# Etienne Lucier (1793-1853)

Etienne Lucier (1793-1853), one of the first French Canadians to settle in the mid-Willamette Valley with his family, was a prominent leader in the French-Indian community in French Prairie (1820s-1850s). Along with his countryman Joseph Gervais, Lucier was one of the small number of French Canadians who voted to support the American-led effort to organize a provisional government at Champoeg in 1843.

Lucier was born in the Montreal region of Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1793. In the summer of 1810, while at Michilimackinac, Michigan, he engaged as a *voyageur* with the Pacific Fur Company (PFC) and journeyed to Oregon with the ill-fated overland party headed by Donald McKenzie and Wilson Price Hunt (1810-1812). Lucier spent some twenty years as a *voyageur* and fur trapper for the PFC, the North West Company, and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

In the late 1820s, Lucier was one of the "Willamette freemen," or independent trappers, working on contract for the HBC. When not moving about the Willamette Valley or other parts of the vast Oregon Country, the freeman were often seasonal inhabitants of the mid-Willamette Valley, especially the territory of the Ahantchuyuk Kalapuyans (French Prairie).

In 1828, Lucier sought to retire from the fur trade and settle permanently in the Willamette Valley with his native wife, Josette Nouette, and their children. HBC Chief Factor John McLoughlin initially opposed Lucier's request. HBC policy discouraged agrarian settlement in the Oregon Country, and the company was concerned that a French-Indian settlement in the valley might develop independently of the HBC. Indeed, in 1828 McLoughlin refused to give Lucier the implements needed to establish a farm.

By the fall of 1829, McLoughlin had changed his mind for strategic reasons. He agreed to loan Lucier and other Willamette freeman implements and supplies in order to assure the French Canadians' strong economic relations with the HBC (rather than with the American maritime fur traders then plying the Pacific Northwest coast). By the early 1830s, Lucier and his family—along with the French-Indian families of Joseph Gervais, Pierre Bellique, Jean Baptiste Desportes McKay, and Louis Labonte—were the first non-Kalapuyans living year-round in the valley above Willamette Falls.

Lucier and his French Canadian compatriots later assisted the Methodist and Catholic missionaries who established missions in French Prairie in the mid to late 1830s. In 1843, following the arrival of more Americans in 1842, Lucier voted to support the organization of a provisional government. Lucier, like the small group of French Canadians who supported the provisional government initiative, sought to give French Canadian settlers a voice in community affairs. He and others wanted to protect the economic interests of their French-Indian families in the Willamette Valley, which many believed would eventually come under American jurisdiction. Today, Lucier is recognized as one of the founding fathers of the Oregon Provisional Government.

Written by Melinda Jette

**Further Reading:**

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