

Mapping the 1850 Census

Map 8 on the facing page is derived from a compilation of data developed by geographer William Bowen and published in 1978 in “The Willamette Valley - Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier.” By combining Donation Land Claim certificates, township plats, and the cadastral surveys of the U.S. General Land Office (GLO) with data from the 1850 federal census, Dr. Bowen was able to locate 78% of the 11,873 enumerated individuals to USGS map accuracy at 1:62,500 scale and another 15% to within 1.5 mi of actual residence location.

Figure 70 at right shows a portion of the 1850 census marshal’s route against a background of vegetation derived from approximately contemporaneous land surveys conducted by the General Land Office. Figure 71 is a portion of a map produced by Dr. Bowen which shows the location of censused 1850 dwellings in relation to streams and roads which existed circa 1950-1960. The circles are dwelling locations; the upper number is the dwelling number, sequential in the census marshal’s route, and the lower number is the count of persons enumerated at that location. The dwelling number makes it possible to connect these data to locations in digital maps, and from this to conduct spatial analyses. Changes in census data gathering procedures after 1850 and data privacy regulations mean that the spatial accuracy with which individual people’s dwellings can be located in the basin is higher for 1850 than for any time since.

Table 23 below illustrates the information that describes the residents of the dwelling highlighted in Figure 71 by a brown circle. The table begins to tell the story of the Geer family and their journey to Oregon. It appears that Joseph and Elizabeth Geer commenced their travel in the vicinity of Connecticut and New York and had their first child in Ohio in 1834. Over the next decade, they spent at least seven years in the neighboring state of Indiana and bore four more children before moving on to Oregon. A young male by the name of Oliver Crumb is also listed as a member of this household. Considering the age and gender of the Geer children, Mr. Crumb may have been hired to help with the farming. It is not known if he accompanied the Geer family on their journey to Oregon, but his state of birth is New York.

Trajectories of Change

By 1850 EuroAmerican settlement had already produced fundamental change in landscape processes and patterns that were several thousand years old. Bowen documents the degree to which settlers located dwellings at the grassland-forest edge to avoid the flooding and high water in the low-lying, fertile prairies and to secure access to fuel and building materials from the forest (see Fig. 70). These edges had been established by Native American fire management, a practice that had ended by 1850. Even prior to the first large wave of immigration in the 1840s, the landscape had begun to experience drastic changes. Intensive beaver trapping by the Hudson’s Bay Company virtually eradicated beaver by the early 1830s. This had long-term effects on the basin’s hydrology, vegetation, and wildlife.

A mosaic that had been stable for millennia entered a period of rapid change. This continues today, with population in the basin projected to double within 50 years. Coping with such growth requires that we make informed generalizations regarding how landscapes we see today came to be and the nature of landscape change initiated by people. And this in turn requires that we have an understanding of historical conditions and the trajectories of landscape change in which human populations play an increasingly important part.

Schedule 1.-Free Inhabitants in the County of Yamhill

Name	Age	Sex	Birth.	Occupation	Cnty.	House
Crumb, Oliver	22	M	NY		Yamhill	170
Geer, Eliz	42	F	NY		Yamhill	170
Geer, Eliza M	4	F	IND		Yamhill	170
Geer, Ellen	11	F	IND		Yamhill	170
Geer, Joseph	56	M	CON	Farmer	Yamhill	170
Geer, Joseph	8	M	IND		Yamhill	170
Geer, Juliette	16	F	OHI		Yamhill	170
Geer, Sydney	6	M	IND		Yamhill	170

Table 23. 1850 population census schedule. This table corresponds to dwelling #170 shown within a brown circle in the map detail at right. Note the age and state of birth of Elizabeth and Joseph Geer’s children as they migrated west to the Willamette River Basin.

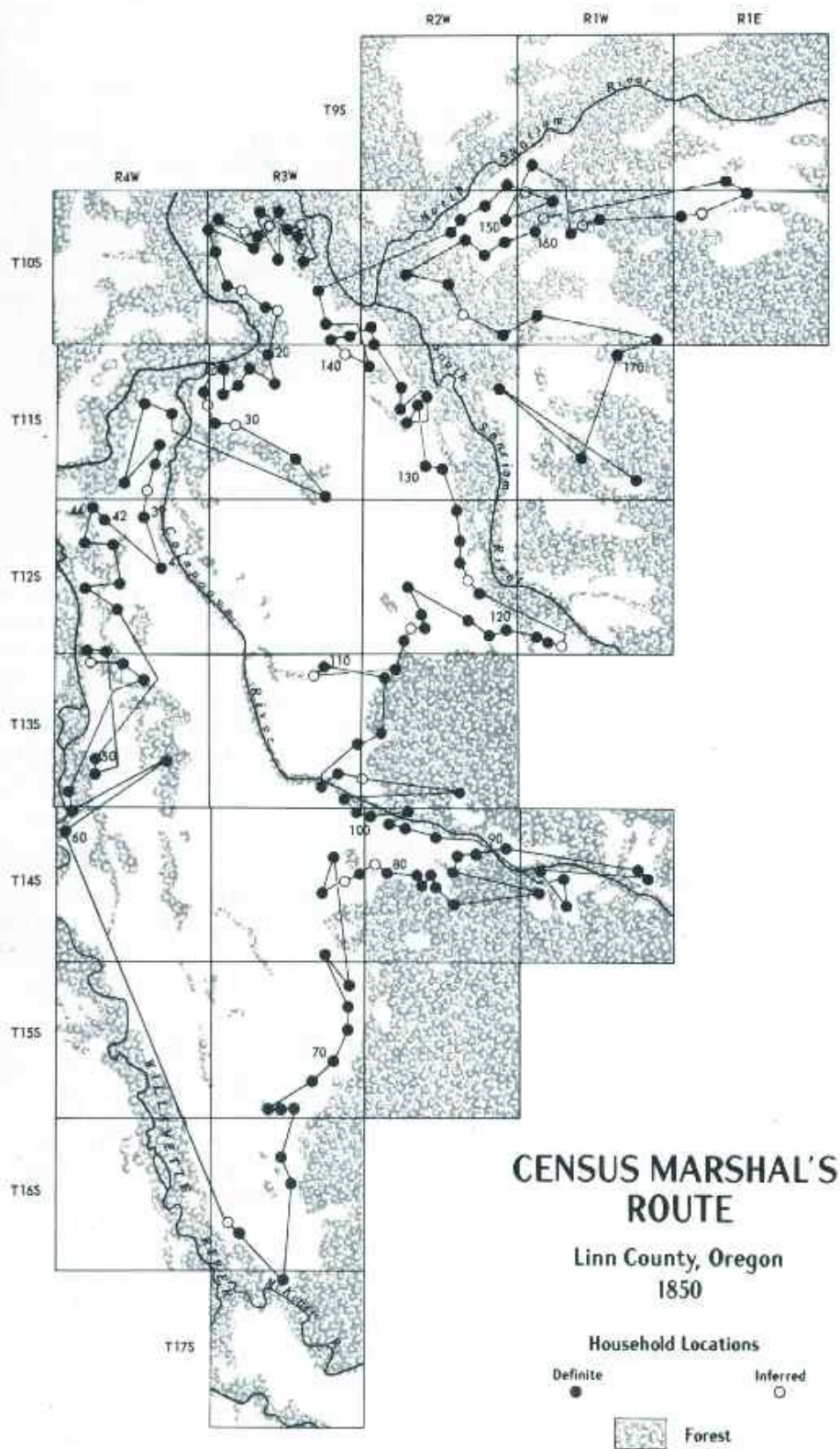


Figure 70. 1850 Census Marshal’s route, Linn County, Oregon.⁶⁷ For a section of the central Willamette Valley near present-day Corvallis and Albany, the 1850 census marshal’s route is placed in a map derived from the General Land Office Survey. Bowen located some of the dwellings by inferring their location from others whose positions were established in Donation Land Claim certificates. (Used by permission, University of Washington Press.)

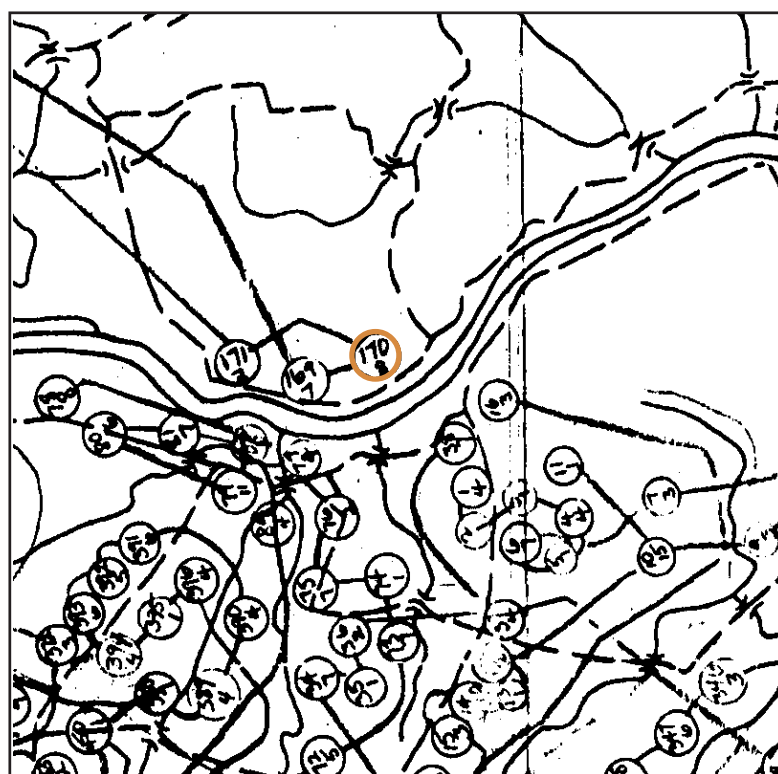


Figure 71. 1850 dwellings, French Prairie-Champoeg. Lying in the center of this detail, the French Prairie - Champoeg (“Shampooe”) area was one of the earliest locations for homesteads as economic and political trends shifted from trapping to farming in the middle of the 19th century in Oregon. For reference, this map included streams and roads circa 1950-1960. Dashed lines indicate roads and continuous curved lines indicate streams. (Used by permission of Dr. William Bowen.)

