

# Chronicles of Diversity



*A Map of Washington Territory*

## Metis Economics: Land

*26 January 2005; Volume 7, Issue 4*

This has been a discouraging week. I started thinking about the hardships that people went through to settle the American West. Even back then, the great fly over, or more appropriately, pass through, existed. Oregon, or California, or bust! In the intervening country all sorts of problems, sacrifices, and hardships would have to be endured as you traveled across the vast country of deserts, grasslands, and mountains, hostile peoples and animals. Would the journey be worth the risk?

I'm sure once the great railroads ran to the coast, most of the natural problems diminished, but probably not the apprehension of the unknown. "Can I really make it out west, away from my familiar surroundings.

Early last year, I was asked how my great grandfather was able to have a mountain named after him, just about a century ago in the Okanagon region of north central Washington. Honestly, I didn't have a clue. After all, much of early Washington encompassed a history of fifty to a hundred years by then. How could this be? What I was to learn in my travels last summer was quite a picture of the true American West.

Briefly the story goes, the United States Government gave the land to the Indians in 1872. In 1890 mineral deposits in the north half of the reservation caused the Federal Government to take it back, for a small payment, and open this land to mining. In 1900 the government allowed this land to be homesteaded. The sparse personal facts available from this saga, would give a Washington Ivan Doig, characters for a transposed novel. A map of Washington Territory from this era is found on this week's PDF.

Without using any known fictions, we will find ourselves lead to a general understanding of what land policy has done to the American west, and why the second opening of the west, as described in Wallace Stegner's, "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West," never really materialized.

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The Declaration of Independence and other founding documents of this republic are now being challenged under the premises of “separation of church and state.” But if this sinister plot was not evil and enough fiction, another hidden agenda, to turn this republic into a true (unworkable) democracy, through judicial litigation under the guise of majority rule, is well underway.

Thomas Jefferson in the phrase, “Natural Law and Nature’s God” prescribed fundamental human rights that flow from the Creator to the individual, to be unimpeded by the government. The United States has never gave such a doctrine to the reality of land. I doubt the well landed founding fathers ever thought about the concept seriously.

Tracing these roots back further to Europe, land has never belonged to God, always the king and his vassals, the state, or the church. Over time some of these lands were parceled out to individuals, and groups of individuals, but the concept that a person has a divine right to real property has never existed in western culture. You have the right to acquire said property, in some sort of (legal?) authorized transaction, but some type of government has always been and maintained rigorously a regulatory and taxing authority.

Therefore, we have inherited a principle of the commons, land that poor landless persons could use for some limited prescribed uses to survive, but ownership always was maintained by the government. This has developed over time so that the rich and landed could again use this land for authorized purposes, for a modest fee, without any of the responsibilities actual land ownership should entail. Stewardship either being handled, but normally neglected for a number of reasons by governmental regulators.

Railroad building, homesteading, and mining laws however, allowed for regulated parcels to be obtained by people and by extension corporations, for prescribed uses and services. So onto a map of natural topography, squares of one mile blocks are used to legally determine, ownership, rights, and usages. In 1900 my great grandfather found 160 acres, or a quarter section, around a small swale up on a mountain, soon to be named after him, where he thought he could make a home and a living. A chance for a landless Irishman and his family to own a piece of America, and by extension I suppose, the American Dream.

Sometime, somehow, reality set in. Why he didn’t homestead the valley floor and some of the subirrigated land I do not know, perhaps he was just too late into the area. Even living on the flat valley floor, at a 3000 foot elevation, in semiarid steppe country, with only 160 acres, was almost impossible. With no good bottom land, homesteading was nothing but an exercise in futility. However, that would have required a grasp of reality, not the hope of free realty.

Nobody ever really talked about my great grandpa Bannon, when I was quite young I heard he died someplace in southern California. I’m pretty sure he out lived his son, my grandfather, but I don’t know for sure, and I never met the man. What I have been able to piece together is at sometime up there in the early years of the 20th century, he had an epiphany that this homesteading thing was not going to work and he moved to California, leaving his wife and family behind to fend for themselves.

The discussions of why he left, and why his wife and family did not accompany him, by the time I came along were incorporated into the oral myths of the remaining family. My great grandpa Bannon was the black sheep of the Bannon brothers who settled in the Okanagon a century ago. Then again, maybe his Mrs. Bannon was too head strong to face an impossible reality, that this homestead thing was just not going to work there. Instead of 160 acres you need at least 1600 to make ranching work in the Okanagon, as time has shown by the ranches remaining in the area. Slowly, the almost impossible has become only difficult, by buying out the old homesteads.

My dad was just beginning school when his dad moved back to help his mother on the homestead for a brief time. It was only for a few years, but my dad was too young to remember anything. His oldest sister took us up to the old homestead when I was also too young to remember any of the details. What I recall was the remains of one building in this swale up on the mountain. I think it was the barn, and the house burned down, but that is all I know. Maybe that is why my grandparents then moved to Colville and my great grandmother moved to Tonasket.

This is a personalized picture of why the second opening of the west never occurred. Throughout the west, if you homesteaded where the irrigation potential could be developed, you may eventually own a profitable piece of America. With water, as we will learn next week, all sort of possibilities can exist. But even with limited water, it is better to raise hay near the streams, and over graze the surrounding common land with a grazing permit.

In the sixties and seventies of the last century there was a back to land movement in America. People seeking an alternative lifestyle to urban life and a city job, blew up the TV, threw away the paper, and moved to the country to build a home. These people found Jesus on their own, and as a consequence, when you add in the remaining locals, you now have the red counties and red states, and the majority of the so called "Christian Right."

It's amazing when your survival is at stake, how prayer enters the picture, but that is another story for another time.

Somewhere in a storage box, I have a book from that time, "Five acres and Independence." True, you can subsist on five acres of high graded land (with abundant water), but again unless you have some cash crop, or a job in town, your good life experience must center around visits to Wal-Mart.

"Hey ma, some city slicker just paid Brother Jones \$50,000 for 10 acres of his worthless land up on Onion Crick! Maybe we should subdivide the old home place, take the money and become one of them 'Snowbirds' and spend the winter in Arizona. Before I die I want to see the country."

Well, it ain't Microsoft stock, but if instead God gives you lemons, make lemonade, if he gives you 160 acres of a marginal farm, we see the potential for a new land rush. The third settling of the American west, is the metis adventure of wealthy city slickers following their poor hippie brothers, to find God and peace outside the urban jungle.

There are still some problems with this American Pipe Dream however, once you have built your 5000 square foot log mansion, you realize that it takes at least 60 grazing acres for those two horses you always wanted to have, and you only have 10. And because of those beautiful animals your once beautiful natural grassland now looks like the Iraqi desert. And it snowed 10 inches last night covering that desert landscape. And Brother Jones just went to prison for growing grass of the Mary Jane variety. And the Microsoft stock is gone. And Ben and Jerry already moved to Vermont, "Oh, God what am I going to do?"

"I'm glad you asked that question Brother George. Oh, it wasn't you. You already have a government job with a good retirement plan so you can keep your ranch. So you say you have another agenda for a Blue State remake of Social Security and the Income Tax system. Is that really leading your red county (Republican) base? Well then, I guess I'll see if I can perk up your interest over the next couple of weeks, as we look at natural water, and liquidity."

Pure land speculation now is pretty much regulated by county governments by state mandate, at least in Washington. However, because of irresponsible speculation, it is difficult to sell raw land parcels of less than 20 acres. There are grandfather clauses, and other exceptions depending on the county, but below that size and especially under 5 acres you now at least need water and ground that will support drainage of your septic tank. If you think of it, this sure isn't outhouse type of reasoning. Which reminds me, what is the state of the vast areas of government common land?

Because of the Endangered Species Act and other environmental regulations, not much is being done for the common good of all the American people on our common lands. Overgrazing has made much of the land of little value for traditional livestock. Climate change is making ski areas tentatively obsolete. Little timber is being cut on National Forests for Old Growth preservation or endangered critters. Because there is little tax money, user fees, only slow slightly the deterioration of infrastructure. We nationally are forfeiting our common land grant from God and losing our national leasehold. Basically, America has abandoned her common lands to the critters, and yes the nomads.

Just has Native Americans lived a romantic nomadic lifestyle, after they subdivided the family homestead, or retired early from the culture of corporate imperialism, the American Dream for many now centers around the motorhome, or the travel trailer, and the search for metis with God and His creation, or in Jefferson's words, Natural Law and Nature's God. The horses this time are under the hood, and only eat when the switch is turned. Air conditioned living quarters and a Honda generator,

sure beat a tepee and a campfire.

I'm not as discouraged now as when I began this message. Over our history the American Dream, as with much of the rest of our culture has been dumbed down into the desire of getting financially rich. As the nation has become wealthier, just as with the Old Testament Jews, we have found that this wealth, does not satisfy the longings of Natural man to commune with God, however each individual personality might define the Deity.

However, for most of the original settlers of America, they came to worship God in the way they deemed important enough to risk all their material blessings. The oral traditions of Native Americans also shows that they never lost God when they immigrated to this land either. Metis is just a continuation of that search for eternal truth. God created us all as metis people, half breeds, part natural, part spiritual.

As a country boy, who always knew the wonder of creation, it was not a difficult step to find Jesus (on my own). Surely the church provided something, but I'm not that sure of the specifics. The specific revelation of the Bible however, served as my light when my view of the church carried no light.

Now, as a church man I have to ask myself, whether that is the way that God planned it, or whether the church has gotten, like the Pharisees of Jesus day, too interested in the legalism of the law and religion, to see that both common law and grace are present in every one of God's creatures and in the world's grandeur?

Most people love to get back to nature, but they don't love going to church. The gospel is supposed to be about, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Our exegesis of "world" in this passage typically defines it has the world's human culture, to do otherwise, we have been told, would result in some sort of paganism. However, in a church so enamored with literalism and itself, as self-righteous Pharisees, could God really have meant in the term world "all of His creation." After all, world literally appears here three times and it is always the Greek "cosmos" not culture.

So who has (should, is going) to change, the cosmos, or church doctrine?

Something for you to contemplate this next week.

### ***Other articles in this Phylogenesis Series:***

*Liquidity with purpose; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/liquidity9-29-4.pdf>*

*Bottled Liquidity; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/bottleliquid10-6-4.pdf>*

*Fakin it; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/fakinit10-13-4.pdf>*

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*Political Energetics; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/poleenergy10-27-4.pdf>*

*Reasoned Phylongeny; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/reasonphylodg11-3-4.pdf>*

*Sasquatches & Polar Bears; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/sasbears11-10-4.pdf>*

*51-48 gas; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/51-48gas11-17-4.pdf>*

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*Cheesy Cows; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/chessycows12-8-4.pdf>*

*Raurbs versus Apgars; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2004pdffiles/raurbsapgars12-15-4.pdf>*

*Metis; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2005pdffiles/metis12-29-4.pdf>*

*The Complete (Natural) Metis; PDF link: <http://www.wondersprings.com/2005pdffiles/completemetis1-5-5.pdf>*

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