

THE ROLE OF MISSION LANDING IN THE WHITE SETTLEMENT OF THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY OF OREGON



by

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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Location and Geography	3
Family Background.....	5
Early Settlement 1829-1844	7
Mission Years 1844-1850.....	8
Steamboat Years 1851-1916.....	12
Nearby Landings.....	15
Roads, Ferries, and the Mail.....	16
Railroads.....	17
Floods on the Willamette	18
Summary.....	21
Endnotes	22
Annotated Bibliography – Major Sources.....	28

Cover picture: This stamp is U.S. Scott 1124 issued in 1959 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Oregon becoming a state. The scene shows a covered wagon with Mt. Hood in the background.

List of Figures

	<u>Page</u>
1. Genealogy Chart Linking 1870 Owners of Mission Landing to Author.....	1
2. Location of Mission Landing.....	3
3. Mission Landing and St. Paul (Google Maps).....	4
4. Mission Landing from land side today.....	4
5. Mission Landing from river side today	4
6. Lower Willamette Valley Showing French Prairie.....	5
7. Lithograph Woodcut of St. Paul Mission including the Landing	8
8. St. Paul Roman Catholic Church	9
9. Champoeg Memorial.....	10
10. Willamette Falls at Oregon City	12
11. Unknown Steamer Unloading at Mission Landing.....	13
12. <i>Grey Eagle</i> at Salem.....	14
13. U.S. Post Office at St. Paul.....	17
14. Watershed Councils of the Willamette Basin.....	19

Acknowledgments/Dedication

I wish to dedicate this HIST 499 History capstone paper to my mother, Margaret Mary (Peggy) Connor, who instilled a love for family and farm in me.

I wish to acknowledge my wife and family who have supported me in this endeavor to pursue a BA in History and to learn more about the history of and the family connection to Mission Landing.

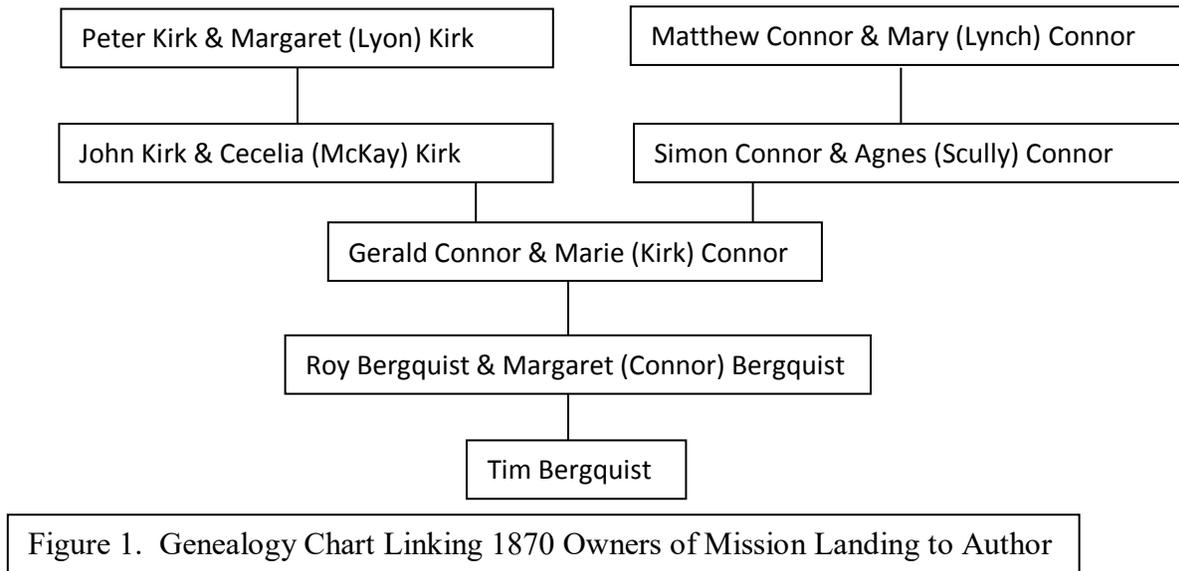
I also wish to thank my sister and youngest brother for providing helpful comments and suggestions on this paper.

Abstract

Mission Landing, also known as St. Paul Landing, is located on the Willamette River about one mile west of the town of St. Paul in Marion County in the state of Oregon. This paper provides background on the landing and traces its role in the white settlement of the Willamette Valley. The religious, economic, social, cultural, and political impacts will be investigated along with family ties to the area. The Landing has been in the author's family since 1870.

Introduction

The impetus for this historical research project was the story about my mother's family. The Connor family have owned and farmed land in the St. Paul, Oregon area since 1871 when Matthew Connor and his family came from Minnesota via the railroad. They were preceded the year before by Peter Kirk and his family. Mission Landing (or St. Paul Landing) became a part of that farm since they first settled there on the former Jesuit mission property. My mother is a Connor and the Landing was owned by her father Gerald, then his son John (her younger brother), and now by his son, her nephew, Sean (my first cousin). Although they came late (about 40 years) from the initial settlement of the area, the Landing still played a major role in commerce of the area. Figure 1 shows how I am related to both Peter Kirk and Matthew Connor (my great-great-grandfathers) through my grandparents.



I used to spend summers on the farm in the 1960s during my high school years helping with the crops, especially strawberries. I have walked the land and seen the Landing. I have always wondered what part it played in the development of the area and now this paper provides the opportunity to explore that.

The intent of this research ultimately is to better understand how Mission Landing played a role (political, economic, religious, social, and cultural) in the white settlement of the Willamette Valley, specifically the St. Paul and French Prairie areas, in Oregon and to trace its history/ownership.

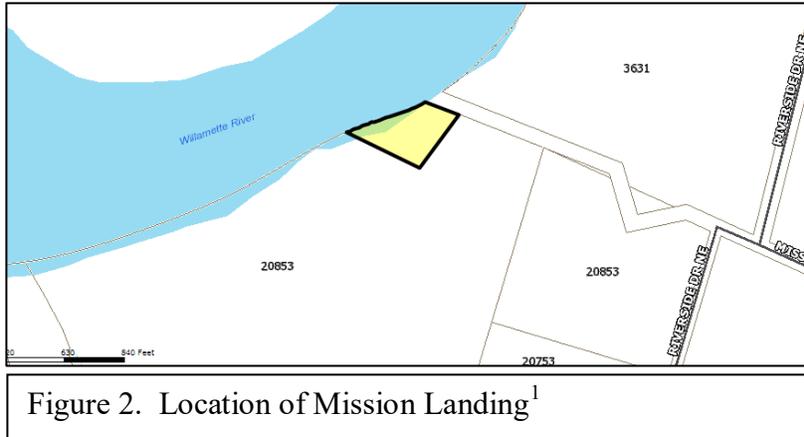
Mission Landing had a significant impact on the settlement of French Prairie, especially with respect to the early development of the Catholic Church in Oregon and the St. Francis Xavier Mission (from whence it got its name). It served as a point of departure for many years on the main transportation route, the Willamette River, in the Willamette Valley. The coming of steamboats also impacted the use of the Landing and provided a means of travelling downriver to the big metropolis of Portland. Eventually roads and the railroads overshadowed the steamboats and gradually the Landing fell into disuse. The last warehouses and docks were swept away in the flood of 1923 (one of many over the years). Today the Landing continues as an important place for irrigation and one of the original pilings can still be seen.

The Catholic Church in Oregon has its roots in St. Paul and the Irish Catholic background of my family played a large part in why they came to St. Paul when they immigrated from Ireland. The brick Catholic church building that exists today was the same one they saw and worshipped in when they settled in St. Paul. The Landing was a part of that Catholic heritage, yet expanded to become a commercial site as well. It is still tied closely to the land.

This paper is going to provide some background on the location and geography of Mission Landing; trace the family ties to it; discuss the early settlement of French Prairie and St. Francis Xavier Mission years; look at the role of steamboats at the Landing; the relevance of nearby landings; explore the development of roads, ferries, and mail in the area; the development and impact of the railroad on the landing; and the importance of floods over the years.

Location and Geography

Mission Landing is located on the Willamette River about one mile west of the town of St. Paul in Marion County in the state of Oregon at the end of Mission Road NE (see Figure 2). It is listed with the Marion County Tax Office with Property ID R12439 and a size of .75 acres.



Global positioning system (GPS) coordinates are 45.222 north latitude and -123.001 west longitude. The property extends into the Willamette

River on the west side.

The June 7, 1886 deed of sale from Peter and Margaret Kirk to Simon Connor (son of Matthew) for \$155 describes the property (in handwriting) as:

One warehouse and parcel of land Beginning at a point on the East bank of the Willamette River where the County Road from St Paul to Mission Landing intersects the same and running thence along the center of said road S 67½° E 3.00 chains thence S 35° of 3.75 chains thence W 67½° of 3.10 chains to the Willamette River thence down the river with the meanders thereof to the beginning point: Containing one acre more or less. The same being a fraction of Donation Claim A69 in Township 4 South Range 3 West in the County of Marion in the State of Oregon.²

A chain in survey terminology was 66 feet long and composed of 100 links.³ It was a primary tool of surveyors and was developed by Englishman Edmund Gunther in 1620. It was the measurement method required of surveyors when mapping many donation land claims throughout the United States. A mile is 80 chains. Thus, the Mission Landing property is 198 feet on the North side by 248 feet on the East side by 205 feet on the South side by about 250 feet on the West side (in the river). It should be noted that the Margaret Kirk on this deed had

the maiden name of Gargan and was Peter Kirk's second wife, who he married in 1875.⁴ The other thing to notice in this deed is the mention of Township (4 South) and Range (3 West) designations, set according to the Willamette Meridian, which was determined in 1851 and used to identify land claims in the states of Oregon and Washington.⁵

A satellite view via Google Maps provides a perspective of the Landing in relation to the town of St. Paul, about one mile east (See Figure 3). Just to the north of the town is Mission Road which goes



Figure 3. Mission Landing and St. Paul (Google Maps)⁶

from Highway 219 to the river. The Landing is actually where the Willamette River makes a bend and goes from a north/south direction to a west/east direction. It is accessible via a steep road from the top of the bluff down to the bottom land; that road is actually private property at this point and a locked gate blocks regular traffic to the farmland below.



Figure 4. Mission Landing from land side today⁷



Figure 5. Mission Landing from river side today⁷

The Landing is located on bottom land; that is, land that is close to the river. Just to the east a few hundred yards are some high bluffs, up to 80 feet tall. The bottom land, because of frequent flooding before the advent of dams on the upper river, received large deposits of soil and thus has a topsoil of at least three feet thick. This makes for very fertile farm land and it can grow abundant crops. No trace of the landing exists today and it is used today as a place to pump water from the river for irrigation (See Figures 4 and 5 above).

The Landing is located in an area of the Willamette Valley called French Prairie. This

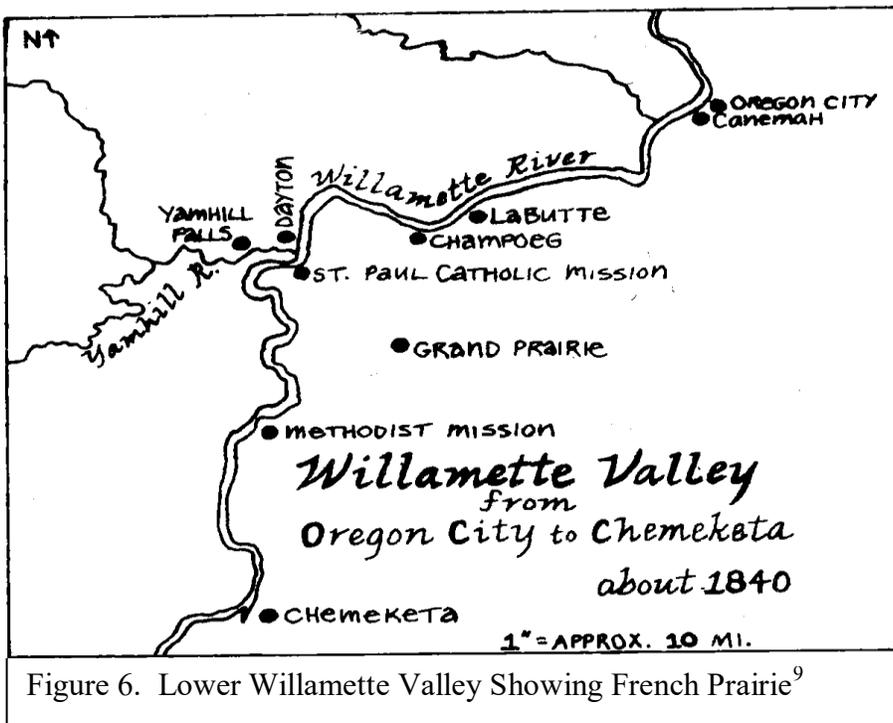


Figure 6. Lower Willamette Valley Showing French Prairie⁹

name derives from the settlement starting in 1829 of many French-Canadians from the Hudson Bay Company who married native women.⁸ French Prairie is a region in the middle of the Willamette Valley

bounded on the north and west by the Willamette River, on the east by the Pudding River, and on the south by remnants of Lake Labish (see Figure 6).¹⁰

Family Background

Both the Kirks and the Connors were originally from Ireland. Peter Kirk was born in Clogherhead, County Lough in 1830 and came to the United States in 1850. Mary Lyon (his first wife) was born in Killarney, County Killarney in 1832 and came to the U.S. in 1848. They were married in Boston, MA in 1854.¹¹ They then moved to a town near Waseka, Minnesota and

bought a farm in 1857. Because of the poor soil they decided to move again, this time in 1870 to St. Paul, OR; they came by railroad. Upon arriving in St. Paul, they purchased a 345-acre farm a half mile north of the town. Mary died shortly after arriving in St. Paul in 1873. Peter then married Elizabeth Gargan in 1875 and, after she died, he married Matilda Dixon. Peter died in 1897. It is this second Elizabeth whose name is on the deed of sale of Mission Landing to Simon Connor.

John Kirk was born in Minnesota and was the third of eleven children of Peter and Elizabeth Kirk. He married Cecelia McKay on January 21, 1884 (thus the author's connection to the McKay's).¹² She was the daughter of James McKay who settled in St. Paul in 1847. John and his brother Thomas purchased a 250-acre farm in 1879 about a half mile east of St. Paul. I remember visiting John Kirk's oldest daughter Geraldine (my Aunt Geraldine) when she lived in southwest Portland in the 1960s.

Matthew Connor was born in Killican, County Westmeath in 1823. Mary Lynch was born in Reharney, County Westmeath in 1824. They were married in Ireland in 1845. Shortly after that, they came to the U.S. and settled on a farm near Waseka, Minnesota, not far from the Peter Kirk family. In 1871 the family moved to St. Paul, OR, by railroad, where Peter Kirk had purchased the old St. Xavier Mission property for them.¹³ Unfortunately, Matthew Connor died in 1875. Mary Connor died in 1906. Simon Connor, the second of nine children, married Agnes Scully in 1885. He took over much of the farm work and was the shipping agent at Mission Landing. His house on the bluff was a place where people waited for the steamboats. Interesting, Mission Landing was not sold to the Matthew Connor along with the other Mission property, but was instead was sold to his son Simon later in 1876.

Gerald Patrick Connor (the author's maternal grandfather) was born on May 20, 1897 in St. Paul, the fifth child of Simon and Mary Connor.¹⁴ He married Marie Beatrice Kirk (the author's maternal grandmother), who was born on July 22, 1897, also in St. Paul, in 1917. Thus the two families were joined in this marriage. Gerald completed building a house on Mission land in the spring of 1922. They had three children: Gerald Patrick, Jr (Jerry, born 1919), Margaret Mary (the author's mother), and John Simon (Jack, born 1927). Gerald Sr. died in 1964 in a farm accident; the author remembers being an altar server at his funeral. Mission Landing is now owned by John's son, Sean, who still lives on and farms the Mission land. Margaret was born in St. Paul on October 5, 1922. She married Elroy Atlee (Roy) Bergquist on August 16, 1947 in Portland, OR. The author is their oldest child, born on May 13, 1949.

Early Settlement 1829-1844

In 1813 the Northwest Fur Company (before it merged with the Hudson Bay Company) established the Willamette Trading Post at a place the natives called Champoeg. This spot was at a natural break in the trees lining the river and had been used by the Indians. South of this there were natural prairies. These were created by the native Kalapuya (also spelled Calapooia) Indians who had routinely burned the area creating an excellent farmland (for whites) with few trees.¹⁵ In 1826 the Hudson Bay Company established the first ferry across the Willamette River that "ran from a point about two miles northwest of present day St. Paul to a point directly across the river, about one mile below where the Yamhill River empties in the Willamette River near present day Dayton."¹⁶

Dr. John McLaughlin, principal Factor of the Hudson Bay Company, was instrumental in helping the former employees obtain land and set up farms in the French Prairie region around 1829. Wheat was the primary crop grown.

In 1836 some of the French-Canadians had erected a log church, about 60 by 70 feet in size at what became the town of St. Paul. Between 1834 and 1838 these settlers, led by Joseph Gervais, had requested four times that the Catholic Bishop of Red River, Manitoba, Joseph Provencher, send priests to minister to their religious needs. The first two letters no longer exist, but the third and fourth do.¹⁷ As a result two Jesuit priests, Fathers Francois Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers, finally arrived at Fort Vancouver in November 1838. Father Blanchet celebrated the first Catholic Mass south of Columbia River on January 6, 1839 and dedicated the church to St. Paul.¹⁸ The St. Paul church was the founding site of the Roman Catholic Church in Oregon and the First Provincial Council was held there in February 1848.¹⁹

Mission Years 1844-1850

In 1842 Father Pierre DeSmet, a Jesuit, arrived at Fort Vancouver and after some discussions with Father Blanchet, it was decided that he should go East to secure some funding for a mission. He returned in 1844 and established the St. Francis Xavier Mission on a land

claim about one mile west of St. Paul. This was to be the headquarters of the Jesuit missions in the Oregon Country (Pacific Northwest).



Figure 7. Lithograph Woodcut of St. Paul Mission including the Landing²⁰

This land included Mission, or St. Paul, Landing (see Figure 7 above). Along with Father DeSmet also came six nuns from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who established a girl's academy. Several buildings were constructed on the bluff overlooking the bottom land of the river: "a 45 feet by 35 feet two-story log house, three shops, and several barns".²¹

Mission Landing "came into use as a convenient site for the arrival and departure of dignitaries and servants of the Catholic church in Oregon, individuals whose ecclesiastical activities were first centered at St. Paul among the French Canadian residents of the Prairie..."²² Thus the early role of the Landing was primarily for religious reasons.

St. Paul became the hub of the French Prairie area as it was essentially at the center. And the Catholic church was at the center of St. Paul. In 1846 the log church was replaced with a brick church, making it the oldest brick building in the Pacific Northwest. It was built in the form of a cross and was 100 feet long by 45 feet wide with two 15 feet by 15 feet side chapels. It included an 84 foot bell tower and was composed of 160,000 bricks, made on-site (see Figure 8). In 1993 it suffered damage in an earthquake but was rebuilt and rededicated in 1995.²³ The Catholic Church is still an active parish in the Archdiocese of Portland and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.²⁵ Seven of the stain-glass windows were donated by the author's relatives: the Kirks, the Connors, and the McKays.

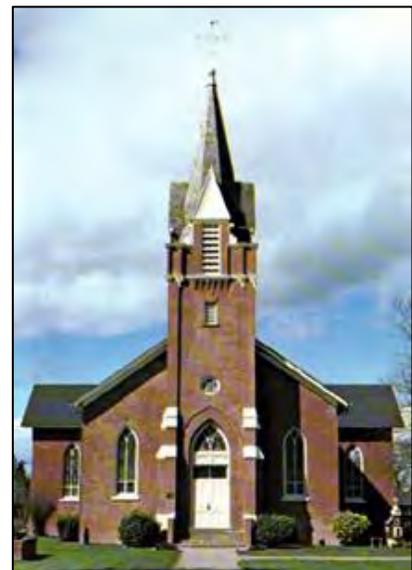


Figure 8. St. Paul Roman Catholic Church²⁴

Champoeg at the northern end on the river was the first territorial seat of American government. The Methodist mission founded by Rev. Jason Lee in 1834 was south of the area at Mission Bottom and would soon move to the Salem area near Chemeketa.²⁶ Early on the rich

soil attracted settlers and led to much commerce in crops. These needed to be taken to market and the river provided the means. The Landing was one of many in that area that allowed the settlers to get their crops to market downriver in Oregon City and Portland.

There was much competition among the various religious denominations for the native Americans/Indians. The Protestants were not happy with the presence of the black-robed Jesuits in the area, although the Jesuits were there primarily to minister to the French-Canadians and their families. In an effort to teach the natives about the Catholic Church and its doctrines, Father Blanchet had developed what he called the Catholic ladder, a device that starts at the bottom and shows historic events up to the coming of Jesus and eventually the end of the world.²⁷ In response, the Protestants created their own ladder and used it to deride the Catholic one.



Figure 9. Champoege Memorial²⁹

In 1842 the first organized wagon train crossed the plains and many of those travelers settled in the Willamette Valley. Eventually with continuing migrations white Americans came to greatly outnumber the French-Canadians. On May 2, 1843 a meeting was held at Champoege that established the first American government. All of the Americans and two of the French-Canadians voted in the affirmative (See Figure 9). In 1844 the seat of Government was moved to Oregon City.²⁸

The Gold Rush in California in 1848 saw many of the settlers around St. Paul head to California to make their claim. The remaining farmers were very busy providing crops to the thousands of people who traveled to California. A few years later, many of the settlers returned to St. Paul, including Peter McKay and used their gains to further develop the land.

In 1850 the U.S. Congress passed the Oregon Donation Land Act that made legal the land claims that the Oregon Provisional Government had established.³⁰ This then set up the requirement to survey all of the lands in Oregon and led to the establishment of the Willamette Meridian. In January 1855 the federal government finally negotiated a treaty with the native Calapooia and related tribes that ceded the entire Willamette Valley to the United States. As stated in the treaty, the boundaries were:

Commencing in the middle of the main channel of the Columbia, river, opposite the mouth of the first creek emptying into said river from the S. below Oak point; thence S. to the first standard parallel N. of the base line in the Government survey; thence W. to the summit of the coast range of mountains; thence southerly along the summit of said range to the Calapooia mountains; thence easterly along the summit of said mountains to the summit of the Cascade mountains; thence along said summit northerly to the middle of Columbia river at the Cascade falls; thence down the middle of said river to the place of beginning.³¹

The Mission quickly proved too remote a location to serve the various Jesuit locations, and thus it closed down after five years in 1850. The priests moved to California and settled in the Santa Clara area. One of the priests assigned to the Mission was Father Nobili, who did move to California and established Santa Clara University, where I obtained my MBA. Even though the land was ordered to be sold in 1854, it actually took much longer to accomplish. It was not until 1868 that it was finally sold to Michael Schultheis and the three Neibler brothers.³²

In 1869 the transcontinental railroad became a reality. In 1870 Peter Kirk and his family moved from St. Mary's, Minnesota to St. Paul, Oregon. One of his neighbors there was Matthew Connor, who asked Peter to purchase some land for him. Peter purchased the St. Xavier Mission land for his friend who arrived in 1871.³³ Unfortunately, Matthew Connor died a few years later in 1875. However, the Mission Landing property itself was retained by the Kirks and actually sold to Matthew's son Simon on June 7, 1886 for the sum of \$155.³⁴

Steamboat Years 1851-1916

By 1851, settlement in the Willamette Valley and the French Prairie area had grown tremendously. As a result, a better method of transporting the crops from the many farms became imperative. Up to the time, flatboats had been used, but were becoming increasingly inadequate.³⁵

The first steamboat to go into service on the upper river; that is, the river above Willamette Falls in Oregon City was the *Canemah*. The Falls had been the head of navigation for some years. It is the largest waterfall in the Pacific Northwest;

while dropping only 42 feet it is 1700 feet wide in a horseshoe shape.³⁷ (See Figure 10) The town of



Figure 10. Willamette Falls at Oregon City³⁶

Oregon City was founded and named by John McLaughlin, who, as head of the Hudson Bay Company, established a mill there to process the wheat from up river. This town became an important center and the first Territorial Legislature was held there in 1844.

Because of the size of the Falls, goods had to be portaged around it. The town of Canemah was established just above the Falls by Absalom Hedges in 1849.³⁸ This town, now a part of Oregon City, became an important steamboat building site as well as a commerce center for the upper river. Here the *Canemah* was built in 1851. “Nine or ten boats were built at Canemah during the 1850s.”³⁹ Among them were the *Shoalwater*, the *Wallamet*, the *Gazelle*, and the *James Clinton* (first steamboat to get to Eugene, in 1856).⁴⁰ “Until 1854 all riverboats plying inland Oregon waters were sidewheelers.”⁴¹ In that year the first sternwheeler, the *Jeanie Clark*, was built. Since then almost all steamboats were sternwheelers.

Two companies were the primary rivals in controlling the trade on the river above the falls: The Oregon Steam Navigation Company, incorporated in 1860, and the People's Transportation Company, organized in 1857.⁴² Some other companies came and went.

In 1868, the Oregon Legislature provided \$40,000 to help build a set of locks at Willamette Falls to help navigation. It was combined with \$30,000 from the Willamette Falls Canal & Lock Company. The locks were built on the west side of the Falls. The locks opened on New Year's Day, 1873.⁴³ From that day forward, steamboats could make the entire trip from Portland up river, and regular service was provided daily.

An account of people using Mission Landing is described in Harvey McKay's book *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, page 108 (see Figure 11):

One of the Connor sons, Simon, was in charge of the wharfage there. He was also the agent for the shipping company. Many steamboat passengers and people waiting for shipments would await the arrival of the steamboats at Simon Connor's home on the bluff overlooking the river. The boat captains knew this and always gave a toot well in advance so the waiting people would have plenty of time to finish their coffee and get down to the dock before the steamboat arrived. The typical passenger trip to Portland took three days – one day going, one day shopping, and one day returning.⁴⁴

Another reminiscence by Eileen Kaufmann (a distance cousin) was related to St. Paul High School students as part of an oral history project in 2000:

At the time the river was a very important transportation system. It was important to the valley because the landings were shipping points. The "landings" themselves were docks for loading and unloading freight. People from St. Paul would ship things out or they would get things in. Eileen's grandmother Rose Hughes had a twin brother whose name was Simon Connor. He was the manager of Mission Landing. Eileen's mom and grandmother would take the steamboats to Portland. The steamboats were for both passengers and livestock. When she was growing up, the landing was no longer in use. She remembers the old warehouse at the site.⁴⁵



Figure 11. Unknown Steamer Unloading at Mission Landing⁴⁶

The *Capital Journal* newspaper in Salem, Oregon recorded several instances in 1895 of steamboats stopping at Mission Landing:⁴⁷

- “Steamer *Grey Eagle* made her regular trip between Independence and Mission Landing today, taking on board at Salem today a number of passengers for lower river points.”

July 12, 1895 issue, page 4

- “The *Grey Eagle* arrived up from Mission Landing last night with another large load of hop pickers and returned at 6 a. m. today. She will reach Salem again this evening.”

September 4, 1895 issue, page 1 (See Figure 12)

- “The O. R. & N. Co’s new boat *Gypsy* left Portland at 2 o’clock Tuesday afternoon. She reached Mission Landing in the evening where she remained overnight coming on up the river to Salem this morning arriving about 8 o’clock.” September 4, 1895 issue, page 1

- “The *Altoona* and *Grey Eagle* continue to make regular daily trips on the Willamette, each connecting with the other at Mission Landing. The *Grey Eagle* leaves Salem at 6 a. m. every morning and the two boats carry not a few passengers up and down the river.”

September 9, 1895 issue, page 4

- “The *Grey Eagle* arrived up from Mission Landing at 1:30 o’clock this morning heavily loaded with hops and miscellaneous freight.” October 17, 1895 issue, page 3

By the 1870s, the use of steamboats began to decline with the coming of the railroad, but steamboats continued on the river until 1916, according to the *Daily Capital Journal*, September



Figure 12. *Grey Eagle* at Salem⁴⁸

6, 1916 issue, page 8: “The *Ramona* is bringing hop pickers from Portland as far south as Salem and *Pomona* is distributing them at points as far as Mission Landing and Dayton.”⁴⁹

Some sternwheelers still operate on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. The author has traveled on the *Portland Spirit* from Portland to Oregon City where he first learned of Corning’s book *Willamette Landings*. The *Columbia Gorge* sternwheeler at Cascade Locks travels down to Bonneville Dam and upriver a short distance. There are also cruises from Portland to The Dalles. Dinner and lunch cruises are very popular.⁵⁰

Thus Mission Landing played an important role in moving passengers and cargo for over 60 years. The steep bluff did provide some hindrance and other landings in the area, such as Ray’s Landing and Champoeg, provided easier access. But for the people of St. Paul, this was their primary link to the outside world. In the flood of 1923 (the year after my mother was born), the last warehouses and the dock were swept away, never to be rebuilt.

Nearby Landings

There are several landings close to Mission Landing. These are indicated in the section titled Willamette River Steamboat Landings in Corning’s *Willamette Landings*.⁵¹ Ray’s Landing is known primarily as the start of the narrow-gauge railroad across the valley to Silverton (more on this later). Ray was also involved with transporting the mail. Fulquartz was across the river and was to be the other end of the railroad bridge spanning the river. Both were located about three miles downriver from Mission Landing. The Yamhill River comes into the Willamette about one mile downriver from Mission Landing.

Because of the steep road down to Mission Landing, “commercial activities and the shipping of crops seem to have been handled largely through Champoeg and Butteville, nearby to the northeast, or at Fairfield further south.”⁵² Champoeg had been used since the Northwest

Fur Company had established a post there in 1813. Butteville is a couple miles downriver from Champoeg, at the extreme northern edge of French Prairie. For many years it was a prominent commercial center until the railroad passed it by.⁵³ Fairfield was upriver (south) about six miles from Mission Landing; by 1852 it “had become a considerable wheat-shipping port, with a trade activity sufficient to encourage Ben Simpson and a company of farmers to build—in the small slough just to the south of the landing—the little steamer *Oregon*.”⁵⁴

All of these landings declined after the railroad came to the Willamette Valley and many of the towns that grew up around them have disappeared, but for many years they were active centers of commerce. Today they still live on in people’s memory.

Roads, Ferries, and the Mail

The initial roads in the area were crude and usually muddy. This made travel difficult. Primary travel was to the landings to ship wheat and other crops or to town and to church. In 1850, Charles Ray “bought the Oregon City-Salem mail route, which was then the only wheeled mail route in the Oregon Territory. His Conestoga Wagon passed through Champoeg and St. Paul on each trip.”⁵⁵

Also in 1850, “the Territorial Legislature authorized the surveying and building of a road from Salem to Champoeg. The road, which was to pass through St. Paul, became the known as the Salem-St. Paul-Champoeg stage road.”⁵⁶ This became the main north-south road through the valley. It is now designated as Oregon Highway 219.

The first east-west road was completed in 1857 and went from St. Paul to the Mission Mills, about three miles east of town. Later this road was extended to Woodburn with the coming of the railroad there.

Ferries were very numerous on the river and provided a means to get from one side to the other. The ferry at Ray's Landing was the closest to St. Paul. The first ferry on the river was established by the Hudson Bay Company in 1826, just a few miles downriver from St. Paul. It wasn't until 1913 that "the St. Paul-Newberg bridge was completed and the ferry era in the St. Paul area ended."⁵⁷ This was the first bridge between Salem and Oregon City. The author distinctly remembers this wooden bridge that had a steep climb from the lowland to a bluff at Newberg. The ferry at Wheatland Landing, established in 1844, is still operational, but much modernized.⁵⁸ Wheatland is about 10 miles upriver from Mission Landing and at the very southern edge of French Prairie; it was a major shipping port for farmers.⁵⁹ A ferry was planned in 1879 at Mission Landing by B. C. Bequette but it never materialized.⁶⁰

The first U.S. post office was finally established in St. Paul in 1874, although there had been a post office at Champoeg since 1854 and mailed had been provided to the area since 1839.⁶¹ A post office operated at nearby Fairfield from 1852 to 1903. A post office, now long gone, was started at Butteville in 1850.

The St. Paul post office is designated zip code

97137.⁶² (See Figure 13) The author's uncle, Jerry Connor, was postmaster from July 1945 to October 1956. There have been many been many stamps issued depicting Oregon, the most recent being US Scott 4316 issued in 2010 that was a part of the Flags of Our Nation series.⁶⁴



Figure 13. U.S. Post Office in St. Paul⁶³

Railroads

In 1868 the Oregon & California (O&C) Rail Road began building a rail system from Portland south through the Willamette Valley. In 1869 it reached Oregon City, in 1870 Salem,

in 1872 Roseburg, and in 1877 the border with California.⁶⁵ The railroad went down the east side of the valley and through Woodburn, about eight miles east of St. Paul. This provided a new outlet for the farmers of the area and much of the shipment of crops and grain was soon going by rail rather than by steamboat. As a side note, this is the same O&C Company that received a lot of land from the federal government, which lands are now being hotly contested as to logging after their return to the government in 1903. It eventually became part of the Southern Pacific Railroad.⁶⁶ Stations were also established at a few nearby towns in French Prairie such as Brooks, Gervais, and Hubbard.

An east-west narrow-gauge railroad was constructed, starting at Ray's Landing and going through Woodburn to Silverton, about eight miles east of Woodburn in 1880.⁶⁷ The idea was to connect this via a bridge over the Willamette to Fulquartz Landing (on the opposite side) and then to Dayton. Ray's Landing was established by the same Charles Ray who had the first Concord stagecoach line in Oregon.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, in 1881 an outside interest purchased the line and work stopped immediately. In 1886, the idea was resurrected, but shortly after in 1887, it was discontinued again when the Portland and Willamette Valley Railroad was sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Floods on the Willamette

The Willamette River has been prone to flooding for centuries. Most flooding was minor, affecting the lowlands along the river. But there have been several severe and massive floods during the last two centuries that have had a major impact on Mission Landing and other locations along the river. Some of these were in 1861, 1870, 1874, 1890, 1894, 1922, 1964, and, most recently, 1996.

The Willamette River basin is 187 miles long and comprises a watershed of about 11,500 square miles between the Coast Range on the west and the Cascades on the east. There are 12 major tributaries: Coast Fork, Middle Fork, Lukiamute River, McKenzie River, Long Tom River, Mary's River, Calapooia River, Santiam River, Yamhill River, Molalla River, Tualatin River, and the Clackamas River (See Figure

14). The Yamhill River comes into the Willamette one mile north (downriver) of Mission Landing.

The flooding in recent years has been controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers which maintains 13 dams in the basin, built between 1941 and 1969.⁶⁹ Even with these controls and the management of water flow from the dams, flooding does occur, as in 1964 and 1996.

The December 1861 flood was the first major flood experienced by white settlers in the valley and it devastated many places.⁷¹ Pretty much any low-lying place along the river was inundated. Heavy rains had raised the river level and with warmer temperatures the snow in the mountains melted. Canemah was particularly hard hit. "The town, almost at river level, suffered more than any other community excepting Linn City and Champoeg. Practically every building was washed away."⁷² Linn City was across the river on the low land next to the Falls. "Champoeg, which had been the largest



Figure 14. Watershed Councils of the Willamette Basin⁷⁰

settlement near St. Paul, was completely washed away”.⁷³ Mission Landing was similarly impacted, but fortunately St Paul itself was located well away from the river and on high ground.

“In 1890, during late January and early February, the worst Willamette River flood in the St. Paul area since 1861 occurred. The water was so high that steamboats were docking at Jette’s store.”⁷⁴ This flood essentially destroyed the railroad at Ray’s Landing and flooded many towns.

The June 1894 flood raised water levels to the point that Portland was inundated. People were getting around in rowboats and canoes.⁷⁵ Miles of railroad track were destroyed along with many structures. This was the worst flood that Portland has ever experienced with 250 square blocks under water.

The 1922 to 1923 flood finally carried away the last warehouses at Mission Landing. This flood came after the river had been frozen for some time and then it rained and the temperature rose.

The December 1964 flood was another catastrophic flood and occurred when the author was a teenager. He remembers that his mother had come from Portland to pick him up from Mt Angel Seminary High School that December, and she could not return the way she had come. So they drove to Salem and got on the freeway there, barely getting across the Abiqua River in the process. The Interstate at Keizer, just north of Salem, was starting to flood and was closed shortly after we passed through. The seawall in Portland managed to contain the damage there, but many basements were flooded in the downtown area.⁷⁶

The January to February 1996 flood, “was one of the more serious floods of the twentieth century. Portland’s seawall was in danger of over-topping.”⁷⁷ Fortunately, the flood control dams on the river helped to minimize the flooding but a lot of development had taken place in

the low-lying areas along the river. The author was living in Eugene at that time and remembers the high waters in many places.

The Willamette River today is still a powerful river. It is used primarily for recreation with many boat landings and is controlled by the various dams in the watershed.⁷⁸ Fishing is a major sport on the river. The closest boat launch to Mission Landing is upriver about two miles at San Salvador Beach, a popular picnic spot for many years.

Summary

This paper has shown how what role Mission Landing played in the white settlement and development of the Willamette Valley. Starting with the establishment of the first Catholic church in Oregon at St. Paul through to the present day, Mission Landing has played a role in the religious, economic, social, cultural, and political life of the area known as French Prairie.

It got its name from St. Francis Xavier Mission, founded to be the headquarters and motherhouse for the Jesuits in the Pacific Northwest. It first served a religious purpose. With the coming of the steamboats, beginning in 1851, the Landing became a site for crops to be transported downriver to Portland. It also provided a means for people to travel up or down river to visit and shop. Many of the settlers in the area were involved in establishing the first American Government at nearby Champoeg.

With the flood of 1923, the last warehouses disappeared. But it continues on as a point to draw water from the Willamette River to irrigate the surrounding fertile cropland. And it remains in my family, a source of history and stories.

Endnotes

1. Marion County Tax Assessor's Property Records Property Summary, Property ID R12439. This shows that the current owner is Sean Connor (author's first cousin) and includes the map shown in Figure 1.
2. Record of Deed, Marion County Clerk's Office, Salem, Oregon. The handwriting has faded over the years, making it hard to read some of the wording.
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4. Harvey J. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1980), 146.
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6. Mission Landing and St. Paul. Google Maps: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/St+Paul,+OR+97137/@45.2175243,-122.9877861,3362m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x5495436d9c14154b:0x5163d806987868ba>. [accessed March 13, 2015]
7. Pictures of Mission Landing from both land side and river side taken by the author on April 12, 2015 while on a river excursion with his major advisor, Professor Steve Goetz, and his faculty colleague, Professor Mick Bollenbaugh.
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9. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, xi.
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15. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 3.
16. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 4.
17. Connie Lenzen. *Settlers on French Prairie, Oregon Territory, in 1836-1838*. <http://www.lenzenresearch.com/STPaulpages/spfrprairie.html>. [accessed March 13, 2015]
18. Harriet Duncan Munnick and Mikel Delores Warner (eds.). *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898 Volumes I, II and III*. (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1979), Volume I, 1.
19. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 24.
20. St. Paul Mission Historical Society, St. Paul, Oregon. This is a woodcut done by Father Point, pastor of the St. Paul church, in 1847. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orspmhs/stpaulindex.html> [accessed February 5, 2015] Also shown on page 15 of McKay's book, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*.
21. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 12-13.
22. Howard McKinley Corning, *Willamette Landings*, 3rd ed. (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2004), 231.
23. Tim Bergquist, "St. Paul Roman Catholic Church," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR. http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/st._pauls_church/#.VSQicLdOVLM [accessed March 30, 2015] Also see Richard Engeman, *St. Paul Catholic Church, Marion County*, <http://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/st-paul-catholic-church-marion-county/#.VNFd8WxOVLM> [accessed February 3, 2015].
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25. *St. Paul Roman Catholic Church*. Entry 79002098. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/nrhp/text/79002098.PDF> [accessed February 20, 2015].
26. Corning, *Willamette Landings*, 8.
27. Albert Furtwangler, *Bringing Indians to the Book* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), 142.
28. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 16.

29. This Memorial at Champoege commemorates the meeting to establish the first American government in the Pacific Northwest. The names of those who voted for this, including the two French Canadians are listed on the other three sides. Picture taken by the author on April 12, 2015 while on an excursion with his major advisor, Professor Steve Goetz, and his faculty colleague, Professor Mick Bollenbaugh.

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http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_donation_land_act/#.VPo002xOVLM [accessed March 6, 2015].

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33. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 107-108.

34. Record of Deed, Marion County Clerk's Office, Salem, Oregon.

35. Corning, *Willamette Landings*, 129.

36. Picture of Willamette Falls taken by the author on March 1, 2015 at the I-205 viewpoint above West Linn on west side of Willamette river and across the river from Oregon City.

37. Northwest Waterfall Survey, "Willamette Falls"
<http://www.waterfallnorthwest.com/nws/falls.php?num=4074> [accessed February 25, 2015]

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39. Ibid., 68.

40. Ibid., 132.

41. Ibid., 130.

42. Ibid., 134.

43. Ibid., 138-140.

44. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 108.

45. Judy Brown and Jennifer Calvert (eds.) *From Wild Meadows...and Days Remembered: A Cooperative Oral History Project of St. Paul Residents and the St. Paul High School Class*, Volume 1 (2000), St. Paul, OR, 60.

46. Picture of steamer unloading at Mission Landing, unknown steamer, unknown date. In collection of St. Paul Mission Historical Society, St. Paul, OR. <http://spmhs.pastperfect-online.com/35802cgi/mweb.exe?request=image&hex=200521005.JPG> [accessed February 17, 2015]

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72. Corning, *Willamette Landings*, 70.
73. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 50.
74. McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*, 78.

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http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/willamette_flood_1894_/#.VO-YFGxOVLM [accessed February 27, 2015].

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http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/willamette_flood_1964_/#.VO-V82xOVLM [accessed February 27, 2015].

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3. McKay, Harvey J. *St. Paul, Oregon 1830-1890*. Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1980. Mr. McKay is a distant cousin of the author. His book is considered the definitive source on the 19th century history of St. Paul, Oregon. The first part of the book is a chronological history while the second part contains profiles of the pioneer families.
4. Munnick, Harriet Duncan, and Warner, Mikel Delores (eds.). *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul, Oregon 1839-1898 Volumes I, II and III*. Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1979. This is a transcription of the written records for the St. Paul Catholic Church, started by Father Blanchet in 1839. It lists major events of the church, including all of the births, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and deaths in the community. There is a detail index that is very helpful.
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