



Dr. McLOUGHLIN'S HOUSE

by Alice Greve, Portland

Photos by Boychuk

THE old wooden house that "The Father of Oregon" built, and where he lived and died, still stands in Oregon City, and has recently been declared a National Historic Site. With its white clapboarded exterior, and its sunny rooms furnished with period pieces—many of them from Fort Vancouver—it charmingly recaptures the atmosphere of early days in Oregon, when the Hudson's Bay Company was a power in the land.

Chief Factor Dr. John McLoughlin, it will be remembered, severed his long and honourable connections with the Company in the fall of 1845, and decided to make his home in the little town of Oregon City. He had taken up land at the falls of the Willamette and, in 1846 when his house was finished, he went there to live.

The house was a lovely white colonial among the oaks, overlooking the falls. The lumber used in its construction was cut at nearby mills, but doors, sashes,

and mantels had to be sent from the east around the Horn. The doctor took great care in the building of this house. His strenuous life work was over, and this was a simple joy.

Life in the beautiful home to which the McLoughlins came can easily be imagined. How luxurious it must have seemed after the austerity of Fort Vancouver! Their son David was living at home and their widowed daughter, Eloise Rae, with her two small children. Mrs. McLoughlin, although now elderly, was always the gracious hostess.

Dr. McLoughlin died in the house in September 1859, and his wife followed a few years later. After a time the property went from the family and despoilment started its deadly work.

In 1909 there was a news item in the Oregon City paper saying that the property on which the house stood had been purchased by the Hawley Pulp and Paper Company, and that the old house would have

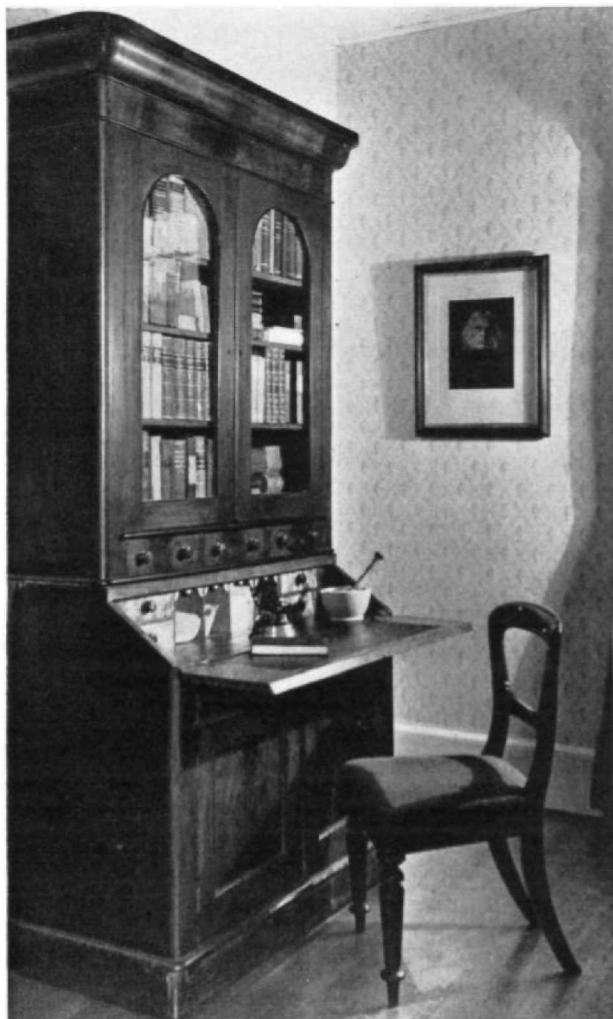
to be torn down. A meeting was held by those interested on May 8, 1909, and the minutes say six men attended. This first meeting organized the "McLoughlin Memorial Association," with E. G. Canfield as president and Edward E. Brodie as secretary. Plans were made for raising money, and at the meeting on May 23, it was reported that \$700 had been pledged, including \$48 cleared at the "Bachelor Girls" dance, and \$45 sent by the "Catholic Sentinel."

The house had to be removed from the river front at once, so plans were made to haul it up the hill to a spot that had been part of Dr. McLoughlin's land claim. To get the big, two-story house up the narrow road to the ledge overlooking the city was indeed an undertaking. The kitchen was in such poor condition that it was decided to leave it. But an attempt was made to take the rest intact.

The day came for the big move. Men, teams and machinery sweated and groaned. At last the house swung free of the foundation and moved slowly off. Hundreds of people lined Main Street to watch.

The cavalcade had proceeded but a few blocks, when an injunction was served on the officers of the association to prevent the moving of the house through the town. The machinery creaked and groaned to a standstill as near the curb as possible, and waited the court's decision. It took three days and the association won. Once more the old house was on the move, across the railroad track and up the hill. Real trouble was

A secretary from Fort Vancouver stands in the library.



The entrance hall. On the right is a Chilkat blanket.

encountered then, for the dirt road was narrow and steep. At one place the dirt began to slide, and for one terrible hour it was thought that house, machinery, and the road itself would fall back to the foot of the hill. Another injunction was served, but the situation was too perilous to remain in the *status quo*, so the house had to move on.

The upper level was at last reached, and the house was sitting crosswise of the street when the last injunction was served. This had to do with neighbours, whose view of distant hills was obstructed. An amicable settlement was reached by placing the house on another part of the site.

For over a year no minutes of the association were kept, but there was work being done. A caretaker had been hired, with the use of the upper floor as his wage. A small appropriation had been made by the state for up-keep. The house became the repository for a miscellaneous collection of early Oregoniana.

Many years went by, and it was not until 1933 that Mrs. John Y. Richardson, the State Regent for the Daughters of the American Revolution, began to get sponsors who pledged their support to furnish the house appropriately. A discriminating committee was chosen for the final decision on the bequests and purchases. Their plan was to use the original pieces that had been in the house or at Fort Vancouver, whenever possible. Most of this furniture had been lost, but the sponsors did not spare time or money when an authentic piece was located. When that could not be done, furniture of the period, and as near as possible to what the McLoughlins had in the house, was used.

The furnishing of the large living room was sponsored by the State chapter of the D.A.R. It has a flowered velvet carpet from France, over one hundred years old. This was purchased originally from the old A. T. Stewart store in New York and is similar to what Dr. McLoughlin had. The lovely "J. Pirsson" rosewood square piano came from the old Rose farm, where Dr. McLoughlin was often a guest. We can imagine the gatherings around it, for the singing of



This desk came from the H B C store in Oregon City.

Scottish ballads or old Irish airs. The square desk belonged to Dr. McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver, and the dirk and pistol upon it belonged to Sir George Simpson. In the room also is a small chest that Dr. McLoughlin gave to his great granddaughter, Margaret Wygant. On the wall is an interesting painting called "Columbia River on the Willameta" by H. Sanford, a member of an early Boston expedition.

There are two small bedrooms off the living room—too small, surely, for the great bed that legend tells us belonged to Dr. McLoughlin. It is thought almost certain that the partition was added at a later date.

Eloise Rae, the doctor's widowed daughter, probably used this bedroom.



One of these bedrooms contains a washbowl with the Hudson's Bay coat-of-arms upon it. This was at Fort Vancouver. The other bedroom is most interesting because of the strong box that belonged to the doctor when he was at the Fort. In this room, too, is an old binnacle stand said to have come from a clipper ship. The small bed in the room was made by the men at the Fort. The candlesticks were in the house at Oregon City.

It was almost by accident that the beautiful mahogany dining table and chairs that had been used at Fort Vancouver came back to Oregon. After the British-American boundary was settled at the 49th parallel, Fort Vancouver was dismantled. Dr. William Fraser Tolmie bought many of the pieces of furniture from the Fort and took them with him to Fort Nisqually, where they remained until he resigned as chief factor, and moved them to his new home near Victoria. He had often dined with Dr. McLoughlin and remembered well the long, impressive table. After the death of Dr. Tolmie the family heirlooms were divided, the table and chairs going to his daughters. It was from them that Dr. Burt Brown Barker, vice-president of the University of Oregon, purchased the pieces for the McLoughlin House. In this room is a fine old wine cabinet, with the far-away odour of wine still about it. There is a rare pair of old whale-oil lamps from the Percival estate, and a beautiful Irish Waterford flagon and two goblets once owned by Sir James Douglas. The fire-tongs belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company and the tailor's iron (now used as a door stop) was the first at Fort Vancouver. The dishes in the cabinet were the gift of Miss Lelia



At this table, Dr. McLoughlin entertained distinguished guests at Fort Vancouver.

McKay, daughter of Dr. William McKay and a great granddaughter of Mrs. McLoughlin. These had been gifts from the doctor and his wife.

There are two small rooms off the dining room. Dr. McLoughlin used one as his study, and it now contains the bookcase from the Columbia Library, the first library association in this part of the country. A number of the medical books belonged to Dr. Tolmie, and were among the first of their kind in the Pacific Northwest.

The four spacious bedrooms upstairs are quite completely furnished. In one room is a large round table of apple wood that originally came from a clipper ship, but was part of the furnishings of the house while the McLoughlins lived there. On it is a very old, large Bible. In one corner is a walnut what-not that was lent by "descendants of old voyageurs" of the Hudson's Bay Company. The andirons and a few pewter tankards are from the Company. The Toile-de-Jouy draperies are one hundred and eighty years old. There is a small rosewood chair that belonged to Governor Gaines and was given by him to Governor Geer, both of Oregon. Perhaps of greatest personal interest is a couch that belonged to Dr. McLoughlin and was often used by him for "forty winks." It was in the upstairs hall in the old days and there Father Blanchet was often found napping.

In the bedroom across the hall is a chest of drawers and a mirror that is lovely. There is the ever-present cradle and trundle bed. On the washstand, that had

belonged to Dr. Forbes Barclay, hang linen towels from the Hudson's Bay store. An old Currier and Ives print, "American Homestead in Winter" hangs on the wall.

Another bedroom has a corner fireplace, as that was the only means of heating the house in its early days. This room has just received a fine gift from a great granddaughter of the family. It is a huge wardrobe of rosewood, in a fine state of preservation. It is lined with birds-eye maple, and is of the finest craftsmanship. There is a Sheraton washstand in this room of which Sheraton himself said, "It can stand in a genteel room without giving offense to the eye, the appearance being somewhat like a cabinet."

Across the hall is the room thought to be the one used by the McLoughlin's daughter, Eloise. Here is the huge four-poster bed that belonged to Merriwether Lewis' mother. A fine pair of old Bohemian lustres are on the mantel, and a musk-ox skin is on the floor. Skins were often used as rugs in the early days for they were always to be had.

In the upper hall is a cabinet containing the complete Highland uniform of the Fraser clan. It was worn by John Rae, the son of Eloise, when he returned from school in Scotland. There are many pretty little trinkets that belonged to Eloise, and several pictures of her children.

So the old house has at last come into its own and will be preserved for all time as a monument to this great and generous pioneer of the Pacific Northwest.