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## PRELUDE TO WAR

### **COLUMBIA: Summer 1988; Vol. 2, No. 2**

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#### **Almost Columbia, Triumphantly Washington**

**Prelude to statehood—the remarkable beginnings of Washington Territory.**

*By John McClelland, Jr.*

The northern part of what once was the Oregon Country is a state that will mature soon to the centenary point and can look back, not just to the year when statehood was achieved, but all the way to the beginnings in the mid-19th century when Oregon was divided and what almost became Columbia was created. How and why that division was achieved constitutes the remarkable initial chapter of Washington's history. It tells of a group of mostly young families who decided, very soon after becoming the first white Americans to establish homes north of the Columbia, that it was their destiny to be the founders of a new state. And so, almost as soon as the roofs were on their log houses, they launched a secessionist movement, demanding that what lay north of the great river be cut off from Oregon and made into a separate territory, to be named, quite naturally, Columbia. Courage was common on the frontier, but political audacity was less so, and it is that quality which led this group of wagon-train pioneers, newly arrived from the Middle West, to conclude that it was not unreasonable to ask Congress to split a territory that had been established only three years previously.

If they had not been as audacious, and had not been cheered on by the region's one newspaper, itself just born, there would likely be no state of Washington, but instead just one huge state of Oregon. If they had remained a part of Oregon Territory for only six years longer, they would have become citizens of the new state of Oregon. After that there would have been little possibility of a division.

The beginnings of Washington seem all the more extraordinary when it is remembered that in 1851, when the push for a new territory began, the area involved had been a part of the United States only seven years. The British flag had been flying prior to 1846.

It was not happenstance that those who came first to what is now Washington were late in coming. Many Americans came west to Oregon in the 1840s, but until a treaty with Britain was made in 1846, ending a long period of joint occupancy by the two nations, they came to a political no-man's-land where there were no laws to be enforced and no one to enforce laws if there had been any. The British Hudson's Bay fur-trading company, with headquarters at Fort Vancouver, undertook to rule the region, but this was not acceptable to the Americans who settled in the Willamette Valley. They decided to make do with a home-made structure that they called a provisional government, with some of the British participating. It had no formal sanction or connections with either London or the city of Washington.

The north country-north of the river-was open to those who came in the first wagon trains, but until 1844 none went. The end of the trail was Fort Vancouver, where the imperious Hudson's Bay Company was doing almost nothing to bring in British citizens. Those with such desires were nearly all Americans, and they were weary after a months-long journey ending at the mouth of the Willamette River. Southward along that river extended the rich bottomlands, easily reached. To the north were only swift rivers and dense forests through which ran only a few trails made by Indians and wild game. The Hudson's Bay Company encouraged the earliest pioneers to go south into the valleys of the Willamette and its tributaries and that, plus the region's accessibility and fertility, is why they went there, ignoring the unknown north.

Then in 1844 came a wagon train led by Michael Simmons which included one George Washington Bush, part black. Blacks were not allowed by the provisional government in the Willamette Valley because they might get Oregon involved in the slavery question and delay territorial ambitions.

People traveling together, on shipboard or across the plains, develop friendships. Simmons would not abandon his friend Bush. After a winter at the fort, Simmons explored north and found what he was looking for where the Deschutes River drops into Puget Sound with enough force to turn the wheels of grist mills and sawmills. There the first American settlers in what was to become Washington established themselves. They called it Newmarket, later changed to the more euphonious Tumwater.

The "Oregon fever" that led so many to make the long trip west became even more prevalent after 1846. More families followed Simmons and went north to settle. They didn't tarry at Fort Vancouver or visit the Willamette. They were emigrants directly

from the Midwest to the Cowlitz or to Puget Sound. They were the first there, on their own, with no one to answer to.

So it was a band of highly independent citizens, with no allegiance to Oregon, who scattered through what is now Western Washington, and even though they were busy in every daylight hour with the tasks of settlement, they found time to discuss their mutual dissatisfaction with their plight as citizens of Oregon Territory. The seat of government, far down in the Willamette Valley at Salem, was too far away. What little federal funding was made available was spent in the south. Their totally undeveloped frontier in the north needed everything—roads, mail service, troops to hold off Indians, law enforcement, courts. The settlers felt they were entitled to have their needs met and they wanted them met without delay. After all, this was 1851. Technology was advancing fast. Steam was propelling ships and trains. Modern times were at hand and these settlers, though not forgetting they were pioneers, didn't expect to be living for long in the primitive ways their grand parents and parents had endured when they settled in the Midwest.

Their needs called for a government of their own with a voice in Washington, D.C., and so an idea came into being.

The idea's originator was never recorded but the first to put it into print—in a letter to an editor—was a young lawyer in Oregon City, John Chapman. What should be done, he said, was to divide Oregon in two parts, north and south of the Columbia River, and the northern part should be called Columbia.

Later, in a Fourth of July oration in Olympia, he elaborated on the idea and it found favor immediately. To get to Oregon's capital then required a journey of several days by horseback over a trail to Cowlitz Landing, down a turbulent stream in an Indian canoe to the mouth of the Cowlitz and on up the Columbia in another canoe and into the Willamette as far as the falls, and finally, by horse again, or canoe, over the last miles into Salem. It was nearly always three days of travel. How much better it would be to have the seat of government right in Olympia.

The fact that northern Oregon had a population of less than a thousand—no one knew just how many—was no deterrent at all to the new settlers. So what to do? Hold a meeting. Lay plans. The first meeting was at Cowlitz Landing at a bend in the river where travel going north and south shifted between land and water and where a way station that passed for a country inn was established. There, on August 29, 1851, a delegation of 19, with Seth Catlin, one of the few not still in their 20s and 30s, as chairman, declared themselves to be in convention assembled and drew up a formal memorial to Congress asking that a new territory be created in northern Oregon. And they asked for more—\$100,000 to build a road from Walla Walla to Puget Sound over the mountains, and authority to create new counties, for which

they had names already chosen.

The memorial, written by John Chapman, ran to 1,500 insistent words and was quite specific about the name selected for the new territory-Columbia. It was published in two territorial newspapers, the *Oregon Spectator* and the *Oregonian*, both of which had some circulation in Washington, D.C.

A territory was entitled to one elected nonvoting representative in Congress and Oregon's was Joseph Lane, who had been governor and was a part of the Democratic organization firmly in control of politics in the new territory. The memorial made its way to him by the slow ways of the mail at that time—down the Cowlitz for a connection with a ship going to California, then by another steamer to Panama, by land across the isthmus, and on across the Carribbean by another steamer to the East Coast. Lane read it but was not persuaded that his territory, which he had just started to represent, should be cut in two. He filed the memorial with the clerk of the committee on territories where it was effectively buried.

Another meeting had been scheduled for May 1852, to start a movement for statehood if by then Congress had not acted on the petition for a territory, but it seemed futile when their missive about a territory had not been acknowledged. They were not discouraged, however, and their restiveness about their isolation and political plight increased. The Fourth of July, 1852, came and this time the orator in Olympia was Daniel R. Bigelow, another young lawyer newly admitted to practice. He was as eager as Chapman to display his oratorical talents and enthusiasm. He envisioned a great state in the northwest comer of the nation where "the force of our example and the advancement of free principles will...go on and illumine the islands of the sea, and exert such a powerful influence that benighted China will wake up from her sleep of ages and take strides forward in civil freedom."

At this point frontier journalism enters the scene. Two printers-Thornton F. McElroy and James W Wiley, using the small press on which the *Oregonian* began publication-launched a weekly newspaper in Olympia, giving it a name they hoped would be prophetic-the *Columbian*.

The *Columbian* began aggressively promoting Columbia even before there was any assurance that northern Oregon would be allowed to secede. In an Oct. 9 article addressed to those planning to move west, it promised that "a territorial government will be organized for northern Oregon as soon as practicable, when we will have a market of our own-a governor, federal officers and a legislature of our own-a delegate in Congress of our own and finally a STATE of our own. ... Your assistance is wanted in the settlement and improvement of the country- the organization of our territory and in the formation of a state." In a later issue the *Columbian* confidently predicted that "a legal divorce from the

south is inevitable."

Within six months the *Columbian* had a circulation of 350, spread over a wide area, with agents in Monticello, Whidbey's Island, Port Townsend, Steilacoom, Nisqually, Cowlitz Farms, Chlickeeles (Chehalis), New York (Alki), New Dungeness, Oregon City, Seattle, Jackson's Prairie, Poe's Point and Washington City. The latter listing showed that the *Columbian* had readers from its outset in the national capital.

Leaders of the separatist movement used the columns of the new newspaper to argue their case. All of its early issues contained material intended to generate more public determination to achieve independence as a separate territory.

The district court met at Jackson's place near Cowlitz Farms in October 1852, and so many citizens were on hand that Major H. A. Goldsborough, one of the most vocal of Columbia Territory advocates, called an impromptu meeting to give consideration to a second convention. A new start needed to be made. Out of this came a call for delegates to be elected in every part of northern Oregon to attend a convention in Olympia in November. Later the site was moved to Monticello at the mouth of the Cowlitz in order to get good attendance from those living along the Columbia who could not be expected to be as eager to split off from southern Oregon as those who lived far away on Puget Sound.

The *Columbian* began to promote the forthcoming convention enthusiastically. It raised its editorial voice to a shout with the biggest type it had:

#### **CITIZENS OF NORTHERN OREGON!**

It behooves you to bestir yourselves to claim your independence from the territorial authority exerted over you by the Willamette Valley. Call meetings in your several precincts; memorialize Congress to set us off; exhibit our grievances both in omission and commission under which we have suffered from all departments of government and that body will be compelled to regard your prayer.

Editor McElroy realized that travel at any time was difficult and in November the trail south would likely be deep in mud. He urged those who lived along the way to help take care of the travelers going on foot or by horse to Cowlitz Landing, resting there, then moving on down the twisting course of the Cowlitz River for another 30 miles by canoe or bateau to Monticello. That settlement consisted only of Harry Darby Huntington's place, part home and part hotel; Olson and Mahan's store; two old Hudson's

Bay Company warehouses; and the houses and barns of L. P. Smith and Royal Smith. Help get the delegates to the convention, the *Columbian* urged, and "inasmuch as dollars are not plentiful in this region. ..and as many of our delegates will have to incur considerable sacrifice in order to attend the convention, it is to be hoped that the good people along the routes—Warbassport, etc., instead of desiring to turn the necessary means for reaching Monticello at a profit, on the contrary. ..will endeavor to make the expenses of the delegates from the interior as light as possible."

The *Columbian* was determined that attendance at the Monticello convention be substantial, realizing that the more names on a petition to Congress, the more attention it was likely to get. Under the heading "PREPARE! PREPARE!" McElroy and Wiley explained why the meeting was to be held at Monticello, far down on the Columbia River, a hundred miles from Olympia.

The *Columbian* said voters should meet in every precinct and elect delegates and alternates. But there was to be no limit on number. "Let all be appointed who can possibly attend," the *Columbian* urged. And the newspaper warned that "if we should fail again" (referring to lack of action after the Cowlitz convention), southern Oregon might achieve statehood before another attempt at separation could be made and "in the settlement of her boundaries, serious encroachments may have been made upon territory which nature designed should be incorporated with our own. We must be vigilant and active in arranging matters for the crises before us. Again we say, PREPARE! PREPARE!"

The tone of the exhortations in the following issue reflected the apprehension of the editors that the convention might not be well attended and therefore would not impress Delegate Lane and his colleagues. "TURN OUT! TURN OUT!" shouted the headline. "ACTION! ACTION! " Time was growing short. Delegates must be elected.

The great concern, the *Columbian* explained, was that southern Oregon would receive all favors from the federal government because all the territorial officers were down there, and because even the existence of northern Oregon might not be known in the national capital. Only through action at Monticello could that existence be made known.

"Rally! Rally!" shouted the *Columbian* in its issue of November 20. "On to the convention!" By then some of the delegates were on their way, including some who only the year before settled at two places on the Sound, New York and Alki, soon after to be known as Seattle. An even more distant settlement-Port Townsend-also sent a delegate.

One of the travelers, Quincy Brooks, was surprised to find at the Landing a young man he had known in the East, Edward J. Allen, then 22 years old, driving three yoke of oxen from Fort Vancouver

north. Brooks explained their mission and urged him to leave his oxen at the Landing and accompany the group back down the Cowlitz to take part in the convention. Allen demurred, saying he could hardly qualify as a citizen of Oregon, having just arrived. But Brooks assured him that this made no difference. What was wanted at the Monticello convention was numbers, not merely delegates bearing credentials. So, to be obliging or just for the fun of it, Allen went.

At Monticello the delegates found shelter wherever they could and gathered for their meetings in Darby Huntington's large home. Forty-four were counted as delegates. A Puget Sound man, H. G. McConaha, afterward president of the first Legislative Council, was elected chairman and Dr. R. J. White secretary. Quincy Brooks moved the appointment of a 13-member committee to undertake the all important task of drafting the memorial to Congress. Those appointed besides Brooks, who served as chairman, were Seth Catlin, known as the "sage of Monticello," D. C. (Doc) Maynard of Seattle, W. W. Plumb, Alfred Cook, John R. Jackson, Eugene L. Finch, A. F. Scott, Fred A. Clarke, C. S. Hathaway, E. H. Winslow, Nathaniel Stone and the young man who just happened by- Edward Allen.

The Monticello Memorial to Congress, drawn up and promptly adopted, was considerably shorter than the one put together at the Cowlitz convention the year before, and was far better written. The actual writer may well have been Allen, putting into words what Brooks and the others advised him to say.

Addressed to the House and Senate, the memorial said that it "respectfully represents" that northern Oregon be set apart as a new territory to be called Columbia. The Columbia River should provide the border on the south and east, the 49th parallel on the north and the Pacific Ocean on the west. The 32,000- square-mile area requested did not even approximate the vast sweep of land that was to be designated eventually as the new territory.

Numerous reasons were given to support the petition. Oregon as it stood was far too big. The regions north and south of the Columbia were economic rivals and always would be. With most of the voters in the southern part, those in the north were not getting a fair share of the appropriations from Congress. The seat of government was 300 miles from those living on Puget Sound.

The petition concluded, "Northern Oregon, with its great natural resources, presenting such unparalleled inducements to immigrants and with its present large population constantly and rapidly increasing by immigration, is of sufficient importance, in a national point of view, to merit the fostering care of Congress, and its interests are so numerous, and so entirely distinctive in their character, as to demand the attention of a separate and independent legislature." (No mention was actually made of population numbers.)

The entire convention, the *Columbian* reported, was held in a "Spirit of harmony and agreement."

The Memorial to Congress was signed by all 44 delegates. Copies were made and entrusted to the uncertain mails on December 3, 1852. On January 31, two months later, Lane wrote to Brooks acknowledging their receipt. Meanwhile, on December 6, Lane had decided to take the action he had been urged to take a year before—he introduced a resolution calling for the creation of Columbia Territory.

But news of his action did not reach the Northwest for more than two months and the northern Oregon settlers were left wondering. The *Columbian* was willing to admit to doubts about the outcome. In its issue of March 2, when it said, 'Even the most active and enthusiastic supporter of these movements [perhaps referring to the editor himself] did not think that either of the memorials would have the desired effect on Congress.'

The next week there appeared a letter from "Agricola" urging that a meeting be held in Olympia to keep the separatist movement alive and proposing that a fund be raised to send an elected delegate from northern Oregon to Congress, even though he would have no status when he arrived.

But before another meeting could be held the mails brought the welcome report of Lane's introduction of his Columbia Territory bill.

Several historians, including Clinton Snowden, Hubert Bancroft, Elwood Evans and Edmond Meany, mistakenly attributed Lane's action to the Monticello Convention. Meany noted this discrepancy in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* in January 1922. He had noticed what he and the others had overlooked—that the convention report could not have reached Lane by December 6.

So what did prompt Lane to act? It could hardly have been the Cowlitz Convention Memorial, which he had received and buried in committee a year earlier. And it was certainly not the Monticello petition itself.

Actually the historians were only partly wrong about the influence on Lane of the Monticello meeting. True, he had not received the petition by December 6, but he knew it was coming and he knew what it would say. He knew this because he had read it in the *Columbian*, which, beginning with its first issue on September 11, 1852, had been trumpeting the cause of territorial division, announcing that a convention was to be held to petition Congress again, calling for wide-spread election of delegates, and otherwise stirring up public sentiment in favor of the creation of a new territory. And he could not but notice that there was no opposition being expressed in any quarter.

Lane, as the elected representative of Oregon Territory, was simply responding to the wishes of a sizable number of his constituents when he saw in the newspapers from home that the movement was gathering great momentum and finally deserved his attention.

A further consideration was the political situation in Oregon, where a so-called "clique" of Democrats was firmly in control of the new government with the capital established at Salem.

Governor Gaines was well aware of the separatist movement in the north, as well as another in southern Oregon. Addressing himself "to friends of separate territorial government in northern Oregon as well as those of Umpqua, Rogue River, Shasta, etc.," he said a Mr. Matlock had introduced a bill for the formation of a state with a new territory on both its north and south sides. He said the boundaries of this state would probably be the Columbia River on the north and Umpqua Mountains on the south.

It is not difficult to believe that Gaines and Lane's other political allies in Oregon urged him to sponsor the division. Northern Oregon was gaining population now that the treaty with Britain had been signed. There was more free land in the north for new settlers to claim. Voter strength could grow in northern Oregon to such an extent that those in power in Salem would be threatened. Better to let the northerners go off and form their own government. The rest of Oregon was large enough for a state with- out the northern part anyway.

The Oregon legislature convened in Salem only 10 days after the Monticello convention adjourned with the two northern representatives, F. A. Chenoweth and Isaac Ebey, in attendance. Although neither had been at Monticello, they too were strongly for division and Ebey introduced a memorial to Congress supporting that proposition. It noted that in the four and a half years since Oregon Territory had been authorized by Congress, the population had spread north of the Columbia River and the people of that area "labor under great inconvenience and hardship, by reason of the great distance to which they are removed from the present territorial organizations. Communication between these two portions of the territory is difficult, casual and uncertain."

The memorial said the Columbia River was a natural dividing line and "experience has proven that when marked geographical boundaries, which have been traced by the hand of nature, have been disregarded in the formation of local governments, that sectional jealousies and local strife have seriously embarrassed their prosperity and characterized their domestic legislation." Therefore, "the time has come. to establish a separate territorial government for all that portion of Oregon Territory lying north of the Columbia River and west of the great northern branch of the same, to be known as the Territory of Columbia."

This document was adopted by the Oregon House on January 14 and the Council on January 18. Allowing a month for mail to reach Washington, it would have been mid-February before it reached Lane. Therefore it, like the Monticello Memorial, could not have influenced Lane when, on December 6, 1852, he introduced his bill to create Columbia Territory. But it is very likely that in mail communication between Lane and the territorial leaders at home he was urged, in November or earlier, to take action, or was informed by those leaders that they would not object if he undertook to follow the drastic course of excising and casting adrift half the territory.

Lane's bill came out of the Committee on Territories with favorable recommendation on February 8, 1853. It was one of several territorial bills, including those pertaining to Nebraska and Wyoming. None had completely smooth sailing. Lane's bill could have foundered on the issue of Indian land title or whether there were enough people in northern Oregon to justify the expense of setting up another territorial government.

Representative Daniel Jones of Tennessee was against Lane's bill and said so-not enough population. He moved that the bill be tabled. There followed some parliamentary maneuvering and then Lane made his speech. It was a forceful argument for Columbia, repeating much of what was written in the Cowlitz and Monticello memorials.

At one point he was interrupted by Representative Charles Skelton of New Jersey, who asked what was the population of northern Oregon. Lane was ready with a skillful though evasive answer: as much population as the whole of Oregon Territory had had when it was admitted in 1848. The answer seemed to satisfy the questioner. And well that it did, for if Lane had been forced to put out a number, and he had been honest about it, he could not have said there were as many as 2,000 white citizens north of the Columbia River.

In his remarks Lane emphasized that the regions on both sides of the Columbia River were essentially the same-heavily forested with much good soil for farming. Each side, he said, would make a fine state. Congress had invited people to move West when it passed the donation land claim law. Now it had an obligation to provide adequate government for those who were responding to the invitation.

Upon the completion of Lane's speech, a new issue was injected into the proceedings. Suddenly the question was not whether the new territory should be created, but what name it should be called. Representative Richard Stanton of Kentucky rose and moved that the bill be amended by striking the word "Columbia" wherever it occurred and substituting "Washington."

Lane, perhaps sensing that this would give his colleagues new

reason to vote for his bill-to give honor to the first president-without hesitation said, "I shall never object to that name."

Jones persisted in his effort to get a vote on his motion to table the bill, but he was interrupted by Representative Edward Stanley of North Carolina who made a short speech favoring the name Washington. "There is something very appropriate about it," Stanley said. " And it is a little singular that this same idea should have occurred to others at the same time." He had suggested it to his seat mate moments before, but he realized it "might lead to trouble" if there should be a city of Washington in a state by that name. "Washington, Washington" would hardly do.

The House then voted favorably on the motion to substitute "Washington" for "Columbia" without being told that it was contrary to the wishes of the people involved, emphatically expressed many times. That taken care of, the consideration of the bill itself was put aside while the House took up debate on a bill to create the territory of Nebraska.

One congressman made an attempt to restore the name "Columbia" to the Washington bill. Representative Alexander Evans of Maryland agreed that no one would object to honoring George Washington but, he said, "our geographical nomenclature has become such a mass of confusion that it is almost impossible, when you hear the name of a town, to know in what part of the world it is, much less to know in what part of the United States it may be found. We have perhaps in this country one hundred counties and towns of the name of Washington." Evans suggested giving northern Oregon "one of the beautiful Indian names which prevail in that part of the country." But it was too late. "Washington" had already been substituted for "Columbia" all through the bill, and that is the way it passed the House.

On March 2 the bill went before the Senate where it was quickly approved with no debate. "It is one of the old-fashioned territorial bills," one senator explained, and so needed no discussion.

The *National Intelligencer*, a leading newspaper of that time, published in Washington, D.C., was not happy with the choice of name for the new territory on the West Coast. It said the name choice "contributes fresh confusion to our already confused nomenclature [and] will have to be changed."

But it was never changed and the confusion that the *Intelligencer* foresaw did materialize, making it necessary for residents of Washington on the West Coast to add the word "state" to the name to avoid being confused with the city on the Potomac. Historian Julian Hawthorne commented in 1893 that "it would have been far better to have retained the name first selected. ..but as all things yielded to him [George Washington]" after the revolution, "so the name Washington appears to have been equally irresistible in 1853."

Harvey Scott, pioneer Oregon editor and historian, blamed the change entirely on Representative Stanton, noting that he was a native of the capital city. Stanton surely was aware of the several failed attempts to fund the preservation of Mt. Vernon, Washington's estate on the lower Potomac. This failure could be considered a slight to the first president. Naming a territory after him would help atone for allowing his home to decay. (Later a group of Southern women bought the property and has maintained it since.) Scott wrote that almost every state had a county or town named Washington, and although several also had a Columbia or a Columbus, it was unfortunate that the name preferred by those who would live in the new territory was rejected. Bestowing the name "Columbia" would have made up in some measure for the name of Amerigo Vespucci being given to the continent when that distinction rightly belonged to Columbus.

The act took away more than half of Oregon Territory and made it into Washington Territory. The dividing line was the middle of the channel of the Columbia River from its mouth to the 46th parallel near Fort Walla Walla, then eastward along that degree to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, where it turned north to the Canadian border. It was a big territory.

News that the House had passed the bill, and changed the name to Washington, reached Olympia in early April. The size of the favorable vote, 128 to 29, made the *Columbian* confident that it would soon get Senate approval. Commenting on the name change, the news- paper remarked, "Although Washington is not the name with which we prayed that our infant might be christened, yet it is certainly a very beautiful one. Nevertheless this novelty has met with some distaste among many of our citizens, whilst with others it met with enthusiastic applause. It will be remembered that our Memorial prayed for the name 'Columbia '-this the House refused to grant us. Be it so. Even if the name 'Columbia' had our preferences, we would not cavil at a name when principles are at stake. It is a mere difference in taste, and the people of northern Oregon are not sticklers for trifles."

The settlers were obviously so pleased that their efforts were succeeding that they did not want to risk delaying or impeding final approval by objecting to the name the House had chosen, much as they preferred "Columbia."

On April 30, the *Columbian* was able to report the final good news: "The Territory of Washington is a fixed fact. Henceforth northern Oregon has an independent existence, and a destiny to achieve separate and distinct from that of her southern neighbor. She has been baptized by the Congress into a new name-a name Glorious and dear to every American heart. Everywhere, throughout the length and breadth of the Territory the news will be received with joyful acclamations. The separate organization which the citizens of northern Oregon with earnestness, and, may

we say, entire unanimity, have ardently wished and labored for, has been triumphantly achieved."

Thus Washington Territory came into being. It was a kind of political phenomenon. In 1846 only eight Americans lived north of the Columbia River. Two years later when Oregon Territory was created only a few more resided there. When the movement for separation was launched in 1851 the population may have reached a thousand, although when a census was taken in mid-1853 the new territory was found to have 3,965 persons, of which 1,682 were voters. This number of people had governance over all that is now Washington, plus northern Idaho and the part of Montana lying west of the Rockies. That vastness was not to endure for long, however, but when the boundaries were finally drawn, the new territory had far more area than the delegates meeting at Monticello had asked for.

One can speculate on how different the course of the region's history might have been. What is now Washington might very well have become a part of Canada. If neither Great Britain, which insisted that the boundary be the Columbia River, nor the United States, even more insistent that it be at 54°40", had backed down, the issue conceivably could have been settled by armed conflict, which was threatened, or by arbitration. And if the United States had lost, the Canadian border would now be the Columbia River.

A difference was made by the start of American migration into the region by the Simmons party in 1844 and the failure earlier of the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a permanent colony of Canadians at Cowlitz and Nisqually. If Canadians rather than Americans had been living on Puget Sound in 1846, London might have taken a different stance in the negotiations of that year.

Almost certainly there would have been no Washington if the first settlers had not launched a movement to divide Oregon Territory or if they had delayed doing it. And they might not have bestirred themselves to conclusive action had it not been for the newspaper that came into being and revived interest that began to lag when the initial appeal for a separate territory brought no response. The enthusiasm stirred up by the *Columbian* was infectious. It convinced all with repeated argument and exhortation that separation need not be just a dream. Delegate Lane's reading of the early issues of the *Columbian* is probably what convinced him that he should heed the wishes of the northern Oregonians and introduce a bill to create a new territory. He knew another memorial would be forthcoming from the convention at Monticello that was being promoted enthusiastically by the *Columbian*, and when it did arrive, amid debate on his resolution to create Columbia Territory, he had the clerk read the text to the assembled House of Representatives.

The timing of the settlers' action was critical. If nothing had been done in the early 1850s, it is likely that Oregon would never have

been divided. The building of roads and the establishment of river steamboat transportation in the late 1850s, with resulting better mail service and improved travel facilities, would have removed the main reasons a division was asked for—the distance and travel time between the two parts of the territory. If the settlers had decided to be patient and wait for what they needed, the efforts needed to achieve a division, not hard to arouse in 1851, might not have been forthcoming and Oregon would have remained whole.

It might be contended that because Oregon was so large, it would likely have been divided eventually anyway. But California was larger and it remained intact.

Washington came into being at the only time when division was feasible, as it would surely not have been later when the institutions of government in Oregon had become more firmly established, when there were more voters and when it would not have been possible for a mere handful of men to gather on a riverbank and represent themselves as the spokesmen for all those within hundreds of miles in asking for a separate government.

No opposition at all developed within the territory to the separation proposals. The political leaders in the Willamette Valley, firmly in control of the new Oregon government, and seeing the seeds of continuing north-south contention in an acrimonious dispute over the location of the capital, not only did not oppose giving up half or more of their territory; they actually gave it their blessing.

Because 36 years had to go by before statehood was achieved, it might be contended that Washington Territory must have come into being prematurely. Perhaps so, but it would not have come into being at all had it not been for the aggressive action of the first settlers.

We who are quite sure that we are better off with a state of our own, whatever its name, can admire and be grateful for those pioneers of long ago for their audacity, courage, persistence and foresight—all qualities which, when they appeared at the right time, led in successive steps to a triumphant conclusion, laying the solid foundations of what became the state of Washington.

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The foregoing article is based on an 1986 Pettyjohn Lecture in history given by the author at Washington State University.

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