that hope. This happened even though Preston claimed, “every settler is anxious to receive his patent in order to divide and sell.” In 1857 the Secretary of the Interior reported, “not having been empowered to hasten the surveys of private land claims...the work in many townships goes on tardily, because settlers still withhold their requests for surveys.” It was not until 1863 that the last of the holdouts were convinced to succumb and to finalize their land title. Thus, a large proportion of Oregon’s landholders remained essentially in the same position as before the passage of the DLCA in 1850: holders of land under “inchoate, imperfect rights.”³⁸

Thus, the survey requirement of the DLCA left land in dispute all over the Willamette Valley, and encouraged delays that had consequences of their own. To effectively complete their task, surveyors needed to know the size of the legal subdivisions of the land surrounding any non-conforming claim; they were stuck without it. If earlier claims did not contain straight lines, it could be extremely difficult for anyone to claim adjacent land while still conforming to the new requirements laid out in the DLCA.³⁹ Similarly, the requirement of four years consecutive residence and cultivation to achieve official title limited the DLCA’s efficacy as a path to official and undeniable ownership because it was extremely difficult to meet. Since the four year “term of occupation” did not begin until after official cadastral survey had been filed along with a new federal claim, patent was further impeded, preventing even the initial claims from being certified until mid-1853. By 1854 (and maybe earlier) Preston tried to apply pressure on settlers who had non-conforming claims to survey them, and his successors continued to complain about the problem of non-conforming and unsurveyed claims in their reports to the general land office.⁴⁰

Conditions on the ground, which centered on the difficult cultural and geographical processes of replacing vernacular geographies with rationalized ones, minimized the efficacy of the DLCA to effectively incorporate Oregon into national systems, and frustrated colonists eager for such incorporation. Disenchantment with the DLCA arose from the strict requirements for residence and cultivation, which meant, “claiming land in Oregon did not offer a great deal of advantage over buying land elsewhere.” Since wages were high on the West Coast, one could earn enough money in that time to buy land in another Western territory. One settler commented, “In four years time that I lost on the land claim, I could have earned enough to purchase three such farms.” But for colonists already committed to the Territory it was not that simple because a

³⁸ 420 claims added up to 590,720 acres; Bergquist, “The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy,” 29; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 165; Whaley, “Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic,” 173; Harlow Zinser Head, “The Oregon Donation Claims and Their Patterns” (Ph.D, University of Oregon, 1971), 29; Dorothy O Johansen, *Empire of the Columbia: a History of the Pacific Northwest*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 232. This had the further consequence of obstructing the beginning of any public land sale until 1862, since surveys were required before public sale could begin.

³⁹ Boag, *Environment and Experience*, 118–119.

⁴⁰ Bergquist, “The Oregon Donation Act and the National Land Policy,” 31.

DLCA was the only method of obtaining federal lands in Oregon. No provision initially existed to allow for cash sale of land from the government. And without survey and title it was impossible to buy land from private individuals because they could not legally sell unpatented land.⁴¹

Thus, the federal laws passed in 1850 severely complicated colonists' relationships to Indian people, Indian Country, and their own possibilities for land ownership and national incorporation. Things only got more complicated as the extinguishment of Indian title became reality and Indian agents negotiated treaties that would separate Indian Country from American country. During this process, colonists constructed native title as an impediment to the full incorporation into the nation they hoped would accompany the extension of the national and rational property regime embodied by the DCLA. Because of this perceived peril colonists reacted with panic and violence when, during the removal process, they perceived Indians as violating newly forming mental maps of Oregon. It follows that colonists strongly resisted the presence of Indians, even temporarily, in areas of their mental maps that they hoped to transform into Indian-free and fully American places.

Colonists' mental maps were laden with contradictions as Indian removal began to be enacted. Colonists had a tenuous hold on a new system of understanding the geography of their new home—one whose distance and foreignness from the United States continued to highlight the importance of geographical fluency for mastering and exercising true dominion. During this perceived contest between an Indian-influenced and vernacular types of land ownership, and a more alienated and unevenly implemented system of land division (accompanied by the highly desired and powerful idea of national incorporation) colonists began to interpret the presence of Indian people in an area coded as American as a threat to the future progress toward Americanization of the territory.

Three telling controversies emerged in 1855 and 1856, as the Indian removal began and frustration with the DLCA reached peak levels. They all centered on Indian presence in areas coded as American or Americanized. First, colonists protested the location of Indian reservations west of the cascades, and were placated only by assurances that they would be securely segregated from the Willamette Valley. Second, Valley residents mounted a seemingly incongruous protest against Indians walking through the settlements en route to new reservations west of the Coast Range. Third, settlers in the Umpqua Valley exhibited a more localized example of the same intolerance of Indian presence by murdering Indian farmer Dick Johnson. Johnson's death was tragic example of colonial efforts to create American meaning in Oregon amid changing geographic systems of knowledge. The debates surrounding Johnson reveal colonial efforts to navigate the contradictory land laws and Indian policies that dominated the American scene in 1850s Oregon. These extreme responses to the prospect of Indian people near settlements coded as American, where many had so recently made their home, reveals the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30–33. When settlers clamored for the option of cash sale to offset some of the occupation and cultivation requirements, they were not necessarily trying to claim land for purposes other than occupation and agriculture. Rather, they may have been reacting to the extreme delays caused by the backups in the land office. In July 1854 lobbyists were successful in getting the DLCA amended to require one year continual residence and cultivation plus \$1.25 an acre to prove up. The amendment also allowed for sale with patent because of delays at the land office. The surveyor general of Washington observed in 1855 some of the problems of the DLCA: “the onerous condition of ‘continuous residence and cultivation,’ with the risk of losing their claims, should their affairs call them off, and the uncertainty of ownership under such inchoate title appears, in many cases, to more than counterbalance the value of the gift, or, in other words, the conditions of the donation; the expenses of private claim surveys and the inconvenience incident to transfers of property are not worth the difference between donation and pre-emption.”

colonial need to extinguish symbolic Indian claims to land in addition to extinguishing their legal claim to land and removing them to reservations.

Locating the Reservations

Public opinion and policymaker attitudes, both influenced by predominant mental maps and communally legitimized vernacular geographies, shaped the process through which reservation locations were selected. Superintendent Palmer dedicated himself to keeping the Indians of western Oregon in western Oregon, despite the fact that plans were in place to move them east when he assumed his position. His commitment was indicative of the continued relevance of mental maps formed in the aftermath of the Whitman Massacre that privileged the geographical division segregating the deeply plotted Willamette Valley from other areas of the Territory. In order to avoid moving the Indians to what he believed to be an inhumane landscape, Palmer devised a plan to find a location that could balance his objective of keeping the Indians out of the interior against the public mandate to sufficiently separate the reservations from the American settlements. He decided to move them to a location on the coast, with the idea that the Coast Range would be a sufficient barrier to the Valley (see Figure 5.2).⁴²

⁴² Kent, William Eugene, "The Siletz Indian Reservation, 1855-1900" (M.A., Portland State University, 1973), 2, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

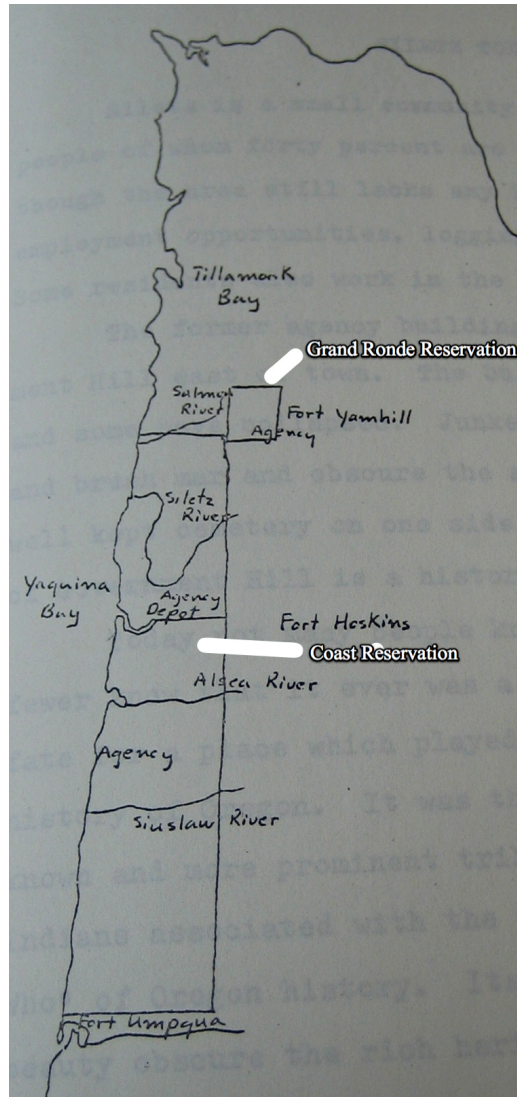


Figure 5.2 – The original Coast Reservation spanned nearly one hundred miles from north to south. The Grand Ronde Reserve was small in comparison. Both were too close to the Willamette Valley for many colonists’ taste. (Taken from William Eugene Kent, “Siletz Indian Reservation, 1855-1900.”)

Others, both within the Indian Department and without, espoused similar dedication to the purity of the Willamette Valley. They also tended to transfer the values they associated with western Oregon to Willamette Valley Indians to a certain extent. Some, like Robert Shortess, who served as a sub-agent under Anson Dart in the early 1850s, insisted that the Indians of western Oregon were fundamentally incompatible with the environment of the interior of Oregon. In an 1850 letter to Joseph Lane, he argued that it would be better to kill them than to send them to “that miserably black, barren region to die of famine, for I do not believe they would eat each other as the natives of that country are said to do in times of scarcity” because, as “high minded” Indians their “habits and modes of life entirely disqualify them for living in the interior...” Associating the nature of people with the nature of their landscape informed the binary racial division of white vs. Indian in the minds of Oregon’s Indian agents. They placed more importance on the uniquely Valley-like characteristics of Western Oregon’s Indians (fish

eating and “high mindedness,” e.g.) than on the fact that they were Indians and therefore belonged in the savage landscape east of the Cascades.

Palmer therefore proposed a large Coast reservation 90 miles in length and 30 miles in width, the entire eastern boundary of which was defined by the Coast Range, as home to the Willamette Valley, lower Columbia, and Coast Indian tribes. According to Nesmith, the coast range made a good barrier because they were, “exceedingly rugged and heavily timbered.” After the outbreak of violence at Table Rock, Palmer began devising plans to put the remaining Willamette Valley people, and some of the Umpqua, Cow Creek, Yoncallas, and Molallas from Southwest Oregon on another, small reservation on the upper Yamhill in a small valley directly adjoining the Willamette Valley and on the east side of the Coast range (near modern Dayton and McMinville). Grand Ronde’s location provided some benefits to the administration of the Reservation. It could be reached from the Willamette Valley only by traveling on a narrow pass, but this was still easier than the ships required to supply much of the Coast Reservation. The same mountains that satisfied colonists’ need for a significant boundary between Indians from the settlements increased the cost of transporting supplies so much that a reservation had to be created closer to the settlements. This became the Grand Ronde Reservation, and its closeness to the Willamette Valley would be a cause of concern for Willamette Valley residents in years to come.⁴³

Indeed, demands for segregation were such a strong force that the Indian Department prioritized them above finding land that was well suited to the civilization program planned by the Indian department, which centered on agriculture. “In fact,” Nesmith asserted, “the entire reservation is the worst possible selection that could be made for agricultural pursuits, and was so worthless that at the time of its selection, it was almost entirely destitute of white settlers, which, I apprehend, was one of the great inducements for selecting it as an Indian reserve, and was, in fact, the only portion of country not already occupied by the whites and upon which the Indians could be located. Its selection does offer good facilities for separating the whites from the Indians, but as an agricultural district it has but little value.” The reservation had cold winds from the coast that killed crops, aggressive ferns that choke cultivated plants, and unproductive cold clay soil.⁴⁴

⁴³ *ARCIA*, 1858, 216–217. He continued: “The Siletz station is on the western side of the coast range of mountains and about thirty miles southwest of Grande Ronde. Its approach from the Willamette valley is over those mountains, by an exceedingly bad trail, impracticable for the passage of wagons. The principal portion of the supplies for the subsistence of the two thousand Indians located at this point is received by sea, and is discharged at the Aquina bay, which affords only a tolerably safe entrance for small vessels during the summer months, but is rendered exceedingly dangerous by reason of storms usually prevalent during the winter. Supplies are transported by pack mules from the Aquina bay, nine miles, to the agency, or Siletz station. There being no white settlements in that portion of the country, no vessels visit the bay except those under contract or charter by the Indian department, which, together with the dangers of navigation, renders the cost of transporting the supplies for the Indians at that point very great.” Beckham, *Oregon Indians*, 126; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 94; Kent, William Eugene, “The Siletz Indian Reservation, 1855-1900,” 6. The treaty with Umpquas, Yoncallas, and Molallas that established the Grand Ronde Reservation did something “unique perhaps to Oregon treaties” by appropriating \$12,000 for the purchase of land belonging to settlers who lived along the Yamhill in the areas where the Indians were to relocate. Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua*, 103. Within these reserves were two smaller areas of arable land, commonly called “Siletz” (on the Coast Reservation) and “Grand Ronde” (on Grand Ronde Reservation) to which the reservations would eventually be downsized. They centered on the Indian Agencies and were the center of life on the reserves.

⁴⁴ *ARCIA*, 1858, 217.

But still the public was not satisfied that this choice of location would do enough to insure the purity of the settlements. Colonists in many cases were not happy with the idea of reservations being west of the Cascades at all. They preferred a more substantial division between the most richly plotted place on their mental maps and the Indian reservations. Outcry regarding the location of the Indian reserves spurred the territorial legislature to pass a “memorial by an almost unanimous vote, asking congress to restrain the Supt. Ind. Affairs from locating Indians in this valley, and declaring [him] foolish...in attempting to settle Indians upon the Coast Reservation,” and excoriated him for his desire to “congregate the Indians in and among the white settlements.” All this despite the fact that the Coast Reservation was not in fact located in “this valley” but rather on the western side of the Coast Range. The legislature went so far as to agree to petition the president for Palmer’s removal and to vet a replacement candidate by asking him to sign a formal statement indicating that if he were appointed he would “encourage the abandonment of the Coast Reservation.” They also insisted that he “countermand the order by which the friendly Indians are to be congregated at the Encampment,” which was a reference to Palmer’s highly unpopular plan to march friendly Indians from Umpqua City through the Willamette Valley on their way to the Coast Reservation (an issue that will be addressed below).⁴⁵

Though Palmer’s recounting of the legislature’s actions do not specifically indicate that they were motivated by the Coast Reservation’s distance from the settlements, it is safe to assume they were, since the content of Palmer’s main policy decision was to change removal from an east-of-the-Cascades plan to a west-of-the-Cascades plan. During this period Palmer’s Indian colonization program provoked political opposition because of the fears associated with bringing the Indians through the Willamette Valley. Fred Waymire, speaker of the Territorial House of Representatives, was a vocal critic of Palmer’s plan. His reasoning, printed in the *Statesman* in the spring of 1856, reflected a mental map of the Willamette Valley as a pure and therefore vulnerable zone as opposed to an inherently unstable Southwest Oregon. He accused Palmer of creating “a war where peace has so long prevailed” in bringing the Indians from the violent quarters of the territory into the nearby Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations. The result, he feared, would be “a great slaughter of our citizens at their pleasure” even if only the “old decrepit men, women, and children” took up residence on the reserve. They would, Waymire warned, ship ammunition south in order to fan the flames of violence in the valleys to the south.⁴⁶

A public meeting held in the town of Lafayette (near the border of the Grand Ronde Reserve) in March of 1856 indicates that the disquiet over reservation location linked directly to concerns about the safety of Willamette Valley settlements. Attendants wanted to express unease over the “numerous reports in circulation throughout the country, greatly agitating the public mind, rendering many fearful of their personal safety, and of the safety of their property.” They also wanted to know how many Indians would be on the reservation and what sort of arms they had, and “in what manner, and in what number Indians are permitted to leave the reservation.” Palmer responded through his secretary that the Indians would only be armed under severe

⁴⁵ Joel Palmer, “Palmer (presumably) to Manypenny”, January 22, 1856, MSS 114, Joel Palmer Papers, Box, 2, Folder 1, Oregon Historical Research Library; Spores, “Too Small a Place,” 189. For examples of the press criticizing Palmer for the location of the reservations, See *Oregon Statesman*, Dec 25, 1855 and Jan 1 1856. Also see Spaid, *Joel Palmer and Indian Affairs in Oregon*.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, 119. Waymire’s account taken from the *Oregon Statesman*, 1 April 1856.

restrictions, would only leave the reservation to work as teamsters accompanied by white men under the employ of the Indian service, and that he would personally take any arms from the Indians when he next returned to Grand Ronde. The Committee was not satisfied and later that month reconvened and adopted a series of resolution including “that the whole project of making an Indian Reservation upon our coast meets with our unqualified disapprobation; that our duty to ourselves and our country demands that we should use every means within our power to prevent the consummation of the same.”⁴⁷

The specific concerns voiced by the Lafayette committee reflected a general aversion to the idea of an Indian reservation close to settlements. Colonists were so alarmed by the idea of reservation Indians having freedom of movement because they feared the idea of unfettered Indians dangerously close to the settled portions of the territory. This threatened the foundational motivations of removal, according to the mass of settlers, in the first place—to rid the settlements of the presence of Indians, their bodies, sounds, and styles of life. It also reflected that Willamette Valley colonists were nervous about Southwest Oregon Indians, whom they had long considered violent and dangerous, taking up residence in the hallowed and safe confines of the Willamette Valley. This was indeed something many early Willamette Valley colonists had mounted up and fought against in the Cayuse War nine years earlier. And though Grand Ronde was difficult to reach from the Willamette Valley with supplies, colonists likely believed the Indians would be able to easily travel the road on foot or horseback if they so desired.⁴⁸

Palmer was willing to put up with the headaches associated with keeping the Indians west of the Cascade Mountains. He weathered complaints from settlers who felt they were too near the reservation or who were insulted by being asked to leave their claim so the reserve could be established as well as attempts to remove him from office. One way he and later Superintendents mitigated the backlash from colonists who feared having Indians so close to the Willamette Valley was by establishing army stations at various Indian agencies and constructing a ring of militarized forts around the reservation to supplement natural division of the rugged Coast Mountains. These included a network of three forts around the boundaries of the coast reservation, located at strategic points to intercept any Indians leaving the reservation, and located at the mouth of the Umpqua River, Fort Hoskins at Kings Valley, and Fort Yamhill near Valley Junction.⁴⁹ In some cases, the troops protected the Indians from aggressive colonists and went so far as to keep nightly bed checks to keep account of the people on the reservation. The

⁴⁷ Ibid., 121–122.

⁴⁸ Joel Palmer, “Palmer to Manypenny”, July 18, 1856, MSS 114, Joel Palmer Papers, Box, 2, Folder 6, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. This fear of Indians leaving Grand Ronde was not without its complications. Those who had long lived near the Grand Ronde site may have been welcome as laborers: “The Indians, gathered from remote parts, give us but little trouble at the encampments, but many of those who have heretofore resided in the vicinity of the Grand Ronde are often running away, which requires the constant employment of messengers, and sometimes troops, to hunt them up. I have good reasons to believe they are enticed away by whites, who desire the benefit of their labor, but of this I have no positive proof beyond the statements of the Indians, whose evidence is inadmissible [sic] in a Court of law.”

⁴⁹ Kent, William Eugene, “The Siletz Indian Reservation, 1855-1900,” 14. There were groups of Indian who threatened to leave the reservation and presumably might have if not for the army guard. In at least one case, especially vocal Indians who encouraged their fellows to vacate the reserve were banished from Siletz and sent instead to Alcatraz Island. Agent R.B. Metcalfe reported having used the banishment of “some of the most desperate characters” as a way to encourage the remaining Indians to commit to and accept their permanent residence on the reservation. By excluding these few individuals, he reported being able to “subdue their determination to leave” in order to establish civilization of the children while “keeping the old under subjection.” *ARCIA, 1858*, 252; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 233–234.

considerable anxiety expressed by Oregon's colonists regarding the problem of keeping newly confined Indians on the reservations was indicative of colonial desire to maintain the Willamette Valley as an American space that was by definition free of Indian people at a time when legal changes posed significant challenges to vernacular systems of geographic organization and interpretation. Colonists took further action to insure that this idealized image of Indian-free space within settlements was protected.

Resisting Indian Presence in Settlements

During Indian removal, Oregon remained in a legal and geo-cultural limbo, stuck between the national incorporation and land ownership promised by the DLCA and the reality of local geographic norms that reinforced Indian title and inhibited the application of cadastral survey. Under these circumstances, it is perhaps easier to understand why colonists took the otherwise counterproductive measure of organizing against the movement of Indians through settled areas on their way to reservations. Moving Indians was, after all, the last stage in the process of extinguishing Indian title to land and clearing the way for a clearer system of American land ownership. It may seem like an exaggeration to say that, in this context, colonists would not endure an Indian so much as stepping foot within their sacred settled zones (see Figure 5.3). But it was not; colonists staunchly resisted Indian agents' plans to march Indians overland through areas they considered American. From within this context, the presence of Indians in the settled portions of the territory was a threat to the delicate reorganization of mental maps that, due to the symbolism of the DLCA, carried national significance.



Figure 5.3 – This image of Coos and Lower Umpqua Indians awaiting removal to Grand Ronde Reservation shows the use of a saw, kettles, and cotton clothing. Each of these is evidence of the rapid cultural change they underwent in the mid-nineteenth century. (Taken from Beckham, *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries*; originally appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine*, 24 April 1858)

The campaign to disrupt Indians' movement through the Willamette Valley was an organized one. Threats against the lives of peaceful Indians were not crimes of passion, but

aspects of an organized effort on the part of the community to prevent the presence of Indians from Southwest Oregon in the Willamette Valley. It is likely that this campaign was connected to the efforts described above to prevent the establishment of the reserves themselves. Joel Palmer wrote on 1 December 1855, describing the organized nature of Oregon's settlers who threatened the lives of Indians traveling to the Coast Reservation. "I have received intelligence that meetings of the citizens of Willamette Valley, residing along the route to be travelled by these Indians in reaching the designated encampment, as well as those in the vicinity of the latter, have resolved upon resisting such removal, and avowing a determination to *kill* all who may be brought among them, as well as those who sought to effect the object" [emphasis in original].⁵⁰

From the beginning of the removal process in late 1855, colonists protested the movement of Indians near their settlements. They did so even when the Indians were under armed guard. On their trip to Grand Ronde in January of 1856, the Umpqua Yoncalla Molallas, encountered colonists who, for very different reasons, were opposed to their movement. The first came to pass while the party, accompanied by Robert. B. Metcalfe, camped near Yoncalla. The Indians met members of the Applegate family who told them the government had no right to drive them from their homes, discouraging some of the Indians from continuing. This was a rare instance of colonists resisting removal because they thought it was unjust to the Indians.⁵¹ Later in the trip they had what would become a typical experience for Indians traveling overland to reservations when they met whites who were hostile to their presence near white settlements even as a traveling party. On Elk Creek in Northern Douglas County, "armed, white settlers intercepted the refugees and denounced the plan to bring the Umpqua, Calapooia and Molalla to the Willamette Valley. They threatened to kill the Indians if they continued farther. With this warning a number of the Indians fled into the hills." But most of the resistance to the transport of Indians on their way to the reservation came from residents of the Willamette Valley. General John E. Wool of the U.S. Army found the trend disturbing and compared it to the exterminationist campaigns carried out by settlers in Southwest Oregon. He reported to his colleagues in Washington of "the determination of the inhabitants of the Willamette valley to kill these Indians, with all that might accompany them, should an attempt be made to remove them to the coast reservation." Palmer responded to these threats by requesting military guards; in a January 21st letter to Major Rains, commander of the US Army in Oregon, Palmer wrote to explain the need for troops, "owing to the prejudicial interference of certain citizens of Oregon" to disrupt the removal.⁵²

Other measures intended to quell the concerns of colonists threatening violence indicated that, at least in part, the obscurity of legal definitions were to blame for the furor over Indians marching. In one case Palmer sent "discreet messengers [to] explain to the inhabitants along the

⁵⁰ "Indian Hostilities in Oregon and Washington Territories," 6. There is also evidence that some volunteer regiments sought to infiltrate the military guard in order to attack traveling Indians. See Joel Palmer, "Palmer to H. Harris", May 23, 1856, MSS 114 - Joel Palmer Papers, Box, 2, Folder 4, Oregon Historical Research Library.

⁵¹ The Cow Creeks had not in fact agreed to removal neither in their earlier 1853 treaty nor in the recent treaty that included the confederation of the Molallas, Umpquas, and Yoncallas. Although it is not clear that the Applegates were aware of this situation.

⁵² "Indian Hostilities in Oregon and Washington Territories," 6. This was only one hardship in an extremely harsh trip. The group had only 8 wagons for all the elderly and all the supplies of 300 people. Virtually all had to walk on snowy trails, and the supplies were short and they ran out of money. Dr. T.J Wright who Palmer asked to take care of the health of the Indians refused to do so, and Major Gabriel J. Rains of the US Army declined to provide a military escort to protect the Indians as they passed through the settlements of the Willamette Valley. Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua*, 103.

route to be travelled by these Indians the objects sought - to be attained in their removal, and that the immigrating party consisted wholly of the peaceable and friendly bands of Umpqua valley.” He noted that the most effective part of this strategy was to include in the telegrams documents that could clarify the law regarding Indians and their right to land. It was particularly helpful, he observed, to include “A full explanation of the policy of the government in regard to these Indians, and the correction of the erroneous impressions imbibed, with an exhibit of a few sections of the intercourse laws....” They “had the effect to deter persons from resisting by force our efforts to move these people.”⁵³ The Intercourse Act perhaps impressed upon panicky colonists that they could in fact be punished for inhibiting Indian agents from marching across what technically remained Indian Country.

Less counterintuitive to a modern audience, perhaps, settlers often reacted violently to Indian people who attempted to set up shop as farmers among colonial settlements. One such family, consisting of Dick Johnson, a Klickitat who lived apart from his tribe, his wife Mary, an Umpqua Indian, and his brother-in-law settled in the Umpqua Valley and appeared by all accounts to demonstrate his acceptance of American culture and habits.⁵⁴ He apparently eschewed alcohol, cultivated crops and fenced his fields according to colonial norms, lived monogamously with his wife with whom he conformed to American gender norms, and attended church. Despite having powerful and influential friends, most notably Jesse Applegate (the Johnsons had previously traveled with the Applegate clan and lived on their land for some years), his presence in the valley was not tolerated for long. Neighbors launched a long campaign of intimidation, harassment, and physical violence in an effort to get the family to vacate their farm. In the end, the neighbors brutally murdered Johnson and his brother-in-law, leaving Mary and her brother with no recourse against their family’s murderers or the right to receive compensation for their land.

The case of Dick Johnson has been told by historians to illustrate the powerful racism among Oregon’s colonists and to expose the hypocrisy that lay at the core of the assimilationist rhetoric used to justify the removal and reservation programs of the era. There is another dimension to his story, though, that underscored the colonial need to eliminate Indian claims to land ownership during a time of vernacular geographic transformation in order to incorporate Oregon into the United States in a meaningful and lasting way. The elements of Johnson’s lifestyle that represented his assimilation—and could have been interpreted as a victory for Americanization—instead threatened the delicate nature of the transition to a DLCA-type system of land ownership. The Johnson story should be understood as part of the transition from a more inclusive and fluid vernacular notion of property rights that included continuity from previous modes of land ownership to a new DLCA-inspired one characterized by rationality, alienation, and commodification. It was this new system that came to signify the imminent incorporation of Oregon into the nation.

Thus, by adopting the signs and symbols of assimilation, Dick Johnson unknowingly threatened the newly emerging mental maps of Oregon. These maps contained DLCA-surveyed and rationalized landscape and were distinguished from older maps by the absence of native people. The Johnson farm threatened the process, still in its formative stages, of using the DLCA

⁵³ *ARCIA, 1856*, 196, 198.

⁵⁴ The Klickitat had “invaded” the Valley from above the Columbia and had migrated all the way to the bottom. They lived throughout the Valley “and were considered troublesome trespassers by Indians and whites alike.” Spores, “Too Small a Place,” 172. According to Stephen Dow Beckham, some of them were hired as mercenaries during the war, personal Communication.

to signify incorporation into the United States in the most fundamental way—by transforming the landscape from one marked by informal negotiation with Indians and a property regime unmanaged and unsanctioned by the government into one that conformed to the most idealized images of the American republic and which could be commodified and thereby integrated into the national marketplace.

Historian Stephen Dow Beckham was not incorrect when he plainly stated of Johnson that he “had no legal right to land.”⁵⁵ Even so, all Dick Johnson’s advocates during the 1850s used some form of legal argument to urge local officials to find a way to give Johnson outright land ownership. In the day-to-day reality under a fluid legal situation, then, it cannot be said for sure whether or not he had rights to land. Just what each resident, Indian and colonist, was entitled to by law was constantly changing, and the complications of the Dick Johnson’s particular land claim certainly left room for interpretation.

Johnson’s vernacular claims to land were reasonably strong when he first established his claim. Especially in the context of an Oregon where most land claims were not technically legal. He originally received permission from the Umpqua tribe to carve out a piece of their land to start a farm with his wife, an Umpqua woman named Mary. Later, when the Umpqua ceded their territory, Johnson stayed on and continued to improve his land, living much like his colonist neighbors. It took only his presence on the fringes of the Umpqua Valley to anger local colonists, who proceeded to appeal to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to have him removed. Later they continued their efforts at intimidation by squatting on his land, bringing a false murder suit against him, destroying his fences and outbuildings, and attacking and beating him and his family. Finally, they killed Johnson and his brother-in-law, and injured other family members, driving them from their fifty-acre farm. His killers then entered a Donation Land Claim (officials of the land office were rumored to have approved their tactics) and moved onto the Johnsons’ farm in order to take advantage of the family’s hard work without compensation, as the law would have required if Johnson had been white or half-white. As his friend and advocate Jesse Applegate put it, Johnson’s “little wealth excited the cupidity of others, [and] being neither ‘white’ nor ‘half white’ [he was] excluded from the benefits of the Land Law.”⁵⁶

Johnson had taken his claim on the outskirts of a small valley near the Umpqua river around 1850, before the events surrounding the dissolution of the Table Rock reservation and the Rogue River War encouraged segregating white and Indian space to become dominant among colonists. That he staked his claim around the time the DLCA was passed may indicate that he hoped the new law would extend his own rights in addition to his white American neighbors. With available evidence, it appears that he and his family began experiencing harassment at the hands of a group of neighbors in the summer 1854, around the time the war was ending, treaties were being negotiated extinguishing Indian title, and the removal of the Indians of the Umpqua Valley was underway. These troubles also took place during the time when the 1850 DLCA was slowly implemented throughout the Willamette Valley, and began to take hold in the Umpqua and Rogue River Valleys of Southwest Oregon.⁵⁷ The transition in legal structures described

⁵⁵ Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua*, 106–107.

⁵⁶ Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 235; Jesse Applegate, “Letter from Jesse Applegate to Nesmith”, September 18, 1858, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁵⁷ The southern Willamette Valley was beginning to be surveyed around 1854, and the Rogue and Umpqua Valleys, spottily, by 1855. By 1853 surveys had progressed south through Willamette Valley to the Eugene area and the bulk of Valley floor had been completed. In 1854 a few townships along the east and west fringes of Willamette Valley were added along with several along Columbia below mouth of the Willamette. By the end of 1856 all but eight

above was occurring concretely on the ground in the years during which Dick Johnson staked his claim in “marginal hillside land,” constructed stables, sheds, granaries, smokehouses, and two log cabins, grew an orchard, broke ground and cultivated crops, and amassed fifty head of livestock, and was then, on 25 November 1858, murdered by a group of neighbors.⁵⁸

Prominent Umpqua Valley men who supported Johnson in his struggle to defend his claim wrote most of the extant sources on the situation as it developed. They advocated for him to be able to maintain a hold on his land, despite the fact that they all recognized he had a weak claim to ownership under the combination of land laws considered applicable to the territory. In order to argue for Dick Johnson’s legitimate right to the fifty acres that he had improved, this group of advocates, which included many notable Oregon citizens, tried a number of different creative interpretations of land law. These shed light on the way the contradictions and complications inherent to these laws impacted colonial thought about Indians and land ownership.

The first strategy Johnson and his colonist friends tried was to outfit Johnson with certificates written by men under the auspices of their official positions insisting that he had a right to his farm. Josiah L. Parrish wrote the first of these in December of 1853. It stressed Johnson’s character as “an honest and industrious Indian,” and it informed “all persons that this man will be protected in his right of property + person...under the jurisdiction of the United States...against all persons who may try to remove or drive him from his improvements.”⁵⁹ This seems to be a reasonable assessment of the situation in 1853, when Indian Agents were accustomed to protecting the rights of Indians in their traditional homelands. In addition, since Johnson’s wife, Mary, was a member of the Umpqua tribe perhaps Parrish believed himself capable of protecting the Johnson family.

As time passed and the extinguishment of Indian title fundamentally changed relationships between Indians and the federal government as well as Indians and agents to non-reservation territory, this type of language became more and more empty of the authority needed to achieve results. That did not stop local advocates for Johnson’s plight from employing it. For example, in December of 1854 Joel Palmer wrote another affidavit meant to protect Johnson’s interests in the land and his improvements upon it. He began by notifying the reader that he had “visited and examined the land claimed by the Indian known as Dick Johnson” and noted the “considerable improvement” he had made, and that he currently lived there. Using the word “claim” in the same sentence as he noted the improvements and his permanent residence on the land was an attempt to invoke the legitimacy of the Provisional Organic Acts and the DLCA, both of which constituted a right to a land claim as contingent upon residence and improvement

townships in the Willamette Valley that had ever had any claims had been surveyed along with the area between Saint Helens and Astoria along lower Columbia and Josephine County in addition to the main valleys of Umpqua and Willamette. After 1857, townships around the fringes remained of the Willamette Valley along with a smattering around Umpqua Valley, and a block in Applegate Valley. Head, “The Oregon Donation Claims and Their Patterns,” 56–57. Though he doesn’t specifically mention the Umpqua, it is fair to assume that the Valley was being surveyed around the same time as the Rogue River, in 1854 or 1855.

⁵⁸ Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua*, 106–107; Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 235.

⁵⁹ Josiah L. Parrish, “Letter from Josiah L. Parrish to All Whom It May Concern”, December 3, 1853, MSS 2320 Josiah L. Parrish: Indian affairs, Property Rights ca 1853, Oregon Historical Society Research Library; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1859, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/>. Despite Drew’s urging that “the land described in these certificates be reserved from sale, and, if possible, secured to the families and surviving relatives of the deceased,” the family never received any money and the land was claimed by the very men who murdered Dick Johnson and his stepfather.

of the land. Palmer recognized his limited power to directly provide protection or change the legal status of a lone Indian whose tribe had ceded land rights and removed to a reservation elsewhere. In this letter, he did not confirm Johnson's right to the land, and instead only informed the reader that Johnson had been "instructed and authorized" to "hold said land as claimed by him against any claimant thereof whomsoever, until such time as the proper authorities of the United States shall make final decision on the premises." In this case, rather than embodying the jurisdiction of the United States, as Parrish had, Palmer could only hope to hold other claimants at bay and then beg higher-ups to do something for Johnson. He then urged, but cited no legal authority to command, "all...good citizens" to "refrain from disturbing said Indian in his possession of said claim."⁶⁰ After his murder, Johnson was found carrying these two documents along with another that has been lost. Each represented attempts to certify Johnson's possession, and are a powerful demonstration of the crosshairs of contradiction where Johnson's family and their supporters found themselves during a time of legal a geo-cultural transformation. They also exemplify the recursive process of vernacular geographic production as colonists' arguments reflected a transformational dialogue among national narratives, legal discourse, and practical Indian title.

In another rearrangement of prevalent legal ideas, a group of sixty-five local men submitted a petition in July 1854, using the history of how Johnson obtained his land from local Indians to argue that his land rights were continuous and that they derived from his status as a Native American. It informed William Martin that Johnson was "a subject within your province, as Indian Agent" and reiterated previous arguments about his industriousness and his valuable agricultural improvements. They lauded Johnson for choosing a location "away from the settlements generally" and "peaceably" improving the land, and also made clear that he had "enjoyed the quiet use and occupation of the property...agreeably to and with the consent and approbation of a very large class of residents of this county, and who desire that he should continue to so reside and peaceably improve for his subsistence...."⁶¹ Their suggestion to satisfy whites who wanted to take the land "occupied by said R.M. Johnson" (significantly, they did not use the term "owned" or even "claimed" here) was for the Indian agent to establish a 50 acre, one family reservation so that Johnson "may be justly dealt with and located permanently upon said lands, as a reserve," and they argued that the act of creating such a reserve was according to the "law provided for the Indians." The linchpin of this argument was that Johnson, when he refused to go to the reservation with the other Umpquas became an "outcast from his own tribe" who "claims nothing beyond the wise and humane provisions made of by congress to encourage labor, temperance, and morality among Indians." Later in the month, as tensions raised ever higher on the Johnson farm, Applegate wrote another letter to Nesmith, describing a visit he paid to a local camp meeting to excoriate the local colonists for their treatment of Johnson. In his rampage, he again argued, "as the Government paid the Umpqua's to vacate their Country and remove to another place, and Dick neither wished to sell or remove, I think he very properly

⁶⁰ Joel Palmer, "Land Claim - Indian Dick Johnson", December 4, 1854, MSS 114 - Joel Palmer Papers, Box, 1, Folder 11, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁶¹ Jesse Applegate also stressed the location of the claim: "Being earnestly desirous to abandon his nomadic life, by the advice of his white friends he settled upon an isolated little valley some distance removed from the new settlements and began on his own account the arduous labor of subduing the wilderness. Applegate, "Letter from Jesse Applegate to Nesmith."

declined to receive his part of the purchase money when tendered him by Gen Palmer.”⁶² The petition’s authors attempted to manipulate existing laws in a way that reflected local understandings of the correct division of territory. It exemplifies the revision of vernacular geographic discourse.

Johnson’s advocates at times contradicted each other, making legal arguments in one instance that would delegitimize their allies. For example, an 1854 petition to Indian agent Martin, Lindsay and Elisha Applegate (along with two other men) relied on an element of the 1841 Preemption Act that allowed occupants of longer than 14 months to receive compensation for improvements made to property even if they could not afford its purchase price. They argued that Martin, who had previously written he “claimed no authority to remove intruders” from Johnson’s claim, did have authority, under the Preemption Act, to see the Johnson was compensated for his work. Petitioners who had argued for Johnson to receive an individual Indian reserve had not mentioned the Preemption Act because to do so would have nullified their entire argument in two ways. First, the law required all preemption claimants to be citizens of the United States, a status for which Dick Johnson was not eligible. Second, because the law basically opened up land to any American citizen for settlement, thus making Johnson’s land ripe for the taking by settlers. Indeed the fact that the Preemption Act and DLCA were amended to allow the settlement of unsurveyed land in Oregon in 1854 may have been one reason (along with the removal of the Umpqua Indians to Grand Ronde in the same year) why pressure on Johnson from his neighbors increased so dramatically in that year. But the Applegates, admitting that Johnson may need to leave his land, tried to manipulate that venerable legislation in order to assure their friend receive the compensation they believed he deserved.⁶³

Other advocates further expanded the flexibility of current land law in their petitions on Johnson’s behalf. In a passionate letter to Joseph Lane, E.L. Applegate critiqued the way white men used the “shield” of the “land law” to extend his “covetous wing over the labour and living of the native,” and argued that it reflected poorly on the Americans who recognized Johnson’s “property right in justice to the enjoyment of his labour, and that it is a shame on an American citizen to deprive him thereof” [emphasis in original]. He asked Lane to use his authority to do “the best thing that can be done,” to convince “Congress to make a donation of land to this Indian and thereby settle the matter.”⁶⁴ This letter used even more direct language to equate the problems of Johnson to DLCA claimants. This was an attempt to try to include Johnson in the new DLCA-centered imagination of the new Oregon. Though the result would be very similar to the idea proposed above, that Johnson be granted a special, tiny Indian reservation for himself and his extended family, the signification of the act would be completely different. The latter would have brought Johnson legally through the door of assimilation and difference and symbolized the sincerity of the federal government to eventually allow Indians to fully assimilate into the “American way of life.” The former, meanwhile, stigmatized him as an Indian with a unique and distinct relationship to the government, even while defending his desire to live an assimilated lifestyle.

⁶² Jesse Applegate, “Letter from Jesse Applegate to Nesmith”, September 26, 1858, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁶³ Lindsay Applegate and et.al, “Petition from Lindsay Applegate, Et Al to Mr. William Martin”, June 30, 1854, Box 1 Folder 3, University of Oregon Library, Special Collections.

⁶⁴ Joseph Lane, “Letter from [E.L.] Applegate to Joseph Lane”, November 23, 1854, Box 1 Folder 3, University of Oregon Library Special Collections.

The flexible interpretation of the law was indicative of the post Rogue River, pre-statehood moment in Oregon's history. Land laws that played a huge role in day-to-day life for colonists were loosely interpreted and selectively and creatively implemented throughout the settlement. So why, then, when Johnson was upholding the spirit of all Indian policy, could the government not establish an Indian reserve for him, separate from that made for his people, from whom he was now estranged? Especially when he had forfeited his share of the annuities agreed to by the rest of the Umpqua Indians, who were at that moment enjoying the benefits of their sale on the Grand Ronde Reservation? The situation illustrates the malleability of law when applied on the local stage, as well as the increasing rigidity of racial exclusion that somewhat surprisingly accompanied that malleability.

Territorial officials rebuked every effort to obtain aid for Johnson and his family. These officials, some of whom may have had sympathy for Johnson, were caught at the intersection of the logic of the DLCA and that of the long history of Indian title. Applegate, angry with Nesmith for refusing to aid Johnson at a key moment in 1858, pinpointed the issue colonists faced at this transformative moment, writing, "And as tho' you and your agents only, the will of the Government is made known to the Indians, not Dick alone but almost every other Indian in this territory has a right to believe its promises made not to be fulfilled, but to defraud and deceive." The grey areas of the law shaped the process of Indian removal but they were not flexible enough to save Dick Johnson and his family. His death sheds light on the connection between removal and incorporation in Oregon's history.⁶⁵

Even after his death Johnson continued to fall through the cracks in the overlapping and sometimes contradictory legal system in Oregon when it came to land. Despite a warrant for Johnson's murderers, no witnesses materialized whose testimony was admissible against a white man. A civil suit was filed to obtain the value of the improvements on Johnson's farm for Mary, his wife. Applegate hoped that a previous ruling by Judge Wells that those unable to afford to buy their preemption claims at the end of fourteen months were nevertheless entitled to payment for their improvements would be held to apply to Dick Johnson's extensive improvements on his farm. Nesmith sent someone from the Indian Department to help attend to Johnson's affairs, but Mary was never remunerated for her or her husband's labor. By 1859 Klikitat Jim, Johnson's brother-in-law, resettled in Washington Territory, and Mary Johnson and her two children moved with Grand Ronde after living on the Applegate's land in Yoncalla for a time.⁶⁶

Johnson, presumably aware of colonial touchiness about the racial and national purity of their settlements, chose his claim on the outskirts of the valley in order to avoid offending local geographic sensibilities. This show of deference was insufficient for colonists who needed every corner of the settled valley free of nativeness in order for it to be mapped as eligible for inclusion in the American republic. From within their vernacular geographic discourse, attaining legal and transferable title to land and the political status of American territory was not sufficient to fulfill American desires. The Oregon colonists had a deeper and subtler objective of unquestionable national inclusion, which had to be achieved in the realm of meaning. Sadly for the Johnson family, assimilated Indian farmers did not fit into the areas on the map marked as American.

⁶⁵ Jesse Applegate, "Letter from Jesse Applegate to Nesmith", October 19, 1858, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁶⁶ Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua*, 106–107; Jesse Applegate, "Letter from Applegate to Nesmith", December 17, 1858, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

~ Conclusion ~

In September of 1858, a Portland agricultural journal, the *Oregon Farmer*, ran an article entitled “Oregon—As Viewed by a Stranger” in which a Californian identified only as Viator documented his arrival in the Territory and soon-to-be state of Oregon.

Imagine me, Mr. Editor, a weary passenger on the Columbia; and after escaping the dangers of the fog, rocks, breakers and a lee-shore—four days out from San Francisco, on a beautiful Sabbath morning we cross the bar of the Columbia, now tranquil as the hallowed day, and sweep up against its element, past the gloomy forests of which Bryant wrote—‘Take the wings/Of morning, and the Barcan desert pierce,/ Or, lose thyself in the continuous woods,/ Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,/ Save its own dashings....’ The poet did not anticipate the march of civilization, or he would have heard the coming footsteps of then un-born generations who are now making vocal the woods of Oregon with the songs of labor, and the harmony of social progress.¹

Viator’s description of entering Oregon conveys many elements of its transformation since the first missionaries settled the territory in 1834. The Pacific Northwest was no longer half-a-year’s travel from the nearest American state, but “four days out from San Francisco.” Oregon was still isolated, but the continuing expansion and increasing American dominion over the American continent—results of the Mexican-American war and the California Gold Rush—had made it significantly less so. Moreover, Viator’s use of the word Oregon in this passage brought to mind a settled territory rather than the lonely river (running through an unnamed land) evoked by Bryant’s “Thanatopsis.”

But the most evocative part of Viator’s description was his use of Thanatopsis’ silence and solitude in opposition to the multitudinous sounds of an American Oregon. Noisy footsteps constituted the “march of civilization,” and the songs of labor and “social progress” now reverberated through the “woods of Oregon,” all adding up to an experiential depiction of Oregon’s transformation as one from hushed to cacophonous, and from vacant to teeming. Remarkable in its lack of visual description, the letter chronicles how Oregon sounded and how it felt to arrive there. Where the impenetrable woods had signified a savage wilderness, their reverberating sounds of voice and ax were now identified with progress.

This rendition speaks to the importance of taking nation as lived space seriously, and of measuring a territory’s degree of national incorporation through parameters of meaning rather than simply those of politics, law, or economy. The signs and symbols embedded in Oregon’s landscape, as expressed by the Californian’s visit, were part of a long and complex process of place making through vernacular geography, that, in 1858, had transformed the physical environment in dialectical relationship with local experiences of being in the landscape.

To demonstrate the way spatial history can confound political definitions, we only need look east of the Cascade Mountains at the time of Viator’s journey. Eastern Oregon continued to

¹ Viator, “Oregon--As Viewed by a Stranger,” *Oregon Farmer*, September 1858.

be coded as dangerous and wild since the Whitman Massacre and Cayuse War, and presented many of the difficulties colonists had only just gotten under control in the Willamette Valley. These problems persisted into the 1860s and 70s, statehood notwithstanding. Colonists continued to negotiate treaties and implore the federal government to ratify them, fight Indian wars, wrestle with the problems of backwards settlement and the persistence of Indian title, attempt to navigate through treacherous and unknown landscape, and to communicate with the eastern United States. Distance from the centers of American power meant that colonists continued to face these challenges without much federal assistance. The continuing challenges posed by Americanizing Oregon's interior demonstrate that achieving statehood did not necessarily equal the experience of national membership. Meaning-centered standards of national membership may or may not have been achieved by becoming the 33rd state in the union. Further, places that had come to be seen as American could again become identified with foreignness. Thus just as the Willamette Valley was beginning to meet local definitions of national inclusion, continuing struggles over the high desert interior reveal that terms like "post-colonial" and "post-statehood" can be misleading and at times obscure deeper dynamics at play.

By utilizing a spatial framework, the present study has modeled a way to investigate expanding settler colonial societies not from the bottom-up or top-down, but from the center-out. It also narrates that history not so much as a story of cause-and-effect, but rather as a shifting constellation of maps and meanings. Central to this approach is a recognition that the abstract and the concrete existed as part of one unified worldview in colonial Oregon. Through vernacular geography colonists organized symbols and their meanings, bringing abstract concepts, narratives, and images into productive dialogue with concrete experiences. There was no pure unmitigated experience just as there was no idea that existed in a vacuum. Mental maps and locally transmitted geographic discourse acted as bridges between concepts scholars often treat as dichotomous, and were flexible enough to anchor symbolic meanings even as they shifted, changed shape, switched meanings, and were destroyed or created. The process of making place and transforming territory into nation through vernacular geographic discourse is a circular one. From this perspective, political alignments, legal changes, or changing lines on a map cannot satisfactorily define epochs or periods in the history of the Americanization of territory acquired through conquest.

"Americanization" can connote a one-way acculturation, where a static culture teaches its superior ways to one they deem inferior. This spirit was certainly present in colonial Oregon; espoused by Protestant Missionaries who traveled to Oregon to assimilate and convert Native Americans, and more violently, by vigilante miners who sought to exterminate Native peoples. Yet Americanization has another side if we understand it as an iterative transformation of lived space and its enmeshment with national ideals. Seeing Americanizing as a process that occurred and occurs within webs of meaning situated spatially, experiential knowledge becomes integral to political and geographic transformation. Americanization was nation making and it was place making. Settler-colonists inscribed shared ideas of what American meant onto new locales under new circumstances together. Forced to adapt to local conditions, they created new meanings and started the cycle again. This was not a simple one-way relationship with a beginning, middle, and end. It was a complex process that rooted colonists to place as it dispossessed Native Americans. Attempts to fulfill the American ideal of eliminating all traces of native inhabitation from the landscape were never complete, and neither was the project of imbuing the landscape with American meanings. The payoff of understanding these processes is not to trace them through to their conclusions, for they can never be reached. It is, rather, to understand the impact of building

cultural traditions around an unending project of exclusion and erasure of native racialized others. If there is one underlying lesson to be taken away from a spatial interpretation of Oregon's early years, it is that nations were—and are—lived spaces, defined by their power to exclude. They require constant work to be created and inscribed in particular territory through individual and communal acts of cultural interpretation and the making of meanings.

This approach can and should be applied to other contexts. Particularly interesting would be analyses of other colonial American possessions that were geographically divided from the centers of American power and nationhood, and could include California, Alaska, and Hawaii. How did the geographical differentiation of the Pacific Ocean and Canada interrelate with efforts to create American place in the Hawaiian Islands or Alaska? What was the impact of rapidly constructed ocean transit networks on the experience of distance in Gold Rush California, and how did those interrelate with myths associated with mining for gold? Similarly, the methods of spatial history and the recognition of the nation as lived space can be deployed into any context where a community's mental maps do not match the nation in which they live. Borderlands contexts like the American Southwest, urban immigrant neighborhoods, and Indian reservations are only a few of the many examples where reconstructing spatial experience can yield a nuanced understanding of the relationship between conquest and national incorporation.

Understanding the meaning-centered and cultural dimensions of Americanization as a constant creation and adaptation of lived space helps to account for Oregonians' continuing struggle for inclusion after achieving statehood and to imagine its application in other locations and times. Nations are porous, contradictory, and yet exhibit a flexibility that accommodates territorial expansion. Understanding the way nations have changed over time and space is the work of the historian, and a benefit of spatial history. The choice to end this study in 1859 came from my original assumption that statehood was an unmistakable division with a distinct before and after. It turns out that 1859, while still an appropriate end-point, did not mark a total transformation but instead highlights the incomplete nature of abstract geographical change. The passage of the Oregon Constitution and the redrawing of official national maps were significant. Yet, political and cartographic changes were only two among many that made up the constellation of meanings through which Oregon became America.

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