

A letter from Oregon  
Written by Clarborne Campbell Walker  
Submitted by Pamela Paulin

Oregon Territory "Willamette Valley"

1845

Dear Brother, Sister and Friends,

We left Independence on the 6th of May and arrived at the dolles on the 6th of October---We might have arrived sooner but being in a company that had poor cattle we was detained on that account, saying by 27 days on the Rout, of the Rout I shall not say much as I will send you a copy of notes taken by me which will give you every days travel. The trip to Oregon is not as bad as I expected though it is a long road to travel, but the time passes off briskly or did to me. From Independence to Fort Hall the road is very good, the Black Hills being the worst which are not as bad as I expected, though. From Fort Hall to the dolls is some good road and some bad. Some part of this end of the road there is considerable rock and the dust is worse having the Blue Mountains to cross, but by the time you reach them your loads are lighter. The dolles are situated at the foot of the Cascade mountains. There is a missionary station here. It is called 120 miles from here to Oregon City. On arriving here we found 2 boats plying from here to the Cascades a distance of 40 miles and below these, 2 other boats from there to Linton. These boats belong to Dr. McLaughlin which he loaned to assist the Emigrants in getting down. For a family and baggage they charge \$10. to \$20.00. Some get down in these boats whilst others got canoes from the Indians and some made rafts and decended to the Cascades, a fall in the Columbia that boats cannot go over. A great many left their wagons at the mission until spring. We had a very favorable time the first part of the trip to what the two other Emigrations had before us, having good roads all the way, no mud. A great many of our campany ran out of provisions before reaching the dolles and those that had let them have, on arriving at the Umittila

River they obtained potatoes and peas of the Indians, having to pay high prices in clothes. They trade in shirts altogether.

At the dalls we found flour here at \$8.00 per hundred cash. But so many being here that had no money, they bought wheat at the mission and ground it on a hand mill.

We were advised to drive our cattle down the river from here, as the Rout across the mountains for 30 or 40 miles there was not much grass and those that had got here before us had principally gone over the mountains. We drove them down the south side of the river about 30 miles and then swam them over to the north side which we found to be very troublesome. From there to Vancouver or 6 miles below we forged them back to the south side, thence up to Linnton. This Rout we had plenty of grass, but no road only a pack trail and very rocky. We had rain on us nearly every day from where we grouped our cattle at first until we arrived at Vancouver, getting there on the 1st of November. We were nearly four weeks in getting down, they go across the mountains in 7 and 8 days though some longer. A great many cattle lost in the mountains this season. Doak and his family went down the river, arrived at Linnton the 15th of October. We left our wagon at the mission, when we got our cattle to Linnton we borrowed a wagon and on the 8th of Nov. we left Linnton for Rickreall which is about 70 miles by land. For 10 miles the road very bad, tremendous mountains to climb, dense forests of timber from 150 to 300 ft. high and arrived in the Tualtine Planes, which were on the west side of the Willamette river about 15 miles in width surrounded with the best timber you ever saw, principally fir. The soil of these are not as rich as the country above, not so well watered. There is a weede here and in other parts of the valley called Fern which interferes with the crops very much. From the Planes we traveled through the Yamhill country which is a beautiful part of the valley. Principly praire, high rolling swells with considerable white oak on the hills and around the edge of the fir groves; fir on the Branches and creeks, valleys between these hills very rich, noble springs breaking out of the hills. These hills or high lands are throughout the valley, so far as I can see they resemble an old orchard at a distance very much. There can be valuable farms made on the most of them, the soil on them is very rich and of a reddish cast, producing excellent crops. It is not uncommon to see elder growing on them from 3 to 5 inches in diameter. Thense to the Rickreall, rich soil here, timber

rather scarce. The country can be settled by making use of the oak timber for fencing. The oak in this country is shorter, get from 1 to 2 rail cuts from a tree sometimes 3, rare chance, splits excellently. The claims are being taken up here. We went 10 miles farther to the Luckamute where we got a cabin to go into, then we started out to select claims; we did not succeed in a selection to suit altogether; best claims are taken up. We then rented a farm on the east side of the Willamette about 4 miles north of the Mission mill and living here yet. About 40 acres in cultivation, we get plows, harrows and seed found and get one half. We have sown about 25 or 30 acres this winter and still sowing. We have not selected claims as yet. This valley is from 50 to 80 miles in width and supposed to be from 2 to 3 hundred in length. The farther up the valley you go the better the soil and the climate is better farther south. There are numerous streams rising in the mountains, Cascades and the range along the coast flowing east and west and emptying into the Willamette River, along these streams there is timber, principally fir. This timber generally splits well the nearer the top the better it splits. You get from 5 to 14 cuts off a tree. There is considerable ash and maple here along the water courses. The country is not suited to agricultural pursuits as it is gravelly, valued mostly for its timber and fur. I have seen several gentlemen that have been 30 or 40 miles up the valley, they state that the country improves in soil and the valley becomes wider. There was a small company traveled up the valley last summer about 30 miles south from here they came to a small stream which they followed down about 15 miles to its mouth where it empties into the Pacific. At the mouth of this stream they state there is a good harbor there being a sand bar at its mouth. The Indians informed them that there was 12 feet water on the bar at the lowest tide and also informed them that down the coast there was a good country on the coast. A considerable valley on this stream and could be a good road got down to the coast. There is considerable valleys south of this Umpqua valley, Rogue's River, Klamet River valleys, extensive valleys the climate is much better. I would refer you to L.W. Hastings account of Oregon, California for a general description of the country. He describes it very well, so far as I have seen. The eastern section of Oregon, about 1/2-part suited for agriculture whilst 1/10 may be found to be tolerably well adapted to pastures, the middle section of Oregon may be 1/10 part suited to agriculture, whilst 1/5 to grazing. The western section is by far the most

interesting part of Oregon. The climate is better in this section, the soil richer, the valley more extensive. The climate is milder here at 50 degrees north, than 40 degrees on the Atlantic coast. The greatest objection I see to this country is the rainy or wet season, which generally commences the 20th of October and ceases about the middle of February. This has been what the old settlers call a cold winter, there has not been as much rain as usual, it rained about 8 days in November, the same in December, January it rained about 1/3 of the time. There has been no snow here this winter and I have not seen any ice in any of the streams. The ground at one time was frozen about one, two or three inches, at the commencement of the rains here the grass commenced growing and grew all winter. This winter has appeared more like spring to one than winter. The most objection to Oregon is the agricultural portions of the country are too remote from the ocean or navigation. These are about all the objections I see to this country, with the great difficulty of getting to it. The advantages which this country has over the western states are too numerous to mention. The country on the Columbia from Linnton to the mouth, a distance of about 120 miles is not suited to agricultural pursuits. That is principally timberland country and the soil is gravelly. There is a settlement at Astoria, great mill privileges along down here and splendid timber. Ships can come up to Oregon City in high water. There has been a town laid off this fall 8 miles below Oregon City at the head of ship navigation, called Portland, by Mr. Lovejoy and Pettigrove. Oregon City is improving very fast, it is situated at the fall of the Willamette river on the east bank. Extensive water power here and is bound to become a great manufacturing town, if Oregon ever makes anything and all it wants is protection by the United States. There are 3 stores in Oregon City, 2 flouring mills, 2 saw mills, a church and another going up, brick, besides shops of all kinds and a number of dwellings, two taverns. Town lots are worth from 2 to 8 hundred dollars in produce or property. Dr. McLoughlin has removed to Oregon City and intends becoming an American citizen if the United States takes possession of the country. Mr. Douglas is in charge in Vancouver, he contends for the country north of the river. The people here do not apprehend much danger from England.

They sow wheat here from October to May and they usually get from 20 to 40 bushels to the acre and I heard Dr.

White says he made 50 1/4 to the acre. It would do your eyes good to see the wheat they make here. It is not suitable for corn though, the nights are said to be too cool during the summer. Irish potatoes do extremely well here, the best potatoes I ever saw. Sweet potatoes have not been tried, turnips grow fine. I have seen them larger by one half than I ever saw in Missouri. Oats grow fine, peas, beans, cabbage, onions, parsnips, lettuce, pumpkins, watermelons and all kinds of vegetables do well. Farming utensils cost high. Plows from 20 to 30 dollars. Iron costs from 8 to 12 cents, steel from 30 to 50 cents. Dry goods and groceries are not very plentiful, clothing is not so high in proportion to groceries. Coffee is worth 25 cents per pounds, sugar 12 1/2 cents tea from a dollar to 2 dollars per pound. Goods and groceries were much cheaper here three years ago than they are at present. We want men here with capital to carry on trade with the Islands. Sugar I am informed can be purchased at the Islands for 3 and 4 cents. Coffee from 8 to 10 cents and frequently up. We can buy first rate blankets here for 5 dollars, excellent quality. Molasses is worth 55 cents English measure, which is about 1/4 larger than American measure. Salt can be bought at Vancouver for 70 cents by the measured bushel, which is about equal to two bushels in weight. Their measures are much larger than ours. Wheat is worth a dollar per bushel, though for cash it can be bought for 50 cents, oats 40 to 50 cents peas one dollar, potatoes 40 to 50 cents. Oxen are worth 75 to 100 dollars per yoke in wheat or other produce. Milch cows 40 to 50 dollars bred. American horses from 100 to 200 dollars. Bollivar has been offered 200 dollars for his mare, in currency. Common labor from 1 dollar to 1 1/2 dollars per day. Mechanic from 2.50 to 3.50 per days, tools found. Wagons are worth from 75 to 100 dollars. We have a mixed community here, people from all parts of the world, English, Americans, French, half-breeds, Quarters, and Sandwich Islanders. The latter are in the employment of the Hudson Bay Company. The French are good citizens, Roman Catholic and living in the neighborhood of the Catholic Mission. The English and the Americans get along very peaceably. The Columbia river is navigable to about 50 miles above Vancouver which would be about 170 or 180 miles from the mouth. The Willamette river is navigable above the falls for a small steamer some distance. It is not been explored more than 20 miles above this place. Mill sites are plenty here. Springs are common but not so essential as in the States. The creek and

branch water is cool and good all year the soil looks to be as rich as soil of the mission on the Willamette. This country, I believe to be healthy in the extreme. The winters are mild and pleasant. The ground seldom ever freezes and the summers are said to be lovely and picturesque beyond description, having a regular sea breeze here throughout the summer. It seldom ever rains here after the wet season ceases, though last season they had showers on till the first of June. They have some ague and fever though it is more mild than in the States. No bilious types or nervous fevers bin known here. There has bin two ships in the Columbia this winter, an American merchant one and an English Man of War which is lying in Vancouver, yet the American vessel is lying in the Willamette river at Portland about 6 or 8 miles from its junction. The printing press arrived on this vessel, they will have it in operation in a short time.

I have written you three letters since I left home. One from Caw river, one from Ft. Laramie and one from Boisia river by Dr. White who was returning to the States with three other gentlemen. It is reported that they have bin murdered by Sioux Indians. This information was received from Ft. Hall. I am inclined to think it is not correct. L.W. Hastings, on his way to California, not meeting them, supposed they were murdered, tho they did not intend to follow the old trace all the way. Leaving it between Ft. Hall and Briger, leaving Ft. Laramie to the left.

I have given you all the information concerning the country that I am able at this time. I will give some instructions how to equip yourself to come to this country in case you should ever wish to do so. You should procure strong 3 horse wagons or light 4 horse, very strong and durable, well ironed. The tires should be very tight or they will get loose. It would be well to have bolts put through the tires and fellows with base beds about 11 ft in length, made as tight as possible having the side pieces one plank on each side with braces on each side at the top of the bed, preventing the rain from beating in. Have a falling tung, by all means double cover all over with cotton drilling. In case you should undertake this trip you should have two wagons, one for your family and the other for your provisions. Have one half or double the team that is necessary on ordinary roads, for cattle have the foot evil considerable on this trip a great many are left on this account. The best remedy for this is powder mashed up put in old bacon fat and put on moderately warm. Your oxen should be young sound cattle, close made from 3 to 6 years old not over 6 by no means, as many of them leaders as convenient. Young 3

and 4 year old steers are very easy broken on the road, if you have other cattle that are gentle. Good strong cows answer very well if in good order. Drive some milch cows and heifers though they are considerable trouble. Have 200 pounds flour for everyone who eats, 75 or 100 pounds bacon. Our bacon and flour held out well, we had some of each when we got to the Dalls and we sold or gave away 150 pounds of flour and some bacon. We started with 1000 pounds of flour and 475 pounds of bacon, one bushel of dry fruit for every two persons, 10 pounds of salt, 10 to 15 pounds coffee, 20 or 25 pounds of sugar and some beans would be good. A good rifle gun, 10 pounds of lead, 5 pounds of powder. The old musket that I left would be worth 100 dollars if I had it here to kill geese and ducks and if you ever come here bring it with you. Good dogs are very valuable here, blood hounds particularly, We want them to run wolves they are plenty here. They interfere with the raising of hogs very much. Hogs do well here, there is a root called Camerores (camas lily) which is very abundant that is great for hogs and Oak mast. You should start from Independence by the 1st of May or sooner if the grass will answer. The grass will be getting better every day til you get to Ft. Hall, from there to the Blue mountains you will find the grass poor in places. From the Blue mountains the grass is good, you should aime to travel as near in front of the companies as possible on account of the dust and the grass. Have your cattle in good order when you start, travel steady. Lay by no more than is necessary to wash. You should aim to get in a company that has good teams, wagons and plenty of provisions Do not dispense with your provisions for if you let it go you will never get it afterwards. Travel in a company of 30 or 40 wagons all the way. They travel from Ft. Hall to the Dalles generally in smaller companies but they have been imposed on by being in small parties and some have bin robbed. The trip I believe could be made from Independence to the Dalles in two months by traveling steady. You should aime to get there as soon as possible on account of the rain. we were not troubled by the Indians. In the dangerous part of the country keep a strong watch all the way especially at night. In traveling through the Pawnee and Sioux Indian country, persons should not leave the company for if these Indians catch three or four men they will rob them and sometimes take their scalps. When you come to the Sioux and Shoshone Indians you will have to give the Sioux some presents if you meet a party, they are met in large parties

on sweet water. We did not see any of them after leaving Ft. Laramie. You should bring some old flintlock guns to trade with the Snake Indians, they have the best horses on the route, and some rings, trinkets and speckled calico shirts, cheap quality. You travel among the Snakes until you arrive at Ft. Boisia. On arriving at the Grand Round valley you meet with the Skyanys (Cayuse) and WallaWallas. The later are the meanest Indians this side of the mountains. Their territory extends down to within 100 miles of the Dalles, they are found all along the Columbia to the Dalles. The Skyanys generally are Christians and are the most civilized of any Indians on the route. The Indians of this valley consists of 4 or 5 small tribes, perfectly inoffensive, they haven't the courage to collar a hen generally. They are hired to work by the whites and they generally work well for Indians. They are diminishing very fast by veneral disease. The Indians of Oregon are very different from those east of the mountains. The Skyanys and Nezperce are getting all the cattle they can. They traded for goodly numbers from our immigrants, trading their horses. Give a horse for a cow and calf generally. They have large herds of horses. You should bring some American mares with you. We succeeded in getting ours through safe, they were a great deal of trouble. Bring shoes and nails to shoe them. They will not want shoeing until you reach Laramie. You should bring clothes enough to last a year from the time you leave, principally woolen clothes, as they are the best on the route and after you get here. Have your wagons so as to sleep in them much better than to sleep on the ground, especially in wet weather. Bring your beds for there are few feather beds here. Plenty of feathers but they are not to be obtained at all times. Bring on the fowles, bring plenty of shoes and boots for they cost very high here. There is but one tannery in the country as yet and they haven't much leather yet. Shoes they make at this tannery sell for 6.00 a pair.

A part of our immigrants attempted to make a cut off from Ft. Boises or 15 miles this side of the valley. They were led in here by Steven L. Meek, the gentlemen that our company hired as guide at Caw river, he is well skilled in living. They traveled over a tremendous rough country and finally found their way to the Dalles but a great many of them suffered very much from water and provisions. There were a great many died after and before arriving at the Dalles. A Mr. Barlow and others attempted to escape the Cascade mountains with their wagons but it getting late in the season they had to abandon



them after getting about 50 miles from the Mission. They say they will get a road through that will be practicable for wagons. The hills are not as bad as anticipated. Dense forest of timber to cut through, the greatest obstacle in the way. The Legislature has given S. Barlow a charter for the road and he intends to cut it through in the spring. It is in contemplation to cut a road through the Cascades about 50 miles south of this road but whether it will be done is uncertain. There is a halfbreeds talks of undertaking it in the spring, is to turn off at Boisia. Mountaineers say there can be a good road got through this way, but in general they are such liars there is no certainty in what they say. Cooking utensils is very hard to get here, they are very scarce and cost high. Bollivar's health has improved very much. He looks better and is fleshier than I ever seen him. His cough has nearly left him, he is well pleased with the country. We have the best beef here you ever saw. They kill beef at any and all times of the year and as fat as any State fed beef you ever saw. Bollivar and I are living with A. J. Doak as yet. Doak's family are all well. His wives in better health than she has had for several years. Her breast is getting well very fast and without physical aid. She is fleshier than she ever was. All well pleased with the country, they send their respects to you and the family.

C.C. and W. B. Walker

Note: The original at one time was in the possession of Eleanor Purvine Miller who transcribed this letter and several other ones. This letter has had some of the misspellings and punctuation corrected by the transcriber. The original author was Claiborne Campbell Walker( born Wythe County Virginia 1 March 1819, died 30 December 1902, Polk County, Oregon) along with brother Wellington Bolivar Walker (born 17 March 1824 Wythe County, Virginia, died 16 February 1904 Walla Walla County, Washington, buried Spring Valley Church, Polk County, Oregon). They settled Spring Valley, Polk County, Oregon. A.J. Doak (born 1816 Campbell County Tennessee, died 22 August 1885, Cottage Grove, Oregon) was the founder of Lincoln a now defunct location on the Willamette about 8 miles north of Salem on the west side of the river. His wife Rebecca McConnell died 29 March 1854 after being bedridden for over a year with a breast ailment.