NPS Form 10-900-b
(Jan. 1987)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**United States Department of the Interior**
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form



This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

## A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Early French-Canadian Settlement, Marion County, Oregon

## B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Significant date range: 1829-1842)

| | |
|---|---|
| Early settlement: | First agricultural settlement of the Willamette Valley, Oregon |
| Ethnicity: | French-Canadians were the pioneer agriculturalists of the region |
| Commerce: | French-Canadians established the earliest independent commercial enterprises |

## C. Geographical Data

The first permanent agricultural settlement in the Pacific Northwest, beyond the confines of a handful of fur trade posts, took place in the Willamette Valley of western Oregon beginning in 1829. Within the Willamette Valley, settlement gathered on an area known as French Prairie. French Prairie is located in the north-central portion of the Willamette Valley, bound on the north and west by the Willamette River, on the east by the Pudding River, and on the south by the old northern shoreline of Lake Labish (now approximately the northern city limits of Salem). French Prairie now lies entirely within the political boundaries of Marion County (please refer to map).

☐ See continuation sheet

## D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

James M. Hamrick — 9/12/91

Signature of certifying official — Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Janet E. Jennsen — 10-31-91

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register — Date

## E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

Please see continuation sheet.

[X] See continuation sheet

HISTORIC CONTEXT AND SETTLEMENT HISTORY

The first French-Canadians came (on an extended basis) to the Pacific Northwest with John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company (Astorians) during the spring of 1811. Their base of operation was Fort Astoria, near the mouth of the Columbia River. David Stuart and Regis Bruguir ascended the Willamette River in the winter of 1811 bringing back word of the potential bounty in furs to be found there. Hunting and trapping expeditions to the Willamette Valley involving French-Canadians began on a regular basis in 1813. As a result of the War of 1812, the American owned Pacific Fur Company sold its interests in the Pacific Northwest to its rival, the British owned North West Company, in October of 1813. The North West Company retained the Astorians' French-Canadian employees and the administrative headquarters at Fort Astoria, renaming the post Fort George. In November, 1813, the North West Company established a base of operations in the Willamette Valley near a large open alluvial terrace on the south bank of the Willamette River called *Campment du Sable* (sand encampment). They named their base of operations Willamette Post. *Campment du Sable* later became the town of Champoeg. The North West Company maintained an exclusive hold on the Oregon fur trade until they merged with their rival British firm, the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1821. The Hudson's Bay Company took over the administration and maintenance of the Oregon fur trade and moved their administrative headquarters up the Columbia River, near the mouth of the Willamette River. Fort Vancouver was constructed in 1824 and served as the economic hub and focal point for all residents of the Willamette Valley through the 1840s (Hussey 1967).

We know little about the activities of French-Canadian trappers in the Willamette Valley while employed by the North West Company between 1813 and 1821 (Hussey 1967:30). Better records were kept by the Hudson's Bay Company between 1821 and 1829, but we still know precious little about these people's lives while trapping in the valley. The French-Canadians were not literate, so they were not writing about their experiences, and the Clerks at Fort Vancouver rarely saw anything interesting or important enough in the lifestyles of their employees to write about.

Hudson's Bay Company records do indicate that several of the French-Canadian "freemen" had established base camps in the Willamette Valley that had a certain permanency to them by 1826 (Hussey 1967:44). Freemen, or free trappers, tended to be ex-employees of the Pacific Fur Company who had no contractual obligation to the Hudson's Bay Company. They were however under the total economic dominance of the Company if they wished to pursue their careers in the Oregon Country. Their only market for the sale of goods and services and their only source of supplies was Fort Vancouver. As a consequence, the Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, John McLoughlin, could exert considerable control over this population. One thing the Company actively discouraged prior to 1829 was permanent settlement in the Willamette Valley. A wild country, needed to ensure a continual fur supply, and permanent settlements dependent on an agricultural base, were viewed as incompatible. The concern over the appearance of "settling in" among these freemen in the Willamette Valley resulted in some mention, albiet brief, of their activities in official reports.

The free French-Canadian trappers working the Willamette Valley between 1821 and 1829 spent most of their time in the valley. They would travel to Fort Vancouver periodically for supplies and to deliver marketable commodities. They would also occasionally join one of the formal fur brigades to southwest Oregon and northern California. Generally, however, they and their families confined their activities to the Willamette River drainage basin. In contrast, contractual employees of the Hudson's Bay Company lived singley, or with their families, within the fur posts or in villages adjacent to them. They would regularly travel with the fur brigades, generally leaving their families back at the fur post. When their terms of emloyment were up, they were (prior to 1829) required to return to eastern Canada, as western settlement was against company policy. Needless to say, this policy had a tragic effect on many of the families which grew, "according to the custom of the country", out of European-Indian alliances.

By 1821 the French-Canadians trapping in the French Prairie region of the Willamette Valley had probably already developed a central based wandering lifestyle. Available evidence suggests that the trappers established base camps, where they lived with their families and hunted the sur-

rounding countryside until local game supplies were too depleted. Occasionaly more than one family resided in the same base camp. Occupation at one of these base camps probably ranged from one to three years. By the late 1820s, some of the French-Canadians had begun to raise horses for sale to the Hudson's Bay Company and had probably been experimenting with small family gardens (Hussey 1967:46-47).

Little detail about pre-1829 settlement exists in the literature. We can assume that occupation of a year or more at one location required the erection of a single log cabin, probably employing the *Piece sur piece* building technique typically associated with French-Canadian construction. Less elaborate log buildings suitable for short term occupation, storage, or some other function may also have been associated with these isolated cabin sites. Hand wrought square nails were being manufactured at Fort Vancouver in small quantities, but were probably not used in the Willamette Valley before the early 1830s. Window glass was not used in regional construction until the mid-1830s. Brick was similarly not used in Willamette Valley construction until the late 1830s. Archaeologically, little architectural evidence will ever be found relative to the pre-agriculture period of French-Canadian usage of the valley. We also have little evidence relative to the location of these pre-1829 occupation sites. Several French-Canadians, including Lucier, had cabins in the Champoeg area and there was a short term occupation site at the mouth of the Pudding River (Hussey 1967). Beyond that, little is known. The occupation sites selected by the first permanent French-Canadian settlers from 1829 to 1831 may well have been their place of residence for several years prior to recieving formal permission from the Hudson's Bay Company to settle in the valley.

Realization that American politicians were beginning to seriously discuss establishing a strong American presence in the Oregon Country caused a reevaluation of the long-standing no settlement policy on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company (Hussey 1967:46). John McLoughlin and Governor George Simpson reasoned that the only hope of stemming an American push into the Pacific Northwest, and an eventual claim to the territory, was to establish a much larger British presence in the form of established settlements. Beginning in 1829 "freemen" and retiring

Hudson's Bay Company employees had the right to settle in the Oregon Territory south of the Columbia River. Etienne Lucier, Joseph Gervais, Jean Baptise Desportes McKay, Joseph Despard and Louis Labonte, Jr., were the first to take advantage of the change in policy. Although the debate continues, the weight of evidence seems to suggest that Etienne Lucier was the first to begin farming the Willamette Valley. The others were only weeks or months behind. A good description of the crops and yields of these early farming ventures is presented by Gibson (1985).

Most of the first group of French-Canadian settlers had been in the Oregon Country since 1811-1812. By the late 1820s they knew the Pacific Northwest like the back of their hand. When given the opportunity to start a farmstead, there was no question as to where the best land was to be found. To a man, they brought their families to French Prairie. The Willamette Valley was frequently described by early chroniclers as" Eden". Few early settlers disputed that description. If the Willamette Valley was a settlers "Eden", then the French-Canadians had defined the center of "Eden".

The initial settlement of French Prairie (1829-1832) focused on the broad alluvial flat from the mouth of Champoeg Creek west to the big bend of the Willamette River (Fig. 1). This was an area of well drained sandy soils on a series of undulating natural levees paralleling the Willamette River. Between the natural levies lay rich bottom land soils that were seasonally flooded. Occasional small lakes and ponds were found in these seasonal drainage channels. The largest of these features, Skookum Lake, was situated on Lucier's original claim. The alluvial flat was dominated by prairie grasses on the well drained soils and lush riparian vegetation in the low lying areas. Isolated stands of oak and fir trees grew on the high terrace which formed the southern boundary of the alluvial flat (150 foot contour). A high alluvial levee which parallels the Willamette River the length of the flat, about midway between the river and the southern high terrace, was the chosen landform for Willamette Post (Bellique homesite), the Lucier, Despard, McKay and Longtain homesites, as well as the later Hudson's Bay Company granary and Clerks house at Champoeg (Brauner 1987). The first road linking these homesites to Champoeg was also placed on this high natural levee (100 foot contour). By placing their homes on the levee

the French-Canadian settlers were above normal flood level and therefore as close to the Willamette River, which was their only transportation link to Fort Vancouver, as they could safely be. They were also positioned along the main trail that linked their small settlement together. They were situated directly on the best ground for their gardens and orchards, and in the center of a vast prairie which provided more than ample grazing for their livestock. Timber for the construction of their houses, outbuildings, fences, and for fuel was nearby on the southern terrace. Unlike later settlers, the availability of native plant foods may have played a role in the selection of a land claim. The low ground on the alluvial flat would have been prime habitat for camas and other edible tubers and bulbs. Native plant foods may have played an important role in the diets of the early French-Canadians and their families. The suggestion has also been madethat the selection of a homesite among the French-Canadians had a lot to do with the local availability of good trapping grounds. Lucier, for example, is said to have included Skookum Lake in his original claim because it gave him a good place to set his traps.

The boundaries of these first land claims on the northern edge of French Prairie stretched from the Willamette River back to the high timber covered terrace to the south. The intervening landforms contained habitats suitable for agricultural purpose and for the maintenance of native plant and animal foods. All of the early structures were placed on high ground adjacent to the local road system, and as close to the Willamette River as was prudent.

A similar settlement pattern was observed on the southern edge of French Prairie, which was the only other part of the prairie settled in the early 1830s. Joseph Gervais selected a site similar to Lucier and the others to the north. All of the same habitat types are present and the same selection criteria undoubtedly applied. Joseph Delard, the only other early settler on the south prairie, positioned his claim inland from Gervais' and some distance from the Willamette River. Like Gervais however, he positioned his claim on high ground bordering the northern shore of Lake Labish. The lake, with an abundance of indigenous edible plants, waterfowl, and wild game was a resource important enough to Delard to forego easy access to the Willamette River. The high ground north of the lake provided ample pasture and tillable ground to fulfill his agricultural needs.

French-Canadians arriving on the prairie in the mid to late 1830s focused their attention on Champoeg, Case and Senecal creeks as well as some minor infill in the Champoeg flat area and the northern shore of Lake Labish. Unlike the first French-Canadian settlers, every claim along the creek channels was laid out in the traditional French "long lot" system. This settlement system which had its roots in France, was brought to the Americas with the first French colonies, became established in eastern Canada and the southeastern United States, and through the mechanism of the fur trade found its way to the Pacific Northwest (Bowen 1978). The distinctive French "long lots" were laid out with the long axis of the claim perpendicular to a water course. The original objective was to maximize access to water in a densely populated area, and yet have enough land to support ones ' agricultural endeavors (Bowen 1978, Head 1971).

The distinctive "long lot" claims on French Prairie each have a portion of a major stream flowing through one end of the property. The claims usually include the floodplain of both banks of the stream. Dwellings were traditionally placed on high ground near the water course but above seasonal flood level. On French Prairie this pattern was modified somewhat. We discovered that most dwellings were oriented to a primary road that passed through the claim, not to the stream course. Distance to water, which tends to be an important criteria for the location of a dwelling in most environments, was of little importance in the early settlement period on French Prairie. The ground water table was originally so high that shallow wells would usually supply a households needs (Helen Austin:personnal communication). Tilled fields ,orchards, and pasture dominated the high ground. On French Prairie, timber suitable for construction purposes and fuel was available along the stream drainages and in scattered groves on the prairie. The availability and maintenance of native resources was of little or no concern to the settlers coming into the prairie during the late 1830s and early 1840s.

The settlement criteria used by the first wave of French-Canadian settlers in the Willamette Valley was based on a blend of traditional values gleaned from intimate contact with native populations during their many years of service to the fur trade and the needs and demands of an agriculturist. The land they chose allowed them to retain many of their old customs and habits while providing a suitable base for a successful entry into the modern world of agriculture. The

French-Canadians who followed in the late 1830s and early 1840s brought with them a settlement model derived from their French agrarian past, devoid of the values shared by their older contempories who had been tempered by the fur trade. This later group of French-Canadian settlers approached the land strictly from the perspective of agriculturists, similar to the American pioneers who were beginning to arrive on the scene with yet another agrarian model to impose on the land.

ETHNICITY: FRENCH-CANADIAN SETTLERS, 1829 - 1842

The first individuals to recognize the agricultural potential of the Willamette Valley were the employees of the Pacific Fur Company (1811), followed in rapid succession by the Northwest Company (1811) and the Hudson's Bay Company (1821). Men working for these fur trading companies were the first non-Kalapuyans to exploit the inland resources of the Pacific Northwest and through their explorations added substance to the void on chartmaker's maps. Numbered among these men were French-Canadians from eastern Canada who eventually would form the nucleus for settlement on French Prairie.

Numerous histories on the development of the Pacific Northwest fur trade have been written. John Hussey's (1967) history of Champoeg provides a good chronology of events leading up to the settlement of French Prairie. James Gibson (1985) presents a well organized account of the development of agriculture in the Pacific Northwest, much of which involves French Prairie. Harriet Munnick's numerous articles on the topic of French Prairie and French-Canadians in the central Willamette Valley serve as a foundation for the study of this ethnic group (see Sanders-Chapman 1989: 155-156). As good as these historical works are, and the works upon which these authors built, the French-Canadians remain a faded image with little definable substance. Five or 6 French-Canadians ( Gervais, Labonte, Lucier, Bellique, La Framboise, and Longtain) are frequently written about, several others are mentioned by name (e.g. West 1942: 207), but the majority of French-Canadians, if they are dealt with at all, occur as nameless figures hidden among reconstructed census data (Gibson 1985: 136).

Early Northwest historians were unable or unwilling to discard the nationalistic and racist cloak that blanketed much of 19th and early 20th century society. Prejudice against French-Canadians and their Indian/Metis wives and children have run deep and long. Even before the French-Ca-

nadians established permanent homes in the Oregon country, they had been stereotyped in an image deemed colorful by some and derogatory by others. Before they were farmers, they were trappers, *engages*, and *voyageurs*. The French-Canadian "*voyageurs* who paddled the canoes of the company up and down the rivers were a picturesque breed of men, worthy predecessors in romantic charm to the gold seekers and cowboys"(Chapman 1909: 53). Or, as seen by other eyes; "French-Canadians were like happy children -- volatile, naive, usually incapable of deep or lasting feelings" (Case 1947: 33).

> The voyageurs may be said to have sprung up out of the fur trade, having originally been employed by the early French merchants in their trading expeditions through the labyrinth of rivers and lakes of the boundless interior. In the intervals of their long, arduous and laborious expeditions, they were wont to pass their time in idleness and revelry about the trading posts or settlements; squandering their hard earnings in heedless conviviality, and rivaling their neighbors, the Indians, in indolent indulgences and imprudent disregard of the morrow. When Canada passed under British domination, and the old French trading houses were broken up, the voyageurs were for a time disheartened and disconsolate, and with difficulty could reconcile themselves to the service of the new comers, so different in habits, manners and language from their former employers. By degrees, however, they became accustomed to the change and at length came to consider the British fur traders, and especially the members of the Northwest Company, as the legitimate lords of creation. The dress of these people is generally half civilized, half savage. They wear a capote or surcoat, made of a blanket, a striped cotton shirt, cloth trowsers, or leathern leggings, moccasins of deer skin, and a belt of variegated worsted, from which are suspended the knife, tobacco pouch, and other implements. Their language is of the same piebald character, being a French patois, embroidered with Indian and English words and phrases. The lives of the voyageurs are passed in wild and extensive rovings. They are generally of French descent and inherit much of the gaiety and lightness of heart of their ancestors, being full of anecdote and song, and ever ready for the dance. Their natural good will is probably heightened by a community of adventure and hardship in their precarious and wandering life. They are dexterous boatmen, vigorous and adroit with the oar and paddle, and will row from from morning until night without a murmur. The steersman often sings an old traditionary French song, with some regular burden in which they all join, keeping time with their oars. In the course of years they will gradually disappear; their songs will die away like the echoes they once awakened, and the Canadian voyageurs will become a forgotten race, or remembered among the poetical images of past times, and as themes for local and romantic associations (Washington Irving, as quoted in Lang 1885: 174-175).

The French-Canadians did not become a forgotten race but as opportunities in the fur trade waned new opportunities presented themselves in the fertile valley of the Willamette River. The French-Canadians in the employment of the Hudson's Bay Company out of Fort Vancouver had begun their careers as young men in the Great Lakes region of eastern Canada. They had seen the northern tier of North America and more -- but they had never seen a place like the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Like Americans who would come later, they were aware of the agricultural and economic promise of the fertile, well watered prairies and the forest mantled hillsides. This was a place to raise a family and prosper. Beginning in 1829, the Hudson's Bay Company broke a long standing rule which required men leaving the service of the "Honorable Company" to return to eastern Canada, and allowed western settlement.

The popular misconceptions about the French-Canadians which grew out of the fur trade, both pro and con, followed them into their new setting and lives as agriculturists.
The idyllic view of French-Canadians in the Willamette Valley is best expressed by an historian who was also a Catholic priest.

> There was a time when French Prairie was the home spot of the Pacific Northwest, when the Americans had not yet gone into rendezvous on the Missouri border and had not taught their prairie schooners the long way across the plains. In those ante-pioneer days the Canadian French had made their homes on the beautiful prairie and in the absence of their country-women had espoused the dusky maidens of the Calapooias, who raised for them bright eyed groups of half-breed boys and girls. The Catholic Fathers were here to bless the union and guide the lives of these youths, and the condition of these people was one of peace and plenty. The earliest comers among the Americans took homes among them and speak with pleasant memories of the quiet, peaceful, faraway life which the French and half-breed population enjoyed. These remember seeing the young people assemble on the Sabbath where is now the Catholic Church of St. Paul and the pictures they draw are charmingly illustrative of the idyllic period that Oregon passed through and the quiet pastoral lives these Canadians lived (O'Hara 1925: 95-96).

This positive image of the French-Canadian, albeit biased by the "noble savage" concept, is a rarity in the chronicles of Northwest history. The prevailing view of the role played by the French-Canadians in the early settlement of the Willamette Valley was dictated by 19th century

American historians, many of whom were active or retired politicians. Their historical writings were biased by a strong sense of nationalism and ingrained bigotry. The French-Canadians with their Indian/Metis wives and children coupled with their association with the fur trade led American society to view them as Indians, and they were frequently dealt with accordingly. French-Canadians rarely spoke English and few were literate, furthering the misunderstandings held by Americans. Having recently rested the Oregon country from the British, the French-Canadians were viewed by Americans as the last unwanted symbol of the all powerful Hudson's Bay Company. The French-Canadians also tended to be strongly Catholic. After the 1848 killing and hostage taking at the Whitman Mission, there was a pervasive belief among Protestants that the Catholics had precipitated the massacre, which only enhanced the dubious image held by most Americans of their French-Canadian neighbors. William Barrows' history, published in 1883, illustrates the above biases and helped to ingrain them in our collective memory. In the following quote from Barrows, his reference to the " English trader" includes the French-Canadian.

> One carried in the single man and the other the family; one, his traps and snares, the other his seed wheat, oats and potatoes; one counted his muskrat nests, and the other his hills of corn; one shot an Indian for killing a wild animal out of season, and the other paid bounty on the wolf and bear; one took his newspaper from the dog mail . . . and the other carried in the printing press; one hunted and traded for what he could carry out of the country, the other planted and builded for what he could leave in it for his children. In short the English trader ran his birch and bateaux up the streams and around the lakes to bring out furs and pelteries, while the American immigrant hauled in, with his rude wagon, the nineteenth century, and came back loaded with Oregon for the American Union (Barrows 1883: 114).

Barrows continues.

> In some instances, and after the Americans began to introduce farming, the Company allowed a few of its broken-down men to cultivate the ground about the Wallamette, but they reserved the right to call these men back at any time to their stations (Barrows 1883: 90).

The denial of a viable French-Canadian agricultural presence in the Willamette Valley before the arrival of Americans is reiterated and reinforced by later historians. Among them a former

Governor of the State of Oregon T. T. Greer. Referring to Jason Lee's arrival in the Oregon country, Greer notes that;

> when we recall that when he and his four companions made their way up the Willamette valley on that day in October, 1834, there was not a civilized American settlement anywhere west of the Rocky Mountains. All was wilderness and savagery ---- solitude and barbarism. Those who came after them had at least "The Mission" to give them a welcome and a temporary home until they were able to find a permanent location (Greer 1912: 53-54).

While Greer is correct about the lack of an American presence west of the Rocky Mountains, he neglects to discuss the well established French-Canadian presence in the Willamette Valley or the assistance given to Jason Lee by the Hudson's bay Company and the local French-Canadian families (documented in Daniel Lee's letters) which ensured the success of the mission (Lee and Frost 1973).

While more objective, and acknowledging the presence of a pre-American agricultural presence in the Willamette Valley, modern historians still provide little more than a brief paragraph on the French-Canadians and, although toned down, persist in presenting many of the 19th century misconceptions. One recently published Northwest history text presents an image of the early French-Canadian settler little changed from the Barrows' quote presented above.

> As the life of the mountain man grew harder, as the beaver supply diminished, as the grueling labor for the HBC or PSAC seemed harsher, as they themselves became older, the life of the farmer beckoned. For these worn-out trappers and voyageurs, the Tualatin Valley and the region near present day Salem (the French Prairie was named for them) provided a gentle, pastoral routine of contentment and order (Dodds 1986: 78).

If we are to understand French-Canadian lifestyles, settlement patterns and their ultimate contributions to the early settlement of the Willamette Valley we must turn away from the written historical accounts and rely on the archaeological record. The language left behind by the French-

Canadians lies buried beneath the sod or on the surface of recently plowed fields in the form of shattered and discarded material goods. Locating, protecting and systematically investigating a sample of these sites from the perspective of a solid research design will ultimately resurrect the French-Canadians to their rightful place in Pacific Northwest history and further our understanding of the rich cultural diversity that was old Oregon.

COMMERCE

As previously noted, some of the first French-Canadians to settle the Willamette Valley after 1829 came to the Pacific Northwest as members of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company (Astorians) in 1811. The Astorians built the first land based fur trade post in the Oregon Country at the mouth of the Columbia River and called it Fort Astoria. During the winter of 1811-1812 two Astorians, David Stuart and Regis Bruguir, ascended the Willamette River and established a small post called Wallace House. The location of Wallace House is still uncertain but the most likely area to search for its remains is along the east bank of the Willamette River near the northern city limits of Kiezer at the extreme southern end of French Prairie. Wallace House was little more than a hunting and trapping base camp consisting of a cabin and a storage shed. Wallace House was abandoned after one winter's use but the trapping success that Stuart and Bruguir reported encouraged regular visits to the Willamette Valley by hunters and trappers beginning in 1813.

As a result of the War of 1812 the American owned Pacific Fur Company sold its holdings in the Oregon Country to the British owned North West Company in October of 1813. The North West Company took over Fort Astoria as their regional headquarters in the Pacific Northwest. They renamed the post Fort George. French-Canadians that had been on the Astorians payroll were retained by the North West Company, many as free trappers. The North West Company also had a substantial number of French-Canadians on their payroll, many of whom would also settle the Willamette Valley in years to come.

As early as November of 1813, the North West Company established a satellite post in the north-central part of the Willamette Valley in order to efficiently extract furs and meat from this

region. The base camp named Willamette Post was established on a broad alluvial flat on the south bank of the Willamette River called *Campment du Sable* or sandy camp. Sandy camp was situated on the northern edge of the first large open grass prairie encountered by travelers ascending the Willamette River. Several structures were built at Willamette Post and a well was dug, but exact details as to the number and kinds of structures and their layout have not been located in archival sources. Willamette Post served as a supply center and fur warehouse for the French-Canadian trappers working in the Willamette Valley for over a decade. The post also maintained a large horse herd for the southern fur brigades. The North West Company held a monopoly on the fur trade in the Oregon Country until 1821 when it merged with its rival the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company took over the administration of the fur trade in the Pacific Northwest retaining the French-Canadians previously employed by the North West Company. The Hudson's Bay Company built a new administrative headquarters on the Columbia River opposite the mouth of the Willamette River in 1824. The new post was called Fort Vancouver. With Fort Vancouver situated so close to the Willamette Valley their was no further need for Willamette Post and it was closed in 1824.

There is no record relating to how many French-Canadian trappers may have been living in the vicinity of Willamette Post between 1813 and 1824. It is within the realm of possibility that the home sites selected by the earliest French-Canadians to settle the northern valley in 1829, 1830, and 1831 were older cabin sites utilized by these men during their employment as trappers. This hypothesis can only be tested by the archaeological record.

When the French-Canadians were allowed to settle French Prairie and grow crops after 1829, the only outlet for their goods was the Hudson's Bay Company. As a consequence, all their goods had to be shipped down the Willamette River by small boat, offloaded and portaged around Willamette Falls, reloaded onto boats and shipped to Fort Vancouver. Produce was usually exchanged for goods from the Company store at Fort Vancouver, then returned to French Prairie by boat. All transportation of goods was the responsibility of the individual farmer.

Hudson's Bay Company dependence on grain and other produce coming from the French Prairie farms increased after 1839 when the Company signed an agreement with the Russian America Company to supply Russian fur trade posts in Alaska with food. By 1839 the Hudson's Bay

Company operation out of Fort Vancouver was already supplying the bulk of the food supplies for their own western posts as well as supplying a great deal of food to the Spanish Missions in California. With their own farms on Cowlitz Prairie and a monopoly on goods coming from the Willamette Valley the Hudson's Bay Company could meet their yearly food production quotas.

By 1840 rumors were spreading in the Willamette Valley that American business interests were thinking of purchasing produce directly from the farmers, then selling the goods at inflated prices to the Hudson's Bay Company. In order to head off this business venture and ensure the loyalty of the French Prairie farmers, i.e. maintain their monopoly, the Hudson's Bay Company decided to construct a grain warehouse near the old site of Willamette Post in 1841. A store would also be associated with the warehouse to make shopping (bartering) more convenient to the residents of the prairie. The warehouse would eliminate the arduous trip required of the farmers to get their crops to market and supplies back to the prairie. The Company would now absorb those costs.

The construction of the warehouse and store did prolong the Company's economic monopoly in the Willamette Valley for several more years. The tremendous influx of Americans after 1841 however, brought competing business interests diluting and weakening the Hudson's Bay Company economic stranglehold on residents of French Prairie. Competing warehouses and stores were soon erected along the banks of the Willamette River near the northern farmsteads. The construction of the warehouse and store represented the last attempts by British interests to maintain their hold over the growing population on French Prairie and, indeed, their authority over land south of the Columbia River.

II. DESCRIPTION

All of the eligible properties are archaeological sites. No buildings or surface features such as fencing, wells, paths, and roadways remain on any of the sites. Related exotic vegetation, such as fruit trees, is also absent on recorded sites. With the exception of the Hudson's Bay Granary site, all known sites are at least partially contained in plowed fields. A surface scatter of broken ceramic, window and bottle glass, clay pipe fragments, hand-wrought square nails, and other metal objects (usually fragmented), characterize the site locations. The majority of the identifiable ceramics and glass objects date from the late 1700s to the early 1840s and can be traced to the Hudson's Bay Company store at Fort Vancouver. Nineteenth century surface features have generally been incorporated in the plow zone (upper 30 to 40 cm). Deep features, including wells, privies, and cellars, are still intact as relic collecting activities on these sites has been restricted to surface collecting. The dwelling and associated outbuilding groupings were relatively compact so the sites rarely exceed 1 acre in total surface area. Dumps were usually close to the house, but their incorporation in the site boundary may extend the area to a couple of acres in size.

The earliest French-Canadian occupation sites, and the earliest related commercial buildings, were oriented to the Willamette River on the northern edge of French Prairie. The sites were situated on the natural levee above the 100 foot contour paralleling the river. The habitation sites were situated above the normal high water level, near the Willamette River which served as the primary transportation link with Fort Vancouver. The dwelling sites were also positioned near microenvironments that provided native medicinal and edible plants as well as a reliable supply of game animals. Nearby timber supplies for construction and fuel, and well drained ground for crop production and pasture land, were also considered when determining the placement of the habitation site. A similar grouping of microenvironments occurred on the southern edge of French Prairie, although smaller in total area. As a consequence, two of the eight earliest French-Canadian families chose to settle there. Land claim boundaries were usually somewhat irregular in order to encompass the desired diversity of habitat types.

After the early-1830s, French-Canadian settlers began claiming land along small tributary streams that meandered across French Prairie. Their land claims were usually laid out in the "French long lot" configuration originating along one of the stream channels. The dwelling sites within the claim were not oriented to the water course however, but to one of the north-south trails recently established to link the southern end of the prairie with the northern sector. Land selection had little to do with the availability of natural food supplies. Good agricultural land and a suitable stand of trees for construction material and fuel supplies were the primary selective factors.

Of the four nominated sites the Lucier Cabin Site (OR-MA-69), the Belleque Cabin Site/Willamette Post site (OR-MA-68), and the Despard Cabin Site (OR-MA-71) are all now located in open agricultural fields. Human occupation ceased at these sites by the mid-1850s. Since that time they have all been subject to seasonal agricultural tillage. The general appearance of the landscape has changed very little in the vicinity of the nominated sites however. Broad expanses of open grassland interspersed with oak groves and interfingerings of fir forests from the surrounding foothills and along stream courses typified French Prairie as noted in this early settlers account: "French Prairie was in the borderland between the originally heavily timbered country of the lower Willamette and the more open lands of southern Marion County and the 'big prairies' of the upper valley. He found it a veritable paradise with its rich black loam, abundant water, and ample timber. "Stately groves of fir and oak, or belts of deciduous timber along the water courses, broke the monotony of the grassy levels...while from almost any point of view the panorama of distant mountain scenery was uninterrupted.' The natural flowers upon this extensive plain are the most beautiful that our eyes ever beheld" (Hussey 1967:7). Lieutenant William Peel (Peel 1845) provides a similar account. "The land in the Wallamette is rich and well watered, generally clear of timber, and covered with a fine luxurious grass... The face of the Country is very picturesque, the eye resting upon large prairies, divided by belts of timber running along the banks of the rivers and streams, and separated from each other by a soft outline of hilly land, whilst the snowy mountains to the eastward, forming a chain parallel to the coast, are distinctly visible and make a beautiful background".

The sites are specifically located on a natural levee of the Willamette River that parallels the south bank of the river from the "big bend" of the river near Newberg to the present town of Butteville.

The levee is 100 feet above sea level which is approximately 30 feet above the mean annual flow of the Willamette River. The levee was not timbered, contained well drained sandy soils, was close to the Willamette River (main transportation route), and was high enough to provide protection from normal winter and spring flooding. The first trail connecting the outlying farmsteads to each other, and by the early 1840s to the Hudson's Bay Company warehouse at the future townsite of Champoeg, was positioned along this levee. The levee trail served as the only east-west land link for the northern French Prairie settlers until the 1861 flood resulted in its abandonment.

The Hudson's Bay Company granary site (OR-MA-72) is situated in Champoeg State Park and is tree covered.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The archaeological sites encompassed by this multiple property nomination represent the first permanent non-Indian settlement of the Pacific Northwest outside of the fur trade posts, and the beginning of the realization of the agricultural potential of what would become the Oregon Territory and later the State of Oregon. Word of the success of the farms established in the Willamette Valley, and specifically those on French Prairie, between 1829 and 1842 spread to the eastern United States and Canada like wildfire. Descriptions of the temperate climate, rich soils, and the pastoral lifestyle found on French Prairie were soon enlarged by distance and imagination to encompass the entire Oregon Country. Drawn by the images of Eden on earth, one of the most monumental migrations in the history of humanity began in 1841 with the first transcontinental wagon train to the Willamette Valley. While historians usually credit Americans associated with the Jason Lee Mission as being responsible for pioneering the agricultural settlement of the Willamette Valley and demonstrating to the world the agricultural potential of the Oregon Country, they were not the first, and indeed, during the decade leading up to the emigrant trains of the 1840s were not even in the majority of agriculturists present in the Willamette Valley.

Prior to the establishment of the Willamette Station of the Methodist Mission by Jason and Daniel Lee in October of 1834, the only farmers in the Willamette Valley were French-Canadians with Indian or Metis wives. Even after the arrival of more Americans in the Wil-

lamette Valley after 1834, the French-Canadians remained the dominant agriculturally based population in the valley until the arrival of the first emigrant trains in 1841 and 1842. Indeed, without the knowledge and assistance of the French-Canadian farmers, the success of several early American farming ventures including that of the Jason Lee Mission may have been in doubt. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about the French-Canadian population in the Willamette Valley during these critical formative years. For reasons discussed in section B this ethnic group has been excluded from the written history of the Pacific Northwest. If we are to learn anything about the lifestyle and settlement pattern of this pioneering French-Canadian population and the role they played in the agricultural settlement of the Oregon Country, we have only the contents of a handful of archaeological sites remaining to tell the tale.

Two commercial establishments were built by British fur trading companies along the northern margin of French Prairie to support the local French-Canadian population's economic endeavors. Willamette Post, established in 1813 by the North West Company, served as a focal point for trade among the free trappers working in the Willamette Valley well into the mid-1820s. Most of these freemen were French-Canadian trappers who had come to Oregon with the Astor party in 1811. These men and their families would also be the first to permanently settle the Willamette Valley beginning in 1829. Although the post was abandoned by 1829, the traditional importance of the post throughout their experience in the Willamette Valley may have played a major role in where the first French-Canadian farmers took land claims.

Willamette Post was the only establishment built in the Willamette Valley by the North West Company. As such it was the sole supplier of material goods to the French-Canadian freemen prior to 1824. In order to understand what an early French-Canadian tool kit would look like we need to know what kinds of goods they were obtaining from the North West Company. Since written records no longer exist, the archaeological record at the site of Willamette Post may provide our last hope of obtaining a sample of these kinds of data.

The Hudson's Bay Company granary, built in circa 1841, was the only other British fur trade related structure to be built in the Willamette Valley. The granary and associated clerks house also served as an economic focal point for the majority French-Canadian population living on French Prairie as well as the growing minority American population. Rather than furs, this post traded for agricultural commodities. The granary was built to ensure that the Hudson's Bay Company could maintain a competitive edge in the acquisition of produce coming out of the productive French Prairie farms and the loyalty of their many retired employees who resided there. The store associated with the granary brought Hudson's Bay Company goods almost to the doorstep of the French Prairie settlers at a time when other merchants were coming into the Willamette Valley looking for customers. Knowledge relating to the specific kinds of goods being sold at the store can only be recovered archaeologically. The success or influence of the company store in the French Prairie community can only be gauged by a comparison of the material goods recovered from contemporary homestead sites with an assemblage of goods from the old store site.

Archaeological sites pertinent to this multiple property nomination can be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A, B, and D at the State and National level.

Criterion A:

The French-Canadian farmsteads established on French Prairie between 1829 and 1841 were the first agricultural ventures outside the confines of the fur trade posts in the Pacific Northwest. The pre-1834 farmsteads initiated a transition away from a 12,000 year old economic base reliant on hunting and gathering in the Pacific Northwest toward an agricultural economic base which has characterized this region ever since. They also served as the foundation upon which other French-Canadian and American settlers built between 1834 and 1841 to demonstrate to the rest of the western world the economic potential of the Oregon Country. The success of the pre-1841 farmsteads on French Prairie resulted in an image of the American west which gained mythical proportions and resulted in one of the epic migrations of human history. The image of the Oregon Country as an "Eden" on earth that every

traveler held in the 1840s was, in reality, a very small place called the Willamette Valley. The center of that "Eden" was French Prairie.

Willamette Post and the Hudson's Bay Company granary represent two of only three commercial complexes built and operated in the Willamette Valley by the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company which served as the economic link between the inhabitants of French Prairie and the outside world.

Criterion B:
This criterion cannot be used to support the nomination of most of the pre-1842 French-Canadian farmstead sites but is certainly applicable to three of the four sites nominated at this time. Lucier established the first privately owned farmstead in the Pacific Northwest. Belleque and Despard were only months behind Lucier in this endeavor. Their success at farming encouraged others to follow, ultimately attracting thousands of emigrants who would wrest the Oregon Country from British domination. Beyond their role as the first agriculturists in the Willamette Valley, they were among a handful of men who had arrived in the Oregon Country in 1811-1812 with the Astor Company, and had continued to serve the North West Company, and the Hudson's Bay Company. They had been respected employees and free trappers throughout the land based fur trade era. They not only opened up the agricultural potential of the Willamette Valley, but were also participants in establishing the economic importance of the Pacific Northwest during the fur trade era.

Criterion D:
Written accounts of the French-Canadian occupation of the Willamette Valley prior to 1842 are almost nonexistent. The role that this ethnic population played in the early agricultural development of the Pacific Northwest has yet to be fully elucidated. Indeed, we know next to nothing about the settlement pattern, economic base, sociopolitical organization, kinship affiliations and technological base of this ethnic group. Our only mechanism for understanding this ethnic group from a cultural and historical perspective is through archaeology. The bulk of our knowledge about these people lies, as yet untapped, in a few precious archaeological sites scattered across French Prairie.

IV. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

In order to qualify for listing, the site must be located on French Prairie and have been occupied by a French-Canadian/Metis individual or family during the period 1829 to 1842. Based on current archival research there are potentially 93 sites that meet these basic criteria. The location of 52 sites meeting these criteria have been determined to within 100 meters. All known site are archaeological in nature. All those sites not yet located are assumed to be archaeological as well. Sixteen of these 52 sites have been totally or significantly destroyed by erosion, highway construction, urban development, and modern farmstead expansion. Several more sites may have been destroyed by field leveling practices, but this will need to be determined by subsurface testing. The remaining known sites are all at least partially incorporated in plowed fields. An additional criterion for listing is, therefore, that the site must still have enough archaeological integrity to provide some cultural and historical information about the occupants of the site.

It is doubtful that any early French-Canadian/Metis occupation site on French Prairie has escaped disturbance. We therefore cannot exclude a site from consideration if the upper 30 to 40 centimeters has been disturbed by plowing. If plowing has been the only post-abandonment disturbance to the site, in the context of French Prairie, the site could be considered relatively intact. Archaeologists at Oregon State University have discovered that plowing certainly destroys vertical relationships between cultural materials, but horizontal relationships are generally good enough to still potentially define activity loci and the position of structures across a site. The preservation of organic remains in archaeological sites on French Prairie is poor irregardless of post-abandonment disturbance. Plowing has not significantly reduced this aspect of the archaeological assemblage. Inorganic cultural materials may be more fragmented than in an undisturbed context, but a full range of archaeological analysis is not precluded just because the artifacts are smaller.

Cultural features such as wells, privies, cellars, and refuse pits are still intact below the plow zone even if the open surface features are entirely encompassed in the plow zone. Concentrations of cultural debris noted and mapped in the plow zone can frequently assist the archaeologist in locating the deeper intact features.

References Cited

Bancroft, Hubert Howe
1886-88 *History of Oregon.* Vol. 1, The History Company, San Francisco.

Barrows, William
1883 *Oregon: The Struggle for Possession.* The Riverside Press, Cambridge.

Black, Lloyd
1942 Middle Willamette Valley Population Growth. *Oregon Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 43: 40-55.

Bowen, William
1978 *The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier.* University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Boyd, Robert
1975 Another look at the "fever and ague" of western Oregon. *Ethnohistory* Vol. 22: 135-154.

Brauner, David
1987 Archaeological Evaluation of Site 35MA72: The Hudson's Bay Company Granary Site, Champoeg State Park, Marion County, Oregon. Report prepared for the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Deptmartment of Anthropology, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

1989 *The French-Canadian Archaeological Project, Willamette Valley Oregon: Site Inventory and Settlement Pattern Analysis.* Department of Anthropology, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.

Burnett, Peter
1880 *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer.* Appleton and Company, New York.

Case, Robert
1947 *The Empire Builders.* Doubleday and Company, Garden City, New York.

Chapman, Charles
1909 *The Story of Oregon and Its People.* O. P. Barnes, Publisher, Chicago.

Clarke, S. A.
1905 *Pioneer Days of Oregon History.* Volume I. J. K. Gill Company, Portland.

Corning, Howard
1956 *Dictionary of Oregon History.* Binford and Mort, Portland, Oregon.

Dickson, Evelyn
1946 Food Plants of Western Oregon Indians. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, School of Education, Stanford University, Palo Alto.

Dodds, Gordon
1986 *The American Northwest: A History of Oregon and Washington.* The Forum Press, Inc. , Arlington Heights, Illinois.

de Mofras, Eugene Duflot
1925 Extract from Exploration of the Oregon Territory, the Californias, and the Gulf of California Undertaken During the Years 1840, 1841, and 1842. translated by Nellie Pipes, in *Oregon Historical Quarterly* , Vol. 26: 151-190.

Edwards, Philip
1842 *Sketch of the Oregon Territory: or, Emigrants' Guide.* the "Herald" Office, Liberty, Missouri.

Gibson, James
1985 *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country.* University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Geer, T. T.
1912 *Fifty Years in Oregon.* The Neale Publishing Co. , New York.

Hafen, LeRoy (ed.)
1954 *The Far West and the Rockies: Historical Series 1820 to 1875.* Arthur H. Clark Company, Glendale, California.

Head, Harlow
1971 The Oregon Donation Claims and Their Patterns. Unpuplished Ph. D. Dissertation, Geography Department, University of Oregon, Eugene.

Hussey, John
1967 *Champoeg: Place of Transition.* Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Lang, Herbert
1885 *History of the Willamette Valley.* Himes and Lang Publishers, Portland, Oregon.

Lee, Danial and Joseph Frost
1973 *Ten Years in Oregon.* Arno Press, New York.

Leechman, Douglas
1970 "I Sowed Garden Seeds". *The Beaver,* Winter, Publication of the Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Canada.

McKay, Harvey
1980 *St. Paul, Oregon 1830 - 1890.* Binford and Mort Publishers, Portland, Oregon.

Mackey, Harold
1974 *The Kalapuyans: A Sourcebook on the Indians of the Willamette Valley.* Mission Mill Museum Association, Inc. , Salem.

Munnick, Harriet
1968 Etienne Lucier. in Leroy Hafen (Ed), *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West.* Vol. 6. Arther H. Clark Co., Glendale, California

1979 *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon, 1839-1898.* Vol. I, II and III. Binford and Mort, Portland, Oregon.

*Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest; St. Louis, Gervais and Brooks.* Binford and Mort, Portland, Oregon.

*Catholic Church Records in the Pacific Northwest; Vancouver Parish.* Binford and Mort. Portland, Oregon

Nichols, M. L.
1941 *Mantle of Elias..* Binford and Mort, Portland Oregon

O'Hara, Edwin
1925 *Catholic History of Oregon.* Catholic Book Company, Portland, Oregon

Payette, B. C.
1962 *The Oregon Country Under the Union Jack.* Payette Radio Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Sanders, Judith, Mary Weber and David Brauner
1983 Willamette Mission Archaeological Project. *Anthropology Northwest,* No. 1, Department of Anthropology, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Sanders-Chapman, Judith
1989 *French Prairie Ceramics: The Harriet D. Munnick Archaeological Collection Circa 1820-1860 A Catalog and Regional Comparative Guide.* Department of Anthropology, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Slacum, William
1912 Slacum's Report on Oregon 1836-7. *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society,* Vol. 13: 2, Portland, Oregon.

Steele, Harvey, Lester Ross, and Charles Hibbs
1975 *Fort Vancouver Excavations XII: OAS Sale Shop Excavation.* Manuscript, Oregon Archaeological Society and the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Vancouver, Washington.

West, Oswald
1942 Oregon's First White Settlers on French Prairie. *Oregon Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 43. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Zenk, Henry
1976 Contributions to Tualatin Ethnography: Subsistance and Ethnobiology. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.