

# Oregon City & the Willamette Valley

Dr. John McLoughlin encouraged the Oregon Trail travelers to head south to Oregon City and the Willamette Valley. This was in part to keep American influence from spreading throughout the extensive territory claimed by Great Britain under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), but also because he had a stake in the city he had founded at Willamette Falls in 1829. The HBC ran a store there, and McLoughlin would build a house and later retire there. By 1844, Oregon City had three stores to supply farmers and was the seat of the newly-founded American Provisional Government. Anyone wishing to file a land claim had to come to Oregon City.

The end of the Oregon Trail was Oregon City, not quite 2000 miles from Independence. Those arriving by river landed near Governor George Abernethy's house and proceeded to Abernethy Green, a large meadow behind his house. The Barlow Road travelers entered Abernethy Green from the east. Here was the final campground.

In 1850, Congress passed the Donation Land Act, which recognized most of the land claims filed under the provisional government. Single white males over the age of twenty-one could claim 320 acres. If they were married, they could claim an additional 320 acres for their wife. Widows could hold title to land, but single women could not.

Territorial officials began their terms on March 3, 1849, in Oregon City, when Oregon was still predominantly wilderness.

Homesteads usually consisted of one room log houses with vegetable gardens and a few acres planted in wheat. With little hard currency available, wheat was the primary medium of exchange. Few roads existed, so water was the quickest way to move crops and supplies. Some settlers laid out townsites from their claims. John McLoughlin was the first to do this when he platted Oregon City in 1842.