January-March 2026

# Siuslaw Pioneer Museum

## *Did Your Ancestors Travel by Covered Wagon?*

*When I was researching my 1800s ancestors on my maternal side, I found that they traveled by covered wagon train from Pennsylvania to Colorado in the early 1800s. It was quite a special moment realizing that they endured many hardships in their attempt to find new timber land and minerals (gold, silver, lead) that would eventually make them wealthy.*

*Last year we introduced you to some Florence families who sailed around a continent to the Oregon coast. This year we will introduce more families and also talk more about other aspects of the Siuslaw River Valley and its peoples, places, things, events.*

*We're so glad that you decided to join us on this journey! If you have comments or want more information about the museum and research library, contact us...*

*museum staff:*
*https://www.siuslawpioneermuseum.com/*
*newsletter staff:*
*siuslawpioneermuseum@gmail.com*

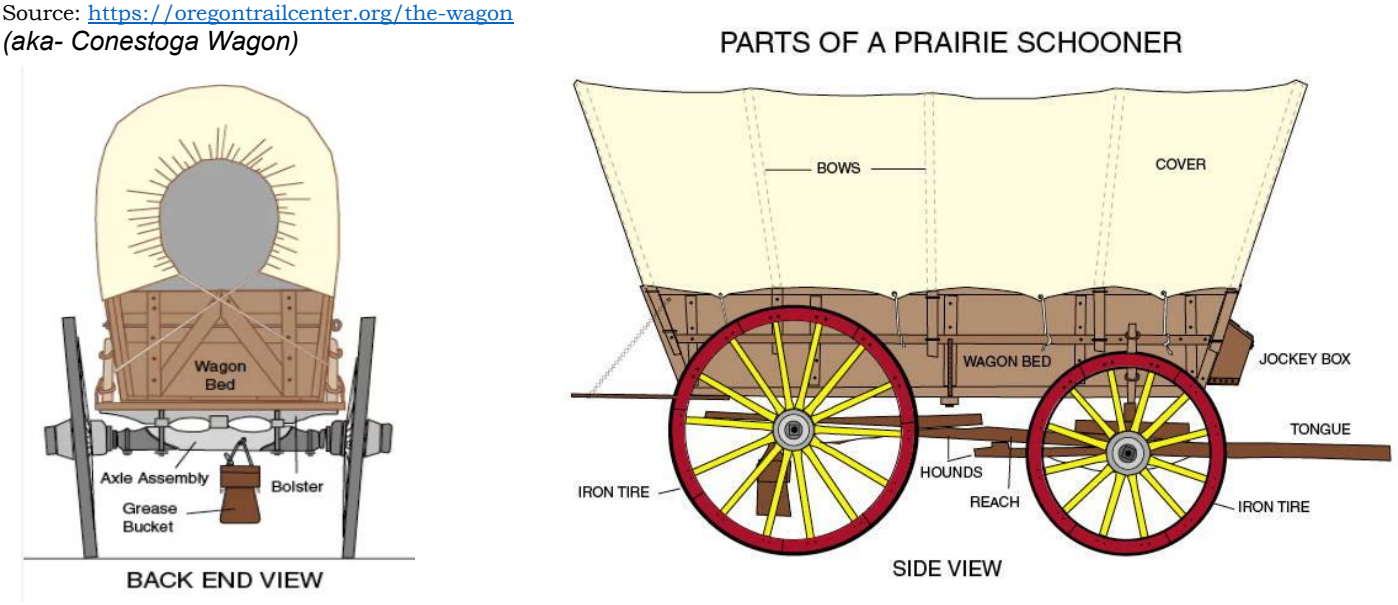
*Merilee Mulvey – Volunteer Editor*
*Kyle Research Library at SPM*

Photo image source:
https://www.homestead.org/homesteading-history/covered-wagons-heading-west-life-on-the-oregon-trail/
This website has some great information about how emigrants traveled on the Oregon Trail in covered wagons.

The **Conestoga wagon** is probably the most familiar pioneer wagon to us of the modern era, as it is often used in films and other media. This vehicle was the primary choice for freighting companies shipping goods to the western frontier. Sleek and angular, with graceful curves, it was attractive to the eye. Sometimes a medium sized variation of the Conestoga would be used by families traveling the Oregon Trail. The name Conestoga comes from the Conestoga River Valley in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. A Conestoga's size was 17 feet long and 11 feet high, reflecting the freighter's need for space in hauling. In addition to a longer bed, it had a curved box much like that on a boat. This curved bed kept freight from moving and shifting, thus keeping the cargo in the center during transit. The front and rear gates angled up higher to help prevent freight from sliding out of the back on steep inclines. A Conestoga could likely haul a load of up to three tons. A load this size may have required as many as eight yoke of oxen.

Source: https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/wagons-on-the-trails.htm

Source: https://oregontrailcenter.org/the-wagon
*(aka- Conestoga Wagon)*




## The Oregon Trail – A short Introduction

Source: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Oregon_Trail

Besides ship travel to coastal ports along the west coast of the Oregon Territory, the Oregon Trail brought some of the immigrants who eventually settled the Siuslaw Valley. We'll just touch on its beginnings and hope you will continue your own research into this country-changing event.

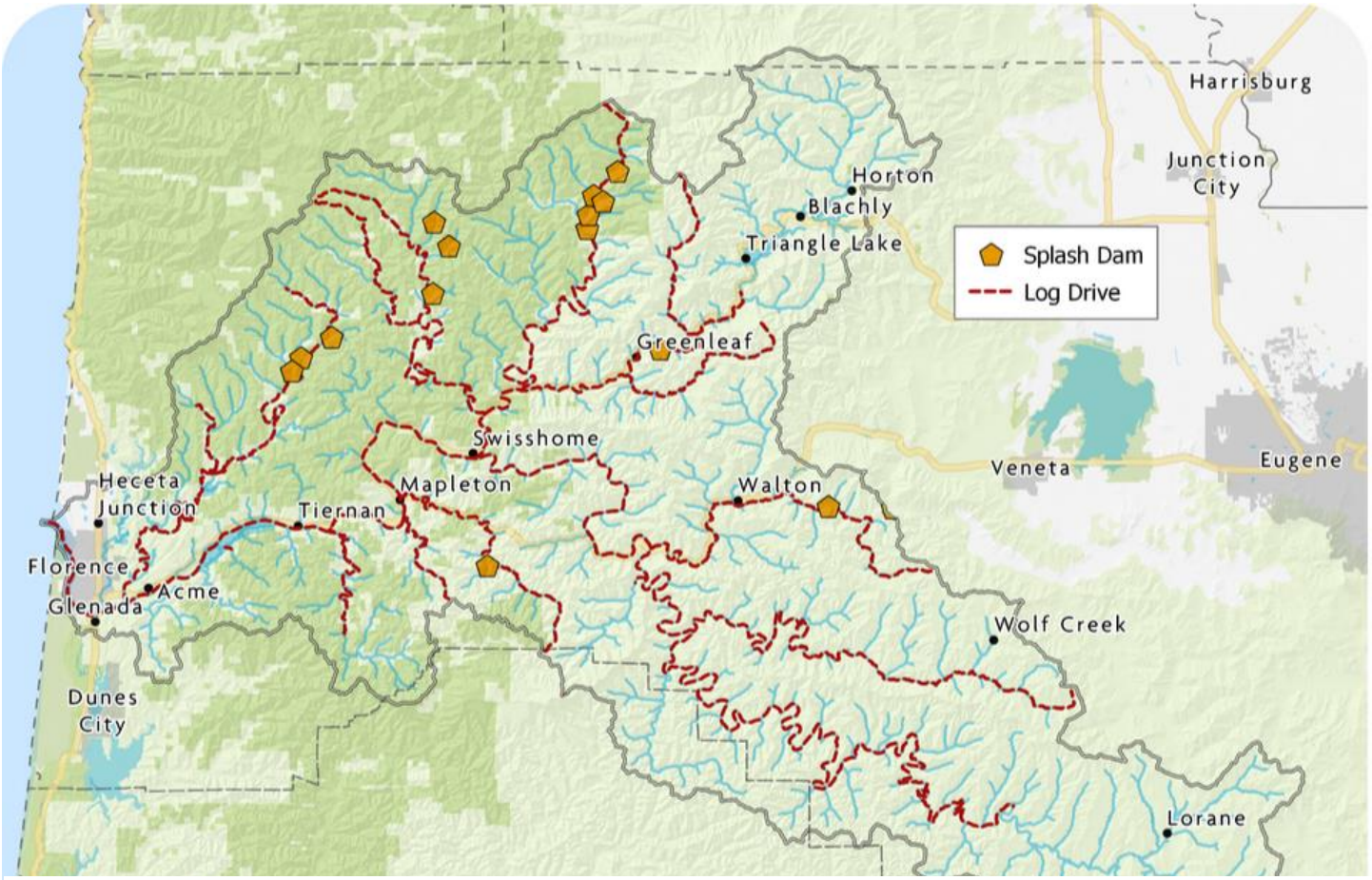
The route of the Oregon Trail began as a footpath and expanded to a wagon road. The route was discovered by fur trappers about 1811. Some expeditions of government men explored and mapped parts of the trail starting in 1832. It was originally a footpath or mule pack trail. In 1830 the first fur trade rendezvous wagons reached the Green River in Wyoming. By 1836 the first pioneer wagon train was organized in Independence, Missouri and the wagon trail went as far as Fort Hall (now in Idaho) in "Oregon Country." By 1843 the wagon road reached the Dalles (now in Oregon state) where pioneers could raft down the Columbia River. In 1846 the Barlow Road around Mt. Hood finally reached Oregon City.

Mountain men fur trappers were the earliest to use the Oregon Trail. A few early missionaries came in the 1830s. Larger groups of American settlers began arriving in 1843. The California Trail, Mormon Trail, and Bozeman Trail overlapped much of the Oregon Trail and branched off starting in 1846. The California Gold Rush of 1849 contributed significantly to west coast migration. Western gold and silver strikes, free farm land, lumber, and ranching all increased traffic on the Oregon Trail. An estimated 80,000 pioneers used the Oregon Trail to Oregon and 20,000 to Washington by 1869, and about 320,000 more followed part of the Oregon Trail to take one of its three main branches.

Most emigrants were farmers who already had their own wagons and most of their own supplies. Other travelers purchased supplies at "jumping off points" in Missouri, Iowa, or Kansas. Supplies cost as much as $200 per person including a covered wagon, teams of oxen, 150 lbs food per person, tobacco, cooking gear, extra shoes, two sets of clothes, 25 lbs of soap, washboard and wash tub, tent, a canvas or rubber ground cloth with blankets for sleeping, tools, guns and ammunition. Some also bought a trail guide book.

Livestock needed watering so the Oregon Trail followed rivers across dry prairies. Independence and St. Joseph Missouri were two starting off points. Once the river was dredged and steamboats could reach it in the early 1850s, Council Bluffs, Iowa became the most popular Oregon Trail starting place. Kansas City, Lawrence and Topeka, Kansas were also used. From their starting point emigrants often followed the Missouri River up to the Platte River. Another option was to follow the Kansas River and then the Little Blue River toward the Platte River.

Below is a map of the Siuslaw Watershed from the Siuslaw Watershed Council website. I chose this image so that you, the reader, and I can learn how logs were transported along the watershed. The council explains that "Waterways were used to transport the timber because roads were difficult to develop and maintain. Many valley bottom areas were cleared to allow for easier transport of timber down the water highways."
Source: http://www.siuslaw.org/the-story-of-the-siuslaw/




## A Brief History of the Siuslaw River Watershed

Source: **https://www.siuslaw.org/the-story-of-the-siuslaw/** be sure to visit this website for more watershed information

Prior to European American settlement in the 1800s, the Siuslaw River valley was a mosaic complex of braided channels, tidal swamps, and freshwater wetlands further upstream. The historic tidal swamps were dominated by Sitka spruce, but crabapple swamp and shore pine swamp were also found in the Siuslaw River estuary.

The **Siuslaw River** is about 110 miles long and flows to the Pacific Ocean coast of Oregon. It drains an area of about 773 square miles in the Central Oregon Coast Range southwest of the Willamette Valley and north of the watershed of the Umpqua River. The river rises in the mountain of southwestern Lane County about 10 miles west of Cottage Grove. It flows generally west-northwest through the mountains, entering the Pacific Ocean at the town of Florence. The "head of tide" is 26 miles upstream. (Head of tide is the furthest point upstream where a river is affected by tidal fluctuations or where the fluctuations are less than a certain amount.)

The watershed historically supported one of the largest runs of Coho Salmon on the Oregon Coast, as well as runs of Chinook and Chum Salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout and Pacific lamprey. Logging and land cultivation over the last 150 years changed the area dramatically; riparian areas were cleared and streambeds were altered that impacted fish runs. Efforts are being made by various conservation groups in conjunction with the **Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians** to restore the Siuslaw River, its tributaries, coastal lakes, and estuaries.

# America 250

2026 is the year of our 250th anniversary as a unified country. The official celebration date is July 4, 2026, the signing of the Declaration of Independence.
There is a website devoted to this event:
https://america250.org/
The *Semiquincentennial* Commission (established by Congress) is focusing on celebrations for the country.
This gives us time to think about the history of our local communities and states. In Florence, the Pioneer Museum is a good representation of the history of those people who came before us to this area and the many generations that followed. They left their homes, belongings, historical diaries, and much more to descendants who brought them to a central location to tell the story of how this town began.

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**Thank You for Your Support!**

## ACME Becomes CUSHMAN

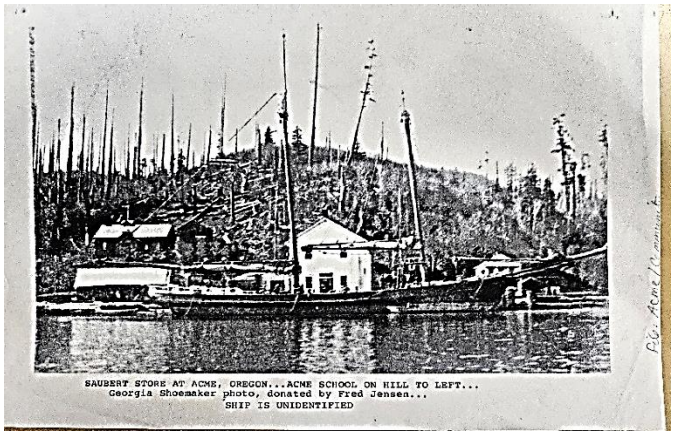
Source: Morning Register, Eugene OR Wed Jul 21, 1915

Cushman is name of new town on Siuslaw.
W.P. Names Station after pioneer resident.
A new town by the name of Cushman will probably spring up at the present terminus of the Willamette Pacific railway a mile from the town of ACME, where the road crosses the Siuslaw river. Train service will be inaugurated to that place by the first of August, according to the announcement of the engineers in charge of construction of the road.
… Cushman is named by the railroad company after I. B. Cushman, a pioneer sawmill man and heavy property owner of ACME. He is chairman of the port of Siuslaw commission. Cushman station is the nearest point to Florence and the beach, and it is here that all passengers on the Willamette Pacific will alight and be taken by boat down the river three miles or more to Florence and three miles further to the beach.

Source: History of Cushman, Class of '42, page 2
In 1914 the Southern Pacific built a railroad across the river. This is important to the logging and ever-developing farm community. However, when a post office was to be located on the railroad it was discovered that Oregon already had a town called ACME. The post master was to be Mr. Cushman so it was suggested naming it after him.

Cont'd…
The citizens voted but not all the taxpayers wanted the name changed. Only the depot and Post Office became Cushman. The town has adopted that name because it was never legally changed.

Source: Morning Register, Eugene Wed Feb 21, 1917
Word has been received from Washington, D.C., that the post office department declines to change the name of the post office at Cushman, Ore., to Acme. Jared Scott and others recently petitioned that the former name (of ACME) be restored.
In an explanation sent to Senator Chamberlain it is stated that the policy of the department is to have the post office name correspond with the name of the railroad station and the telegraph and express offices.




## Tugboats along the Siuslaw…

**A Quiet Siuslaw Tells Story of Disappearing River Tugs – Decline Came in Past 20 Years**

**Nov 4, 1990** Mike Thoele - *The Register-Guard*

Excerpts from the news article…

FLORENCE, Ore. - Once, the tugs skittered around the Siuslaw waterfront like so many water spiders, always busy, always working. Only a couple of decades ago, it took four or five of them to keep things moving at Florence's harbor and eastward up the river. Now, only the Carol plies that territory as the last independent tug to work the Siuslaw. Frank Brooks, who shepherds the Carol on its rounds, does it with a philosophy that old-time river-tug operators would understand. ``In this business,'' he says, ``you learn to do everything with patience. You work with the tide, always with the tide. There's no hurrying it. You do things when the time is right.'' Recently, Brooks, 70, got the call to help berth the huge new barge crane purchased by the Port of Siuslaw. But such jobs are a rarity for a local tug these days.

The truth is that there's little of the classic push-and-pull work left for the Carol to do. The work of setting piling and building new docks has become the prime reason for its existence. That keeps it from joining some of its old companions, the Iris J. and the Norsky, which now sit on dry land berths amid riverside weeds. It's worse at most of the small ports up and down the coast. The Carol is an oddity. Waldport has no local tugs. Nor does Newport, even though it gets an occasional visit from an oceangoing ship that needs assistance. When it happens, the tugs come from as far away as Coos Bay. John Mohr, manager of the Port of Newport, knows why. ``People who drive around Oregon go along the rivers and wonder why they see all the old pilings that run for miles and miles,'' he says. ``They were for tying up log rafts. It was all the log rafts that kept all the tugs busy.'' In the same era that logs were being moved to mills by water, a fair amount of finished lumber was shipped by barge. The small tugs that could work upstream from the coast jockeyed their way down to the ocean with barges that sometimes packed as much as 4 million board feet of lumber. There, the loads were picked up by larger, oceangoing tugs.

But precious few logs are moved by water anymore. And truck and rail carrier have largely replaced the lumber barges that once floated down the coast's smaller rivers. What's left for Brooks and the Carol is pushing up and down the Siuslaw with a work barge and a pile driver. The real history of tug operations on the Siuslaw rests with Trygve Nordahl, a veteran Norwegian skipper who once ran five tugs. In a lifetime on the river, Nordahl, now 76 and retired, did every imaginable task on the Siuslaw from delivering mail to moving houses. ``I was the only one,'' says Nordahl, who occasionally joins Brooks for a bit of river work. ``I had all the tugs on the river. I hired skippers and kept them going. There was always enough work.''

When Nordahl began in the years just after World War II, the river was still the prime conduit for moving logs. Sometimes they'd be floated down creeks from high up in the Siuslaw drainage system. More often, they'd be dumped into the river by trucks. The tugs assembled them into rope-bound rafts 55 feet wide and 360 feet long and moved them, as needed, to the mills. Between logs and lumber barges, pile-driving and odd jobs along the river, Nordahl stayed busy until his retirement in 1975. When he sold out, three of his tugs, including the Carol, were still operating.

The business passed through a couple of hands over the next decade. By the time Brooks got the Carol in 1986, the old way of doing business on the river was mostly gone. It's been two years since a lumber barge has traveled the Siuslaw. In the pile-driving operation, Brooks sets the wooden posts on which docks are built for houses and businesses along the river. The pile driver and other equipment needed for that work are carried on an ancient wooden barge that's moved by the Carol. ``It's a good way to work,'' Brooks says. ``It's the kind of job where people figure you're the one who knows how it needs to be done. And I think there's enough work out there to keep the tug going for a few years.''

## People, **Places**, Things, Events

How did various places around the valley get their name??? Well, a bit of historical information from the KRL files had this story about a lake in the Siuslaw Valley…

David Munsel, born in 1824 in Ohio, came across the Oregon Trail, arriving in December 1847. He filed a homestead claim on 146 acres up the North Fork River, staying there until 1888. He then moved into the town of Florence and became known for his skills as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. He was said by those who knew him, to be "one of the most honest, industrious and kind hearted men that ever lived." We are fortunate to have Munsel Lake, Munsel Road, and Munsel Creek named for this man, a Florence pioneer.

Source: Information from "Tangled Grass: The Story of those buried in the Glenada Oregon, Odd Fellows Cemetery" by Kevin Mittge and the Siuslaw Genealogy Society. March 18, 2014. https://siuslawgenealogy.org/2014/03/18/david-munsel-florence-pioneer/


Topographic images of Munsel Lake located 8 miles north of Florence, Oregon. Most of the lake is at least 30 feet deep and the size is 365 acres.

Topographical maps courtesy of Topozone.com website

For more information about David Munsel's life, visit our SPM Blog page through the link below:
https://www.siuslawpioneermuseum.com/david-l-munsell/


## Upcoming Events

**January – March 2026**

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan 12 | Board Meeting at museum |
| Feb 9 | Board Meeting at museum |
| Mar 9 | Board Meeting at museum |

**Keep abreast of happenings at the museum…**
**Visit us at:**

Library e-mail library@siuslawpioneermuseum.com

Newsletter e-mail: siuslawpioneermuseum@gmail.com

★ website www.SiuslawPioneerMuseum.com

https://www.facebook.com/Siuslaw-Pioneer-Museum

## Endowment Fund

An endowment fund in the Museum's name has been established with many financial gifts from our members. Donors who wish to contribute to this fund should make their contribution payable to:

"*Western Lane Community Foundation*"
and specify
"*Siuslaw Pioneer Museum Endowment*"
on the check

Mail check to:
Siuslaw Pioneer Museum
P. O. Box 2637
Florence, OR 97439

*Please keep in mind that checks specified to the endowment fund are to be used as specified by the endowment maker for special projects or the general endowment held by the foundation.*

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# SIUSLAW PIONEER MUSEUM


**Meet our Board of Directors and Trustees**

SPM Board Members-

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kyle Lewis | John Barnes | Craig Sanders |
| Pat Rongey | Dorothy Hosking | Annie Schmidt |

Board meetings are held the 2nd Monday of each month at the museum. These meetings are open to all members. Call ahead for space availability.