

TAHPDX: TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

A partnership between Portland State University, Portland Public Schools and the Beaverton School District, funded by the U.S. Department of Education

HISTORICAL TOPIC: Boundaries of the Nation (18th & 19th Century)

At the beginning of the 19th century, Americans were unsure of the future extent of their nation. Would it come to include portions of Canada? Would it reach to the Pacific? How far south could it grow into Spanish territory? Some leaders anticipated a vast continental empire, and others a set of sister republics with strong ties to the United States (such as the Republic of Texas). Political philosophy played a role. So did the realities of transportation.

In the Northwest, the question was the future of the Oregon Country. The contest between British and American interests played out in diplomacy, in rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and American fur traders, and in early settlement by British, French Canadians, and Americans. The lower Columbia River and Willamette River valleys (including the Portland region) were the focal point of the contest, which can be traced in the history of early communities such as Champoeg, the site of the formation of the first government for Oregon.

*The Boundaries of the Nation topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [resources] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and websites. To access the material go to the TAHPDX: Teaching American History Website and use the links available on the **TOPIC AREAS [Boundaries of the Nation]** page or the **QUICK NAVIGATION** pages.*

Search TAHPDX on the internet or access the website via the link on the Community Geography page at <http://www.pdx.edu/ims/comgeo.html>.

SUBTOPICS:

1. Unbounded Nation?
 - a. The Expansionists
 - b. Conservative Concerns
 - c. Slavery and the Debate over Expansion
 - d. Expansion and Indian Rights
2. National Expansion
 - a. Across the Appalachians
 - b. The Louisiana Purchase
 - c. Texas
 - d. The Mexican War
 - e. The Northwest Corner
3. Exploration and the Struggle for Oregon
 - a. Early Maritime
 - b. The Maritime Fur Trade
 - c. Crossing the Columbia River
 - d. Lewis & Clark

4. The Fur Trade and the Struggle for Oregon
 - a. Maritime
 - b. The American Fur Company
 - c. The North West Company
 - d. The Hudson's Bay Company
 - e. Invasion of the Yankees
5. Early Oregon Government
 - a. Factions
 - b. Patterns of Governance
 - c. Showdown at Champoege
 - d. When the Dust Settled
6. Early Settlement and Oregon Government
 - a. Extent
 - b. Disputes
 - c. Claiming the Land
 - d. Federal Land Policy
7. Boundaries of the Nation Bibliography

Curriculum Units developed for this topic (download using the TAHPDX website):

1. Westward Expansion: What Ignites Movement?
2. The Push/Pull Factors of Westward Migration
3. Oregon Myth vs. Reality
4. Forts, Furs and Flags: A Study of Early Oregon Land Ownership

1. Unbounded Nation?

The Expansionists

One could say that the United States had been expanding since long before it was constituted. All of the original thirteen colonies began as isolated outposts clinging to the seaboard. All soon expanded inland, and by the time of the American Revolution many colonists had crossed the Appalachian Mountains to settle in places where England feared that they would become more independent and foment conflict with Native Americans. Both concerns were well founded.

The Revolutionary War removed one of the major impediments to westward expansion (Great Britain's attempts to keep the colonists near the Atlantic Ocean). The young nation's boundary stretched to the Mississippi River. The Louisiana Purchase doubled its size in 1803, and in the 1840s a war with Mexico and a treaty with Great Britain added the Southwest and the Northwest, respectively. Meanwhile, leaders like Albert Gallatin – in his *Report on Roads and Canals* – [pdf resource] advocated that a strong system of transportation would enhance both the nation's economy and its sense of nationalism.

Most Americans were enthusiastic expansionists by this time; indeed, not a few believed that the nation should incorporate the entire continent. They argued that it was God's will and the nation's "manifest destiny" (e.g. *O'Sullivan's treatise on Manifest Destiny*) [pdf resource] that the United States extend as far as possible. This expansion, moreover, was defended as benign, as its proponents argued that it entailed the replacement of autocratic with democratic governments. Without such expansion, they added, the nation's economic and moral health would suffer. The United States was growing rapidly and required a huge expanse of land for its growing population to settle and cultivate.

Conservative Concerns

Not everyone favored rapid expansion. Many patriots opposed it for the same reason that they opposed a strong federal government; republican, participatory government required relatively small states, they argued. Massive nations were vulnerable to despotism.

Some northern Whigs opposed the Mexican War because it seemed to constitute a naked attempt to seize territory from a sovereign nation – and was likely to increase the political power of the South. Many worried about the racial composition of the lands that expansionists coveted. After the Mexican War, for example, such citizens argued that annexing all of Mexico would be a horrible mistake as it would entail trying to assimilate a population of people they considered nonwhite and degenerate.

Slavery and the Debate over Expansion

Race loomed so large in discussions of expansion because it was related to slavery, probably the nation's most divisive issue in the years between the nation's founding and the Civil War. Indeed, one of the most heated and divisive sectional debates, over the *Wilmot Proviso* [pdf resource], erupted in the wake of the Mexican War.

The arguments over slavery and expansion were based on both practicality and emotion. Those who defended slavery came to believe that it might well shrivel and die if it was not allowed to expand. Indeed, slaves had become most numerous in the cotton belt of the Deep South, an area that white planters had not settled in large numbers until the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s pro-slavery Southerners argued that slavery was a positive institution, a more moral form of labor than that practiced in the factories of the North. There was therefore no contradiction in simultaneously expanding American liberty and slavery.

Those who opposed slavery as an immoral institution wanted to kill it or, in the case of Republicans like Abraham Lincoln, to contain it. That is why the *Dred Scott Decision of 1857* [pdf resource], which asserted that territories – and implied that states – could not outlaw slavery, so alarmed Republicans. Every territory that applied for admission to the United States during this expansionist period had been evaluated on the basis of how it would affect the Congressional balance of power, particularly in the Senate. Southern Democrats feared that if and when most Senators hailed from free states, slave states would be at their mercy.

Web Resource: Further information on the Dred Scott Decision can be found at the Library of Congress' American Memory African-American Pamphlet Collection – "From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909." (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aapchtml/>).

PDF Resource: Newspaper editorials about the Dred Scott Decision. Source: Furman University, Secession Era Editorials Project at <http://history.furman.edu/~benson/docs/index.htm>.

Map Resources: *Missouri Compromise of 1850* and the *Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854*. These maps illustrate the changing balance of slave and free-states in the country prior to the Civil War and provide a means to visualize the political debates regarding the expansion of slavery into the territories.

Expansion and Indian Rights

The early United States recognized Indian nations as states within a state. Its leaders denied that these states had a right to negotiate with any European powers. But they also said that the United States could not simply occupy Indian land. Indeed, the "utmost good faith clause" of the seminal *Northwest Ordinance of 1787* [pdf resource] stipulated that the United States could only wage just wars that had been approved by Congress on Native Americans and that the laws of Congress addressing Native Americans would be "founded in justice and humanity." To be sure, the leaders of the young United States fully expected to acquire most Indian land. But they expected to do so in a just and moral fashion. Indeed, American leaders had hoped that pacific and ethical relations with Native Americans would illustrate its moral superiority to skeptical Europeans.

This program of peaceful land acquisition ran into two large problems: Native Americans were seldom willing to give up their lands as willingly as the federal government had thought, and settlers commonly moved onto those lands well before the federal government had gained control of them.

America's often haphazard and bloody relations with Indian nations certainly served the interests of American expansion, but not in a way that redounded to the nation's honor.

2. National Expansion

Across the Appalachians

The 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War granted the young nation all of the land east of the Mississippi River (aside from Spanish Florida). But Great Britain, France, Spain, and dozens of Indian nations tried to forestall or stop U.S. expansion. The European powers of course wished to keep their colonial possessions. Native Americans, on the other hand, perceived that the United States differed from European powers in its desire to settle and use land for intensive agriculture, an activity – unlike the British and French-controlled fur trade – profoundly at odds with their own interests.

Settlers moved quickly across the Appalachian Mountains to take up land in the fertile Ohio River Valley, in Kentucky, and in what would become the cotton belt of the American South. Indian nations provided most of the resistance. Thomas Jefferson and many other leaders of the young republic had believed that Native Americans would gladly sell the great majority of their lands in return for instruction in agriculture and other fruits of civilization and that the federal government could arrange these treaties before white settlers arrived.

Both sets of assumptions were misplaced. Most indigenous nations gave up their lands only after a fight, and a series of bloody wars ensued in the Old Northwest and the Southeast, including major conflicts with the Shawnee and their many allies – the Creek, the Seminole, the Kickapoo, and the Winnegabo. These conflicts, moreover, were often provoked by whites who settled on Indian land without permission and well before any treaties had been negotiated. Even Indian nations that tried to accommodate or even emulate the newcomers, such as the Cherokee and Choctaw, were expelled from their homes and forced, under dreadful conditions, to “Indian Territory” across the Mississippi River.

Book Resource: Perdue, Theda and Michael D. Green (eds). 1995. *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford Books.

Map Resources: Individual maps showing Indian Conflicts and Battles from 1521-1700, 1701-1800, 1801-1845 and 1846-1890; a poster map combining the 4 Indian Battle Maps; and a map showing Indian Land Cessions from 1750-1890.

The Louisiana Purchase

Thomas Jefferson, despite having been a strict constructionist in Constitutional matters, leapt at the chance to double the size of the nation when France offered the Louisiana Territory for sale in 1803. Jefferson believed that the nation’s future depended on expansion. Full control of the Mississippi River would ensure the prosperity of the massive watershed that it drained, and an excess of arable land would enable the country to avoid what he perceived as the evils of industrialization and urbanization: highly stratified, class-ridden societies.

Parts of the Louisiana Territory had already been settled by Euro-Americans, and the fur trade was well established in much of the area by 1803. Thousands of farmers soon made their way to Missouri and Texas, but much of the Great Plains was not settled until after the Civil War. Here, as in much of the United States, settlement was preceded and accompanied by a series of bloody wars against Indian nations who wished to maintain their independence: the Lakota, other Siouxan peoples, and their allies, such as the Cheyenne (see map resources for Indian Battles).

Map Resource: The Louisiana Purchase and other U.S. Territorial Acquisitions from 1783-1898.

Texas

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1820 and, in an effort to develop its isolated northern territory, invited settlers from the United States to come to Texas. By 1824 more than

2,000 people from the United States lived there – and they proved reluctant to conform to Mexican expectations. They resisted Catholicism, avoided import duties on goods from the United States, and refused to give up slavery when Mexico made it illegal in 1829. The settlers also demanded more self government.

The Americans declared their independence from Mexico in 1836 and established the Republic of Texas. Though beaten conclusively against a superior force at the Alamo, the Texans soon defeated Santa Anna’s army. Shortly thereafter the captured dictator-general signed treaties recognizing Texas independence (see the *Velasco Treaties* with images of the primary source documents) [[pdf resource](#)].

The Mexican War

Most Texans assumed that their republic would soon become part of the United States, and they were correct. The westward push of settlement in the 1830s and 1840s prompted many to assert that it was the nation’s “manifest destiny” to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, perhaps even to rule over all of North America (see O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny PDF).

James Polk ran for President in 1844 on a platform of aggressive expansion (*Polk’s Inaugural Speech*) [[pdf resource](#)]. In 1845 the United States annexed Texas and took up its claim to land that Mexico believed belonged to it. When General Zachary Taylor provocatively moved into the disputed territory, war broke out.

Despite determined Mexican opposition, the United States won a decisive victory by occupying Mexico City. Its forces also moved into California, where American settlers had already begun a revolt, as well as New Mexico.

The war was devastating to Mexico, which lost nearly half of its territory. The United States gained what became its southwest quarter. As with other acquisitions, this settlement did not resolve Native American land rights. Settlers continued to flood into Texas and were soon drawn in very large numbers to Central California, where gold was discovered in 1848. But the Comanche, Navajo, and Apache, among others, resisted American settlement, in some instances into the 1880s.

PDF Resource: “Civil Disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau (protesting the Mexican War).

PDF Resource: Abraham Lincoln’s Speech on the War with Mexico (January 12, 1848):

The Northwest Corner

The Pacific Northwest was part of Spain’s expansive claims in North America, but England challenged this late in the 1500s, and in 1793 at the Nootka Claims Convention Spain agreed to surrender its claim “of sovereignty or territorial dominion” to the region. This effectively opened up the Pacific Northwest to all comers.

Book Resource: Cook, Warren L. 1973. *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

By the aftermath of the War of 1812, the U.S. had joined England as the major players in the region. Diplomats at the ***Convention of 1818*** [pdf resource] struggled to settle the boundary between the two nations in the Pacific Northwest (also called the “Oregon Country”) before agreeing to kick the matter down the road for another ten years. Great Britain and the United States agreed that the region would “be free and open, for the term of ten years. . . to the vessels, Citizens and Subjects of the Two Powers.” Lengthy negotiations in 1827 ended with similar results: the compromise arrived at in 1818 was extended, though either party could call the question of where the boundary would be with one year’s notice.

Great Britain wished to retain its rights in the Oregon Country for reasons of trade. The United States looked forward to the day when its citizens would settle across the continent and argued that the 49th parallel should simply be extended to the Pacific Ocean.

Dissatisfaction with the status quo in Oregon mounted in the United States in the early 1840s. Fired largely by the Texas annexation question, expansionism played a major role in the presidential campaign of 1844. Democrat James Polk ran on a platform of taking Texas and the Oregon Country, and soon after his election he asserted that Oregon’s boundary should be settled at the 54th parallel, far north of where Americans had already settled. Pro-expansionists began insisting on “54–40 or fight” (after the line of latitude serving as the northern boundary of the Oregon Country at 54°40').

Calmer heads prevailed, in part because war with Mexico loomed. Great Britain, for its part, had no wish to go to war over land where the fur trade was in decline and American settlement was booming. The ***Oregon Treaty of 1846*** [pdf resource] set the boundary at the 49th parallel, simply an extension of what had prevailed along the rest of the US-Canada border.

Book Resource: For information on the British perspective on the question of the Oregon Territory Boundary see Merck, Frederick. 1967. *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (pg. 290, 26 April 1845 article from the *Examiner*).

Map Resource: Map showing the changing boundaries of the Oregon Country from 1818-1846.

3. Exploration and the Struggle for Oregon

Early Maritime

Spain was able to claim so much of the Americas because Christopher Columbus’ voyages and subsequent explorations had established its pre-eminence. But although Spanish expeditions may have in the 1540s sailed along the southern coast of what would become Oregon, Spanish settlement did not push beyond New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California.

Francis Drake late in the sixteenth century claimed the western portion of North America for England, and he may have sailed as far north as Oregon. The Spanish countered with additional expeditions up the coast, but they established no colonies there, and exploration of the North Pacific lagged for two centuries. Indeed, Spain did not begin populating coastal California until 1769, and its northernmost outpost was in San Francisco Bay.

PPT Resource: *Spanish and French Colonization 1492-1763*. A short powerpoint presentation that highlights key expeditions by Spanish and French explorers resulting in their extensive land holdings on the North American continent (which later came under United States' control via various means). Adapted from the University of Nebraska (Omaha) Department of History lesson modules.

The Maritime Fur Trade

Interest in the North Pacific reappeared in the eighteenth century because of the fur trade. The Russians moved from Siberia down the Alaska coast. England's James Cook sailed in 1776 and was charged with exploring and claiming territory in the Pacific Ocean. Cook died in Hawai'i, and his most lasting contribution was unintended; in 1780 his crew found that the Chinese paid a very high price for sea otter pelts that they had traded for along the Northwest Coast.

The prospect of huge profits touched off something of a bonanza in what had, for Europeans, been a marginal part of the world. British and French ships soon set sail for the northern coast of North America. But no one pursued the sea-otter trade as avidly as the young United States. Seventy-two ships left its ports for the northwest coast between 1787 and 1806.

Web Resource: Excerpts from journals of explorers and a list of trading vessels on the NW coast from 1785-1794 and 1795-1804 can be found at the site of Dr. John Lutz at the University of Victoria (<http://web.uvic.ca/~jlutz/courses/hist469/index.html>).

Crossing the Columbia River

Spain was unable to keep other maritime powers away from the northwest coast but had revived its explorations there in the 1770s. Indeed, Bruno de Hezeta was the first European to report on the presence of the Columbia River, though he did not try to cross its bar. But Spain was forced to retract its claim to sole control of western North America after seizing three British ships on Vancouver Island, at Nootka Sound. The British, possessors of the world's strongest navy, forced the Spanish to back down and open the area to all comers.

The first European ship documented to have crossed the Columbia River bar belonged to a fur trader, not an explorer. **Robert Gray [pdf resource]** had landed at Tillamook Bay in 1788, and four years later he crossed the Columbia River bar and traded for a few hundred pelts.

Gray was quickly followed by George Vancouver, who had sailed with Cook and was now making careful maps of the coast from Cape Mendocino to Vancouver Island. Unlike Gray, Vancouver was working for a nation (Great Britain), not simply for profit, and he was charged

with finding the long-sought (and, as we of course know now, non-existent) Northwest Passage which would provide a convenient all-water route across the continent. Vancouver missed the entrance to the Columbia River shortly before Gray entered it and instead explored the Puget Sound, where he claimed the region for Great Britain. Upon learning of Gray's entry into the Columbia River, Vancouver sailed south and sent one of his lieutenants, William Broughton, across the bar in the party's smaller ship. Broughton spent three weeks mapping the lower Columbia and, near the mouth of the Sandy River, he took possession of the area on behalf of Great Britain – a task that Gray had not thought to perform for the United States.

Map Resource: Major Explorations on the Columbia River 1778-1812.

Google Earth Map: A Google Earth map of Cook's explorations in the North Pacific can be downloaded from the David Rumsey Map Collection (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/>). The *World Globe 1812* shows the exploration routes of both Cook and Vancouver in the north Pacific.

Lewis and Clark

Thomas Jefferson was much more savvy than Gray had been about the ways in which trade intersected with national interest. He began planning an expedition to the Columbia River's mouth even before he learned that France was considering selling Louisiana, and from the beginning he conceived of the expedition as an instrument of American geographic and economic expansion.

Several years later he charged Meriwether Lewis, who had served as his secretary, with the work of combining exploration (especially finding a convenient, hopefully all-water route across the continent, but also identifying land that would be useful for farming, mining, or other productive purposes) and diplomacy (convincing Indians that they should pursue trade and political relations with the United States rather than Great Britain, France, or Spain).

PDF Resource: Jefferson's Letter with Instructions to Meriwether Lewis (includes graphic of original document).

Despite its impressive feats of endurance, the Lewis and Clark Expedition failed to realize Jefferson's most ambitious hopes. There was, of course, nothing approaching an all-water passage across the continent, and the expedition's course across the Bitterroot Mountains was far from the most convenient route. The captains met with scores of Indian leaders and distributed many American peace medals and flags. But most of these native leaders had already established trade relations with European powers, and the promises that Lewis and Clark made to groups like the Nez Perce were not consistently realized.

Nor did the expedition prompt a wave of settlement in the West. American fur traders continued to go west. So did British fur companies. However, it was not until the 1840s, nearly four decades after the expedition left Fort Clatsop at the Columbia River's mouth for their return journey, did significant numbers of settlers come to the Oregon Country.

Possible Field Trip: Columbia River Maritime Museum (Astoria, OR). For information see the CRMM website at <http://www.crrmm.org>.

4. The Fur Trade and the Struggle for Oregon

Maritime

Americans, as we have seen, dominated the early sea-based trade on the North Pacific. Most of that trade occurred north of the Columbia River, though many ships entered the river to winter. But American hegemony in the fur trade did not result in the young nation gaining control over the Oregon Country, and the maritime fur trade waned in the 1810s as sea otters became more scarce.

Most of the Native Americans along the shores of the Pacific Ocean and the Lower Columbia River were eager to trade. The trade brought a mixed bag of disease, wealth, increased slavery, and opportunities for upward mobility to Chinookan peoples on the Lower Columbia River. Comcomly, who lived just a few miles from the river's mouth, on its north shore, was the leading example of a man who gained status and power from the fur trade.

Book Resource: Information about early contact with Indians of the Pacific Northwest (including a Klickitat prophecy and a Clatsop story of the first ship) can be found in Beckham, Stephen Dow (ed). 2006. *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press.

PDF Resource: A detailed account of Concomly and Astoria can be found in Washington Irving's "Astoria or Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains." Source: [\[http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/astoria/index.html#contents\]](http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/astoria/index.html#contents)

Map Resources: *Early Native Americans of the West* and *Oregon Tribal Groups in the 1850s*.

The American Fur Company

The maritime trade gave way to a land-based trade. **John Jacob Astor [pdf resource]**, one of the wealthiest men in the United States, hoped that employees of his American/Pacific Fur Company would fan out along the coast and the interior to gather furs that would be shipped to China.

The enterprise never really got its feet on the ground and was plagued by bad luck and poor execution, though employees ranged far into the Columbia River basin and acquired thousands of furs. Then, during the War of 1812, a British war ship arrived at Fort Astoria and took possession of the trading post. Astor's ambitious hopes had been dashed after just two years.

The North West Company

The North West Company, a private business, had long been moving across Canada, and in 1793 one of its partners, Alexander Mackenzie, had reached the Pacific Ocean in what would become

British Columbia. He was quickly followed by company employees who established posts. Indeed, David Thompson traveled down the Columbia River and arrived at its mouth shortly after the Astorians of the American Fur Company had set up shop there, in 1811.

The “Nor’Westers” decided that the War of 1812 provided the perfect opportunity to wrest control of the Columbia River Basin trade from the Americans, and in 1814 they changed the name of Fort Astoria to Fort George and set about tapping the region’s furs. Some sixty-six men labored there to process trade goods and furs bound to and from several posts in what would become British Columbia and Washington, including Spokane House and Fort Nez Perce. The company acquired furs not only by trading with Native Americans – the traditional method – but by dispatching large expeditions of trappers whom they employed.

Curricula (Drama): The curriculum guide “Forts, Furs and Flags” contains a detailed dramatic script with characters (mentioned here) that illustrate the transition from American to British ownership of Fort Astoria/Fort George.

The Hudson’s Bay Company

The Hudson’s Bay Company swallowed its long-time rival, the North West Company, in 1821 and quickly set about making the business of extracting furs from the Columbia Department more centralized, efficient, and economical. In 1825 the company moved its regional headquarters 100 miles upriver, to Fort Vancouver, where employees could more easily grow crops to feed themselves.

Possible Field Trip: Fort Vancouver and Kanaka Village National Historic Site (<http://www.nps.gov/fova/>).

Under George Simpson, who oversaw the company’s operations on the north slope, and **John McLoughlin [pdf resource]**, Fort Vancouver’s Chief Factor, the Hudson’s Bay Company became profitable and powerful. It directly controlled little territory and did not contest the sovereignty of Indian nations. It did not need to. But it integrated more and more of the region’s indigenous nations into its operations, partly through encouraging debt, and McLoughlin retaliated swiftly and violently when he believed that the company’s rights had been violated.

The Hudson’s Bay Company was first of all a business concerned with profits, but self-interest as well as patriotism suggested a policy of trying to keep Yankee trappers out of the Oregon County. Peter Skene Ogden and others trapped aggressively in the Snake River Basin in hopes of creating a “fur desert” that would keep out American trappers who were filtering into the region from the East.

Invasion of the Yankees

American trappers pushed into the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountains in the 1820s and 1830s. Most of these “mountain men” were employees of companies like the Rocky Mountain

Fur Company and Astor's old company, the American Fur Company, but they operated much more independently than their counterparts with the Hudson's Bay Company, and many were "free trappers" who sold their furs and restocked their provisions at an annual rendezvous but otherwise worked independently.

Jedediah Smith [pdf resource], who worked for William Ashley, led a brigade of trappers to California in 1826 and two years later was at Fort Vancouver, after most of his party had been killed by Indians along the Umpqua River. Simpson asserted that Smith's difficulties "are likely to deter his Country-men from attempting" to settle in Oregon. But Smith wrote the Secretary of War of the United States that overland settlers could reach Oregon easily and urged settlement.

Indeed, other Yankees soon found their way to Fort Vancouver and the Willamette Valley, including retired mountain men like **Ewing Young [pdf resource]** and those accompanying entrepreneur **Nathaniel Wyeth [pdf resource]**. Young and his friends settled in the Chehalem Valley, near what would one day be Hillsboro. Much different settlers, a party of Methodist missionaries, arrived in 1834 and lived north of what would become Salem. Other American settlers trickled into the Willamette Valley until 1843, when hundreds began to migrate along the Oregon Trail.

Book Resource: For more information on Ewing Young see Holmes, Kenneth L. 1967. *Ewing Young, Master Trapper*. Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort.

Web Resource: Selected Letters of Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1833-1836 can be accessed via the Library of Western Fur Trade Historical Source Documents: Diaries, Narratives, and Letters of the Mountain Men at <http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/>.

5. Early Oregon Government

Factions

By 1840, then, the non-Native population of the Oregon Country was diverse. Fort Vancouver was by far the most important settlement. It boasted a large stockade guarded by cannon. It had grist and lumber mills and farms, a variety of craftsmen, clerks and other "gentlemen" of the trade, and a polyglot population of indigenous peoples from the Oregon Country, Hawai'i, and the Great Lakes, together with Europeans, and their so-called "mixed-blood" offspring. French Canadian men had begun retiring with their Native American wives to French Prairie, north of what would become Salem, in 1829 and of course tended to align themselves with the interests of the company that had employed them. The American mountain men were more independent, and in 1834 several Methodists set up a mission in the Willamette Valley. Jason Lee, his nephew Daniel Lee and his helpers converted few Indians, but they drew more Americans here: thirteen in 1837, fifty in 1840.

The American missionaries sometimes cooperated with the Hudson's Bay Company – to convince the mountain men not to set up a distillery, for example. But their interests were fundamentally at odds with those of the British; when Lee went east in 1838 he carried with him

a petition asking the United States to “take formal and speedy possession” of the country. The mountain men, for their part, resented what they regarded as the monopolistic and authoritarian attitudes of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

PDF Resource: *Emigrants to Oregon by 1840* (from www.oregonpioneers.com). Shows the diversity of residents in the Oregon Country from the first settlement in the early 1800s to the beginning of the great migrations along the Oregon Trail. The website also has links to photos and pioneer diaries.

Patterns of Governance

The settlers’ diverse political allegiances and goals became manifest by 1841. The death of mountain man Ewing Young prompted Lee to propose that the area’s residents organize to settle Young’s estate and to maintain “peace and good order.” His ambitious plans to create a slate of government officials came to little fruition, however.

In the main, current and former employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company were satisfied with the status quo. Their American counterparts – particularly the so-called “mission party” – wanted a much more formal system of government, in part because they anticipated waves of settlers from the United States and wanted to move the area away from the control of the Hudson’s Bay Company and to prepare it to join the United States.

Showdown at Champoeg

Early in 1843 a group of settlers called another meeting, supposedly to create some sort of mechanism for killing predators (the *Wolf Meetings*). Those who attended set up a system of bounties that would be funded by taxes, and they elected some men to run this system. They also appointed a committee to explore the establishment of a broader mechanism of governance.

That committee proposed an ambitious system of government: legislative and executive committees, a judge, a militia, and counties with their own set of officials. It is not clear exactly how the men gathered at Champoeg on May 2, 1843 responded to these recommendations, but the upshot of the meeting was that those who favored the creation of a government adopted the above recommendations and elected a legislative committee of nine to draw up a code of laws.

When the Dust Settled

On July 5, 1843 at Champoeg, the committee presented a set of laws drawn largely from Iowa’s code – probably because someone had a copy on hand. But the Oregon code differed from Iowa’s in two major and consequential respects. First, it awarded settlers already residing in Oregon with very generous land claims: a township of six square miles to the Methodist mission, and a full section (640 acres) to the rest of the settlers. Second, the government was shorn of the authority to levy taxes. The government would be supported by fees and voluntary contributions; there was no provision for paying the militia.

PDF Resource: *Beginning Oregon Government*. Text describes the events and meetings that occurred in the Oregon Country in the early 1840s including the Wolf Meetings, the Organic Law, the meeting at Champoeg and the establishment of the provisional government.

PDF Resource: *Champoeg*. Text describes the pivotal meeting at Champoeg that established the Oregon Provisional Government...the precursor to the petition for U.S. territorial status.

Book Resource: For more information on the “Showdown at Champoeg” and the establishment of Oregon’s first provisional government see Hussey, John A. 1967. *Champoeg: Place of Transition, a Disputed History*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1967.

Possible Field Trip: Champoeg State Heritage Area (http://www.oregonstateparks.org/park_113.php).

6. Early Settlement and Oregon Government

Extent

The number of overland immigrants arriving in Oregon increased dramatically in the mid-1840s, from barely a handful of people a year in the late 1830s to nearly 900 in 1843 and some 2,500 in 1845. A few lived among the Whitmans in what would become Walla Walla or settled along the coast, particularly near Fort George. But the great majority spread out across the fertile Willamette Valley. More than 12,000 non-Native Americans lived in Oregon by 1850, about 90 percent of them in the Willamette Valley.

Data Resources (MSEXcel Spreadsheets): *1845-1849 Oregon Territorial Census by County, 1850 Oregon Territorial Census by County*. See the Metadata and Project Description for the OR SETTLEMENT GIS projects for ideas on how to use these spreadsheets in research and teaching.

Disputes

Those who arrived in Oregon in the fall of 1843 were not much impressed by the young government that they found here. Because the newcomers soon outnumbered the old guard, they were able to make many changes in how Oregon was governed.

The newcomers strengthened the government’s ability to tax by adding a poll tax and a very small tax on merchandise, livestock, and farm improvements. Later in 1844 the executive committee was replaced by a governor.

Land ownership often resided at the heart of the divisions between recent and more established settlers. The new government reduced the mission party’s land claim, and for the next several years newcomers would grumble that earlier settlers (“the aristocracy of the land”) had greedily taken more than their share of prime ground.

Book Resource: For more information on land disputes during this era see Johansen, Dorothy and Charles Gates. 1957. *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest*. New York: Harper & Row.

Claiming the Land

Taking up land in Oregon had always been something of an act of faith. Not only might indigenous nations resent and resist such farms, but for many years no one knew for sure who would ultimately control the Willamette Valley or the rest of the Oregon Country, and no one knew what sort of land policies the nation that won control of the Oregon Country would enact. The French Canadians, mountain men, and early over-landers who asserted extensive claims were essentially squatters who were gambling years of work and property improvements that their claims would not one day be overturned by authorities who would eventually materialize.

Oregon's first government distinguished itself in 1843 by stipulating that settlers could claim 640 acres – which is of course exactly what the early settlers had wished and hoped for. But this government was literally “provisional,” and unless Oregon followed Texas in setting itself up as an independent state, there was no guarantee that these claims would hold up. Indeed, recent settlers were soon squatting on and claiming land that their predecessors had already claimed.

Federal Land Policy

The fact that Oregon would eventually become part of the United States did not erase all doubt as to what would become of Oregon's land. The federal government had long asserted that settlers could claim land occupied by Indians only after that land had been gained by the federal government by treaty. No such treaties for Oregon land had been signed in 1848. Nor had the federal government allowed the sort of generous claims that early Oregon settlers had awarded themselves. Prior occupants of areas that had become part of the United States had been allowed to purchase up to 160 acres at minimum prices before federal land was auctioned. That was just a quarter of a typical Oregon land claim, and of course Oregonians did not want to have to pay anything for land they already considered their own.

The Donation Land Law of 1850 [pdf resource] assuaged the concerns of Oregon land claimants. It essentially granted 320 acres of land to those who settled in Oregon before the end of that year. As wives could also claim 320 acres, most of the early settlers, if married, were able to keep all of their substantial claims. Settlers who staked claims within the next few years would also get generous terms.

The actual work of surveying the Willamette Valley, let alone the rest of state, took several years, and the boundaries of many land claims remained murky for many years. The irregular borders of many Oregon farms remain as a testimony of the hopes and aspirations of Oregon's earliest settlers, people who adapted their claims to the contours of the land rather than accommodating them to the rigid lines laid down by surveyors.

Map Resources: *1860 Willamette Valley Survey Map Poster, 1860 Willamette Valley Cadastral (Property) Map Poster.* The Cadastral Map Poster shows the boundaries of the original donation land claims in the upper Willamette Valley. The Survey Map Poster shows physical features. These are scans of the original documents produced by the Government Land Office and retrieved from the Bureau of Land Management (OR/WA Division).

GIS Data and Projects: <OR Settlement>
Download the OR Settlement Project Description and Metadata document for ideas on how to use the GIS Data and pre-built GIS-based projects (in Google Earth, ArcView and ArcExplorer formats). The projects and GIS data can be viewed and retrieved from the TAHDPX website on the Quick Navigation Map Resources page or through the Historical GIS Data menu link.

7. Boundaries of the Nation Bibliography

Billington, Ray Allen. 1974. *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier, 4th edition.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

Clark, Jr., Malcolm. 1981. *Eden Seekers: The Settlement of Oregon, 1818-1862.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cook, Warren L. 1973. *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819,* BY WARREN L. COOK. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819.*

Dodds, Gordon Dodds. 1977. *Oregon: A Bicentennial History.* New York: Norton/American Association for State and Local History.

Goetzmann, William H. 1966. *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Horsman, Reginald. 1981. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism.* Cambridge: Harvard Press.

Hussey, John A. 1967. *Champoeg: Place of Transition, A Disputed History.* Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press.

Hussey, John A. 1957. *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure.* Portland: Abbott, Kerns, and Bell Company.

Johansen, Dorothy O., and Charles M. Gates. 1967. *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest, 2nd edition.* New York: Harper & Row.

Merk, Frederick. 1963. *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, a Reinterpretation.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Merk, Frederick. 1967. *The Oregon Question” Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- Peterson del Mar, David. 2003. *Oregon’s Promise: An Interpretive History*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press.
- Pletcher, David. 1973. *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Roberts, Randy and James S. Olson. 2004. *A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory*. New York: The Free Press.
- Michael Paul Rogin, Michael Paul. 1975. *Fathers & Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Ronda, James P. 1990. *Astoria & Empire*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990
- Ronda, James P. 1984. *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Singletary, Otis A. 1971. *The Mexican War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Winder, Richard Bruce. 2002. *Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas*. The American Crisis Series #6. Published by Scholarly Resources, Inc.