

Yates, Elizabeth. "Early Steamboating: Pioneer Thoroughfare to Eugene and Springfield via Willamette River." *Lane County Historian* 4.1 (1959):6-9. (Reviewed by Alexis Steinberg)

Elizabeth Yates provides a look at some of the earliest means of transportation in the Willamette Valley; boating on the river! A short chronology is provided about the history of steamboating along the Willamette River. This includes the prominent steamboats (and later sternwheelers) and their respective captains, as well as the function of freight boats on the Upper Willamette.

Oregon City had regular steamboat service to downstream sites by 1850. This was the furthest traveled up the Willamette until 1851, when the first steamboats began portaging around Willamette Falls. By 1857, Eugeneans had bought shares in the *James Clinton*, a steamboat navigated by Captain White and the first freight arrived in Eugene. The People's Transportation Company's *Enterprise* steamboat was soon running freights once a week from Portland to Eugene during high water seasons. This was a 3-4 day trip with stops in Corvallis and Salem. Prices, in 1867, were \$16/ton for a one-way freight and all freight and passengers portaged the falls at Oregon City. The typical cargo included passengers, mail, cattle, wheat and farming supplies.

The upper portion of the river was considered very hazardous with low water flows because of the meandering channels and uncharted gravel bars. "When a boat was stuck passengers would grab the low branches and help pull her across the gravel bar," (Yates, 8).

Ben Holladay's railroad service began in 1871, shortening the Portland to Eugene travel time to 18 hours and effectively ending steamboating. Also in 1871, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began clearing the Willamette River channel for navigation aid and flood control. The canal and locks at Willamette Falls were constructed soon after, but larger sternwheelers were the only boats being used to transfer goods.

Critique

Chronicled in the *Lane County Historian*, this article focused specifically on steamboating on the Upper Willamette. A more complete picture of early river travel along the river would include accounts from the lower Willamette and even the Columbia River. This article was written in newspaper-like fashion and dramatized the excitement and danger involved with steamboating on the Upper Willamette. It would be interesting to find charts of the river from the 1850s that documented the various channels, tributaries and flows of the river.

I found comparisons with this account and our own means of travel very interesting. Steamboats were the fastest, most efficient transportation running in the 1850s, but can you imagine spending 3-4 days traveling between Eugene and Portland? And how many tons were being transported per week compared to how much is transported along the river today? Initial river channelization and log removal seem to be likely effects of people and businesses wanting to move materials upstream in the 1800s.

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