

EARLY HISTORY OF SKAMANIA COUNTY

by Louis Thun

Upon request I submit a few notes of early History of Skamania County. These notes: are compiled from letters and notes and a few copies of old Oregonians I found in an old trunk in the attic of the Ed Underwood home, which I purchased for our home, and from talks with the Underwood brothers, Ellen Underwood, the late Chief Chenowith's wife, Mrs. Mary Olson-Lane, and from my own diaries and memory. I hope you can use some of the items for your compilation of Skamania County History. Much of it may be duplication of what you already have.

Captain Gray discovered the Columbia River in 1792 and named it after his ship Columbia, although the river was known to exist for many years. Lt. Broughton, in 1792, explored the Columbia up to Corbett, naming the different points along the river and claimed the country for Britain. Lewis and Clark Expedition started in 1804 from St. Louis and returned in 1806. There were Indian villages near Beacon Rock, lower, middle and upper Cascades. Capt. Bonneville left Missouri in 1832 for Expedition west. The route used was the same as used by the pioneers 17 years later to Oregon and California. He returned to Missouri in 1835, died June 12, 1878, 85 years old.

Astoria was established in 1813. Hudson's Bay trading post was established at Vancouver in 1624. The Dalles (Fort Lee) came into being. War started to stop the increase of the so-called white invaders and missionaries. Capt. H. A. Lee was sent up from Vancouver with 45 men to The Dalles to keep a communication line open to Walla Walla. A smaller Company under Col. Gilliam was sent out in December, 1847, to build a storehouse and a blockhouse at the Cascades. The Territory of Washington was created, including Idaho and parts of Wyoming and Montana, by act of Congress in 1853, with Isaac Stevens appointed Governor. Settlers began to build their homes at and near the Cascades and the Indian war in 1855 and 1856, instigated by the Yakimas and Klickitat Indians, was well remembered by our old pioneers, now gone. The Blockhouse at Fort Rains was named after Major Gabriel Rains, built in 1855.

In early March 1856 the Indians started down the river, burning the Joslyn home, pioneer settlers of White Salmon. Reinforcements were sent down the river from The Dalles to Dog River, now called Hood River, but they were not enough to engage the Indians. They kept moving down the river, attacking and burning the Cascades settlements and killing all but about 25 of the settlers who

had taken refuge in the blockhouse and Bradford's store. The Yakima, Klickitat, Nisqually and Cascade Indians were involved. The Hood River settlement consisted of 11 persons. The 26th of March, 1856, news was received at Hood River of the war at Cascades, brought up by Eugene Coe, brother of H. C. and Chas. Coe. Eugene Coe, Amos Underwood, two Benson brothers and three volunteers had gone with the troops to the Cascades after receiving warnings from some friendly Klickitats. The rest of the Hood River people started in a canoe for The Dalles for safety, meeting the steamers Mary and Wasco, loaded with cavalry for relief of the Cascades. They reached The Dalles in their canoe that afternoon.

Mr. and Mrs. Joslyn returned after awhile to White Salmon to build them a new home. They still were the only settlers there. After some time and still interested in The Dalles from their short stay there, they helped to establish the First Congregational Church at The Dalles and were charter members of that society in the fall of 1859. Mr. Joslyn represented Skamania County in the Washington Territorial Assembly in the 1860s. In 1875 he sold his home in White Salmon and moved to Colorado.

Now, back to the Cascades massacre in which Capt. L. W. Coe and Amos Underwood took part in the defense of Upper Cascades in which the Blockhouse of the middle and upper Cascades and the Bradford store held out. Fort Rains was built in 1855 and Fort Lugenbeel was started in 1856. Fort Rains was rebuilt by the Skamania County Historical Society and dedicated on May 30, 1927 with a company of soldiers from Vancouver Barracks attending. An account of Skamania County history was given there, which has probably been recorded.

The coming of the steamer Mary with the dragoons and infantry and volunteers surprised the Indians and when the bugle sounded and a few shots from the cannon hit into them, they scattered in all directions and most of them made their escape. Nine of the Indians, mostly chiefs, were hanged and some sent to Vancouver as prisoners. Chief Chenowith was the first one to be hanged. He asked Amos Underwood to take care of his squaw, which he promised to do and later married her.

History tells us that Capt. Robert Gray was the first white man on the Columbia River, but Mrs. Ellen Underwood, the former wife of Chief Chenowith, told of an Indian Legend about a white man named Konapee. About 1725 a Spanish Galleon ship was wrecked on Clatsop Beach, Oregon. There were four survivors whom the Indians captured. One of them, Konapee, was a skilled blacksmith and made weapons and ornaments from the iron and copper of the wrecked ship. No other ship arrived to give them a chance to escape. Konapee finally escaped in a canoe, travelling close to shore and unknowingly paddling up the Columbia and finally arriving at The Dalles. There he met an

Indian girl, a daughter of a chief, whom he later married and they had an Indian girl whom they named Soto. After a long residence at The Dalles and showing his skill and wisdom, he was made an Indian Chief. He watched the trading goods coming from the East over the mountains, mostly from the Dakotas and some, from Europe, he decided that there must be a route all the way to the east. He backtracked the trading route and finally landed at Fort Machinac. Information he left there is credited to the Expedition of Major Rogers. Lewis and Clark met old Soto, nearly blind in 1806. Another explorer met Soto near the Cascades in 1811, he was over 80 years old then. The late Mrs. Mary Olson-Lane, the daughter of Amos Underwood, was a direct descendent of Soto. She owned a rare medal presented to her ancestor by Lewis and Clark in 1806. Other history notes seem to support this legend.

The first steam locomotive ever to run in the State of Oregon was on the portage road at Cascades in 1862 and was exhibited at the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland in 1905. It may be seen now in front of the Union Station in Portland.