The disastrous fire at Astoria, which seems to have skirted the site of the trading fort begun by John Jacob Astor's partners in April, 1811, encroaches on what is, historically, the most romantic interesting spot in all the northwest. This was the scene of the first permanent settlement in the Oregon country, and if we except the historically insignificant visit paid by the Winship brothers of Boston to make a location opposite Oak Point in 1810, it was the first white settlement of any kind on the western shores of what is now the United States north of the region of San Francisco bay. The period from the arrival of the ship Tonquin at its anchorage in Baker's bay on March 25, 1811, to the surrendering twenty years of Hudson's Bay company establishment at Fort Vancouver which superseded Astoria as the seat of civilization in the region, in 1824, was filled with parallel in romance, in daring enterprise and adventure and in its bearing on the destiny of the Pacific coast.

Considered as a great public acquisition the commencement of a settlement on that part of the western coast of North America." wrote Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Astor, "should be regarded with gratification to the time when its descendants should have spread themselves through the whole length of the coast, covering it with free and independent Americans." A peculiar sentimental value attaches to Jefferson's evident view that there was here the potential nucleus of an independent republic, "unconnected with us except by the ties of blood and interest, and enjoying like us the rights of self-government." For Astoria, though it was actually a little more than a century ago, antedated by some years the first realization of the possibility of an American republic under one flag extending from ocean to ocean across the American continent. From the old fort as a base of operations there radiated a series of enterprises which in their daring challenge the imaginations of romancers, and were destined to bring under the sphere of American influence the entire territory west of the Rocky mountains and south of the present northern boundary of the United States.

Notwithstanding the unprofitable outcome of the venture from the viewpoint of John Jacob Astor himself, it is now realized that it was a matter of paramount concern in the history of the nation. Astoria was internationally famous throughout the prolonged negotiations which eventuated in the adjustment of the boundary on the parallel of 49; it furnished at least two of the five principal points in the American contention against Great Britain over national sovereignty; it figured in the calculations of statesmen and diplomats for more than three decades and it supplied a strong link in the chain of our claim. "Such a union of titles," said our minister, Richard Rush, at London in 1824, "imparting validity to each, no other on earth ever existed." Without Astoria the union to which Rush alluded would have been incomplete and it is reasonably conceivable that Oregon would have been lost to the United States. The prestige of Astoria as the first white settlement, the calculated permanency of its establishment and its bearing on the interpretation of the treaty of Ghent which terminated the war of 1812 were accomplished facts which the

American negotiators made the most of and which the British were not able to ignore.

Jefferson did not underestimate the significance of the event when he "looked forward . . . to the time when its descendants should have spread itself through the whole length of the coast." The very geography of the Oregon country is redolent with memories which mention of Astoria invokes. The John Day river in Clatsop county and the river of the same name which flows into the Columbia from central Oregon were named for a member of the Astor company whose adventures rival in interest the most fearsome of wild west tales. The McKenzie fork of the Willamette river and the towns of Halsey and Gervais stand as permanent memorials to other daring Astorians.

As early as 1812 members of the party having headquarters at Astoria were making the name and fame of America known from the upper reaches of the Willamette on the south to Kamloops, now in British Columbia, on the north. Territory then held exclusively by Canadian fur traders was invaded by Astorians who founded a post at the doorstep of the Northwesters on the Spokane river. Astoria was a base for operations conducted in the Flathead and Kootenai valleys, on the Okanogan and on the upper Snake. Though Gray's discovery itself had been disputed by hair-splitting British diplomats as but "the casual arrival of a trading vessel at an intermediate point of the coast," the indubitable fact of these Astorian enterprises was nearly impregnable and after the space of 111 years makes the historical prestige of Astoria secure.

In yet another particular Astoria figured in the determination of political events. If it be conceded, as we incline to contend, that the decision favorable to the American claim to Oregon was in the last analysis governed by occupancy of the soil by the pioneers, by their initiative in instituting a government and by their evident predilection for the American flag, it will be remembered that at least six of the Astor party who settled in the Willamette valley cast the weight of their influence in favor of the American party when the provisional government was formed Without the votes of these men, Gervais, Lucier, Labonte, DeBruil, Carson and Cannon, the outcome would not have been as it was and we should need to rewrite the entire history of the northwest.

The first Astorians were building better than they knew when they began the construction of their first warehouse and stockade on the site of the present fire-swept city near the sea.