

## Pierre Belleque, one of French Prairie's "Big Four"

By Connie Lenzen

Pierre Belleque, son of Louis Belec and Margarite Baudoin, was born 5 January 1797 at Assumption, Canada, and died 13 October 1849 at sea.<sup>1</sup> On 21 January 1839, he married Genevieve St. Martin, daughter of André St. Martin and a Chinook woman.<sup>2</sup>

It took a lot of work to be considered one of Oregon French Prairie's "Big Four."<sup>3</sup> Besides Pierre Belleque, the other members of the "Big Four" were Joseph Gervais, Etienne Lucier, and Louis LaBonte. Belleque, a "mild and honest" man,<sup>4</sup> worked with these men as they broke the prairie's sod, signed petitions to bring priests to their community, and actively participated in the establishment of the Oregon Territory.

Belleque, a "Nor'wester," moved his family into the old North West Company post on the Willamette River.<sup>5</sup> Willamette Post, as it was called, was also known as Fort Kalapuya and Henry House. It was a one and a half story dwelling with clapboard walls and glass windows.<sup>6</sup> A historical marker is all that remains.

Because of his contributions to Oregon's history, he is one of the 158 names of prominent Oregonians memorialized in the frieze in the Oregon State Capitol.<sup>7</sup>



### ***Fur trapping***

Pierre Belleque entered service of the North West Company in Quebec in 1819. The company was established in 1779 as a competitor of the Hudson's Bay Company. When the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) merged in 1821, Belleque signed on with HBC as a "Middleman," a canoe man who occupied a middle seat in a canoe. By 1828, he was a "Steersman," the person in charge of the canoe. In 1829 he was stationed in the Columbia District.<sup>8</sup> The Columbia District extended from British Columbia south to what is now the California border and east from the Pacific Ocean to the Continental Divide.

## **Settlement**

By 1832 Belleque and his young family were farming on French Prairie<sup>9</sup> where he had 640 acres adjoining the Willamette River and Church Creek. His neighbors were Joseph Despard, Etienne Lucier, and I. Martin.<sup>10</sup>

In 1835, the French Canadians on French Prairie felt the need to have their marriages blessed and their children baptized. They sent a letter to the Bishop of Juliopolis [at Red River, now Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada,] and asked for a priest. In the spring of 1836, they sent another letter as a reminder. "Peare Belleck," the father of three children, signed with a mark.<sup>11</sup>

In 1837, Belleque signed a petition requesting Ewing Young and Lawrence Carmichael discontinue building their distillery that was planned for the production of alcohol. Many of the petition signers were members of Jason Lee's Temperance Society, but Belleque was not a member of that group.<sup>12</sup>

William A. Slacum of the United States Navy made his survey of the Oregon Territory in December 1837. He reported that Pierre Billique owned two houses, 9 horses, and 28 hogs. He had enclosed 50 acres, cultivated 45 acres, and harvested 700 bushels of wheat.<sup>13</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company sold wheat and pork hams to the Russian Fur Company in Alaska,<sup>14</sup> and the French Prairie settlers provided the commodities.

Belleque, along with other Prairie dwellers, traded at Jason Lee's Methodist Mission store where he paid in beavers. One large beaver was worth \$2.20.<sup>15</sup>

In March 1838, Belleque was one of the signers of a petition to Congress requesting American government in the Willamette Valley. The petition began with this statement,<sup>16</sup>

"That our settlement begun in the year 1832, and has hitherto prospered beyond the most sanguine expectations of its first projectors. The products of our fields have amply justified the most flattering descriptions of the fertility of the soil, while the facilities which it affords for rearing cattle are, perhaps, exceeded by those of no country in North America."

## **The arrival of the priests**

On 24 November 1838, Rev. F. N. Blanchet and Rev. Modeste Demers arrived at Fort Vancouver where James Douglas, acting Chief Factor, welcomed them. On 3 January 1839, Etienne Lucier and Pierre Belleque escorted Blanchet from Fort Vancouver to Champog by canoe. From there, they rode horses to the log church that would be named St. Paul.<sup>17</sup>

On 21 January 1839, Rev. F. N. Blanchet officiated at the marriage of Pierre Belique and Genevieve Martin and also legitimized their children; "Sophie, aged 7 years; Pierre, aged 3 years; Genevieve, aged a year the 18 of next April."<sup>18</sup>

## **The Prairie develops**

In February 1841, Belleque joined Joseph Gervais and Etienne Lucier in the move to establish a provisional government.<sup>19</sup> The settlers appointed him as one of the three Constables.<sup>20</sup> However, when it came to a vote, he voted against the organization of an American Provisional government.

In 1842, Dr. Elijah White, the first Oregon Indian Agent, took a census of settlers in the Oregon Territory. He included the numbers of men, women, and children and a summary of their crops for the 1841–1842 year. White intended to show it was possible to farm the Territory and that the British had a foothold. Unless American settlers moved in, the Canadians (British) would be in the majority. The Territory was under a “joint occupancy” agreement, and unless something was done, an overwhelming number of Canadians could tip the balance of power, and Oregon could become an English possession.

Belleque was listed as “Bilake” in White’s 1842 census. His household consisted of one male over 18, one female over 18, and four children. He had 100 acres under improvement and had harvested 610 bushels of wheat and 392 bushels of grain. He owned 24 horses, 29 neat stock (dairy cattle), and 12 hogs.<sup>21</sup> The grain was sold to Fort Vancouver.<sup>22</sup>

Pierre’s son Joseph was born on 15 April 1843. Ten days later, he was taken to Vancouver for baptism. Joseph McLoughlin and Victoire McLoughlin were his godparents.<sup>23</sup> Joseph McLoughlin was John McLoughlin’s eldest son, and Victoire was Joseph’s wife.<sup>24</sup>

In 1844, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur established a female seminary in St. Paul where the daughters of the French Canadians and their Métis wives received religious instruction. Even more important for their families, the girls received domestic training that made them eligible for marriage into a higher social class. Both Esther and Sophia Belleque attended the seminary.

### ***Pierre’s death***

Pierre Belleque and his son Pierre joined other St. Paul settlers who travelled to the California gold fields. In 1849 they were returning home when he died at sea and was given a sea burial. The gold dust was lost overboard, and Pierre’s son returned home with nothing.

Pierre may have had a premonition of his early death. On 25 January 1848, he went to St. Paul Mission and dictated his will to Rev. J. B. Z. Bolduc who wrote it in French.<sup>25</sup> Bolduc arrived in St. Paul from Canada in 1843 and established St. Joseph’s College, a boy’s school near the church.<sup>26</sup> The school was the first school in Oregon when it opened in 1845 with 28 Métis boarders and three teachers. Lessons were in French and English.<sup>27</sup> It is possible Pierre’s son attended this school.

Pierre’s will provided \$800 to his daughters Sophy, Genevieve, and Esther, and the same to his sons Jean Baptiste and Cyprien. The children were to have the livestock. His wife, whom he named Genevieve (Jany) St. Martin, was to receive a third of his “moveable and immovable goods.”

### ***Life after Pierre’s death***

Genevieve Belleque, a new widow, with young children at home, was now in possession of one third of the Belleque estate. She did not remain a widow for long. On 25 November 1850, she married Casimir Gardepy at the St. Paul church. The witnesses were Etienne Lucier and Jean Baptiste Jodoin and “relatives of the bride.”<sup>28</sup>

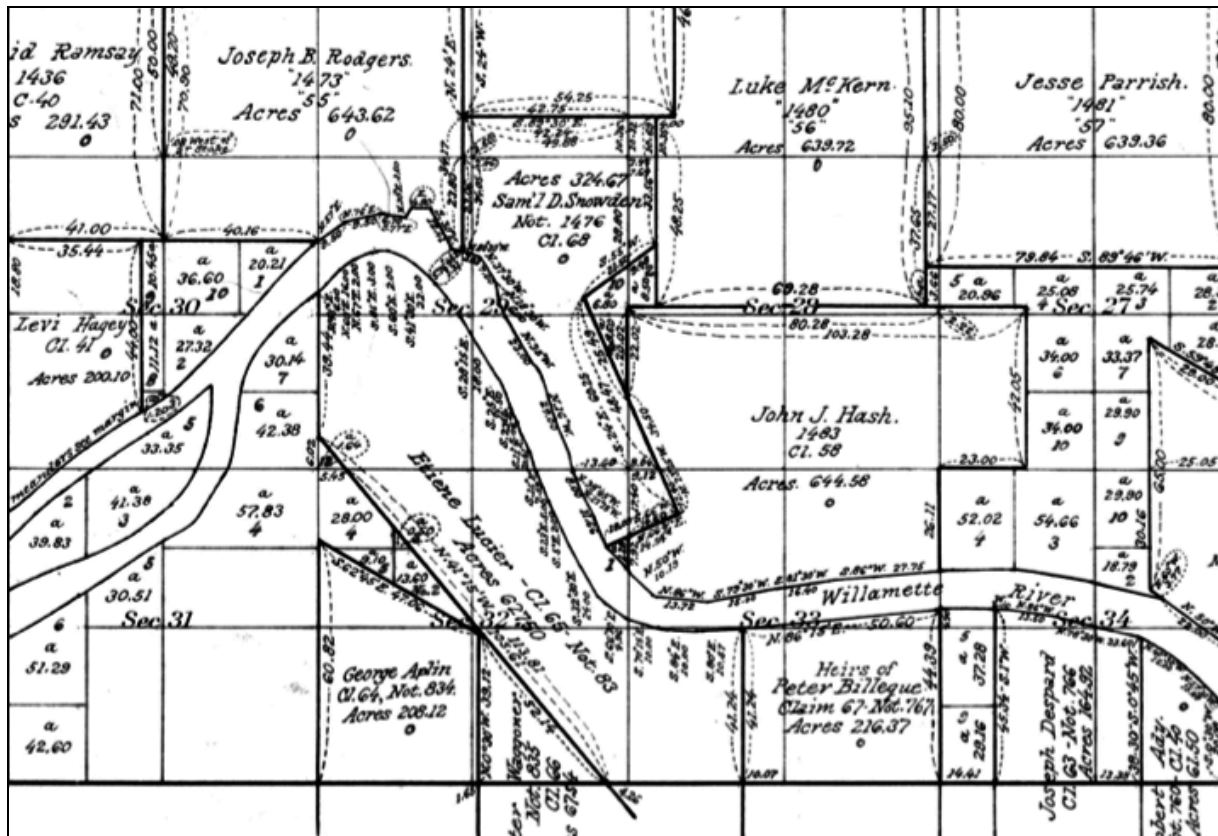
W. H. Reed, the Assistant Marshall charged with enumerating the census, stopped at the household on 28 December 1850. Reed may have been rushed to complete the census that was supposed to be completed in the summer of 1850 because there are errors in the spelling of the names and about the value of the real estate. Casimer Gariepy [*sic*], a farmer, was aged 25, and Jane was aged 34. No real estate was given for either Casimer or his wife even though they

would have been in possession of Belleque's property that had been valued in May at \$1500.<sup>29</sup> Hiram Simkins, a 22-year-old single man living in the neighboring household was supposedly in possession of \$3,000 worth of real estate. That sum would fit better with the Belleque land.<sup>30</sup>

	William Simkins	77	Acres	3000	Willamette	1
8	Casimir Gariepy	25	"		citizen	1
	Yves	31	"			
	Sophie Belleque	15	"			
	Pierre	16	"			
	Yves	13	"			
	Esther	10	"			
	Yves	5	"			
	Isabelle	3	"			
	Robert Lowell	11	"	Farmer	Ohio	1

Pierre Belleque was not able to apply for an Oregon donation land claim. The Act came into effect on 27 September 1850 when he was in California, and he died before returning home. Genevieve filed for 320 acres (half of the original claim). Genevieve and Casimer sold the land in 1857 to Sylvain Bourjeau. In 1860 George W. Eberhard purchased the land and tried to clear the title. The Commissioner of Public Lands ruled, "Pierre Belleque having died in 1849 had acquired no rights under the Act of 1850 which could descend to the benefit of his widow and heirs." Eberhard had to purchase his land again.<sup>31</sup>

This 1860 federal survey shows where the land was located on the Willamette River.<sup>32</sup>





This map shows the location of Belleque's houses and fields.<sup>33</sup>

The black rectangles show houses. The rectangles with dashes show fields.

The road is the road to Champoeg



After the April 1852 sale of beaver traps, oxen, a cow, hogs, an Indian mare, the family clock, and some miscellaneous items to John Gardipy, the family was left with seven cows, one bull, six hogs, a plough and an old plough harness, the use of half of a fanning mill (an instrument that separated the wheat from the chaff), and three saws.<sup>34</sup> Cassimer Gardipie was listed in the Marion County tax rolls until 1858.

Genevieve (St Martin) Belleque Gardipy was godmother to numerous French Prairie children. Godparents who were not family members were usually influential persons. The following list of her godchildren provides an illustration of the family's connections.<sup>35</sup>

Lucie, daughter of Andree Chalifou and Catherine Russie; Genevieve Lonetain, daughter of Andre Lonetain and Nancy Okanogan; Marie Marguerite, daughter of "infidel parents, Tchinouks by nation; Adrienne, daughter of Etienne Lussier and Josephite Nouette; Jean Baptise, son of Jean Baptiste Charles and a native woman; Ursue, daughter of Antoine Azur and Lisette Kilimaux; Victoire, daughter of Frederic Despart and Lisette Tchinouk; Antoine, a child of "unknown parents, the mother Indian;" Lucie, daughter of Jean Baptiste Perrault and Angele Tchinouk; Marie Genevieve Dompierre, daughter of David Dompierre and Marguerite Souliere, M tis Cree; Oliver, son of Michel Laferte and Josephite Pend d'Oreille; Jacques, son of infidel parents; Esther and Catherine, daughters of Alkwatkwolki and of Holokitsal, Tchinouk infidels; Marie, daughter of Adolphe Chamberland and Julienne Watience; Therese, daughter of Jean Baptiste Dubreuil and Marguerite Yougolta; Pierre Paul Pierriche, Indian; Agathe, wife of Pierriche; Julie, daughter of Pierre Pepin and Suzanne Gaudrich; Josette, daughter of Paul Piree, Calapouias and Agate; Andre, son of Pierre Menard and Josephite Youtta.

### ***Child list***

Pierre Belleque and Genevieve St. Martin had the following children:

1. **Mary Sophie Belleque**, born 1832. She married Narcisse Cornoyer on 29 September 1851 at St. Paul.<sup>36</sup>
2. **Pierre Belleque**, born 1835. He married Anne Gagnon on 5 March 1869 at St. Louis.<sup>37</sup>
3. **Genevieve Belleque**, born 1838. She married Felix Gregoire on 20 April 1857 at St. Paul.<sup>38</sup>
4. **Esther Belleque**, born 11 December 1840.<sup>39</sup> She married Joseph Hebert on 5 December 1859 at St. Louis.<sup>40</sup>
5. **Joseph Belleque**, born 5 April 1843.<sup>41</sup>
6. **Jean Baptiste Belleque**, born 19 October 1845.<sup>42</sup>
7. **Cyprian Belleque**, born 1848. He married Julienne Bergevin on 13 May 1873 in St. Paul.<sup>43</sup>

Genevieve and Casimer Gardipy had the following children:

8. **Edouard Gardipy**, born 8 August 1851.<sup>44</sup>
9. **Caroline Gardipy**, born about 1855, died February 1857.<sup>45</sup>
10. **Narcisse Gardipy**, born 15 August 1857.<sup>46</sup>
11. **Charles Hilarie Gardipy**, born 1 March 1860, died 17 March 1861.<sup>47</sup>
12. **Lucien Oliver Gardipy**, born 26 April 1862.<sup>48</sup>

Photos from the St. Paul Mission Historical Society collection, <http://spmhs.pastperfect-online.com>.



Marie Clementia (Bellique) Demacon, 1873-1953; Pierre Belleque II, 1836-1913; Gilbert Belleque, 1871-1926.



Cyprien Belleque and Madeleine Bergevin, children Malvina and Josephine, 1876.



Narcisse Gardipe and granddaughter, about 1913, Athena, Oregon.



Sophie Belleque Cornoyer and Edward Gardipe.



## Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> "Early Oregonian Search," *Oregon State Archives* (<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/prs/personprofile.do?recordNumber=114556> : accessed 1 February 2014). George Brown, *Friend and Family on French Prairie [and elsewhere]* (St. Paul, OR: St. Paul Mission Historical Society, 2001), unpaginated.
- <sup>2</sup> Marie Leona Nichols, *The Mantle of Elias: the Story of Fathers Blanchet and Demers in Early Oregon* (Portland: Binfords & Mort, 1941), 264. "Pierre Bellique," BC Métis Mapping Research Project, *Métis Nation British Columbia* ([http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc\\_bio\\_profile.php?id=MjE3](http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc_bio_profile.php?id=MjE3) : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Oswald West, "Oregon's First White Settlers on French Prairie," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 1942), 200; digital image, *JStor* (<http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/20611437> : accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>4</sup> "Pierre Bellique," BC Métis Mapping Research Project, *Métis Nation British Columbia* ([http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc\\_bio\\_profile.php?id=MjE3](http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc_bio_profile.php?id=MjE3) : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>5</sup> Oswald West, "Oregon's First White Settlers on French Prairie," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 1942), 203; digital image, *JStor* (<http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/20611437> : accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>6</sup> George Edmonston, Jr., "Tales from the Grubby End: Looking at the rich history of the Willamette Post," *The Newberg Graphic* (Newberg, Oregon), 26 November 2013 (<http://www.pamplinmedia.com> : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>7</sup> *Report of the State Capitol Reconstruction Commission* (Salem, 1939), 27.
- <sup>8</sup> Pierre Belleque Biographical Sheet; digital image Hudson's Bay Company Archives ([http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/b/belleque\\_pierre.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/b/belleque_pierre.pdf): accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> *Memorial of William A. Slacum Praying Compensation for his services in obtaining information in relation to the settlements on the Oregon river December 18, 1837* (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1972), 22.
- <sup>10</sup> Lottie Gurley, comp., *Genealogical Material in Oregon Provisional Land Claims*, Abstracted; Volumes I-III, 1845-1849 (Portland: The Genealogical Forum of Portland, 1982), 41.
- <sup>11</sup> Letters to the Bishop of Juliopolis, Red River from the Willamette Settlement, March 22, 1836 and March 8, 1837, Mss 83, Catholic Church in Oregon; located at Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>12</sup> Cornelius James Brosnan, "The Signers of the Oregon Memorial of 1838," *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jul., 1993), 188; digital image, *JStor* (<http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/40475517> : accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>13</sup> *Memorial of William A. Slacum*, page 22.
- <sup>14</sup> George Bryce, *The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1900), 494; ebook, *GoogleBooks* (<http://www.books.google.com> : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>15</sup> Methodist Mission Store Collection; University of Oregon Special Collections.
- <sup>16</sup> Oswald West, "Oregon's First White Settlers on French Prairie," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 1942), 206; digital image, *JStor* (<http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/20611437> : accessed 17 January 2014). *Public Documents Printed by Order of The Senate of the United States Third Session of the Twenty-fifth Congress Begun and Held at the City of Washington, December 3, 1838* Vol. III (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1839), 154-6; digital images, *GoogleBooks* (<http://www.books.google.com> : accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>17</sup> Wilfred P. Schoenberg, *A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest 1743-1983* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987), 42.
- <sup>18</sup> Marie Leona Nichols, *The Mantle of Elias*, page 264.
- <sup>19</sup> Oswald West, "Oregon's First White Settlers on French Prairie," page 206.



- <sup>20</sup> Cornelius James Brosnan, "The Signers of the Oregon Memorial of 1838," *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jul., 1993), 188; digital image, *JStor* (<http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/40475517> : accessed 17 January 2014).
- <sup>21</sup> List of Settlers West of Rockies, 1842; A Census by Elijah White, Indian Agent, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1842-1880 (Oregon Superintendency; National Archives microfilm publication M234, roll 607).
- <sup>22</sup> "Pierre Bellique," BC Métis Mapping Research Project, *Métis Nation British Columbia* ([http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc\\_bio\\_profile.php?id=MjE3](http://ubc.bcmétis.ca/hbc_bio_profile.php?id=MjE3) : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>23</sup> Marie Leona Nichols, *The Mantle of Elias*, page 294.
- <sup>24</sup> "Guide to the McLoughlin-Fraser family papers, 1796-1964," NWDA (<http://nwda.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv07198> : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> Peter Belleque probate, Marion County, Oregon, no. 2; located at Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon.
- <sup>26</sup> Brooke L. Boulware, *The Deathscape of St. Paul: Historic Cemeteries as Cultural Landscapes*, Thesis (Boulware, 2008); online, *Oregon State University* ([http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/8304/Boulware\\_thesis.pdf.txt?sequence=6](http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/8304/Boulware_thesis.pdf.txt?sequence=6) : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>27</sup> Juliet Thelma Pollard, *The Making of the Métis in the Pacific Northwest, Fur Trade Children: Race, Class, and Gender*, thesis (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, 199), 341; digital image, University of British Columbia ([https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/id/106284/UBC\\_1990\\_A1%20P64.pdf](https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/id/106284/UBC_1990_A1%20P64.pdf): accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>28</sup> Marie Leona Nichols, *The Mantle of Elias*, page 304.
- <sup>29</sup> Peter Belleque probate, Marion County, Oregon, no. 2; located at Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon; citing 6 May 1850 Inventory.
- <sup>30</sup> 1850 US Census, population schedule, Marion County, Oregon, page 78, dwelling 18, family 18, Casimir Garipey; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 1 February 2014), citing National Archives microfilm publication M432, reel 742.
- <sup>31</sup> *Oregon Donation Land Claims Vol II* (Portland: Genealogical Forum of Portland, Oregon, 1959), Foreword.
- <sup>32</sup> Land Status & Cadastral Survey Records, Bureau of Land Management, Twp 3S, Range 2 W, ([http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/survey/yPlatView1\\_2.php?path=POR&name=t030s020w\\_002.jpg](http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/survey/yPlatView1_2.php?path=POR&name=t030s020w_002.jpg) : accessed 3 January 2014).
- <sup>33</sup> Township 3 South Range 2 West, Willamette Meridian, Survey, Subdivision of Sections, 12/17/1852; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (<http://www.glorecreds.blm.gov> : accessed 1 February 2014).
- <sup>34</sup> Peter Belleque probate, Marion County, Oregon, no. 2; located at Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon; citing 9 April 1852 Inventory.
- <sup>35</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, 1979); Vol I, 6, 7, 15, 18, 20, 66, 90, 101, 110, 118, 119, 127, 128, 132, 136; Vol II, 7, 14, 18, 26.
- <sup>36</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 41.
- <sup>37</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 40.
- <sup>38</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 85.
- <sup>39</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. I, page 20.

<sup>40</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Louis* Volume I (1845-1868); *St. Louis Register*, Volume II (1869-1900) (Portland, Binford & Mort, 1983), Vol. II, page 140.

<sup>41</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. I, page 70.

<sup>42</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. I, page 117.

<sup>43</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. III, page 62.

<sup>44</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 40.

<sup>45</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 84.

<sup>46</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Louis* Volume I (1845-1868); *St. Louis Register*, Volume II (1869-1900), page 104.

<sup>47</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Louis* Volume I (1845-1868); *St. Louis Register*, Volume II (1869-1900), page 142. Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898* Vol. II, page 117.

<sup>48</sup> Harriet Duncan Munnick, comp. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Louis* Volume I (1845-1868); *St. Louis Register*, Volume II (1869-1900), page 162.