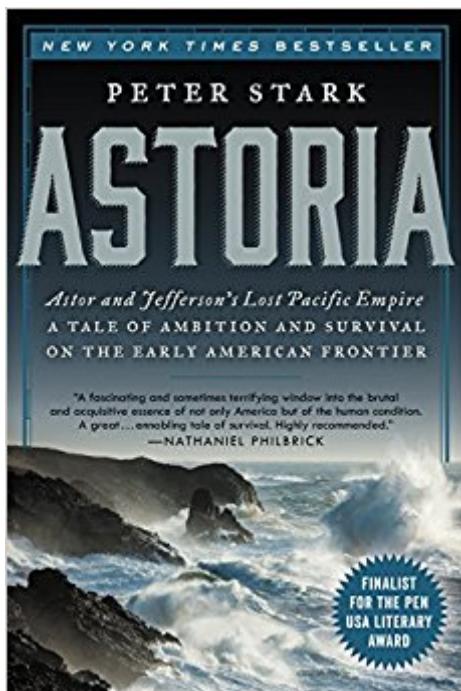


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# Astoria: Astor And Jefferson's Lost Pacific Empire: A Tale Of Ambition And Survival On The Early American Frontier



## Synopsis

In the tradition of *The Lost City of Z* and *Skeletons in the Zahara*, *Astoria* is the thrilling, true-adventure tale of the 1810 Astor Expedition, an epic, now forgotten, three-year journey to forge an American empire on the Pacific Coast. Peter Stark offers a harrowing saga in which a band of explorers battled nature, starvation, and madness to establish the first American settlement in the Pacific Northwest and opened up what would become the Oregon trail, permanently altering the nation's landscape and its global standing. Six years after Lewis and Clark's began their journey to the Pacific Northwest, two of the Eastern establishment's leading figures, John Jacob Astor and Thomas Jefferson, turned their sights to founding a colony akin to Jamestown on the West Coast and transforming the nation into a Pacific trading power. Author and correspondent for *Outside* magazine Peter Stark recreates this pivotal moment in American history for the first time for modern readers, drawing on original source material to tell the amazing true story of the Astor Expedition. Unfolding over the course of three years, from 1810 to 1813, *Astoria* is a tale of high adventure and incredible hardship in the wilderness and at sea. Of the more than one hundred-forty members of the two advance parties that reached the West Coast— one crossing the Rockies, the other rounding Cape Horn— nearly half perished by violence. Others went mad. Within one year, the expedition successfully established Fort Astoria, a trading post on the Columbia River. Though the colony would be short-lived, it opened provincial American eyes to the potential of the Western coast and its founders helped blaze the Oregon Trail.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1810, two years after the Lewis and Clark expedition crossed the American continent, wealthy fur merchant John Jacob Astor financed an overland and overseas expedition to build the equivalent of a Jamestown settlement on the Pacific Coast. Over a three-year period, separate groups, comprising a hodgepodge of Americans, French, and Scottish Canadians, set out for the coast. The Tonquin sailed for six months from Boston to the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest to create an outpost from which to circumnavigate between China, the eastern U.S., and Europe, to take advantage of the rage for otter pelts. At the same time, 140 adventurers and investors set off in two parties, one crossing the treacherous Rockies; nearly half of them died. Stark, author of *Last Breath* (2001) and *The Last Empty Spaces* (2010), offers a thrilling true-adventure tale filled with unforgettable characters, clashes of culture, ambition, and physical hardships from starvation to Indian attacks to cruel weather. A breathtaking account of an expedition that changed the geography of a young nation and its place in global commerce and politics. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Stark’s delightful narrative is proof that even though Astor didn’t leave the legacy he intended, his grand failure certainly deserves its own place in history.” (New York Times Book Review) “In Astoria, Peter Stark recounts the colony’s history as a fast-paced, enjoyable adventure tale.” (Wall Street Journal) “In his new book, *Astoria* . . . Stark moves skillfully back and forth from one segment of the splintered expedition to another. He also raises a tantalizing question about the enterprise as a whole.” (Washington Post) “[Descriptive] passages . . . make Stark’s fine book truly distinctive. They raise *Astoria* above the level of a well-done historical adventure and help the reader get into a scene and understand the context or see relationships between participants and between then and now.” (Chicago Tribune) “Peter Stark’s *Astoria* is a vivid recreation of an era when the Pacific Northwest was a vast unexploited wilderness, with *Astoria* as its main American colony. . . . Stark is particularly strong in describing the wilderness and its effects on human psychology.” (Seattle Times) “Stark tells their grim story well . . .” “*Astoria* is a well-written . . . account of John Jacob Astor’s attempt to found a commercial empire in the Pacific Northwest. It illuminates the cultural limits of the American approach to frontier expansion.” (Portland Oregonian) “In this harrowing historical tale of adventure and hardship, journalist Peter Stark re-creates a largely forgotten 19th-century expedition—during which one group crossed the Rockies and another sailed around Cape Horn—to establish America’s first colony on the Pacific Northwest coast.” (Parade)

Magazine) "A fast-paced, riveting account of exploration and settlement, suffering and survival, treachery and death. [Stark] recovers a remarkable piece of history: the story of America's first colony on the continent's West coast." (Kirkus (Starred Review)) "A page-turning tale of ambition, greed, politics, survival, and loss." (Publishers Weekly) "New York businessman Astor, with support from President Jefferson, launched two expeditions in 1810 - overland and by ship ... and Stark recounts the perilous journeys." (New York Post) "The story of its founders is harshly inspiring, a deeply researched look into the irresistible drive to explore the unknown and the capacity of people to survive, not only the elements, but one another." (Minneapolis Star Tribune) "... a thrilling true-adventure tale ... A breathtaking account of an expedition that changed the geography of a young nation and its place in global commerce and politics." (Booklist) "Author Peter Stark retraces the journey in spellbinding detail, making use of journals to get inside the minds of these explorers who set out just two years after Lewis and Clark successfully crossed the continent. . . . Astoria brings to life a harrowing era of American exploration." (Bookpage) "Stark's compelling, contextual account of Astoria's founding—at one time documented by none other than author Washington Irving - casts this early venture as a pivotal point in the development of the Pacific Northwest and the nation." (Crosscut (Seattle)) "For better or worse, the precedents set by Astor and his expeditions created a tangible American legacy of entrepreneurship, risk-taking, and manifest destiny. Carefully researched and splendidly written—an utterly spellbinding account." (Bellingham Herald) "A great yarn set in our own corner of the continent." (Inlander) "A valuable book . . . but more importantly for my perspective, it's really good reading." (Nancy Pearl on NPR's "Morning Edition") "Astoria is ultimately worth reading not just because it's about Oregon history, but because it contextualizes Oregon's past within American history. . . . The book is a welcome departure from romanticized tales of Lewis and Clark or of later pioneers." (Portland Mercury) "Stark vividly writes of fur trader John Jacob Astor's capitalist quest [a] fascinating account that never loses its focus." (Library Journal) "Well researched and historically accurate, [Astoria] reads much like an adventure novel, engaging you from start to finish." (Coast Weekend) "Peter Stark does readers a very large service in reminding us about this extraordinary and important piece of North American history. I can't recommend Astoria highly enough for anyone interested in the colonization of the American West." (BookBrowse.com) "A truly great adventure story, filled with high drama and hardship that

would put "Survivor" cast members into a tailspin of humility. (BookReporter.com) "Peter Stark's *Astoria* picks up where the Lewis and Clark Expedition leaves off, providing a fascinating and sometimes terrifying window into the brutal and acquisitive essence of not only America but of the human condition. It's also a great and ... an ennobling tale of survival. Highly recommended." (Nathaniel Philbrick, author of *Bunker Hill*, and *In the Heart of the Sea*) "Peter Stark weaves a spellbinding tale from this lost chapter of American history. *Astoria* gave me the sense all readers long for: that nothing exists but the riveting narrative unfolding in your head." (Albany Times Union) "A splendid account of the man and men who had the audacity, passion, and courage to dream of an American Empire. Peter Stark's *Astoria* is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the power of leadership in its purest form." (Stephenie Ambrose-Tubbs, author of *The Lewis and Clark Companion*) "Peter Stark leaps aboard at the very beginning of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Northwest enterprise, then clings tenaciously to witness every twist, by land and by sea, along the entire desperate ride." (Jack Nisbet, author of *Sources of the River* and *The Collector*) "This saga of ambition and adventure and courage is vividly told and thoroughly researched, a not very well known story of ambition confounded. Shipwrecks, bloodiness, and starve-to-death treks through drifted snow in the Rockies-*Astoria* is a hard-edged beauty." (William Kittredge, author of *A Hole in the Sky*) *Astoria* is a scintillating corrective to the "guts and glory" school of American history and economics. [...] Grandiose visions ... have consequences, and Peter Stark's depiction of the body count that results from this one unfolds with the inevitability of a fine tragedy and comedic zing of a good action flick. (David James Duncan, author of *The Brothers K* and *The River Why*)

I did not just read this book. I devoured it. As review author Lawrence Gonzales states on the rear of the dust cover, "...gave me the sense all readers long for: that nothing exists but the riveting narrative unfolding in your head." This was exactly the way I felt reading this excellent book. I have explored the Columbia and Snake rivers including, the Columbia bar, Astoria, their confluence, Hanford Reach, Hells Canyon and east to South Pass (in astronomically greater comfort) and was exhilarated to realize I had trodden the very path of these explorers. I had never heard of this dual expedition before and I could not put it down. Peter Stark weaves a tale that is smooth yet detailed and covers relevant explanatory side paths . The fore and aft character descriptions flesh out the story wonderfully. Other reviewers have covered the book in detail so no need here, just read it. I don't know what I can read next that will surpass this book, whatever it is, it will anti-climatic..

I was interested in this book as I live in this part of the country, and have spent quite a bit of time in present day Astoria, Oregon. Much here I did not know - however, disappointed that the book ended rather abruptly, and at least on the Kindle edition, indicated that I was only about 60 some percent through the book - the rest was all sources and notes! But, good read up to that point - just thought it could have been wrapped up in a more satisfying way by taking it further into future history of the area and how it impacted the settlement of the Oregon Territory. .

A riveting tale of part of our American history that many people would not know without the introduction of this true story beautifully written by Peter Stark. I've been to Astoria , a town that I always thought was smoldering with some long forgotten history..but at the same time a town that seemed like it never caught on! Now I know why. The history and the way this author wove it thru the book, bringing it alive, as if it happened yesterday, ways amazing. And, tremendous research with regard to the people involved , surprising and balanced tenure , not didactic, , insightful observations, what a wonderful early American legacy otherwise largely forgotten.

This is an interesting, compelling read about how the vision and financial investment of one man - John Jacob Astor - drove the ultimate identification and development of trails and locations in what was then an unknown country - the Pacific Northwest. It brings to life a key piece of the drive towards the concept of Manifest Destiny that later drew thousands to the West while providing maps on how to get there. (The Oregon Trail)It's well written and surprisingly, brings the feeling of old growth forests and eternally wet, gray skies. It describes the oppression & depression that can occur when surrounded by threatened and hostile indigenous people. Conversely, it presents the complexity of Native American tribes and society and how the prejudice of leaders can ensure conflicts with other peoples.The book, while kinda small for the vastness of the topics, covers the experiences of multiple parties and politics in both the explorers pursing the route and the political movements of countries and how that impacted both the expedition plans and the eventual outcome. It is clearly well researched but told as though you were listening to the adventures of your favorite Uncle.I also like the way the author indicates what may have been going on with an individual without making it seem to be a statement of fact. Too often, history writers apply their assumptions of motivation as fact where they cannot possibly know if the individual was depressed or angry or psychotic.The feeling of this book has remained with me even though I've read a few other books since then. Of course, I live in the PNW and that probably makes a difference in my

level of interest. However, if you want a good historical read no matter where you live, this is definitely one!

Fascinating history of the settlement of Astoria Oregon. An attempt by John Jacob Astor - with the backing of President Jefferson - to monopolize the fur trading business (Astor's goal) and keep the British and Spanish from adding the west coast to their domains. Although unsuccessful, we did get the west coast back from the British later. The route used by Astor's overland party became the Oregon Trail used by the pioneers a few decades later. Although I've lived in Oregon over 40 years, I never knew this history as the focus has always been on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. A great adventure read even if you don't live here.

The author did a great job researching and writing about this historical adventure. I gave it three stars because the ending to this adventure is boring and a bit of a let down. I know it's history and you can only tell it the way it happened but it was anticlimactic. It's still worth reading. I love reading about early explorers and their lives. You might too.

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