Etienne Lucier, a Man of Firsts

By Connie Lenzen

Etienne Lucier, son of Michel Lussier and Victorie (Deline-Edeline) Lussier, was born and baptised on 9 June 1786 in Ste Familie de Boucherville, Canada. He married Josephte Nouite on 23 January 1839 and Marguerite Tschinouk on 10 August 1840; both marriages took place in St. Paul, Oregon. He died 8 March 1853 and was buried 9 March 1853 in St. Paul.¹

As a member of the Wilson Price Hunt expedition of 1811–12, he was one of the first North Americans to arrive in Oregon. As one of the twenty endorsers of the 1836 petition to the Bishop of Juliopoles to send a priest "as quick as possible," he was instrumental in obtaining a Catholic priest to minister to the Oregon settlers.² In 1829, when he settled into a cabin in what is now Portland, Oregon, he was that city's first resident.³ As one of the first settlers in French Prairie, he broke sod of one of the richest farmlands in Oregon.⁴ In 1841 he was a member of the first committee charged with forming a government in Oregon Territory.⁵ On 2 May 1843, Lucier, along with F. X. Matthieu, provided the deciding votes when the question of establishing an Oregon provisional government was called. With the tally of 52-50, Oregon became part of the United States rather than England.⁶ Because of his contributions to Oregon's history, he is one of the 158 names of prominent Oregonians memorialized in the frieze in the Oregon State Capitol.⁷

The Wilson Price Hunt Expedition and first years in Oregon

John Jacob Astor formed the Pacific Fur Company as competition to Canadian fur trading firms. His intent was that the company would trap out of Astoria on the Columbia River. An overland expedition was formed under Wilson Price Hunt, one of the company partners. On 4 August 1810, Etienne Lucier joined the overland party at Mackinac.⁸ Lucier was an experienced trapper. He had previously worked for J. B. Caron & Co. in 1807 where he wintered in Ouisconsin and the Macinac Company in 1808 where he wintered at St. Joseph.⁹

On 18 July 1811, Wilson Price Hunt wrote, "Misters McKenzie, Crooks, Miller, McClellan, Reed, and Hunt, in company with fifty-six men, a woman, and two children had travelled up the Missouri River from St. Louis to the village of the Aricaras. We left there with eighty-two horses packing commodities, munitions, food, and animal traps. Everyone walked except the company partners and the woman, a squaw." On 2 November 1811, the expedition divided into smaller parties. Lucier was in the group with Donald McKenzie and Robert McLellan, both Astor Company partners. After numerous hardships, the group made their way to Astoria, arriving in two canoes on 18 January 1812.

Northwest Company

In October 1813, the Pacific Fur Company was sold to the Northwest Company, the men were discharged, and the keys were turned over to the new owners. Around twenty Pacific Fur Company employees, including Lucier, went to work for the Northwest Company and were based out of Fort George (the British name for Astoria). Lucier's first assignment was to trap along the Willamette River along with St. Amant, and Hearteau. 12 It was during this time that Lucier's daughter Felicite was born. 13 Lucier and twelve others travelled from Fort George to Montreal on an express run, a fast, non-stop trip to Montreal ,with company correspondence.

"Fast" meant a round trip of about six months. After this, he was listed as a freeman, meaning he could trap where he wished, but he had to sell his furs to the company. 14 In 1821, Donald McKenzie reported, "Lucier and Gervais are trapping the river Walamet as usual." 15

Hudson's Bay Company

The Hudson's Bay Company listed Lucier as a "freeman" from 1824-1830.¹⁶ He was based on the Umpqua River from 1826 to 1827.¹⁷ On 16 May 1826 at McKay's Old Fort, Chief Trader McLeod purchased ten horses and two colts from "Lucier the Freeman."¹⁸

Settlement

In October 1828, Donald Manson married Felicite Lucier, Etienene's eldest daughter. Manson later reported that Lucier was living on his land claim near Champoeg and that he had settled there in the fall of 1827.¹⁹ In 1829, some of the retired HBC French Canadian employees asked Dr. John McLoughlin permission to settle their families in the present-day St. Paul area. The HBC policy was that their employees were to go back to the place where they were hired; they were not to put down roots. In a "Copy of a document found among the private papers of the late Dr. John McLoughlin," McLoughlin related his memories of the negotiations that would allow Lucier and his family to remain in Oregon.²⁰

"In 1828 Etienne Lucier, a Willamette trapper, asked me if I thought this would become a settled country. I told him wherever wheat grew he might depend it would become a farming country. He asked me what assistance I would afford him to settle down as a farmer. I told him I would loan him seed to sow and wheat to feed himself and family, to be returned from the products of his farm, and sell him such implements as were in the Hudson's Bay Co., store at fifty per cent. On prime cost. But a few days after he came back and told me he thought there was too remote a prospect of this becoming a civilized country, and as there were no clergyman in the country he asked me a passage for his family in the Hudson's Bay Co.'s boats, to which I acceded. He started in September to meet the boats at the mountains; the express came in too late and he had to return, and went to hunt for the winter.

"In 1829 he again applied to begin to farm. I told him that since he had spoken to me I heard that several of the trappers would apply for assistance to begin to farm, and that it was necessary for me to come to a distinct understanding with him to serve as a rule for those who might follow. That the Hudson's Bay Co. were bound under heavy penalties to discharge none of their servants in the Indian country and bound to return them to the place where they engaged them. That this was done to prevent vagabonds being let loose among the Indians and incite them to hostility to the whites. But as I knew he was a good, honest man, and none but such need to apply, and as if he went to Canada and unfortunately died before his children could provide for themselves they would become objects of pity and a burthen to others. For these reasons I would assist him to settle. But I must keep him and all the Hudson's Bay Co., servants whom I allowed to settle on the Hudson's Bay Co. books as servants, so as not to expose the Hudson's Bay Co. and me to a fine, but they would work for themselves and no service would be exacted from them."

In accordance to McLoughlin's plan, Lucier continued on the HBC books as:

- o 1830-1831, trapper, Southern Expedition
- o 1831-1836, free trapper
- o 1836-1843, Willamette settler²¹

In 1829, Etienne Lucier built a house in what is now East Portland on the bluff near the mouth of the gulch where boating parties would stop to camp. McLoughlin decided he needed the area, and Lucier had to move on.²² Move on, he did – to what is now called French Prairie. He may have received the Company allowance for settlers; two cows, two steers, seed grain, a two-wheeled cart, and a plow.²³

Petitions for a priest

In 1835, the French Canadians on French Prairie felt the need to have their marriages blessed and their children baptized. They sent a letter to the Bishop of Juliopolis [at Red River, now Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada] and asked for a priest. In the spring of 1836, they sent the following letter as a reminder.²⁴ [The spelling and punctuation is not changed from the original.]

1836 Petition Willammeth March 22 1836

To the Bishop of Juliopoles

Reverend sir

We received youre kind Letter last fall wich gave us Much pleasure and ease to our minds for it has been a Long time since we have heard the Likes of it it has Gave us a new heart since we received youre kinde instructions to us we will do oure Best indeavours to instruct oure fammilies to youre wishes still Living in hopes of some Speady releafe wich we are Looking for with eager hearts for the day to Come since we Received youre kinde Letter we have beGun to Build and to make some preparations to Receive oure kinde father wich we hope that oure Laboure will not be in vaine for you know oure sittewations better than oure selves for Some of us stand in greate Neade of youre Assistance as quick as posible

We have nothing to Right to you about the Country but that the farms are All in a very thriving state and produces fine Crops We have sent theis few Lines to you hoping that that it will not trouble you to much for Righting so quick to you but the Country is setteling slowley and oure Children are Learning very fast wich make us very eager for youre assistance wich we hope by Gods helpe will be very sone oure prayers will be for his safe Arivele We have sent you a List of the families that Are at preasent in the settelment so no more preasant from youre humble servants

Eken Luceay signed as the father of six children.

When a year went by and a priest did not arrive, they sent another petition on 8 March 1837. By December 1837, when William A. Slacum of the United States Navy, made his survey of the Oregon Territory, Lucier owned 21 horses, 45 hogs, and a gristmill. He had enclosed 70 acres and cultivated 45.25

Lucier and the Methodist Mission

The nearest church was Jason Lee's Methodist Mission near present-day Salem, Oregon, and Lucier and several of his neighbors looked to Jason Lee for their spiritual needs. Jason Lee baptised a child named Etienne Lucier on 1 March 1838; the child died shortly thereafter.²⁶

In 1836, Lucier joined Rev. Jason Lee's Temperance Society. In 1837, he signed a petition to reimburse Ewing Young and Carmichael if they would discontinue their distillery.²⁷ Lucier did business at Young's sawmill. In 1839, he bought nine thousand four hundred feet of inch and ½ plank boards, weatherboards, and flooring. Lucier also purchased clothing, blankets, and two hogs. In return, Lucier paid with wheat.²⁸

In 1838 Lucier signed a petition to Congress requesting the United States extend jurisdiction over Oregon. Jason Lee took the petition to Washington, D.C., but Congress took no action.²⁹

Jason Lee had a store at the mission where Lucier conducted business, again paying with wheat that he had most likely ground in his gristmill. On 2 July 1838, he brought fifty bushels of wheat to the store and received \$30.00 credit. In return, Lucier charged \$6.50 for blacksmith work and \$23.50 for an order on the Hudson Bay store. On 11 February 1839, Lucier received \$4.00 credit from D. Leslie for bringing goods from the falls. In return, Lucier charged \$6.00 for blacksmith work – leaving a balance due of \$2.00.30 The blacksmith work may have been for a part of his gristmill.

The arrival of the priests

On 24 November 1838, Rev. F. N. Blanchet and Rev. Modeste Demers arrived at Fort Vancouver where James Douglas, acting Chief Factor, welcomed them. On 3 January 1839, Etienne Lucier and Pierre Belleque escorted Blanchet by canoe from Fort Vancouver to Champoeg. From there, they rode horses to the log church that would be named St. Paul.³¹

The church was built in 1836 in anticipation of this day. It was 40 feet by 70 feet and included living space in back of the altar. A replica of the church stands outside of today's church.



On 6 January 1839, Rev. F. N. Blanchet baptized "Joseph, aged 6 months, natural child of Etienne Lussier, farmer of this place, and of Josephte, Nouite. Godfather Joseph Gervais who as well as the father, has not known how to sign."³²

On 22 January 1839, Rev. F. N. Blanchet baptised "Louis, aged 7 years, natural child of Etienne Lussier, farmer, and of Josephte, Nouete. Godfather Francois Xavier Laderoute,33" and "Michel,

aged 4 years, natural child of Etienne Lussier, farmer of this place and of Josephte Nouite. Godfather François Xavier Laderoute."34

On 23 January, Rev. F. N. Blanchet, "in view of dispensation of 2 bans of marriage granted by us Vicar General, and the publication of the third between Etienne Lussier, of Saint Edouard, district of Montreal, in Canada, farmer of this place, on the one part, and Josephte, Nouite by nation, on the other part, nor any impediment being discovered, we priest undersigned Missionary, have received their mutual consent of marriage and have given them the nuptial benediction in presence of Pierre Depot and of Pierre Stanislas Jacquet, witness before whom the said spouses have recognized as their legitimate children Felicite aged 25 years, Adrienne aged 15 years, Pelage aged 12 years, Louison aged 7 years, Michel aged 5 years, and Joseph aged 6 months.³⁵

The Prairie develops

In about 1841, F. X. Matthieu made his appearance on French Prairie. When he arrived at Champoeg Landing, he walked the mile and a half to Lucier's house and stayed the winter. Matthieu later reported there were nearly three hundred settlers on the Prairie, mostly French Canadians with their Indian or mixed blood wives. Lucier, as Matthieu later described him, was short and stocky with a dark complexion.³⁶ His wardrobe included black silk handkerchiefs, white silk handkerchiefs, fine cotton shirts, and a scarlet worsted sash.³⁷ At around age sixty, he was considered an old man, but he wasn't too old to discuss politics, perhaps smoking his clay pipe as he did this.³⁸ Lucier and Matthieu debated many topics that winter including the laws and customs of the United States.³⁹

Lucier heard that the U.S. imposed a tax on windows. As the owner of considerable real and personal property, taxes on wealth may have concerned him. In 1842, Dr. Elijah White, the first Oregon Indian Agent, took a census of settlers in the Oregon Territory. It included the numbers of men, women, and children and a summary of their crops for the 1841–1842 year. White intended to show it was possible to farm the Territory and that the British had a foothold. Unless American settlers moved in, the Canadians (British) would be in the majority. Lucier had 100 acres under improvement and had harvested 350 bushels of wheat and 264 bushels of grain. He had 56 horses, 66 neat stock, and 20 hogs. In 1844 Etienne Lucier had horses valued at \$450.41

Lucier's house was not described in the census, but other accounts indicate it was a one and a half story log house and whitewashed on the outside.⁴² It was wallpapered in the inside with paper he purchased from David McLoughlin's store in Oregon City.⁴³ A beehive brick oven stood near the kitchen door. A peach orchard surrounded the house. In addition, there was a frame barn, a warehouse near the river, stock sheds, a horse-powered gristmill, and split rail fences.⁴⁴

According to the 1844 tax list, Lucier had a clock valued at \$12.00, horses valued at \$450, cattle valued at \$1,295, and hogs valued at \$100.45 During an archaeological dig, over 76 types of ceramics were found.46

Matthieu was able to reassure Lucier there was no window tax, and it was his opinion that the United States laws were fair. When it came time for the settlers to decide whether they would be British or American, Matthieu voted American and Lucier followed him.⁴⁷

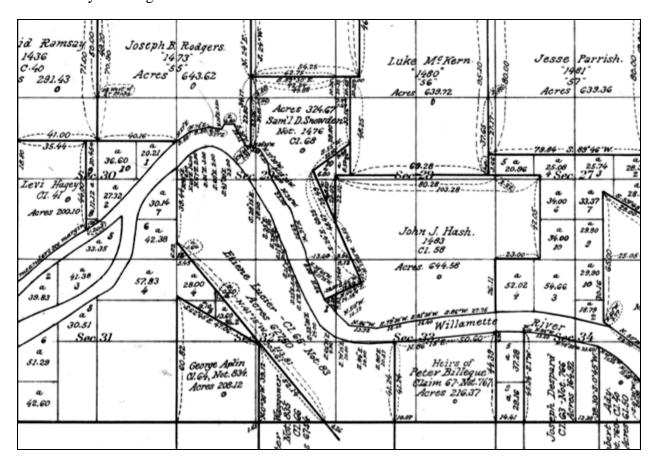
When Oregon's provisional government was established in the spring of 1843, it permitted inhabitants to stake out claims and survey them by the metes and bounds method. A legislative

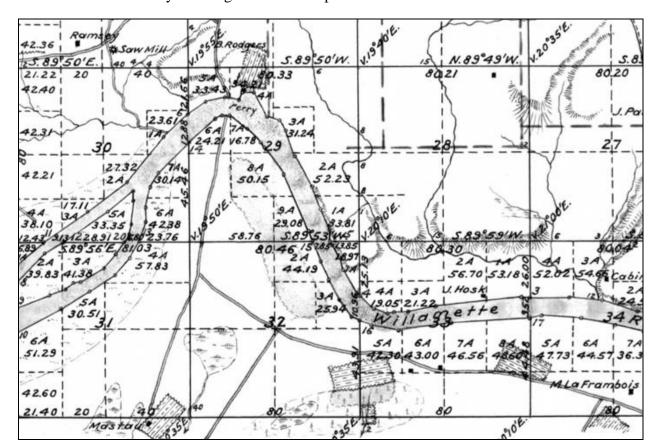
committee created a constitution that included rules for the land claims. Any male could claim 640 acres, and within six months of recording their claim, they were to build a home. 48 Lucier and his neighbors, Pierre Beleque, Jean Baptiste Debreuil, Medoard Foisy, Benjamin F. Hall, Joseph Despar, F. X. Liard, Louis Monique, Andre Samatar, and John Young, applied for provisional land claims.

These provisional claims became null and void when Congress passed the Donation Act of 1850. That act, effective 1 December 1850, gave 320 acres to every white settler or American half-breed Indian who was over eighteen-years of age and who filed a claim. For married men, their wives received 320 acres in their own right, and a proof of marriage had to be submitted. The claimant had to be a citizen of the United States, or they had to have made a declaration of intent to become a citizen. Lucier became a citizen of the United States at the Yamhill County Court in October 1851. Courtney M. Walker and Joseph L. Meek testified that, "he had conducted himself as a man of good moral character."

Lucier re-applied for his land under the Donation Act. The legal description was Twp 3S, Range 2W, sections 29, 32, 33 and Twp 4S, Range 2W, section 4, all of the Willamette Meridian. The 1850 federal survey (below) showing Lucier's land also shows that of all his earlier neighbors, only the heirs of Peter Billeque remained.⁵⁰

1860 survey showing land claim outlines.





The 1852 federal survey showing man-made improvements.⁵¹

In 1850, the first federal census was taken of the Oregon Territory, and the Lucier family was enumerated in Marion County. Etienne was listed as 60-years-old, born in Canada, a farmer. Marguerite was 46, Louis was 21, Michel was 18, Joseph was 13, Pierre was 8, and young Etienne was 5 – all of them were born in Oregon Territory.

The Lucier farm consisted of 140 improved acres and 500 unimproved acres and had a value of \$6,000. There were four horses, thirteen milch cows, thirty other cattle, and twenty swine, all valued at \$1,600. In the previous year, the family had harvested 900 bushels of wheat, 100 bushels of oats, 75 bushels of Irish potatoes. The orchard yielded a profit of \$2,000.⁵³

When Lucier died, his death notice in the Portland Oregonian included these words, "He was regarded by all who knew him as a most worthy citizen and an industrious man. Peace be to his ashes." 54

Child list

Etienne and Josephte Nouite had the following children:

- 1. Felicite, born about 1814; died 10 June 1867 in St. Paul. She married Donald Manson in 1828.
- 2. Adrienne, born about 1823 in Ft. Vancouver. She married Andre Lachapelle.
- 3. Pelagie, born about 1827 in French Prairie; died 8 June 1856 in St. Paul. She married François Bernier.
- 4. Louis, born about 1829. He married Celestine Gervais.
- 5. Michel, born about 1832 in Oregon Territory.
- 6. Joseph, born in Jul 1837 in St. Paul.

Etienne and Maria Marguerite Tchinouk had the following children:

- 7. Etienne "Stephen," born 5 December 1844; died 11 July 1920.
- 8. Pierre, born 25 October 1842 in St. Paul. He married Thais Senecal in 1871.

Photos

Etienne Lucier, son of Etienne Lucier.

Photo: St. Paul Mission Historical Society collection.



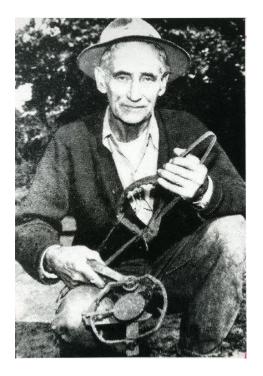
Andre Lachapelle and his wife, Adrienne Lucier.

Photo: St. Paul Mission Historical Society collection.



Felix Choquette with beaver traps that belonged to Etienne Lucier, his great-grandfather.

Photo: St. Paul Mission Historical Society collection.



End notes

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- ³ Caroline C. Dobbs, *Men of Champoeg* (Repr. Cottage Grove, OR: Emerald Valley Craftsmen, 1975), 15.
- ⁴ Dobbs, 15.
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- ¹⁹ Vaughn, Joseph Gervais, a Familiar Mystery Man, p. 335.
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- ⁴³ Etienne Lucier Probate, #75.
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