THE LAST DAYS OF LINCOLN CITY!

BY HOWARD McKINLEY CORNING

IN THE hay light of late summer, in his great house overlooking the Willamette at Oregon City, John B. Moore was 73.

At the age of his stout-hearted career he had founded the town, sprawled half on the rising level plains and half on the rocky, hard earth and rock at the river's mouth.

ACROSS the unquiet water stood the stately home of Linn City, founded by Robert Moore. Each town had known the guiding wisdom of a single hand. On September 23, 1845, on the slope of the high cliff hill behind Linn City, in its simple dwelling named by him "Robin's Nest," Robert Moore died.

John McLoughlin, ex-factor of the Hudson's Bay company in the Oregon country, died one day after.

Four years later came the "great flood." When New Year's Day, 1848, dawned cold with frost and mist, the white covering mantling snow overlay Oregon Country. But Linn City had vanished.

Robert Moore came to Oregon in the fall of 1843. With him as his guide was the Feoria Party. Pleased by the prospect of the Willamette valley, Moore flatly lying along the west bank of the Willamette river at the falls, he negotiated for its purchase from Chief Wanaxo, of the Clatsops, and signed the Willamette Indian treaty.

In the act he differed from the majority of his fellow settlers, whose experience, whether born of bad land they chose, sometimes finding their lives imperturbably for days.

MAJOR MOORE was 59 years old when he came to Oregon. He was a husky, red-faced man, fair hair slightly graying, a clean-cut face, a square chin, with a soft, opinionated and dominating, and stubborn enough for others to find it hard to disagree with him.

Withoutstanding, he was honest and on occasion kindly.

The log cabin which Moore built for his home was on the east slope of the hill overlooking the falls. Partly because of its situation among the trees and partly after his own first name, he called his home "Robin's Nest."

Moore's Donation land claim extended westward from the water at 1360 feet, and from 100 feet to the river's edge. He built the first frame house above the falls, from the northeast corner of this property the owner carved out townsite.

ORIGINALLY there were 25.

Of that number, he returned to two: a block facing on the river and one directly behind it. These were omitted in the plat of the townsite. Two others remained unused.

All blocks were sold by Moore, the same day the townsite was surveyed. The streets were 60 feet wide, and a streetcar ran between the presidents of the United States, and for local geographical points. The entire townsite occupied between 60 by 50 acres, and extended part way up the tree-covered slope where Moore's dwellings stood.

WHEN THE 1861 FLOOD was at its greatest, the daring Riverboat Captain George W. Taylor rode the small steamer St. Claire from Camas north on the Willamette falls. It was agreed that Captain Taylor, if still alive and his boat dry, should put out the whistle as he entered the lower river. As the triumphant foot-totched echo over the river, a shot went up from the gunboat Mississippi. Directly after is Linn City site, Oregon City across river.

On the night of Tuesday, April 23, 1861, fire—later said to be of incendiary origin—breke out in the lower warehouse and soon spread to the grist mill.

There William Overholster, the caretaker, was asleep on an upper floor. Half choked by smoke, he fought his way to a window, from which he lowered himself to the ground by a rope tied to his back. The rope burned off just as he reached the ground.

ALREADY Linn City's residents were aware of the destruction that threatened.

Two river boats, that had come in only that afternoon, were beached in the upper Linn City basin; the steamers James Clayton and James Clarendon, which was then supplying the Yamhill river from the middle Reeds to the Reedy, a smaller vessel.

Someone heroically chopped the wooden roost of the Reedy, and it was towed away by rowboats. The James Claton, however, was larger and less manageable. The efforts to cut it loose were thwarted by fire, which leaped from rail to cabin and swept along the decks. In a few hours it burned to the water's edge. The morning of that day the James Claton had unloaded into the warehouse about 25 tons of bacon from up-river farmers.

Each parcel was wrapped in burlap and it was thought for a while that a market for the chum of one of the vessels, or from a laborer's pipe or cigar, had fallen in the inflammable material, had smoldered and finally broken into flame.

But Linn City's industries had been destroyed. The books and papers of the Oregon Milling & Transportation company had been consumed. It was the loss of these, the evidence of much indebtedness on the part of individuals, that raised the suspicion of incendiary.

AT LEAST a few of the town's business leaders refused to be discouraged. Robert Pitchford, by the right of his equity in the works, laid claim, with James K. Kelly, to the property. If the warehouse and freight handling facilities that remained in the valley could regain its lost trade, and Pendleton was now in the arms of July, it that he intended to reconstruct the partly burned warehouse.

As before, the building was largely made up of warehouses and livery stables,

The fall of 1861 opened with but little precipitation; late in October the customary rains began. During November, however, rain fell almost continuously over Northwestern Oregon.

It was this rain and in the still cold mountains a vast amount of snow began to accumulate. In the closing days of the month the temperature softened, but a humid downpour that melted the snow continued. The Willamette rose at a rapid rate, the embankment in the levees and terraces collapsed and their wreakage was sucked into the current.

On Monday, December 9, 1861, a great water fall was running over its banks for its entire 190 miles latterly was seen.

AS DARKNESS settled over Monday, December 9, the floating debris in the immediate basin was breaking up and the water was washing over the townsite.

Two boats, torn adrift in the stream, were leaping over its banks for its entire 190 miles latterly was seen.

Stranded before dawn through the drenched daybreak at the still-rising river, new men thickly strewn with debris. Log rafts, splintered and broken, and laden with anything that would float, piled up at the mouth of the willamette.

The willamette was carried away.

Stranded before dawn through the drenched daybreak at the still-rising river, new men thickly strewn with debris. Log rafts, splintered and broken, and laden with anything that would float, piled up at the mouth of the river. All of the boats of the mechanics were gone. Only the lower and upper mills remained standing.

OREGON CITY had suffered far less, about a third of the lower town being under water. A half dozen buildings, at the most, were demolished. At the flood's height, water coursed down Main street for half a mile and many buildings were unsightly and abandoned.

The Clark house, northern site of the town, as well as the west shore levels below Linn, were entirely under water. The houses with houses deeply submerged or carried away. The Willamette's streamline level stood 5 feet higher than its lowest 1-foot stage reached in autumn; it was 12 feet higher than the flood of 1853-54.

During that afternoon a large part of the watercourse protecting the Works gave way before the immense pressure of water.

At intervals, great masses of timber forming the crib-work broke up and were swept away.

Gradually the flood's force became too great to resist; walls of houses and stores were crashed or picked up bodily and borne away. With the breakwater gone, the works were in a state of collapse and their collapse and their wreckage was sucked into the current.

By Wednesday afternoon, the extent of the destruction was further than the first day, and only two dwellings and the warehouses of the Works remained standing.

The breakwater, above and below the works, had been carried away. The stream became a torrent, rushing directly over the townsite. The road down into the river was washed away over its banks for its entire 190 miles latterly was seen.

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