

ASTORIA, OREGON'S OLDEST CITY, HAS COLORFUL PAST

Town at Mouth of Columbia Founded by John Jacob Astor in 1811
Was Once Under British Control.

ASTORIA has always reeked with romance, from the time of its founding, a far outpost of empire, to its spectacular fire of yesterday. Its life has always been colorful, cosmopolitan and of the strong western flavor.

To it, through its more than century of history, have come sailormen, fur trappers, Hudson's Bay officials; it was once the seat of Dr. John McLoughlin, father of Oregon; gold miners from California and Alaska, early settlers who crossed the plains and founded new homes on the fertile Clatsop soil, lumbermen, fishermen, and all the varied assortment of the country's sturdiest who sought the western frontier.

Astoria was once under the British flag. It was later the first post-office west of the Rockies. Founded by John Jacob Astor, who planted a fur-trading post there in 1811, Astoria is the only Oregon city that has won an outstanding place in permanent American literature, having been the motif for Washington Irving's novel of that name.

Early Days Bloody.

Its early days were bloody and tempestuous. Its early history was as romantic as its location was picturesque and its later years have been always interesting, a singularly progressive and alert population having built a city noted for its enterprise and modern refinements.

Few cities have so charming a site. Sitting on an attractive slope, Astoria lies at the mouth of America's second greatest river, with an outlook upon a beautiful bay and to the sea. Shipping in the harbor, the wooded hills in the background, and the salmon fishing fleet as it dances over the shining water, have always made a picture that was the admiration of all who have visited the place.

1883 Fire Destructive.

Older residents of Astoria have been accustomed to date modern events in the city's life from the "big fire" of 1883, when a disastrous blaze started in a sawmill on the waterfront and swept that district of the city, together with several blocks of residences and wharves.

The loss was heavy, but it was, fortunately, the most prosperous year Astoria had ever known, due to the fact that the salmon pack had that year reached its maximum. Everyone had money in plenty and the city was restored better than it was before.

As a result of the fire a "citizens' committee," like to the vigilantes of California, came into being. As the flames, which burst out on July 3, progressed, quantities of liquor were taken from the saloons in the path of the blaze and stored in places of safety. The stuff was stolen by rough characters and great disorder prevailed. Drinking continued through the night and there was plundering from homes and stores, the authorities being powerless.

Emergency Law Enforced.

The emergency law and order group was formed and finally restored quiet after several malcontents were run out of town. One person mauled, recognized three of his assailants and brought suit for damages in the federal courts, recovering a substantial judgment. Citizens subscribed \$20 each to pay the damages. As the result, the disorderly part of the city, graphically, if inelegantly, known as "Swilltown," was cleaned out, its denizens being driven away.

Astoria was known as one of the wettest of cities in pre-Volstead days and rainfall there at times vied with world records. It was the resort of sea captains and sailors, of woodsmen, frontiersmen, miners, fishermen of many nations and a large transient population that lent support to its varied resorts.

Gambling Games Flourish.

A tenderloin district as highly spiced as the west ever knew flourished there for years. Wine and women led gay revels, with the goddess of chance enshrined at the gaming tables in the days when the west was younger and giddier than it is today. Then Astoria outdid many a mining camp of the early romances in its high flavored life. When other western cities cleaned house, Astoria did also, but the memory of the old days at the mouth of the river lingers in the hearts of the old timers who see the life in retrospect.

In its later days it was picturesque, even if in a different way. A fight of years raged for common point rail rates with Portland, with Sidney Dell its best known protagonist. A truly western executive, Mayor Harley, lent the place considerable color during his term of office, a fist fight on the street being an incident.

Recent Years Prosperous.

Substantial accomplishments that placed Astoria in the front rank of Oregon cities have been the work of recent years. Port terminals that are the last word in docks have been built. Schools, churches and all modern facilities have been afforded. The city is noted for its beautiful homes. Its people are remarkably progressive, with thriving industries making the city hum. Good streets and fine stores mark Astoria's progress and a new pipe line to bring a larger supply of splendid

mountain water from Bear Creek to the city reservoirs is now being completed.

The beginning of Astoria was the erection of Fort George as a fur-trading post. It was not until 1840 that the first permanent settlers began to arrive and take up homesteads on Clatsop plains between Astoria and the sea. Colonel R. W. Morrison, grandfather of John W. Minto, was one of the early ones, crossing the plains in 1844. James W. Welch, Robert Caruthers, J. M. Shively, Colonel Taylor, Colonel John McClure, A. E. Wilson, Robert Shortess and James Birnle, the last named a Hudson Bay company agent, were among the earliest residents. In 1844 there were but four white men on the site of the future city, which the last census credits with 14,207 people.

1850 Population Was 252.

A count of the population was made in 1850 and the result was 252 persons, which included two companies of United States engineers stationed there, and numerous other transients.

Shipping at the mouth of the river had increased to such a point in 1849 that a custom house was ordered established and a pilot boat, the Mary Taylor, was put in commission off the bar. Colonel John Adair was the first collector of customs. His attempt to obtain the donation of a site for the custom house in the better settled district of the city ended in failure, prices he believed to be exorbitant being demanded for the land. Colonel Adair then established his offices in upper Astoria and the rivalry between the two districts that was to continue for years was started.

City Incorporated in 1856.

Astoria was incorporated by act of the territorial legislature in 1856. There were aspirations at that time for rail connection with the outside world, all communication being by water. T. R. Cornelius, W. W. Parker and John Adair incorporated the Astoria & Willamette Valley Railroad company in 1858. This was the beginning of a long struggle for a rail outlet that ended with the opening of the Astoria & Columbia river railroad in 1898, 40 years later.

It was in 1849 that Astoria became the first postoffice in the west, being the distributing office for the entire northwest, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, a distinction that was later to go to San Francisco.

Land Sold in Lottery.

Fort Canby and Fort Stevens were erected in the early '60s. The "Olney lottery" was used by Judge Cyrus Olney in 1867 to dispose of extensive real estate holdings in the growing city. He sold tickets widely at \$50 each, every holder to be entitled to receive a lot in the drawing, location to be determined by chance, and each ticket holder also had a chance on the capital prize, which was two lots and a house.

The first newspaper, the "Marine Gazette," appeared in the '60s, to be succeeded by the Morning Astorian in 1873. In 1870 the census gave the place a population of 639. It was in 1874 that the first grain ships to take an entire load at Astoria were sent away by R. C. Kinney & Sons. In 1873 the first salmon cannery was built and the new industry meant much to the people, adding greatly to the prosperity of the district.

City Doubles Population.

During the years between 1874 and 1876 the population of the city nearly doubled. Lumber mills had been started and it was the period of Astoria's greatest early prosperity. Money was plentiful and the early-day mining camp atmosphere prevailed, with everyone a ready spender. Coins smaller than 25 cents were unknown.

The Western Union built its telegraph line, the wire that told this city of yesterday's disaster, from Portland to Astoria in 1876. The following year it is set down that Astoria had 40 saloons and was a wonderfully prosperous city. The census of 1880 gave it a population of 2303.