

Towards Oregon

By E. H. Staffelbach

Illustrated by Charles Hargens

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press

Also by E. H. Staffelbach

Part of the *Long Rifle Series*:

For Texas and Freedom
Long Rifle Vanguard

Print book originally published by
Harr Wagner Publishing Company, 1953
eBook formatting © 2011 Bethlehem Books

Slightly revised by Publisher
All Rights Reserved

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press
10194 Garfield Street South
Bathgate, ND 58216
www.bethlehembooks.com

To C. B. and R. J.
Who know that country well

Contents

1. Old Hickory Looks at a Map	1
2. Death in the Woods	8
3. A Canoe and Its Contents	14
4. A Grave for Two Gentlemen	22
5. First Meeting with Bonneville	31
6. Friendly Swords Clash	39
7. Guess Trails a Foe	46
8. A Duel of Wits	52
9. Westward Ho from Fort Osage	58
10. The Meeting with White Plume	66
11. The First Buffalo Hunt	74
12. Guess Makes an Important Discovery	89
13. Crossing the Great Divide	101
14. Arrival at the Rendezvous	107
15. Kit Carson “Wins” a Saddle	113
16. A Strange Duel in the Wilderness	124
17. Bonneville Reveals His Plans	131
18. The Cabin on Wood River	139
19. Trapping Beaver	147
20. Buckeye Tells of British Plans	157
21. A Plan to Save an Empire	166
22. Scouting in Oregon	172
23. The Arrest of Henry Chatillon	180
24. Pierre Fights Another Duel	192
25. The Scouts Rejoin Bonneville	208
26. “King Andrew” Receives a Report	217
About the Author	228



1. Old Hickory Looks at a Map

ANDREW JACKSON, seventh president of the United States, with a prolonged grimace, tugged at one of his boots until it finally gave up its grip on the foot inside. He cast the footwear aside on the bearskin hearth rug, and tenderly massaged his toes through a red yarn stocking.

“By the eternal, they sha’n’t have it!” he declared, in tones that seemed to dare his listeners to disagree with him. “Oregon is ours!”

He rose and clumped across the room, the foot of his unbooted stocking showing bright against the worn carpet.

President Jackson, or “King Andrew,” as his political opponents did not hesitate to call him, seemed wholly unaware that he presented a somewhat ludicrous spectacle—that is, for a president. That cussed boot had been hurting his foot! In spite of the fact that he was in the third year of his presidency, he still maintained in language and habits the rough-and-ready character of a backwoods general.

Both of his listeners were far from disagreeing with the President. The older, a stocky gray man of sixty or more, was John

Jacob Astor, who for long had been in the fur business in the Ohio Valley and around the Great Lakes. In 1811 he had established a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River. Without the help of Congress he had been unable to keep this foothold on the Pacific. It had been captured by the British in 1813.

From that time on, Astor had continued his attempts to get re-established in the Oregon Country, which he knew to be one of the richest regions of the entire continent. President Jackson was well aware of the fact that Astor was interested in extending the boundaries of the nation as well as in expanding his own fur business.

The second man before the President was in uniform. In spite of his shiny bald head, he appeared to be on the early side of forty. Captain Benjamin Louis Eulalie Bonneville had come from France when but a small boy. Alexander Hamilton had taken him under his protection. Friends of Hamilton, after his death in a duel with Aaron Burr, had obtained for Bonneville an appointment to the Military Academy at West Point. Following his graduation, he had served with distinction in the army, and had been appointed military aide to Lafayette at the time of that great Frenchman's last visit to America. Already Bonneville was widely known throughout many parts of the United States.

There had been several previous meetings of the three. Perhaps that is why neither Astor nor Bonneville showed surprise at the President's unconventional behavior. They seemed fascinated by what he was saying.

"Jefferson bought the whole shebang, and Lewis and Clark clinched the bargain when they went down the Columbia in 1805."

Jackson pointed a long bony finger at the gray stocky man.

"You opened that country yourself. And just because a cowardly Congress let 'em take it without a fight doesn't mean they've got a deed to it. Not by a whole keg o' powder!"

Thoughts of the doctrine, that the United States was already too large, brought emotions which temporarily choked the President. Men in Congress had preached that doctrine and thereby earned his undying contempt. Andrew Jackson was not a man to be sparing in his criticisms.

"That weak-kneed policy is a thing o' the past," he roared, his eyes fairly blazing. "Why, some of 'em even wanted to let 'em take New Orleans!"

"That Oregon Country is ours," Astor agreed. "Besides—"

"And not only the Oregon Country, Astor," Jackson broke in. "Look here!" The other two men obediently arose to look at a map, before which the President had paused. "We're the greatest country on God's green footstool. And we're goin' to be greater. We've got to be a *two-ocean* country.

"Already too big!" Jackson fairly snorted his contempt. "See there! There's Texas." His bony finger passed along the Gulf of Mexico and up the Rio Grande. "That's our natural boundary. Texas is full of Americans, and it's ours by settlement." His finger continued westward to where the Pacific Ocean showed in wavy lines on the map. "And the whole Pacific Coast up to the Russians in Alaska. The Russians are already in California, and the Mexicans can't hope to hold it. The Britishers think they've as good as got Oregon. By the eternal, they sha'n't have it! None of it!"

"As I understand it, Your Excellency, I am not to be concerned about Texas," Bonneville remarked.

"That's right, Bonneville. Sam Houston'll look after Texas. He knows that country, and I reckon we don't have much to worry about with Sam lookin' after things. You're to size up the situation in California and Oregon, but particularly in the Oregon Country."

He glanced at Astor, who nodded approval.

"I reckon it's the Britishers we've got to watch," Jackson went on. I want to know their strength—how far they've got into the interior. What kind o' forts and posts they've built, and where they are."

"We spoke before of settlers," Captain Bonneville reminded him.

"Yes, there's that, too. I want you especially to find out what the chances are o' gettin' settlers across the mountains. We've got to get settlers into that country before it's too late. Sailin' around the Horn is out o' the question for the kind o' settlers we need. It was settlers that took the Ohio Valley and the Kentucky and Tennessee country. And it'll be settlers that'll take that country you're goin' into out there. But they're the kind that don't take to salt water. They just move in. It'll be up to you to find a way for 'em."

"Mr. Astor and I have agreed on that. I plan to take wagons," Bonneville told him.

"Already they are bought and paid for," Astor broke in. "They will be on the Missouri, come spring."

President Jackson seemed for the first time a little chagrined. "It's a shame for a private citizen to have to spend his money for what Congress ought to buy," he declared, revealing the cause of his embarrassment. "But it would be worse than useless to try to get money for this expedition out o' Congress. Congress would raise a fuss, and then not vote the money. Everybody, includin' the Britishers, would know what we're up to."

Astor spread his hands in a complacent gesture. "It is a small matter, Mr. President."

Jackson sat down and leaned his tousled gray head on his hand. "A small matter o' great importance to the Republic, Mr. Astor. And I thank you in the name o' the country. It's probably all you'll ever get for your money and trouble."

The stocky, gray Astor stood up. He turned for a moment to look out of the window where silent flakes of snow were steadily ladening the trees of the White House grounds. When he turned back to the President, there was a new light in his face—a light that was more than the reflection from the blazing fireplace.

"Mr. President," he began, with a calm intensity that carried complete conviction, "I came to dis country as a boy in 1783, the first year of peace und freedom. I was an immigrant boy, with nodding but ambition und a willingness to work hard. Everything I own I owe to my adopted land. Do I need tell you, General, dot de future of dis country means more to me than de future of the Astor fortune?"

Jackson seemed pleased at being called "General." Perhaps the title awakened memories of his own sacrifices for the Republic he loved. He got up from his chair and took Astor's hand. His steely blue eyes seemed to lose some of their hardness.

"We'll say no more about it," he told Astor. "Your puttin' up the money for the expedition is deservin' o' the nation's deepest thanks. But, unfortunately, that cannot be generally known at present. In years to come, possibly when we are both dead, the Republic may remember to thank you. Probably it won't. But just now we have to remember that this is all extra-legal. My personal thanks will have to suffice."

Astor bowed. "I want no thanks, Mr. President. I am more interested in what dot map says." His words and gesture towards the map they had been discussing brought a smile to Jackson's face.