

Spanish-owned California on the south. An American had discovered the mouth of its great river, which an American expedition had explored for 400 miles. In all the rest of the Oregon Country, except the Kootenai valley visited by David Thompson in 1808, and in much of Louisiana except that part traversed by Lewis and Clark, no white men had set foot. A virgin world rich beyond all conceiving in fur-bearing animals, big and little, so Gass' journal proved to Astor—in beaver, marten, mink and other small wearers of costly pelts; while legions of buffalo, elk, deer, wild sheep, wolves and bears offered incalculable wealth in robes and hides.

Astor was by this time a rich man. The profits of the China trade and of soaring real estate values provided wealth equal to and superior to that flowing in from the fur business. It is certain that gain was not the only incentive back of the great plan he was now to put into execution and which lay nearer his heart than any he had ever engaged upon.

He believed in America; his whole career was both a result and a proof of that faith; and he desired its aggrandizement. He realized the important part the existence of an American establishment on the Columbia would play in securing that country to us as well as very keenly perceiving its advantage as a commercial base. All his first hand knowledge of the fur trade, and of Indian character and habits, his personal experience in wilderness travel and his knowledge of international maritime commerce, went

into the perfection of detail he lavished upon the two-fold project to be carried on by the Pacific Fur Company.

Regular commerce was to be established between the North West coast and the United States; the Oregon Country and the American hinterland west of the Mississippi were to be occupied; trading posts were to be strung along the Missouri and Columbia rivers and their tributaries, a central station to be established at the mouth of the Columbia. This was to be a clearing house for furs, a



From Franchère's Narrative

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