Jason Lee Wins the West for Methodism

LOWELL B. SWAN

THIS paper will consider the beginnings of the Oregon Mission and the story of Jason Lee's connection with it. Lee was the dominant figure at the outset, and he was so colorful that the beginnings reflect him, his life, and his dedication almost to the exclusion of other matters. The Flathead Indian deputation to St. Louis in 1831 was the real spark which set off the missionary effort of the Methodists for the Indians of the Northwest. Lee accepted the call to head the mission to the Flatheads in 1833; he died twelve years later. This study therefore will cover the period from 1831 to 1845.

Since the story of Jason Lee has filled several volumes, it is not possible to cover it thoroughly in the time allotted for this paper. It is hoped, however, that enough detail can be given to bring out the color and the excitement of this man and his significant historical venture.

Jason Lee, the youngest in a family of fifteen children, was born June 28, 1803, at Stanstead, Quebec. His ancestors came from England in 1634 and settled in Connecticut. Jason's father served in the Revolutionary War, but soon afterward he married and moved to Canada. The older Lee died in 1806, and Jason then went to live with an older brother, Elias, who at the time was 25 years of age. Jason grew up with his nephew Daniel Lee, who was only three years his junior. Later Daniel Lee was to be Jason's associate in mission work in Oregon.

The War of 1812 which broke out while Jason was still a boy, proved to be a trial for the Lee family. Though living in Canada, the Lee's considered themselves Americans and they favored the United States in the war.

Jason was educated in the village school at Stanstead. By the time he was 13 he was on his own in the world and was self-supporting. Writing of his early years, he said in his diary, "Years after years passed away, which I spent successively in business, in study, and in preaching until I reached the age of thirty."[1] In reporting to the mission board of the Methodist Episcopal Church about his youth, Lee indicated that "he was brought up to hard work and had managed gangs of men before he was converted and reminded them that he had seen the day when he could chop a cord of sugar maple wood in two hours."[2]

Bishop Osman C. Baker characterized Lee as follows:

Jason Lee was a large, athletic young man, six feet and three inches in height, with a fully developed frame and a constitution like iron.

His piety was deep and uniform, and his life, in a very uncommon degree, pure and exemplary. In those days of extensive and powerful revivals, I used to observe with what confidence and satisfaction seekers of religion would

---

LOWELL B. SWAN was President of The Iliff School of Theology from 1962 until his tragic death in 1969. This paper, indicative of his deep interest in regional church history, was presented at the Bicentennial Celebration of American Methodism in Baltimore, Maryland, April 21-24, 1966. Together with the other papers presented it was published in the volume, *Forever Beginning:* 1766-1966, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina: Association of Methodist Historical Societies, 1967. Normally this journal does not include articles previously published elsewhere, however in these circumstances it was deemed highly appropriate to share this article with a wider audience, both for its intrinsic significance and by way of paying tribute and homage to the memory of our late President. It is reprinted with the kind permission of the Commission on Archives and History, the United Methodist Church.

[1] "Diary of Jason Lee," *Oregon Historical Quarterly,* XVII, 408.

[2] Cornelius J. Brosnan, *Jason Lee: Prophet of the New Oregon,* 1932, p. 24.

place themselves under his instruction. They regarded him as a righteous man whose prayers availed much; and when there were indications that the Holy Spirit was moving in the heart of the sinner within the circle of his acquaintance, his warm Christian heart would incite him to constant labor until deliverance would be proclaimed to the captive.[3]

Frances Fuller Victor described Lee in these terms:

He presented striking characteristics, carrying them on the surface; qualities pronounced, which made the presence of the possessor felt in any society in which happened to be placed. . . . At the time of his appointment to a position destined to be more conspicuous in Oregon's history than at the time he could have surmised, Jason Lee was about thirty years of age, tall and powerfully built, slightly stooping, and rather slow and awkward in his movements; of light complexion, thin lips closely shut, prominent nose, and rather massive jaws; eyes of superlative spiritualistic blue; high, retreating forehead, carrying mind within; somewhat long hair pushed back, and giving to the not too stern but positively marked features a slightly Puritanical aspect; and withal a stomach like that of an ostrich, which could digest anything. In attainments there was a broad open pasture of possibilities rather than a well-cultivated field of orchard, grain, and vineland. He believed in the tenets of his church; indeed, whatever may become of him, howsoever he may behave under those varied and untried conditions which providence or fortune hold in store, we may be sure that at the beginning, though not devoid of worldly ambition, he was sincere and sound to the core. Strong in his possession of himself, there was nothing intrusive in his nature. Though talking was a part of his profession, his skill was exhibited as much in what he left unsaid as in his most studied utterances. Frank and affable in his intercourse with men, he inspired confidence in those with whom he had dealings, and was a general favorite. . . . Unquestionably he was a little outside the ordinary minister of the period. Some would have said he lacked refinement, others that his brusque straight-forwardness was but simply honesty unalloyed with clerical cant, and stripped of university gown and sectarian straight lace.[4]

One of Lee's missionary associates, Alvin F. Waller, left this description of him:

He is a tall, stout-looking fellow. But let me say, the more I become acquainted with him the better I like him. A slight acquaintance would give you the impression that he is rather distant and cold, but as you become more intimate all this is removed, and he becomes the warm-hearted, cheerful and familiar friend. I believe him to be decidedly pious. So far as he has experience he is a good disciplinarian. He presides with a good degree of dignity. His decisions show that he weighs what he decides. He is not hasty in deciding, consequently, when he gives his judgment, he is not easily moved. And in most cases I have admired his course, and could not readily conclude that he was not generally correct. He is a very good business man, a good accountant and economist. He is not willing to spend money without an effort to have it well applied. Though some think him overcareful in this, I am pleased with his course. In his preaching he is not of the brilliant, flowery order, yet he is a good sound preacher. He is generally well liked in the country, and has much influence. Upon the whole I do not know that we could have a better man for the superintendence of the Mission. Some men might excel him in some things,

[3] W. B. Sprague, *Annals of The American Pulpit,* VII, 792.

[4] H. H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon.* San Francisco, 1886, I, pp. 56 f.

but in others they would fail to come up to him. I like him well.[5]

One Richard Pope, a British Wesleyan pastor, won Jason Lee for Christ and the church. Pope was the preacher at Stanstead for four years, twice the usual length of time a Methodist preacher was allowed to stay in one place in those days. Jason's nephew, Daniel Lee, was also instrumental in persuading Jason to make a full commitment. Daniel spoke to Jason about the salvation of his soul as they were on the way home from church one Sunday morning. That evening after real struggle, Jason rose in the service to utter the vows that led him down the path of great advanture. In his diary Jason referred to his conversion experience:

Thus far I had lived without hope and without God in the world, but now, the spirit, which I had so often grieved, again spoke to my conscience, and in language not to be mistaken, warned me of my danger. I saw, I believed, I repented. I resolved to break off all my sins by righteousness and my iniquities by turning unto the Lord; and if I perished, I would perish at the feet of Jesus, pleading for mercy. I saw the fulness of the plan of salvation, cast away my unbelieving fears — believed in, and gave myself to Christ — and was ushered into the liberty of the children of God. I was now, by my own consent, the property of another, and his glory and not my own gratification must be the object of my pursuit.[6]

After three years at manual labor, Jason Lee decided that he must prepare himself for service in the church . At 26 he enrolled in a summer term at Wilbraham Academy, Wilbraham, Massachusetts, where he made some lifelong friendships. As it turned out, Wilbur Fisk, the principal at Wilbraham, influenced Lee in a tremendous way and guided him into his life work. Lee completed the course of study at Wilbraham in 1830 and then taught for two years at Stanstead Academy, preaching at the same time in nearby towns under the direction of the Weselyan Church in Canada.

While teaching at Stanstead, Lee began to feel that he ought to become a missionary to the Indians in Western Canada, and in 1832 he applied to the London Weselyan Missionary Society for such an assignment. Due to the sudden death of the secretary of the London Society, nothing was done about Lee's application.

Knowing of Lee's interest in missions, Fisk wrote to him in March, 1833, asking if he would like to serve as a missionary to the Flathead Indians in Oregon. (At that time, of course, neither Oregon nor any other section of the far west was an integral part of the United States).

Methodist interest in the Flathead Indians was aroused by a letter written by one William Walker, which was published in the **Christian Advocate and Journal,** New York City, in March, 1833. Walker's letter said in substance:

That these 'red men' were from the Flathead tribe, in the interior of Oregon, beyond the Rocky Mountains, from whom they had been sent by a Council of their Chiefs, as delegates to St. Louis, to inquire concerning the word of the Great Spirit; that in prosecution of their great object they had travelled two thousand miles, through rugged mountains, barren plains and dangerous enemies, enduring cold and heat, thirst and hunger, and many hardships, and reached their destination in safety; and that having made known the object of their visit to General Clark, and gained the information they sought, two of them were snatched away by death, not being permitted to carry back the 'glad tidings' to their anxious countrymen.[7]

Later it was proved that much of the story outlined in Walker's letter was apocryphal. Even so, the account of the

[5] A. F. Waller letter to Fuller Atchinson, Albion, Michigan, *Christian Advocate and Journal,* November 8, 1843, XVII, 50.

[6] Jason Lee's Diary, *Oregon Historical Quarterly,* XVII, 408.

[7] W. B. Sprague, *op.cit., pp.* 793-794.

four-man deputation from the Flathead Indians made a profound impression. Wilbur Fisk, by that time president of Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, was one of those who was inspired by the story of the Indians pleading for the 'Book of Heaven'. Fisk urged the mission board of the Methodist Episcopal Church to establish a mission to the Flathead Indians in Oregon. Before the Board of Missions had time to act, Fisk wrote to Jason Lee, as already indicated, to ask if he would go as a missionary to the Indians in Oregon. The mission board soon approved the mission, and after prayer and deliberation, Jason Lee wrote Fisk that he would accept the assignment. Thus Wilbur Fisk was the "father" of the Oregon Mission, and it was he who chose Jason Lee to inaugurate it.

On June 14, 1833, Bishop Elijah Hedding in an impressive service ordained Jason Lee as "Missionary to the Flathead Indians." Fisk said in a letter to the **Christian Advocate:**

Our esteemed brother, Jason Lee, was appointed by Bishop Hedding at the late session of the New England Conference for that mission. Brother Lee is one whom all who know him judge well qualified for the enterprise. He is the one man on whom my mind rested when the subject was first agitated. I know him well, and can most cordially recommend him to all the friends of the enterprise as one worthy of their confidence.[8]

Following a two-month visit to his home at Stanstead, Jason Lee was ready to proceed to Oregon. He chose his nephew, Daniel Lee, as his associate, along with several assistants. In August, 1833, the New Hampshire Conference appointed Daniel Lee, who had been a traveling preacher for two years, as Jason's associate. Daniel proved to be an excellent choice.

In October, 1833, the mission board appropriated $3,000 and authorized the appointment of two laymen for the Flathead Mission. At the same time a short tour was arranged for the Lees in order that they might obtain contributions for the mission.

On the tour the two men visited Wesleyan University, New Haven, New York, and Boston. In the latter city they conferred with Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, who had just returned from his first journey to the Rocky Mountains. Wyeth permitted the Lee's to make plans to join his second expedition to the west in April, 1834. Also, he agreed that they could ship farming implements, furniture, books, garden seeds, and live chickens on his brig, the **May Dacre,** which was scheduled to leave for Oregon by way of Cape Horn in January, 1834. At each missionary rally on the tour the Lee's received generous offerings, as much as $400 in some places. At Boston Jason Lee enlisted Cyrus Shepard, a school teacher, to join the mission.

In a letter to the **Christian Advocate and Journal,** Jason Lee said:

We have made arrangements to cross the mountains with Captain Wyeth whose company will consist of about fifty. He expects to leave Liberty (which is about one hundred miles above St. Louis) in April. From St. Louis to the Flathead country is about one thousand five hundred miles; thence to the Pacific nine hundred miles. This journey, from the shores of the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific, accomplished, the most laborious part of our work is yet before us. It will still remain for us to transport our outfit nine hundred miles up the river to the place of destination. Our dependence for subsistence is almost exclusively upon the rifle, as it is impossible to carry provisions for such a journey on horseback.[9]

The Lee's closed the speaking tour with visits to Lynn, Dorchester, and Andover, Massachusetts. Two Indian boys whom Captain Wyeth had brought with him from the west were featured at sev-

[8] Wilbur Fisk letter to *Christian Advocate and Journal,* VII, 174.

[9] Letter to *Christian Advocate and Journal,* February 21, 1834, VII[r], 101.

eral of the rallies; their presence aroused much interest in the proposed mission.

In January, 1834, the Lee's left New York for St. Louis, campaigning for funds en route. Among other places they visited Philadelphia, West Chester, Baltimore, and Washington, D. C. At Washington the Lee's parted company for a time; Daniel Lee remained to attend the Baltimore Conference at Alexandria, Virginia, where he was ordained elder, February 20, 1834. Jason Lee pushed on to Pittsburgh where he held a meeting and then boarded a steamboat on the Ohio River for the journey to St. Louis.

At Cincinnati, Jason Lee was joined by Cyrus Shepard, and they stopped at Louisville, Kentucky, for another missionary meeting. From there it was a six-day trip by boat to St. Louis. Shepard continued up the Missouri River by boat to Independence, where he was to be in charge of the task of readying the equipment for the trek westward.

Reunited in St. Louis, the two Lee's visited General William Clark, seeking information that would help them on their journey to the west. The churches of St. Louis arranged a farewell service at which the two missionaries were honored. They then rode horseback to Liberty, Missouri, arriving on April 20, just eight days before the expedition was to depart for the west. But even in the fever and excitement of those few days, Lee took time out to address a Sunday evening congregation about the mission. On April 22 they arrived at Independence, the eastern end of the Oregon Trail. Again they sought more personnel for the mission and were fortunate in securing two lay assistants, Philip L. Edwards and Courtney M. Walker. Edwards was a man with leadership ability, while Walker was a good business agent acquainted with Indian life who knew what the party would encounter **en route** to Oregon.

Captain Wyeth, a careful planner, set April 28 as the day of march, and at ten o'clock on that morning the signal was given to begin the trek. Daniel Lee wrote:

The company was mounted on horses and mules and armed with rifles. Most of them had each a powder horn or a flask, a large leathern pouch for bullets being at his side, and buckled close to his body with a leathern belt, in which hung a scabbard of the same material, bearing a 'scalping knife' that savage weapon whose very name is a terror.[10]

By May 18, they had crossed the prairies between the Kansas and the Platte rivers, having covered about 235 miles. They were then about 20 miles east of what is now Grand Island, Nebraska. Shortly after reaching that point, they entered the buffalo country. The vast extent of the territory and the anticipation of the task ahead exhilarated Jason Lee. Frances Fuller Victor, writing under the pen name of Bancroft, described the effect of the country and the envisioned mission on the man:

On the way the elder Lee conducted himself so as to command the respect of all, religious and irreligious. The character of the man unfolded in beauty and fragrance under the stimulating prairie sun. No discipline of lecture room, general ministration, or other experience could have been so valuable a preparation for the duties awaiting him at his destination as the rude routine of those overland days. It seemed to him as if his theological sea had suddenly become boundless, and he might sail unquestioned whithersoever the winds should carry him. It was delightful, this cutting loose from conventionalisms, for even Methodist preachers are men. Not that there was present any inclination toward a relaxation of principles, as is the case with so many on leaving home and all its healthful restraint; on the contrary, he felt himself more than ever the chosen of God, as he was thus brought nearer him in nature where he was sustained and guarded by day, and

[10] Lee and Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon*, p. 114.

at night enfolded in his starry covering. Fires, both physical and mental, blazed brightly, and he was not one whit behind the most efficient of this company in willingness, ability, and courage. Nor were his associates broad-collared, long-haired, puritanical, prayer-mongers, but wide awake, hearty, and sympathetic men, bent on saving souls and having a good time.[11]

Toward the last of May, 1834, the party had reached Fort Laramie [Wyoming] which was then under construction. On June 9, they arrived at Independence Rock, which marked 838 miles from the starting point in Missouri. The next day they saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time. On June 14 they crossed the continental divide known as the south pass. Thence, they moved rapidly down the Big Sandy to its junction with the Green River. On June 20, they arrived at Horny Fork, the place of rendevous. They stopped there two weeks in order to rest the men and the animals. While there they witnessed the most picturesque features of the fur trade—the meeting of representatives of the fur companies with free or independent hunters from the mountains and Indians from various tribes. It was a time for bargaining over the sale of the year's take in furs, coupled with gambling, drinking, horse racing, and quarreling.

The missionaries used the rest period to catch up on their chores and to write letters. Jason Lee's letter to President Fisk gives a good account of the journey up to that time. At the rendezvous the Lees and their company were treated well, although most of the people involved were neither interested in religion nor in a mission to the Indians. The missionaries resumed their march on July 2, and reached the Bear River three days later. On July 9, Jason Lee wrote that he met Thomas McKay, the Hudson Bay Company's brigade leader, near the site of what later became Soda Springs, Idaho. McKay was to play a large part in Lee's work in the years ahead.

The travelers reached the Snake River on July 14, where the Wyeth party stopped to begin the erection of Fort Hall. At that spot Jason Lee conducted the first formal Protestant service in the interior land lying west of the Rocky Mountains. The religious service was held on July 27 at the request of Captain Wyeth. J. K. Townsend, who was with the Wyeth party, wrote of the occasion:

Mr. Lee is a great favorite with the men, deservedly so, and there are probably few persons to whose preaching they would have listened with so much complaisance. I have often been amused and pleased by Mr. Lee's manner of reproving them for the coarseness and profanity of expression which is so universal amongst them. The reproof, although decided, clear and strong, is always characterized by the mildness and affectionate manner peculiar to the man; and although the good effect of the advice may not be discernible, yet it is always treated with respect, and its utility acknowledged.[12]

On July 30, the missionaries left Fort Hall, escorted by Thomas McKay. Captain Wyeth remained behind to supervise the building. Because of the desert-like country through which they had passed for almost a fortnight, the party stopped on a large island in the Snake River August 12 to 18, in order to pasture their animals.

Lee left McKay near the site of Fort Boise and pushed on down the south bank of the Snake River and by the end of August entered the Grande Ronde. On September 1, they reached Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River, the end of a land journey of more than 1,800 miles.

The party spent two days at Fort Walla Walla where they made arrange-

[11] Bancroft, *op.cit.*, I, 61.

[12] J. K. Townsend, "Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains," R. G. Thwaite, *Early Western Travels,* (Cleveland, 1904-1906), pp. 228 f.

ments to trade their animals for other stock to be delivered later at Vancouver. On September 4, they began the voyage down the Columbia River on a Hudson Bay Company barge which they hired. The two serious portages, the Dalles and the Cascades, having been safely negotiated, they arrived at Fort Vancouver and were greeted by the chief factor of the Columbia River district of the Hudson Bay Company, John McLoughlin. This meeting marked the beginning of a close friendship between Lee and McLoughlin.

What a journey for Jason Lee and his party! The man's physical strength and his deep consecration to the task he had chosen for himself carried him through the strenuous miles he traveled from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The Wyeth brig, the **May Dacre,** reached the Columbia River the day after the arrival of Lee and his party. Thus the Lee's were able to proceed at once with plans to establish their mission.

After a tour of inspection of the area, the Lee's chose a site on the southern edge of the French Prairie about ten miles northwest of the present city of Salem, Oregon. It was on the east side of the Willamette River in a broad, rich bottom, well watered and well timbered, and it was to be known as the Willamette Valley Mission.

In October they moved to the new site and commenced to build a house which they occupied before it was finished. The one and one-half story mission house, built of oak logs hewn only on the inside, was 32′ x 18′. It had two rooms downstairs, a floor of split plank, a chimney of clay and sand, and four windows.

Lee wrote to Fisk that they had chosen the particular site rather than going directly to the Indians in order to lay the foundations for future usefulness. He reported that they already had three Indian children which he hoped would be the beginning of their school. After about a year they built an addition on the house 15′ x 32′. A barn 42′ x 32′ was completed in the spring of 1836.

During the first winter their food was limited. In the spring they fenced, plowed, and planted thirty acres to crops. McLoughlin proved to be a great friend, providing seed and loaning cattle to the mission. Soon they had more acreage under cultivation and were planting wheat, potatoes, peas, barley, oats, and beans.

On March 7, 1835, Cyrus Shepard began his Indian school, the first in that region, and continued teaching until his untimely death in 1840. He was regarded as a good teacher, well qualified for his task. Soon Indians were accepted as members of the mission family. Shepard told of the arrival of some of the Indian charges in a letter written January 10, 1835:

The special providence of God has, already, seemed to throw upon our care three poor Flathead orphans; one, a lad of fourteen or fifteen years of age, who is quite serviceable in several ways. The other two are apparently about seven years of age; one is sister to the above mentioned lad, and they are the only survivors of the family to which they belonged; to this girl we have given the name of 'Lucy Hedding'. The other is a flathead boy, and has neither parent, brother, nor sister. He came one day to the mission house, and, in the most imploring manner, asked in Indian, and by signs, to stay and live with us; and though food will naturally be scarce with us for the present, yet such importunities cannot be turned away. Providence, we trust will provide means of support, till we can raise something to subsist on. These children came to us almost naked, in a very filthy state, and covered with vermin. The girl had no other covering than a small deerskin over her shoulders, and a deep fringe of the same material around her waist. I made her a gown (although not a very fashionable one) from some pieces of tow-cloth, which had been used for baking our goods; and Jason Lee cleansed

them from their vermin, so that they do not now appear like the same children they were when they first came.[13]

This mission school in Oregon was different from others in its day in that the pupils were part of the mission family and were given education, food and clothing, and moral and religious training. Shepard was not only in charge of the school, but was also responsible for the entire mission family, serving as the mission steward, physician, and nurse, not to mention conducting a Sunday school with 53 members.

Daily instruction began in the fall of 1835; it included mainly spelling, reading, committing the catechism, and the singing of hymns. By 1836 the number of pupils rose to 19.

Notwithstanding some evidence of success, the going was rough for the mission in the first few months, as shown by a letter which Jason Lee wrote to Fisk on March 15, 1836:

> My courage has sometimes been diminished, and my faith weakened, but they have never failed. But I find it much harder walking by faith than by sight. The truth is we have no evidence that we have been instrumental in the conversion of one soul, since crossing the mountains, and this being the object, the end, of the Gospel ministry, the faithful herald of the cross, must most devoutly wish, and diligently labor for, the salvation of souls; and he cannot but feel straitened, if he is placed in circumstances where he is not permitted to see the accomplishment of this most desirable object.[14]

Prospects for the mission began to improve in May, 1837, when reenforcements arrived. Among those who came were the first doctor for the mission, Elijah P. White, and two young women, Susan Downing and Anna Maria Pittman. On July 16, 1837, Susan was married to Cyrus Shepard and Anna Maria to Jason Lee.

Manual instruction was offered at the school for the Indian children. The boys were taught to cultivate the soil, and they learned to plow and reap very well. The girls were instructed in sewing, cooking, and other female arts. Shepard wanted to teach English to the Indian children, believing that with a knowledge of the white man's language they would learn more and would grasp instruction more quickly. The school and the mission suffered a great loss when Shepard died January 1, 1840, leaving his young wife with two infant daughters.

The white trappers had already introduced the Indians to alcohol before the Lees arrived in Oregon. Observing the tragic effects of whiskey on the Indians, the mission began to work for temperance. As early as January 1837, the Lee's organized a temperance society among the settlers in the vicinity.

Previous to Jason Lee's arrival in Oregon, all cattle were the property of the Hudson Bay Company. But in January, 1837, a joint stock company was organized, money was subscribed, and men were sent to California to buy cattle for the settlers of the vicinity as well as for the mission. Eight hundred head were purchased, 630 of which survived the long drive of 600 miles to Oregon and were distributed among the stockholders. Thus began the cattle industry in Oregon.

The second re-enforcements came in September, 1837. Notable among them were a preacher, David Leslie, his wife and three daughters. Leslie became one of Jason Lee's assistants; he served as the active head of the mission when Lee made his trips east in search of aid for the enterprise.

Jason Lee began his first journey back to the eastern seaboard on March 26, 1838, taking with him Philip L. Edwards, one of the lay assistants, and two Indian boys, Thomas Adams and William Brooks. Jason visited the Dalles Mission, newly erected by his nephew, Daniel Lee and H. K. W. Perkins. Also

[13] *Zion's Herald,* October 28, 1835, VI, 170.
[14] Letter of Jason Lee to Dr. Wilbur Fisk, March 15, 1836.

he stopped at the Whitman Mission for a visit with Marcus Whitman, who was a doctor. **En route** Lee called at the Spalding Mission near the site of what is now Lewiston, Idaho, a work directed by a minister, H. H. Spalding. When Lee reached Fort Hall, Thomas McKay entrusted his three half-breed sons to him for schooling in the east. Lee pushed on toward St. Louis and reached the Shawnee Mission near the Missouri frontier 52 days after leaving McKay and the rendezvous. There on September 8, 1838, Lee received news that his wife had died in childbirth in Oregon on June 26. Though grief-stricken, he continued his journey eastward with the five Indian boys, preaching and telling the story of the Oregon Mission. He went from Shawnee to Alton, Illinois, and thence to St. Louis. From the latter city he traveled to Chicago with stopovers at Jacksonville, Springfield, and Peoria. From Chicago they traveled by boat on the Great Lakes to Utica, New York. Lee finally reached New York City seven months after leaving Oregon.

At a special meeting of the Methodist Board of Missions on November 14, 1838, Jason Lee gave a detailed report on the founding of the Oregon Mission. Favorably impressed, the board voted an appropriation of $40,000 along with addition personnel—five ministers, one physician, four women teachers, a stewardess, and several lay assistants, including a business agent, two carpenters, a cabinetmaker, a blacksmith, and two farmers.

The mission board asked Lee to assist in a campaign to raise the funds it had voted for the mission. He arranged several tours. On the first, he spoke in twelve cities and towns near Philadelphia and Washington. His second tour included thirty meetings at which he presented the needs of the mission through New England, northward from Connecticut to Canada. His last tour was made up of one-day stops in nineteen cities and towns in New York State. He took pleasure in enrolling two of the Indian boys in his old school, Wilbraham Academy in Massachusetts.

In order to carry out the mandate voted by the mission board in New York City, Lee had to engage and outfit a vessel, the **Lausanne,** for transporting the personnel, supplies, goods, and equipment to Oregon via Cape Horn.

The increased appropriation and the provision for additional personnel to the number of 32 were proof of enthusiasm on the part of the mission board and the whole church for the Oregon Mission. Five of the new people going out were to be ministers. Lee felt that two two additional ministers would be enough, but he was overruled by the board. Unfolding events showed that Lee was probably right; the ministers became dissatisfied and caused trouble in the mission.

A brief announcement in **Zion's Herald** said that Jason Lee of the Oregon Mission was married to Lucy Thompson of Barre, Vermont, on July 26, 1839. Miss Thompson had joined the re-enforcement party as a teacher and expected to sail on the **Lausanne.**

Instead of returning to Oregon by land, Lee decided to go on the **Lausanne.** Commenting on the sea journey, he said he was persuaded that it was one thing to be a missionary on the **Lausanne** and another to be a missionary in Oregon. Rounding Cape Horn, the **Lausanne** arrived in Honolulu six months to the day after leaving New York. It remained at Honolulu a few weeks and then set sail for the Columbia River. After another month land was sighted. Leaving the party, Lee went ahead to prepare the way and to inspect the parent mission at Willamette.

The boat trip up the river was slow due to unfavorable winds and lack of knowledge of the channel. The ship finally arrived at its destination on June 1, 1840, and the party was treated hospitably by McLoughlin, who had befriended the mission since its inception.

Lee's original purpose in establishing the Oregon Mission was to convert and

educate the Flathead Indians. But as time passed he seemed to have in mind also the future development of Oregon for the white man. A good organizer and administrator, he made strategic use of the new re-enforcements for expanding the mission. The very names of the new mission stations are indicative: Nisqually, on Puget Sound; Clatsop, at the mouth of the Columbia; the mouth of the Umpqua, yet unnamed; the Dalles, the gateway; the Falls, where there was to be an Indian station; and Chemeketa, where a sawmill and a grist mill were to be located.

The Indian station at the Dalles seemed to make the greatest advance in bringing the gospel to the natives. It grew under the guidance of Daniel Lee and H. K. W. Perkins, developing into a model for the entire project.

Though Lee carefully assigned the new personnel in his plans for establishing new mission stations, some of the men became discouraged and resigned. Two of the five new preachers, Kone and Richmond, returned to New York, where they made some damaging reports about Jason Lee to the Methodist Board of Missions. But in spite of the defections, the mission advanced and the new stations mentioned above were developed. In addition, the old mission was transferred ten miles south to Chemeketa. This proved to be a wise move.

One of the new projects which was to have great influence on the whole northwest was the establishment of the "Oregon Institute" on January 17, 1842. More than two years before, the passengers on the **Lausanne** had demonstrated an interest in education. They celebrated the centennial of world Methodism on board ship, October 25, 1839, and raised $650 toward the establishment of an educational institution for white children in Oregon. In 1844, the Indian Manual Labor School was deemed no longer necessary because of lowered enrollment. The building was then sold to the Oregon Institute, and Willamette University was formally founded.

Jason Lee's second wife died on March 20, 1842, leaving a tiny daughter born three weeks before. With faith and fortitude Lee continued his work. In a letter to his friend, Osman C. Baker, Lee wrote:

Do not contemplate your old friend as disconsolate and disheartened. No, my brother, discouraged I am not. In heaviness I cannot be, while the grace of God, as hitherto, bears me entirely above that region, I feel it would be sin to waste my energies in fruitless grief or unavailing sorrow, and yet I am aware that it is the sustaining grace of God in me that preserves me from it. Glory to God in the highest![15]

Lucy Thompson Lee had endeared herself to all the mission and the surrounding community. Both of the women who shared Jason Lee's life for only a brief period made unusual contributions.

Lee had work which taxed his strength and problems which tried his mettle—a possible Indian uprising against the settlers; a trip back east by his nephew, Daniel; inspections of the several stations; rumblings from the mission board caused by the slanted reports made by the preachers who resigned and returned east; and the arrival of more white settlers under two physicians, White and Whitman.

Feeling that he should personally face the mission board and answer the criticism leveled at him, desiring to report to officials in Washington on the developing situation in Oregon, and hoping to obtain a government subsidy for the Indian Manual Labor Mission School, Jason Lee decided to make another trip east himself. He arranged to take with him his two-year old daughter, Lucy Anna Maria Lee, and to go by water in the company of a preacher by the name of Hines and his wife and daughter. On arriving at Honolulu Lee learned that the mission board had already appointed a preacher by the name of George Gary to supersede him as superintendent of the

[15] *Zion's Herald,* September 14, 1842, XIII, 146.

Oregon Mission. Lee conferred with his friends and decided to continue his trip. But since he could secure passage for only one person on a Hawaiian schooner leaving for Mexico, he took leave of his small daughter and his companions, made his will, and set sail for the United States via Mexico on February 28, 1844. Arriving at San Blas thirty-five days later, Lee began a journey overland to Tipes, Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Vera Cruz. At the latter place he took the first ship for New Orleans and went thence by steamboat up the Mississippi River to Pittsburgh and overland from there to New York. The entire journey from Oregon to New York took five months, and he travelled by every mode of transportation known at that time.

The General Conference of 1844 was in session at New York when Lee arrived, but it was too concerned about slavery and the imminent division of Methodism to give time or attention to Lee and the Oregon Mission. It was suggested to Lee that he plan to meet the mission board later and that he go on to Washington and present the claims of the Oregon Mission to the officials there, including President Tyler. This he did, taking care to request that the lands of the Oregon Mission be respected in the event that a bill admitting Oregon into the Union as a state should be passed by congress.

When the mission board finally met to hear Jason Lee, he learned the nature of the charges which had been made against him and his administration: appropriationof mission funds in the amount of $100,000 for private speculation; misuse of mission funds; and failure to report concerning mission property. In session from July 1 to 10, the mission board listened intently to Lee's testimony in answer to the charges made against him. In the end the board exonerated him completely, and if Gary had not already been appointed and sent to Oregon, the board would have retained Lee as superintendent of the mission. The board specifically gave him the title "Missionary to Oregon."

Feeling fatigued after this long "trial," Lee decided to go to his old home at Stanstead, Quebec, for a rest. However, before doing that, he went to the New Hampshire Conference to deliver a missionary talk, and he visited the New England Conference, where he gave a report on Oregon, and was appointed agent for the "Oregon Institute."

Lee had a brief visit with his nephew, Daniel, who was then as East Haverhill, New Hampshire. Then he pushed on to Stanstead, where his sister lived. There in the late summer he contracted a severe cold and complications developed. Letters which he wrote to his nephew and the Hines' who were caring for his daughter, his words to the little girl, and a note he sent to the **Christian Advocate** all reveal that he was more ill than those about him realized.

At the request of the pastor, Lee preached in the little Stanstead Chapel in November, 1844. It was his last sermon, and while it was up to his usual standard and style, it was obvious to the congregation that he was not well. Time was running out, and on March 12, 1845, Jason Lee passed away. In accordance with his request, he was buried in the little Stanstead graveyard.

Jason Lee's significant contributions have been summarized briefly as follows: "(1) He was the first missionary, Catholic or Protestant, to enter the Oregon country; (2) He founded the first permanent American settlement in Oregon; (3) Lee laid the foundations of an American state by planting a mission colony that became the center of American influence; (4) He prompted immigration by lectures; (5) While Lee was first of all a missionary, he perceived that it was futile to try to rescue a vanishing race, and he foresaw the future occupation of the Oregon country by white settlers; (6) He firmly established the Methodist Episcopal Church in Oregon and even made provision for the schooling of white settlers yet to come by helping to establish a college; (7) He was influential in introduc-

ing the cattle industry into Oregon; (8) His wisdom in the choice of sites for the mission stations demonstrated his conception of the future commonwealth of Oregon."[16]

[16] Brosnan, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-278.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atwood, A., *The Conquerors.* Arthur H. Clark Co., Glendale, California, 1907.

Bashford, James W., *The Oregon Missions.* Abingdon Press, New York, 1918.

Brosnan, Cornelius J., *Jason Lee: Prophet of the New Oregon.* MacMillan Co., New York, 1932.

Canse, John M., *Pilgrim and Pioneer.* Abingdon Press, New York, 1930.

Hines, H. K., *Missionary History of the Pacific Northwest.* Portland, 1899.

Parsons, John, *Beside the Beautiful Willamette.* Metropolitan Press, Portland, Oregon, 1924.

Youngson, William Wallace, *Swinging Portals.* Kilhan, Portland, 1948.