2-19-1852

OREGON TERRITORY.

MEMORIAL

OF

COLUMBIA LANCASTER AND W. T. MATLOCK,

PRESIDING OFFICERS OF

The Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon.

FEBRUARY 19, 1852.

Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled:

The memorial of the undersigned, late president and speaker pro temp. of the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon, in behalf of the inhabitants of said Territory, respectfully shows to your honorable bodies: that the vast extent of the Territory, the number, yet sparseness, of the settlements west of the Cascade range of mountains, and the formation of contemplated settlements in various places east of said range of mountains, present so many varied interests for legislation, that the number of nine members of the council is entirely inadequate to a proper representation in that body of all parts of the country, and to a just discharge of the duties which belong to that branch of the Legislative Assembly. Your memorialists, after mature deliberation upon the subject, have a firm conviction that the interests of the Territory require that that body should be composed of at least fifteen members: we therefore pray your honorable body to provide for the desired increase.

And we would further represent, that there is no spot within the government domain presenting so many barriers and obstructions in the way of approach and intercommunication between its different parts as Oregon. The surf of the Pacific is lashed in one unbroken line against the base of the coast range of mountains, while they shut in the Eden of Oregon, and present one dark outline of unbroken and impassable barrier on the west—creating a solitude which is felt, but which cannot be expressed. It is true that the Columbia river, like the principles of civil and religious equality, with wild and unconquerable fury, has burst asunder the Cascade and coast ranges of mountains, and shattered into fragments the basaltic formations, thereby opening a communication into the interior of about two hundred miles; and that a few other places have been found south, along the coast, which, in time, will be reached at great labor and expense. Yet the present wants and necessities of the inhabitants of the whole Territory require aid, protection, and security. They, with propriety, regard themselves as insecure; for they know that three small armed vessels could
blockade every avenue and shut out their whole foreign commerce; and
the hour is unknown when they may be called upon to defend their hearths
against foreign assault. They therefore, with one united voice, appeal to
their fatherland to place within their reach arms and munitions of war,
and that a communication be opened by a military road commencing at
Puget’s sound; from thence to the Columbia river; thence up the Willamette
valley to the Umpqua; thence to the southern line of the Territory, upon
the nearest and best route—hoping and believing that, at no distant day,
it will be continued into the heart of California; and that an appropriation
in money be made, and means devised for its speedy accomplishment
through this Territory.

And we further represent, that the inhabitants of this Territory have
been, are now, and for years to come will be, from the very circumstances
which do and must surround them, consumers of foreign fabrics, and, as
such, pay large sums into the revenue chest; that a trade with China and
the islands of the Pacific is begun, and is assuming character and impor-
tance; that in aid of the agriculturists, some means should be devised
whereby their surplus produce can, with less expense, find a market
abroad; that, although their grievances are full to overflowing, and their
grounds capable of supplying the consumption of the whole coast of the
Pacific, yet Chili has driven, and, as things are, can drive Oregon flour
from the California market. The great wheat-growing region of Oregon
lies upon the Willamette, and the only means of transportation is upon its
waters. This stream is obstructed by rapids below and above the falls at
Oregon city; and although steamboats are now plying upon that river far
into the centre and heart of its productive soils, yet, owing to the delays
and dangers of its navigation, the farmer pays nearly the entire value of
his products in transportation before they leave the Territory.

We therefore pray that a sufficient sum be appropriated for the improvement of this
river.

And we would further represent, that, whilst a nation’s gratitude has
been publicly and repeatedly bestowed upon the various volunteers and
soldiers who have fought as well in defence of her honor as in the protec-
tion of her soil, and that she has manifested a sense of the obligations
conferrd, not only by public thanks, but by substantial rewards, the sol-
diers of Oregon have not been requited by the government with the same
generous tokens bestowed upon others. We can perceive no difference be-
tween the spirit and valor displayed upon the plains of Mexico and that
which animated the bosoms and nervéd the arms of her sons in the wild
recesses of Oregon. The means of our soldiers were more limited, their
hardships and privations unexcelled, and their foe more relentless and
bleeding. Shall the Oregon army—they who without even an officer of
their government to muster them into service—who, at the cry of danger,
when an honest and well-grounded conviction had seized the minds of the
inhabitants of this settlement that a union of all the tribes of savages east
of the Cascade mountains had been formed for the purpose of making a
descent upon this valley and butcher the people in cold blood—when the
lives of those who had nobly encountered every danger and endured every
privation for ameliorating their condition, and dispensing amongst them
the blessed truths of religion, had been ruthlessly taken—shall the army
without means, without previous discipline, without sufficient clothing,
crossed the mountains with its snows and frosts, rushed to the thickest of
the danger, and there, in the fastnesses of his own forests, encountered,
anquished, and dispersed the savages, and thus saved the domestic hearth
from inhuman desecration, and the young settlements from being crushed
in their infancy, be by their mother country forgotten? We cannot be-
lieve it. We therefore respectfully pray your honorable body to bestow
upon each volunteer of that army a bounty of one hundred and sixty acres
of land; and to settle a pension upon those who were wounded and disabled,
and upon the widows and heirs of those who fell in that campaign.

And we further represent, that we deeply regret the necessity which
caused the withdrawal of the United States troops from this Territory.
The immigrations by sea and land now pouring in upon us, who are in-
vited by inducements growing out of the soil, and the proud commercial
position which this Territory will soon occupy, if fostered by the liberality
of the federal government; make it necessary that the resources of the
Territory should, at an early day, be developed, and that settlements may
be extended in safety along the borders of Puget's sound, upon the coast
of the Pacific, in the south and southwestern portions, as well as upon the
Columbia and its tributaries east of the Cascade mountains. We there-
fore pray that a competent organized military force be ordered on, and
stationed upon, these outposts of our rapidly extending settlements.

And we further urge upon your consideration another painful subject.
It is the suffering and dangers incident to the overland journey to Oregon.
The crime of piracy upon the seas is the most odious of offences, and is by
all civilized nations punished with the severest penalties. Our government
maintains a large naval force, and sends its cruisers in all those places
where the property and lives of its citizens are exposed to most risk and
need most protection. It has, upon principles of justice, as well as human-
ity, provided protection to the frontier settlements against Indian aggres-
sion, from the falls of St. Anthony to the Mexican boundary, and along
that line to the Pacific ocean. Forts are erected, troops are quartered
and posted; and all things done that may not only protect human life and
property, but that will further the interests and comfort of those for
whose benefit these provisions were made. But, how is it when any citi-
zen of the States disposes of his homestead, gathers about him his wife
and his children, his stock, and the fruits of his hard earnings, and bids a
sad adieu to the friends he has known so long and loved so well, and, cast-
ing his tearful eyes over the land of his infancy and childhood, gives it
one long, lingering look, ere he should pass away from it forever, and,
with a stout heart, (though a misgiving may now and then come over him,)
sets his face towards Oregon—what protection does he find when he crosses
the Missouri and enters the Indian territory? What aid can he now ex-
pect? None, save God in Heaven and his own right arm. Although still
within her borders, his country ceases to spread over him her protecting
shield; but his heart glows as strongly as ever with the love of country,
and he feels himself what he is proud to acknowledge—an American citi-
zen. Should another family from the same neighborhood attempt a jour-
nay to the same place by water, and the vessel in which it embarks be
assailed by a pirate, and this family murdered or robbed, would not the
fact startle all Christendom, and instant and effectual measures be taken
to arrest the offender? And would not the vessel so fortunate as to cap-
ture the pirate craft be salute by government ordnance as she have in
view with the pirates dangering at the yard-arms? And why is not an
American citizen entitled to as much protection on American soil as he is
upon the highway of nations? He, who crosses the plains and mountains
is in danger every hour; he suffers all that humanity is capable of en­
during in body and mind. He is often so beset with hunger and thirst,
that the most loathsome food is rendered palatable to his famishing appetite,
and the foulest water sweet to his parched lips. All this produces no
complaint. But when he encounters troop after troop of savages; when,
exhausted by his toilsome journey, he is called upon, to defend, at fearful
odds, his own life and that which is still dearer to him—the persons of his
wife and little ones; when he sees his team slaughtered for Indian food—
his horses and property openly taken away from his sight; when he be­
holds these bands of marruding and plundering savages, led on by outcast
whites, more brutal still than the Indians, and who have fled from civilized
communities and from the justice that awaited their guilty deeds, and
whose selfish and reckless notions exact the lion's share of the immigrants'
property, to enable his escape with his life—the toil-worn pilgrim begins
to despair. He thinks of his government, and he feels, with mingled sor­
row and indignation, its unjust neglect. The cup of his misery runs over
when he learns that the authors of losses and sorrows are rewarded by
presents from government—doctulous made under the mistaken idea that
they will serve to propitiate the savage ferocity of their natures, and dis­
pose them to treat the coming trains of immigrants with kindness. There
are many widows and fatherless children in Oregon, who look back along
Snake river and other places as spots where their hopes in this life were
crushed and lost forever. Should the pathway across the plains be closed,
Oregon may write her own epitaph. It is through that channel, across
the mountains, that Oregon is to receive her horses, cattle, and sheep;
and the supply does not equal the demand made by the immigrations by sea.
Oregon requires also the hardy pioneer of the western States; for upon
him, and those of like habits of industry and vigor, depends the force
necessary to prostrate these mighty forests, and lay bare the hidden
treasures of her prolific timbered soils. We therefore pray your honorable
body to station troops at proper intervals along the great overland route,
so that the lives and property of the immigrants to Oregon may be, in a
measure, secured against the dangers to which they have heretofore been,
and, unless such provision be made, are again likely to be exposed. The
number of the citizens, and the condition and prosperity of the country,
in a great measure, depend upon your beneficent action in this matter.

We cannot close this memorial without allusion to the condition of the
youth of Oregon. Many of them have been here for years—some of
whom have grown to man's estate. It has always been impossible for
families to bring school-books across the plains. Libraries, as well as
other valuable property, to a vast amount, have been thrown away in the
mountains. In the mean time the rising generation are coming forward,
and will soon take upon themselves the support of government; and no
regret is so general as that uncontrollable circumstances prevented the
education of the youth of the land; and, had it not been for the self
denying missionary, a waste of intellect would have resulted too dark and
mournful for contemplation. A strong and general desire pervades every
family to use, as best they can, all means within their power to avert this evil—of all others the most to be lamented. In this matter the government of the United States is also directly interested. Situated as this Territory is—so far from home—so far from the multiplied influences which there mantle the infant when thought commences—which surround him on all sides, inviting him forward, until hope and desire find him in the halls of learning, made sacred by the pencil-marks of his ancestors. Within his reach, be he never so poor, stand learned and devout teachers ready to instruct; and let him walk where he will, his eyes behold classical displays of art and refinement, and his mind, mixing with the general mind, is borne aloft enlightened, refined, and purified. These aids and appliances are not sufficiently found here. Would that they were here; that more books and teachers were here; then, with the grandeur and sublimity of Oregon's scenery—its mountains piled up and supported by pillars of columnar basalt, covered far above the clouds with everlasting snows—its mighty rivers and tumultuous water-falls—its magnificent forests, and its clear anthems forever sounding on the coast—the youth of Oregon would soon challenge the world for equals.

We would most earnestly and respectfully ask in their behalf, and in behalf of the whole federal government, present aid; for, should we be delayed until wild lands can be brought into legal market and purchasers be found, the evils to which allusions have been made will have become irreparable. We therefore pray that an appropriation of ten thousand dollars be made, and applied in the purchase of a suitable library, to be placed in the University of Oregon; and, as in duty bound, we will ever pray, &c.

COLUMBIA LANCASTER,
Late President pro tem. of the Council.

W. T. MATLOCK,
Late Speaker pro tem. of the House of Representatives.