JOHN P. RICHMOND, M.D.
First Methodist Minister Assigned to the Present State of Washington.

by Erle Howell

John P. Richmond became the first Methodist minister to receive an appointment in the present state of Washington when Jason Lee, superintendent of the Oregon Mission, assigned him to the Indian Mission at Nisqually on Puget Sound, in 1840. At that place Richmond officiated at the first marriage of an American couple north of the Columbia River, August 16, 1840. He delivered the oration for the first Fourth of July celebration on the Pacific Coast at Nisqually July 5, 1841. He also became the father of the first American child born on Puget Sound with the birth of his son, Francis, February 28, 1842.

The versatility of Richmond, a medical doctor as well as an ordained minister, is seen in the fact that after his return to Illinois he served in the Senate of that state at the time that Abraham Lincoln was a member of the lower house. He also was speaker of the lower house when Chief Justice Fuller and General John A. Logan occupied seats in that body. He was chosen by the Electoral College of his state to cast its vote for president in 1856. He was elected to membership in two state Constitutional Conventions, and was superintendent of schools in Brown County, Illinois, for eight years. In 1874 he became superintendent of the Bon Homme Mission in the present South Dakota, and in 1884, he was Post Master at Tyndall in that state.

John Plastics Richmond was born in Middletown, Frederick County, Maryland, August 7, 1811. His father, Francis, was born in Maryland and was a planter. He served in the War of 1812. His grandfather, John Richmond, was a native of Massachusetts and was a soldier in the Revolutionary War. The Richmonds traced their descent to the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.

Richmond, at the age of fifteen, was converted and united with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Later he attended the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, where he studied medicine, graduating in 1833. He began to practice his profession at the town of his birth in 1834 and about this time was licensed to exhort by his church.

Indicative of the restless nature of Richmond is the fact that, in 1835, he went to the state of Mississippi to practice medicine. There, on October 14, 1835, he was married to America Walker Talley, widow of Alexander Talley, M.D., who was a member of the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and superintendent of the Choctaw Indian Mission in Indian Territory West. The

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marriage took place in Madison County, Mississippi.³

Still seeking a better place to invest his life, Richmond moved to Rushville, Illinois, in April, 1836. Soon thereafter he was employed as a supply on the Rushville Circuit, replacing Wilson Pitner who had been sent to Iowa. In the fall of 1836 he was received on trial in the Illinois Annual Conference and assigned to the Pulaski Circuit.⁴

In 1837 Richmond went to the McComb Station and in 1838 to Jacksonville. It was in 1839, while he was still serving the latter church, that Jason Lee came to Illinois presenting the opportunities for settlement in Oregon while looking for prospective missionaries for his station in the Willamette Valley.⁵ He greatly impressed Lee who strongly desired to have his services in the mission on the Pacific Coast.

Richmond accepted. During the following months he seized every opportunity to present the cause of Oregon before public gatherings in his state. He severed his connection with the church at Jacksonville and, with his family, departed for New York to make ready to sail on the Lausanne bearing the great reinforcement to Oregon.

At this time, besides his wife, America, Richmond’s family consisted of three children. They were: Martha A. and Harriette Talley and his daughter Felicia, born near Pulaski, Schuyler County, Illinois, October 3, 1837.⁶ With his family he ascended the Illinois River as far as practical and then by land traveled to Chicago, then a village.⁷ By steamer the family traversed the chain of lakes to Buffalo, thence by the Erie Canal to Troy. Travelling by way of Albany, they arrived in New York in September, 1839. While in New York the Richmonds’ second child was born and they named him “Oregon” in honor of their destination on the Pacific Coast.⁸ The Richmonds and other Oregon-bound missionaries remained in New York until boarding the Lausanne.

The ship sailed October 9, 1839, bearing a company of 52 missionaries, teachers, and laymen with their wives and families to be at-

³ Original record in Office of Circuit Clerk for Madison County, Canton, Mississippi, Marriage Book E, page 239.
⁴ Leaton, op. cit.
⁵ Bashford, James W., The Oregon Mission (Abingdon Press, New York-Cincinnati, 1918), 165; also Atwood, Albert, The Conquérors (Jennings and Graham, New York-Cincinnati, 1907), 110.
⁷ Letter written by John P. Richmond to the Editor of the Seattle Weekly Chronicle, September 11, 1883. Copy in Genealogical Department, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
⁸ Brosnan, Cornelius J., Jason Lee, Prophet of the New Oregon (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1925), 159. Federal Census shows Oregon Richmond to be born in New York and that he was 11 in 1850. A Compendium of Biography gives Oregon’s birth date at September 3, 1840, but since the ship sailed October 9, 1839, and he was on it, the year undoubtedly is 1839.
tached to the Oregon Mission. The ship touched at Rio de Janeiro; Cape Horn; Valparaiso, Chile; and the Sandwich Islands; arriving at Fort Vancouver June 1, 1840.

The entire mission staff, including those recently arrived on the Lausanne, were called in conference by Jason Lee at Vancouver June 13, 1840. Two days later, Richmond was appointed superintendent of the Nisqually Mission on Puget Sound. To serve with him were William Holden Willson, carpenter, in charge of the secular department, and Miss Chloe Aurelia Clarke, teacher in the mission school.

Willson, accompanied by David Leslie, had gone to Nisqually in April 1839, where he began to erect the mission building. When the structure was near completion, Willson returned to the Willamette to await the arrival of the reinforcements led by Jason Lee.

Having previously made the trip to the Sound, Willson acted as guide for the company assigned to Nisqually, to which place they started July 2, 1840. Shortly after the journey's end Richmond described the experience in which he reported that, with Indians manning the canoes, they drifted quietly down the Columbia River to the mouth of the Cowlitz. Ascending this stream, the oarsmen found the current very swift. By Sunday, the fifth of July, they were encamped on the banks of the river adjacent to the Cowlitz farming port belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company.

The day was quiet but the night was disagreeable according to Richmond, because a considerable number of Indians had encamped around them and annoyed them during the night with whooping and singing. On Monday morning the Nisqually-bound missionaries were invited by Charles Forrest, in charge of the farm, to take up quarters at the farmhouse until they could make arrangements to continue their journey. He sent a cart to carry their goods to his house and horses for the ladies to ride, the distance being about two or three miles from the landing.

On Tuesday morning July 7, 1840, the farm superintendent provided 17 horses to transport the company and their effects through the portage. They set out about noon under the guidance of several half-breeds and two Indian women who took charge of the elder children. Richmond said, "We found the roads very bad and progressed very slowly, sometimes through dense forests, and sometimes over beautiful plains, until the third day after leaving the Cowlitz, and arrived at our destination."

Richmond paid tribute to the kind reception tendered the missionaries by William Kittson, in charge of Fort Nisqually, who furnished them with several rooms within the stockade and invited them

9 The number aboard the Lausanne when she sailed from New York is usually given as 53, but the 53rd passenger, David Carter, joined the ship in the Sandwich Islands.
10 Brosnan, op. cit., 169. Date of the arrival of Leslie and Willson at Nisqually is usually given as April 10, 1839. Atwood, op. cit., 106, gives the dates of starting the building as April 10, 1839.
to the hospitality of his house and table. Richmond said, "We re-
mained at the fort about three weeks, having every attention and ac-
commodation within the power of Mr. Kittson, and his excellent wife,
to render our situation comfortable. At the expiration of which time,
Mr. Willson having laid part of the floor in the Mission house, we
removed and commenced housekeeping for ourselves. Our cooking
for several months was done out-of-doors and our table consisted of
several boxes permanently located in the middle of the floor."\(^\text{11}\)

Just 37 days after the arrival of the company at Nisqually (July
10, 1840), Richmond, on August 16, 1840, united in marriage his lay
helper, William H. Willson, and Miss Chloe Aurelia Clarke, mission
teacher.\(^\text{12}\)

Cornelius J. Brosnan says of this first marriage\(^\text{13}\) on Puget Sound,
"The beginnings of domestic life established by the union of these two
missionary pioneers continues unbroken to the present time in one
of Oregon's prominent families."

A note in the Richmond family record reported the birth of
Francis Richmond, the first American child born north of the Colum-
bia River. The entry read: "Francis Richmond, son of John P. Rich-
mond, and his wife, America, was born at Puget Sound, near Nis-
qually, Oregon Territory on the 28th of February, anno Domini, 1842,
and was baptized by Rev. Jason Lee, superintendent of the Oregon
Mission."\(^\text{14}\)

In accepting an appointment north of the Columbia River, Rich-
mond entered into territory to which Great Britain laid claim. Never-
theless Richmond reported courteous and generous treatment on the
part of the British company, being the recipient of many favors in-
cluding supplies, transportation and the loan of cows for milk. How-
ever, Richmond declared in a letter that the Hudson's Bay Company
was well paid for favors tendered him.\(^\text{15}\)

Cornelius J. Brosnan cites several communications indicative of
the type of assistance the Hudson's Bay Company gave the missionar-
ies.

October 17, 1840 a note signed by John McLoughlin, Chief Factor
of the Hudson's Bay Company, Fort Vancouver, said, "You will sup-
ply Dr. Richmond with five bushels of peas and four barrels of flour."
On February 1, 1841 he wrote, "you can lend six broken-in cows to the
Methodist Mission for the season. And after some time, when their
calves are big, you will let them go and give the missionaries others in

\(^{11}\) Brosnan, op. cit., 170, 171.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Hines, H. K., Missionary History of the Pacific Northwest. The primary exist-
ing source is a letter written by Richmond to the editor of the Seattle Weekly
Chronicle, September 11, 1883. The Richmond family record apparently has been
lost.
\(^{15}\) Atwood, op. cit., 108-9 and letter addressed by Richmond to the Tacoma News,
April 8, 1884.
their place."

A fortunate coincidence in the work of John P. Richmond at Nisqually was the presence, in adjacent waters, of United States ships under the command of Captain Charles Wilkes. He had been commissioned by the United States Government to make examinations in the waters of the southern part of the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. He arrived at Cape Disappointment, at the mouth of the Columbia River, April 28, 1841. One of his ships, The Peacock, was lost at the entrance of the Columbia, the men being saved. Wilkes, with the Vincennes and the Porpoise, spent the summer of 1841 in the Puget Sound country. Entering the Straits of Juan de Fuca May 1, 1841, he made investigations in line with his instructions and gave names to many points of interest in the region. He spent some time at Nisqually and became acquainted with Richmond. Being in that locality over the Fourth of July 1841, the captain, the crew of his ship and the missionaries seized upon the opportunity to celebrate the Fourth of July. Wilkes presided and Richmond delivered the patriotic address. The fourth being on Sunday, the celebration took place Monday, July 5.

Something of the foresight and statesmanship of Richmond is seen in the address which he delivered before a company of about six hundred persons embracing naval officers, missionaries, men from the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post, one hundred marines and about four hundred Indians.

Richmond is quoted as saying, in part:

... We entertain the belief that the whole of this magnificent region of country, so rich in the bounties of Nature, is destined to become a part of the American Republic. The time will come when these hills and valleys will be peopled by our enterprising countrymen, and when they will contain cities, farms and manufacturing establishments, and when the benefits of home and civil life will be enjoyed by the people.

... They will assemble on the Fourth of July, as we have done today, and renew their fidelity to the principles of liberty embodied in the Declaration of Independence that we have read today. ... The future years will witness wonderful things in the settlement, the growth, and development of the United States, and especially of this Coast. The growth may embrace the advance of our dominion to the frozen regions of the North, and South to the narrow strip of land that separates us from the lower half of the American Continent.

In this new world there is sure to arise one of the greatest nations of the earth. Your names and mine may not appear in the records. Those of our descendants will. ... The illustrious founders of the American Republic declared against the union of church and state; in this they did well, yet it is undeniably true that the world civilization of today is inseparably connected with the religion of Christ and cannot survive if the Christ-life and Spirit were eliminated from it. ... Our mission to these children of the forest is so to teach them the truth of the gospel that they should be fitted for the responsibilities of intelligent Christian citizenship. ... We are here also to assist in laying the foundation stones of the great American Commonwealth on these Pacific shores.
Commenting upon this address, Albert Atwood said, "The address of Dr. Richmond was worthy of the occasion. In the unfolding light of the intervening years, it is easy to see that his utterances were prophetic. . . . It should be remembered that these statements were made when the entire Oregon country was claimed by England and when the purchases of Alaska and the occupation of the Isthmus of Panama by the government of the United States were not thought of." 19 It also should be remembered that at the time of his utterance no American settler resided north of the Columbia in the present state of Washington.

"This was the first Fourth of July celebration held on the Pacific Coast—that held at Champoeg, near Salem, Oregon in 1843 being the second," Atwood said. "Both of them were under the guidance of the missionaries and were held on or contiguous to the mission grounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

A little more than a year after this Fourth of July celebration Richmond abandoned the Nisqually mission and, on September 1, 1842, with his family, sailed for the United States on the American brig, The Chamamus bound for Newbury Port, Massachusetts. 20

Most historians state that Richmond's decision to abandon the mission was due to illness in his family and other circumstances. But other records indicate that this is an oversimplification. Jason Lee, in 1844, testifying before the Board of Missions in New York, said, "He considered Dr. Richmond his enemy because he had so declared himself, and sent word to him (Mr. Lee) that he was his antagonist and he hoped as they had heard his enemy, they would hear him." 21

While in New York, before returning to his home conference in Illinois, Richmond spent several hours testifying before the Board of Missions and his presentation was not complimentary to the program being carried out by Lee in Oregon.

James Leaton states,

In 1843 Richmond returned by way of the Sandwich Islands and Tahiti, of the Society group, to Boston, and thence to Illinois. He was then appointed in succession to Petersburg, Springfield, Rushville Circuit, Quinsey, and Mt. Sterling. In 1838 he located, having been elected to the state Senate. When his term in the Senate expired in 1852, he went to the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and traveled the Madison Circuit. The next year he returned to Illinois and, in 1854, was elected to the House of Representatives of that state. In 1856 he was one of the presidential electors and was appointed to carry the returns of Illinois to Washington.

In the fall of 1858 he was again elected to the Senate; and in 1862 was a member of the Constitutional Convention. In 1865 he was elected County Superintendent of schools for Brown County, and held the office eight years. In 1874 he removed to Dakota, and for one year had charge of the Bon Homme Mission. In 1884 he was Post Master at Tyndall and preached as often as circumstances would permit. 22

19 Ibid., 119-21.
20 Brosnan, op. cit., 172.
21 Ibid., 264.
22 Leaton, op. cit., 271.
There is no available evidence showing that Richmond rejoined a Methodist conference after 1848, yet he remained a loyal churchman to the end of his life.

He was a man of many facets of character, personality and ability. His unilateral decision to abandon the mission at Nisqually and his opposition to Jason Lee present one side of his personality. This event is to be kept in mind when one considers the reasons for Richmond's leaving the ministry. Evidently he was a man of strong convictions with a tendency to act impulsively at times. To the end of his life he cherished his conviction as to the efficacy of the Christian evangel, but was not always certain he could best serve in the pastorate.

The circumstances under which he requested his Conference to locate him in 1848, are not clear. But the minutes of the Conference for 1847 carries the following notation: "W. S. McMurray complained of John P. Richmond. Dr. Richmond made explanation, and then requested to withdraw from the Methodist Episcopal Church with a view to connect himself with the M. E. Church, South. The Conference by a rising vote 'very respectfully and affectionately expressed to him it was their desire and pleasure that he should recall his request to withdraw,' and he recalled it. Dr. Richmond then complained of W. S. McMurray that he made the pulpit a vehicle to prosecute a tirade against Masonry. After explanation and discussion his (McMurray's) character was passed." While no record specifically so states, it is evident that henceforth Richmond was a dissatisfied member of the Illinois Conference. The following year he was elected to the Illinois Senate and was located by the Conference at his own request.

Leaton says of Richmond, "... he was an ardent Democrat and had no sympathy with the agitation of the slavery question, and so he located and gave himself to Politics." The fact that after Richmond's term in the Illinois State Senate expired in 1852, he returned to Mississippi and traveled the Madison Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, tends to verify Leaton's statement. After one year on the Madison Circuit Richmond returned to Illinois and again entered politics, being elected to the Lower House of that state in 1854.

Evidence that Richmond was active in national politics during the years of his service in the House of Representatives is to be found in the fact that in 1856 he was one of the presidential electors and was appointed to carry the returns of Illinois to Washington.

One could wish for more information about Richmond's activities while he was in the state senate from 1858 to 1862, but the fact that he was a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1862 suggests something of his interests. Undoubtedly his years as county superintendent of schools for Brown County with headquarters at Mt. Sterling, Illinois, from 1865 to 1873, were filled with activities in support of issues dear to his heart.

24 Leaton, op. cit.
Investigation has failed to uncover information with reference to the nature of the Bon Homme Mission in the present South Dakota. It is a conjecture but a reasonable one that it was an Indian mission and that Richmond had not lost his devotion to the cause of the original Americans. Available records reveal little of Richmond’s activities between 1875 and 1884, yet certain references indicate that he took up a land claim near Tyndall and engaged in farming.

In a letter written from Bon Homme, Dakota Territory, October 13, 1878, to his grandson, Richmond L. Neill, Richmond states that prairie fires had consumed all the grass on his claim. Books in the Bon Homme County Courthouse at Tyndall show that during the years following this time Richmond transferred a number of parcels of land to his sons, Francis and Oregon.

How long Richmond served in the capacity of post master at Tyndall, is not known. But he continued to live there until his death. While the exact date of Richmond’s death seems to be well established, August 28, 1895, the place has been variously stated. H. K. Hines states that Richmond died in Manitoba, but the Pacific Christian Advocate published in Portland, Oregon, October 30, 1895, states that Richmond died in Oakdale, Nebraska, “at the age of 84 years and 21 days, the last man of all the company of Methodist missionaries who entered Oregon up to 1840.”

Richmond fathered four children by his wife, America. The United States Census for 1850 gives the names of these children as Felicia, Oregon, Francis and John P. This record also names three other daughters—America, Cora and Corona, by Richmond’s second wife, Kitty.

The United States’ Census, dated June 15, 1870 casts further light on this point. The presence of Allice Richmond, age 18, in the Richmond home at this time would indicate that America Richmond was the mother of a fifth child fathered by Richmond.

The eldest Richmond daughter, Felicia Hemans, became the wife of J. R. Neill who sometime before 1890 took his family to reside in Portland, Oregon. Her son, Richmond R. Neill, became the father of Catherine W. Neill who, in 1970, resided in New York City.

Oregon Richmond settled in Bon Homme County, Dakota in 1874. He was said to be the second physician ever located in that county and, in 1897, held the record as the oldest medical man in his section. It was reported further, “He is a Republican, and has held several important political offices in Bon Homme County. He

25 Letter in possession of Richmond’s great-granddaughter, Miss Katherine W. Neill, New York City.
26 Compendium, op. cit.
27 Atwood, op. cit., 111. Pacific Christian Advocate, Portland, Oregon, October 30, 1895. Copy in Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.
29 Compendium, op. cit.
was its first county judge and the last probate judge before it became a part of the state of South Dakota. In 1876 he formed a partnership with A. J. Kogen and they established the *Scotland Citizen*, the second paper published in that county. In 1878 the partners sold their paper and after that time he engaged in the practice of medicine." He was a member of the G.A.R.

Francis Richmond, born at Nisqually, also went to Tyndall, South Dakota and, in 1883, was superintendent of schools of Bon Homme County.

Time and place of the death of America Richmond are uncertain, but evidently she died before 1859 for on the books of the Brown County Courthouse is the record that on October 18, 1859, John P. Richmond was united in marriage to Kitty Grisby. Kitty's name appears jointly with that of her husband upon the documents conveying property to their children in Tyndall, in the 1880's.

An interesting note on the maiden name of Richmond's second wife is found in variations in existing records. Two researchers investigating independently for the author of this article, examining the records in Mt. Sterling, Illinois, reported that the name was "Grisby." However, in the census of the State of Illinois, (Brown County and Pea Ridge Township, June 15, 1870) is found the name of Joseph Grista, 51 years of age, unemployed, who was a resident in the Richmond household.

Further complicating this matter is an item in a letter dated October 13, 1878 at Bon Homme, and addressed to Richmond R. Neill, in which Richmond refers to a "Jack Gristy," living in Illinois.

Although John P. Richmond was an outspoken exponent of his convictions, there is no indication that he held grudges. Evidence clearly implies that he strongly opposed Jason Lee's management of the Oregon Mission, yet in later years he seemed to hold high admiration for Lee and for his statesmanship as a missionary leader. In the letter addressed to the editor of the Seattle *Weekly Chronicle*, Richmond reaffirmed his pride in the part that he played, along with Jason Lee, in finally obtaining the Northwest for the United States. One paragraph of this letter indicates that Richmond's admiration for the Democratic Party was unchanged and bristles with the spirit of a crusader. He says, "Had the true meaning and the lesson inculcated by the treaty between the United States and Russia in 1842, been properly regarded, in the virtual recognition by the latter power of the right of the former to the line 54° 40' North Latitude, in the agreement binding the parties not to cross that line in making settlements or colonies by their respective nationalities, and had the policy of President Polk been adhered to, and the cry of "Fifty-four forty or fight," by the Democratic party which elected him in 1844, been persisted in, there would have been no fight, and the whole country north to that line would have belonged to the United States," and British

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30 Richmond letter to *Daily Chronicle*, 1883.
31 Letter in hands of Miss Neill, New York.
Columbia would have no existence. And then the purchase of Alaska by Seward in Johnson’s administration in 1867 would have given the United States an uninterrupted coast line from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of California.”

Indicating that Richmond has instilled into his sons a great admiration for Lee is found in the letter written by Francis Richmond, Tyndall, South Dakota, to the Tacoma News, in which he says,

The emigration of 1842 and 1843 was brought about by Jason Lee. In 1838 he spoke at many places in Illinois where lived the persons who composed the larger part of the first companies of emigrants to go to Oregon. These places were Springfield, Peoria, Alton, Jacksonville, and other points in that country. My father, Dr. John P. Richmond, was at that time pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, Illinois. Of Jason Lee’s visit to that region I desire to say such was the magnetic influence of the man, his great eloquence, his fervent Christian spirit, his manly bearing, his evident sincerity, that wherever he went enthusiasm was kindled and an Oregon sentiment was created that ripened into the emigration movement of 1842 and 1843. Jason Lee was not only instrumental in awakening great interest in Oregon, which was followed by discussion and the adoption of a plan of emigration, but he was equally successful in securing helpers for his mission work. At his suggestion my father, Dr. Richmond, decided to go as a missionary to Oregon. Jason Lee possessed great ability as an orator. He was also a tireless worker. He had more to do with the peopling and the shaping of the destiny of Oregon than any other man. Many of the emigrants who went to Oregon in 1842 and 1843 were the personal friends and acquaintances of my father, and the same causes that influenced my parents to go to Oregon also influenced their friends, acquaintances and neighbors in that and other communities in that region to go to Oregon.

These words certainly do not come from the pen of a man who held prejudices against Jason Lee.

The forgoing facts will indicate that John P. Richmond was a man of unusual ability, strong convictions, although at times impetuous in his desire to act upon his convictions. This occasionally led him into conflict with his friends but not to estrangement.

As to Richmond’s work as a churchman, James Leaton says, “Dr. Richmond has been a very able man. The Illinois Conference never had a more Biblical preacher than he. Most of his sermons consisted of apt quotations from Scriptures, briefly commented on, and connected by a slight thread of narrative or argument as the subject required. The effect was sometimes very powerful.”

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32 Leaton, op. cit.