

It takes more than a good resume to get a government contract.

Anson Gordon Henry (1804-1865)

By Jerry Olson

Anson Henry was born in Richfield, Ostego County, New York on October 3, 1804. After basic schooling, he studied medicine at Richfield Springs and then Cincinnati. Beginning early on a quest for wealth, he travelled to Michigan to engage in mining, but was not successful. After losing a run for the state legislature, he returned home to live with his parents and teach school for a winter in 1829. The next

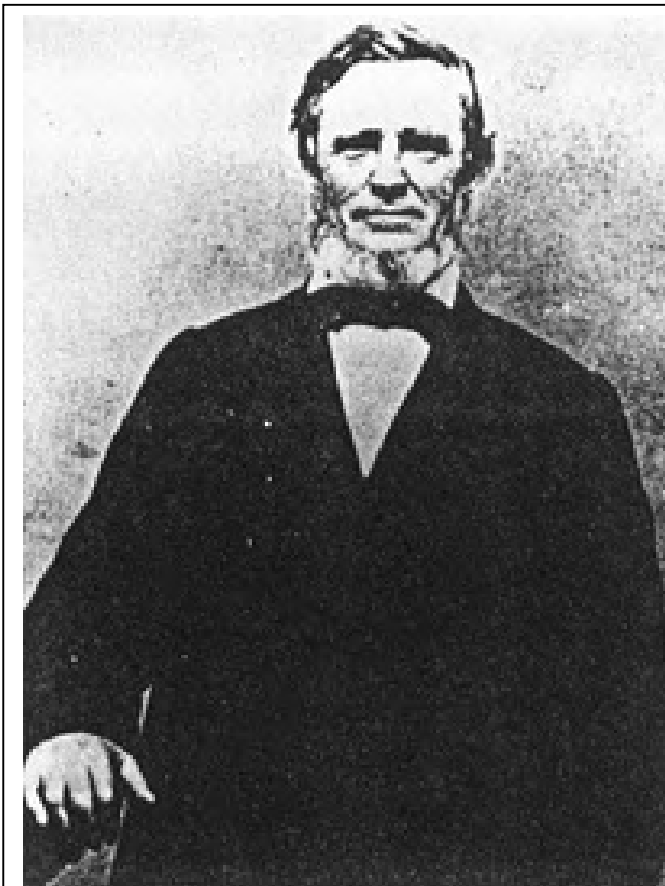


Figure 1 Anson Henry

venture took him to Louisville, Kentucky where he borrowed \$5000 to start a drug store, only to lose the money and go broke.

While in Louisville, he met and married Eliza, the daughter of Dudley Storey Bradstreet, whose full name was used as the middle name of some of their children. Their marriage took place in March of 1832 and later that year they settled in Springfield, Illinois where Anson began the practice of medicine. Besides his local practice, he became an expert in the treatment of cholera by attending to several epidemics in the region. Medicine was barely making him a living, and he aspired to more. Political patronage would become his method of choice to succeed.

Abraham Lincoln was at that time the assistant County Surveyor for Sagamon County, which included Springfield. He was elected to the Illinois State Legislature in 1834, having been defeated first in 1832. He and Anson Henry, five years his senior, became friends in 1834, both associating with the Whig party. Shortly after his first election victory, Lincoln began self-studying law as he had done with surveying, and in 1837, he was admitted to the Illinois Bar.

In 1837, Henry ran for probate justice, with Lincoln's help, but lost. The campaign was vicious, with anonymous letters to the editor attacking the Democrat James Adams assumed to have been written by Lincoln. Mary Todd refused the engagement proposal of Lincoln in 1841, and Lincoln became very depressed and despondent. Henry treated him a long time and pulled him out of it. In response, Abe wrote to Congressman John Stuart, his now law partner, to attempt unsuccessfully to have Anson appointed Postmaster for Springfield, so that he would be close by.



Figure 2. Mrs Eliza Bradstreet Henry, wife of Anson.

Anson was appointed Treasurer of the Board of State House Commissioners, a group of three that oversaw the funding and construction of a new Capitol Building in Springfield. He was charged by some with corruption, and ultimately found to owe the State of Illinois \$271 by a panel of arbitrators that included Lincoln. Henry and Lincoln campaigned for Whig Henry Clay for President in 1842 and for Whig Zachary Taylor for President in 1848. Even that early, they expressed doubts about the Whig position on slavery in their correspondence. Henry was the editor of the Whig national newsletter and editorialized against allowing slavery in the acquisition of the Mexican territory.

When Taylor became President in 1849, the opportunity for patronage that Henry awaited was now at hand. Lincoln first asked that Henry be named Register of the Government Land Office in Minnesota, and then wrote to the Secretary of the Interior for

him to be named head of the U. S. Indian Agency. On June 24, 1850, he was appointed as Indian Agent for Oregon Territory. Panama was as far as he travelled in the winter of 1851, becoming engaged as the doctor for the crew building the railroad across the isthmus, and he came back to Springfield.

On April 6, 1852, Anson, his wife, and five children joined the pilgrimage of settlers on the Oregon Trail. Their wagon reached a point below The Dalles, OR where they built a raft. High winds kept them from reaching The Cascades until October 20, 1851. They walked around the Cascades and reached Portland by steamer on the 22nd. Friends from Springfield had already staked a claim near Dayton, OR, and had secured a house in Lafayette, where Anson set up his new practice of medicine. He probably had been drawing his salary as Indian Agent all along.

During the years of his absence from Springfield, Henry and Lincoln kept up a correspondence and continued their friendship. Their dissatisfaction with the Whig

position on slavery grew, leading Lincoln to associate himself with the Republican Party in the 1860 presidential election in a then three-way-race.

Anson made the best of the new surroundings. He soon claimed a Donation Land Claim near Dundee, successfully ran for the Oregon Territorial Legislature in 1853, and secured a Government Land Office contract for the survey of claims in Oregon. His oldest daughter Margaret married Alleck C. Smith, a lawyer and recent arrival that filed a claim next to Anson, and both men began second careers of government surveying. Lincoln was a surveyor during the early years of their friendship, and since Henry was struggling as a doctor, it is possible that he helped Lincoln in his surveys, although there is no record of Henry doing any surveying previous to his arrival in Oregon.

The law in effect at that time was that the settlers needed their claims surveyed in order to create a legal description for the notification. Oregon territorial law allowed for the filing of claim notifications at Oregon City. The claimants could not file an official notification with the Surveyor General's Office until the survey of the sections in the township was completed. Later, the Surveyor General would hire a Deputy Surveyor to officially survey the claims in a township and create the official notes and plats. Many times it was the same surveyor that the claimants had hired to do the notification survey that would be hired by the Surveyor General to do the official survey.

Henry was well known in Yamhill County, and probably put together an arrangement such as this. Claim Contract number 13 was awarded on June 4, 1853 to Anson by Surveyor General John Preston, a Whig. It covered claims in T3,4S R3W and T2S R4W, all very near to Lafayette and Dundee. He began on June 9th and was finished August 30th, 1853, with Alleck Smith as a chainman for part of the work

Franklin Pierce, a Democrat became President in 1853 and replaced John Preston with Charles K. Gardner as Surveyor General. Before he left Preston awarded Survey Contract 38 to Anson in September of 1853. He completed T2S R3W, including the Chehalem Mountains, northwest of Newberg during December. Anson was compassman and Francis Loehr, a future Deputy Surveyor, was chainman. In February he surveyed T1S R2E encompassing most of the area between Gresham and Milwaukie, all relatively flat. The crew included future Deputy Surveyor Sewall Truax as compassman and future Deputy Surveyor Lewis Van Vleet as one of the chainmen. They were finished on February 21, 1854. Next was T1N R1W, beginning on February 29th. It was the township immediately northwest of the Initial Point of the Willamette River, going from the Sunset Highway to the St Johns Bridge. This was steep wooded ground and included a portion of the Willamette River. The same crew as on the previous township completed the work by March 13th.

The last township was T2S R2W between Aloha and Newberg. Sewall Truax was still compassman, but Lewis Van Vleet was not a chainman. They were done on April 3rd, 1854. This survey included many crossings of the Tualatin River as it meandered through the lowlands.

On June 12th, Anson wrote Surveyor General Gardner asking for him to make a copy of a certain petition signed by settlers wanting their claims surveyed. He said he wanted to send the copy to the General Land Office in Washington, D. C.. Gardner complied on June 24th. Anson wrote another letter asking for the petition from the citizens of the South Fork Yamhill area, also saying he was unemployed this season and would like to be hired to do this work.

In correspondence dated June 30th, Gardner told Henry that his contract was suspended for errors and omissions, and that there would be no money until all was accepted by the Surveyor General. If Anson had performed a correct survey, it would have been approved by June 1 and the settlers could have filed their notifications. The errors involved poor notes, location of witness trees, closing of meander lines, and the triangulation across the Willamette. Gardner said he had sufficient reasons for not discussing a new contract. If the corrections were not made, a new surveyor would be hired to make them.

In a July 24th letter to the S. G., Anson asked for several things. He recognized that the survey was suspended, but said he had stopped to see Joseph Trutch in the office and had convinced him that the survey was corrected. Next, he said that he had a judgment of \$400 to pay by September, and that if it was not paid, he faced bankruptcy. Anson had been talking to Deputy Surveyor Ambrose Armstrong and found out that Armstrong was to get the contract that Henry “had been positioning for.” Anson said he really wanted the contract and would hire Armstrong to do the work if that would help. Again, he wanted paid for Contract 38 by September. The contract was approved by Gardner on December 25, 1854, and Henry was paid shortly thereafter. Henry received no more contracts from Gardner.

However, Alleck Smith, Anson’s son-in-law, was a proclaimed Democrat, and aligned himself with Charles Gardner to receive a contract soon after Gardner’s arrival in Oregon City. Claim Contract 22, dated January 30, 1854, was awarded to Smith, and he surveyed it between March and December of 1854. Anson was a chainman for part of it in August. In July of 1856 Smith also received Contract 65 in Oregon from Surveyor John Zieber of the same political alignment for seven townships in the westerly foothills of the Willamette Valley. These were all partial townships consisting of the mountainous sections left over after the first and second surveys. Anson did not help, but his son Gordon and son-in-law Francis Henry were chainman. The contract was completed by late 1857. Before these two contracts and the role as chainman for Anson, there is no known record of Alleck Smith doing any surveying either. He had an education in law and advertised himself as a lawyer.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1855, Anson joined the Rogue Valley Indian wars, acting as either commissary or surgeon. When the Salem Statesman criticized the volunteers for being mercenary and vengeful, Henry gave a speech in December defending the militia. He has been quoted for the end of his speech where he said “..*the only alternative to the citizens of the valley was to “kill them off” or, in other words, to exterminate them.*” Shortly after this in 1856, he received an appointment as Physician and Surgeon to the

Grand Ronde Indian Reservation in western Yamhill County for a salary of \$2000 per year. At about this time, he was also elected City Surveyor of Portland.

In 1858, Anson and his son-in-law, Alleck Smith, were awarded interdependent contracts north of Grays Harbor. Alleck surveyed the Coast Guide Meridian from the 4th to the 5th Standard Parallel, involving a four mile triangulation across Grays Harbor, and then continued to the 5th Standard Parallel near the present Quinault Indian Reservation. Anson surveyed the 5th Standard Parallel west to the Pacific Ocean, and then T20N R11W. Alleck was compassman on the Parallel. Alleck surveyed portions of T17-19N R7-12W with Anson as axeman much of the time. Alleck used E. S. Barnes as compassman for T18N R10W, and Anson used Alleck as compassman on the Standard Parallel and Township Exteriors, and George House on the subdivisions of T20N R11W. He made some error in the West boundary of T20N R11W, and had to redo it in 1859. Per Richard Sterling, they also made an error of 0.83 chains in the triangulation across Grays Harbor.

While working along Grays Harbor, they were in canoes in August, 1858, travelling west to a campsite in R11W, when another canoe accompanying them decided to head across the Bay to Westport, with an East wind and an outgoing tide in process. Mr & Mrs. Hatch were swept out to sea and lost.

Anson was awarded contract 62 by Tilton of a township near Walla Walla, but it was cancelled when he was appointed Surveyor General.

Lincoln ran for the Senate from Illinois in 1858 as a Whig and lost, but defined the slavery issue. He was elected as President in 1860 on the third party, Republican platform, and in July, 1861, appointed Anson as Surveyor General of Washington Territory. He took office on September 11, replacing James Tilton. He was as partisan in that office as he ever was, giving contracts to Republicans and relatives wherever he could.

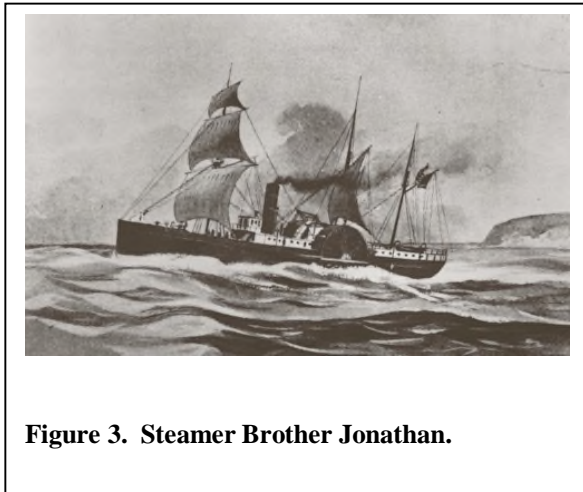
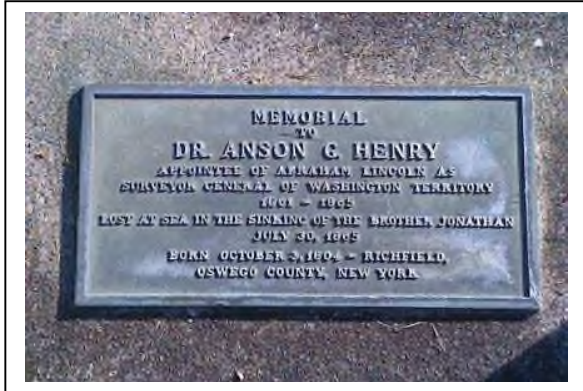


Figure 3. Steamer Brother Jonathan.

B. F. Kendall, of the Democrat newspaper in Olympia, wrote a very critical article on Anson, in 1862, and Anson, thinking it was Amos Poe that wrote it, confronted him with a Bowie knife at the general store, and struck Poe with his cane. Henry had secured the state printing contract away from

Kendall. The son of a man shot by Kendall, in self defense, attacked Kendal in his office and shot him, by rumor with a gun owned by Henry.

Anson travelled to Washington, D. C. in the winter of 1863 to lobby for a better political job, and to remove Victo Smith from the post of Customs Collector. He didn't get the job, but did remove Smith. While there he lived at the White House and visited the war zone at the Potomac with Lincoln. He also shepherded the creation of Idaho Territory through Congress, and his reward was the appointment of Alleck Smith as a Justice of the Idaho Territorial Supreme Court.



When Lincoln was reelected, Abe sent for Anson, and he returned to D. C. in December of 1864, escorting Mrs. Lincoln to the official counting of the electoral vote. In January he was told he would not be appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and went to Richmond VA, where he was when informed Lincoln was assassinated. He was in the funeral procession with Mrs. Lincoln, and stayed six weeks comforting her, and took

her to Chicago. He left for home via Panama, and on the leg from San Francisco to Victoria, the Brother Jonathan ran aground on rocks off Crescent City, CA, with 110 passengers drowned, including Anson. Also drowned was Victor Smith, his arch rival from Washington. The California newspapers reported that Anson had been recently appointed Governor of Washington in their reports of the shipwreck. His body was never recovered, and he is memorialized by a bronze plaque next to his wife in the IOOF Cemetery in Olympia.