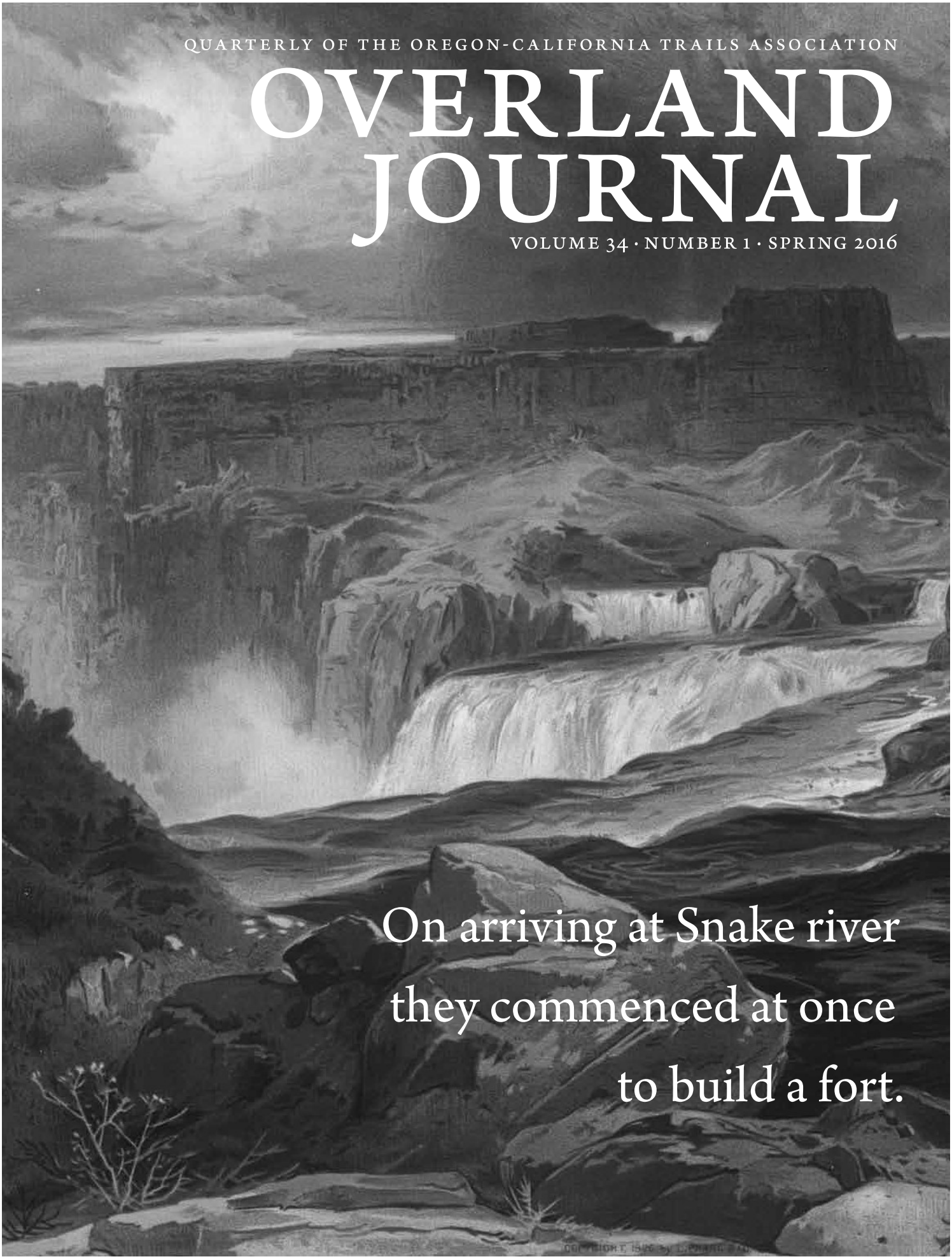
QUARTERLY OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

OVERLAND JOURNAL

VOLUME 34 · NUMBER 1 · SPRING 2016

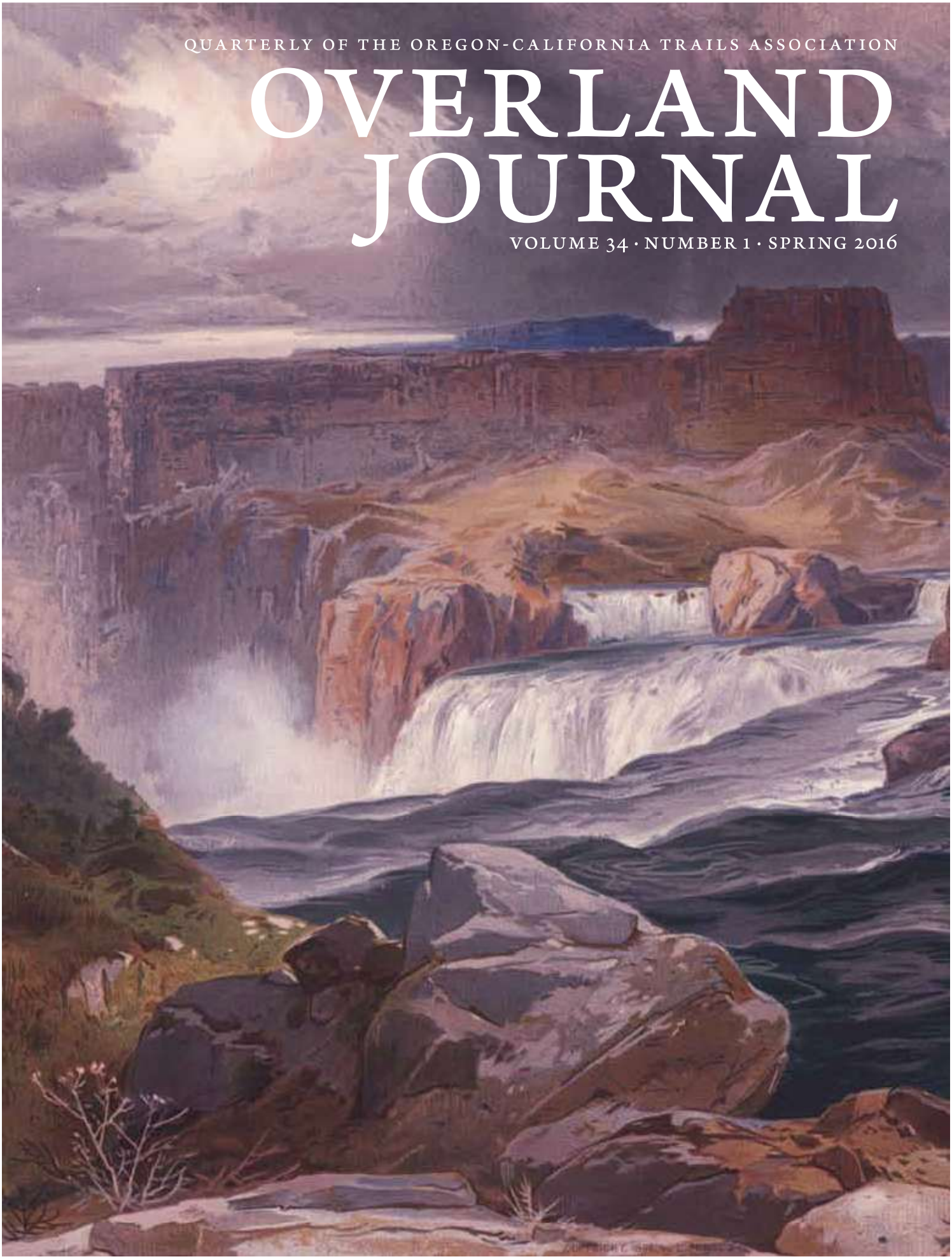


On arriving at Snake river
they commenced at once
to build a fort.

QUARTERLY OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

OVERLAND JOURNAL

VOLUME 34 · NUMBER 1 · SPRING 2016



SPRING 2016 CONTENTS

VOLUME 34 · NUMBER 1

2 BEHNE
BY JOHN BRIGGS

5 CONTRIBUTORS

6 BUILDING FORT HALL
A Story Told by Many People
BY JERRY EICHHORST

20 SUGGESTED CONVENTION READING
BY JERRY EICHHORST

22 SPEECH AT OLD FORT HALL, IDAHO
BY EZRA MEEKER

25 DIARIES ACROSS IDAHO
Curiosities on the Oregon Trail in Southeast Idaho
BY JERRY EICHHORST

37 REVIEWS FROM THE TRAIL
Confessions of a Revisionist Historian: David L. Bigler on the Mormons and the West · *A Way across the Mountains: Joseph Walker's 1833 Trans-Sierra Passage and the Myth of Yosemite's Discovery* · *John A. "Snowshoe" Thompson, Pioneer Mail Carrier of the Sierra*

41 LOOKING WEST
Mapping and Trail Inventory Projects
BY DAVID J. WELCH

44 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ON THE COVER
Thomas Moran (1837–1926), *Great Falls of Snake River, Idaho Territory, 1876* (detail), chromolithograph on paper, 8⅜ × 12½ in. L. Prang & Co, and Thomas Moran. RETRIEVED FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, HTTPS://WWW.LOC.GOV/ITEM/95502111. (ACCESSED MARCH 14, 2016.) PUBLIC DOMAIN.

The indefatigable Ezra Meeker appeared before the House of Representatives Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures in April 1926, urging the government to issue coins to raise money to install monuments along the Oregon Trail. (The effort was very successful.) Meeker is shown here on April 3, 1926, with (LEFT) Representative Addison T. Smith of Idaho and (RIGHT) Dr. David G. Wylie of New York, Secretary of the Oregon Trail Association. NATIONAL PHOTO COMPANY COLLECTION (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS), LC-DIG-NPCC-15576. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

Speech at Old Fort Hall, Idaho

by Ezra Meeker

July 27, 1921

Introduction · Wednesday, July 27, 1921, marked the eighty-seventh anniversary of Methodist missionary Jason Lee conducting the first public worship service on the Overland Trail delivered by an American. To commemorate that occasion, Ezra Manning Meeker, standing beside waters flowing into the Pacific, spoke at the old Fort Hall site. In his speech, Meeker praised Jason Lee, and claimed Fort Hall as the most significant historical site along the Oregon Trail.

Meeker's original handwritten notecards of this speech are held by the Idaho State Archives in Boise.[1] The last card is signed by Meeker. Selected excerpts of his speech follow.

Jerry Eichhorst

1 Meeker, Ezra Manning, "Speech at Old Fort Hall," August 27, 1921, MSS 2, Folder 0197, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, Idaho. Ezra Meeker (1830–1928), an Oregon Trail pioneer, was a founder of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association (OTMA), organized in 1926. OTMA is considered the "spiritual predecessor" of the Oregon-California Trails Association. In 2015 Meeker was named the first honoree in OCTA's Emigrant Trails Hall of Fame. See Dennis Larsen, "The Emigrant Trails Hall of Fame: Ezra Manning Meeker," *Overland Journal* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2015–16): 166–67.

In the lapse of years as like with the greater part of the Oregon Trail the landmarks pointing to the site of Ft Hall had disappeared, while others were forgotten and passed out of memory as the pioneers one by one passed on to their reward. So, when I drove with my ox team into Pocatello in May of 1906, on my way over the Oregon Trail searching for suitable spots upon which to erect monuments. I naturally first queried to ascertain the site of Fort Hall, which I then and do now consider the most important historic point on the great trail. . . .

I made a third trip over the Oregon trail in 1916, this time in an automobile and on August 29 under the auspices and guidance of Dr. W. [William] Howard and Dr. Minnie Howard with the interpreter Joe Rainey as guide we unmistakably found the exact spot where the old fort had once reared its formidable wall; Rainey had taken us straight to the old site; we need not rely on his recollection. Excavations made at once developed numerous relics of the old fort, which has since been supplemented by further exploration resulting in a treasured collection in the possession of Mrs. Dr. Minnie Howard of Pocatello.

A people that fails to record its history falls short of fulfilling a destiny of highest civilization.

The most contributing and convincing relics consisting of broken English decorated china, deeply rusted scrap iron; an old clay pipe stem, a broken hinge, an ox shoe, a broken stone grate, a broken beef bone, a quantity of lime all two feet or more under accumulated debris. The site of the old blacksmith shop with its tell tale story of clinkers within the walls is there. A temporary wooden post was set which subsequently has been replaced by a stone marker and so, you my friends, need have no doubts but this assemblage is on the memorable spot, where we have met to commemorate the memory of the great event, the preaching of the first sermon west of the Rocky Mountains by Jason Lee. . . .

A people that fails to record its history falls short of fulfilling a destiny of highest civilization. I am led to express these thoughts upon realizing that eighty seven years has passed since the enactment of this great historic event and as yet no tangible plan adopted to secure a recognition of the characters participating in this drama of life indelibly writ by heroism, suffering and death. . . .

Fort Hall was an integral part of the Oregon Trail, the greatest trail of history, that has contributed largely to the development of the nation by safeguarding its Pacific possession and that is destined to play a greater role in the future of preparedness for defense. It is destined to become the great thoroughfare from river to river from the great Missouri to the greater Columbia, from the Mississippi valley to the Pacific Ocean.

I do not expect to live to see it, but there are people within the sound of my voice that will, when the whole will be paved, when the passage of the trackless car will compete with the railroads both for passengers and freight. But time forbids pursuing this interesting subject further.