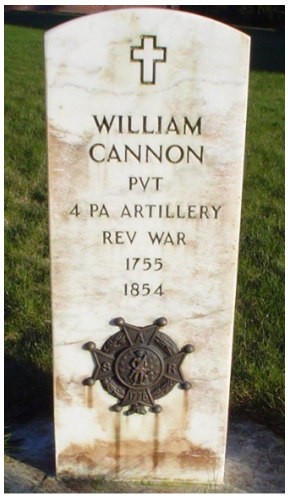
William Cannon, Oregon's Revolutionary War Veteran

By Connie Lenzen



A marble tombstone sits on the grounds of the old St. Paul Roman Catholic cemetery in St. Paul, Oregon. The stone commemorates William Cannon, the only known Revolutionary War veteran to be buried in Oregon.

Cannon told his neighbors that he was at the battles of Cowpens and Kings Mountain.

Members of the Sons of the American Revolution found his name on a list of enlisted men in the 4th PA Artillery, and that is what was inscribed on his stone.

The 4th Pennsylvania Artillery was not at Cowpens or Kings Mountain, and research is continuing to be conducted for Cannon's service record.

Literacy was low in the early Oregon country, and spelling was not consistent. Names are given in this article as they are found in the originals.

The Battle of King's Mountain was on 7 October 1780 in what is now North Carolina.

The map to the right shows the routes that the soldiers took to get to Kings Mountain.[1] Along the way, men joined the army. These unpaid volunteers knew how to hunt and shoot, and they expected to return home after the encounter with the British.[2]

The Battle of Cowpens was fought on 17 January 1781 by Americans from South Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Georgia, and Delaware.



In Hubert Howe Bancroft's 1886 *History of Oregon,* Cannon is called a Virginian who settled on the west side of the Willamette River, opposite the falls.[3] In 1933, J. Neilsen Barry wrote about Astorians who stayed in Oregon. He said Cannon was born in 1755 in Pennsylvania.[4] Based upon the Kings Mountain soldiers' origin, the Virginia birthplace is more reasonable.

Dan Doughty, a member of the Lewis and Clark Chapter, SAR, researched the two battles.

• **Battle of Kings Mountain:** American forces ranged between 1,100 and 1,700 soldiers. Among these was a company of militia from Washington County, Virginia, under the command of Col. William Campbell. Virginia also contributed militia elements of the Augusta County Regiment and the Rockbridge Rifles. In an exhaustive work performed by J. D. Lewis in 2015 to carefully identify the complete battle rolls, he estimated a total of 534 "unknowns" across all American units, or individuals who participated in the battle but were not identified by name. In addition, another 47 individuals were identified but had no known regiment or detachment.

• **Battle of Cowpens**: American forces totaled less than 2,000 soldiers. These forces included a battalion of Continental Infantry under Lt. Col. John Eager Howard, including one company from Virginia. Also present was a company of Virginia state militia troops under Capt. John Lawson, a Virginia militia battalion under Frank Triplett, and three companies of Virginia militia under Maj. David Campbell.

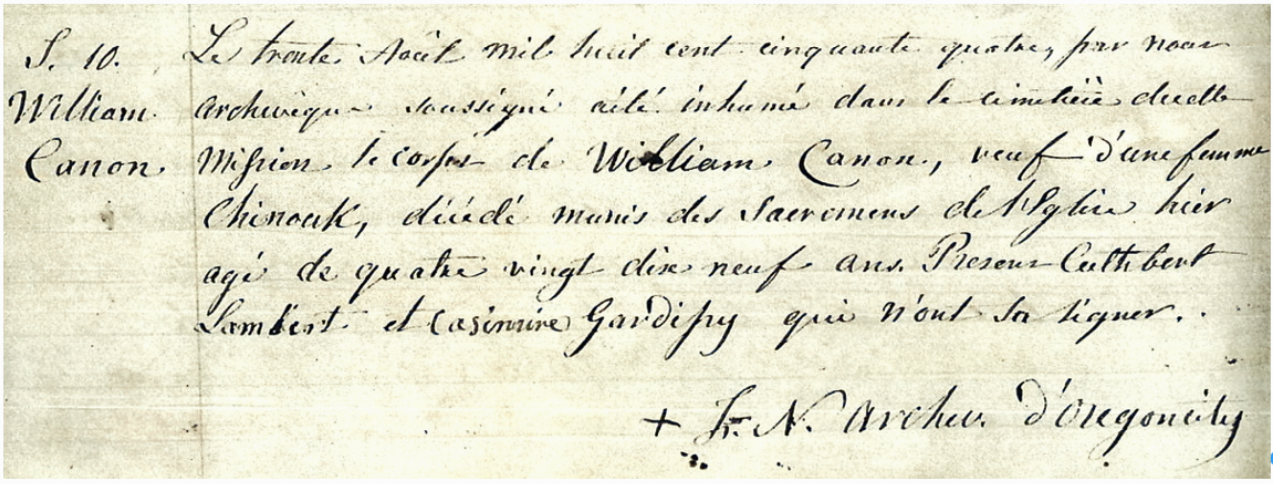
In 1843, Cannon attended a meeting of the Oregon City Lyceum Debating Society. George Abernathy, later elected Oregon's governor, spoke on the need for settlers to establish a government with the United States. The following selection is from a 1926 article by Glenn N. Ranck in the Oregonian newspaper.

> "Pointing to William Cannon, the sole survivor present of those who had served in that sanguinary struggle, the strident orator called upon the aged soldier-patriot to arise. With trembling limbs, the feeble veteran of King's Mountain and Cowpens once more stood up in behalf of liberty, his wrinkled features radiantly alight with an old soldier's ecstasy."[5]

William Cannon died on 29 August 1854 at St. Paul, Oregon Territory. The entry in the St. Paul Church register reads,

> The 30 August, 1854, by us Archbishop undersigned has been buried in the cemetery of this mission the body of William Canon, widower of a Chinouk woman, deceased supplied with the Sacraments of the Church yesterday aged 97 years. Present Cuthbert Lambert and Casimire Gardipy who could not sign.
>
> +F. N. Archbishop of Oregon City.[6]

However, a copy of the death entry, provided by the Archdiocese of Portland, shows slightly different information. It says he was 99 years old.


S. 10. William Canon

Le trente Août mil huit cent cinquante quatre, par nous Archevêque soussigné été inhumé dans le cimetière de cette Mission le corps de William Canon, veuf d'une femme Chinouk, décédé munis des Sacrements de l'Eglise hier agé de quatre vingt dix neuf ans. Present Cuthbert Lambert et Casimire Gardipy qui n'ont su signer.

+ F. N. Archev. d'Oregon city

This gives him a birth year of about 1755.

His obituary, published in the 5 September 1854 issue of Salem, Oregon's *The Oregon Statesman*, gives his age as 99. This also puts his birth year at about 1755

> Died on the French Prairie, in this county, near mission of St. Paul, at the residence of Casimir Guardipie, on the 29th ultimo. Mr. Wm. Canning, a native of Virginia, age 99. He came to the Willamette Valley in 1811; previous to that time he was in the rocky mountains, and on his return to the States he met Hunt's party, on their way to the Columbia. He has resided in the territory since 1811, much esteemed by all who knew him."[7]

The comment about being in the Rocky Mountains before meeting up with Hunt's party is discussed later. Cannon's connection to Guardipie is also discussed later.

Events closer in time to a person's birth are usually more accurate than those created later. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) records were created when Cannon was alive, and he likely provided the information.

During the 1836 -1837 outfit year, Canning was listed by the Hudson's Bay Company as age 73 with 22 years of service.[8] This gives him a birth year of 1764-1765.

This article will use 1764 as his birth year.

NAME: CANNING, William (Cannon) **PARISH:** U.S.A. **ENTERED SERVICE:** [1814] **DATES:** b. ca. 1763 d. 29 Aug. 1854

Appointments & Service

Outfit Year*:	Position:	Post:	District:	HBCA Reference:
1824-1826	Millwright		Columbia	B.239/g/64-65
1826-1827	Freeman		Columbia	B.239/g/66
1827-1837	Millwright	Fort Vancouver	Columbia	B.239/g/67-76
1837-1839	Millwright	Willamette	Columbia	B.239/g/77-78
1839-1845	Freeman / Settler	Willamette Valley	Columbia	B.239/g/79-82, 84

*An Outfit year ran from 1 June to 31 May

In 1836-1837, Canning is listed as age 73 with 22 years of service (B.239/g/76). Canning was employed prior to 1821 as a millwright at Fort George (Fort Astoria), with the Pacific Fur Company and the North West Company (F.4/61, fo. 6; Search File, "Canning (Cannon), William").
Listed in Columbia Servants Ledger (B.223/d/105a; B.223/d/214a).

Pacific Fur Company and Astoria

In 1808, John Jacob Astor of New York City, one of the richest men in the United States, founded the American Fur Company to compete with the British fur companies operating out of Canada. In June 1810, he incorporated the Pacific Fur Company with partners Alexander McKay, Duncan McDougall, and Donald Mackenzie. Astor brought on additional partners, including Wilson Price Hunt. Hunt was selected as the leader of Astor's overland expedition to the West Coast. Donald McKenzie served as co-leader. Another expedition was to sail around the Horn on the ship Tonquin under Captain Thorn.

Hunt and McKenzie set off from New York City to Montreal, where they intended to hire voyageurs for the journey. These men would row and transport the canoes, cook, and do general chores. The British fur companies, not liking competition, made this task difficult. Only thirteen men in Montreal were willing to sign contracts.

On 22 July 1810, the company reached Mackinaw Island, a major fur trading post at the end of Lake Huron. It was the headquarters of the Mackinaw Fur Company, which Astor would purchase a few years later. Other fur companies also brought their pelts to the post. It was a prime location for finding men seeking work.



This map shows the Great Lakes. Mackinaw City is in the center of the map.[8]

Between 31 July 1810 and 10 August 1810, seventeen men were hired for the expedition. In addition, Ramsay Crooks, an experienced fur merchant, signed on as a partner. William Cannon, the only American, was one of the last to be hired.

Several writers claim Cannon was a soldier at Fort Mackinac The fort's mission was to protect the American fur trade. During the War of 1812, the fort held 60 men.[9] There is a problem with the claim. If Cannon was a soldier at the fort, it would be doubtful that he could have received a military discharge in order to sign on with the expedition. This doesn't explain what Cannon was doing at Mackinac – unless he was a hunter for one of the fur trading companies, possibly American.

The Headquarters Log of the Pacific Fur Company appears in the book Annals of Astoria: The Headquarters Log of the Pacific Fur Company on the Columbia River, 1811 – 1813.[11] Cannon is introduced in this note,

"William Cannon was recruited as a hunter by Wilson Price Hunt at Mackinac Island in August 1810."[10] .

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."[11]

This story from Washington Irving's 1836 book, Astoria, may be where the claim that Cannon was "a soldier at one of the frontier posts" originated.[12]

That the dangers apprehended from the grizzly bear, at this night encampment, were not imaginary, was proved on the following morning. Among the hired men of the party was one William Cannon, who had been a soldier at one of the frontier posts, and entered into the employ of Mr. Hunt at Mackinaw. He was an inexperienced hunter and a poor shot, for which he was much bantered by his more adroit comrades. Piqued at their raillery, he had been practising ever since he had joined the expedition, but without success. In the course of the present afternoon, he went forth by himself to take a lesson in venerie, and to his great delight, had the good fortune to kill a buffalo. As he was a considerable distance from the camp, he cut out the tongue and some of the choice bits, made them into a parcel, and, slinging them on his shoulders by a strap passed round his forehead, as the voyageurs carry packages of goods, set out all glorious for the camp, anticipating a triumph over his brother hunters. In passing through a narrow ravine, he heard a noise behind him, and looking round beheld, to his dismay, a grizzly bear in full pursuit, apparently attracted by the scent of the meat. Cannon had heard so much of the invulnerability of this tremendous animal, that he never attempted to fire, but, slipping the strap from his forehead, let go the buffalo meat and ran for his life. The bear did not stop to regale himself with the game, but kept on after the hunter. He had nearly overtaken him when Cannon reached a tree, and, throwing down his rifle, scrambled up it. The next instant Bruin was at the foot of the tree; but, as this species of bear does not climb, he contented himself with turning the chase into a blockade. Night came on. In the darkness Cannon could not perceive whether or not the enemy maintained his station; but his fears pictured him rigorously mounting guard. He passed the night, therefore, in the tree, a prey to dismal fancies. In the morning the bear was gone. Cannon warily descended the tree, gathered up his gun, and made the best of his way back to the camp, without venturing to look after his buffalo meat.

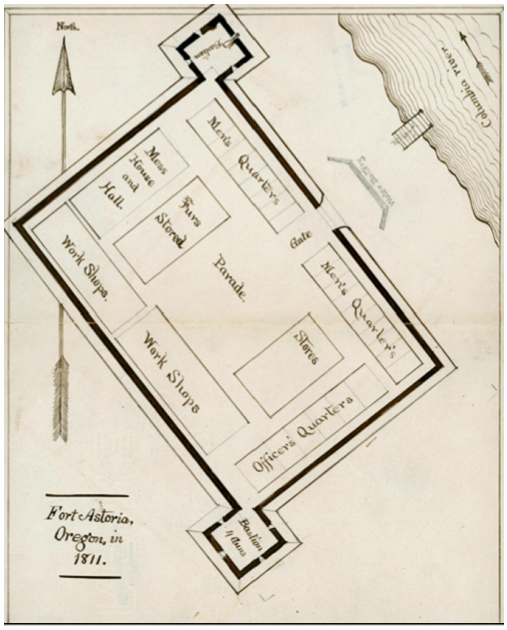
On 2 November 1811, the expedition divided into smaller parties. After numerous hardships, the group reached Astoria, arriving in two canoes on 18 January 1812.[13]

A priority for the men was to build the fort.

Cannon is named in the fort journal, working as a hunter, carpenter, and blacksmith. Carpenters and blacksmiths were categorized as mechanics. When Cannon wasn't named specifically, it can be assumed his work was included in the comments like "Mechanics at their respective Occupations, or "Mechanics employed as usual."

On 2 August 1812, "Carpenters, Cooper & Cannan employed at Bastions and Platform."[14]

A map of the Fort Astoria compound in 1811 showing the two bastions.[15]



- On 6 August 1812, "Thursday. Pleasant weather, Wind Westerly. All hands employed as Yesterday, with the addition of Cannan to the number clearing away stumps, etc."[16]
- On 11 August 1812, "Cooper & Canan were set at work pulling down the shimney which smoked so badly as not to be endured. Three men attending & assisting them."[17]

Chimneys and ovens were made with stones. The original Fort Astoria chimneys no longer exist, but this photo of stone chimneys from Rocky Mountain House shows the type that could have been built at Fort Astoria.[18]



- On 13 August 1812, Cannon, along with three others, helped make a lime kiln.[19]
- On 17 August 1812, he, along with two others were "burning Lime Kiln, which they set fire to this morning."[20] The lime kiln was abandoned on 26 August because "no appearance of lime whatever is to be seen."[21]
- On 28 August 1812, Cannon and [Paul] Jeremy "getting out Stone, blasting, etc., by the Wharf."[22]
- On 7 September 1812, along with four others, he built up the old chimney.[23]
- On 10 September 1812, the chimney in the old house was finished, but it "smokes at such a rate that it must be taken down and again built."

- On 12 September 1812, Cannon was "unwell & laid up."
- On 21 September 1812, he was "employed at guns, etc."[24]
- On 22 September 1812, "Cannan & Cooper with 3 men to assist them began the chimney of the new building; Two getting out stones for ditto." They were still working on the chimney on 2 October.[25]
- On 5 October 1812, "Cooper & Cannan with four men to assist them at the chimney."
- On 11 October, "Cannan and Cooper kept busy today at the chimney."[26]
- On 12 October, "At evening, Cannan & Cooper finished the Chimney."
- On 13 October 1812, he was "boaring & pining Shingles."[27] Note: This means they were drilling a hole in the upper portion of the shingle and fastening to the roof.
- On 14 October, "Cannan & Paterson putting the roof on the new house."[28]
- On 16 October, "Cannan & Cooper with two men to assist them building a wall on each side of the chimn in the new house."[29]
- On 21 October 1812, he was blasting rock.[30]
- On 5 November 1812, he worked with the carpenters "shaving shingles for repairing a part of the old house, in order if possible to make it comfortable."[31]
- On 11 December, along with others, he was sent off to find suitable boat timbers.[32]
- On 17 December 1812, they arrived back with the timbers. For several days, they continued cutting timbers and bringing them to the fort.
- Note: "timbers" means the frame of the boat – the keel, frames, and ribs. The wood they were using was likely Western Red Cedar. The photo to the right shows a finished example.[33]



- On 28 December, "Monday. Rainy, incessantly during the day. The people having kept up Christmas so high a rate that few of them were able to begin work this morning. Blacksmith's, Sawyers & the Sandwich Islanders only busy. Boat builder, Cannan, Cooper, Carpenters, etc., laid up."[34]
- On 4 January, 1813, it was noted that the New Year's celebration took a toll on a number of the men. "One of the Blacksmiths, Cannan, boatbuilder, Taylor & Flanagan unable to begin work this morning, having kept up New Year at too high a rate."[35]
- On 5 January 1813, he was back to work, "Little & Cannan setting a kettle, & fixing a steam Box."[36]
- On 7 January 1813, "Little & Cannan finished their steam Box and bent their Timbers."[37]
- News of the outbreak of the War of 1812 was received at the fort. There was a concern that supply ships would not arrive, so food supplies were cut. Local Indians brought in fish to trade, but that wasn't enough to feed the men. The food allowances were reduced for all the men.
- On 11 January 1813, Cannon and two Hawaiians were sent out to hunt.[38] They returned five days later with no meat and were sent out in a different direction to continue to hunt.[39]
- On 19 January 1813, Cannon worked with Alexander Carson, "one of the new hunters, making a stock, etc., for Mr. McKenzie's gun."[40] Note: Carson was a gunsmith. He will be a later topic of discussion.
- They finished the work on 28 January 1813 and started work on a stock for Mr. Reed.[41]
- On 12 February 1813, Cannon "began work with Boat builder."[42]

- On 1 February, "Canan, Patterson and four others sent up to the Oaks in the new Boat for Timber."[43]

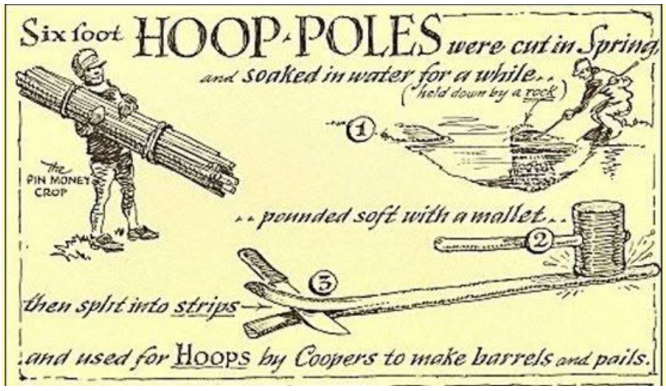
He continued working on boats until 24 February 1813, when he was added to the sick list. He was down for two days.[44]



- On 7 March 1813, Cannon went hunting and returned with two geese. He spent the next day "fixing his gun."[45]
- On 27 March 1813, he was repairing gun locks.[46]

Example of a gun lock[47]

- On 2 April 1813, a fine, clear day, Cannon repaired a canoe.[48]
- On 5 April 1813, Cannon, along with four others, was sent "to the Cathlakamaps [probably the Cathlakamas, a Chinookian tribe living near the mouth of the Willamette River] to procure a Rifle that the Chief has traded from the natives at the Rapids, and to cut 300 Ash saddle Crutches." Eight days later, they returned to the fort.[49]
- On 16 April 1813, he was "making a turning Lathe."[50]
- On 26 April 1813, he took sick. Two days later, he was better but still on the sick list.[51]
- On 3 May 1813, he "resumed his work with the Carpenters. Sick list now 4 in number."[52]
- On 9 May 1813, he was making saddles.[53]
- On 10 May 1813, "Two Carpenters at sundry small work. Cooper at his trade, Cannan making Saddles."[54]
- On 14 May, 1813, "One Carpenter & Cannan unwell, making six men Sick."[55]
- On 17 May 1813, Cannon, along with seven others, went out in the boat to cut hoop poles. [Hoop poles are used in barrel making.]They returned five days later with a boatload of Cedar and hoop poles.



- The crew was then sent out to obtain another load. The cedar was to be cut into boards for canoes.[56]

It was known that the United States and Britain were at war, and there was fear that British ships would capture the fort. Canoes would be needed if they had to evacuate the fort and return to St. Louis.



Astoria in 1813.[57]

- On 26 May 1813, the boat with cedar arrived at the fort. Cannon, along with four others, were put to work "at Cedar stuff, with which they begin to make considerable progress."[58]
- On 31 May 1813, the rainy weather made it impossible to work on the canoes. He was assigned to repairing guns.[59] Work continued on the canoes for several months.
- On 6 July 1813, along with Joseph Gervais and three Hawaiians, he was sent out hunting. The men returned two days later with a female elk and her fawn.[60] He was then set to work repairing guns.[61]
- On 16 August 1813, he was "handling Knives, repairing & arranging Guns, etc." He was sent out to hunt, but he returned empty handed.[62]
- On 2 September 1813, he was "employed at Small jobs."[63]
- On 27 September 1813, Cannon and Alexander Carson "came in from hunting, having killed Two Elks near the factory. Sent Five men with them in a canoe to bring in the meat."
- On 30 September 1813, Cannon, Carson, John Day, and six other men went hunting in Young's Bay in a canoe.[64]

Northwest Company (NWC)

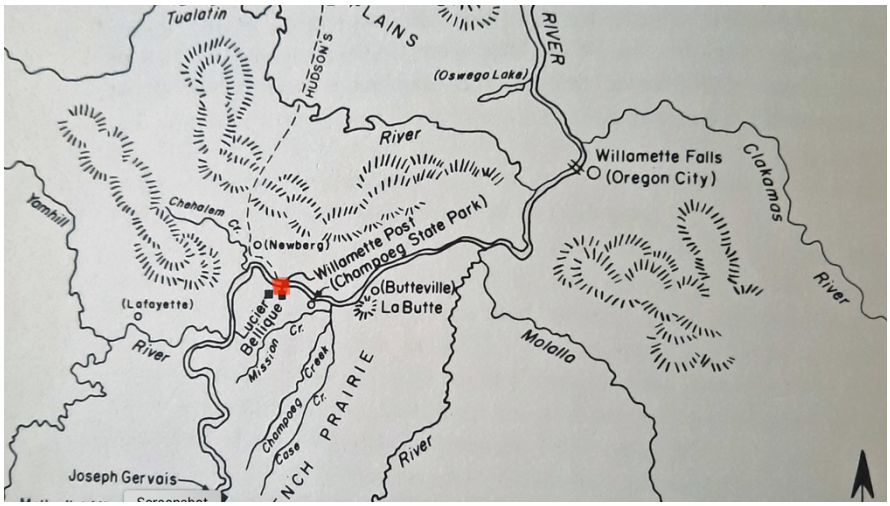
When the War of 1812 began, people worried the British might seize American assets, including the Pacific Fur Company at Fort Astoria. John George McTavish of the Northwest Company offered to purchase the Pacific Fur Company's holdings. In October 1813, the NWC bought Fort Astoria and renamed it Fort George. Many of the Pacific Fur Company workers stayed on as employees of the NWC.

William Canning was one of these people. The Astoria log noted Cannon decided to trap on the Willamette as a free trader.

"19 October 1813, :Tuesday. Weather the same as yesterday [cloudy with rain]. Wind S. E. John Day, Carson, Cannan, Baker, Martial & Flangan left this for the Wolamut, having received their discharge and made arrangements with the N. W. Co. to trap till Spring up that river."[65]

The Pacific Fur Company established the Willamette Post, where trappers could take pelts to have them transferred to the fort. The post was transferred to the NWC.

This map from Hussey's *Champoeg, Place of Transition,* shows the location of Willamette Post in about 1834.[66]



William Canning, now designated a wheelwright, spent the 1813 – 1814 winter at the Willamette Post. Others at Willamette: Alexander Carson, gunsmith; Andre Dufresne, Milieu; John Day, hunter; Moses Flanagan,

bookbinder; J. Bte. LaBonte, Milieu; Michel Laframboise, Milieu; Etienne Lussier, hunter; Richard Milligan, tailor; Alexis Mascon, Milieu; Donald McGillis, clerk; Thomas Mackay, Clerk and Interpreter; Francois Marial, Milieu and Sawyer; William Perrault, boy; Louis St. Michel; Milieu; Joseph St. Amant, G; William Wallace, clerk; and Jac. Hareau.[67] William Henry, NWC clerk, was in charge of the Willamette Post.[68]

Alexander Henry the Younger, a partner in the NWC, took charge of Fort George on 18 November 1813. His 1814 fort journal mentions Cannon several times.

John Day, Alexander Carson, and William Cannon had been trapping on the Willamette River when they returned to Fort George from Willamette Post on Sunday, 20 March 1814."[69] The packs were examined on 28 March and accounts were settled. "Wm. Canning [Cannon] engaged to remain here [Fort George]."[70]

At one point, Cannon was one of eight men confined to his room with venereal disease.[71] Alexander Henry explained venereal disease at the Fort.

"When the Americans first landed here in 1810 there was but little of it among the natives; but it was soon communicated to them by the whites, who brought it not only from New York, but also from the Sandwich Islands."[72]

Chinook Chief Comcomly made regular visits to Fort George.

"Apr. 12th, 1814. We are on tiptoe of expectation, in hopes of seeing a sail. But the tide flows, the breeze blows, the tide ebbs, and our hopes vanish. Mr. Mathews in, complaining of the men's laziness ; Duchesne making an oak trunk for my papers; blacksmith mending axes; Canning stocking a gun for Comcomly; men pressing packs."[73]

Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)

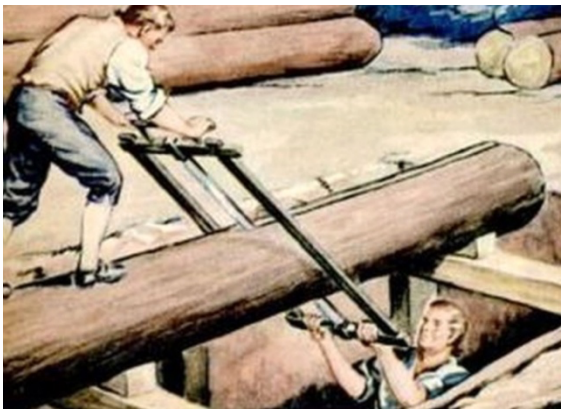
In 1821, the NWC merged into the Hudson's Bay Company, and Cannon worked as an HBC employee. His HBC biographical sheet itemizes his work for that company.[74]

- 1824-1826 Millwright Columbia
- 1826-1827 Freeman Columbia
- 1827-1837 Millwright Fort Vancouver
    - John Ball wrote about seeing Cannon in 1828. "October 28 -We encamped at the sawmill of the company, which was superintended by Mr. Cannon, one of J. J. Astor's men, who came out with Mr. Hunt in 1811"[75].
      Cannon was paid 45 pounds for the 1833 outfit year.[76] He was paid 45 pounds for the outfit year 1835. During the 1836 outfit year, he drew only 8.0.3 pounds in wages.[77]
- 1837-1839 Millwright Willamette Columbia
- 1839-1845 Freeman / Settler Willamette Valley Columbia
- In 1836-1837, he was listed as age 73 with 22 years of service.

Fort Vancouver

Fort Vancouver was built in 1824 – 25. As noted in the Hudson's Bay records, Cannon set up a bellows and an anvil under a tree and made the nails and other hardware needed for the fort construction.[78] He also built a grist mill. In 1982, David K. Hansen researched the Hudson's Bay Company blacksmiths for the National Park Service. Some of his findings are incorporated in this story.

Trees for lumber was one of the Northwest's natural resources. Traditionally, logs would be sawed into lumber with the use of a whipsaw as shown by the image to the right.[79] One man would be on top of the log, and another man would be in a pit below. The work was labor intensive.



Governor Simpson and Chief Factor McLoughlin could see that lumber sales to the Sandwich Islands, California, and other markets could bring in considerable income. William H. Crate was hired to build a sawmill with machinery sent from London. William Cannon was the first millwright.[80]

The mill sat around six miles upriver from the fort and across from what is now called Government Island. The saw was a "Muley Saw," a saw which cut up and down.[81] The photo below is from Martin Middlewood's article, "Clark County History: Sawmills," in the 14 November 2021 issue of the Columbian newspaper.[82]

"This gear is all that remains of Fort Vancouver's first sawmill, which was located near the present day Columbia Springs environmental education center. One end of this gear would attach to a waterwheel (or turbine) and the other side turned a large circular or muley saw. (Contributed by Clark County Historical Museum)"



Cannon was the sawmill superintendent in 1832 when Captain Wyeth's expedition was traveling west on the Columbia River. Wyeth penned this entry,

"[1832, October] 28th With a fair wind and a little rain we decended the river at a great rate on the route we killed a goose which dropped in the water a white headed Eagle from a distance seeing this took occasion to come he seized it and lifted it into the air a few feet but our near approach fright[en]ed him away made this day 26 miles and stopped at a saw mill belonging to the H. B. Co. under charge of a Mr. Cawning[?] a

gentleman who came here 22 years since with a Mr Hunt he is in the service of the Co. We were treated by him with the greatest kindness he gave us mocasins and food in plenty."

French Prairie

During the 1835 outfit year, Cannon earned 45 pounds. During the 1836 outfit year, he drew only 8 pounds in wages, suggesting retirement or part-time work.[83]

In November of 1835, the U.S. Navy's William Slacum received a commission from the United States president, "To obtain some specific and authentic information in regard to the inhabitants of the country in the neighborhood of the Oregon, or Columbia river; and, generally, endeavour to obtain all such information, political, physical, statistical, and geographical as may prove useful or interesting to this Government." Slacum reached the Columbia River at the end of December 1836.[84]

Slacum took a census of the Prairie settlers and their property. William Canning was a miller and millwright. He had £300 sterling in the Hudson Bay Company accounts.[85] When using the GDP deflator, the (average) value of £300 from 1836 was $41,200.00 in 2024. The range of values was from $27,000.00 to $70,000.00.[86]

Settler's name.	When begun	Acres enclosed	Acres cultivated	Crop of wheat, bushels	Horses	Hogs	Houses	Remarks
Jean Baptiste McRoy	1831	69	35	556	33	22	3	Good.
Andre Longtre	1835	45	24	400	3	33	2	Good.
Charles Plante	1835	60	60	800	12	14	2	Good.
Charles Rondeu	1836	24	24	200	9	10	1	Good.
Louis Fourier	1835	34	34	540	9	10	1	Good.
Joseph Gervais	1832	125	65	1,000	19	55	3 & 1 grist-mill	Good.
Xavier Delarout	1834	36	36	350	11	35	2	Good.
Joseph Delor	1832	28	28	280	11	28	2	Good.
E. Arquette	1833	80	50	600	5	31	2	Good.
Jean B. Perault.	1832	80	60	500	4	20	3	Good.
Etteine Lucia	1832	70	45	740	21	45	4 & 1 grist-mill	Good.
Pierre Billique	1833	50	45	700	9	28	2	Good.
*Frederick Depau	1833	40	35	500	8	39	2	Good.
Ewing Young	1835	29	29	240	79 & 2 mules	30	2 & 1 distillery	Good.
†Lawrence Carmichael								
William Johnson	1834	45	25	300	2	14	2	Good.
‡Jas. A. O'Neil and Thos. J. Hubbard	1836	200	15	70	9	13	1 & blacksmith's shop.	
||Wm. Canning, miller and millwright								
Solomon H. Smith								
Winslow Anderson								
Charles Roe, carpenter								
Elisha Ezekiel, wheelwright								
John Hord, carpenter								
Webley Hawkshurst, carpenter								
John Turner								
William Bailey								
Calvin Ebbets, stone mason								
John Rowling								
George Gay								

*The above thirteen are all Canadians, and have been in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company.
†Works on shares with Young. ‡Besides the crop of wheat, each of the above five have a large quantity of barley, oats, peas, and potatoes, sufficient for their support. || £300 sterling in the hands of the Hudson Bay Company.

Joseph Gervais was another member of the Hunt expedition. In 1835, Cannon built Gervais's grist mill. "It was operated by an overshot wheel powered by water diverted from a creek which was fed by small lakes lying east of the Lee mission site, two miles southwest of Gervais' house."[87]

While no photo of the mill is known to exist, this photo of a grist mill with an overshot wheel provides an example.[88]



Alexander Carson as a cousin

In 1836, Alexander Carson, another Hunt Expedition member, was killed by Indians. He had previously written a will in 1829, giving his property to Cannon. After he died, Cannon obtained Carson's balance due on the Hudson's Bay Company accounts.[89]

On 28 September 1858, Thomas Jefferson Hubbard wrote the following letter to James W. Nesmith, the Indian Commissioner.

> Dear Sir:
> . . .You desire to know the particulars of the murder of Alexander Carson, a Virginian (I think) who was murdered in April, or May, 1836, at a place called Ellick's [Alec's] Butte, about six miles north of Lafayette, Yam Hill County, by an Indian, who was called Boney, of the Nefalitin Tribe.
> This Boney had been in Carson's employ for several years, trapping, and had always been treated with the utmost kindness and regard, by Carson, he had great confidence in the Indian.
> Whatever led to the crime, is more than anyone knows. Carson had been stopping at my house two or three weeks, this Boney, his wife, and son with him. Carson was sick. When he thought he was able to travel, left my house accompanied by Boney, Boney's wife and son. The first night after leaving my house (he) camped at Ellick's Butte, the whole tribe camped there. Boney arose in the night, stole out of Carson's tent his (Carson's) rifle, which he held in reserve and holding up the curtain of the tent so that the light of the fire might shine on Carson, compelled his son (a lad of twelve or fourteen years) to shoot him in the head with a shot-gun, blowing his brains all over the tent.
> The body was thrown in a small stream, and the plunder distributed out amongst the tribe. I may mention here an Indian by the name of Click-kowin who was said to be a half Killamook, and was with the Killamooks a portion of his time, was accessory to the murder, and shared in the plunder. Boney, and his son, died soon after the murder was committed, and Click-kowin was shot after the murder, by Waaninkapah, the Chief of the Nefalitin tribe.
>
> Those Indians have never atoned for the crime, they were compelled to give up a portion of the plunder which was delivered over to **William Cannin**, **a cousin of Carsons.** Boney's son confessed

the crime and went with us and showed where all the plunder had been cached, as far as he knew of. Carson came out to the Mountains with Lewis & Clark and after returning to the States, engaged with Hunt in 1811 and returned to this country, and remained here. Yours in haste,
T. J. HUBBARD

Alice Mahoney, Alexander Carson's biographer, wrote,

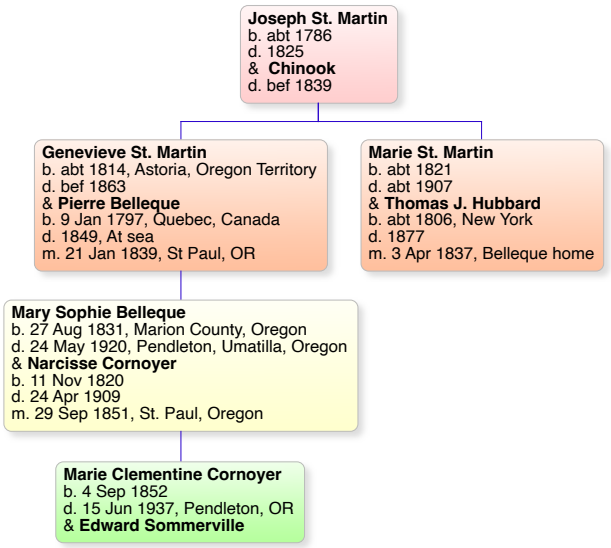
"Alexander or Alec Carson . . .was a Missouri River hunter and trapper. He, like his distant relative, the famous Christopher, was a descendant of William Carson, an Englishman who landed on American shores before the Revolution."[90]

T. J. Hubbard

Thomas Jefferson Hubbard was married to Marie St. Martin, daughter of Joseph St. Martin and a Chinook woman. Both Joseph and the Chinook woman were dead by 1839 when Marie's sister, Marguerite, married Pierre Belleque in St. Paul, Oregon.

In 1929, Fred Lockley interviewed Marie (Cornoyer) Sommerville for his "Impressions and Observations of the Journal Man" in the Oregon Journal newspaper.[91]

The chart to the right shows her lineage.



Mrs. Sommerville said,

- In 1851 my father [Narcisse Cornoyer] married my mother, whose maiden name was Mary S. Belique…
- My grandfather Belique [That would be Pierre Belleque.] died at sea while returning from California, when mother [Mary Sophie Belleque] was about 17 and was at school in Oregon City…
- Joseph St. Martin, my paternal grandfather, and his son were both drowned while making a portage while they were on their way to Canada.

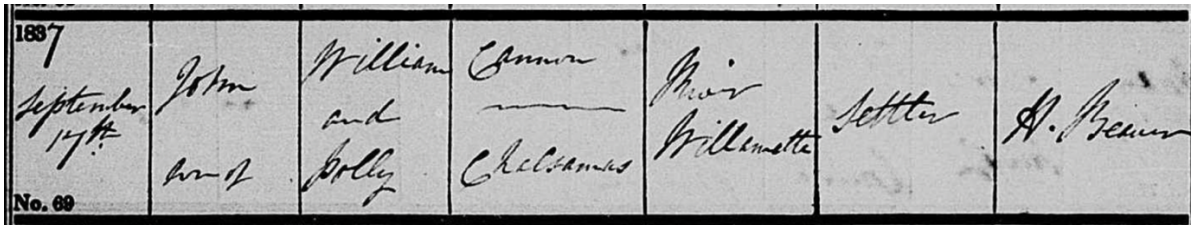
The above statements can be shown to be true. The next one may explain a Cannon and Carson connection.

- His wife, Mrs. St. Martin [That would be the Chinook woman], afterwards married John Canning.

While no John Canning can be found, William Cannon had a son named John who was born about 1837. Mrs. Sommerville may have misremembered the first name.

John Canning, a son

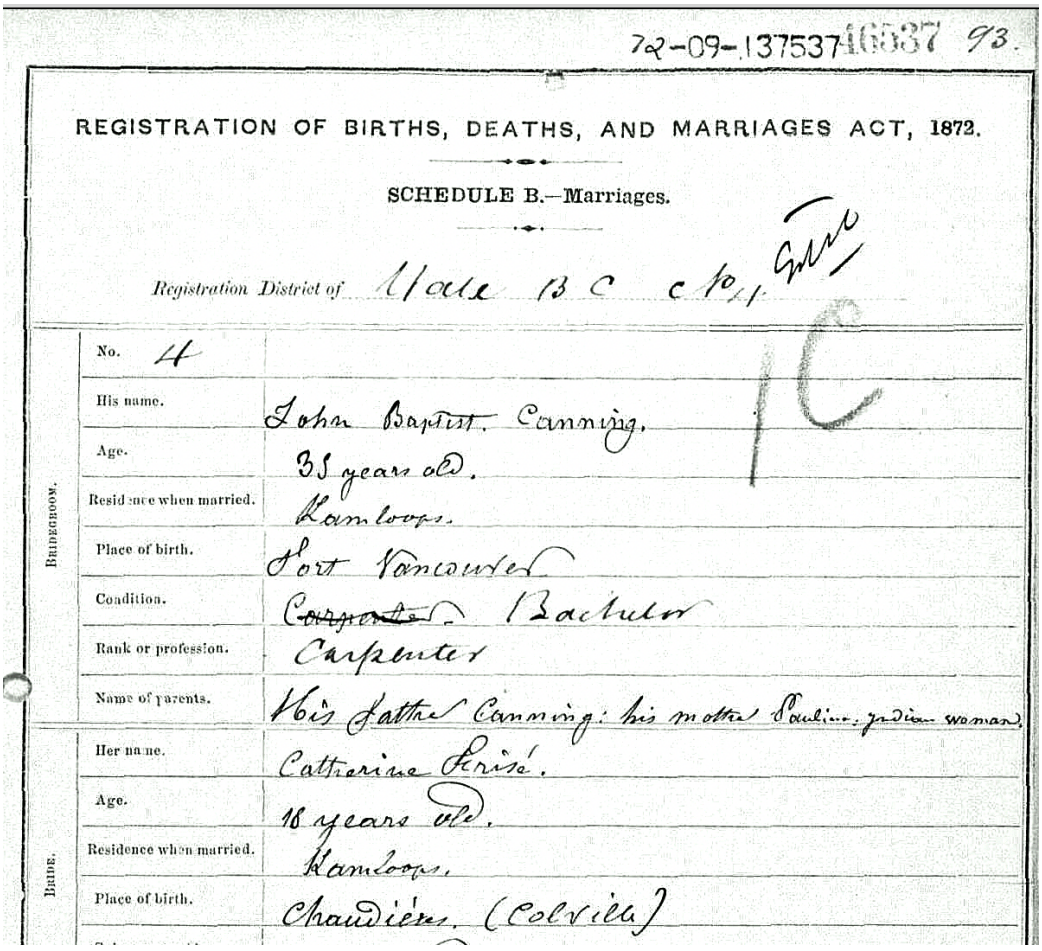
The HBC sent Rev. Herbert Beaver, an Anglican (Church of England) minister, to Fort Vancouver. His mission was to be a "chaplain and missionary to the Indians."[92] He served from 18 October 1836 to 12 October 1838. He kept a baptism register and a marriage register. The register shows a baptism for John Cannon, son of William Cannon and Polly Chelsamus.[93] Cannon was a settler living on the River Willamette. John was baptized on 17 September 1837.



1837 September 17th No. 69	John son of	William and Polly	Cannon — Chelsamus	River Willamette	Settler	H. Beaver

Note: There is no "Chelsamus" tribe. According to William Cannon's St. Paul church register listing, he was a widower of a Chinook woman when he died in 1854. A search of the St. Paul church register that begins in 1839 does not reveal a Pauline/Polly that fits as this woman.

John Canning married Catherine Frise on 28 October 1872 in Kamloops, British Columbia.[94] His marriage record shows he was 35 years old and was born at Fort Vancouver. This gives him a birth year of about 1837. His father was Canning. His mother was Pauline. John's occupation was carpenter. The marriage took place at the Catholic Church, F. M. Baud, a Catholic Priest officiating.



72-09-137537 46537 93.

REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES ACT, 1872.

SCHEDULE B.—Marriages.

Registration District of Vale B C c No 4

	No. 4	
Bridegroom.	His name.	John Baptist. Canning.
	Age.	35 years old.
	Residence when married.	Kamloops.
	Place of birth.	Fort Vancouver
	Condition.	~~Carpenter~~ Bachelor
	Rank or profession.	Carpenter
	Name of parents.	His father Canning: his mother Pauline. Indian woman.
Bride.	Her name.	Catherine Frisé.
	Age.	18 years old.
	Residence when married.	Kamloops.
	Place of birth.	Chaudières. (Colville)

French Prairie activities

Ewing Young, an American mountain man, arrived in Oregon in 1834. Because of a misunderstanding, Dr. McLoughlin believed Young was a thief and made his trade attempts difficult. In 1836, Young and Lawrence Carmichael set out to build a distillery to make liquor. Dr. McLoughlin and the settlers tried to talk them out of this plan because alcohol had a bad effect on the local Indians. Jason Lee's Oregon Temperance Society organized and appealed to Young to stop it.[98] On 2 January 1837, the Oregon Temperance Society drafted a letter to Young. William Canning, as a nonmember of the Oregon Temperance Society but who agreed with them, signed the letter[95]

In 1838, William Canning was among the thirty-six men who signed a petition to the United States Congress to "take energetic measures to secure the execution of all laws affecting Indian trade and the intercourse of white men and Indians." In other words, the petition asked the United States to take over governing the Oregon Territory.[96]

Ewing Young erected a sawmill on the Chehalem Creek near its confluence with the Willamette River. It operated until high water carried it away in 1841.



Cannon was one of Young's millwrights.

Ewing Young's "Day Book" was a record of his sawmill business, and Cannon is mentioned there.

January 1839 William Can[n]g account Brought forward from old Memorandum Cr By fifty seven days work at $1 per day Including all time to the second day of December	$57.00
Time worked from the second of December to the 26th January including the 26. 40 Days By 1 days work 28 Jan 1.00	$40,00 $1.00
Total 98 days work $1.00 pr day	$90.00 $68.62
28 Jan Balance Due Mr. Canning	$29.38
Contra DR	
26 Jan To Beaver $13.00 1 faling ax $2.20 To order to fort Vancouver To Goods Brought from the Fort	$13.00 $2.20 $38.50 $13.92 $67.62
New page William Cannings Account Brought forward	
9th Feb 1838 Amount 98	$98.00
New Page	
William Canning Dr To order to the Fort Amount Bought forward	 $68.62 $98.00

New page	
21 May To Cannings Work To his Board	 $98.00 $32.50
June 18th 1838 Memorandum of Wages paid Hands for Work on Saw Mill	
Paid Mr. Cannon forty one dollars August To 1 Hog	$41.00 $6.00
1839 Ewing Young Dr in a/c with William Canning To ox ring and staple	 $2.13 3/4

Ewing Young Died	
Amounts paid out by D Leslie for the Estate of E Young deceased	
July 22, 1840 By 12 bus. Flour deld to Mr. Young By Mr. Canning in 1839 @$1.00	 $12.00
Paid to Mr. Canning as pr recpt	$7.63 1/2

Ewing Young died in mid-January 1841. He had no will and apparently no heirs. With his mill, store, cattle, and property, he was the wealthiest individual in the area. Up to this period, the Territory was under joint control of Britain and the United States, and the HBC served as the de facto government. With no legal process that satisfied the American settlers for disposing of his estate, the settlers began a series of meetings to remedy this situation. On 18 February 1841, at one of the meetings, Cannon was elected Justice of the Peace for the local government in the Willamette Valley.

On 6 June 1841, Lt. Charles Wilkes stopped at William Johnson's home at Champoeg. He wrote,

> "There are four houses and three lodges in sight of Johnson's farm, whence all the neighbours called to see us. They were just the sort of men one would expect to see in such a place. One was an old man by the name of Cannon, who had been one of the party with Lewis and Clarke, and was from his own account the only remaining one in the country. He likes the country, and says he thinks there is no necessity for Dr. McL. Authority or laws to govern it."[97]

In 1843, Cannon was living at Thomas McKay's mill in Champoeg. In 1840, T. J. Farnham wrote, "We went to view McKay's mill. A grist-mill in Oregon! We found him working at his dam. Nearby lay French burr stones, and some portions of substantial and well-fashioned iron work. The frame of the mill house was raised and shingled; and an excellent structure it was. The whole expense of the establishment, when completed, is expected to be $7,000 or $8,000."[98]

In January 1843 Rev. Gustavus Hines made a canoe trip on the Willamette River from the Methodist Mission to Fort Vancouver. The river was running high.

> "Next morning proceeded to Champoeg and found our trusty horses not far from where we turned them loose. The water had risen to an amazing height; farms were swept of their fences, and farmers suffered heavy losses in grain, the water rising several feet deep in some of their barns, Thomas McKay had recently built a large grist mill, and an old gentlemen by the name of Canning; was tending the mill. In the morning when he awoke, as he slept in the mill, in the second story, the mill was standing in the centre of a large lake. Some persons at a distance, supposing that Canning; must be in a perilous condition, procured a canoe, and sailing high over fields, fences, logs, &c., soon arrived at the mill, and running their canoe into the window of the second story, found Canning; perched upon a high box, in one

corner of the mill, awaiting some one to rescue him from his danger. No essential damage was done the mill, but several hundred bushels of wheat were lost."[99]

Cannon would have been around 79 years old. No mention was made about a wife or a child.

In 1843, wagons filled with settlers arrived in the Oregon Territory. William E Hill's trail statistics estimates 125 people arrived in Oregon in 1842, and 875 people arrived in Oregon in 1843.[100] These newcomers foreshadowed changes that would come to French Prairie. Up to this time, the Territory was under joint control of Britain and the United States, and the HBC was the de facto government.

On 2 May 1843, a vote was taken at Champoeg by the settlers to decide if a Provisional Government should be established as a preliminary step for aligning with the United States. By a 52 to 50 vote, the Provisional Government won.101 William Cannon was one of the pro voters, and his name is on the commemorative marker at Champoeg.



The Oregon Provisional Government was established in the spring of 1843. Taxation was an issue, and the assembly adopted a resolution that there would be no taxes. Instead, they adopted a voluntary subscription. Unfortunately, that subscription did not bring in enough money to pay the government bills. In 1844, the legislature passed a voluntary tax act. There was a "catch" to the voluntary part. If a person did not pay the tax, he would not be allowed to vote or to defend his rights in court. The rights included land ownership and debts.[33]

In 1844, the first taxes were assessed on personal property. Cannon is not listed in the tax list.[102]

On 30 March 1844, Dr. John McLoughlin of Fort Vancouver contracted with William Canning of Willamette Falls (the name for Oregon City) to "build and improve within the term of one year" on Oregon City town Lot No. 4, Block No. 11. Cannon would be paid $1,000 for doing this. On 10 August 1849, McLoughlin released William from his promise to build on the lot.[103] 10 August 1849, McLoughlin sold the property to Elizabeth Markham.[104]

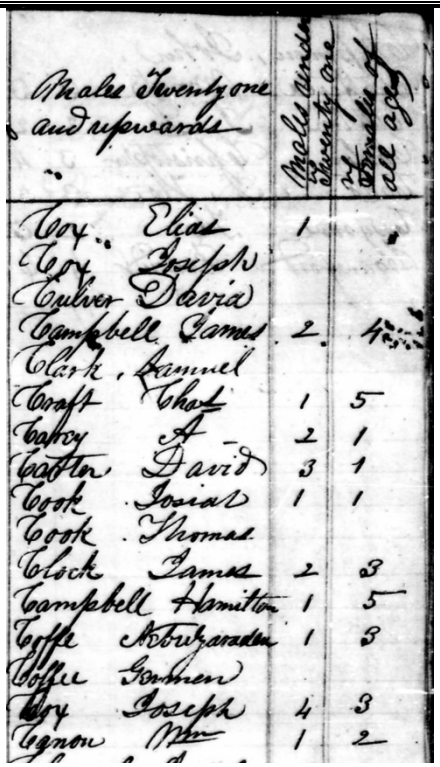
The provisional government authorized a census to be taken after the first Monday in March 1845. This census enumerated white men and their immediate family members. Cannon was not in the census.[105]

The provisional government permitted residents to stake out claims and survey them by the metes and bounds method. Any male could claim 640 acres. Within six months of recording their claim, they were to build a home.[106] Cannon did not take out a claim.

William Cannon was enumerated in the 1849 Champoeg District Apportionment Census.[107]

His household consisted of one male under the age of 21 and two females.

The under 21 male could have been his son who would have been around 15-years old.



Males Twenty one and upwards		Males under Twenty one & Females of all ages
Coy	Elias	1	
Coy	Joseph		
Culver	David		
Campbell	James	2	4
Clark	Samuel		
Craft	Chas	1	5
Cakey	A	2	1
Carter	David	3	1
Cook	Josiah	1	1
Cook	Thomas		
Clock	James	2	3
Campbell	Hamilton	1	5
Coffe	Nebuzaradan	1	3
Coffee	Gardner		
Coy	Joseph	4	3
Cognow	[illegible]	1	2

William Cannon does not appear in the 1850 Oregon census.

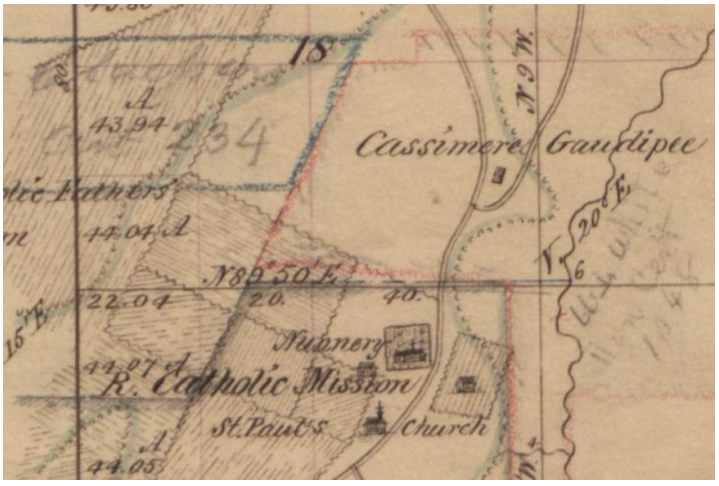
Cannon's death

Cannon's obituary reads, "Died on the French Prairie, in this county, near mission of St. Paul, at the residence of Casimir Guardipie, on the 29th ultimo [1854]. Mr. Wm. Canning, a native of Virginia, age 99. He came to the Willamette Valley in 1811; previous to that time he was in the rocky mountains, and on his return to the States he met Hunt's party, on their way to the Columbia. He has resided in the territory since 1811, much esteemed by all who knew him."[108]

On 27 August 1852, Cassimer Gardipie filed for a donation claim near the St. Paul Church. His claim was denied, but the claim file gives no reason.[109]

This 1862 General Land Office survey shows the Gaurdipee home – it's the black rectangle under his name.

The family may have been living here when Cannon died.



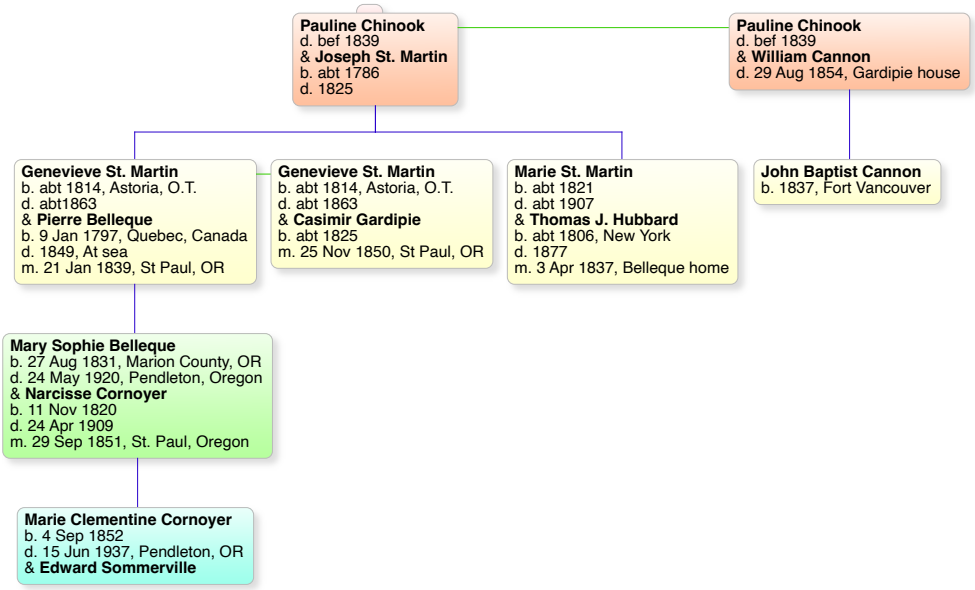
The St. Paul Church Register, "The 30 August, 1854, by us Archbishop undersigned has been buried in the cemetery of this mission the body of William Canon, widower of a Chinouk woman, deceased supplied with the Sacraments of the Church yesterday aged 97 years. Present Cuthbert Lambert and Casimire Gardipy who could not sign."[110]

Why was an aged and dying man in the Gardipie house?

Gardipie was a newcomer to French Prairie. On 25 November 1850, he married Genevieve St. Martin, the widow of Pierre Belleque, at the St. Paul Church, [111]

Marie Sommerville, Genvieve's granddaughter, said, "Mrs. Joseph St. Martin married Canning."

That would mean Genevieve St. Martin was William Cannon's step daughter.



More research is needed to verify this hypothesis.

An item in Cannon's obituary leads to another question.

"Died on the French Prairie, in this county, near mission of St. Paul, at the residence of Casimir Guardipie, on the 29th ultimo. Mr. Wm. Canning, a native of Virginia, age 99. He came to the Willamette Valley in 1811; previous to that time **he was in the rocky mountains, and on his return to the States he met Hunt's party, on their way to the Columbia.** He has resided in the territory since 1811, much esteemed by all who knew him." (Bold added.)

The men who were in the Rocky Mountains were Mountain Men. Some of these men had served with Lewis and Clark, including Alexander Carson. In Dayton Duncan's study of the Lewis and Clark Expedition members, he writes,

"As shown, the previously mentioned Alexander Carson, in his last years, was living in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. **A companion of his trapping days, William Canning, was living on a farm nearby. William Canning was a bona fide mountain man,** and had been with Wilson P. Hunt's Astorian party of 1810."[112] (Bold added.)

- Could William Cannon have spent the years between his Revolutionary War service and 1810 when he was signed up at Mackinac for the Astor expedition as a hunter in the Rocky Mountains? More research is needed.
-

Connie Lenzen, 31 October 2026

End Notes

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15 A map of the Fort Astoria compound in 1811; http://www.ohs.org/images/collections/maps/full/map-163.jpg
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18 John Stanton, "Rocky Mountain House Site #4 Chimneys, 13 July 2014;" http://www.fortwiki.com/File:Rocky_Mountain_House_- _43.jpg#file; Available under Creative Commons attribution Share Alike.
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21 Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 119.
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[41] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 150.
[42] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 154.
[43] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 151.
[44] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 159.
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[49] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 169.
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[52] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 178
[53] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria*, p. 179.
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[62] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria,* p.210.
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