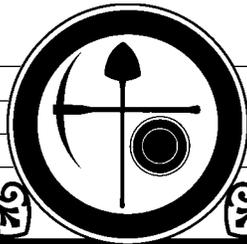


This month's theme:  
**The Astorians**



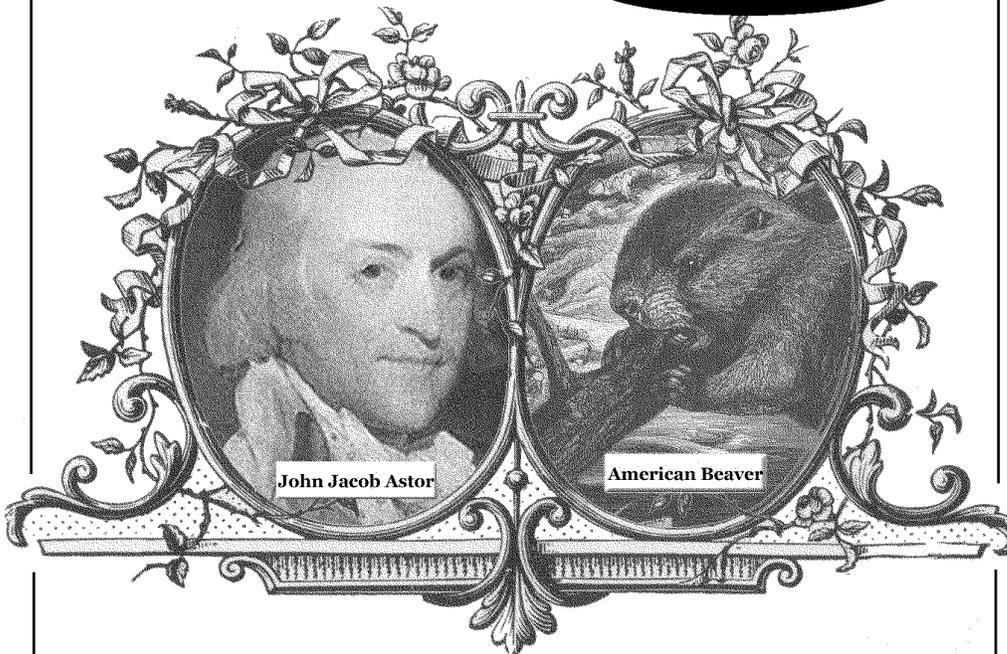
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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

# PROSPECTOR

December, 2003



John Jacob Astor

American Beaver

## The Astorians

**W**hen the Lewis and Clark expedition took their epic journey to the Pacific Ocean in 1804, they were happy to discover a certain, important animal living in the Rocky Mountains. Although this animal wasn't new to science (it lived in the East and Midwest also), the explorers were eager to tell President Thomas Jefferson of its presence. What animal caused all of the excitement? The answer is *Castor canadensis*, also known as the

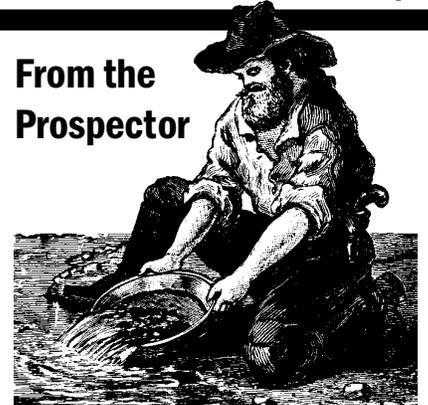
American beaver.

In the early 1800's, beaver fur was very valuable. The fine black hairs on the animal's back were used to make felt top hats. These hats were fashionable in both America and Europe.

Although there were already fur trapping companies in many parts of the continent, the Northwest provided new opportunities for men willing to take a risk. One of these men was an accomplished businessman named John Jacob Astor. Astor had a dra-

*Continued on next page*

### From the Prospector



### Howdy Prospectors!

This issue we're going to tell the story of one of the first industries in Idaho. In the early 1800's if you wanted to make a living in this state, there wasn't much choice of occupation. Except for the Indians, most folks who lived around these parts were fur trappers. Fur trapping was a difficult and dangerous job. But for those who were well prepared and had good luck, it could have great rewards.

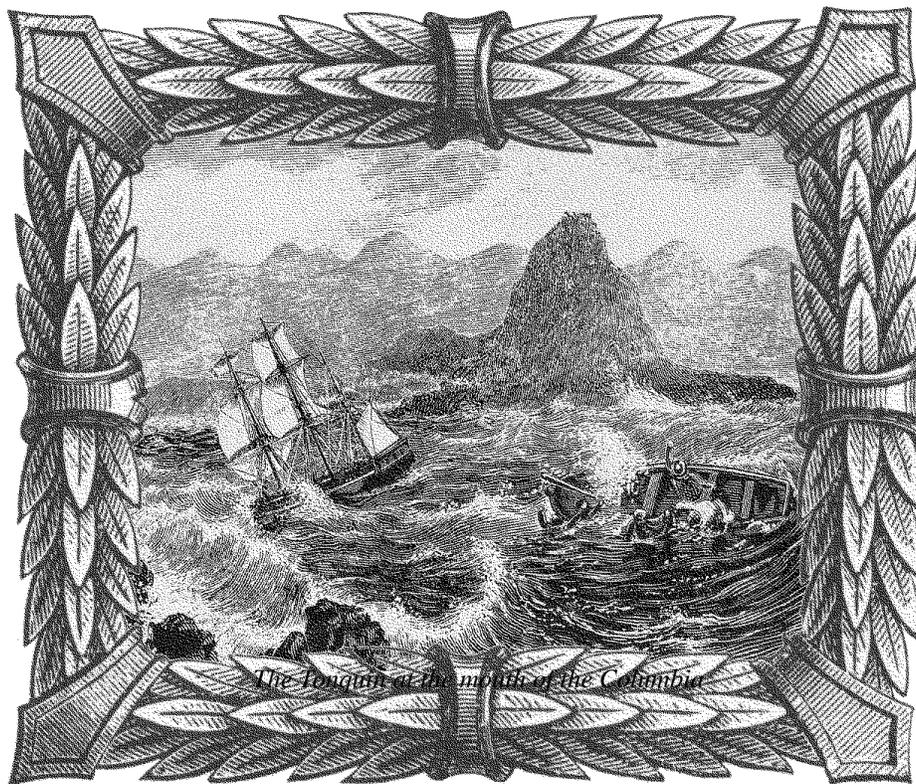
This month's story is about an ambitious group of fur trappers called the Astorians. Sponsored by a rich businessman from back East, they had a plan to take the Idaho fur trapping industry by storm. Unfortunately, things didn't work out quite like they planned.

That's all I'm going to tell you for now. I don't want to spoil the surprises. ♦

# The Astorians Continued

matic plan to control the fur trading business in this new region. His Pacific Fur Company had two teams. The first group would sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and build a fort at the mouth of the Columbia River in what is now Oregon. The second team would cross the west like Lewis and Clark did a few years earlier, by boat, horse, and foot. It was a grand plan, with a potentially large payoff if everything went well. Unfortunately, things didn't go as smoothly as everybody had hoped.

The first team left the East Coast in a large ship named the *Tonquin* in September of 1810. They had a long journey ahead, all the way around the tip of South America and back up the Pacific Coast, but they sailed without any problems. The trouble began when the vessel arrived at its intended destination, the mouth of the Columbia River, in March of 1811. The waters where the river met the ocean were rough and treacherous, but the captain was eager to land and didn't want to



*The Tonquin at the mouth of the Columbia*

wait for better conditions. Against the good judgment of some of the other men, he sent several smaller boats out to scout a route for the bigger ship. One of these boats was overturned in the waves and three sailors drowned. The *Tonquin* finally pushed through to shore, and a much relieved crew began to build the fur trading fort of Astoria.

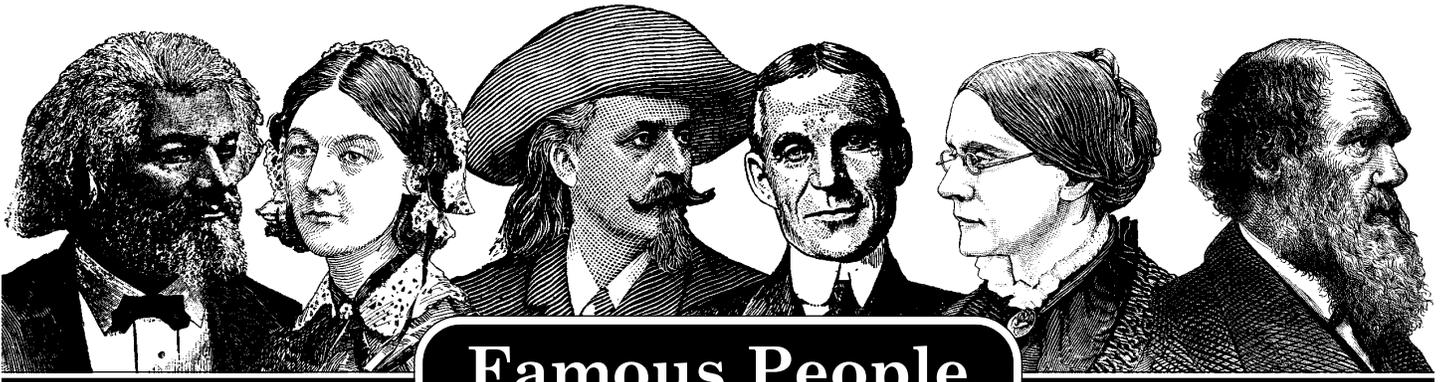
At this point the captain made another hasty decision. Leaving some fur trappers behind to run the fort, he returned the *Tonquin* to the ocean and explored the coast north of the river. While trading with some of the Indian tribes along the way, the captain

insulted one of the native leaders. Angered by the captain's conduct, the Indians came back the next week and cunningly attacked the ship. A furious battle took place, ending in the explosion of the ship's gunpowder stores. After it was all over, the ship, the entire crew, and most of the attackers were lost.

Unaware of the disaster that was to befall the ship, the second team was getting ready to leave St Louis in June of 1810. The overland crew was known as the Hunt Party, after their leader, Wilson Price Hunt, an eastern businessman who was chosen by Astor to be in charge of the expedition.

The first leg of the journey was by boat up the Missouri River. Along the way, a frightening encounter with the Sioux made the group nervous about further Indian confrontations. The original plan was to follow the Missouri River through to the Yellowstone River, traveling as much as possible by water. This route would have taken them through Blackfoot territory, a tribe

*Continued on Page 5*



## Famous People

# Donald Mackenzie

One of the heroes of the Hunt Expedition was an experienced fur trader named Donald Mackenzie. As a young man, Mackenzie had left his home in Scotland to make a life for himself in North America. He entered the fur trade in Canada, where his hard work and energetic spirit distinguished him from others in the business.

In 1810 he was recruited by the millionaire John Jacob Astor, to help run the Pacific Fur Company. Mackenzie was one of the leaders of the tragic Hunt Party that got into trouble in Idaho when they chose to use canoes instead of horses to finish their trip to the Pacific Ocean.

After their disastrous boat wreck, it was

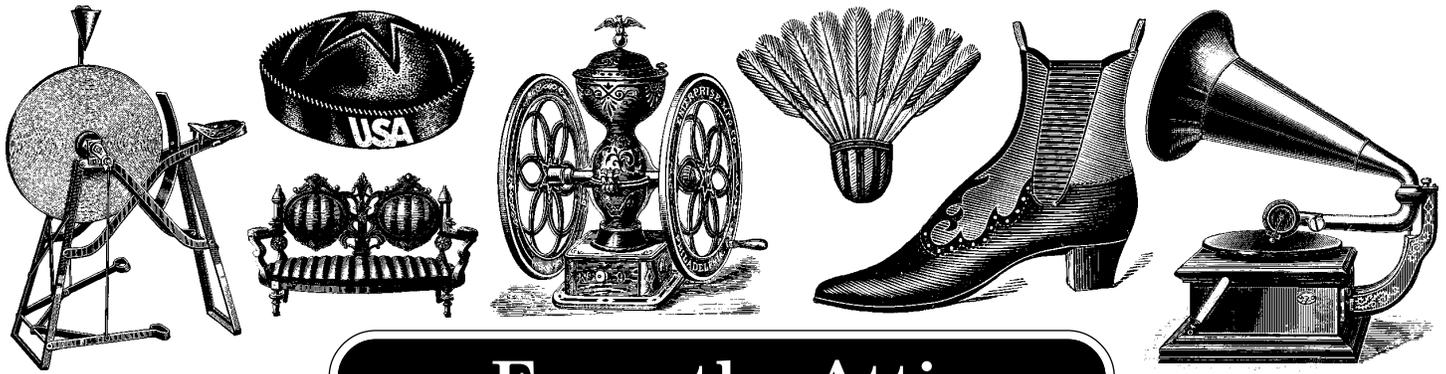
decided that the expedition would split up. Donald Mackenzie's group of men went north and followed Lewis and Clark's route from the Clearwater, to the Snake, to the Columbia River. Of the members of the original expedition, Mackenzie's team was the first to arrive at Fort Astoria on

the Pacific Ocean. Although the group was tired and hungry, they managed to make the over 900 mile trip without losing a life.

Even though the Pacific Fur Company eventually failed, Donald Mackenzie helped open up the fur trade in Idaho. From the Boise Valley, to Lake Pend d'Oreille, to the Yellowstone region, Mackenzie trapped and explored all over the state. Also, his good relations with the Native Americans and his innovative ideas on expanding the fur trading market, made it easier for the mountain men and businesses who came after.

Eventually Mackenzie left the Rocky Mountains for an important job in Winnipeg, Canada. Although he never returned to Idaho, his important contributions helped pave the way for others to follow in his footsteps. ♦



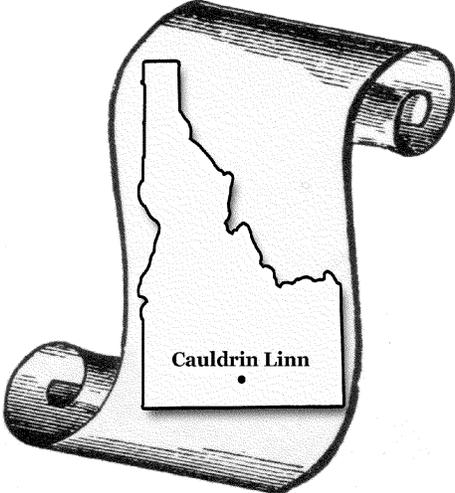


## From the Attic

# The Artifacts at Caldron Linn

In 1938 a farmer named Clifford Starrey was fishing on the Snake River when he made an important discovery. A year of low water had made the river shallow, allowing Starrey to retrieve several badly rusted objects he noticed on the rocky river bed. Carefully inspecting the corroded metal, Starrey identified the remains of several muskets, axes, beaver traps, and a rifle. Where did they come from?

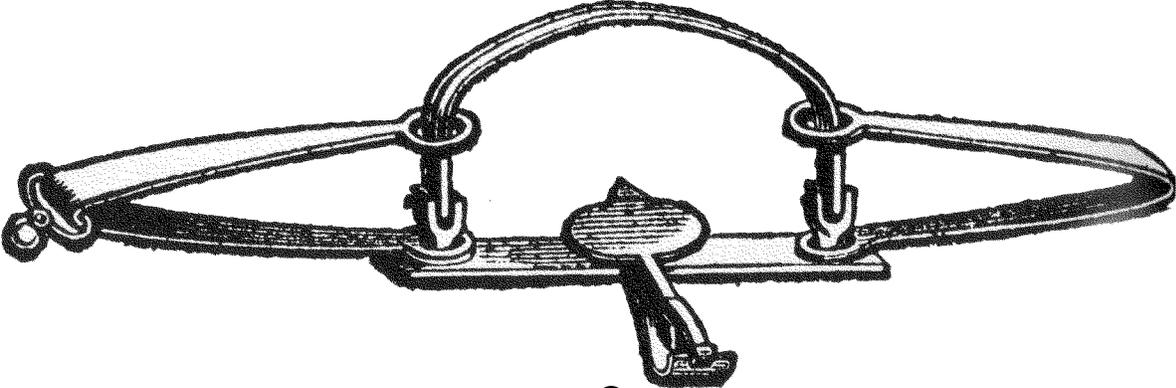
For years, historians had known that the Hunt Party had lost four canoes near the rapid water the expedition had named Caldron Linn. Although the scholars had a general idea of the site's location in the canyon, nobody was sure exactly where



the boat wreck happened. According to the stories, the Hunt Party lost one of their first canoes near a large jutting rock. The objects Starrey found were downstream from a rock that matched that description. Even

more exciting, an examination of the artifacts revealed that they were supplies typically carried by fur trappers of the early 1800's. Clifford Starrey had found the location of the Hunt Party's historic boat wreck.

In 1949, the Idaho Historical Society acquired Starrey's collection. Three of the best preserved artifacts, a musket, a trap, and an ax head, are on exhibit in the Historical Museum in Boise. If you are ever in our capitol city, come visit the museum and see these intriguing objects. Using the artifacts to inspire your imagination, you can easily picture the Hunt Party and their dangerous trip down the Snake River. ♦



# The Astorians Continued

that had been hostile towards visitors ever since a fatal incident with the Lewis and Clark expedition. Wanting to avoid a fight, Hunt decided to leave the river at the village of a friendly Indian tribe named the Aricaras, and make his way by land. In July, the group of sixty-four explorers and eighty-two horses set off toward the Rocky Mountains.

The journey was long and tiresome for the large crew. Many of the fur trappers were accustomed to river transportation and thought travel by horse slow and uncomfortable. Arguments with some of the other leading men on the expedition made Hunt's job even more difficult. The weary group crossed the Teton Mountains and arrived in what is now Idaho in October of 1811.

Here the expedition made its biggest mistake. Tired of walking and riding, the men convinced Hunt to continue the journey by river. The team left their horses behind, making sturdy canoes from cottonwood trees, and set out on the water.

Most of the group thought this was a great idea. The eastern fur trappers were skilled boatmen and the calm river would certainly meet up with the Columbia, leading them to the Pacific. Their directions were correct, but they had misjudged the river. The Hunt Party was afloat on the mighty Snake and, although its waters were calm in Eastern Idaho where they had started, there was trouble ahead.

Little by little the canyon got

steeper and the rapids more ferocious. The experienced boatmen were careful, but they couldn't handle the raging waters. Disaster struck near what is now the town of Murtaugh. In a raging rapid the crew named Cauldron Linn the crew lost four canoes and one unfortunate trapper named Ramsey Crooks. A short scouting trip revealed that the river ahead was impassable. Without their



*Wilson Price Hunt*

horses, the expedition now faced a terrifying journey on foot across unmapped territory. The careful plan of John Jacob Astor had fallen apart.

Hunt decided that the best chance the group had was to split up. Breaking into five small groups, the men took what supplies they could carry and set out in different directions. The trip went horribly. Hungry and exhausted, a few of the weak men were lost to accidents and sickness and others had to be left behind to be rescued later. Even-

tually though, the persistent explores made it to the Columbia and the fort at Astoria.

Events seemed as if they couldn't get worse, but they did. In 1812, America went to war with Great Britain. The British had a strong navy that could easily capture American ships at sea. Because of this threat, John Jacob Astor was unable to send a planned supply ship to the fort to help the explorers. Food and equipment quickly ran low.

Finally, the group gave up. Their low supplies, combined with the fear that a British war ship might attack them, broke the men's spirit. Of the original members of the expedition, 68 had given up their lives. Too many things had gone wrong to make their business a success. The Pacific Fur Company sold what equipment it had left to a rival fur trapping company from Canada.

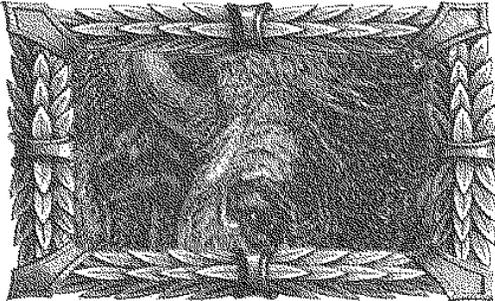
Even though John Jacob Astor's dream never worked out, the travels of the Astorian fur trappers did have a few good results. Many of the surviving fur trappers from the expedition went on to work with other trading companies in the west. Their knowledge of the Rocky Mountains' geography and the skills they learned surviving in the wilderness helped them succeed in future fur trapping endeavors.

In Idaho, the era of fur trappers was to go on for another thirty years. These brave mountain men helped pave the way for the pioneers who would soon follow their trails west. ♦

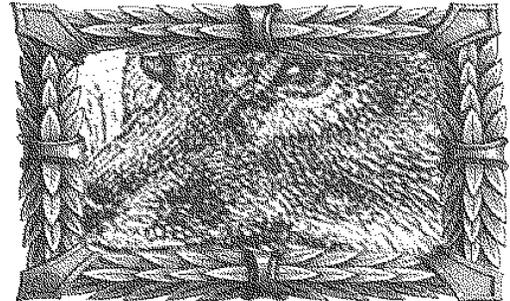


# The Fun Page

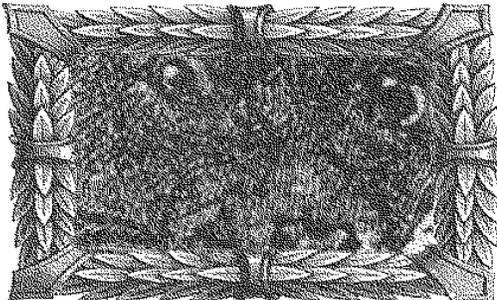
Although beavers were important, they weren't the only animals the trappers killed for their fur. Unscramble the words below to reveal the names of other creatures that were important to the fur trade on the western frontier.



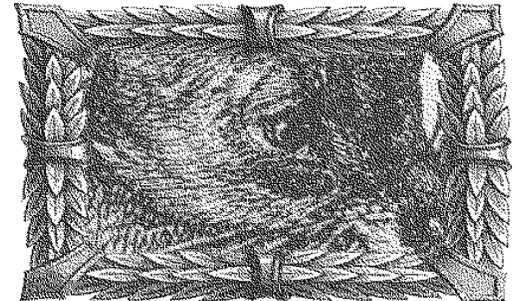
1. CAMARINE NOBIS



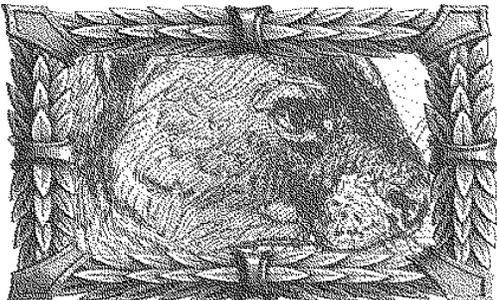
2. ERD OXF



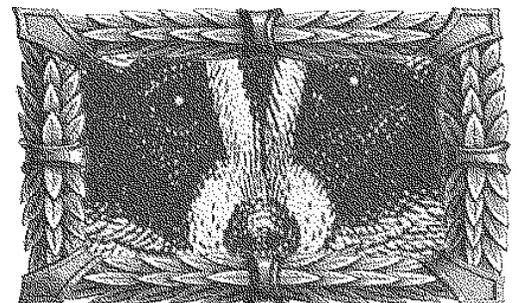
3. TAMNER



4. NMKI



5. RETOT



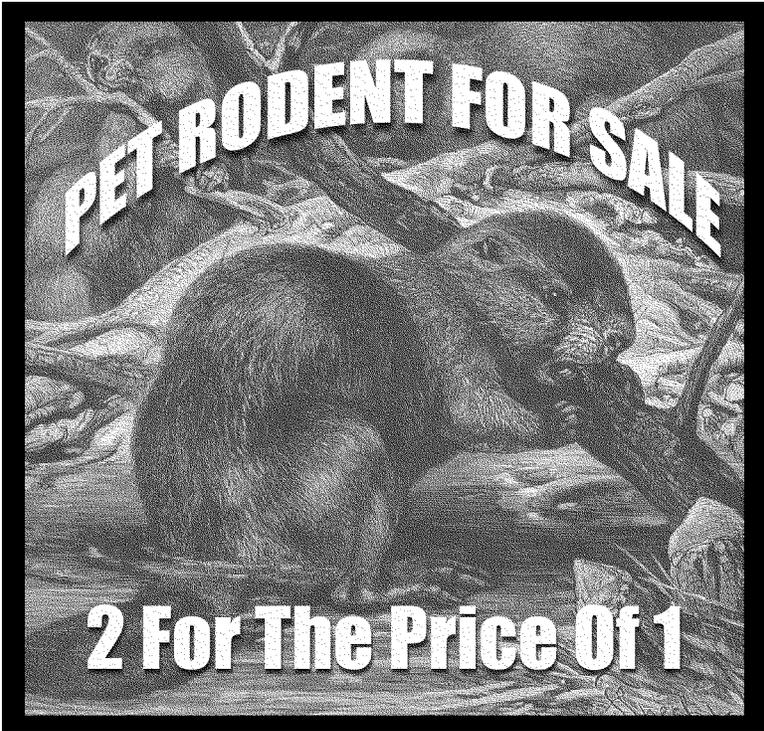
6. ORNACO

Answers: 1) American Bison 2) Red Fox 3) Marten 4) Mink 5) Otter 6) Raccoon



## Next Month's Activities

**N**ow it's your turn, Prospectors. We've told you all about the adventures of the Astorians, but there is a lot more fur trapping history in Idaho to learn. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own fur trapping project. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, school and town where you are from, and the name of your prospector chapter.

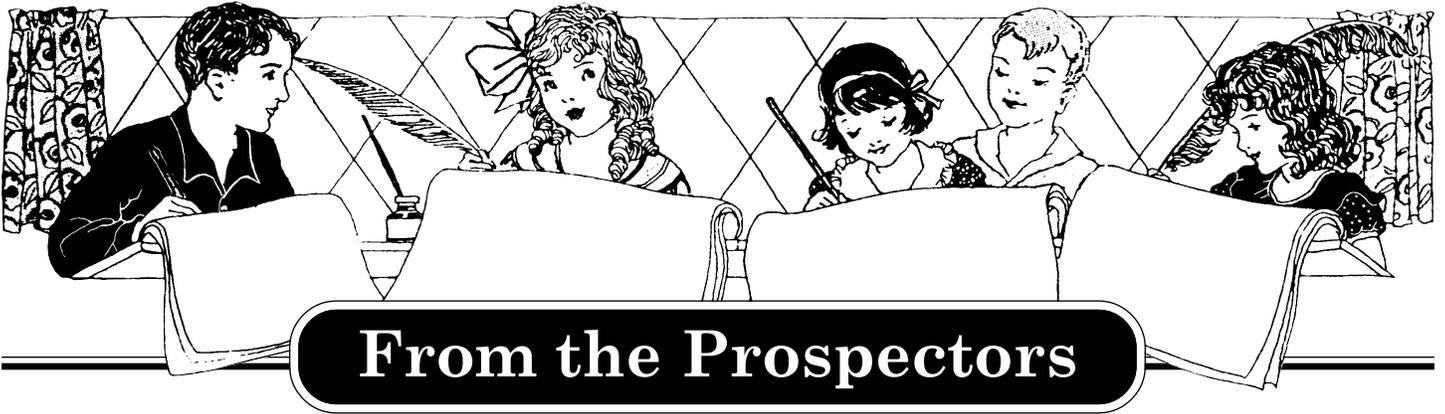


**My New Pet:**  
Beavers were important to trappers because their fur was used to make expensive top hats, but what if a clever businessman or woman came up with another use for the wild animals? Pretend you are the head of a company trying to sell beavers as family pets. Make a newspaper ad that can convince the public that your unique pet is worth buying.

**What If?:**  
What if the Hunt Party never made the decision to abandon their horses and ride in canoes? Pretend that you are one of the leaders of this famous expedition and you convince the group to finish their journey on foot. Write a short story telling us how this changed the expedition. Did you have better luck? Did you get lost? Did everybody get rich?

**Everything In One Bag:**  
Fur trappers couldn't carry much into the wilderness. After they packed their food, tools, and other supplies there wasn't much room for anything else. Still, a fur trapper would probably carry one small memento or keepsake to keep him company in the lonely mountains. If you could take one special item with you in the wilderness what would it be? Tell us about the object and why it's so important to you.

Send in your work by January 12<sup>th</sup> to:  
  
Prospector Club  
Lucky Noah  
Idaho State Historical Museum  
610 North Julia Davis Drive  
Boise, ID 83702  
  
Or email it to us at [kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us](mailto:kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us)



Look at these great submissions on last month's Coyote theme! Thanks for the help, Prospectors.

### Singing About Coyote (Poem and Songs about Coyote)

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#### Coyote

There was a coyote  
His name was sly coyote  
One day he heard that a monster was locking people  
up  
Sly coyote got mad when he heard while he was eating  
his sup  
The sly coyote started sharpening his claws  
Then dark at night when coyote was walking he  
touched it with his paws  
He figured it was a monster  
Sly coyote knew how to jump because he was a  
jumper  
So he jumped on the stomach with his claws  
And landed on the ground with his paws  
He destroyed the monster  
Because he was a good jumper  
Then he found the key that locked people in  
He found them inside a dungeon  
Sly coyote let them out  
And gleefully shout  
Thank you Thank you Sly Coyote

Michelle Wu  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

#### Poem of Coyote

Coyote is sly,  
Always ready for a lie.  
Coyote is very clever,  
a good deed? Why never,  
for a very sneaky  
very leaky coyote.  
Coyote won't play,  
Not even a day.  
For coyote is too busy for fun.  
Why have fun when you can run, run, run  
all day being a pest.

Maria Kennedy  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

#### Coyote in Snow

Dancing prancing,  
jumping too. Coyotes putting  
their noses in the snow.  
Playing with their kits.  
Hopping and bopping all night  
long. Sweet little ones go to sleep.

Natalie Koskella  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

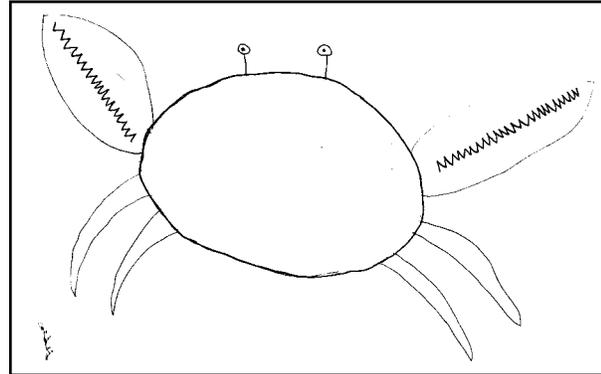
## Calling All Tricksters (which animals would make good tricksters)

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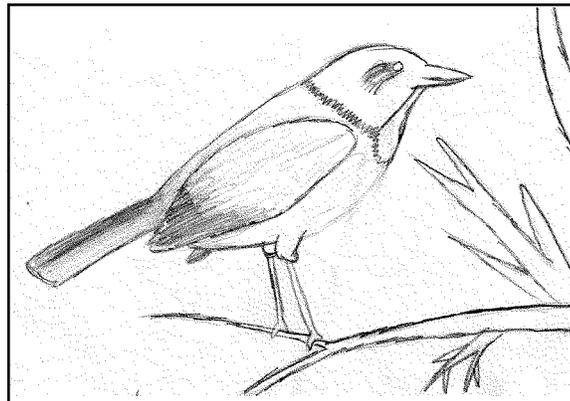
The rattlesnake would be a good trickster because you think he will strike but he can't strike unless he is coiled up. Its rattle is to keep things away. They are very poisonous.

Eric Robbins  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise



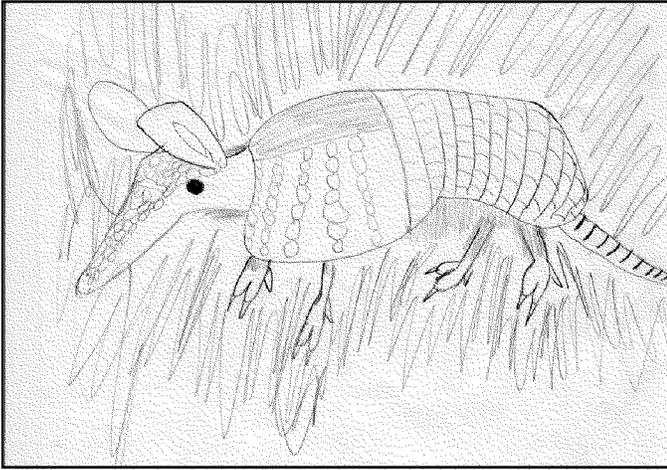
I think a crab is a trickster because they can snap and they can run very fast.

Isabella Cohen  
Riverside Chapter



A jay would make a good trickster because they are sneaky, smart, and fast. They can be pretty or annoying. I think you could make up lots of Native American stories with a jay in them.

Katie Knick  
Riverside Chapter

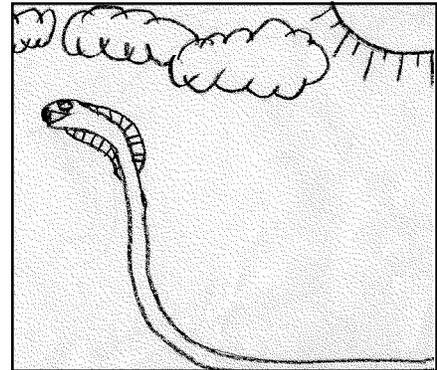


I choose the armadillo because of its hard shell. If it rolls up in a ball it may be mistaken as a rock. It is a master of disguise. The armadillo would make a good trickster.

Robby Gonzalez  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

The King Cobra is my trickster because they trick you when you see them. They look like a regular old snake then they get those puffed up cheeks and rise off the ground. I think that's pretty tricky.

Roman Bernardo  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise



I think a squirrel could be a trickster because squirrels are swift and fast. Also because squirrels are smart and can fit into small places. They can bite hard too.

Paul Schroeder  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

## Coyote Facts

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The coyote is a wild member of the dog family. It is known for its strange howl. It is sometimes called prairie wolf or brush wolf. It lives in deserts, mountains, and prairies.

Alexander Wolford-Griggs  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

The coyote is a wild dog member. The coyote is known for its howl. Coyotes are 4 feet long from head to tail. They are 5 to 30 lbs. A new born coyote weighs 7-10 grams. The mother provides milk for her pups until they're 6 to 7 months old. Coyotes eat most kinds of food.

Jeremy Feldman  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

Coyotes are gray and brownish-yellow. An adult coyote is 4 feet long. It has an 11 to 16 inch tail. The coyote is about 25 to 30 pounds. Coyotes live alone or in pairs. Female coyotes give birth to 5 to 6 pups. They mostly live in the western part of America.

Brink Bolen  
Riverside Chapter  
Boise

# Resources for Teachers

## Field Trip Ideas

Idaho Historical Museum  
610 N Julia Davis Drive  
Boise, Idaho 83702  
334-2120

Located in Julia Davis Park in downtown Boise, the museum features three of the Astorian artifacts recovered from the Snake River.

## Books

Chittenden, H.M.  
*The American Fur Trade of the Far West, Volume 1-3*  
Francis P. Harper, 1902  
An extensive retelling of the Astorian's story with other chapters highlighting other important events and characters of the period.

Hafen, L.R. editor  
*The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West, Volume 5 and 6*  
Arthur Clark Company, 1968  
Biographical sketches of the main participants in the fur trade, including Donald Mackenzie and Wilson Hunt

Idaho Historical Society  
*Historical Reference Series #547-Donald Mackenzie*  
Idaho Historical Society, 1971  
A brief biography of Donald Mackenzie.

Idaho Historical Society  
*Historical Reference Series #992-Astorian Sites Investigation Below Milner*  
Idaho Historical Society, 1992  
A review of the artifacts found at Cauldrin Linn

Irving, W.  
*The Complete Works of Washington Irving-Astoria*  
Twayne Publishers, 1976  
Written in the mid 1800's, Washington's account is the first complete record of the expedition.

## Web Resources

A Brief History of Fur Trapping in the West  
[www.Northamericantrapper.com/history.htm](http://www.Northamericantrapper.com/history.htm)

Astorians and the Oregon Trail  
[www.thefurtrapper.com/astorians.htm](http://www.thefurtrapper.com/astorians.htm)

Complete Text of Washington Irving's Book on the Astorians  
[www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/Astoria/index.html](http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/Astoria/index.html)

The Complete Journal of Wilson Price Hunt  
[www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/huntintr.html](http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/huntintr.html)

# Lesson Plan

## Mapping the Astorians' Route

### Goal of Lesson:

History can be a great tool for the teaching of geography. Studying maps can help to put a historical story in context, while at the same time building valuable map reading skills. In this lesson, students will compare an old map from the 1850's of the Hunt Party's route across the west with a modern map of the region.

### Inventory:

Copies of map A, B, and worksheet. Crayons, colored pencils or markers.

### Activity:

Have the students read this month's newsletter, so that they are familiar with the story of the Hunt Party. Break into small groups of two or three. Each group will receive a copy of both maps and the worksheets with instructions for comparing the maps. Using the worksheet as a guide, the students will then try to locate important historical and modern landmarks.

### Discussion:

If you have time, make a copy of both maps for an overhead projector and go over the answers as a class when the group is finished.

# On the Trail of the Hunt Party

## Introduction:

Your group should have two maps in front of you. **Map A** is a map from the 1850's. It shows the Hunt Party's route across the Northwest. There were no states yet in the Northwest back then, so the main features on the map are rivers. **Map B** is a modern map of the region where we live. This one should be easy to recognize with state lines and familiar cities.

At first, the two maps might look nothing alike, but if you look at them closely you'll see that the maps cover the same area.

Study the maps and follow the instructions below.

## Instructions:

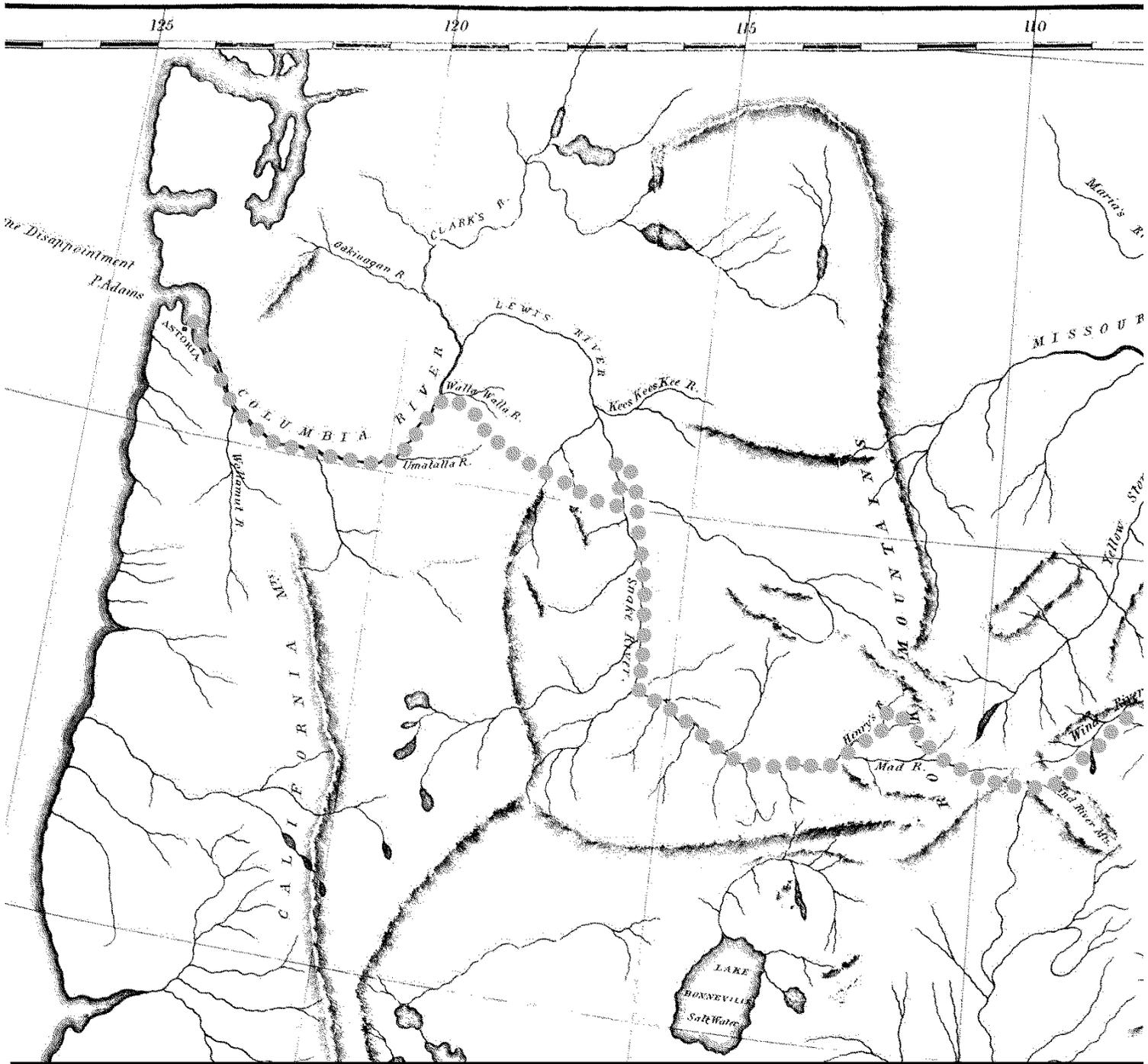
- 1) Astoria was the fort built by the Pacific Fur Company at the place where the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean meet. Find it on **Map A** and circle it in red (Hint: It's at the very end of the Hunt route).
- 2) Now look on **Map B** and see if Astoria is still around today. If you find it, circle it with red also. Why would it be a good idea to locate a fort or a town near a place where the river meets the ocean?
- 3) Rivers were important roads for the fur trappers in the West. One of the greatest of these rivers was the Columbia. The Hunt Party followed the Columbia to Astoria at the end of their journey. Find the Columbia on **Map A** and trace it in blue.
- 4) The Columbia River is still important in modern times. Find the Columbia on **Map B** and trace it with blue. What two states does it separate?
- 5) Boise wasn't around when the Hunt Party traveled through Idaho, but a group of men led by Donald Mackenzie explored the valley nearby. Locate Boise on **Map B** and put a green X through it. Now, by comparing the maps, try to find where Boise should be on **Map A**. You can use the Snake River as a guide. When you think

you've found where it should be, mark it also with a green X.

6) One way you can compare the maps is to identify important geographic features on both. Find the Great Salt Lake on **Map B** and color it with yellow. Now try to find it on **Map A** and color it in. Does it have the same name? What did they call it in the 1850's.

7) Now comes the tricky part. The Hunt Party's trail is marked on **Map A**. Can you trace it on **Map B**? Make a dotted line where you think the group traveled (Hint: use the Snake and the Columbia rivers as guides).

# Map A



..... **Hunt's Route To The Pacific**

# Map B

