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THE OREGON COUNTRY

GOES TO UNCLE SAM

Threat of War With Britain Yields

Northwest Region ,100 Years Ago;

Area Larger than Germany

By Dean Miller

This article deals with the struggle for the land north of California and West of the mountains, known as the "Oregon Territory".

It tells how different nations contested for the land; and how it finally came into the possession of the United States.

It is timed for June 15. England agreed to the present boundary with us on June 15, 1846-100 years ago.

The author is a social scientists at the Louisiana Polytechnic Institute. He has formerly been a college dean, and has been connected with two other colleges.

By Dean Miller

Old Glory has flown over our land known as the Oregon Territory- Washington, Oregon, and Idaho- for 100 years on June 15, and no other national flag has had the honor to fly over it. But if it were not for the " tricks" of history we in this territory today might be under the flag of another nation. Spain, Russia, and England contested for this land for several years.

The United States and England were at each other's throats over the territory in the final stages of the contest. The United States claimed all the land north of California and west of the mountains even for 350 miles into Canada including a part of British Columbia and Alberta. " Fifty-Four forty or fight" was a slogan back in 1844. Great Britain claimed all the territory north and west of the Columbia River, including much of the present State of Washington. War between these countries was averted perhaps by the missionaries who came to help save the souls of the Indians and remained to save the United States and Britain from a war, and to save the State of Washington for the United States.

If " finders" were " keepers" in world affairs, we of the territory today might be doing the bidding of General Franco of Spain for a Spanish buccaneer saw the land first. One adventurer sailed his rickety ship along the coast in 1542, or a bit more than 400 years ago. Juan de Fuca for whom the strait between Vancouver Island and Washington is named came about 50 years later. Others came still later, But Spain's

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star of destiny was declining and she gave up her empire in the new world, ceding this territory to us in 1819.

If Russia could have made good on her claim to this land, the Red Flag of Marshal Stalin might be flying over it today. Adventurers from Russia sailed along the Aleutian Islands- those the Japs took from us in the early days of the war- and down along the coast of Alaska and farther south in 1741 to claim all the land they saw. Forty years later they built a fort in Alaska and then one in California, and claimed the land in between. We blasted her out of all the territory ^{except} ~~except~~ Alaska with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, when we said that American ~~soil~~ soil was no longer open to colonization. She sold us Alaska in 1867.

The first Englishman to espy the land was the Adventurer Drake, in 1578, while on his famous trip around the world. The American continent got in his way and he tried to find a water route through it known as the northwest passage, to keep from having to go around it. Two centuries later Captain Cook took a month to explore around the Vancouver Island and look for the "northwest passage". England's best claim though came from her trade with the Indians by the Hudson Bay Company. In 1823 after doing business in the area for several years they sent Dr. John McLoughlin, "Father of the Oregon Country" to the region. He built Vancouver on the Columbia and ruled the country for 22 years. Other English explorers who came to the region were Vancouver and McKenzie.

A Boston merchant, Robert Gray, sailed his ship, the Columbia, into the mouth of a river he named Columbia on May 11, 1792. He claimed all the land drained by the river for the United States. Across the mountains in 1805 came Lewis and Clark from their noted expedition through the northwest. They sailed down the Columbia too. Near the mouth of the river in 1811, John Jacob Astor established a post to trade with the Indians. Bonneville and Fremont and other Americans also came to the region.

Four Flathead Indians appeared at the Methodist headquarters in

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St. Louis in the early 1830's from the Oregon region, and requested the pale faces to send some one who could tell them about the "book of heaven", the Bible. This Macedonian call was answered by Jason and Daniel Lee. Soon came Dr. Marcus Whitman and others. These missionaries wrote stories "back home" about the picturesque country. Soon hundreds and then thousands people came over the "Oregon Trail" and by other routes to reach the dream land.

A government was needed and the residents of the Columbia-Willamette area met at Champeog in May 1843 and formed a written "constitution". Elections were held and officers elected. Former residents of the United States led in this movement, and it was said to be the first American government established west of the mountains.

Rivalry for control became more bitter. In 1818 Great Britain and the United States agreed for both countries to control the land. This was renewed in 1827, for an indefinite period. Many Americans came and there was a demand that the land be annexed to the United States. Great Britain offered to compromise by taking all the land north and west of the Columbia, while the Americans insisted on at least all of what is now Washington. It looked as if there would be war. In 1844 the Democrats coined the slogan "Fifty-four forty or fight". Polk got tough in 1845 with Britain even though he was about to get into war with Mexico. An agreement was reached June 15, 1846 on the present boundary. Abe Lincoln was offered the job of being the first territorial governor but declined.

In 1853 the Territory was divided into the Oregon and Washington Territory. In 1863, Idaho and parts of what is now Montana and Wyoming were also carved out of the Territory of Washington.

Added to the United States just one hundred years ago, June 15, ^{Was} territory one and a half times as large as Germany. No national flag except Old Glory has flown over it.