

ASTORIA

JOHN JACOB ASTOR III
AND
THOMAS JEFFERSON'S
LOST PACIFIC EMPIRE

PETER STARK

READ BY MICHAEL KRAMER

At a time when the edge of American settlement barely reached beyond the Appalachian Mountains, two visionaries, President Thomas Jefferson and millionaire John Jacob Astor, foresaw that one day the Pacific would dominate world trade as much as the Atlantic did in their day. Just two years after the Lewis and Clark expedition concluded in 1806, Jefferson and Astor turned their sights westward once again. Thus began one of history's dramatic but largely forgotten turning points in the conquest of the North American continent.

Astoria is the harrowing tale of the quest to settle a Jamestown-like colony on the Pacific coast. Astor set out to establish a global trade network based at the mouth of the Columbia River in what is now Oregon, while Jefferson envisioned a separate democracy on the western coast that would spread eastward to meet the young United States.

Astor backed this ambitious enterprise with the vast fortune he'd made in the fur trade and in New York real estate since arriving in the United States as a near-penniless immigrant soon after the Revolutionary War. He dispatched two groups of men west: one by sea around the southern tip of South America and one by land over the Rockies. The Overland Party, led by the gentlemanly American businessman Wilson Price Hunt, combined French-Canadian voyageurs, Scottish fur traders, American woodsmen, and an extraordinary Native American woman with two toddlers. The Seagoing Party, sailing aboard the ship *Tonquin*, likewise was a volatile microcosm of contemporary North America. Under the bitter eye of Captain Jonathan Thorn, a young U.S. naval hero whose unyielding, belligerent nature was better suited to battle than to negotiating cultural differences, the *Tonquin* made tumultuous progress toward its violent end.

Unfolding from 1810 to 1813, *Astoria* is a tale of high adventure and incredible hardship, drawing extensively on firsthand accounts of those who made the journey. Though the colony itself would be short-lived, its founders opened provincial American eyes to the remarkable potential of the western coast, discovered the route that became the Oregon Trail, and permanently altered the nation's landscape and global standing.

PETER STARK is the author of *The Last Empty Spaces: A Past and Present Journey Through the Blank Spots on the American Map*; *Last Breath: The Limits of Adventure*; *At the Mercy of the River: An Exploration of the Last African Wilderness*; and the essay collection *Driving to Greenland: Arctic Travel, Northern Sport, and Other Ventures in the Heart of Winter*. He also edited the anthology *Ring of Ice: True Tales of Adventure, Exploration, and Arctic Life*. A correspondent for *Outside*, he has written for *Smithsonian* and *The New Yorker*, among other publications, and has been nominated for a National Magazine Award. He lives in Montana.

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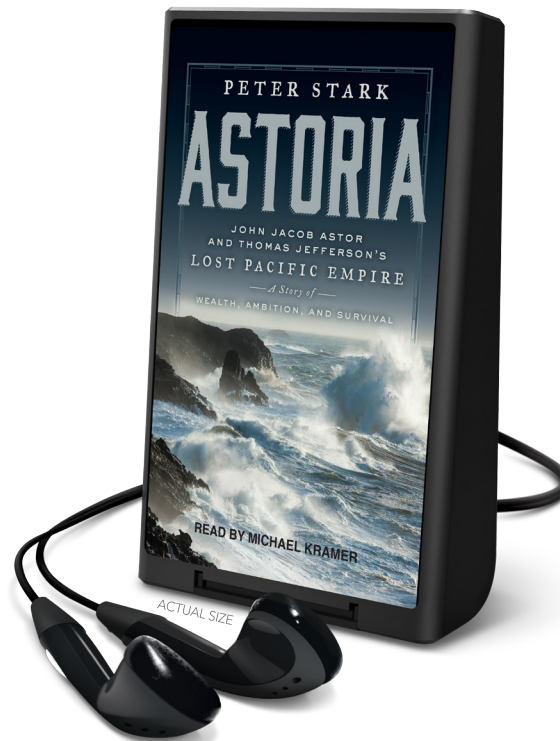
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