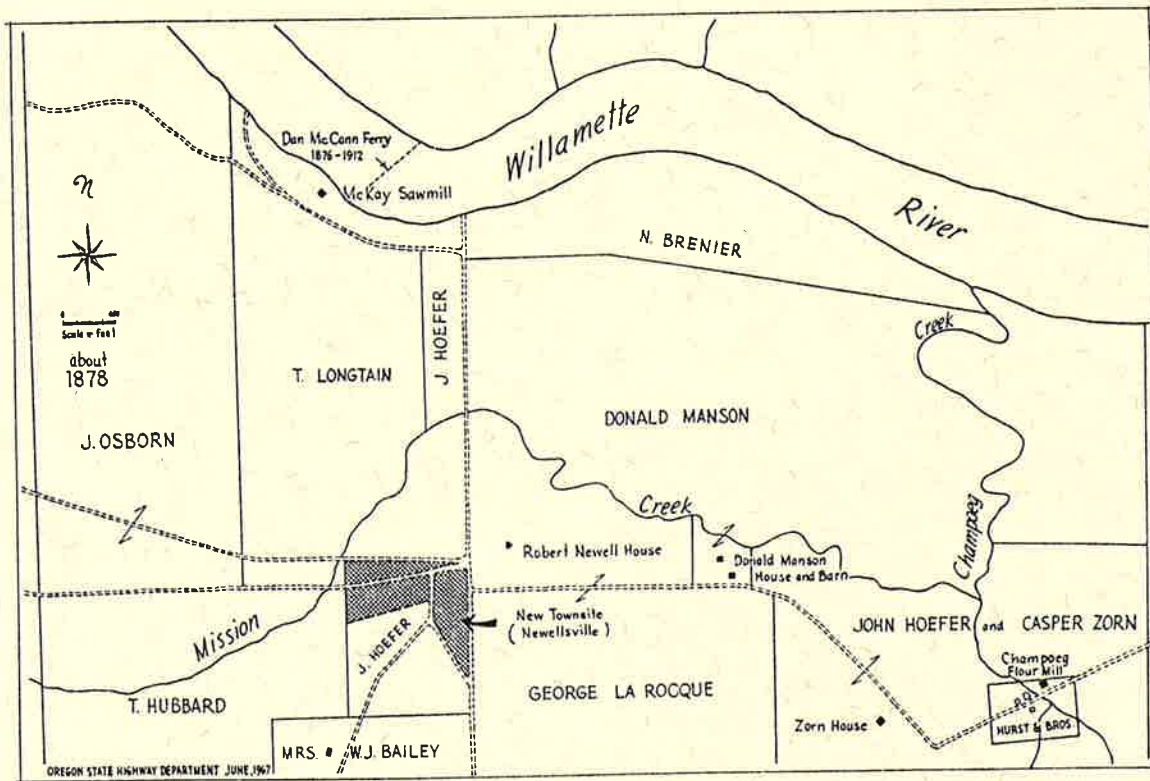


HISTORIC RESOURCES EVALUATION OF A PORTION OF THE OLD CHAMPOEG-SALEM ROAD, MARION COUNTY, OREGON

Jill A. Chappel



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By

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Submitted to

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ABSTRACT

During April 1992, a reconnaissance survey and site evaluation of historical resources was undertaken in the proposed area of a Marion County road-widening project adjacent to Champoeg State Park. The intent of the field visit was to initially determine the physical integrity and historical significance of landscape, architectural, and archaeological resources and to determine the potential effects on those resources. A literature search was conducted prior to the fieldwork phase to identify broad historical themes and patterns of development that ensued after Euro-American settlement commenced. An understanding of the historic context of the project area is fundamental to identifying resources and assessing their significance.

The road corridor landscape, four buildings, and one site were identified as possessing certain levels of historical significance or architectural integrity. The resources were inventoried and analyzed according to the criteria established by the National Register of Historic Places, and a determination of significance was formed. No prehistoric resources were observed in the project area.

Although some resources in the project area were found to be historically significant, none of the resources will be directly impacted by the proposed road-widening construction. One area exhibiting possible historical archaeological potential was identified, but an adverse effect on that resource is not anticipated. A monitoring strategy is suggested during the construction phase of the project to ensure that significant archaeological resources are not destroyed during roadwork excavations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The historical resources fieldwork at the Marion County road widening project area reported in this document was carried out under the terms of an agreement between Century West Engineering Corporation of Portland, Oregon and Heritage Research Associates, Inc. (HRA) of Eugene. Ron Weigel, P.E., was the project manager for Century West and provided HRA with the detailed maps and other project information necessary to complete the work task effectively. Kathryn Anne Toepel was responsible for project administration for HRA, while Jill A. Chappel was the project investigator in charge of fieldwork and reporting. Rick Minor, Senior Archaeologist for HRA, assessed the archaeological potential of the project area.

Fieldwork was conducted on April 18 and June 26, 1992 by Jill A. Chappel, and on May 19, 1992 by Rick Minor and Jill A. Chappel. Henry Kunowski, Compliance Officer, and Elisabeth Potter, National Register Coordinator, both with the State Historic Preservation Office, were consulted concerning significance questions about the surveyed landscape and buildings within the road corridor.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The project area is located adjacent to Champoeg State Park along Champoeg Road (the old Champoeg-Salem Road) from its intersection with French Prairie Road to the south to its meeting with Vergens Corner Road to the north (T.4S., R.2W., NW¼ of the SE¼ of Section 2, Willamette Meridian). The proposed project involves minimal excavation and the construction of embankment retaining walls affecting an approximate 500-foot-long corridor of existing roadway (Figure 1). The present 26-foot-wide roadway is scheduled to be widened one and one-half feet to the west and three to four feet to the east. Two four-foot-high concrete retaining walls will be constructed on either side of the road. All work will be executed within the existing Marion County road right-of-way, and no taking of private property will occur.

The road traverses a slope from the bottomlands of Mission Creek to a broad, open terrace above the Willamette River floodplain. The project area is bounded on the north by Champoeg State Park, on the east by the Robert Newell House Museum property, on the south by the intersection of Champoeg and French Prairie roads, and on the west by the Norman Jette property. Mature cottonwoods, locusts, and redwoods interspersed with younger maples line the west side of the road. Younger cottonwoods and maples form the eastern project boundary.

Prior to fieldwork, an investigation was conducted to collect information on previously recorded historic sites and buildings in the immediate vicinity of the proposed road-widening project. Both the Statewide Inventory of Historic Sites and Buildings (SHPO 1976) and the Marion County LCDC Goal 5 cultural resources inventory (Marion County 1990) were consulted for previously recorded historic resources. According to these sources, no historic sites, buildings, or landscape elements have been recorded in the project area to date. The Marion County inventory is largely based on architectural resources, and though both the Jette and Newell museum properties were encountered during the county inventory fieldwork, the buildings either were thought to be too altered or were found not to be eligible under the National Register of Historic Places significance criteria (see Section 4 for an explanation of these criteria).

Some archaeological work was executed outside of the project boundary at the Champoeg townsite between 1971 and 1975 (Atherton 1973, 1974), and other research investigations encompassing the surrounding areas have taken place periodically since the early 1980s (OSU 1992; Speulda-Nichols 1986). According to Dr. David Brauner, an Oregon State University historical archaeologist who is currently researching the Champoeg and French Prairie areas, a portion of the

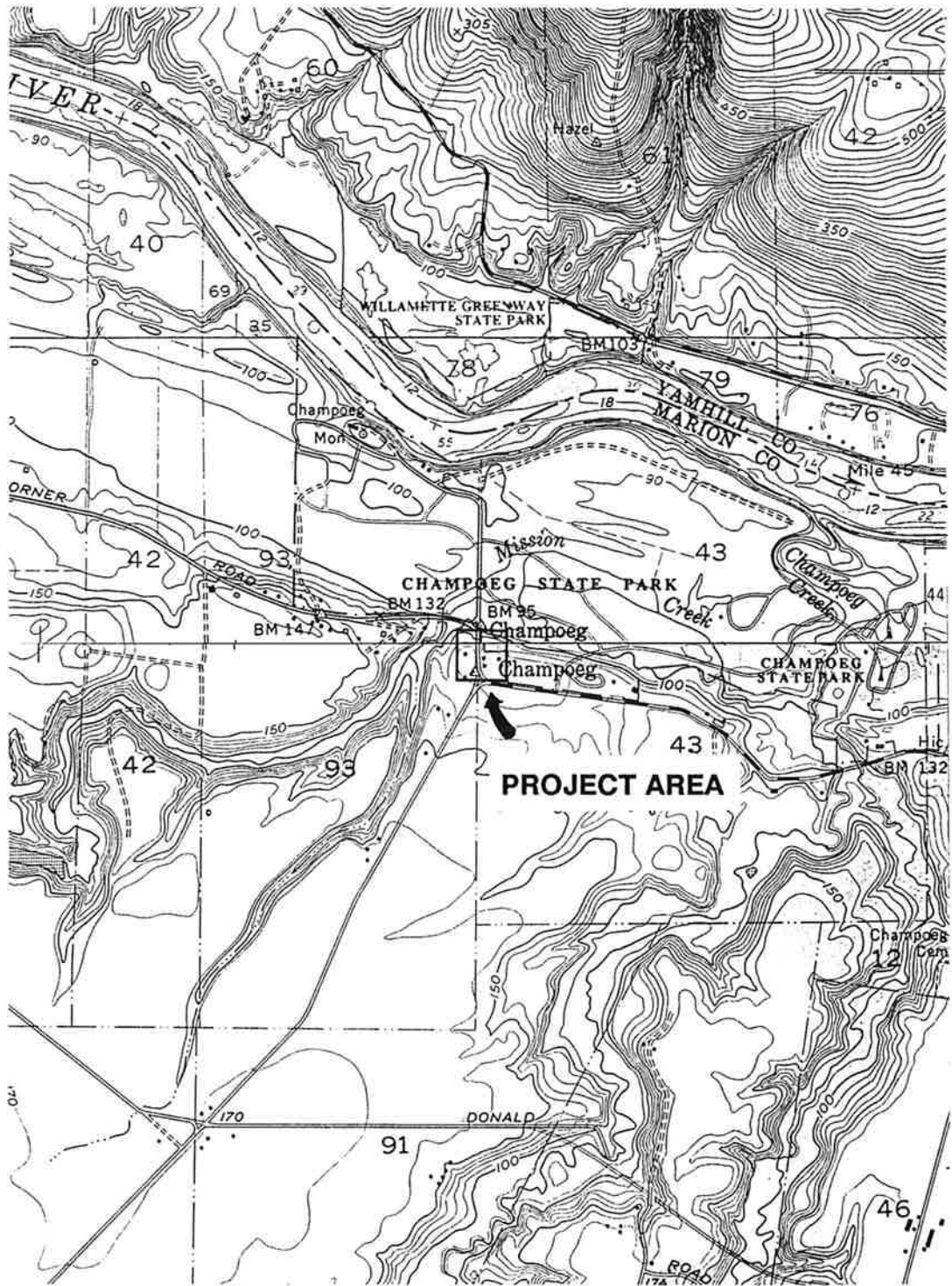
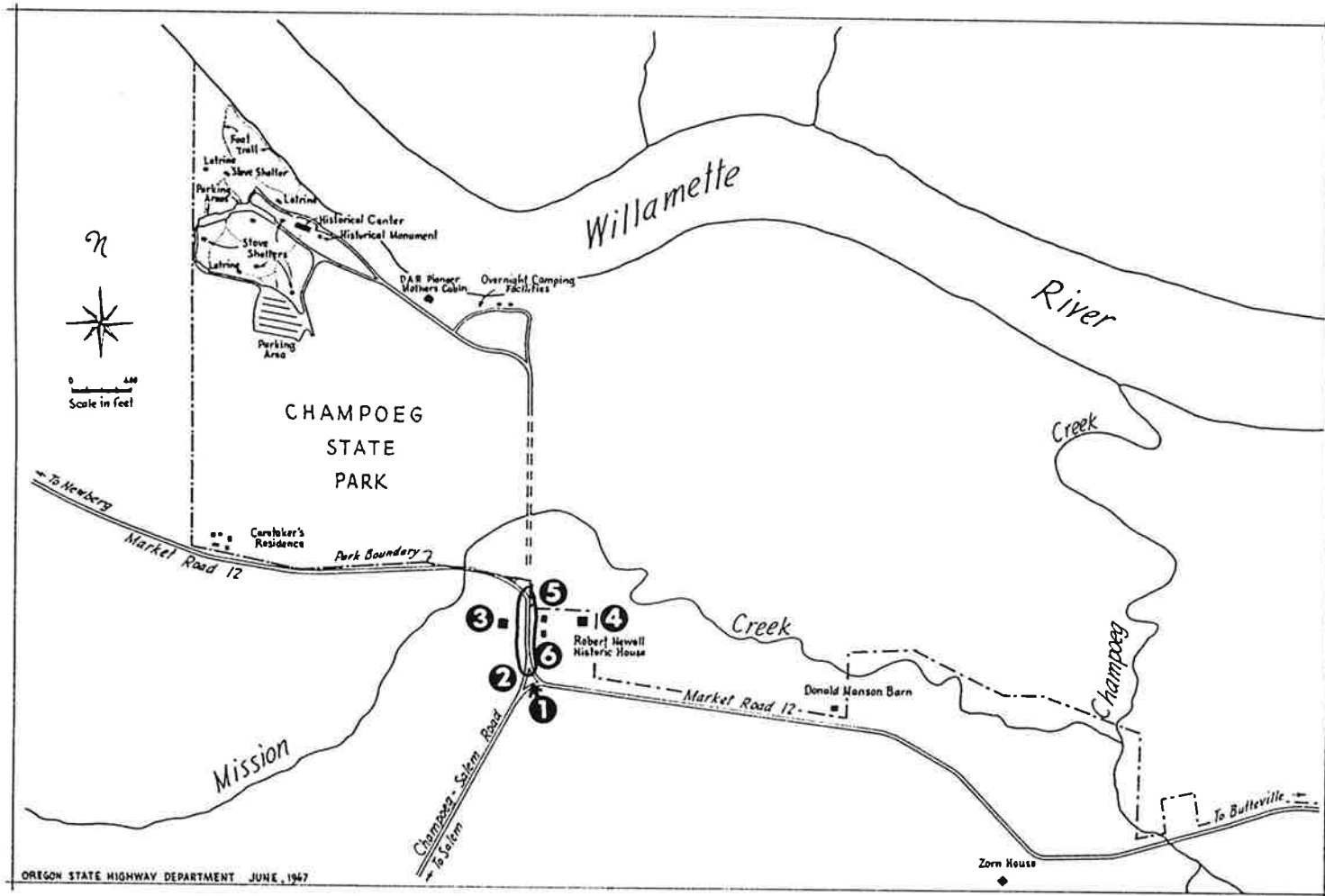


Figure 1. Location of the project area in Marion County (USGS 7.5 minute St. Paul, Oregon and Newburg, Oregon quadrangles).

Newellsville townsite is included in the proposed road-widening corridor (OSU 1992). The Newellsville settlement was an attempt by former residents of Champoeg to reconstruct the town's commercial district after it was obliterated by Willamette River flood waters in 1861. Maps and photographs reproduced in J.A. Hussey's 1967 work, *Champoeg: Place of Transition*, confirm that the north edge of Newellsville once overlapped with the project area.

After the initial inquiry was made to determine the project area's potential for historical resources, a reconnaissance survey was conducted. All properties over 50 years old or that appeared to possibly meet the National Register significance criteria were inventoried. Oregon Historic Resource Survey forms were completed for the properties, site plans were sketched, and black and white photographs were taken. Whenever possible, in-field interviews with landowners were performed, or telephone interviews were conducted at a later date with non-local informants. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was kept abreast of the survey results and was consulted concerning questions of significance for individual properties. A discussion of possible mitigative measures pertaining to certain historic properties also transpired during the SHPO-consultant coordination effort.

No prehistoric resources were observed, but four individual historic areas, consisting of six resources, were identified during the course of the cultural resources investigation of the project area (Figure 2). These include the Old Champoeg-Salem Road corridor, the Norman Jette property, the Newellsville townsite, and the Robert Newell House Museum property. The physical integrity of the resources identified in each area varies from good to poor, and overall, the historical significance of the surveyed resources is high. The following report conveys a brief historical overview of the area, introduces the resources in the defined historic areas, and discusses the methodology and field techniques used to determine the significance of historic sites, buildings, and landscapes existing within and directly adjacent to the project corridor. An explanation of the significance of the surveyed properties follows, and the report concludes with recommendations.



OREGON STATE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT JUNE, 1947

KEY

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1 | Old Champeog-Salem Road Corridor | 4 | Robert Newell House |
| 2 | Newellville Townsite | 5 | Butteville Schoolhouse |
| 3 | Adolph Jette House | 6 | Butteville Jail |

Figure 2. Location of inventoried historic resources within project area (adapted from Honey 1967:222).

2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHAMPOEG AND VICINITY

The Willamette Valley was not seen by Euro-Americans until the winter of 1811-12. At this time, the territory now known as Oregon was under British and American joint occupancy. British interests in the fur business resulted in the establishment and of fur-trading posts and colonization along the Columbia River and an intensive exploration campaign to seek out available resources in new areas. An exploration party was sent from Fort Astoria to determine the hunting, trapping, and trade potential along the Willamette River (Franchere 1967:63). Other parties continued the exploration efforts the following year, and eventually a trading post was established near present-day Salem and, soon after, another along the Willamette three miles upriver from the Champoeg site.

Willamette Post, as it was designated, continued to serve as a trade center for various trapping parties traversing the Willamette Valley until 1824 (Kaiser 1956:27). The location, however, was a favored resting point for those invested in the fur business even after the post ceased to operate. The geography of the 150-square-mile area included abundant, timber-free meadowlands perfect for pasturing. The French-Canadians, who constituted the majority of the fur trapping populace, knew the region as *Campment du Sable* or *Champooitch*, the former after "sandy camp," the latter describing the wild camas that dominated the meadows (Hussey 1967:18).

The landscape was so enticing that many trappers gave up their transient profession, took in women from the native Kalapuyan population, and settled down to farm. Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company (which during the 1820s held the monopoly in the fur-trading business), recognized Champoeg as an ideal settlement site:

Champoeg . . . was the only region along the Willamette River and down the Columbia to the Pacific Ocean where any considerable expanse of open prairie bordered on navigable water. It was one of the few places where a wagon could be driven to the stream without going through a forest. This had influenced Doctor McLoughlin in recommending it as a place of residence for servants of his company whose terms had expired and who did not desire to return to Canada, and these earliest settlers had formed here the nucleus of a farming community (Carey 1922:378).

The Company was authorized to send their retired employees back to their original homes, but most of the French-Canadians had wed Indian women and were content to settle in the Willamette Valley, and most particularly, in the Champoeg-French Prairie area. Thus, by the early 1830s, Champoeg was beginning to take on the appearance of a stable, agricultural community. A Methodist mission was organized

appearance of a stable, agricultural community. A Methodist mission was organized a few miles downstream on the Willamette, just south of Champoeg and attracted some settlers to its vicinity. The establishment of a grist mill at the confluence of Champoeg and Mission creeks in 1834-35 marked the birth of the commercial, political, and social center of Champoeg.

The Great Migration of 1843 brought nearly 1,000 people over the Oregon Trail, a number that increased on a yearly basis. The final destination for the majority of these newcomers was the Willamette Valley, and the Champoeg-French Prairie area, one of the more "civilized" regions because of its proven community, was targeted for settlement (Speulda-Nichols 1986:29). Yet along with settlers came a barrage of quandaries that primarily stemmed from lack of property rights:

The influx of pioneers had a profound effect on Oregon. Suddenly the problems inherent to a populated area were present in the Willamette Valley. Property rights became a major issue, but there was no formal way to resolve land claims. The economy was based on a barter system which was not efficient for a rapidly expanding population. There was no legal or justice system in operation besides the omnipresent Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries. And, of increasing importance, there was no established way to defend the communities from possible Native hostilities. . . . Before the arrival of such large numbers of Americans the population had been fairly evenly distributed between French-Canadian and American, Catholic and Protestant. Problems such as operating a still or marauding wolves were handled through community meetings. These meetings often had a political undercurrent, but attempts to form a government always ended in factional fights between and within the various groups (Speulda-Nichols 1986:30).

Though the community at Champoeg petitioned the U.S. Senate to draft and implement a protective statute, the federal government did not view the population and economic status of the settlement worthy of their involvement, since any actions on their part would have complicated the previous established joint-occupancy treaty between the U.S. and England. Since the voice of the Champoeg settlement remained unheard and the problems still remained, a committee of citizens was formed in 1843 to formally discuss and organize a provisional government. Early Champoeg settlers Robert Newell, Francis Matthieu, Joe Meek, and William Gray were among the members of this committee to establish the law that would administer the Champoeg community. The Organic Act of 1843 provided the constitution on which the newly instituted government was based.

The first half of the 1840s was a period of development for Champoeg, not only in politics and government but in commerce and industry as well. The Hudson's Bay Company constructed a receiving station which included a warehouse at the Willamette boat landing. Other warehouses, granaries, and other facilities related to agricultural products shipping were erected in the "town" (Hussey 1967:198). Champoeg landing became busy with passenger service and freighting to Oregon City.

In addition, ferry service was fully underway by 1844 and, during that same year, plans for a road from Champoeg to Salem were beginning to form (Kaiser 1956:33).

Growth at Champoeg slowed temporarily throughout the California gold rush years due to a population decrease in the community. The advent of steamboats in the early 1850s, however, considerably boosted the settlement's economy and was the principal mode of transportation in the upper Willamette Valley prior to railroad development. The year 1850 brought road surveyors to the burg, and a direct north-south route to Salem was laid out that ran along the west edge of Robert Newell's property to the edge of the Willamette River. By 1852, a stage line was developed between Champoeg and Salem. Robert Newell erected a flour mill in 1855 to the southeast of the town. Powered by Champoeg Creek, the mill was a commercial success, and by 1857, a road was constructed between the mill and the town. The road was reconstructed ten years later, and began serving as the principal route between Champoeg and Butteville to the east (Hussey 1967:220).

Even though Champoeg thrived as a transportation center and shipping point, the town of 180 people had only about 26 houses in 1860, and its commercial landscape included saloons, a hotel, blacksmith shop, harness shop, and sawmill, among other businesses (Kaiser 1956:33; Hussey 1967:215). It was considered by government surveyors who passed through the community in the preceding five years as no more than a frontier settlement with a handful of clustered buildings, several of which were constructed of logs.

The largest flood in Champoeg's history was one instrumental factor that contributed to the town's commercial and social ruin. In November of 1861, the Willamette River reached unheard of flood levels, reaching a depth of 7 to 30 feet over the bottomlands of Champoeg. All evidence of an established settlement at the Champoeg site, except for the completely wrecked Hudson's Bay Company warehouse, was erased by the tragedy, and visions to rebuild the town were daunted:

The flood brought financial disaster to almost every resident of the town. Describing conditions as they were about two years after the catastrophe, one visitor found that the people in the neighborhood, "having lost their all," still "had not money enough amongst them" to purchase the Company warehouse, even in its ruinous state.

Another hard blow given by the flood to Champoeg was caused by the fact that its great rival, Butteville, built on slightly higher ground, was not completely washed away. The residents of Champoeg had no heart to rebuild their town, and at least some of them appear to have focused their hopes on Butteville as the next market and shipping center for the community. Land values at Champoeg plummeted. Lots, said at one time to have sold for as much as \$500 each, fell in value by 1865 to less than \$50 for an acre of them; and even at that there appear to have been few, if any, sales of town lots for building purposes after 1861 (Hussey 1967:231).

The townsite was not altogether abandoned in the post-flood years. Champoeg landing remained a vital shipping point for flour and grain. Buildings, including several warehouses and a sawmill, were erected at the site, yet development along the river was limited to transportation- and industry-related structures. Homes and businesses were reconstructed on higher ground one-half mile south of the former townsite. Between 1861 and 1880, a small grouping of residences and commercial buildings was constructed linearly along the Champoeg-Salem Road adjacent to the west edge of Robert Newell's land (Hussey 1967:232). Because of this association, the hamlet was coined "Newellsville," and the former Champoeg Post Office assumed the same name. The town of Champoeg, in a sense, was reincarnated.

Breakthroughs in transit development during the 1870s proved to be another blow to the potential prosperity and urban advancement of this new Champoeg. Completion of a rail line from Portland to Eugene in 1870 presented a grim future for steamboating. Shipping activities at Champoeg landing became less active in the 1870s and 1880s. The speed and convenience of the railroad easily superceded river transportation. This changeover in transportation methods would not have been so destructive to the community had it not been for the railroad bypassing the Champoeg-French Prairie area. The settlement at Newellsville, as well as the shipping activities on the riverfront, waned as a result.

Another flood in 1890 marked the final demise of Champoeg landing and Newellsville. Isolation from market transit routes proved devastating, and the commercial aspect of the community disappeared entirely by the 1930s. The old Champoeg townsite was acquired by the State of Oregon and designated a state park in 1943. Newellsville, its commercial buildings vacant and neglected, survived as a "ghost town" for many years. Eventually the buildings vanished one by one until October of 1962 when yet another force of nature, a violent wind storm, collapsed the last remaining structure.

3. SURVEYED HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Six historical resources were identified during the course of the reconnaissance survey. Below is a description of each resource and its physical integrity at the time of the survey. Historical significance is based, in part, on the condition of a property, its uniqueness or rarity, and its association with notable individuals and/or events important to the history of the area.

Old Champoeg-Salem Road Corridor

The present 26-foot-wide, paved roadway runs north-south within the limits of the project area. Cutbanks on both sides of the road rise approximately 10 to 16



Figure 3. Old Champoeg-Salem Road Corridor, looking north.

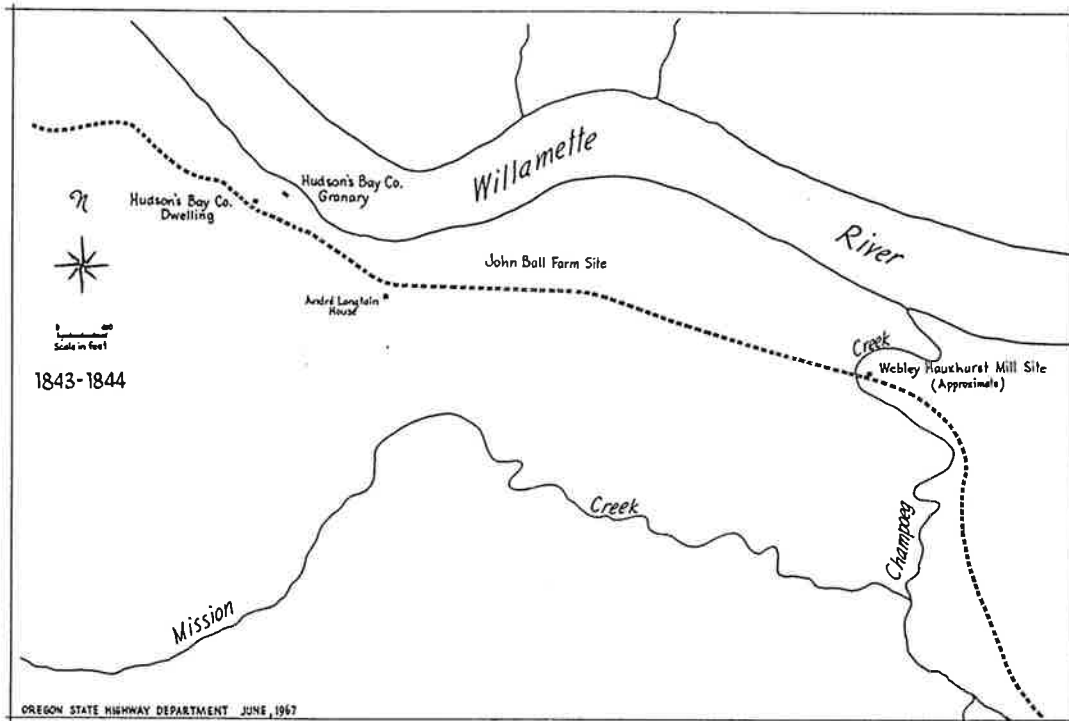


Figure 4. Map of Champoeg area, 1840s, showing earliest settlement (from Hussey 1967:222).

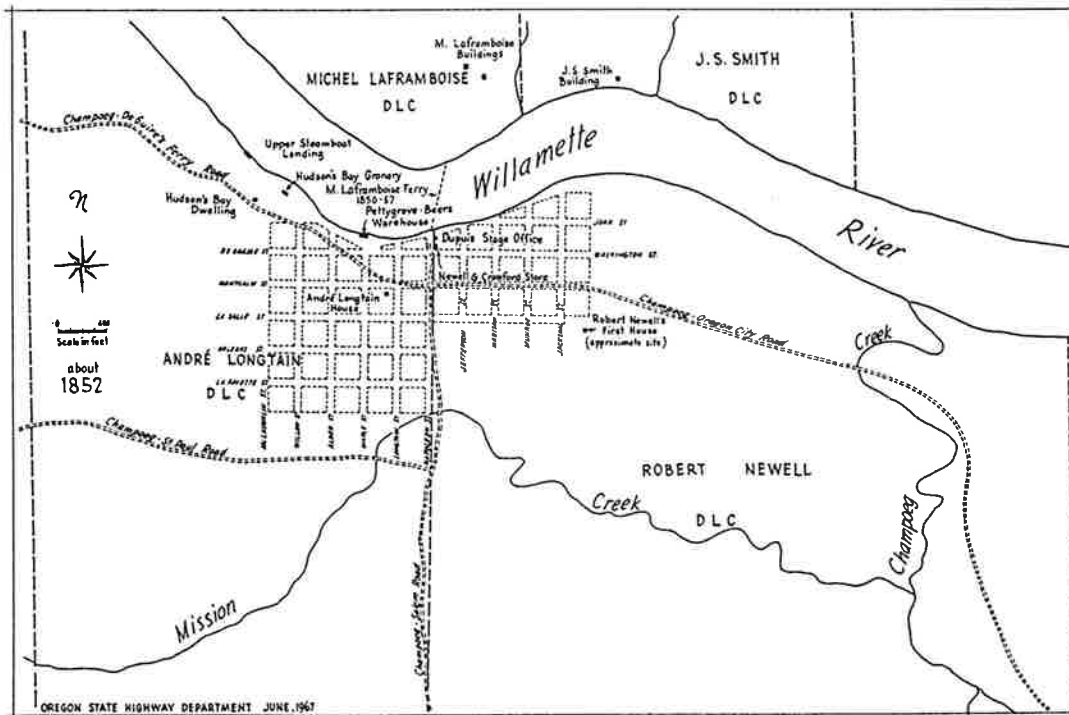


Figure 5. Map of Champoeg area, c. 1852, showing the townsite plat and the Champoeg-Salem Road (from Hussey 1967:222).