

"The earliest attempts made by citizens of the United States for similar purposes (trading establishments) were those of an association, formed at St. Louis in 1808, called the Missouri Fur Company. At its head was an enterprising Spaniard named Manuel Lisa, through whose exertions, chiefly, several trading posts were, within the two ensuing years, established on the Upper Missouri, and one beyond the Rocky Mountains, on the head-waters of the Lewis, the southern branch of the Columbia. The post on the Lewis appears to have been the first ever formed by white men in the country drained by the Columbia.* The enmity of the savages in its vicinity, and the difficulty of procuring a regular supply of food, however, obliged Mr. Henry, the superintendent, to abandon it in 1810."

In the same year (1810) Mr. John Jacob Astor, of New York, formed an association for the purpose of occupying positions on the Columbia River favorable to a successful prosecution of the fur trade. It was known as the Pacific Fur Company. The plan was to divide the forces intended for this enterprise; to send part by sea round Cape Horn, and part by land across the continent. Accordingly, the ship Tonquin, with the first detachment, sailed from New York in 1810; and in January following, the second detachment left St. Louis, under the direction of Mr. Wilson P. Hunt.

The Tonquin arrived at the mouth of the Columbia in March, 1811, and establishing their principal factory on the south bank of the river, they gave it the name of Astoria, made familiar to every ear by the elegant and interesting narrative of Mr. Washington Irving. As the object of the committee is only to show the continual claim and actual possession of the territory, from the time of its discovery in 1792, it will not further our design to give an account of the commercial and trading transactions of the association. They occupied Astoria, and their different hunting and trading establishments on the river, until the 16th day of October, 1813; having thus been in actual possession from March, 1811—two years and six months. At the latter period, having received information, upon which they could rely, that a British force was approaching forcibly to dispossess them, the managers sold "all the establishments, furs, and property," to the Northwest Company. The report of the approach of a British force was soon verified; for, in December following, the Rackoon British sloop of war arrived at Astoria, of which Captain Black took possession, substituted the English for the American flag, and changed the name to Fort George.

From this narrative, it appears that the Americans were the first to discover the river Columbia, and first to take possession of the territory through which it passes. The committee has no doubt that the United States has thus acquired a title to that whole territory, of more validity than that of any other nation. As the British Government now refuses to acknowledge the claims of the United States either to the original discovery or possession, (the *discovery was admitted by Vancouver*), the committee will advert to the facts and reasons by which they justify this refusal.

The pretensions of Captain Gray to the honor and right of the discovery are contested, because it is alleged that, at the same time, Alexander Mackenzie, a British subject, discovered the northern branch of that river. If that allegation be true, it certainly produces some difficulty. That it is not true, we have the testimony of Mackenzie himself, who has left us the only account of his travels. Peace River rises in the Rocky Mountains in latitude 55°, and, running generally a northeast course, empties into Slave River in latitude 59°. The entire river is east of the mountains. But on this river Mackenzie tells us he spent the winter of 1792-93; that, for the accommodation of his party, on the 7th of December, 1792, he "set all hands at work to construct the fort, build the house, and form store-houses," at a point which he ascertained, "by various observations," to be in latitude 59° 9' north, and longitude 117° 35' 15" west. This place they left on the 9th of May, 1773, and, ascending Peace River on the 17th, came in sight of the Rocky Mountains. We have seen that, in May, 1792, Gray had discovered the mouth of the river—that, so far from the river being simultaneously discovered, the American discovery was at least one year before the British, even if Mackenzie ever touched the river. His own account gives no reason to suppose that he did. He says that, after crossing the Rocky Mountains, he came to a large river, which he descended

* Greenhow.—Permanent post must be meant; for Lewis and Clark had erected Fort Clatsop, in 1805, as we have seen, at the mouth of the river.