QUARTERLY OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

# OVERLAND JOURNAL

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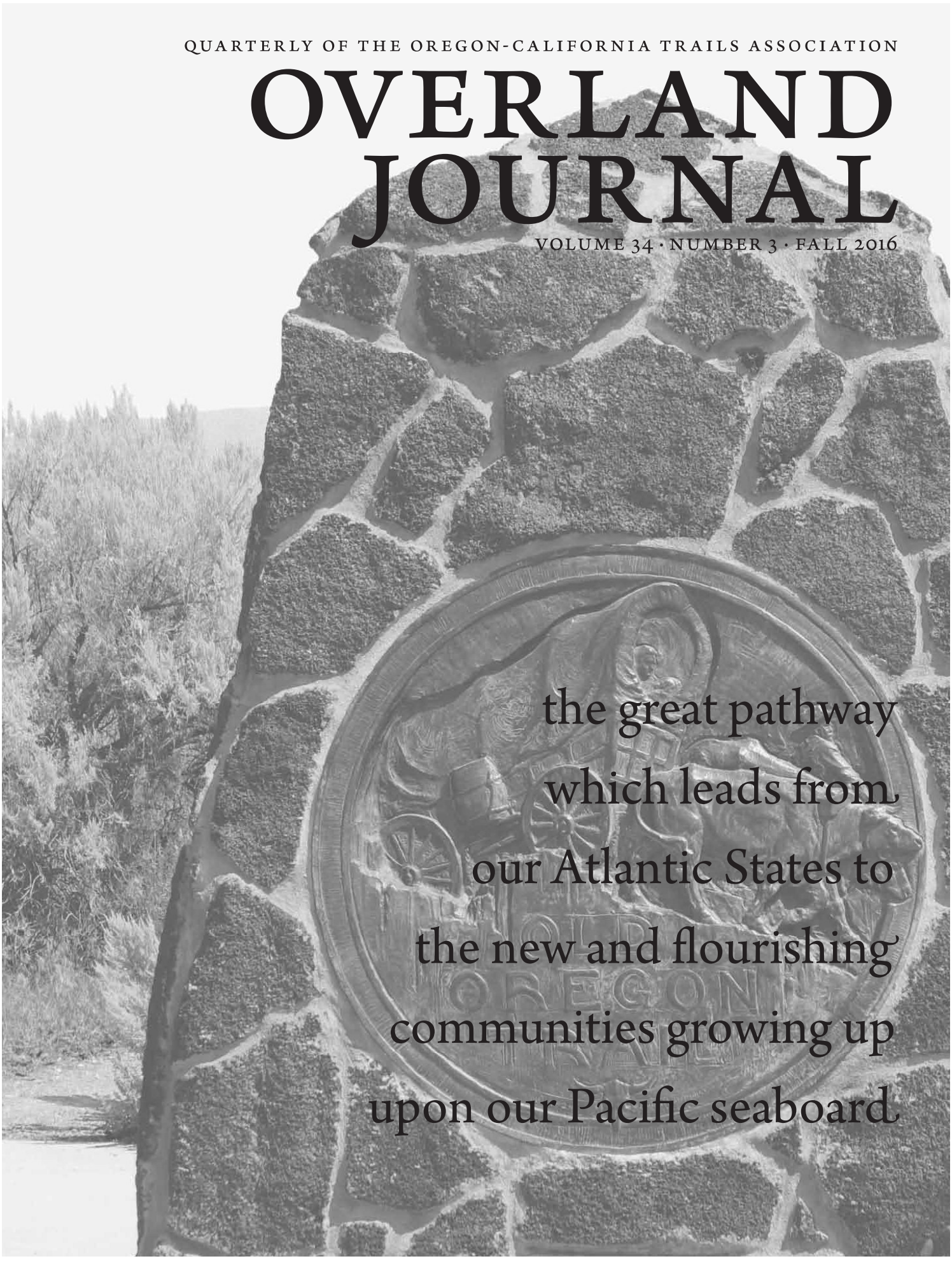

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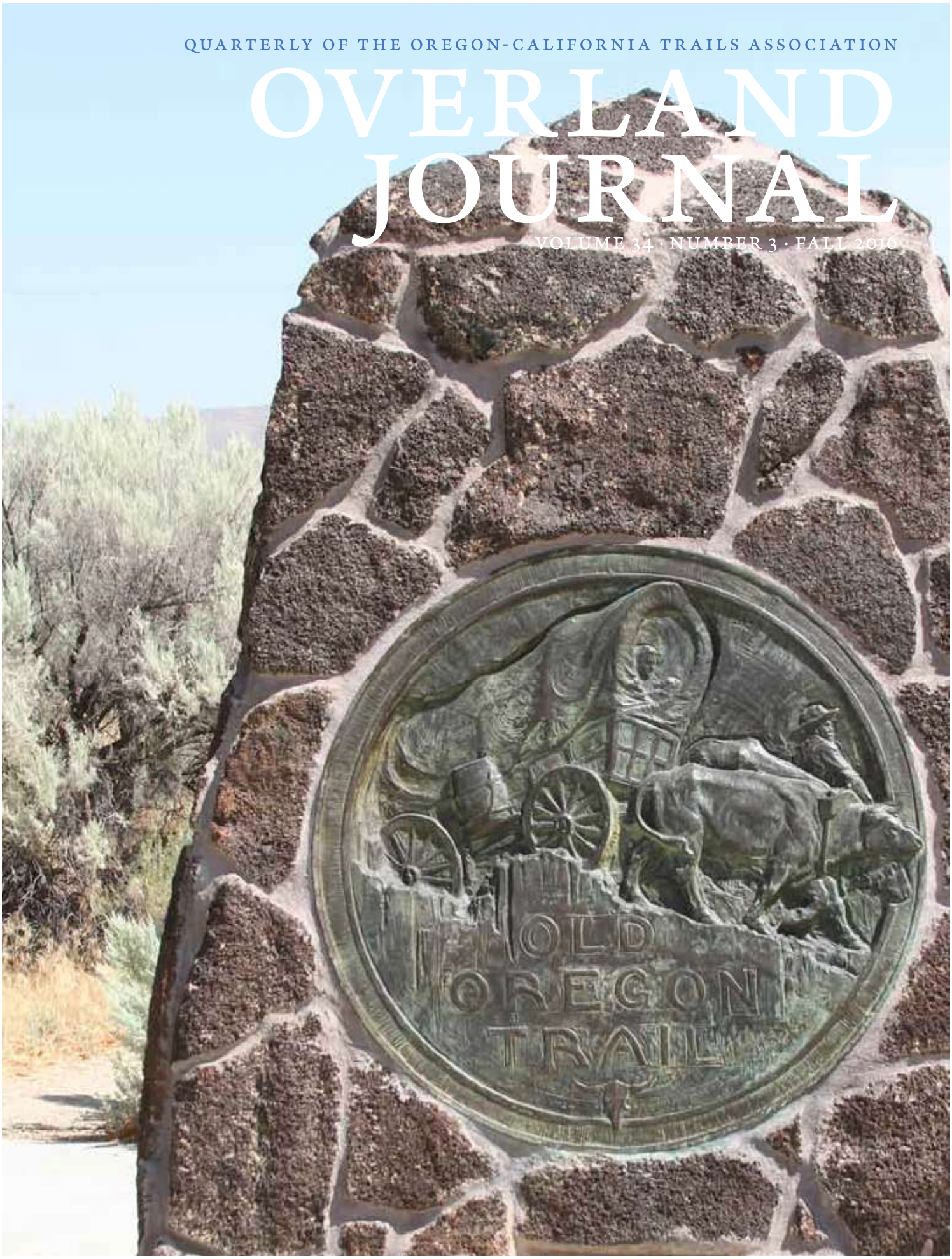

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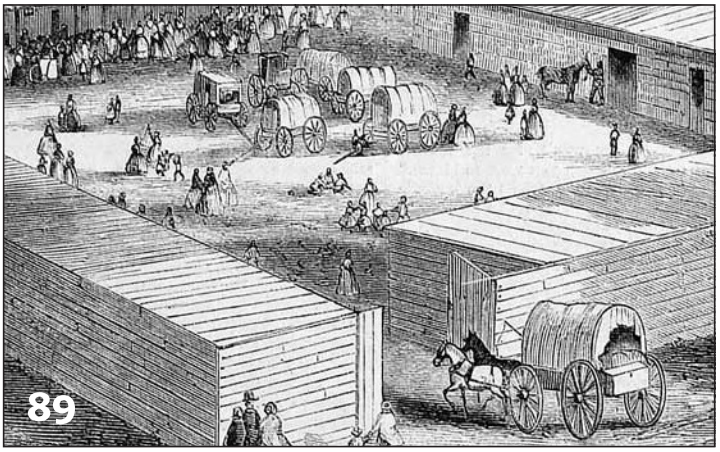

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ON THE COVER

The Avard Fairbanks medallion monument in the Oregon Trail Historic Reserve, east Boise, Idaho. The monument was unveiled on April 24, 2002. PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER BLAIR.

ON THE BACK COVER

Peter Weddell drew at least eight maps showing where he had researched the route of the early Donner Party wagons. This 1951 map (detail shown) was one of his last. COURTESY OF THE SAN JOSE HISTORY CENTER.

# *a cultural awakening*

## I am sorry for what our ancestors did.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

A few words. A short sentence.

We were blessed with a wonderful presentation by three members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe at the OCTA convention in Fort Hall in August. In their fascinating talk, the history of the Shoshone-Bannock tribe was discussed, their lives and cultures described, and a detailed list of the damages done to the Indians presented and examined.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

As detailed by Darrell Shay in the presentation, the negative impacts to the Indian way of life due to the coming of the white men included the following:

- Loss of land
- Loss of life and lifeways
- Loss of freedom
- Destruction of native plants
- Decimation of wildlife
- Loss of culture
- Loss of hunting and gathering areas
- Indian wars
- Assault to Indian women

Serious issues. All were presented by a Shoshone-Bannock tribal elder as he opened up to hundreds of people at a convention glorifying the Oregon Trail—something which led directly to these negative impacts. Certainly it was difficult to trust enough to be open and honest. Certainly he held back a little. And most certainly, his comments struck a deep chord in many of the people listening.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

Non-Indians have long used a number of excuses to justify what happened to the American Indians with the coming of the white men to the western United States. Manifest destiny. Bringing religion to the heathen Indians. Settling the wild West. Yet for many years, white men have failed to understand that the West was already settled. By Indians. They traveled in a yearly cycle to gather camas bulbs, hunt, fish, and trade with other tribes as the seasons of nature changed. A cycle that goes back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The Indian culture was organized, simple, and effective.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

White men came to the West and "settled" a country already filled with Indian inhabitants and their culture. They often drove the Indians away with violence. They killed the game Indians had depended upon for many generations. They homesteaded on lands important to the Indians and destroyed long-time sources of food. They destroyed rivers and the cycles of fish by mining and building dams. They forced a nomadic people onto arbitrary plots of land they called "reservations" and tried to convert the Indians to farmers. Then they took away land of the reservations if white men wanted it for other purposes.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

None of the people in the room had anything to do with the travesties which occurred to the tribes as the fur trappers and western emigrants invaded their tribal lands, killed their game, brought disease and death to many, and ultimately drove the free-ranging Indians to confinement on reservations. Yet all of the people felt the same way as I spoke to Leo Ariwite afterwards.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

We cannot change the past. We have limited effect on the future. But we came together to learn about history and we shared the present, developing an understanding of how such different cultures came together at a convention. We strengthened a friendship through listening and caring. I hope that it continues for many years.

"I am sorry for what our ancestors did."

So much meaning.

So late in coming.

JERRY EICHHORST
President, Idaho Chapter
August 31, 2016 OJ