

Letitia Carson: Her Story



As Told by Dr. Bob Zybach, NW Maps Co.

Axe & Fiddle History Pub * July 11, 2023, 5:00 PM * CGGS, Cottage Grove, Oregon

African American Contributions to Early Oregon (1774-1860)

(Proposed Course Outline: MU 215, Tuesdays, 7:15 P.M.)

Bob Zybach, Instructor: January 17-March 7, 1989

This course will attempt to perform three functions. First, it will try to illuminate African American influences upon early Oregon history by concentrating upon the contributions and experiences of key black individuals. Second, it will try, by example, to place the roles of other contemporary minorities (particularly Indians, Metis, Hawaiians, and Chinese) into a better historical focus. Finally, it will attempt to show the value of historical information in regards to current individual opportunities and long term community planning.

The following outline is for a weekly lecture/discussion accompanied by a mix of proposed readings drawn from current books and magazines and from historical records such as journals, correspondence, newspapers, and memoirs:

January 17: Course Outline and Objectives. The initial meeting will be used to state the objectives listed above, describe the outline listed below, assign texts, and to ask and answer basic questions. Select current and recent events - such as urban gang problems, the Jackson campaign speeches in Corvallis and Jacksonville, and the opportunity of trade with China - will be discussed within the context of specific information to be covered during the course. If time permits, a rudimentary outline of early Oregon history will be given.

January 24: Legends and Explorations (500-1806). This meeting will concentrate upon the importance of the sea otter trade to the exploration of the northwest and upon the claims of Russia, Spain, England, and the United States to the area first named "New Albion." The current legal definition of the "natural" environment found along the Oregon coast and the western part of the Columbia River will also be examined. Personalities to be discussed will include Marcus Lopus, York, and Kilchis.

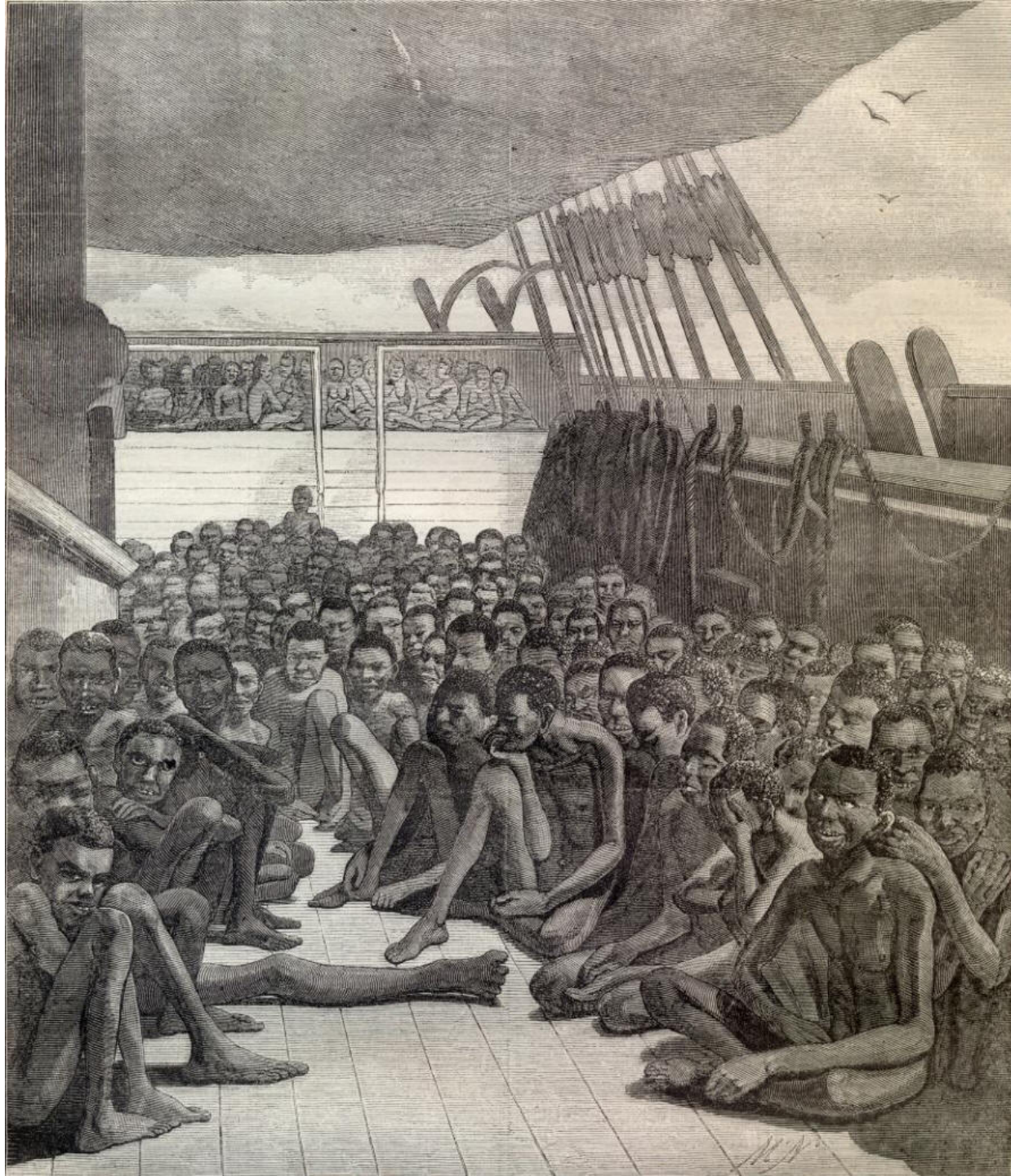
January 31: Mountain Men (1807-1833). This meeting will discuss the transition from otter to beaver as the medium of exchange in the northwest, the importance of Mountain Men to eventual American control of the western United States, and the joint occupancy of the "Oregon Country" by England and the U.S. The lives and careers of Edward Rose, James Beckwourth, and Moses "Black" Harris will be outlined.

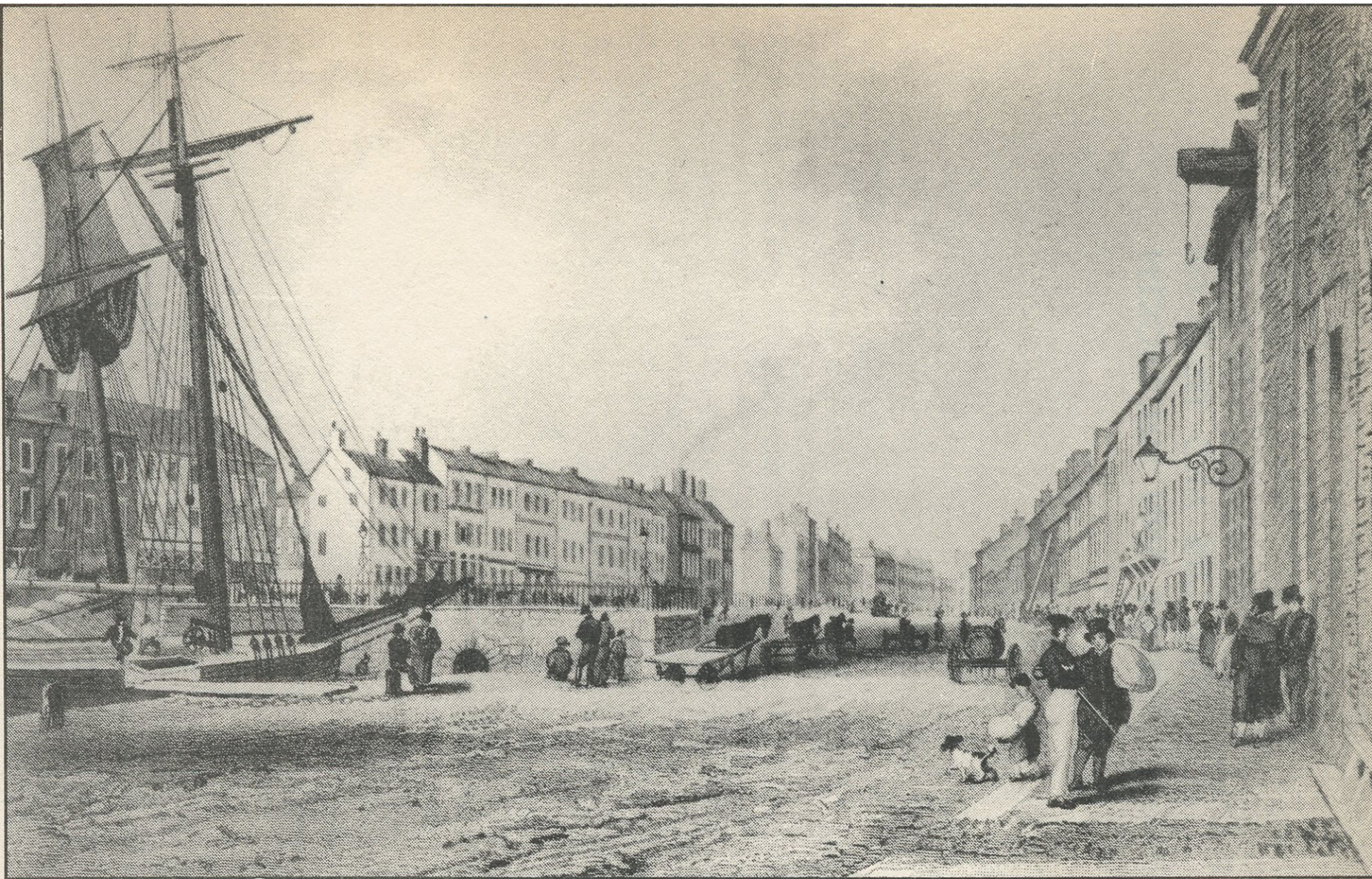
February 7: Pioneers (1834-1849). This meeting will discuss the decimation of western Oregon Indians by disease, the settlement of the Willamette Valley by French Canadians and Americans, and the changes in local vegetation brought about by the replacement of wildlife populations with domestic livestock. The contributions of Winslow Anderson, George Washington Bush, and Letitia Carson will be highlighted.

February 14: Settlers (1850-1856). This meeting will examine the settlement patterns of Americans arriving in the Oregon Territory over the "Oregon Trail," the "expulsion" laws of the Provisional and Territorial









HIGH STREET, BELFAST, c. 1810



The course and
watershed
of the
**Mississippi
River**

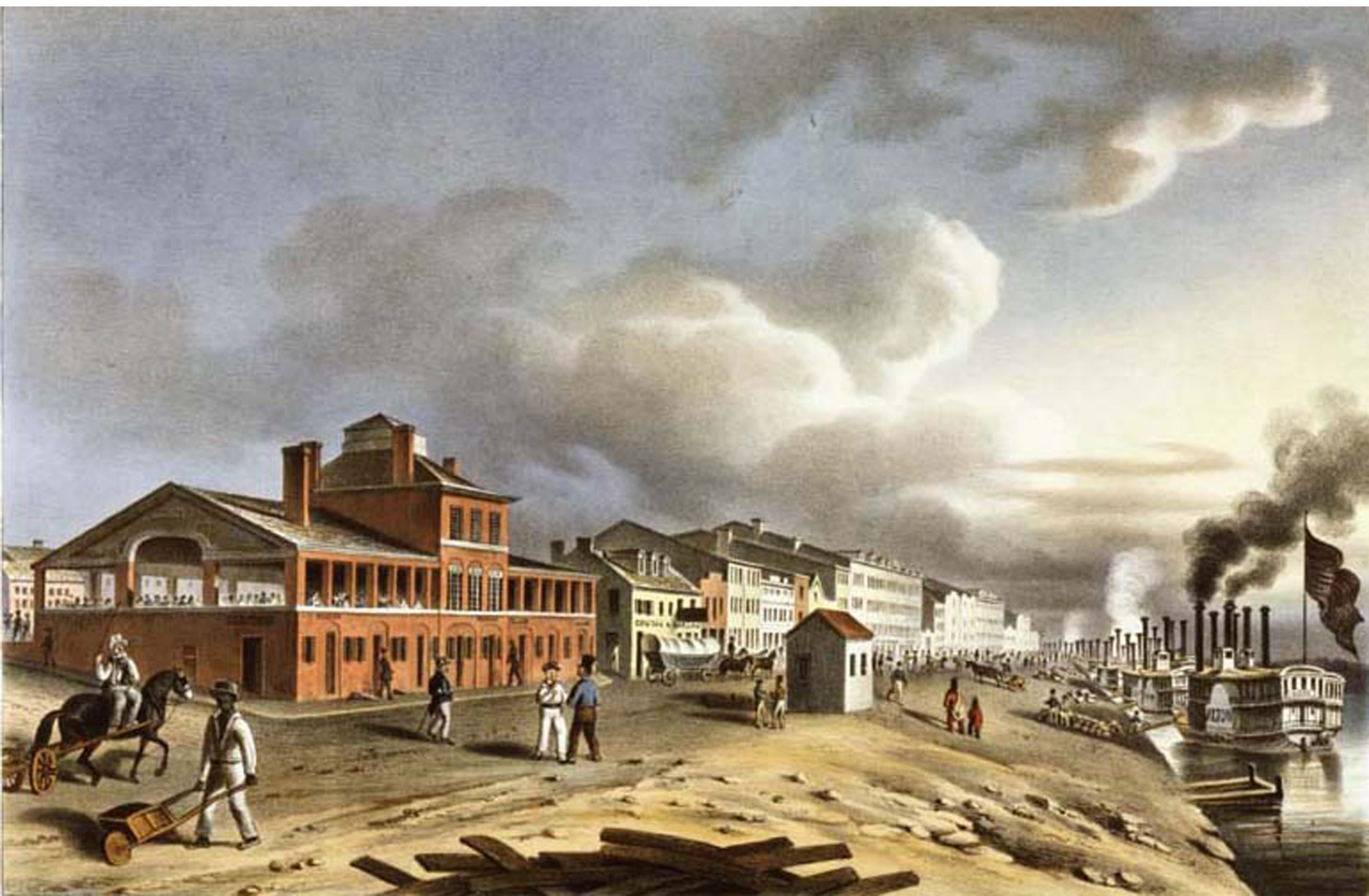
The Father of Waters

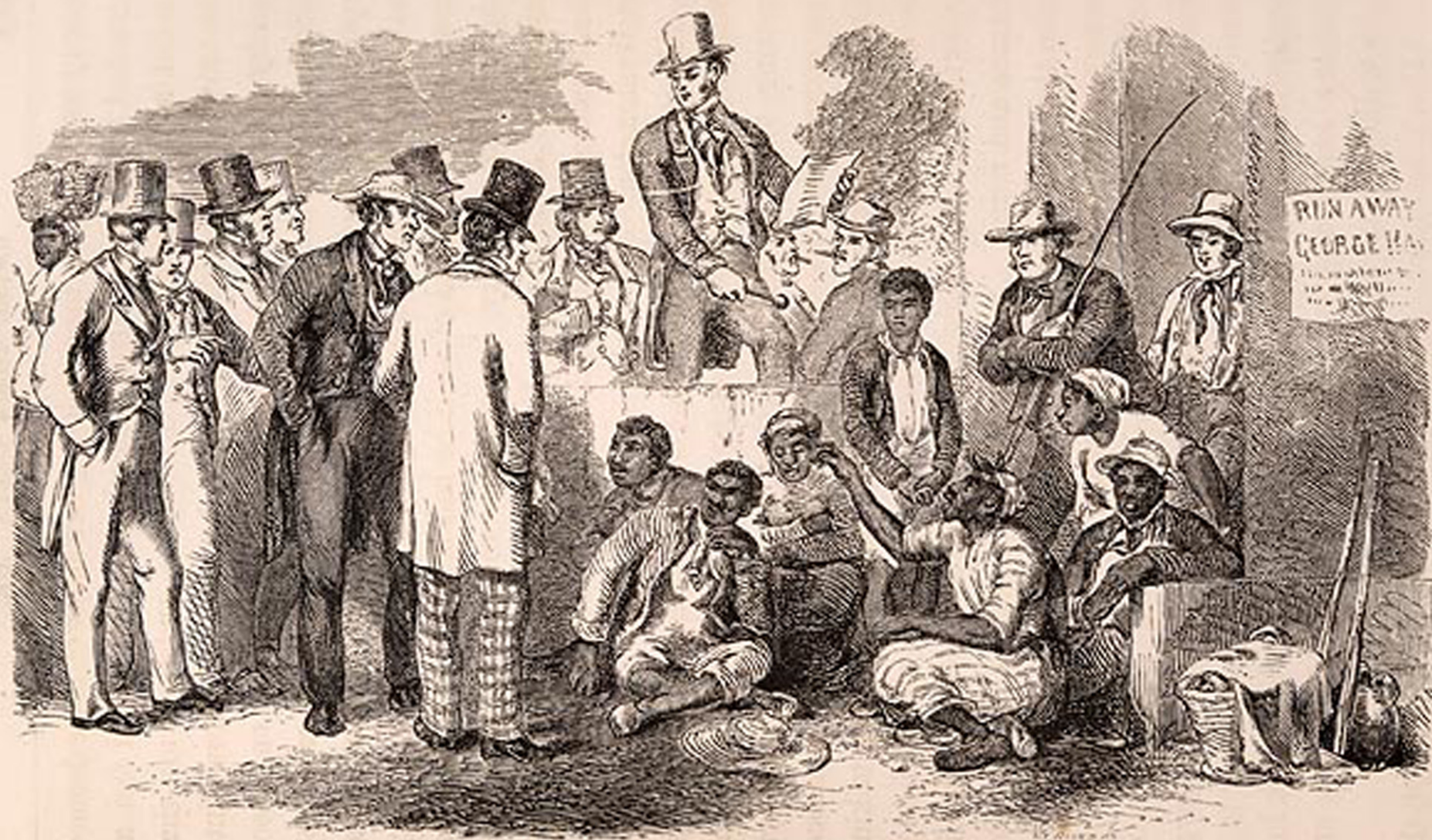
200 Miles

400 Km

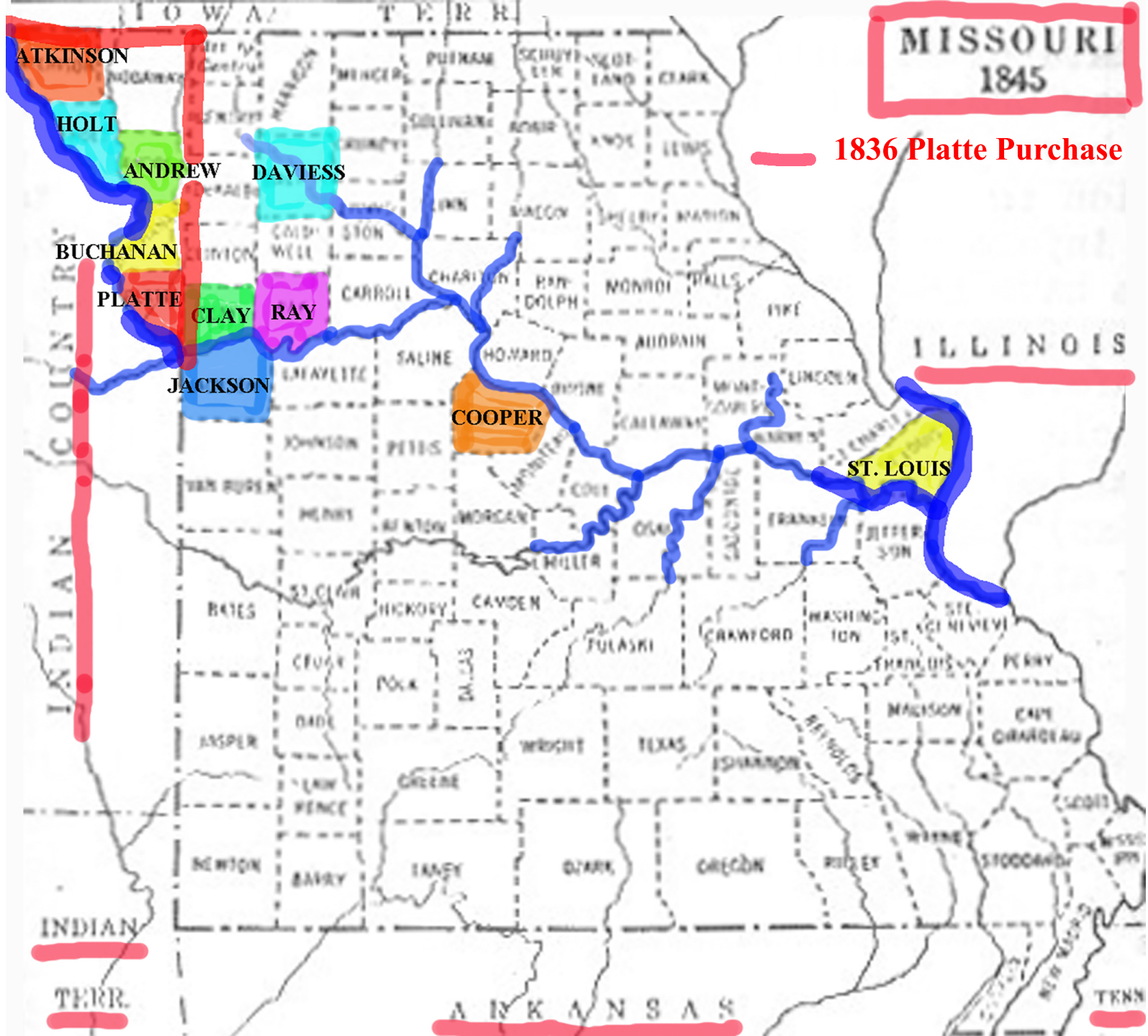


SHORPY





THE AUCTION SALE. Page 174.





CENSUS OF THE O. EMIGRATION.

	Armed Men	Persons	Wag's.	Meal lbs.	Flour lbs.	Bacon lbs.	Powd & Lead
C. M. Johnson	5	10	3	300	1700	500	17 & 68
Zachariah Moreland	2	10	2	350	1000	400	6 17
Alford Marcum	3	8	2	400	1000	422	13 18
Daniel D. Bailey	5	12	2	300	1430	500	10 16
John Ridgeway	3	7	2	125	950	300	12 30
Joseph Cunningham	2	9	1	450	900	350	9 20
Franklin Pomeroy	2	4	1	200	600	300	6 11
William Kitchen	1	5	1	200	600	300	6 11
James Officer	4	12	4	400	1800	680	25 45
Christopher Cooley	2	9	2	400	1000	300	6 20
William Wilson	2	7	2	500	800	350	7 28
John Loyd	3	11	2	500	1700	600	11 19
Andrew Foster	5	7	2	300	1200	370	25 25
Jacob Wooley	1	6	2	1000	500	300	3 12
Lewis Thompson	4	4	1	200	600	150	14 20
Abraham Patterson	1	3	1	300	350	200	7 12
H. M. Knighton	4	8	2	250	1400	425	6 12
William Wilson	2	7	2	500	800	350	7 20
William Dawson	2	5	1	50	600	200	12 30
H. D. Martin	2	3	1	50	600	200	12
David Carson	3	4	1	100	600	600	10 20
Adam Smith	3	8	2	150	1000	500	8 22
Robert W. Hamilton	1	8	1		700	300	2 4
John Martin	2	7	1		900	350	5 20
James E. Hall	5	15	2	250	1100	350	15 38
Jesse E. Henderson	3	9	2	250	1200	425	12 10
Joseph Hughart	3	8	2	250	1200	425	10
Nicholas Ownbey	6	12	4	1250	1000	500	13 30
Woodford Holman	1	6	1	200	1200	300	
Solomon Tetherow	4	13	3	300	1600	100	27 50
Joseph Henderson	2	5	1	125	600	180	6 12
Charles Craft	2	8	2	200	1000	400	7 15
William Helm	3	9	2		1400	450	6 20
George Smith	2	8	1	150	1200	400	4 8
David Tetherow	1	7	1	150	750	300	
Robert Miller	4	19	4	300	2900	700	25 32

Totals 100 293 66 10450 37280 13980 354 752

CATTLE DRIVERS

males over 14	males under 14	males und.	Loose Cattle	Oxen	Mules & Horses	Guns & Pistols
2	1	2	James W. Johnson	30	13	4 10
2	3	4	Francis M. Moreland	111	12	3 3
2	1	1	Joseph Watt	7	12	1 7
3	3	1	Daniel D. Bailey	6	12	
1		3	Rodolphus Kent	19	8	3 5
1	4	2	Samuel Hancock	4	6	
1	1		Samuel Hancock		6	1
2	1	3	Reason Foster	25	6	1
			James Officer, John &			
2	2	4	Eli Officer	20	22	3 9
1	4	2	James Cooley	4	10	1 3
4	1	3	Abner Loyd	24	18	6 5
1	1		James Foster	16	14	6 4
2	1	2	Edward Wooley	5	8	
			Lewis Thompson, P. Hil-			
			terbrand, F. Kitchen	60	6	3 4
1	1		Lewis Thompson	15	8	1 1
			John Moore, H. M.			
2	2		Knighton	30	12	3 9
3			William Wilson	8	10	3 3
1	2		William Dawson	8	6	2 3
1			H. D. Martin	13	6	2 4
1			H. D. Martin	1	8	2 4
2	1	2	Adam Smith, Ezekiel	17	12	1 7
1	2	4	Adam Smith	1	4	
1	2		William Martin	6	6	1 4
3	3	4	James Jackson	19	12	3 7
2	3	1	James O. Henderson	20	12	1 4
2	2	2	Wayman St. Clair	6	12	2 3
			Thomas W. Glasgow, W.			
1	2	3	A. Goulder, D. McKinny	80	22	5 13
			Dillard Helm Goul-			
2	1	1	der Impiry	13	8	22 4
3	1	5	Solomon Tetherow	22	30	6 11
2		1	Solomon Tetherow	16	6	3 3
3	2	1	William Craft	8	12	1 3
1	1	4	John W. Helm	18	12	1 3
1	2	3	George Smith	13	8	
1	2	3	George Tetherow	3	2	
			Robert Miller R. E.			
5	4	5	Miller	24	32	5 15
63	56	68	<i>Totals</i>	624	398	74 170

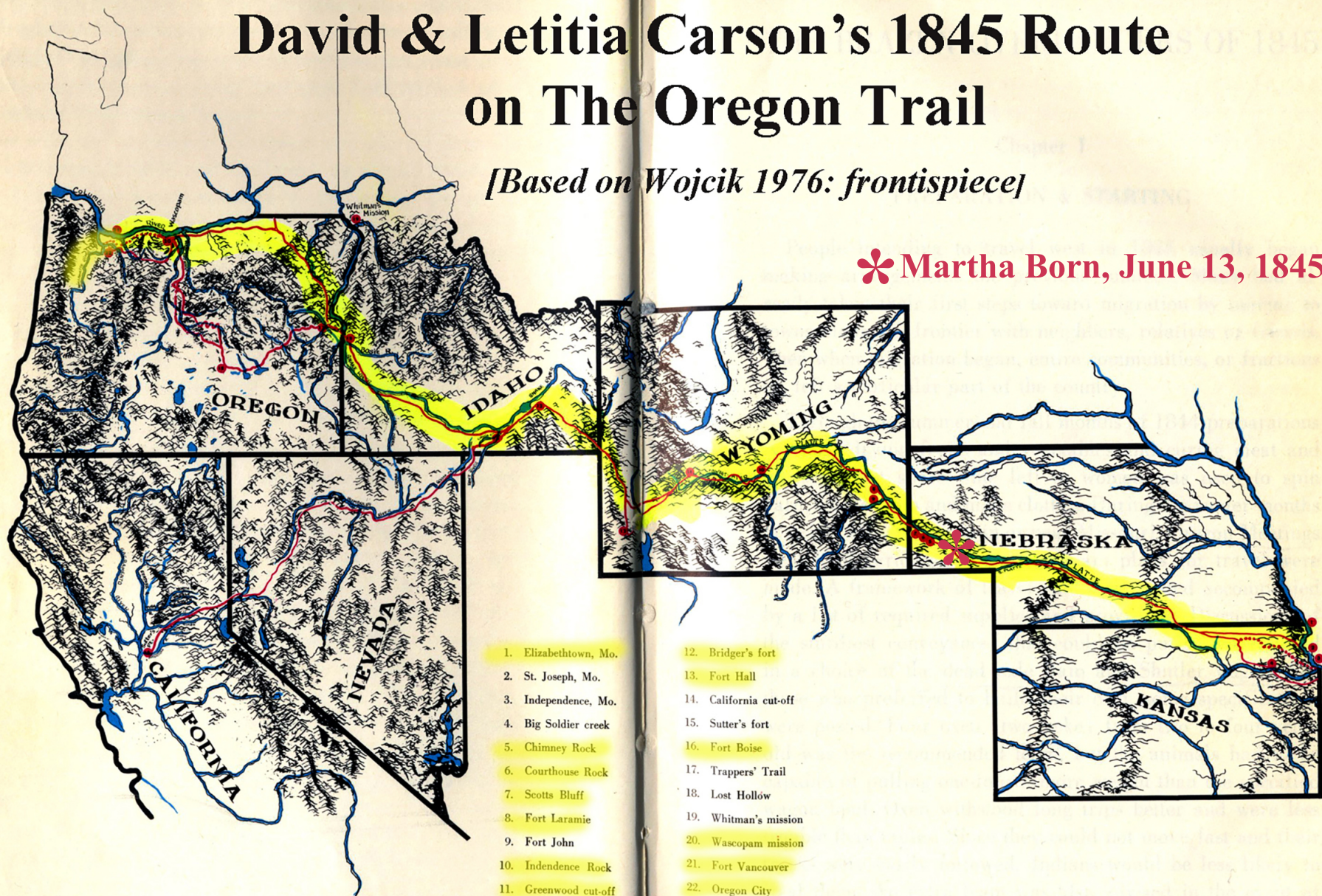


A collectible line drawing by Oregon Artist Ron Conrad, suitable for framing, commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Oregon Trail over which pioneers made the greatest voluntary migration in the history of the United States of America.
Courtesy of Cooley's Gardens, Silverton, OR. 1993.

David & Letitia Carson's 1845 Route on The Oregon Trail

[Based on Wojcik 1976: frontispiece]

✿ Martha Born, June 13, 1845



1. Elizabethtown, Mo.
2. St. Joseph, Mo.
3. Independence, Mo.
4. Big Soldier creek
5. Chimney Rock
6. Courthouse Rock
7. Scotts Bluff
8. Fort Laramie
9. Fort John
10. Indendence Rock
11. Greenwood cut-off
12. Bridger's fort
13. Fort Hall
14. California cut-off
15. Sutter's fort
16. Fort Boise
17. Trappers' Trail
18. Lost Hollow
19. Whitman's mission
20. Wascopam mission
21. Fort Vancouver
22. Oregon City









Nisqually Half Caste Indians Gambling



53. Grand Ball at Fort Victoria, October 6, 1845 (*Photograph of the original*)

Pencil, in Warre's journal
4 6/16 x 7 2/16 in. 111 x 181 mm.

Inventory No. MG 24 F 71, Vol. II, p. 1341

Negative No. C-58113

53. Grand bal au fort Victoria, le 6 octobre 1845 (*Photographie de l'original*)

Graphite. Tiré du journal de Warre
4-6/16 x 7-2/16 po (111 x 181 mm)

Inventaire n° MG 24 F 71, vol. II, p. 1341

Négatif n° C-58113



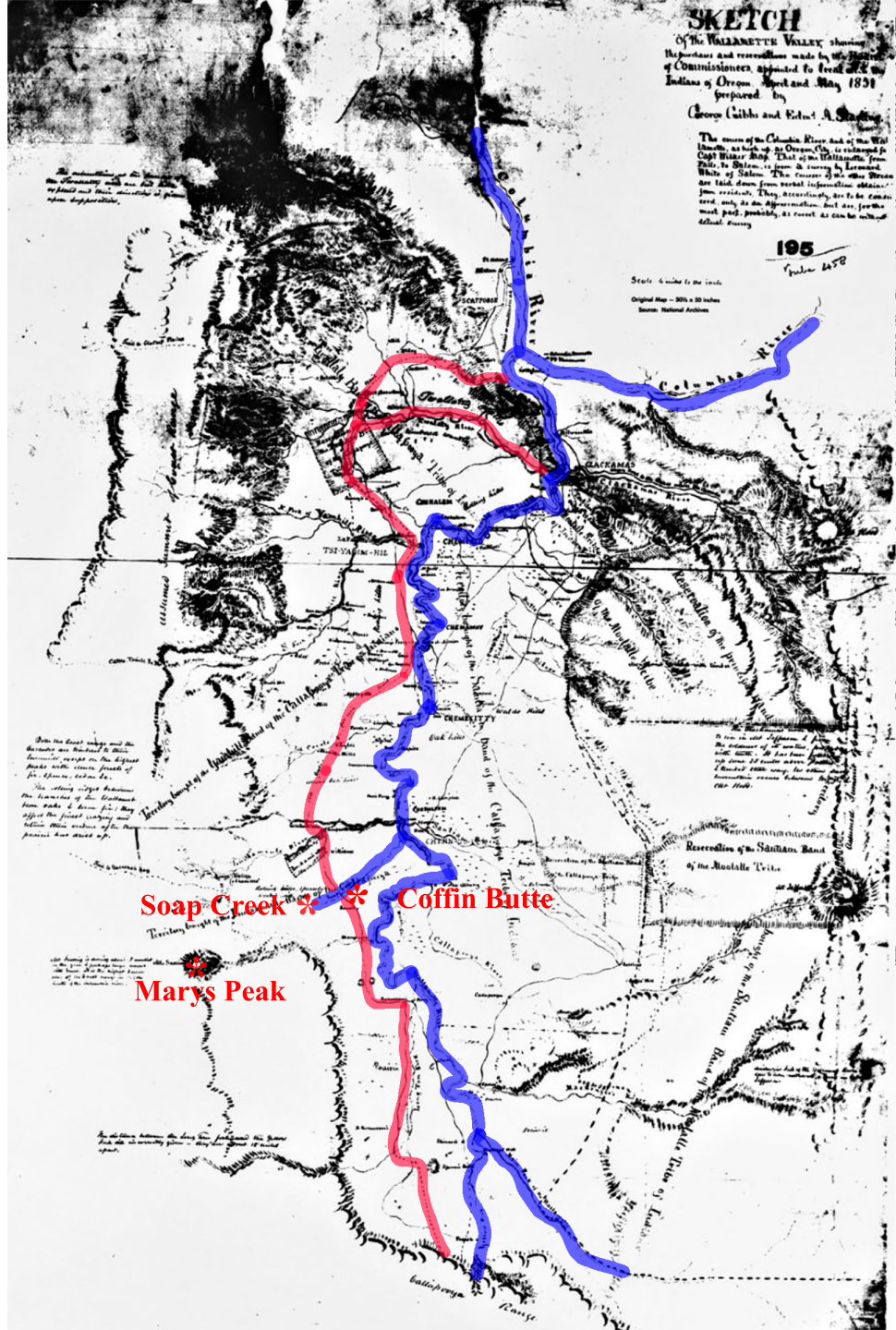
59. AMERICAN SETTLEMENT, WALLAMATTA RIVER, CALLED OREGON CITY.

SKETCH
OF THE WILANETTE VALLEY showing
 the purchases and reservations made by the
 Commissioners appointed to treat with the
 Indians of Oregon April and May 1851
 prepared by
 George Gibbs and Edwin A. Stearns

The course of the Columbia River back of the Will
 Wamette, as laid up in Oregon, Co., is indicated in
 Capt. Winter's Map. That of the Willamette, from
 Willamette Falls to Salem, is from a survey by Leonard
 White of Salem. The course of the other streams
 are laid down from verbal information obtained
 from various sources. They, accordingly, are to be con-
 sidered only as an approximation, but are, for the
 most part, probably, as correct as can be with-
 out actual survey.

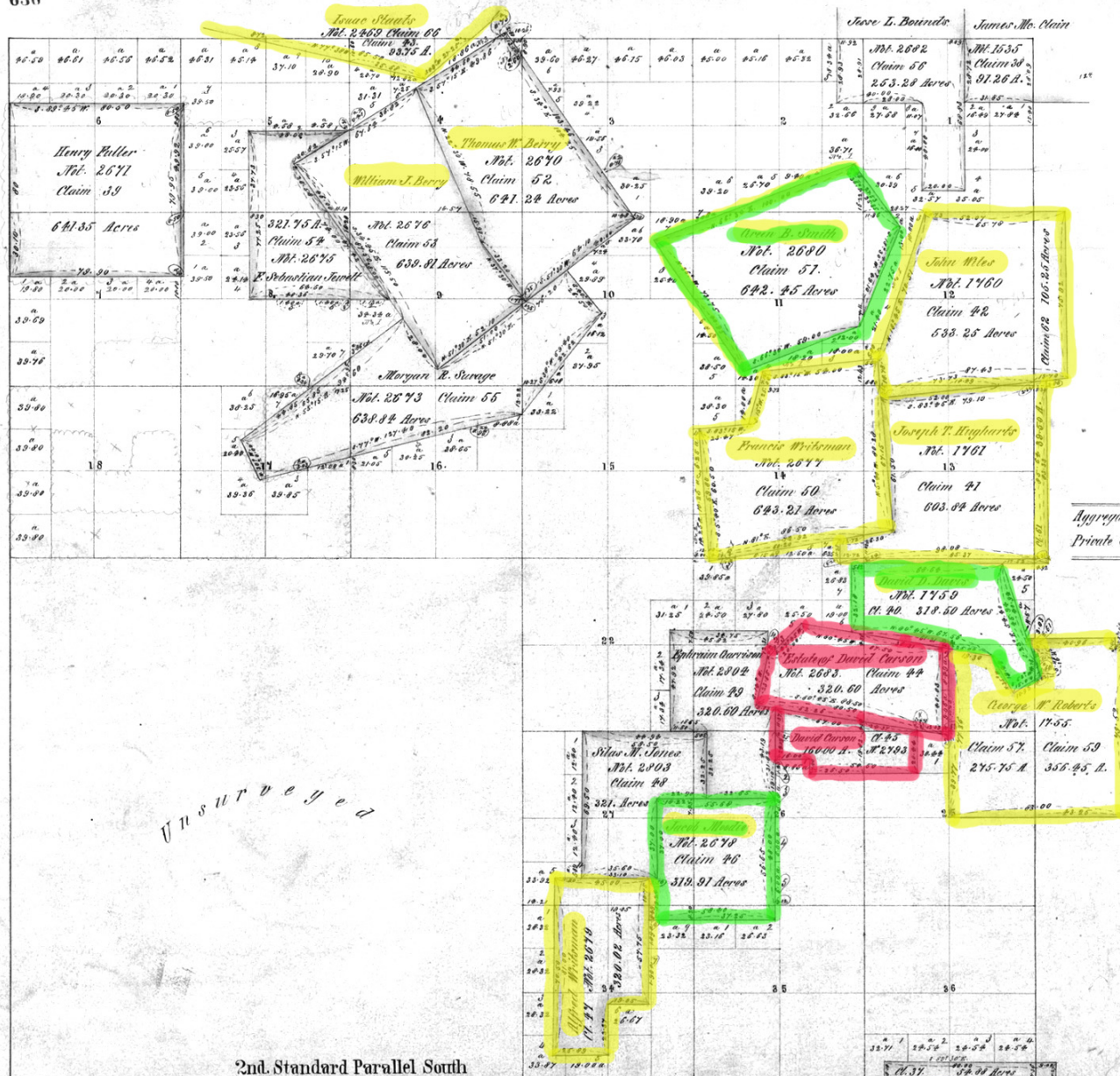
195
 July 1878

Scale: 4 miles to the inch
 Original Map - 300 x 20 inches
 Source: National Archives



Soap Creek * * Coffin Butte
 Marys Peak





Aggregate Area of public land, 3252.57
Private Surveys 8155.23

1742486
570920
2318906

2nd Standard Parallel South

The above Map of the Survey of Claims in Township No 10 South Range No 5 West of the Willamette Meridian State of Oregon is strictly conformable to the field notes of the Survey thereof on file in this Office, which have been examined and approved.

Surveyor General's Office
Eugene City March 6th 1890

M. H. Chapmann





Appraisement of the stock, agricultural implements and household furniture belonging to the estate of David Carson, deceased

1 bindel steer		\$ 45. —
1 3 year old red steer		" 50. —
1 yoke white oxen		" 80. —
1 " oxen		" 100. —
3 yearling heifers	\$15. — each	" 45. —
2 steer calves	" 12. — "	" 60. —
1 red bull		" 30. —
2 yearling steers	" 15. — "	" 30. —
3 2 year old steers	" 30. — "	" 90. —
4 2 " heifers	" 35. — "	" 140. —
12 cows & 2 calves	" 45. — "	" 540. —
26 hogs	" 3. — "	" 78. —
1 4 year old horse		" 45. —
1 wagon		" 35. —
3 leg chains	" 2. — "	" 6. —
1 Gun		" 15. —
7 pieces pot metal		" 10. —
1 lot cup boardware		" 15. —
2 trunks & bedding & books		" 20. —
1 clock		" 6. —
1 watch		" 5. —
1 spade		" 1.50

forwarded \$ 1446.50

1/2 doz. Chairs

Tools & bench view.

4 furkins 1 cask & Bucket.

— brot forward \$1446.50

4.00

6.—

6.—

\$1462.50

Jacob Modie }
Davies, D. G. } Appraisers

Omitted to appraise and added according to
the bill of sale the following articles
The calf taken at fifteen dollars when
found by the administrator

1 Shovel

\$ 2.00

1 harrow

18.00

1 plow

22.50

1 calf

15.—

1/2 in a potatoe patch

17.—

1 Thermometer

1.80

\$ 76.30

Amount of appraisement 1462.50

\$ 1538.80

Appraisement

Witness Jan 12/52
A. G. Harvey
Clerk

N. Davis	1/2 in a patch of potatoes	\$	17.50	
	1 furkin		25	
	1 Churn		50	
	1 small furkin		4	
	1 lot of carpenters tools		1	
	1 bucket		25	
	1 milkstrainer		5	
	1 clock		92	
	1 yoke white oxen		57	
x	1 red cow		18	
	5 hogs		13	
	5 hogs		10	
	5 hogs		5	
				\$223.50
N. Carson	1 bucket		0.50	
	1 iron pot & lid		2.50	
	2 large dishes		1.25	
	1 copper kettle		1.25	
	4 plates		60	
	4 small pans		1.50	
	5 cups & saucers		1	
	1 trunk		1.50	
	1 lot shirts & drawers		1.50	11.60
J. Moody	1 furkin		75	
	1 set 1/2 doz tumblers		40	
	1 tin pan		40	2.55
L. Carson	1 tub		1.00	
	1 large iron pot		1.25	
	1 skillet & lid		2	
	1/2 doz plates		1.12	
	1 best bedding		10	
x	1 roan cow		53.50	
	1 skindle cow & calf		36.00	104
J. Wheeler	1 cask		1	
	1 pitcher		1	
	1 bible		1.50	
	1 gun		12	
	1 plow		22.50	
	1 log chain		4.75	42.75
M. Hodges	1 iron pot and lid		2.50	
	1 summer vest		25	
	1 hat		3.00	5.75
J. Fluhert	1 iron pen		9.50	
	1 spade		1.55	
	1 horse		62	64.05
	forwarded			\$455.07

Wherein I have hundred and forty two
Dollars it being full of and Debts
Due and Demands against the Estate
of Anne Larion Decd this the 2nd 1853
David Carr

Applegate Trail

1856

HENRY SMALLS

WILLIAM SHIELDS

Robert Alexander's Claim

Ja^s Chapin's

The above Messrs. &c.

Territory of Oregon
Benton County ss
Leutishia Carson plff
vs.

Gran B Smith
Administrator of the Estate
of David Carson deceased
Def^t

In the District Court
of the United States
in Her said County
Oct term AD 1834

Leutishia Carson plff
in the above entitled action by A J Thayer
her atty Complains of the Def^t Gran B
Smith Administrator of the Estate of
David Carson deceased For that whereas
the said Plaintiff worked labored & performed
services for the said David Carson during his life
time & at his special instance & request for the
term of seven years & six months in the County of
Benton Territory of Oregon and also on the road
between while crossing the plains between the
State of Missouri & said Territory, which said
work labor & services were done & performed between
the 1st day of May in the year AD 1828 and the
1st day of March AD 1833, ^{And that} which said work
labor & services were reasonably worth the
just & full sum of one thousand dollars over
& above all stopps, Wherefore said plff
Claims ~~claims~~ ^{one thousand dollars} that
there is ^{now} justly due here over & above all stopps
the sum of one thousand dollars, besides
the costs of this action for which she
brings suit

Dated Corvallis Sept 22 AD 1834

A J Thayer

Plffs Atty.

May Term AD 1833

Be it remembered that on this seventh day of May one thousand eight hundred and fifty five, The United States District Court for the County of Benton and Territory of Oregon commenced its regular session at the Court house in said county; present honorable Geo W Williams Judge &c

At which said term the following proceedings were had that is to say

Lutishia Carson }
vs
Greenberry Smith }
Administrators &c }

Now on this day came the Plaintiff by Thayer and Smith her attorneys and the Defd by Logan and Kilsay his attorneys and issue being joined thereupon came a jury to wit James L Bonnas, William P Smith, Alfred Kinchard, Wiley Winkler Joseph Simicks George Belknap John Bryant John Hillhouse, George Knowlton, Galatin Atkins, Lazarus Vankeber and William P. Carchwell who were duly sworn and sworn and after hearing the whole case gave the following verdict to wit "we the jury for the Plaintiff the sum of three hundred dollars, Thereupon it was ordered and adjudged by the Court that said plaintiff have judgment and execution for said sum of three hundred dollars together with her costs in this behalf to be taxed

Oregon Territory
Benton County ss
Bretstie Carson plff

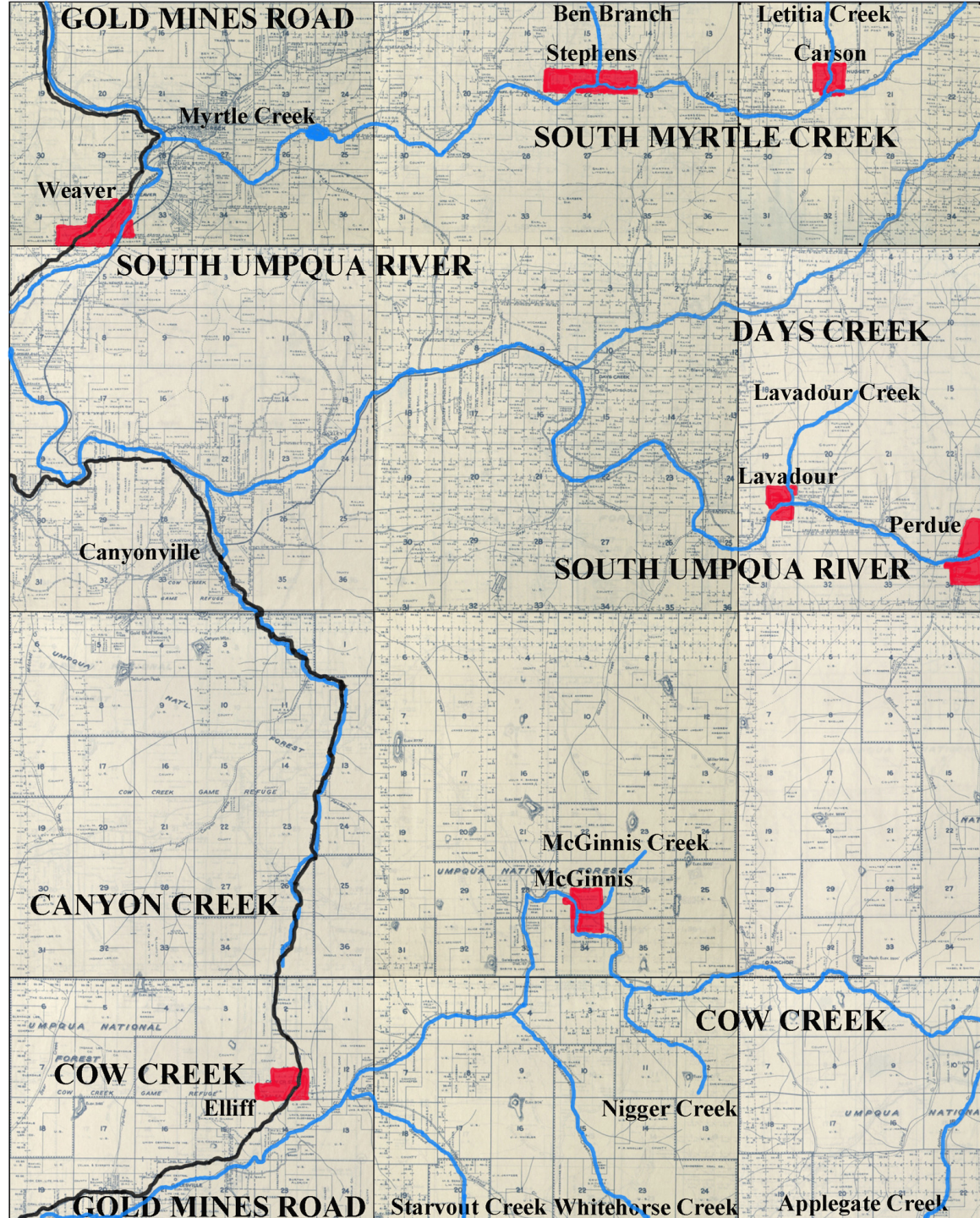
vs
Greenbury Smith Admin-
istrator of the Estate
of David Carson deceased
Def

In the W District
Court in & for said Co
Nov Oct term AD 1836

I hereby Certify that at
the above mentioned term of Court held;
on the 2nd day of Oct AD 1836 judgment was
rendered in said action by the Court for
the sum of \$1200. Damages in favor of
the above named plff & against the
Estate of said David Carson deceased
besides the costs which amount to
to sum of \$199.95 Judgment and
Costs amounting in all to the sum
of \$1399.95.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set
my hand and the Seal of said Court
officed, this 2^d day of December,
AD 1836

Thos Odmeal Clerk



ALICE ELLIFF

AUG. 1854 - OCT. 1855

DAUGHTER OF HARDY AND MELVINA ELLIFF

DIED DURING THE ROGUE INDIAN WARS

FIRST WHITE CHILD BORN IN THE COW CREEK VALLEY

(UPPER COW CREEK TO GLENDALE)

Letitia Creek

Carson

SOUTH MYRTLE CREEK



APPLICATION,

g. 103.

HOMESTEAD.

LAND OFFICE at

Roseburg, Oregon, June 17th 1863

I,

Leticia Carson
Oregon,

of

Clatsop County

do hereby apply to enter, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved May 20, 1862,

entitled "An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain," the

part, E $\frac{1}{2}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section No. 28 NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of and
of Range No. 3 N. containing one hundred and

fifty three $\frac{98}{100}$

Acres.

LAND OFFICE at

Leticia Carson
Roseburg, Oregon,

June 17th 1863

I,

John Kelly,

Register of the Land Office, do hereby certify

that the above application is for Surveyed Lands of the class which the applicant is legally entitled to enter under the

Homestead act of May 20, 1862, and that there is no prior, valid, adverse right to the same.

(On Lot 2 + NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec 20)
on filling up the blanks and the above
words of E $\frac{1}{2}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ to give greater
certainty to the description

John Kelly

Register.

HOMESTEAD.

Land Office at

Roseburg, Oreg
June 19th 1868.

CERTIFICATE,

No. 14.

APPLICATION,

No. 113.

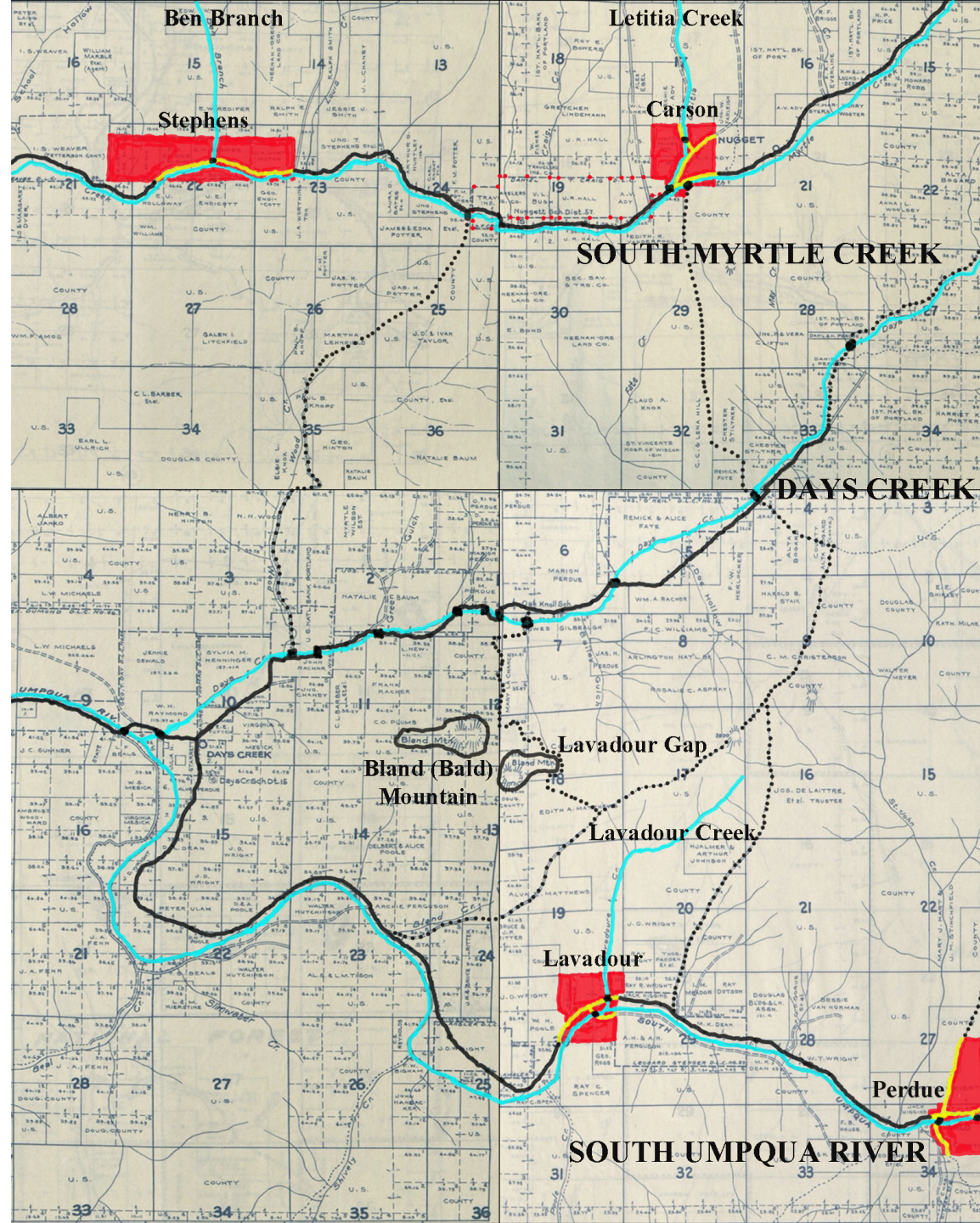
It is hereby certified, That pursuant to the provisions of the act of Congress, approved May 20, 1862, entitled "An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain,"

Letitia Carson has
made payment in full for $W\frac{1}{2}$ of $NE\frac{1}{4}$ & Tract $E\frac{1}{2}$ of $NW\frac{1}{4}$ of
Section 20 in Township 29 South
of Range 3 West containing $153\frac{98}{100}$ acres.

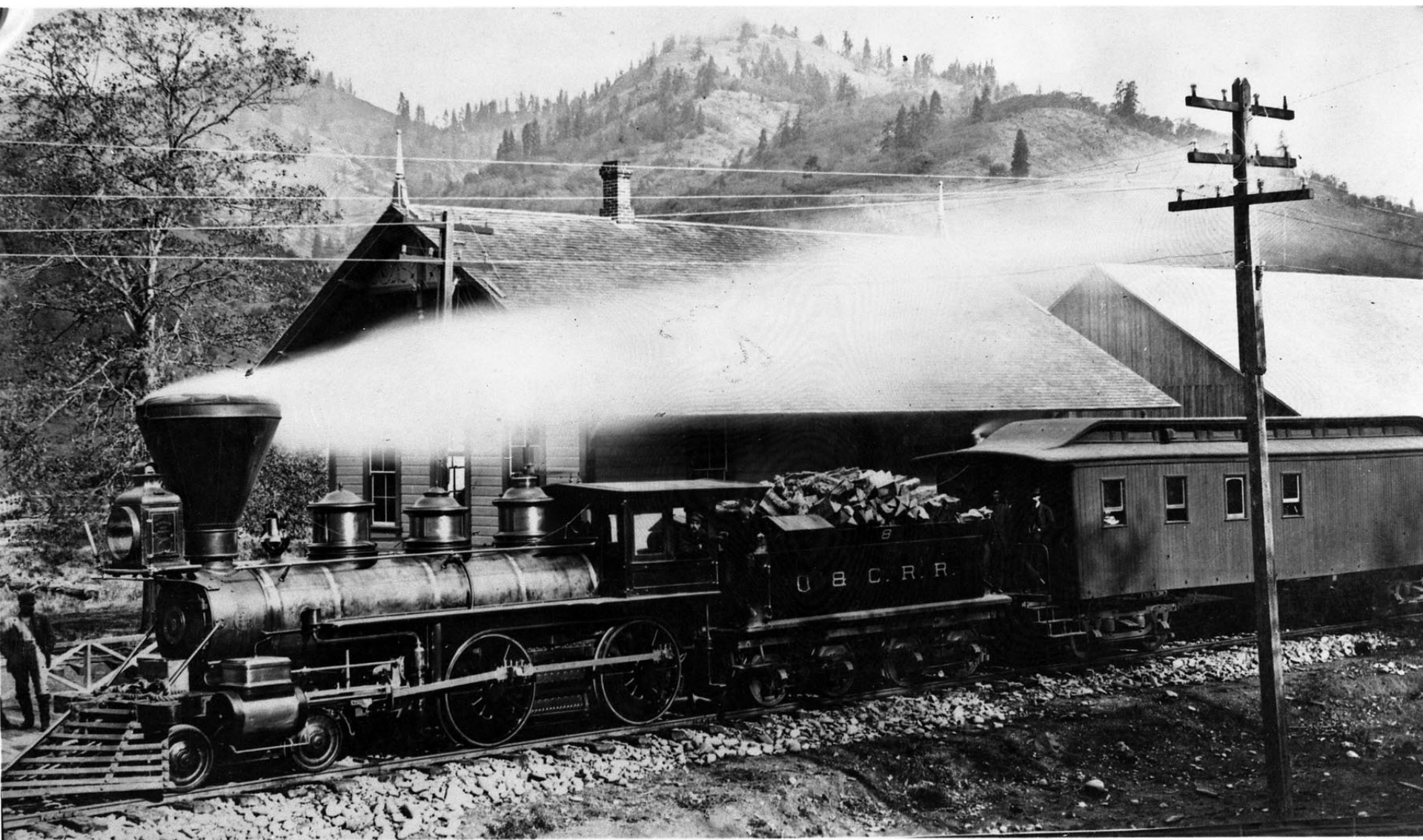
Now, therefore, be it known, That on presentation of this Certificate to the
COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE, the said Letitia Carson
shall be entitled to a Patent for the Tract of Land above described.

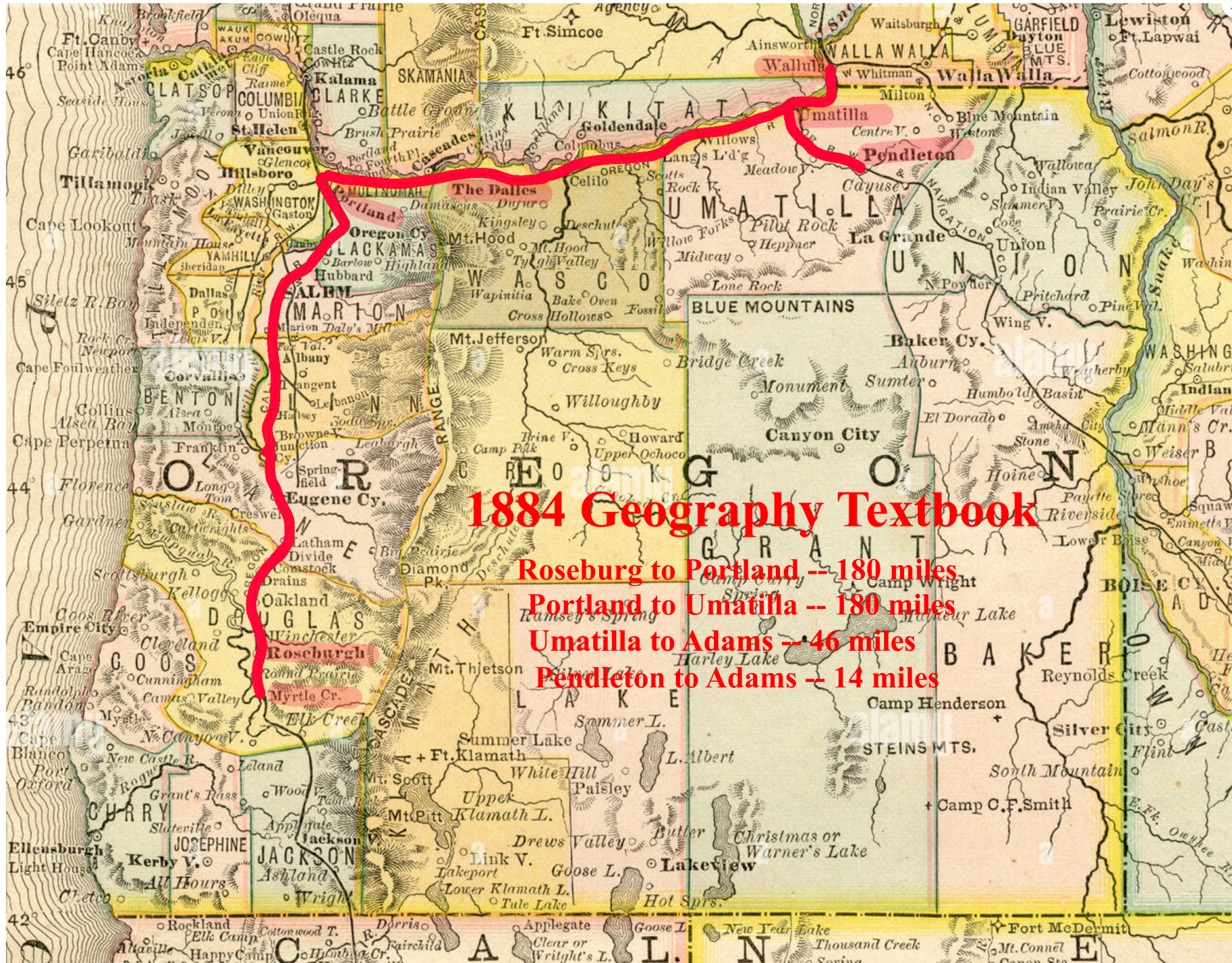
John Kelly

Register.









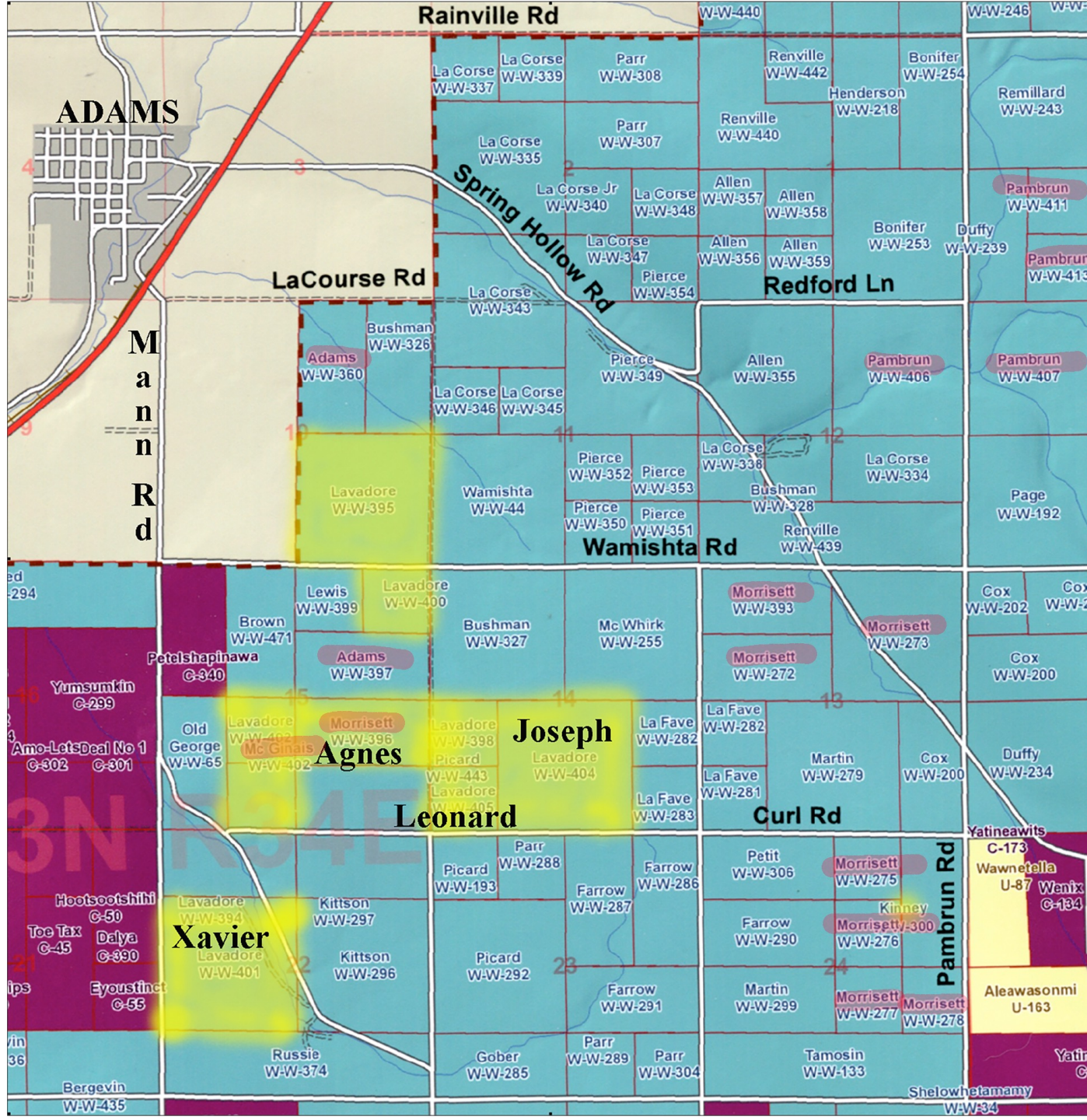
1884 Geography Textbook

Roseburg to Portland -- 180 miles

Portland to Umatilla -- 180 miles

Umatilla to Adams -- 46 miles

Pendleton to Adams -- 14 miles







J. D. Moody, Clerk
R. P. Earhart, Secretary

State Record of Deeds. vol I Page 645

Edward Kirsch, Treasurer

Recorded July 31st 1884
J. S. Marshall

Letitia Carson

Warranty Deed.

So } This Indenture made the twenty first day
Andrew Carson } of July in the year of our Lord one Thousand Eight
hundred and eighty four, between Letitia Carson of the County of Douglas
and State of Oregon of the first part and Andrew Carson of the same place
the party of the second part. Witnesseth; That the said party of the first part for
and in consideration of the natural love and affection of said party of the first part
toward the said Andrew Carson (my natural son) and for the further consid-
eration of the sum of five dollars to ~~be~~ paid to Martha Jane Carson
within thirty days after my death hath granted, bargained, sold,
aliened, remised, released, conveyed and confirmed unto the said party
of the second part and to his heirs and assigns forever all of
the following premises to wit: The West half of the north
East quarter and the fractional East half of the north West
quarter of Section twenty in Township twenty nine South of Range
three West in the Districts of lands subject to sale at Roseburg
Oregon containing one hundred and fifty three acres

McGINNIS FAMILY, STARVOUT, OREGON, 1913-1914

Dave McGinnis -- Lilly Rondeau -- Joe McGinnis -- George (Gans) Rondeau -- Edward Rondeau



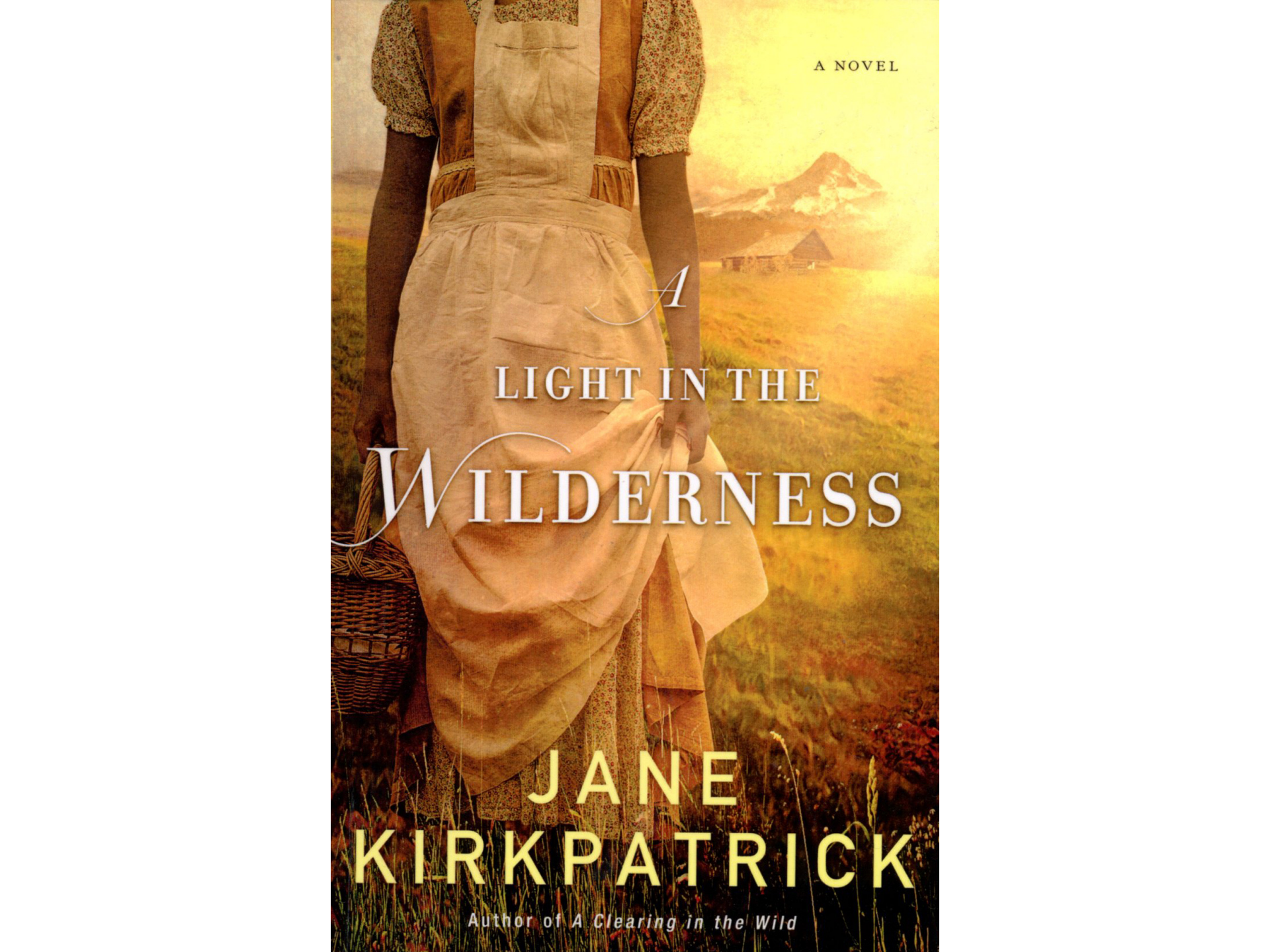
**Angelique Lavadour--Mary Alice Bigham Lavadour--Fred Campian--Virgil (Matt) Campian--Susan McGinnis Campian
Asa Jones Frank Jones**









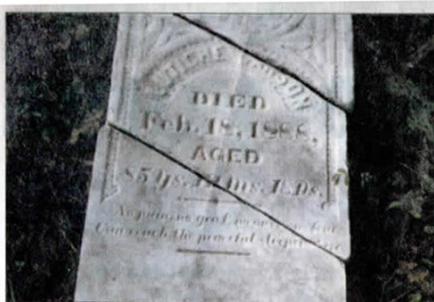


A NOVEL

A
LIGHT IN THE
*W*ILDERNESS

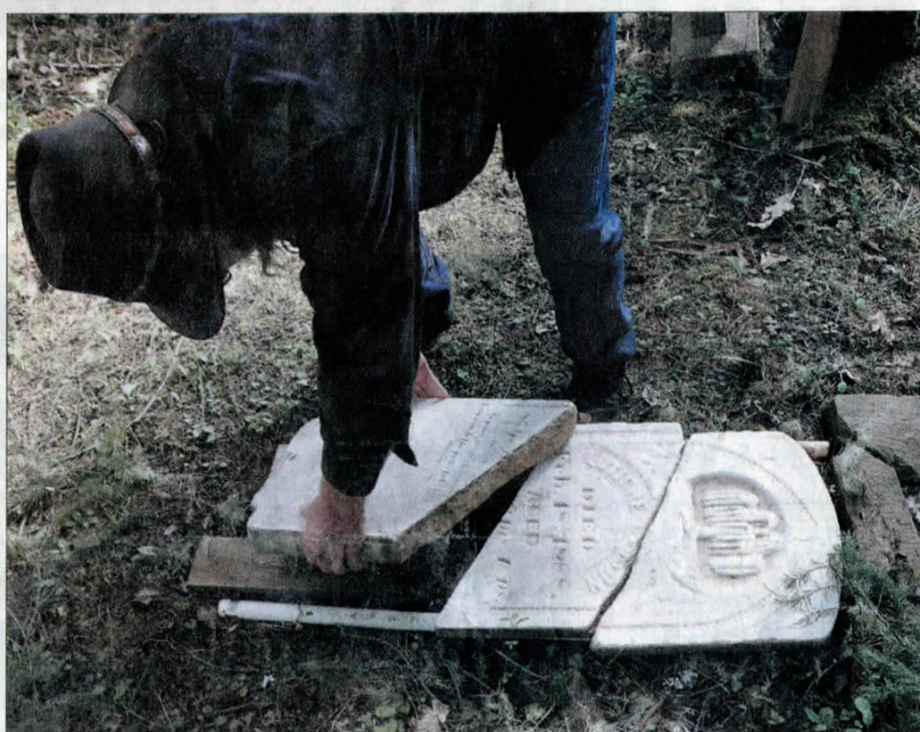
JANE
KIRKPATRICK

Author of A Clearing in the Wild



History found

Historian to relate story of black pioneer woman



MICHAEL SULLIVAN/NEWS-REVIEW PHOTOS

Above left, Letitia Carson's gravestone states that she died Feb. 18, 1888. Carson's gravestone, and several others in the cemetery, were previously damaged by vandals. Above, historian Bob Zybach of Cottage Grove lines up segments of a gravestone marking the final resting place of Letitia Carson at a cemetery outside Myrtle Creek on Wednesday. Carson's gravestone, and several others in the cemetery, were previously damaged by vandals.

CARISA CEGAVSKE
The News-Review

MYRTLE CREEK — In the middle of the Civil War, just four years after Oregon became a state, black pioneer Letitia Carson filed one of the nation's first Homestead Act claims for 160 acres on South Myrtle Creek.

Carson is believed to have been born a slave in Kentucky around 1814, but she died a free woman in 1888, as the owner of a farm valued at \$3,000. In between, she traveled the Oregon Trail, filed a lawsuit demanding a fair share of her husband's estate,

survived the Rogue River Indian War, managed her own ranch and served as a midwife.

For the past 30 years, historian Bob Zybach of Cottage Grove has been piecing together Carson's fascinating history one document at a time. The digging has become a habit, something like smoking, he said.

"It's what I do for recreation," he said.

Zybach will present the information he has uncovered at the Douglas County Historical Society's Spring Dinner Meeting March 8, at China Palace in Roseburg.

David and Letitia Carson were early pioneers. They traveled the

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: Douglas County Historical Society spring meeting. Historian Bob Zybach will discuss his research about black pioneer and Myrtle Creek homesteader Letitia Carson.

WHEN: 1 to 4 p.m., March 8.

WHERE: China Palace, 968 N.E. Stephens St., Roseburg.

REGISTER: Contact DCHS President John Robertson at 541-673-0466. Cost is \$15 and admission is limited to 50 people.

Oregon Trail in 1845, and Letitia Carson gave birth to their first child, Martha, along the way. David Carson, an Irish-American, claimed a 640-acre piece of property in Soap Creek Valley in Benton County. His claim was later reduced to 320 acres, the amount a single man was allowed, on the grounds that he could not

be married to a black woman.

Carson's paper trail becomes particularly interesting after her husband's death in 1852.

Zybach discovered Carson filed two successful lawsuits in Benton County after a pro-slavery neighbor denied her right to inherit David

Welcome to the Homepage of the Letitia Carson Historical Website!



Allison Saar 2000, *Washday Blues*. Color woodcut 30 x 32 in. Copyright Allison Saar, courtesy of L.A. Leuwer, Venice, California. [Link to larger image is only proportional and not the same size as the original; also, it is only 300 dpi. Livecast display quality and not intended for wall display or other unauthorized reproduction. This image is very symbolic of Letitia Carson's life and will be used on the cover of her planned biography.]

February 23, 2019 Update: Welcome! This site was launched in 2014 in conjunction with the planned release of Jane Kirkpatrick's historical novel about Letitia Carson, "A Light In The Wilderness," and creation of the ORWW Friends of Letitia Carson Facebook Page at that time: <https://www.facebook.com/WhyIsThisWebAddressNotAvailable>

The principal purpose of this website is to serve as a digital archive for historical research and documentation that can be used for future educational purposes. The website's design intentionally mirrors the working outline of a planned biography of Letitia Carson's life. A significant number of the hundreds of historical maps, illustrations, documents, texts, and photographs contained on this site are scans and transcripts of more than 200 original documents from the 1850s and 1860s specific to Carson's life — with dozens of linked articles, reports, and other references to provide context. This website, as with most ORWW educational websites, is intended to be organic and improved over time with relevant research, editing, and student contributions.



Acknowledgements.

A long list of individuals made this project possible, including members of our own families. We will begin accumulating and posting a list in alphabetical order at some point prior to publication of Letitia Carson's biography.

red.

I request that State Farm⁶⁰ rerate my auto policy(ies) which are eligible for rerating, using were initially applying for insurance. I understand rerating could only result in a lower pre



Friends of Letitia Carson

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ABOUT

This website is for people who are interested in learning more about the story of Letitia Carson -- and for sharing what they know about her with others.

http://www.ORWW.org/History/Letitia_...

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PHOTOS



Status Photo / Video Offer, Event +



What have you been up to?



Friends of Letitia Carson

Posted by Bob Zybach [?] · 2 hrs ·

Here is a photo advertising the presentation I will be giving in Roseburg tomorrow regarding Letitia Carson's life in Douglas County. Got a sell-out and further proof that my "will work for food" sign is still effective.



Spring Dinner Meeting, March 14, 2015

March 14, 2015, at China on top of the hill on Stephens Avenue, Roseburg, Oregon. Join us from 1 pm to 4 pm. Call President John Robertson for more information:

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The Search for *Letitia Carson* in Douglas County



Written by
Bob
Zybach, PhD

Strangely Absent from

History

Carson vs. Smith, 1852-1857

By Bob Zybach

During the mid-1850s in Oregon Territory, a former Kentucky slave woman filed two suits against a wealthy white landowner in a Benton County court and won both times. The most remarkable — and politically interesting — thing about these events is that nobody noticed. Newspaper reporters didn't report on these unlikely occurrences, and historians have never given them more than a sentence or two — and then almost invariably with misspelled names.

The woman filing the legal actions was an illiterate former slave woman and 1845 Oregon Trail pioneer named Letitia Carson. The person she sued was named Greenberry Smith, for whom the small community just south of Corvallis is named and who had mysteriously served as executor to the estate of David Carson — who had died in September 1852, leaving property behind in Benton County and in Missouri. Carson also left behind his self-proclaimed widow, Letitia, and their two children, 8-year-old Martha and 4-year-old Adam.

In 1852, slavery was still legal in the southern United States, but not in its territories, including Oregon Territory. Oregon became a state in 1859, and the Civil War did not begin until 1860. In each politically related instance, the central issue was slavery and whether it should be legal or not and, if legal, how the legal rights of owners and slaves might vary in the different states and territories.

In March 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, declared: "A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a 'citizen' within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States... Consequently ... they are not entitled to sue in that character in a court of the United States."

Letitia Carson filed her first suit against Greenberry Smith on Feb. 27, 1854, three years before the infamous *Dred Scott* decision — which most historians agree was one of the worst decisions ever made by the Supreme Court — but much public and political sentiment at that time in both the North and South ran strongly in favor of that eventual determination, and few slaves or former slaves were allowed to file legal actions against whites in many courts throughout the states and territories.

However, thanks to an apparently accidental quirk in Oregon law (which had previously held that it was not only illegal for Carson to file a legal action in an Oregon court, it was also illegal for her and her children to even live in Oregon), Carson was allowed to go forward with her action and to follow that up with additional filings. Which she won. This is her story.

Who Was Letitia Carson?

Letitia Carson was likely born sometime from 1814 to 1818 as a slave in Kentucky. Nothing is known of her early life or how she got to Missouri at some point before 1845. Very possibly she was involved in the hemp or tobacco farming industries, whether as a field hand or house servant or both. She was probably a Baptist or a Methodist and attended Sunday services in her owner's church or with an all-black congregation — possibly some of each.

In May 1845, Letitia began a six-month journey across the Oregon Trail with Irishman David Carson, a 45-year-old Platte

Background Image: Oct. 20, 1856, judgment for \$1,200, plus expenses, written by Judge George H. Williams, chief justice of Oregon Territory, on behalf of "Letitia" Carson vs. Greenberry (G.B.) Smith, administrator of the estate of David Carson.



Letitia Carson was one of the first Black women to settle in Oregon. The Letitia Carson Digital History Collection was created by the Letitia Carson Legacy Project to bring together in one online, publicly available place, all the current biographical information, primary documents, photographs, and research being done about this remarkable woman and her story. The Collection also includes a “Digital Exhibits” series about different aspects of Letitia Carson’s life and legacy and ongoing research about her story.

Bob Zybach, a 2004 Ph.D. graduate of OSU’s College of Forestry, collected many of the documents pertaining to Letitia Carson. Dr. Zybach, along with historian Jan Meranda, is credited with uncovering Letitia Carson’s story during his master’s degree program at OSU in the 1990s. The majority of documents in his collection come from the State Archives of Oregon and state and local repositories in Missouri and North Carolina. Dr. Zybach made his collection of documents and transcriptions available to the LCLP for inclusion on this site.

How to use this site?

- To learn more about the Letitia Carson Legacy Project, please visit [*About the LCLP*](#) and [*Who Are the Partners?*](#)
 - For biographical information visit [*Who Was Letitia Carson?*](#) and [*Who Was David Carson?*](#)
 - Jump to [*Items*](#), to see archived documents, photos, maps, etc
 - Explore [*Collections*](#) groupings of related items such as [*newspaper clippings*](#), [*contemporary photographs*](#), [*historical images*](#), maps, and documents from [*Oregon*](#), [*Missouri*](#), and [*North Carolina*](#)
 - Visit our eight current [*exhibits*](#), a set of interactive pages that group items together to interpret a historical event, person, place, etc. in a contextualized manner
 - Search the [*whole site*](#) by record (i.e. item, collection, file) using keywords, [*boolean methods*](#), or exact match searching
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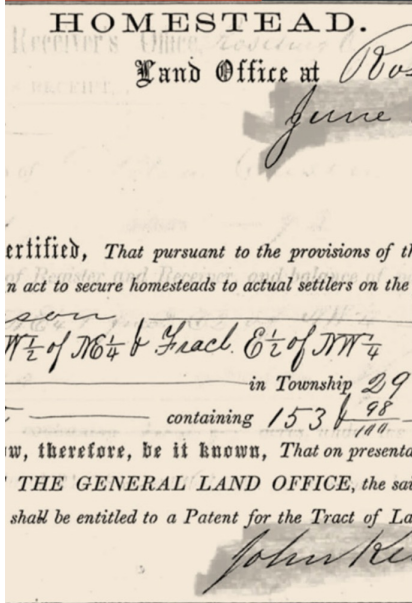
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Letitia Carson (1814-1818-1888)

By [Zachary Stocks](#)



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Letitia Carson, a nineteenth-century farmer and homesteader, was one of the first Black women to settle in Oregon. In the 1850s, she brought two successful lawsuits against a white defendant over her right to own property. She later became the first Black person, and one of the first women, to file a land claim in Oregon under the Homestead Act of 1862.

Letitia was born into slavery in Kentucky between 1814 and 1818. By September 1844 she was living in Missouri with David Carson, a White man who was the father of her unborn child. David was born in 1800 in County Antrim, in what is now Northern Ireland. He immigrated to the United States in the 1820s or 1830s to join his siblings in North Carolina. By 1839 he was living in Platte County, Missouri, and the next year he swore allegiance to the United States in pursuit of citizenship, which he received in October 1844.

In the spring of 1843, American settlers in the [Willamette Valley](#) created a [provisional government](#)

Letitia Carson

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From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Letitia Carson was an Oregon pioneer and one of the first African Americans to be listed as living in Oregon according to the U.S. Federal Census. In fact, she was the only black woman to successfully make a land claim in Oregon under the [Homestead Act of 1862](#). She was the inspiration for *Jane Kirkpatrick's* 2014 novel *A Light In The Wilderness*.

Early life [\[edit\]](#)

Carson was born into slavery in Kentucky around 1814.^[1] Little is known of her early life besides that some time before 1845, she arrived in Missouri.^[1] It is presumed that she was involved in the hemp or tobacco farming industries as a field hand, a house servant, or both. It is also presumed that she might have been either a Baptist or a Methodist and may have attended Sunday services in her enslaver's church, with an all-black congregation, or both.^[2]



Gravestone of Letitia Carson

Life in Oregon [\[edit\]](#)

In 1845, she set out in a 6-month journey on the Oregon Trail for Oregon with David Carson, an Irish immigrant who owned land in Platte County and had become an American citizen in 1844.^[1] It is not clear whether Letitia was ever enslaved by David.^[1] However, by the time they began their journey to Oregon, he recognized her as a free person. On June 9, 1845, Carson gave birth to their daughter,^[1] Martha Jane somewhere along the South Platte River.^[3]

Upon their arrival, the Carsons staked a 640-acre land claim in the Soap Creek Valley, located in modern-day [Benton County, Oregon](#).^[4] Government officials reduced the Carsons' land claim by half in 1850 to 320 acres since David and Letitia could not legally marry, as Letitia was black and the Donation Land Act provided up to 640 acres for solely married couples, in addition to black people at the time being ineligible to make a land claim in Oregon.^[4] Letitia Carson gave birth to a son, Adam Andrew Jackson, in 1849.^[4] According to the 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Letitia and David lived in Benton, Oregon Territory, with their two children.

Trials over land ownership [\[edit\]](#)

In September 1852, David Carson died from an illness.^[1] When he died, Letitia and their children were excluded from his estate settlement, and their wealthy white neighbor Greenberry Smith was named executor of his estate instead.^[1] Smith claimed that Carson and the children were slaves who "were themselves property and therefore could not be heirs to the estate."^[1] For her children's benefit, Carson filed a lawsuit and took Smith to court to recover an equitable portion of David's estate, stating that David Carson had promised "he would make me his sole heir or that he would give me his entire property" in the event of his death, even though this was not ever put into writing.^[4] She asked that the court award her \$7,450 as compensation for her seven years of work on the Soap Creek Valley claim, "plus the value of livestock and other property to which she claimed she was entitled."^[4] On May 12, 1855, Carson was awarded \$300 by a Benton County Jury, plus \$229.50 to pay her court costs.^[4] On October 25, 1856, a federal court awarded her \$1399.75 for the loss of her cattle.^[4] Although she won both of these lawsuits, her accomplishments were not acknowledged in the local press at the time.

During^[1] or after^[4] the federal trial, Carson moved with her children to the upper Cow Creek Valley of [Douglas County, Oregon](#), where she worked as a midwife who was well known among community members.^[1] She is thought to have lived in Douglas County with the family of Hardy Eliff, for whom she also worked in addition to being a midwife.^[5]



Letitia Carson Elementary School, the story of its namesake

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