FOREWORD

The purposes of this publication are to increase interest in nineteenth century picket fences and to foster an appreciation for them and to assist those involved in site and landscape restorations.

Several types of related fences are mentioned, particularly the rail fence and the horizontal board fence which so often accompanied the picket, as well as the woven wire picket fence — though some other wooden fence types are not included. An increase in wood fence types occurred in the later part of the nineteenth century and some especially fine ones were developed in association with an increase in millwork. But most of these fall outside the picket fence category. About 1910 there was a great change in the character and the quality of the picket fence. Such features as boxed posts and the continuous curb base and especially the bar or spindle type, popular for nearly a century and a half, ceased to be standard construction. These changes introduced the low, mundane vertical board fences which have been popular ever since.

About half a dozen early fences which still survive in Oregon and another half a dozen in Washington are known to the author. Attempts have been made to mention these in the text so that the value of these and other survivors may be recognized. The surviving numbers are in great contrast to the countless picket fences built—for fences surrounded a majority of North American buildings in the nineteenth century.

Specific dates for a fence are rarely found, and dating fences by type or by other characteristics can be done only in a general sense. Historic resources for information on specific picket fences are scant but examples of such information have been included. Old photographs provide the most information on nineteenth century picket fences and the illustrated county histories are also of great value.

Appropriate locations, uses, related elements and spatial associations are discussed in this booklet, as are stylistic associations. Technical information provides the physical characteristics of several types of picket fences.

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Figure 2. Picket fence of irregular spindles. Henry Failing house. Completed 1875. Fence 1876. Portland, Multnomah County. Architect for both, Henry Cleaveland.

Cover. A Classical picket fence, a classical house and a classic farmhouse setting. James C. Tolman house built about 1860, Jackson County.

Front Cover, inside. Mass produced fence hardware. Latches. Hinge pair with characteristic difference between upper and lower piece. Supplee Hardware Company catalogue, 1893.

Title Page. A board picket fence. Sam Brown house built in 1858. Seen in 1860. Gervais, Marion County.

Back Cover. Characteristic urban residential streetscape. Judge William R. Willis house built 1875. View about 1880. Roseburg, Douglas County.

BACKGROUND OF THE PICKET AND OF THE FENCE

The greater number of nineteenth century picket fences were well constructed, generous in size and interesting in detail. It is fascinating to consider those American landscapes across the nation from the east coast to the west, in towns and in the countryside, with white painted picket fences playing a large part in the formation of public institutional and of private residential spaces.

Definitions, Terminology and Usage

The picket fence is an ancient form. Understanding its evolution and its early associations adds to an appreciation of the North American fence. The word "fence" is from Middle English and, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, means "a barrier intended to prevent escape or intrusion or to mark a boundary." The picket fence evolved in close conjunction with the pale and the palisade fence, related words in their origins and in their definitions. Similarities are found, for example, in the following definitions.[1]

> **pale** . . . one of the stakes of a palisade . . . picket . . . enclosure;
>
> **palisade** . . . a long, strong stake pointed at the top and set close with others as a defence . . . [and] to surround or fortify with palisades;
>
> **picket** . . . *piquet* . . . pointed or sharpened stake, post or pale . . . [and] to enclose, fence or fortify with pickets.

The long associations of picket and pale are indicated in the *Dictionary of English Etymology*[2], which for pale states "pointed stake, used in forming a fence" and, from the fourteenth century, "a fence of these." And again, for picket, this dictionary states "pointed stake." The origins of the English word "picket" are French: *piquet* from the verb *piquer*, "to prick or pierce." The French associations are implied by Thomas Jefferson in his *Garden Book*; in December 1811 he recorded "The ground laid off for my garden is to be enclosed with a Picquet fence . . . seven feet high and so close that a hare can not get into it."[3]

One example of the shared meanings of the three terms is found in a carpenters' book of prices printed in 1830, owned and apparently used by an Oregon pioneer carpenter of 1853. Fences are covered under *Fences; Gates; Palisade Fences*. Under "Fences" structural pieces such as posts are listed. Finished elements and various types of vertical pieces are under "Palisade Fences." Although the word picket is not used, boards with "pointed heads" are listed. The domestic quality of the palisade fence is emphasized in the feature of a horizontal base, "the continued pedestal, plain cap and moulding, per lineal foot, 9c," and in the statement that the "above fences are supposed about 4 feet high."[4] But while interchanging the terms was part of nineteenth century practice it would be confusing to do so in this article; in line with modern American usage "picket" and "palisade" here distinguish two fence types. Encompassed in the term "picket fence" in

this essay are wooden fences of any one of several types of vertical pieces which have shaped or pointed tops, the vertical pieces being regularly spaced and made of finished material. Critical in meeting picket criteria would be the exposure of the upper end of the vertical piece, standing free rather than dying into the rail. The upper rail is held nearly a foot below the tops of the pickets.

Of importance to an understanding of the nineteenth century fence are early connotations affecting the area within which one is privileged or protected as from intrusions or censure or from "conduct that was beyond the pale." With these associations the great differences between the implications of the space *inside* and the space *outside* are dramatized. Inside is the civilized, responsible; outside, the alien or even the dangerous. A mid-seventeenth century administrative boundary in Ireland, the English Pale, set apart five contiguous counties with their English settlers from the dispossessed native Irish "beyond the pale."[5] Jane Austen, in *Pride and Prejudice*, uses the term in a lighter vein to symbolize several of the novel's themes, "The palings of Rosings park was their boundary . . . ." Lady Catherine de Bourgh's establishment, "well situated on rising ground," is within the pale, and Elizabeth Bennet's host's "humble abode" is without.[6]

The pale (or picket) surrounds achievement and indicates its presence. It is not surprising that the picket fence is associated with the pioneer period or that the picket fence pervaded the agricultural landscapes of each successive wave of North American frontier settlement.

Design Traditions and Design Sources

The picket fence has a long history in many parts of the world; for instance a domestic form of palisade surrounds the pleasure grounds of a Flemish country house in Jan Brueghel's painting of about 1600 "Los Archiduques de Caza" in the Prado, Madrid and fence traditions were transported to the Spanish New World in the 17th and 18th centuries, primarily in the form of palisades and occasionally appearing as the more domestic picket.[7] The white painted picket fence is thought of as being especially peculiar to this continent, even an American invention in its Federal and its Classical Revival forms. There were clearly designs distinctive to the United States but white painted picket fences are seen in nineteenth century settings in such diverse parts of Canada as Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia as well as across the United States.

The physical forms of North American picket fences can be traced to two broad interrelated sources. The basic source was the palisade, wooden constructions of pointed stakes. These were primarily for utilitarian purposes but included symbolic roles relating to definition and to status. The functions, to contain and to exclude, continued throughout the nineteenth century in frontier forts as well as in yards, providing protection from marauders, stray livestock, wandering fowl, and even from "boys." From this utilitarian source came the picket of pointed boards and, also, that propensity to give

fences an undulating or chevron-like upper edge through the use of pickets of irregular lengths.

The second source for picket fences was literary and intellectual. Ideas were presented in architectural publications, examples taken from architects' designs and the great estates provided models and instruction. The literature provided technical information, the basis for deliberating proportions and stylistic attributes. Ideas about the fence reinforced its architectural roles, sometimes associating it stylistically with the house, sometimes relating it to spatial objectives, sometimes to landscape roles. Locally published price books provided practical assistance such as *The Carpenters' Company of the City and the Country of Philadelphia 1786 Rule Book*." This lists on two pages elements of various types of "palisade fence". Plate XXIX illustrates a gate and seven types of board or "stick" pickets and posts. We find the eighteenth and the nineteenth century American picket fence copying and combining forms from wood, from masonry and from metal constructions. From masonry came the heavy post and the curb-like base; light members, the narrow rod-like pieces of the bar or stick type picket fence, recalled estate fences of iron. This range of sources set the composition of wooden picket fence designs which became conventions.

In the eighteenth century English publications provided source material which was then adapted in wood for American picket fence design, and in the nineteenth century American builders' guides provided fence designs for wooden picket fences. A drawing by Samuel McIntire of Salem, Massachusets, which seems to have been made for the 1791 Elias Derby house picket fence, indicates that for the design of its wooden piers McIntire had studied Plate XIX of Batty Langley's *City and Country Builder's and Workman's Treasury of Designs*, published in London in 1740.[8] This book is believed to have been in McIntire's library. It contains eighteen engravings of piers and gates illustrating designs in masonry and in metal—masonry base and piers or posts supporting a body of metal elements.

In his emphasis on "Entrances into Gardens, Avenues, Courts and Palaces," Langley states a public and institutional role for fences. This found one expression in McIntire's architectural embellishments of the Salem Common, which was enclosed with a fence and punctuated with monumental gates. Langley points out that the frontage of fence establishes the setting and importance of a place, "these five plates contain Designs for Piers for Gates at Entrances into Gardens, Avenues, Courts, Palaces," and "the gate, Plate XXV, made for an Entrance to the House of a private Gentleman . . . ."[9] The sense that such fences were appropriate for places of importance gives some explanation to the great height and extensive length of picket fences even at isolated pioneer farmhouses.

Picket fence conventions were reinforced in the five designs presented by Asher Benjamin in the *Practical House Carpenter*, Boston, 1830. Characteristics of wooden fences for subsequent decades are found in his use of heavy boxed posts with terminal spheres, the body of the fence supported on a solid horizontal base. However, the assemblies of Benjamin's fences were not vertical picket organizations, but variations of a chinoiserie lattice

and such arrangements were rare in Oregon. Benjamin's fences do utilize square-sectioned pieces, like the typical bar picket in size. And Oregon's typical fence dimensions are the same as Benjamin's: his bases are about fourteen inches high; the body above the base, another three feet; his post with sphere is nearly eight feet high.

Terminal features for posts and pedestals are illustrated in Plate 26 "Design For Urns" in the *Practical House Carpenter*: one sphere, five urns or vases. All are poised on a thirteen inch high base composed of a circular, scotia-shaped necking on a square plinth. Exclusive of the posts, total heights range from thirty-four inches for the sphere, to a fairly consistent height of approximately forty-seven inches for the five urns. That these great sizes did not carry across to Oregon can be seen in the terminal elements on the fences of William Stevens, Thomas Krewson and others (Figs. 3 and 4). With eastern fences, also, these elements often were built at about half the dimensions shown in the plate. Benjamin is helpful in his accompanying explanation.

> When vases are used on pedestals, posts to fences, and for such like purposes, their largest diameter may be equal to the diameter of the pedestal, or post, on which they are to be placed, or from that size to one fourth less, as judgement may indicate.[10]

When a post was paneled or faced with a pilaster, the width of panel or pilaster often set the diameter of the vase, thus keeping proportions but reducing overall dimensions by as much as a half.

The similarities between Benjamin's plates and Oregon practice reinforce the sense that Oregon reiterated in its fences, for at least a sixty year period, designs which were well established American conventions. Asher Benjamin calls these "Front Fences" and "Suitable for the enclosure of a country residence . . . their construction is bold and simple, and will, if well executed, produce a . . . chaste and pleasing effect."[11] Although in his drawings the fences were all at a height of four feet, Benjamin observed, "There are many situations which require the size of front fences to be varied . . . ."[12] That instruction seems not to have interested many; in practice fence height tended to be rather standardized.

Not all theorists recommended front fences. Landscape theorists had begun attacks on residential fences in the eighteenth century in England, and in North America before the middle of the nineteenth century. Edmund Kemp disparaged the ornamental fence and the wooden fence.

> All fences of a place, . . . should be as light as they can be made, consistently with strength, and be otherwise quiet and inconspicuous. A fence is a thing of necessity, and not an ornament.[13]
>
> Walls, or close wooden palings, may be useful near towns, or in bad neighborhoods, but they should not ordinarily be more than five feet or five feet six inches high. Wooden fences are decidedly the most troublesome and expensive.[14]

Andrew Jackson Downing first published *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in 1841. In over 570 pages of text this popular book gave only one page to fences. His fence paragraph is critical, not descriptive.

Figure 3. Picket gate. Boxed posts, spherical terminations. William Stevens house built 1851. View about 1890. Willamette Forks, Lane County, Oregon.
Figure 4. Gate centered on house with two entrances. Thomas Krewson house built about 1880, in North Drain, Douglas County, Oregon.

> Fences are often the most unsightly and offensive objects in our county seats. Some persons appear to have a passion for subdividing their grounds into a great number of fields . . . . Nothing is more common, than a display immediately around the dwelling of spruce paling of carpentry, neatly made, and painted white or green, an abomination among the fresh fields, of which no person of taste could be found guilty. To fence off a small plot around a fine house . . . is a perversity . . . The close proximity of fences to the house gives the whole place a confined and mean character.[16]

In reference to fences Downing quotes Humphrey Repton's response to them, "The mind feels a certain disgust under a sense of confinement *in any* situation, however beautiful."[16] Many front fences did come down in the interests of more open front lawns in the later nineteenth century through the influence of Downing and such writers as Frank J. Scott, whose book *The Art of Beautifying the Home Grounds* was published in 1870.

And not all promoters of the Gothic house and of picturesque settings abhored the fence. In the 1865 edition of *Village and Farm Cottages* the authors devote three pages to fences. While including some discussion of hedges and wire fencing the emphasis is on the picket fence. Certainly the following lines describe a pervasive nineteenth century viewpoint.

> Though the fence ranks among the minor matters of building, it is far from being unimportant. Without it no residence can be properly protected, or regarded as complete.[17]

A quantity of literature with instruction on fences was available throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. The publications, such as Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect* (1852), Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (1862), and Cleaveland, *Village and Farm Cottages* vary in the amount and kind of information they provide on fencing, but the general impression is that an understanding and interest in fences was well established, that a popular theme just needed restating. Vaux uses a few vignettes with neither construction information nor much discussion. Sloan's large, careful drawings would be sufficient to work from and demonstrate the "boundless variety of wooden fences."[18] Cleaveland is, however, one of the few to illustrate that very popular type, the bar or spindle picket, the picket with a square or a round section. Cleaveland the popular author is pragmatic as compared to Cleaveland the practicing architect; in 1874, for a house in Portland, he developed drawings for the design of a variety of inventive and elegant picket fences. We find that most fences illustrated in architectural publications are elaborate and innovative examples. In Palliser's *New Cottage Homes* of 1887 a plate on fences shows sixteen designs of which only one is a picket fence.[19] Several use square posts with incised and chamfered detail; such posts were found accompanying pickets late into the nineteenth century. Palliser's non-picket fences use combinations of turned and jigsaw elements.

In contrast to trends toward elaboration in the architectural publications are those of the agricultural publications. The latter carry recommendations for the traditional fence. Their emphasis led to presentations of economical and technological innovations. The picket fences presented were without

ornamental posts and sometimes even without a base. This utilitarianism is one basis for the low, styleless picket fences popular from the first quarter of the twentieth century. A well known example of this practical, conservative type of publication is *Fences, Gates and Bridges*, published by the Orange Judd Company, New York in several editions for over twenty years, from 1887. Much of the material in its first edition forms the bulk of its material in 1909.

With the first mass production of iron fencing the established popularity of wood led to imitations in metal of traditional wooden forms—forms which often had metal prototypes. The 1857 catalogue of the firm of Hutchinson and Wickersham illustrates among its several iron fences one with wooden characteristics described (with italics) as "a style of fence *with pickets*, termed the 'Corrugated Iron Picket Fence.'"[20]

Early mention of wire fencing treats it as utilitarian, although something of a novelty. Samuel Sloan expressed the viewpoint, "lately in some sections, wire fencing has found favor, but more for the sake of economy than ornament."[21] A modest domestic use is suggested by Cleaveland, "Woven wire-fence stuff . . . will do very well for the front fence of a small door yard."[22] A domestic use continued to be recommended as even desirable and ornamental. Examples begin to appear in Oregon toward the end of the nineteenth century. George A. Martin in 1887, along with extensive descriptions of conventional picket fences, published illustrations of wire fencing for utilitarian uses. Of barbwire, patented in 1868, he states that not until the 1880's had "the industry attained any considerable magnitude."[23] Of interest is a fence combining wood and wire which Martin describes.

> A very desirable and popular fence is made of pickets or slats woven into horizontal strands of plain wire. . . . For a garden fence it is equal to the best picket, and at one-third of the cost.[24]

Martin also emphasizes the practical advantages of wood fencing.

> For enclosing poultry yards, gardens and grounds . . . a cheap fence with pickets of lath . . . is sufficiently high for the Asiatic and other heavy and quiet fowls [sic].[25]

As late as 1905 the mail order catalogue of the Foster-Munger Company, "America's Greatest Sash and Door Factory," offered in three or four foot lengths eleven picket patterns. All common varieties of "flat" or "square" pickets were represented.[26]

The pier and the curb almost always accompanied the nineteenth century picket fence whether it was of bars or of boards until new utilitarian, social and aesthetic interests combined to erode this pervasive sense of what had been "fitting" in fence design.

EARLY AMERICAN USES AND MIGRATIONS OF THE FENCE

Picket Fences on the Eastern Seaboard

Legislation in the American Colonies indicates the presence of fences, including the picket, almost immediately with the first settlements. "Fence

viewers" watched for the observance of this legislation in seventeenth century New England, in Pennsylvania and in other Colonies. Restoration of enclosures at Plymouth and Williamsburg utilize picket fences. Early legislation in Virginia spelled out the height which became ubiquitous in the nineteenth century in many areas. An act of 1657 entitled "What fences shall be sufficient" required that about cleared land there would be a fence at least four and a half feet high.[27] "An Act Directing the Building TheCapitol and The City of Williamsburg as Revised in 1705" stipulates, in reference to the Duke of Gloucester Street, "That every person having any lots . . . contiguous to the great street, shall inclose the said lots . . . with a wall, pails [sic] or post and rails, within six months after the building, which the law requires to be erected thereupon, shall be finished."[28] This important urban location suggests not only practical concerns but an early association of the picket fence with status.

In a recent English garden book there is a description of "the palisade fence consisting of vertical pickets attached to two horizontal members . . . . The tops of the pickets were given a pointed end. These fences are a strong tradition in the eastern United States."[29] An American would not now use the term "palisade fence" where clearly a picket fence is meant. Jefferson did describe a palisade fence when at Monticello on September 27, 1808 he wrote of a workman, "his first work is to pale in the garden, with a paling 10 feet high,"[30] and then went on to describe a system with posts nine feet apart and rails to which the pales were to be nailed.

The widespread American use of the picket fence by 1800 is shown in views drawn by Benjamin Henry Latrobe[31] in Louisiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and in Washington, D.C. Many of these examples are "front" fences, others are in strictly utilitarian locations. The urban role for the picket fence was indicated at Salem, Massachusetts where between 1790 and 1810 Samuel McIntire had designed at least a dozen.

> Among the most attractive features . . . the white painted wooden fences which adorned the streets of its fine mansions . . . [were] characteristically of vertical spindles, piercing the broader rails supported by stout square posts.[32]

To further enhance a building a regular device was to construct a gateway in the form of columns or piers supporting an entablature or pediment. Such ornamental passages have marked entrances to important places and especially to sanctuaries since ancient times. The forms used recall Classical shrines and niches, by definition, aediculae. In nineteenth century America these gateway structures usually copied or adapted traditional stone detail. An example, mentioned earlier, was erected in 1805 in Salem, Massachusetts. Four large wooden gateways were built with a wooden fence to surround the eight acre Washington Square; the western gate (Fig. 5), surmounted by an eagle and Regency in detail, was "Designed, arched and ornamented by Mr. Samuel McIntire . . . ."[33]

Occassionally and in some areas the great fence heights seen in old photographs and in extant examples were not used.

> Fences . . . referred to as the Cape Cod type . . . are usually lower than we find in the rest of New England . . . with turned post about

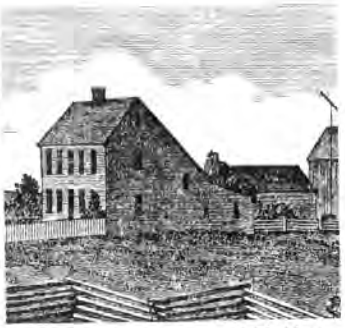


Figure 5. A gateway treated as an aedicula, 1802; by Samuel McIntire. Seen in 1836. Washington Square, Salem, Massachusetts.
Figure 6. The farm tradition of three fence types: picket, horizontal board, rail. At an eighteenth century house. Seen in 1836. Reading, Connecticut.

> 5½ to 7½ inches in diameter . . . . The posts varied from two and one half to less than four feet in height, and the fences, of course, were always lower than the posts.[34]

The majority of fences on Cape Cod, Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard were quite low, but the typical nineteenth century fence was high. Many fences surviving from the nineteenth century had experienced major repairs by the time Carl Schmidt measured them about 1930, yet their dimensional characteristics were persistent. For example, the height of pickets including the base at Miss Porter's School, Farmington, Connecticut was 4'-4¾"; in Salem, at the Ropes Memorial, 4'-5⅝"; at the Pierce-Nichols house, 4'-1⅜". The posts measure two feet or more taller than the fence.[35]

Rural use of the picket fence had clear aesthetic implications. From very early times the picket fence was typically one of three types of fences used on the American farm. A woodcut of 1838 (Fig. 6) shows this combination around a Connecticut farmhouse. The essential location for a picket fence was across the front yard, parallel to the house, with a board fence often enclosing the rest of the yard. Rail fences (worm, zig-zag, rail and rider) were seen around distant fields and pastures; around nearby fields, barnyards or gardens were board fences. This combination on the farm—picket, board, rail—migrated west, a North American phenomenon.

Picket Fences Moving West

Both the domestic picket and the defensive pale or picket migrated west and, with them, ancient terminology made its successive moves, too. Palisades on American frontiers defended from animal as well as human intrusion. At Ste. Genevieve, Missouri are found scaled-down domestic versions. Surrounding the eighteenth century home of Louis Bolduc is a restored

stockade of logs described as protection from Indians and the "flow of cattle along the narrow streets." Perhaps a similar fence was used about 1750 in Vincennes, Indiana where "lived Catholic families from Canada . . . in white-washed log houses on narrow streets. [They] built picket fences around their orchards and gardens . . . . "[36]

The immediate uses the settler made of picket fences demonstrates established fence traditions. These traditions, present in the eighteenth century on the seaboard, appeared early in the successively settled inland regions. Some Oregon pioneers had started life on the eastern seaboard; others, inland. In their labors and improvements pioneers had need for fence traditions, and had found such traditions repeatedly employed wherever they had lived. The national ubiquitousness of the picket fence is suggested by example on Elmer Calef's farm, Willamette Forks, Lane County, Oregon. There in 1873 he had completed his house, an "exact copy" of his mother's home in Washington Village, Vermont. About ten years later his brothers, John and Ira, sent "from back home" the money for Elmer to build in Oregon the white picket fence which was to enclose his house on all sides.[37]

The Centennial of 1876, through published state and county histories and atlases, illustrated North America in full bloom, developed and 'civilized'. Most regions, including the most western, were at least a generation old when the lithographs recorded them, showing a picket fence before the majority of homes. This attrioute is illustrated in: *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, 1875; *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*, 1874; *History of Ontario County, New York*, 1876; *Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Marion and Linn Counties, Oregon*, 1878—and in many similar publications. The styles of houses in these histories, from Federal to Second Empire, indicate the long-established and continuing popularity of the picket fence. Not only was the picket fence found almost everywhere, but its characteristics were persistent.

Lithographic views made in 1876 of Ontario County, New York State show that most of the one hundred homes illustrated are in the older Federal, Neo-classical and Gothic styles; a few, more current for that date, are Second Empire or Italianate. Although occassional uncertainty in drawing may confuse metal with wood detail, a total of fifty-seven fences are counted as of pickets; horizontal board fencing sets off eighteen houses; another eighteen were set off by iron fences; three houses sat behind hedges; another three appear to have been within open lawns, unenclosed. Plate LXII shows the residence of F. W. Sherman in Clifton Springs, Ontario Country, of a design which bears close resemblance to A. J. Downing's "A Plain Timber Cottage - Villa," presented in his *Architecture of Country Houses*. The picket fence surrounding the house is essentially a Classical Revival fence. While the planting before the house aspired to appropriate effects, the presence of a fence ran counter to Downing's landscape theory. It is obvious that Mr. Sherman, like many others, had arrived at house design and enclosure design from divergent concerns or understandings. The Gothic house in Figure 23 is another example.

The picket fence, as one of a group of three types of fences, is found on farms across the nineteenth century continent; for example in New England,

New York, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa; and, later, in the Far West. Variations from territory to territory include stone walls at barnyards in Iowa, for example, or greater preference for horizontal boarding than for rail, as seems to have been the case in Minnesota; but the picket fence is ubiquitous. Across the country picket fences were also seen as an appropriate embellishment for town buildings including the most important public institutions—for academies, schools, churches, city halls and courthouses. In size, scale and detail the public picket fence seems not to differ from the domestic. At various dates more than a dozen courthouses in Missouri had a gate or entire fence of pickets. Many buildings were in the Classical Revival style and, with them, the usually Classical Revival fence is in keeping. That at the Montgomery County Courthouse (1865) was segmental in design; convex curves gave its top an undulating line and sets of boxed piers, framing the gates, supported semi-circular arches. Oregon views of 1884 show similar fences: at the Hanley farm, similar gateways; on the Peters house, a picket fence with convex curves. In towns the picket fence played a protective role as well. The wooden fence surrounding the Chariton County Courthouse in 1876 had stiles—stacked, stepped platforms forming an ascent-descent entry, protection from wandering livestock.[38] Four similar stiles were called for in 1857 for the courthouse fence in Lane County, Oregon.

Figure 7. Picket fences at adjacent yards. Dr. E.J. Page house and, left rear, Carrick Barnett House. View in 1892. Oakland, Douglas County, Oregon.

THE PICKET FENCE IN OREGON

Appropriateness and Chronology

For appropriate restoration, fence selection should recognize the time period sought, the context, as well as other considerations. Time period presents some difficulty for few records indicate the construction dates for fences; certain types of fences had very long usage and information on the chronology of usage is scanty.

At its most mundane the fence was associated with survival. A crude and early stage of enclosure in the west, as on the eastern seaboard, were the stockades. These palisades were made of upright, pointed logs set in trenches, as at Fort Astoria (1811), at Fort Vancouver (1825) and at Fort Henrietta, Echo, Umatilla County (1855). Iron objects on the Oregon and on other frontiers were expensive as well as scarce and both the palisade and the log cabin were systems which could be independent of milled lumber and even of iron objects. The David and Clara Birdseye cabin at Rogue River was protected by a stockade in 1854 as a refuge during hostilities with Indians. Other types of fencing could be associated with early fortifications. At Fort Steilacoom in Washington Territory the "fencing" purchased in 1857 and seen in photographs of the Officers' Row, between the houses, is of white board pickets well over six feet high.

More prevalent in early settlement than defensive palisades were domestic fences, of split pieces. Clearly domestic and clearly primitive is the example Basil N. Longsworth described January 16, 1854 after being two months on his heavily wooded claim in the Alsea Valley, Benton County, "This morning I cut some cuts for palings to pale in a garden."[39] Possibly Basil-Longsworth's fence looked like that seen at the James Berry Riggs house of 1856 (Fig. 8) where the fence is somewhat crude in context with the house, although the house does have a vernacular, eighteenth century character. More to be noted is the fact that the primitive Riggs fence was on a town lot in the newly developing "city" of Dallas, Polk County. There are early examples of picket fences including the legend that Sidney Moss, who had laid out Oregon City for Dr. John McLoughlin in 1842, also built him a picket fence that year. In the new city of Portland the "first" photograph of Front Street, in 1852, shows picket fences set between the wooden commercial buildings, all probably no more than five years old.[40]

Livestock and the problem of stray animals gave early encouragement to fence building both in the country and in towns. Almost every town passed laws to combat livestock running loose on the streets. That stray animals were a widespread problem is indicated by a regular feature in the *Albany Oregon Democrat*; a column entitled "Estrays" listed the names of men who had "taken up" stray livestock with particular descriptions of the various horses, sheep, steer, cows and a heifer. The November 8, 1859 column included the following, "John Adams, living on Myrtle Creek, near the bridge, Douglas County, has taken up one dark bay mare mule, about ten years old with an old spanish brand on the left side of the neck, and another on the left shoulder, both very dim."

Picket fences of finished quality in both bar and board versions appeared early in the development of the Oregon territory. Although fence literature

Figure 8. A fence of pales. Margaret Johnson Taylor Riggs and James Berry Riggs house built about 1856. Dallas, Polk County.
Figure 9. New fence, new home; diagonal walks connect both entrances. Patrick and Alice Masterson house. View 1899. Port Orford, Curry County.

toward the end of the nineteenth century appears to have favored board pickets rather than the stick or square bar version, the fence-building public continued to favor both types. Sam Brown, near the later town of Gervais, had built his fence, perhaps himself as he was a carpenter, within a year or two of the 1858 house. It is shown in a photograph believed to date from 1860 and thus illustrates one of the earliest documented picket fences in Oregon (Title Page). In this photograph the man standing on an elevated mounting platform confuses the sense of fence height. The pickets terminate in a blunted spearhead design. The boards are unusually wide, perhaps five inches, and closely spaced. The tall, boxed posts which accent each gate rise to well over six feet, their tops capped by low pyramids of graduated blocks. The Sam Brown house operated as a stage station in the 1860's, and, as such, the house is set close to the public road. Immediately across the road was the barn, the barnyard's high board fence, in this photograph, showing signs of what is probably whitewash.

The elements of picket fences were available commercially in Oregon towns by 1860 and that availability would have encouraged their use, standardized construction and at the same time increased the variety of available designs. As early as 1860 lumber mills had expanded to include the more complex manufacture of planing mills. The Colbath and Bass, Pioneer Sash and Blind and Door Factory, at Salem, was a going operation in 1859; pickets would be well within the competence of the company that offered, "all kinds of sash, blinds, window frames, cornices, mouldings, outside and inside finish work of all descriptions." And, in 1869, we find the Capital Lumbering Company of Salem advertising in the *Willamette Farmer*, "fence pickets."[41] "Pickets" were one of the items sold in 1874 by the Jones and Crawford planing mill at McMinnville, Yamhill County.[42]

A reliable source on the early use of fences in Oregon are the lithographs which accompany the several Oregon county histories published between 1875 and 1885. The reliability of these illustrations is corroborated by early photographs. The lithographic media did not allow the fine lines necessary to record the specific detail of the board or spindle, but the artists were able to account for the correct positioning of the fence, gate design, type of posts and such specific characteristics as regular or irregular picket lengths. The remarkable attention given to detail in the artist's lithograph is seen in the Michael Hanley farm illustration. If the view of 1884 (Fig 10) is examined it will be seen how similar the unusual construction of the gate (shown in the rear) is to the gate recently photographed at the Hanley farm (Fig. 11). A view of the Hanley front fence, taken about 1890 (Fig. 12), shows that the posts, curiously pointed in the 1884 lithograph, were indeed pointed.

The historical atlases of Oregon show that by the third quarter of the nineteenth century nearly every house and many public buildings had a front fence of pickets. In several cases the houses illustrated were only a year or two old at the time of publication and their fences quite new. Picket fences are found in front of every style of home built between the eighteen-forties and the mid eighteen-eighties and they are found in front of the most modest as well as the more expensive homes. It is the impression that a

picket fence was expected, that the new house was considered incomplete until the fence had been constructed.

A fence of uniform height chosen to go before the Bell house, a new Second Empire style house in Yamhill, received positive comment from the *Yamhill Reporter*, McMinnville, on March 22, 1883, "William Bell has torn down the old blacksmith shop and is putting up a nice new picket fence which will add much to the look of the place."

Appropriateness and Style

Attributes of the nineteenth century picket fence suggest six styles, though distinctions can be slight and, furthermore, association with either a particular style or quality of building is not consistent. Several types of picket fence had a long popularity. But the basic characteristics and principles of the fence itself—its height, its spacings, the size of its pieces and the substantial emphasis given the base—these construction features prevailed throughout the nineteenth century and into the first decade or two of the twentieth. The first of the six styles is the primitive and *utilitarian*; with it this essay is using the term "pale." The simple vertical pieces were split or rough-sawn.

A fence which might be called *Post-Colonial* is found with a few Oregon homes, usually earlier ones. These fences are characterized by great height, relatively light and open elements between the posts; posts are emphasized, large, paneled and often topped by an urn. These fences are usually of three rails with round spindles or, more frequently, square bars, often widely spaced and in staggered lengths. Post-Colonial characteristics are found in the fence which originally accompanied the Villa style Dowell house of 1858 in Jacksonville (Fig. 13); and, at a much later date, in the fence which accompanied the Queen Anne style Ramsey-Hembree house built about 1890 in McMinnville, Yamhill County.

The Classical Revival style fence is distinguished by a sense of weight and by Greek Revival detail. Fences of this general description constitute one of the most prominent and one of the longest-lived fence traditions in Oregon. The curb, "plinth" or base, although usually about twelve inches high, is sometimes eighteen or more. The boxed posts may have paneled faces and often are topped with a beveled block or a sphere. The "field" of the fence derived either from metal precedents (bars or sticks) or defensive wood paling (boards). The heavy posts and base recall stone. Moldings accent posts, mark off the rails and cap the curb. The fence at the Sam Brown house provides an example. Although its boxed posts were held unusually low, the fence at the James C. Tolman house (cover) is a remarkably fine one. While found with some Classical Revival houses, the Classical fence is found with houses of other styles as well.

The *Early Gothic Revival* style fence is distinguished from Classical Revival fences by several kinds of detail not always present in any one Gothic style fence. Posts, boxed and capped with pyramids or pendent forms, had paneled faces proportioned to accent verticality, usually enhanced by moldings of a deep contour. Before a number of Gothic Revival houses fences

Figure 10. Picket fence. Gateways treated as aediculae. Michael Hanley farm house. Built in 1875. Lithograph 1884. Jacksonville vicinity, Jackson County.
Figure 11. A single gate, Gothic detail. Front. About 1875. View 1985. Hanley Farm, Jackson County.
Figure 12. Picket fence, boards with teardrop tops. Michael Hanley house. View about 1890. Jackson County.

Figure 13. Original picket fence and original roof. B.F. Dowell house built 1859. Jacksonville, Jackson County.
Figure 14. Steeple end in a later twentieth century type of picket fence, later roof. B.F. Dowell house built 1859. Jacksonville, Jackson County.
Figure 15. Solid wood post, shaped pyramid top. Wire replacing earlier pickets. View 1985. South Third Street, Jacksonville, Jackson County.

with pickets of irregular height were designed for arrangement in large sweeping curves, ten feet or more in length, concave or convex in form. Such a fence sat before the A.V. Peters house of 1869, a Rural Gothic Cottage house in Eugene (Fig. 23). In another Gothic expression posts of solid blocks were terminated in sharp points, as at the Michael Hanley house, where the single gates used irregular pickets to form an ogee crest. The Hanley fence, which is Gothic in all its detail, is perhaps the best of all examples in Oregon. Many Gothic Revival houses were accompanied by fences hardly distinguishable from Classical Revival fence designs.

Late Gothic and *Late Victorian* fences continued some of the characteristics of the earlier Gothic Revival style. But complex handlings of pickets and of the groupings of pickets are found, and combinations of board pickets accompanied by board spacers given jigsaw edges are frequent. Most notable are the posts; often of solid material, generally of rather large section, some are turned and deeply incised and terminated by a sphere while others are square in section with chamfered edges and lightly incised faces and their tops shaped as pyramids. The view of St. Joseph's Academy, Pendleton shows an excellent example of a chamfered post (Fig. 19).

The sixth type of fence is one which used combinations of *wire with pickets*. This begins a major departure from the true picket fence. In these lightweight constructions strands of wire have replaced the horizontal wooden rails but the pickets remain, as wood laths (Fig. 1). These fences tend to abandon both architectual and structural emphasis. By 1900 several types of woven wire fencing are found as domestic front fences. In one case in Jacksonville (Fig. 15) the posts of the earlier picket fence have been retained to support newer rails and the wire.

By the 1860's cast metal fencing had arrived in Oregon. For example, family plots in two Benton County cemeteries some miles apart, the Armstrong Cemetery near Invale and that on top of Winkle Butte, are both enclosed in cast iron fences manufactured by Crowell, patented in 1865.[43] This rare example roughly coincides with the general availability of architectural iron in the state.[44] Views of nineteenth century Portland show ironfencing. But such iron fencing is not construed as a type of picket and wood was the competitive option, selected, for instance, for the Failing mansion of 1874. The illustrated county histories of 1878-1885 generally show fences of wood, picket fences. Even in such urban areas as Albany or Salem only a few fences were of cast iron.

A wooden picket fence could have a long life. Notable is the hundred-year history of the Michael Hanley fence, shown here in several views. Perhaps built shortly after the house of 1875, first illustrated in 1884, it sat for at least twenty-five years in the same position. Relocated in the early twentieth century it may have stood eighty years in its present location, though with many replacements and patches. A similar lifespan existed for the Fergueson fence, illustrated in 1884 (Fig. 27); seen by the author in 1960, the fence was then in its ninetieth year. The fence on Squire Rycraft's farm at Alsea, Benton County, probably built with his house in 1870, is found in photographs up into the 1920's, forty to fifty years later.

It was sometimes a practice to replace an old picket fence with a picket

fence of another design. Two views of the Dowell house in Jacksonville epitomize this. The house lost, in addition to its original fence, its distinctive nineteenth century villa form for its flat roof was obliterated by the present hipped roof (Figs. 13 and 14). The baseless twentieth century fence lacks the distinctive architectural rhythms of its predecessor; also its greater height.

It is difficult, solely from physical characteristics, to arrive at more than a generalized date for a nineteenth century fence. Fences seem to have undergone little change over a long period in contrast to changes in Oregon houses, which can be dated on stylistic grounds to within a ten year period. Stylistic generalizations could pose difficulty for those who restore fences. There are, however, for most fence types and most building forms, combinations of fence and building which do indicate appropriate stylistic association. A question that must be answered in restoration work is whether the predilection of the fence builder would have been toward the vernacular or the sophisticated.

THE PICKET FENCE IN OREGON, STRUCTURE AND DETAIL

Types of Fence Pickets

Three types of fence pickets were common in Oregon from the 1840's into the first decade or two of the twentieth century. All three are found across the continent and, with differences in detail, had been present in the eighteenth century. The types are distinguished by the differences in the shape of the picket and the assembly which makes the enclosure rather than in their frame construction. In their framing elements the types are similar. A discussion of structure and frame follows in the next section.

A fence of **pales** is usually a crude, utilitarian fence. On the P Ranch in Morrow County before 1898 were horse corrals of "brush." The verticals were of juniper six to eight inches in diameter in natural twisted forms set into the ground, closely spaced, seven to nine feet in height with rough-cut ends. These were held together at three or four feet above the ground by the rail, in random lengths, wired to them.[45] In a fence of pales vertical members were often unfinished split pieces, with flat, pointed or broken ends, seldom painted. Such a fence might be placed across the front of a house, but a proper use was to surround vegetable gardens to exclude animals. It was also used as an enclosure to contain farm animals.

A view of one Oregon pale fence shows verticals split from small poles, widths varying from four to six inches; the height, in the neighborhood of four feet. The pales are nailed to two rails, each a long peeled pole, perhaps with slightly flattened faces. A primitive pale fencing is seen at the James Berry Riggs house (Fig. 8).

Pickets of boards were made from lumber planed to a finish thickness of at least one inch and of three or four or more inches in width. The lighter three-quarter inch piece must be associated with the twentieth century. Of an earlier thickness are the pickets at the Michael Hanley farm; the boards are seven-eighths by three and a half inches wide and spaced their width

FOR OTHER VARIATIONS OF BOXED POSTS, CURB - BASE ASSEMBLY, BOARD & BAR PICKETS SEE PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT.

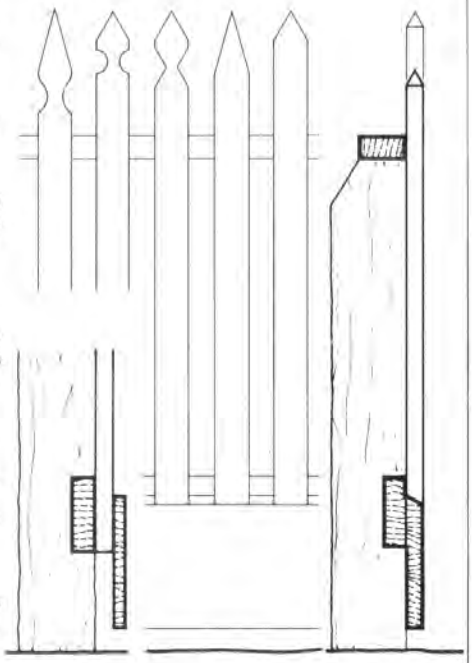
BOARD PICKETS FROM LEFT: TEAR DROP CUT, SPEARS, STEEPLE AT 75° & AT 60° WIDTH 3", 4" THICKNESS 7/8", 1".

CLEAR SPACING OF BOARD PICKETS FROM 1/3 TO FULL WIDTH OF PICKET. TYPICAL 2/3 WIDTH IS SHOWN.

OTHER TYPES OF BAR OR BOARD PICKETS ARE APPROPRIATE WITH BOTH SOLID AND BOX POST FENCES.

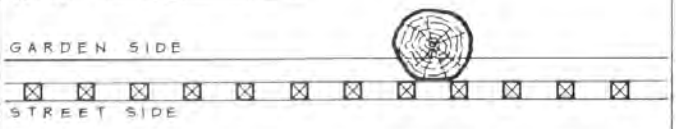
TWO BASE ASSEMBLIES SHOWN, AT LEFT PICKET BEHIND BASE BOARD; AT RIGHT, ON TOP.

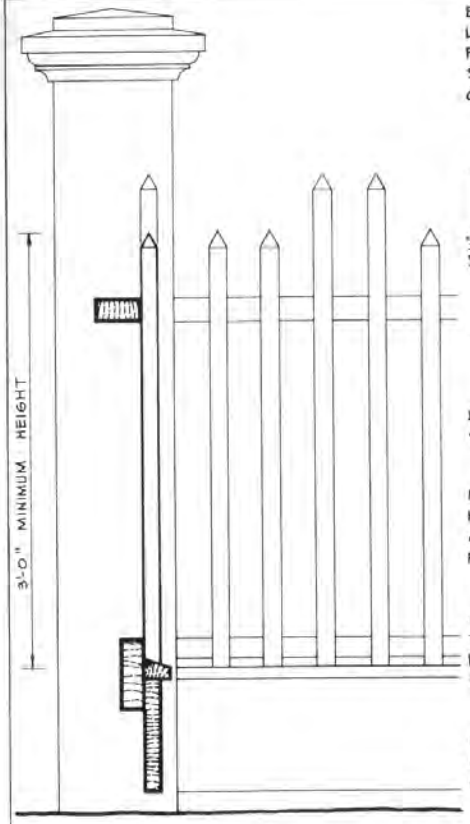
POST NOTCHED TO RECEIVE CONTINUOUS 2" x 6" + BOTTOM RAIL.



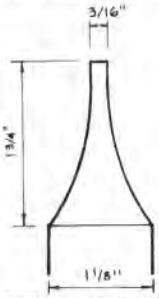
DETAILS ··· SECTION AND PLAN OF SOLID POST

SCALE ONE FOOT





EXAMPLE OF IRREGULAR LENGTH BAR PICKETS - PYRAMID TOPS - CLEAR SPACED AT WIDTH OF TWO BARS.



DETAIL BAR PICKET WITH CHISELED CAP.

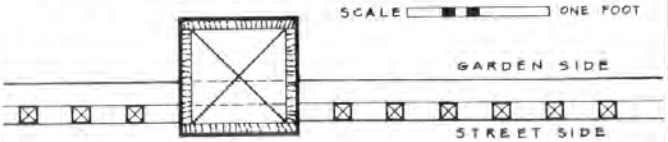
NOT SHOWN ARE HORIZONTAL MOLDINGS OFTEN PLACED ACROSS PICKETS AT RAILS.

2" x 4" + TOP RAIL
2" x 6" + BOTTOM RAIL
NOTCHED INTO POST STRUCTURE.

PLINTH, CURB OR BASE 1 1/4" x 10" MINIMUM, 12" OR MORE TYPICAL.

SECTION · PLAN · ELEVATION AT BOXED POST

SCALE ONE FOOT



apart. A later thickness may be seen at the Stoner house built in Oysterville, Washington in 1905, which has a contemporary-looking fence; the boards are three-quarters of an inch by two and a half inches. Board pickets were set with a clearance equal to at least half the board width and most often equal to its full width, but not greater. Board pickets usually were set a uniform height — "regular" pickets. The individual piece, usually three feet in length, results in a four foot high fence.

A few examples of board picket fences using graduated lengths probably existed in every Oregon county. These include the fences with pickets set in a series to create a great curve. The meeting point between arches often fell at a post, but to get a sufficiently long and graceful curve more than one structural bay (post to post) might be incorporated. While convex curves are seen, the concave, or descending curve, was far more popular (Fig. 23). There are several examples known of "segmental" picket fences placed before Gothic Revival style houses.

The treatment of the upper end of board pickets took any one of six forms, which are not always easily distinguishable. The first form is the *square top*. It is mentioned here although little photographic evidence has survived indicating its use in Oregon. In this simple fence regular boards with square ends were set vertically and carried about eight inches above the upper rail. In a definitive sense the square-ended piece may not be termed a picket; but publications did, and do, occasionally include it.

The second type of board picket, and by far the most common, is the pointed or *steeple end* (Figs. 14, 23, 25). Both edges are sawn at an angle, commonly sixty degrees; many examples of seventy degree cuts are found and a few of about thirty. This last gives a flat and heavy appearance.

Rarely found in Oregon in the nineteenth century, the third type of picket top is the *single slope*, one cut, usually at seventy degrees. Generally these pickets were laid up repetititously and produced a ragged, rather coarse appearance. The type has been called a "Southern" fence.[46] Jefferson specified one for a vegetable garden and often this type was selected for functional rather than for ornamental interests. The single slope picket fence is seen in its utilitarian role in the backyard of the Asa and Abby Sanders house (Fig. 26); for their front fence the Sanders selected a different design. A single slope picket is seen at the nineteenth century Bryan house in Dilley (Fig. 17). Julia Hess Bryan came from Arkansas; George Bryan, born in Missouri, had come to Oregon as a child with his father who had been born in Kentucky.[47] Note that the Bryans set their Southern style pickets either side of the gate at opposite hand, the two patterns meeting in the gate at its central picket, producing the one steeple point in the entire frontage.

Almost all other versions of the board picket are variations of the steeple end including the fourth type of board picket, the *spearhead*. This also terminates in a pointed end, but is cut away just below the seventy degree angles to create a necking or base between the length of the picket and the pointed head. Several versions of "V" cuts were possible, though the "V" of two forty-five degree cuts was almost standard. The spearhead picket found at the Dewitt Stoner house (Fig. 18) is cut at an angle of sixty degrees with a necking formed of two half circular cuts; the radius is one inch. The

same design and the same dimensions had been used in another Washington fence, located two hundred miles to the east; it surrounded a house built about 1889 at Desmoines.[48] By closely spacing its boards three-quarters of an inch apart, full circles were indicated by the adjoining half circles.

The fifth type of board picket is the "pendent" or *tear drop* termination. It also is a version of the steeple end and so very like the spearhead that in photographs distinction is difficult. The essential difference is that the necking of the tear drop is composed, not of angles or of a single curve, but of a double curve on each edge. The form is an "S" curve, a cyma, cutting in for the base and curving out to flow into the angular termination above. An example is found at the Michael Hanley farm (Fig. 11).

The sixth type of board treatment, *jigsaw work*, covers as a classification a range of possibilities affecting not only the cap but the full length of the board. This is a later nineteenth century development with examples found as late as nineteen-twenty. The jigsaw work made use of the scroll saw or compass saw to cut a series of profiles from the edges and the ends of the fencing boards. The use of elaborate pickets was enhanced by the arrival of planing mills and of sash and door factories in the 1860's. Treatments could be similar to the jigsaw work found on Gothic Revival porch railings; great similiarities between architectural detail on a house and the detail of a fence may be found. Such work lasted through the Second Empire style and into the Craftsman work early in the twentieth century. But with houses of Gothic, Second Empire and other styles too, a less complex board or spindle fence, not jigsaw work, was usually the choice.

A simple version of a jigsaw work picket assembly is seen in the Squire Rycraft house (ca 1870), Alsea, Benton County in a photograph taken about 1889 (Fig. 16). In this example the fence pickets were assembled matching the technique used on the Rycraft porch posts. The caps of the pickets were cut at angles of less than forty-five degrees suggesting a circular crown. The pickets are joined by rectangular spacers with their upper and lower edges shaped in half circles (as on the house). Spacers and pickets create a continuous flat surface emphasized by the repetition of curvilinear profiles. Gate and gate posts were also milled and shaped into circular crowns. An example of extensive jigsaw work in a picket fence is seen in the view of St. Joseph's Academy at Pendleton (Fig. 19).

But, of all these types of board picket fences, it must be emphasized that the simple pointed board or steeple-end type remained the most popular throughout the nineteenth century in Oregon.

Pickets of square and of round bars. The greater number of nineteenth century picket fences in Oregon were built of square wooden pickets, distinguished here by the term "bar." These were often one and a quarter inches square; some were more than two inches square. A top treatment was a pyramid cut at a forty-five, sixty or seventy degree angle. An equally common process was to sharply chisel out the four faces at the top, creating concave, angled surfaces and a small flat terminating square. Examples of chiseled tops from the nineteenth century were found at the John Fergueson house of 1869 and the William Stevens house of 1851; twentieth century examples include the fence built around 1900 at the Cochrane house (Fig. 20).

Figure 16. Jigsaw treatment on picket fence and porch at the Squire Ryeraft house built about 1870. Alsea, Benton County. View about 1889.
Figure 17. A single slope board picket fence and a marriage at the George Bryan house. Dilley, Yamhill County.
Figure 18. Board pickets, spear termination. Dewitt Stoner house built 1905. View 1985. Oysterville, Washington state.

Figure 19. Board pickets with jigsaw work. St. Joseph's Academy. Built 1884. View 1887-1896. Pendleton, Umatilla County.
Figure 20. Chisled caps, irregular length bar pickets. Robert Cochran house. Built about 1900. View 1985. Brownsville, Linn County.
Figure 21. Handmade wrought iron strap hinge. Stone post. Carriage gate. About 1875. View 1985. Hanley Farm, Jackson County.

Teardrop shaped tops, an elaboration of the square picket distinguished the Krewson fence of about 1880 in North Drain (Fig. 4).

The spacing between square pickets varied from a clearance, in one fence, of as little as one picket width to as much, in others, of three. A clearance of twice the bar width may have been common. Most pickets were set at the customary right angle to the frame; however the picket could be set on an angle, forty-five degrees askew. In that case, for stability, the rails were drilled for the pickets to pass through. An example of this was seen at the Dowell house in Jacksonville.

Pickets were described as "regular" or "irregular" in reference to the arrangements of vertical lengths within a fence. Perhaps it was as usual to have square pickets all of one length with their tops in horizontal alignment (regular) as it was to create a saw tooth top (irregular) by alternating picket lengths. Height differences were standardized from between two to eight inches, either varying alternate pieces or often pairs, two up, two down. The upper rail was placed about six or eight inches below the shorter picket top. The Cochran house in Brownsville grouped alternating picket lengths in sets based on three lengths. A more sophisticated irregular version created great contrast between the tall and the short pickets through the use of a third rail, the upper receiving the longer picket and the middle rail, the shorter; the rails drilled and pierced by the pickets. These pickets would differ at least a foot in their lengths. This design, using irregular lengths as well as using the square wooden bar, recalls the iron fences featured by Batty Langley and others for English mansions in eighteenth century builders' guides.

Round bars or spindles, while less common in nineteenth century Oregon, perhaps were considered more elegant. An example of their use is seen in the fence of the Henry Failing house in Portland (Fig. 2). These spindles were set in the system using three rails. Spindles could be as simple as broom handles, and as elegant; but these are of a later and different order.

Structure and Framing Members

The fence was carried on posts set into the ground eight or nine feet apart. Henry Cleaveland recommended that "If the post be set with its natural top downward, the reversal of the sap vessels will retard the absorption of water, and will thus add to the durability of the timber."[49] No examples have come to light. Another protective practice was to char the end to be buried. Diameters of peeled log posts would be four to eight inches; and similar dimensions for rough sawn square-sectioned pieces. The majority of fences were constructed with rough posts set behind the face of the fence and held eight or more inches below the top of the pickets. In this manner the structure of the fence is seen from within the yard. One kind of variation, but rather rare, is seen on the Michael Hanley farm where, although the solid posts were set behind, their tops were brought a foot or more above the pickets. In a minority of fences the posts were brought forward, boxed and capped in finished lumber and the pickets were set back to run between these architectural piers.

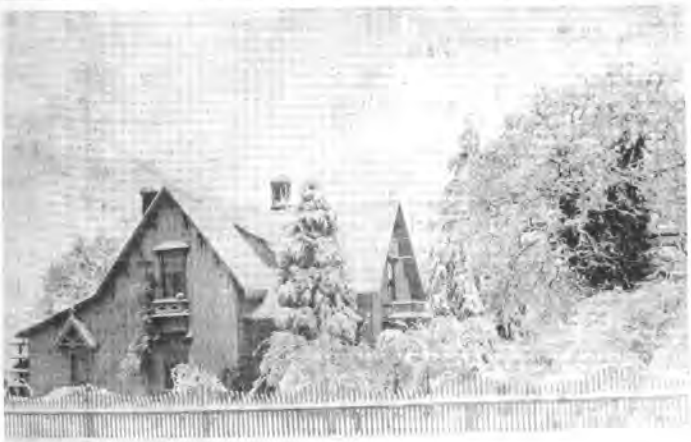


Figure 22. A corner gate in an irregular bar picket fence. The Norman house. Built about 1870-1880. View 1900-1909. Roseburg, Douglas County.
Figure 23. Irregular pickets in concave curves. Gothic cottage after Cleaveland and Backus. A. V. Peters house built about 1869. Eugene, Lane County.

The body of the fence was four or five feet high with the picket element of three or more feet. Below their tops and at their bases the pickets were nailed to rails. These two horizontal pieces were of two or three inch stock, by four to six inches; the lower rail was set vertically, the upper usually flatwise. At the bottom of the fence just above the ground a thick finished board, a base or curb, ran horizontally. On an early twentieth century fence a six inch high board was acceptable, but in earlier structures it usually exceeded twelve inches in height and for a 'proper' appearance twelve inches would seem to be a minimum. On many earlier fences two more horizontal pieces were added; they were finished moldings, seldom of rectangular section, carried across the pickets at their rail lines on the outside of the fence (Figs. 9, 19, 27). In this manner the vertical and horizontal relationships of the fence were emphasized. Sections of fence tended to be set with the rails parallel to the ground and every effort was made to give these horizontals a sense of continuous alignment throughout the length of the fence; steps and slopes were minimized. Both the posts and the pickets were plumbed and set vertically.

In examining old photographs, it is rare to find anything other than a very lightcolored fence; how often it was whitewash and how often white paint is not known. The entire fence (pickets, posts, rails and curb) was covered. The fence color may have matched the body of the house if that was light colored, but the most common color seems to have been white. Occassionally the horizontal moldings or the base of the fence was singled out for a darker color treatment; perhaps like early interior practice the dark or black baseboard was for practical interests (Figs. 4, 9). Light or white fences with dark bases sometimes accompanied houses painted in contrasting colors. An example is the fence of the Willis house built in 1874 (Back Cover). In an undated photograph the Classical Revival James C. Tolman house, built in the late 1850's, is painted what seems to be white, and its fence white with a dark base.

Hardware

Gate hardware might include three elements: the fastener mechanism, the hinges, and a closing device. In more primitive situations various wooden shapes were used, often improvised, for both fasteners and hinges. But many metal shapes, both handwrought and mass-produced, were in use for a long time; items of gate hardware available today resemble nineteenth century pieces.

Iron hinges were as simple as the classic single strap, first handwrought, later rolled, a foot or more in length, bolted to the gate and rotating on a pintle driven into the post. Such a design can be found from the earliest period to the latest in traditional picket fence construction. From 1860 to well after 1900 a common gate hinge was the double strap, two triangular pieces joined by a pin. More finished and more architectural cast or shaped hinges were developed, too.

The Winterthur Trade Catalogue Collection shows a number of heavy cast hinge designs available commercially. Usually the upper and lower

hinges were detailed quite differently. Such differentiation assisted the throw or "balance" of an open gate and its askew effect can be seen in many photographs (Figs. 7, 25). From the Supplee Hardware Company catalogue[30] "Bonney's Gate Hinges" illustrate these differences in detailing (Front Cover, inside). A lower hinge very similar to Bonney's is on a picket gate at the William Barlow house of 1885 at Canby. The hinge is marked "Pat. Nov. 2, 1880." The trade catalogues also show various fasteners with spring- or swivel-operated arms. The "Philadephia Latch" is an example of a long-standing design. Similar hinges, fasteners and latches had been commercially available since the mid-nineteenth century.

Self-closing was assisted in some instances by a heavy-duty spring set diagonally across the stile and post. An older system used a length of chain weighted at the center and secured to the gate and post. At the Birdseye log house in Jackson County the weight was made with scrap metal; on the gates of the gardens behind the pavilions of Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia a wooden ball provides the weight.

When the Michael Hanley fence near Jacksonville was repositioned in the twentieth century many original pickets and other details were reused. Among these elements surviving from the fence of 1875 may well be the four hand-forged strap hinges, each about fifteen inches long, their pintles let into six foot high stone piers which flank the carriage gate (Fig. 21). Note that at the bases the straps run in the reverse direction.

Gates, Gateways

A front gate's proper position could be established by the center of the house, usually the front door. Just as the fence was parallel to the house so the front walk ran perpendicular to it and on axis with this center. Most illustrations demonstrate this convention. Where houses occupied a full city block or a corner lot, the corner gate location was sometimes chosen (Fig. 22). The problem of centering was attractively resolved for a symmetrical house which had two separate front porches, the Thomas Krewson house (Fig. 4): the gate is aligned with the center axis of the house, the bay window, and two diagonal walks branch off to reach each front porch. A similar arrangement was given the Masterson house (Fig. 9).

Gates usually received special treatment. Emphasis was given in many regular picket fences by using irregular pickets in the gates. Some took a pedimented form, as at the houses of Sam Brown, George Bryan and Squire Rycraft. Various curved forms were also used. Emphasis was given by default in those yards where only the gate was of pickets, flanked by fencing of cheaper construction. Often emphasis was given the gate by use of a recessed area. Examples are seen at the Masterson house and the Armstrong house (Figs. 1, 25). A trapezoidal recess three or four feet deep was constructed by turning two sections of the fence at an angle, which strengthened both gate and fence. The board walk, extending into this alcove, received the outward-opening gate.

Sometimes, adding immeasurably to the setting of the house and to the

Figure 24. A gateway treated as an aedicula. Darius Cartwright house built 1853. Lithograph, 1884. Siuslaw Valley, Lane County.
Figure 25. A recessed gateway. Bar type pickets. Minerva Armstrong house built 1858. View 1890-1910. Jacksonville, Jackson County.

architectural quality of the fence, the gate was treated as a three-dimensional aedicula. This ancient classical motif took its form from shrines and niches. The device most frequently used in Oregon was a semicircular arch carried on piers whose only detail was the molding which marked the spring lines. Piers and arch were of a boxed construction at least twelve inches square. Examples were to be seen on several farms including that of Michael Hanley. On Isaac Porter's farm, Springhill, Benton County, the gateway was rectangular, posts and lintel. An aedicula with fully developed architectural detail sat before the Hasnell Ames house, Jackson County. Like the house it was Italianate, remarkable for its segmental arched opening with keystone, flat entablature and three large urns. An architectural screen served as a paired gateway in rural Lane County in keeping with the Classical Revival style of the Cartwright house of 1855, a station on the Oregon and California Stage lines (Fig. 24).

A front or "single" gate was three to four feet wide. Gates for wagons required a width of around twelve to fourteen feet; within a picket fence, a wagon gate sometimes was constructed of two leaves. The greater number of picket gates opened outward and in towns this thrust the gate out over the public sidewalk. There it often must have sat, giving rise to Henry Cleaveland's remark, "Unless you wish to invoke curses on your head, both loud and deep don't let your gates swing outward!"[51]

Gate construction was given great care. Visually the gate continued the characteristics of the fence for its front elevation aligned with the detail of the fence which flanked the gate. However the interior elevation, the "rear", of the gate was a specially constructed mortised, tenoned and pegged frame. Making up this frame were rails and stiles, a full two by three inches. The vertical pieces, the stiles, sat behind the first and last pickets, occasionally incorporating them, and ran the full height of the gate to stiffen it and to support the base board. Some gates set crossed diagonals within this frame for rigidity, but in common practice a single diagonal ran down from the top of the latch stile to the base of the hinge stile (Figs. 3, 7, 25).

THE PICKET FENCE IN OREGON, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

The Picket Fence on the Farm

On the farm in the Oregon territory the picket fence was one in the trilogy of fences: rail, board, picket. This combination, as established on the eastern seaboard along with the picket fence itself, migrated west. Discussion of rail and of horizontal board fencing is included here because of their relationships to the picket fence.

In the earliest development of agricultural property in the Oregon Territory the rail was usually the first and, for some time, the major fence, used in the beginning to separate small areas of grain and garden from large areas of loose stock. By the 1860's and 70's, the rail had moved some distance

from the house to enclose the farm's outlying areas, pastures, fields and woodland. As the driveway often passed between fields, it was seen flanked with high rail fences leading from the county road toward the house.

Splitting rails was one of the jobs the young immigrant to Oregon, often penniless after the long trip west, took on immediately during a wet fall and winter. So John Minto in 1844 agreed for a price to make the Honorable Peter H. Burnett "one thousand and five hundred cedar rails."[52] This would have enclosed about ten acres. Basil Longsworth arriving in 1853 arranged with Mr. Butterfield to "make rails for . . . $1.50 per hundred." During a week he usually split about 800 rails, twelve dollars worth.[53] According to a writer of 1877, "It takes five thousand rails, ten feet long, six inches thick to make a mile of fence."[54]

A distinguishing characteristic of the period's horizontal board fences, and one found nationally, was graduated spacing. A progressive enlargement of space between boards from the ground to the top was accompanied by diminuation in board size, the largest boards and tightest spacing at the bottom of the fence. This can be seen in a number of photographs such as that of the Sam Brown house. At front yards the top board was capped by a board canted flatwise covering the post ends and "dressing up" the fence. Board fences near the house were whitewashed or painted, usually white.

The Fergueson farm as seen in 1884 illustrates the relationships in the three fence system (Fig. 27). The site was developed following 1848. All of the structures and many elements of the fence systems were standing in 1960. These included the picket fence before the house, in the distant field a section of rail fence, and the pole and lintel gateway leading to the barn. The drawing shows board fencing at all yards by the barn and at the vegetable garden. To be noted is the amount of fencing and the number of enclosures.

A series of diaries kept by Evan Woodruff of Cleaveland, Coles Valley, Douglas County gives some insight into the importance of fencing and the frequency of fence building on a family farm, including the extensive use of pickets. Only a portion of his fence references, spread over seventeen years, can be quoted here. A lithograph, published by Walling in 1884, of the Woodruff farm coincides with the second year of the Woodruff diary.[55] At the center distance is the hewn log house. Built by Evan's grandfather, Jonathan Woodruff, about thirty years earlier, it was the family home until his parents, Anthony and Martha Woodruff, moved into the "new" house, seen at the far left, in 1883. The diary's first mention of pickets, October 29, 1883, "built Picket Fence," probably refers to that fence around the new home. Two and a half months after his picket entry, Evan Woodruff recorded that the field sketch for this Walling lithograph was being made: he wrote on January 17, 1884 "Cold. 29° Some men at work on Walling's History here, took a sketch of the farm, Plowed." The accuracy of the Walling artist is substantiated in part by comparison of the lithograph with photographs of the Anthony Woodruff house and of the Jonathan Woodruff log house. Evan Woodruff himself was accurately recorded too, for it must be he shown at the far right, plowing.

The pickets for the Anthony Woodruff fence were of boards with spear-shaped terminations. The same design was used later by Evan in the fence

Figure 26. Outside the picket fence at the single gate. Sanders farmhouse. Built about 1880. View about 1890. From left: Asa, Abby, Mary, Hannah. Molalla vicinity, Clackamas County.
Figure 27. The farm tradition of three fence types: rail, horizontal board, picket. John Fergueson farm. Developed from 1848. House 1869. Lithograph 1884. Junction City vicinity, Lane County.

built around the old log house which became his home after his marriage, May 15, 1884. A photograph of the Anthony Woodruff home in 1945 shows the 1883 fence still in use — although, when repaired five years earlier, its base of horizontal boarding had been removed.[56]

Some of the picket fencing Evan Woodruff purchased may have been in cruder forms, perhaps paling, for such utilitarian uses as he noted March 4, 1893, "Made fence around the cherrie orchard" or for vegetable gardens, or the chicken house built at another time. A great deal of his new fence construction must have been in pickets. Maintenance alone could hardly explain such activity as recorded in April and in October in 1893; perhaps the first-mentioned supply was for the picket fence around the log house.

> April 15, repaired fence forenoon went to Leo Marsters afternoon got 600 boards and 440 pickets. . . . April 21, Worked on fence around house sold Leo Marsters wagon for 3000 pickets also saddle for 500 boards. . . . April 22, Worked on Fence." "October 11, Went to Leo Marsters and got 2350 pickets, . . . October 16, Hauled 1150 pickets from Leo Marsters.

The scale of these constructions can be realized if four pickets are assumed to have made a foot of fence; with the October 11 purchase a fence 587 feet long could have been built.

Beginning in 1893 Evan Woodruff made a series of notations on "portable fences."

> June 26, Today made a portable fence. . . . October 26, 1896, Today moved Portable fence . . . . February 17, 1897, Hauled out portable fence. . . . July 7, 1899, Made 55 panel portable fence."[57]

The first-mentioned fencing is clearly conventional rail fencing such as shown in the center background of the 1884 lithograph of the Woodruff farm, for that particular fence was known in the family as a "portable fence."[58] The "panel" type may have been one of various lightweight fences assembled in short lengths, a prefabricated structure of panels as had been described in publications for a number of years. Similar to these is the kind using the handsplit pickets or thin slats or laths "woven into horizontal strands of plain wire . . . twisted close and tight to the slats and given two or three twists between them." That writer, of 1887, went on to describe its use as "on one side of a pasture or highway . . . the best and cheapest combined cattle and hog fence . . . ."[59] Evan Woodruff may not have built that kind of highway fence, but one like it was in use around 1915 not far from his farm (Fig. 1); it lined both sides of the Hayden Road near the Murdock farm in Douglas County.

In the country the picket fence which was set across the front of the house usually passed well beyond it to include both side yards. For the best effect the front fence was several times the length of the house facade. At the Lester Hulin farmhouse (1854) in Eugene, however, the pickets were placed with only the facade set off within the fenced area. But while customarily broad, most front yards appear to have been shallow, the depth between fence and facade kept to less than thirty feet. The Tolman farmhouse (Cover) provides an excellent example of an extensive fence frontage across a shallow front yard.

The shallow front yard was characteristic of farmhouses placed well back within their acreage. An example is seen in a view of the Asa Sanders farmhouse (Fig. 26), built about 1880, which sits back from the county road at the end of a driveway several hundred yards long. Its dooryard is hardly more than twenty feet in depth, yet within the six hundred and forty acre farm the significance of the house and its setting is highlighted by the proximity of the fence. Exceptions to the shallow yard occurred where the public road ran parallel to the farmhouse but the space between the two was not deep enough for more than one function. Thus one finds the deep front yard at the William Stevens house where the county road passed within eighty feet and the picket fence was set that distance from the house.

The house fence often was set back providing a wide verge in front of it as a parking and maneuvering space for carriages and immediately outside the picket fence was a low pole structure for tying up horses. The other horse-related structure outside the fence was a mounting block, a stepped structure. That at Heceta Head lighthouse (1894) is of two pieces of quarried sandstone. At the Asa and Abby Sanders house it was a large wooden platform.

The front fence was part of a large rectangular enclosure typically surrounding the house on all sides. Perhaps the rural resident imitated the more suburban or city house in this aspect; certainly it usually was the suburban yard that magazines such as the *American Agriculturist* featured. Often all sides of the farmhouse were enclosed in pickets although many had horizontal board fencing at back and sides facing work areas. Within the enclosures were a front yard area with ornamental and native trees and flowering shrubs and, at the sides of the house, flower beds along or parallel to kitchen porches. Grass grew throughout, usually untended and left to the effects of season and weather. Paths and walks ran perpendicularly from porch steps to outbuildings and to gates which opened to further paths leading to the barn and to yards for chickens and vegetables. Many paths were of hard-packed earth; that from the front door was generally a board walk (Fig. 22).

On the farm, the usual trilogy of fences, one within the other, described three different but concentric zones. At the operational center of the acreage was the farmhouse, the innermost sphere, marked by picket fencing. Progress from outside the property to the central farm building group often meant passing through a series of woodlands, pastures, fields—the outer areas enclosed in rails and the next in boards; before cattle guards were invented, it meant opening, then closing, a succession of gates before finally arriving at the picket gate, the garden, the house itself. Such was the mile-long progression on the Belknap farm, Benton County for about half a century. Ransom Belknap's grandson described it simply. "Grandfather sat in the middle of his fields; Grandfather was fenced in."[60]

The Picket Fence In Town

In residential areas houses were set back and fences ran before them. When commercial buildings, such as hotels, sat directly against the sidewalk the picket fence often ran between buildings. Typically the street edge was an accumulation of individual fences and of individual properties. However, when a builder built at one time a street of houses, a continuous picket fence might enclose the entire block with one unified design, as at the three modest, identical Queen Anne style houses of 1891 which comprised "Regan Row" on Fort Street in Boise, Idaho. But variety in individual fence designs was characteristic of western towns. Views of Mendocino in Northern California of about 1868-1870 illustrate this condition as does the view of Oregon City (Fig. 29). A remarkable example of this characteristic variety is seen in early views of the village of Aurora in Marion County—for this conservative, utopian, communal society in other respects exercised great control over its building, suggesting a rigorous architectural dogma or leadership.

Residential streets were given a strong spatial definition by the fences which flanked them, as can be seen in the view of the home of Judge William R. and Mrs. Willis (Back Cover) at the corner of Rose and Cass Streets in Roseburg. In this scene of a newer residential area all elements—including ornamental planting, woodshed and fence—appear to be new. The Willis fence is a three-rail, irregular, square bar type. Another Roseburg house of the same period, the L.N. Norman home (Fig. 22), features a corner gate and illustrates the attraction fences held for boys, an expressed concern in the nineteenth century.

Mansions and larger houses often occupied a full city block surrounded by a wall or fence. Henry Cleaveland, San Francisco architect, designed several Portland mansions, including one for Henry Failing which was sufficiently completed for the family to occupy in 1875. Concurrently with the development of the house, a plan for its grounds was submitted, March 1874, by William Hammond Hull, a San Francisco engineer in charge of the "University grounds and San Francisco's Great New Park."[6] But it was the architect Henry Cleaveland who designed the fence; his thoroughness in the matter was characteristic of his involvement with every aspect of the house. On March 20, 1874 Henry Cleaveland sent Henry Failing sketches for eight fences. Although these sketches have disappeared Cleaveland describes them briefly in the letter which accompanied them. Cleveland's suggestions provide a summary of fence details popular at the time.

> [Enclosed is] Wm. Hammond Hull's sketch of your garden. He enters at the corner nearest town. I send you a number of plans and sketches of fences for you to look over and form some opinion of your wants. No. 1 shows a fence I am now having built in this city . . . the gates are wrought iron . . . No. 2 costs about $5, but I should not recommend it . . . . No. 6 . . . a larger and more ornamental style of picket and a more costly one. This with pickets three inches in diameter would be quite handsome. No. 7 . . . still more expensive. No. 8 . . . post of cedar . . . . This fence in addition to its cheapness has some advantage.

Figure 28. A regular bar type picket fence, residential in character. Umatilla County Courthouse. Built 1869. View 1888, Pendleton.
Figure 29. Several fence types in an urban setting. The Methodist Church of 1844 and the Parsonage. Seen in 1886-1890. Oregon City, Clackamas County.

> It is a very difficult fence for *boys to climb over*, neither dogs, cats, or fowls [sic] can go through it . . . . It is intended to be four feet high. Please return the sketches to me at your leisure.[62]

Six weeks later a ninth set of drawings, actual working drawings, of the picket fence were sent from San Francisco to Henry Failing in Portland. The drawings no longer exist but Cleaveland, in a letter of May 4, 1874 to Failing, gives some general information referring to spacing of posts, and particularly to gate design.

> I send you by Express tomorrow morning an inch scale drawing of front fence and a full size detail of carriage gates and of single gates . . . bays of front about 10'-2" from center to center of post . . . and about 10'-1" from other side of lot. . . . will perceive by the scale drawings I place the single gates on the truncated corner of lot. The carriage gate . . . decided to let slide between two posts of same pattern as the others. The gate has a foundation of brick work to hold it in place. The gate runs on a round iron rod 7/8" diameter screwed to oak sill and with heavy sheaves let into gate where the gate slides between posts at lower end a little piece of iron is screwed at top and bottom into posts for iron bead to play on. When gate shuts it strikes against an iron bar which bonds the posts together . . . . "[63]

Many characteristics of the irregular, spindle fence actually constructed for the Henry Failing mansion (Fig. 2) are indicated in that earlier letter of March 20, 1874. It combined the suggestions for fences number three, four and five. "Number 3 is a plain round picket fence with square posts champered [sic] with vases. No. 4—the same with turned posts. No. 5 the same only with three rails and irregular pickets."

One of the extensive public uses of the picket fence was at the county courthouse. The Umatilla County Courthouse (Fig. 28) is enclosed with a plain picket fence composed of square bars of equal length.[64] The first courthouse in Josephine County, a Stick Style building constructed in 1886, occupied a courthouse square surrounded by a picket fence, made livelier than that at Pendleton through alternating the lengths of its spindles.[65] But at neither courthouse did any feature give a modular accent or a civic scale to the hundreds of feet of fence.

The characteristic, rather low-keyed, landscape treatment of a courthouse square is well illustrated in the Umatilla County example. Some hint of a civic formality and park-like image is given by the centrally placed courthouse, the board walk leading to it and the modularly spaced trees. But most of the enclosed area is a field of grass on which a random collection of secondary civic and service buildings sit, including the bandstand and the "bell tower." In 1889 when a new Umatilla County Courthouse was completed on a different site an enclosed courthouse square was developed again, this time with an iron fence.

Above all, it was deemed important to enclose properties with fences, and even horizontal board fencing might be brought into towns for such formal purposes. One example, contracted April 30, 1857, was to surround the Lane County Courthouse. Four colossal, fluted "Doric" columns marked the pedimented front of this two story wood structure which sat at the

center of a square. A.A. Smith had drawn the courthouse plans. The builder of the horizontal board fence, Mahlon Harlow, had completed the courthouse six months earlier. The contract indicates that the so-called gates were in fact raised entry platforms for protection from wandering stock. But a sense of an orderly, Classical image was presented in this huge, perfectly square enclosure of painted wood, axially articulated by centrally placed "gates," one to a side.

> To erect a fence or enclosure around the Court House in Eugene City two hundred and seventy four feet square . . . posts 4 by 6 inches . . . extending four feet above the ground . . . all to be painted two coats white lead, with four gates, one on each square at center four feet wide, raised two steps and platform four feet square . . . ."[66]

Other public buildings besides courthouses required fences. St. Joseph's Academy is seen between 1887 and 1896 (Fig. 19).[67] The fence and its jigsaw detail bears some relation to the style and the detail of the school. In cemeteries also picket fences were used, as found at the turn of the century in the Grizzly area of Crook County[68] where simple board pickets indicated the individual family plots. Views at the end of the century in Union, Union County show four churches flanked by or placed behind picket fences, the Catholic, the Adventist, the Mormon and the Episcopal. St. John's was built around 1880 from the design of Reubin Denton Nevius, church architect active in the northwestern and southeastern areas of the United States. St. John's was a small, board-and-batten Carpenter Gothic structure, sophisticated and elegant — in contrast to its modest fence of pointed boards. Seen in 1908, St. Thomas Episcopal Church of 1876 at Canyon City, also designed by Nevius, has picket fences, of compatible design, flanking its vestibule (Fig. 30). This attractive fence placement was often found with Gothic churches, made possible or necessary where the vestibule abutted the sidewalk.

Church fences may serve to epitomize an important symbolic role held by the domestic as well as the public picket fence. Although the builder typically would choose to complete the building first and *then* fence it in, this construction sequence was often reversed for churches.

> Apparently it was common practice to 'enclose' the lot for a new church after the lot had been purchased or donated and then 'to open the subscription' for a building. The enclosure, the picket fence, was a sign that the church 'had occupied the field', as Bishop Wistar often put it.[69]

The Bishop's pastoral allusion brings all picket fences, whether at church, courthouse or farmhouse, within one symbolic image. No matter how raw the setting, presence of the picket fence signaled arrival at a secure, important place; for many a haven, even a paradise.

FOOTNOTES

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Figure 30. Picket fences flank the vestibule. St. Thomas Episcopal church built 1885. Seen in 1908. Left, architect Reubin Denton Nevius and, right, the Reverend Paddock. Canyon City, Grant County.
Figure 31. Felicity. In the garden of the Jacob Manley Currier farmhouse. Corvallis vicinity, Benton County.