
Meek & First Wagons To Oregon: 1840

Joseph Lafayette "Joe" Meek (1810–1875) was a trapper, law enforcement official, and politician in the Oregon Country and later Oregon Territory of the United States. A pioneer involved in the fur trade before settling in the Tualatin Valley, Meek would play a prominent roll at the Champoeg Meetings of 1843 where he was elected as a sheriff. Later he served in the Provisional Legislature of Oregon before being selected as the United States Marshal for the Oregon Territory.¹

1840. At that time, Fort Hall was the farthest point on the trail that wagons had reached.

By 1840, as it was becoming clear to Meek that the fur trade was dying due both to a change in fashion preferences and the over trapping of beaver, Meek decided to join fellow trappers Caleb Wilkins and Robert Newell in Oregon.¹ Newell had guided a party of missionaries from the Green River in Wyoming to Fort Hall, a fur trading post located northeast of the present site of Pocatello, Idaho. At that time, Fort Hall was the farthest point on the trail that wagons had reached. The missionaries left their wagons at the fort and continued on horseback to the Columbia River, giving some of the wagons to Newell in payment. Although Newell and Meek knew it would be difficult to get wagons through to the Columbia, they thought it might be more convenient for their wives and children than on horseback, and decided to try. "Doctor" Newell described the journey in a letter written years later.²

Champoeg Meetings

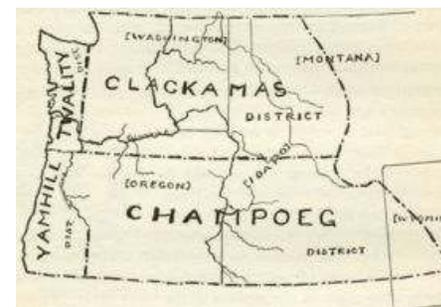
Newell's Letter. *"At the time I took the wagons, I had no idea of undertaking to bring them into the [Oregon] country. I exchanged fat horses to the missionaries for their animals; and, after they had been gone a month or more for Willamette ... I concluded to hitch up and try the much-dreaded job of taking a wagon to Oregon On the 15th of August, 1840, we put out with three wagons; Joseph L. Meek drove my wagon. In a few days, we began to realize the difficult task before us, and found that the continued crushing of sage under our wagons, which was in many places higher than the mules' backs, was no joke. Seeing our animals begin to fail, we began to lighten up, finally threw away our wagon beds, and were quite sorry we had undertaken the job. All the consolation we had as that we broke the first sage on the road, and were too proud to eat anything but dried salmon skins after our provisions had become exhausted."* (Snowden, 24-25²).

"In a rather rough and reduced state, we arrived at Dr. [Marcus] Whitman's [1802-1847] mission station, in the Walla Walla valley, where we were met by that hospitable man, and kindly made welcome, and feasted accordingly. On hearing me regret that I had undertaken to bring the wagons, the Doctor said: 'Oh, you will never regret it; you have broken the ice and when others see that wagons have passed, they too, will pass and in a few years the valley will be full of our people.' The Doctor shook me heartily by the hand. Mrs. Whitman, too, welcomed us . . . We spent a day or two with the Doctor and then went to Fort Walla Walla, where we were kindly received by Mr. P. C. Pambrun, chief trader of the Hudson's Bay Company, and superintendent of that post. On the 1st of October, we took leave of those kind people, leaving our wagons, and taking the river trail . . ." (Snowden, 24-25²).

1. Wikipedia. 2008. *Joseph Meek*. Internet. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Meek.

Provisional Government Of Oregon: 1843

1841 - 1843 The Champoeg Meetings in Oregon Country were the first attempts at governing in the Pacific Northwest by United States European-American pioneers. Prior to this, the closest entity to a government was the Hudson's Bay Company, mainly through Dr. John McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver. These meetings at Champoeg culminated in a vote on May 2, 1843, with a vote of 52-50 in favor of forming what became the Provisional Government of Oregon.



The entire territory was then divided into four administrative districts: Tuality, Yam Hill, Clackamas, and Champoick.³

In 1843, when the provisional government was formed, Meek was appointed sheriff, and he was elected to the legislature in 1846 and 1847.¹

Want more information? Contact an officer of the *Hugo Neighborhood* on how you can become involved.

2. Snowden, Clinton A. 1909. *History of Washington*. Vol. 2, pp. 5-7, 18, 23-25, 269, 274-75, 280-81. The Century History Company. New York. By Kit Oldham, February 18, 2003.

<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/NEWELL/2007-04/1176511580>

3. Wikipedia. 2008. *Champoeg Meetings*. Internet. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champoeg_Meetings.

Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society's Mission

This information brochure is one of a series of documents published by the Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society (*Hugo Neighborhood*). It is designed to be shared with neighbors for the purpose of helping protect our rural quality of life by promoting an informed citizenry in decision-making. The *Hugo Neighborhood* is an informal nonprofit charitable and educational organization with a land use and history mission promoting the social welfare of its neighbors.

Land Use & History

The *Hugo Neighborhood's* land use mission is to promote Oregon Statewide Goal 1 — Citizen Involvement, and to preserve, protect, and enhance the livability and economic viability of its farms, forests, and rural neighbors. It will act, if requested, as a technical resource assisting neighbors to represent themselves.

Its history mission is to educate, collect, preserve, interpret, and research its local history and to encourage public interest in the history of the Hugo area.

Volunteer membership dues are \$10.00 annually per family and normally used for paper, ink, envelopes, publications and mailings. Make checks to the *Hugo Neighborhood* and send them to our Treasurer.

Hugo Neighborhood Association

Email: hugo@jeffnet.org

Edited by Jacque Hardwick, Karen Rose, & Mike Walker

HNA&HS Officers

Wayne McKy, Chair
6497 Hugo Road
Grants Pass, Oregon 97526

Mike Walker, Education Chair
3388B Merlin Rd #195
Grants Pass, Oregon 97526

Hal Anthony, Outreach Chair
3995 Russell Road
Grants Pass, Oregon 97526

Karen Rose, Web Master
575 Red Mountain Drive
Grants Pass, Oregon 97526

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JOE MEEK & FIRST WAGONS TO OREGON: 1840



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May 25, 2008

Hugo Emigrant Trails Committee

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