Oregon Producers' Exporting and Importing Company

In the early months of 1847, a group of Willamette Valley farmers organized the Oregon Producers' Exporting and Importing Company (OPEIC). The farmers wanted to create their own export company so they would not be at the mercy of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and what they believed were unfair monopoly practices in shipping. Although the Oregon Treaty of 1846 had secured the Oregon Country south of the 49th parallel for the United States, the region was still isolated and economically dominated by the shipping and agricultural domain of the HBC. Thus, when Oregon wheat began to overflow local granaries, the HBC received most of the blame, including accusations that it refused to ship the wheat so that farmers would have to sell at lower prices.

With his flour mill and shipping connections, Oregon Provisional Governor George Abernethy figured prominently in the OPEIC's initial deliberations. Plans included a pledge of 2,800 bushels of wheat to be ground into 500 barrels of flour for export by September 20, 1847. There is compelling evidence, however, that the HBC reduced its purchases of Willamette Valley wheat only because its interests, in accordance with the 1846 treaty, were shifting away from the Oregon Country.

Despite its energetic beginnings, the OPEIC disappeared without explanation in April 1847. The likely causes were the development of favorable economic conditions brought on by the Mexican-American War in California and the arrival of 4,000 American immigrants in the fall, which resulted in an increased demand for Oregon's agricultural production.

Written by Cessna (Duke) Smith

Further Reading:

Gilbert, James Henry. *Trade and Currency in Early Oregon*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1907.

Throckmorton, Arthur L. *Oregon Argonauts.* Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1961.

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