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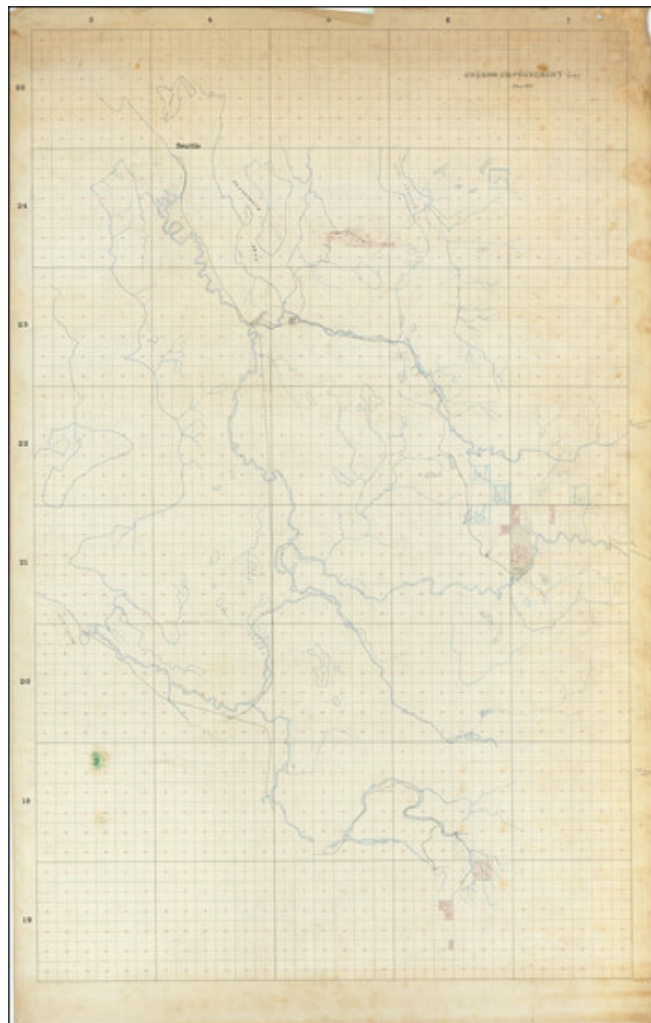
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[King County] Oregon Improvement Co. Mar. 1884

Stock#: 71991
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1884
Place: Washington
Color: Pen & Ink
Condition: VG
Size: 41.7 x 63 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Oregon Improvement Company's Search For Coal in King County -- The Northern Transcontinental Survey

Fine large hand drawn map of a large portion of King County, illustrating the lands acquired by the Oregon Improvement Company, railroad lines, coal mines and roads in the County in the early 1880s, up to its initial collapse in 1883.

The primary stakeholders illustrated on the map are the Northern Pacific Rail Road and Oregon



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Improvement Company (OIC). The map is dated March 1884, during the period the OIC was in receivership and one month before Elijah Smith assumed control of the company in 1884.

The map provides a early overview of a portion of King County, focused on the location of coal mining regions and the rivers, railroad lines and roads that provided transportation routes to Puget Sound, via Tacoma and Seattle/Elliott Bay. The map is dated and includes a number of sections of land acquired by the OIC in 1882 and 1883, in furtherance of its expansion into coal mining in the early 1880s.

In the north, the area around Newcastle and Coal Creek show the OIC's acquisitions in the region, identifying in red the sections purchased and names of land owners. The Newcastle mining region is serviced by a branch of the railroad which split from the main line at Black River Junction, then passing through Renton, before turning to the north to Newcastle.

A second branch line, the Cedar River Extension Railroad, follows the Cedar River to the east and later south, passing a number of houses located along the route before reaching the Black Diamond and Franklin mining regions. Immediately north of the Franklin Colliery, a number of OIC land 1882 and 1883 acquisitions are noted in red identifying the land owner, price acreage, date and purchase price of each section. The lands of the Seattle Coal Syndicate and other lands are also shown and shaded.

At the far southern part of the map, the OIC mines near Carbonado and Wilkeson are shown, again noting in red identifying the land owner, price acreage, date and purchase price of each section. A separate Railroad line to New Tacoma and back to Elliott Bay and Seattle are shown.

The Northern Transcontinental Survey

The Northern Transcontinental Survey was organized by the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1881 and led by Geologist Raphael Pumpelly. The survey collected information concerning the topographical and economic features of Dakota, Montana, and Washington territories. It lasted from 1881 to 1884, during which time there was considerable effort to map the mining regions contiguous to the lines of the Northern Pacific and to promote the economic prospects of the region to investors and land speculators.

Oregon Improvement Company

Henry Villard launched the Oregon Improvement Company in October 1880 as part of his grand scheme to dominate the development of the Pacific Northwest. By 1883 he had tied the area to the national economy with the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

To fuel Villard's steamships and locomotives, a dependable coal supply was a high priority. By February



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1881, the Oregon Improvement Company had acquired the Seattle Coal and Transportation Company, including the Newcastle Mine east of Lake Washington, at a cost of one million dollars. The Seattle and Walla Walla Railroad was also purchased for over half a million dollars to transport coal from mine to Seattle bunkers.

Villard also sponsored the Northern Transcontinental Survey, which was to determine the specific lands belonging to the railroads under the national land grants to locate any valuable assets on those lands, especially coal seams.

Between 1881 and 1884 engineers employed under the survey discovered the valuable coal deposits of the Green River area, including the famed McKay vein at Green River Gorge. One of the key challenges confronting the OIC in exploiting the rich McKay vein on the Green River was accessibility. Howard proposed to build a 20-mile extension of the Columbia and Puget Sound Railroad from Renton Junction to reach the new site. In 1882, the so-called Cedar River Extension of the Columbia and Puget Sound was commenced and preliminary surveying and excavation work was under way at Green River Gorge.

Villard's grand scheme collapsed at the end 1883 and the Oregon Improvement Company went receivership and reorganization. Elijah Smith emerged in April 1884 as president of the Oregon Improvement Company. Work on the Cedar River Extension came to a halt during the early months of 1884. Proposed financial support from such local agencies as the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the newly formed Black Diamond Coal Company was not forthcoming. Howard, however, remained undaunted by the reversals of early 1884. He revived commitments from local interests as well as the company's board of directors. With Chinese laborers hired at 80 cents per man per day, the Cedar River Extension was completed in early 1885. By June of that year the first shipment of Franklin coal arrived at the Seattle bunkers.

Franklin was a coal mining town established by the Oregon Improvement Company, located in east King County. The company town made up of immigrants mostly of Welch, English, Irish, Italian, and Scotch. The town was complete with school, saloons, hotel, black smith shop, and numerous company houses. In 1885 the Seattle to Walla Walla Railroad was extended to Franklin allowing coal to be shipped to San Francisco.

Coal from the region flowed for the company for the next decade. On August 24th of 1894 Franklin's place in history changed forever through disaster, when 37 miners were killed fighting an arsonist's fire in the Oregon Improvement Company's mine. At the time, it was the second worst mining disaster in Washington state history. Mining in the area continued until the company was sold to the Pacific Coast Company in 1896.



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Black Diamond Mining Company in Washington State

The Black Diamond Coal Mining Company was formed in 1861, consolidating the Cumberland and Black Diamond coal mines in the region of Mount Diablo, in Contra Costa County, California. During its years of operation as a mining company, it established three towns: Nortonville, California, Southport, Oregon, and Black Diamond, Washington. Several railroad lines were built in California and Washington to support the company's mines.

Needing a higher grade of coal to compete in the market, the company sent men north in 1880 to search for better sources. They discovered high-quality coal outcroppings in Washington territory, and sent samples to California for testing. The coal they had found was bituminous, higher quality than the lignite coal being mined in the California mines, and the company quickly began clearing trails, building houses, and opening the mine.

The village established for the miners was named Black Diamond. Travel from Black Diamond to other towns was by horse or wagon or on foot over rough trails. Heavy equipment had to be brought in by pack animal, crossing the Cedar River six times from the nearest town, Renton. Most homes were built on land owned by the company. By 1885, the population of Black Diamond was 3500.

The Columbia and Puget Sound Railroad extended its line to Black Diamond in 1884. With the completion of the railroad line, the company closed its mines in California and began moving its miners and their families north. Eventually, several trains a day would haul coal from the mines to Seattle to be sold there or shipped to San Francisco.] Black Diamond Coal Mining Company operated numerous ships to transport its coal between Washington and California.

Detailed Condition:

Minor soiling and toning.