

NOTES ON EARLY RAINIER HISTORY

BY KATHERINE TOLLESHAUG

As the ditty goes:

"In 1492, Columbus crossed the ocean blue"

or

"1493, Columbus crossed the deep blue sea."

As we say, Columbus discovered America when his Spanish expedition landed in the West Indies October 12, 1492. Columbus paved the way and other nations became active also. But, as a matter of fact, it took 300 years to discover merely the outline and shape of the Americas, and the great Northwest, the Oregon country, was an unknown wilderness. It was 300 years before the mouth of the Columbia River was discovered, when in 1792 Captain Gray in the Columbia (Columbia Rediva), a Boston trading vessel, sought out and crossed the bar and sailed up the river which he named Columbia for his ship. This voyage and the later overland exploration of Lewis and Clark and the following tide of settlers were the basis of the United States claim to the Oregon Country which comprised Oregon, Washington, Idaho and parts of Wyoming and Montana.

From 1792 to 1973 is 181 years. What has happened to our part of the country from unknown wilderness to the present is truly a miracle when we consider the fact that it is just 181 years since white men made their entry.

General history covers the ground for these 181 years quite well, but when it comes down to getting specific data on local areas it seems that up until the towns were incorporated and official records kept there wasn't much recorded and those who could tell us are long since gone. So gathering up the bits we weave them together.

The Lewis and Clark journal mentions a stop on land that was to become Rainier, when under date of 1806 they write: "We halted near a river the Indians called the Coweliske; just below the river a high nob arises (Mt. Coffin, which is now leveled). Old timers say they made camp on the bank where Smith Transportation is located, under a big cottonwood tree.

Under "Mayger" we find this recording:

The Winship brothers attempted to establish a trading post and settlement at this place, which is known as Fanny's Bottom.

On May 26, 1810, while Astor was still maturing his plans for the Pacific Fur Company, Captain Nathan Winship of Boston arrived on the Columbia River with his ship Albatross. He began construction of a two story log fort and planted a garden. However, the attempt failed. Robert Stuart of the Astorians wrote in his diary

under date of July 1, 1812: "About two hours before sunset we reached the establishment made by Captain Winship of Boston in the spring of 1810. It is situated on a beautiful high bank . . . Here he intended leaving a Mr. Washington with a party of men, but whether with the view of making a permanent settlement or for trading with the Indians until his return from the coast, the Indians were unable to tell. . . . The high water inundated a house he had built and then a dispute arose with the Indians, the Hellwits, by his taking and putting several of them in irons on the supposition that they were of the Chee-hee-lash nation who had sometimes previously cut off a schooner belonging to the Russian establishment at New Archangel. The Governor of the place gave him authority to secure any of the banditti who perpetrated this horrid act. The Hellwits made formidable preparations by engaging auxiliaries for the release of their relatives by force which came to the captain's knowledge and also of the error he had made. The captives were released and every person embarked and left the Columbia without loss of time."

In an article written by Grace Reid, she stated that the Winship brothers had made stops at Rainier site and had given it the name of "Eminence."

The first to come into this area were the rugged trappers, who would bank their canoes on a high spot and head for the back country, making trails up over the hill into Beaver Valley.

Oregon histories recount these early days and the first settlers chose the Willamette Valley naturally, but there were those who saw the beautiful stand of timber and the open water transit here. The government promise of free land was an incentive and we find captains and ships crews filing on claims along the river.

The site of St. Helens was first known as Wyeth's Rock for the early trader, Nathaniel Wyeth, who had built a temporary post here in 1834. Captain H. M. Knighton took up the site as a donation land claim in 1847 and laid out his paper town as a competitor for the newly established Portland, which he contemptuously called "Little Stump Town."

In 1849 a mate of a sailing vessel staked a claim on Rainier site and intending to return placed his claim in the hands of Peter Crawford, who had staked his claim where Kelso, Wash., is now. The mate failed to return to make the government requirements and Mr. Crawford turned his claim over to his friend and working companion, Charles E. Fox. Mr. Fox met government requirements and Mr. Crawford surveyed it in 1850 and 1851, and another paper town was born. Mr. Fox named his town Rainier for the mountain in Washington which could be seen so clearly from the high country.

So Rainier History refers to Mr. Fox as the founder of Rainier and collecting a bit there and a bit here we gather these facts about our founder:



1914 — A PORTION OF OLD RAINIER — This picture was taken in 1914, showing the remains of Dean Blanchard's early enterprises in east Rainier: Blanchard mill; his home across street from mill (hidden); his country store; his city dock and warehouses; his big warehouse to the left; the two houses to the left were built when the railroad came through in 1897 and later moved up from Front street; house in right hand lower corner that of the Merrit Pomeroy family. The boat is the Oleum of Newark.

Charles E. Fox came over the plains in the summer of 1849 with the government teams as a teamster. He made his way down river and stopped at Rainier site. He got out square timber with Peter Crawford and helped him in his survey work. In 1850 he acquired the land claim the mate had left in charge of Mr. Crawford and they surveyed and mapped it in 1850 and 1851 and another paper town was born. Mr. Fox built a crib wharf at the west end of the town in line with the trail over the hill into the Hudson district. This was called Fox Landing and later changed to Cedar Landing, because of the cedar that was later brought here for shipping out.

We find a recording that a Mr. Fowler built a house here in 1851 to accommodate travelers who came by open boat and canoes from the Cowlitz and up and down river. This later became the home of the John Dibblee family and who enlarged it. Facing the highway, it is now an antique shop. A man named James Dobbins settled on farming land in what is now West Rainier, also built to accommodate travelers. In the summer and fall of 1852 a Mr. Frank Warren began building a sawmill and also kept a small stock of goods. Thus started Rainier and vicinity.

Mr. Fox built wharves and houses and we find record of a gift of two lots to the Methodist church, just east of the old Dibblee house about where a big old pear tree stands. He built a small log house with puncheon floor and skin windows to be used for school and town purposes.

According to the notes Grace Reid left, Mr. Fox was a man of many ideas but did not follow any through, saying he built a grist mill before he thought of the fact that there was no grain for miles around to run it. Aside from the fact that the donation land claim bears his name, along with the creek, there isn't anything recorded to tell what became of him and he does not appear on the town records.

By 1855 there was an Indian scare and Rainier built a fort for protection and Pete Crawford sent his wife and infant son over to Rainier but he himself slept peacefully in his Cowlitz cabin with open door.

In 1858 we find another Crawford recording: "General Clark from California and stationed at The Dalles, plans his entire force to stem Indian trouble" and again quoting: "Some of the denisons of Rainier are pulling down substantial buildings and removing material to The Dalles, which was building up fast."

Sometime after 1860, Joseph Silva came to town and he acquired some of Mr. Fox's property along the waterfront about where the Rainier Review is housed. Dean Blanchard came to Rainier in 1863 and bought a small sawmill on the waterfront on East A Street. He was a bachelor and a man of vision and Rainier became his home town and he worked for its interests the rest of his life. He purchased what was left of the Minear Land Claim in east Rainier and

Mr. Minear and his followers pulled up stakes and left for The Dalles also. Mr. Blanchard ran a sawmill, country store, city docks and warehouses, boats, pile driver, held city and county offices and was general adviser to the community.

On November 25th, 1885, by an act of the legislature of the State of Oregon, the town of Rainier was incorporated, and the Town Fathers took over the government.

The first meetings were held in Mr. Blanchard's home and the first elections in the Blanchard and Muckle Store.

Rainier was the first town in Columbia County to be incorporated.

Rainier, November 25, 1885.

St. Helens, February 25, 1889, and combined with the town of Houlton November 15, 1913.

Clatskanie, 1891.

Scappoose, July 13, 1921.