

# The Historacle

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*The Official Newsletter of the* Talent Historical Society



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## Pioneers Could Get to Oregon by Several Ways

When thinking about Oregon pioneers, most people instantly think “Ah, yes, the Oregon Trail!” However, that may not be exactly what happened back then. There are a lot of misconceptions about the routes west.

For example, there were a variety of trails coming west, all of which started in western Missouri. However, your favorite pioneer may have started west much farther east, from Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, or even Kentucky or Tennessee, adding lots more mileage and days of travel. Of the several trails that started in western Missouri at either St. Joseph or Independence, each had a slightly different end destination. For example, the Bozeman Trail went to Montana; the Mormon Trail went up the Platte River and branched off the famous Oregon Trail to go to the Mormon colony at the Great Salt Lake in Utah; that famous Oregon Trail using either side of the Platte River went through Wyoming's South Pass through Idaho to Fort Hall and then continued on to northeastern Oregon and tended westward to The Dalles, and then pioneers either rafted down the Columbia River or went over Mount Hood via the Barlow Road to northern Oregon. However, at Fort Hall, a pioneer could branch off down Nevada's Humboldt River and go to California (basically down the Feather River canyon—unless they tried to emulate the Donner Party and try to go to Sacramento via the Truckee River), and halfway along the California cutoff, Oregon pioneers could branch off across the Black Rock Desert going north over Fandango Pass in the Warner mountains, around Goose Lake heading west to Klamath Lake and over the Greensprings to Southern Oregon. Two other routes went west from western Missouri, the California Trail to Southern California across the Mohave Desert, and the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico.

But there were two other Canadian options. Canadians following the Hudson Bay Company routes would stay north and end up at Vancouver, British Columbia. The older of the two routes, and the most used, was from Fort Vancouver (now Vancouver, Washington) via the Columbia and Okanagan Rivers, to Fort Shuswap, today's city of Kamloops, then via the Bonaparte and Cariboo Plateaus to the Fraser River at Fort Alexandria. From there the Express used river travel via the Peace River to the Prairies and Rupert's Land. The second route Another used by the Hudson Bay Express was direct to Rupert's Land via the Columbia River to Boat Encampment on that river's Big

Bend (beneath today's Kinbasket Lake reservoir) and then via Howse Pass east. The route from Fort Kamloops to Fort Alexandria later featured prominently in the migration to the Cariboo goldfields and was known to miners using it as the Brigade Trail. The southern part of the trail, between Forts Vancouver and Kamloops, was at this time known as the Okanagan Trail.

Besides these land routes, a pioneer could get to Oregon by boat by two ways. One was around the Horn of South America, up to Maui in Hawaii, catching a boat to Sacramento and coming up to Oregon from northern California. Or by boating to Nicaragua, crossing the isthmus by mule, and going by boat to Sacramento or Astoria and finally ending up in Oregon. Lots of ways to get west!

## **History in Other Places**

### ***Egypt:***

French archaeologists have unearthed hundreds of 3000 year old limestone blocks believed to have been used to build the sacred lake walls of a temple dedicated to the ancient Egyptian goddess Mut. Unearthed in San El-Hagar in northern Egypt, it is thought that the blocks may have belonged to King Osorkon II of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty (925 to 718 B. C.) and used for either a temple or a chapel. So far 120 blocks have been cleaned of which 78 have inscriptions. San El-Hagar was known as Tanis during the pharaonic period. It is one of the oldest Egyptian cities and contains many temples belonging to the god Amun. Tanis was located on one branch of the Nile river delta and became the northern capital of Egypt during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty. It was an important commercial and strategic city until it was threatened with inundation by Lake Manzala in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A. D., and was finally abandoned. A very important royal necropolis has been found in Tanis (which contains the only known intact royal Pharaonic burials — the tomb of Tutankhamun having been entered in antiquity).

### ***France:***

Ancient Viking sailors may have been able to navigate the high seas from Norway to North America centuries before Christopher Columbus thanks to a crystal “sunstone” according to French research. The crystal, called Iceland spar, is a transparent form of calcite that is sensitive to the polarization of light and is commonly found in Scandinavia.

It could have helped the Vikings detect the sun's position to within one degree, even on cloudy days. The Vikings would have used the stone to reflect the sun's rays into two beams of light. By rotating the crystal, they would have been able to see a single “sweet spot” at which the two dots are equal in brightness and would point to the sun.

**Why not Give a Friend a THS Membership as a Gift?**

## Crossing the Isthmus of Panama at Nicaragua

3

William Allen, a Southern Oregon pioneer who settled in Douglas County, in 1939 recounted the following description of coming to Southern Oregon using the Isthmus of Panama route. He was interviewed as part of the Works Progress Administration's efforts by writers who worked to preserve Oregon's history during the Depression. Allen had come to Oregon by crossing the isthmus. This is what the interviewer recorded after talking with Allen about his pioneer travel to Oregon:

“It took 10 or 12 hours to cross the isthmus of Panama by mule-drawn wagon. The passenger wagons were drawn by four mules. One could rent a mule to ride for an extra dollar. There was no real road except the beaten path made by the wagons, over hills and all sorts of grades until the wagons reached the Pacific. Luggage and freight were taken across by two yoke of oxen. Native women carried small objects for travelers, by balancing the objects on trays on their heads and walking along.”

“Some women carried trays of tropical fruit—limes, pineapples, lemons, and coconuts---which they sold to the travelers.”

“The packet ships on which one booked passage lay offshore on the the Pacific about three miles out. Travelers who arrived late in the afternoon slept as best they could arrange on the wharfs. The next morning they boarded boats to go out to the packet ships.”

“Cattle were taken on board so as to provide meat for the travelers, but the cows were forced to swim the three miles out to the ships. Once at the ship, a crane was rigged so as to lift the cows from the water onto the packet. The cows were lifted by ropes attached to their horns, stretching their necks s they kicked and thrashed as the winch lifted them aboard. None seemed to die by this method, however. Milk for the passengers was provided by a ship-borne herd of milk goats. When a beef was killed en route, the offal was thrown overboard and the sharks feasted.”

“If a fight occurred among the passengers, the captain of the ship would hang up the offenders by their wrists, and in severe cases by the thumbs, raising them just high enough so that their heels were off the deck and their toes touching. The guilty hung there varying lengths of time depending on the severity of their offenses---sometimes overnight. At any rate it was agonizing and those being punished would moan and groan and shriek so it could be heard all over the ship.” --- William Allen

### More Archive Family Data Available

Names of families in the THS Archive include (L) Laird, Latvala, Lavenburg, Leaming, Lewis, Lindly, Lopspeich, Lowe, Lowery, Lubbers, Luna, Lundberg, Maddow, Mainwaring, Marquess, Marshall, Mason, McAbee, McColgan, McCord, McFadden, McGrath, McKee, McLaughlin, McMahan, Mathes, Medina, Messenger, Meyer, Michaelis, Michaelson, Miller, Minear, Mooney, Moore, Morefield, Morrison, Morse and Myer. Feel free to review your family files, and add to them at will.

## **Program Featuring Bear Creek Valley Vegetation Draws Crowd**

Gene Hickman's Power-Point presentation of historical photographs of the vegetation of the Bear Creek Valley filled the auditorium at the Talent Public Library on Saturday, October 22.

Hickman, who worked for the U. S. Department of Agriculture until his recent retirement, just finished a contract with the Bureau of Land Management which involved tracing the impact of pioneer settlement and subsequent alterations of the original landscape here in the Bear Creek area. The program, sponsored by the Talent Historical Society, was the first time the research had been presented to the general public.

Not only was the audience treated to a discussion of the contrasts between the east and west side of the valley, a condition which still persists, but the older photographs, all taken years ago were a historical delight for items other than the vegetation in the background of the photographs, which were the real focus of both the presentation and the study that Hickman and his associate had just completed.

Key information was involved: ranging from the mouth of Bear Creek where an oak savanna dominated the area, to woodland area of mixed white oak and madrone and pine, to a mostly pine forest with some black oak, focusing on Anderson Creek, Coleman Creek and Wagner Creek, and then a pine and douglas fir forest in the higher elevations. Scattered throughout the valley were areas of prairie which aided the early pioneer farmers' efforts to clear land and grow orchards and hay crops.

Hickman pointed out that initially the early pioneers cleared some areas as they built log cabins, and cleared land around those houses for heating wood, and garden areas. Immediately after, and often before areas were plowed, and crops planted, the pine forest was raided for rails for fences to keep out the range animals and wild deer that dominated the east side of Bear Creek. Then when sufficient sawmills were built and those pioneers began building frame houses like they had back East, the pines on the valley floor began to disappear as many of the early sawmills preferred to cut pine rather than Douglas fir. Then in the 1880s when the railroad came through the valley, additional stress on the forest areas developed as the railroad needed railroad ties for their roadbed. And since this area has a limited and poor coal supply, wood was cut to power the steam engines...and long trains took at least five steam engines to get over the Siskiyou pass. So goodbye to more pine trees down here in the valley!

Lastly, since World War II, the population growth here in the Jackson county and the expansion and development of our cities not only has removed the older orchards; but now, only small pockets of the vegetation that greeted the pioneers continue to exist in odd corners of the Bear Creek valley.

**If you have or know of old pictures of the Bear Creek Valley showing the trees in the background, let Gene and us know. It will help this research.**

## Community Use of the THS Museum Space-- 5

For over two years, Camelot Theatre has been using the open floor space in the Talent Historical Society museum as a practice area. When the stage at the Theatre is having a new set built, or when a show is currently in process, the Theatre uses the Society space as its actors and dancers create the next show to be mounted in the theater itself. This arrangement has been highly satisfactory to both parties. Camelot pays the Society for the use of the space, and the Society transfers those funds to pay the lease to the City of Talent for the building which the city owns. Some of those funds are also used for the utilities that provide water, sewage, and heat (or cooling) to the museum itself.

As most of readers of this quarterly are no doubt aware, the historical societies in all of Jackson county, some 13 separate societies, have all been deeply affected by the withdrawal of the tax money that voters in 1948 had dedicated for historical purposes. The most obvious impact of this decision by the county commissioners has fallen on the Southern Oregon Historical Society and the county-owned buildings in Jacksonville, but the local community societies across Jackson county have also been negatively impacted by the withdrawal of these funds that have sustained historical research and preservation here in Southern Oregon for over 62 years.

The museum also houses the Talent Food Bank whose space in the northeast corner of the museum has been dedicated to those who run the food bank by the City of Talent. The Food Bank, through the county-wide Access program, provides food (to Talent area residents who qualify) weekly on Thursdays from 2:00 p. m. to 5:00 p. m. Local residents provide additional food resources. Some local gardeners bring in excess crops, and residents of the Talent area also contribute non-perishable commodities, using a program similar to the one that operates in the city of Ashland. Recent statistics indicate that approximately 35 individuals representing their families use these food resources to supplement their diets. However, each person who relies on the food bank can only utilize the Food Bank twelve times a year.

Having the Food Bank in the museum introduces a number of individuals over time to the activities and displays of the Talent Historical Society museum. Given that many individuals in the greater Talent area are often unaware of the very existence of the museum, the Society's board of directors welcomes these folk to our museum each week. Members of the Society will note that the Society does not count those who use the food bank in the statistics of those who come into the museum monthly. Currently about 130 people on average come to visit the museum for a variety of reasons each month.

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**Members of the Beeson family met together in the museum on Saturday 22 October 2011 with Jan Wright, former director of the Museum, who spearheaded the Beeson Diary transcriptions.**

## **We Call It Mount McLoughlin, But That Is Just Its Latest Name**

There it sits, docilely, east of the Rogue River Valley, its crest rising to 9,495 feet. And every year, or so it seems, some people who journey to its peak, seem to get lost and rescue teams end up trying to locate them. That is Mount McLoughlin.

Today, Mount McLoughlin boasts perhaps the most perfect peak in the Cascade Range---ever since the former title holder, Mount Saint Helens, blew her top and lost that crown, too. McLoughlin is the mountain that provides almost every person in the upper Rogue Valley with drinking water (Ashland is the exception!)

McLoughlin is one of the middle-sized volcanic peaks in the Cascades. It is dwarfed by neighboring Mount Shasta (14,162 feet), Mount Rainier (14,410) and Mount Hood (11,239). Instead it shares elbow-room with Mount Theilsen up by Diamond Lake (9,182), Diamond Peak—east of Eugene (8,744), and Mount Washington—north of the McKenzie Pass—at 7,794.

But our mountain bowls them all over by the multiplicity of names it has borne. Depending on the language, that perfect local peak, has been called by the following native American names: Alwilamchaldis (Takelma—our resident native Americans), M'laiksini Yaina (Klamath tribe--meaning “the mountain with the steep sides”), Makayax (Shasta language—naming one of the three mountains they thought poked above the surface of an ancient ocean).

And then came the white explorers and pioneers, who seemingly could not decide what to call the peak: Peter Skene Ogden, the Hudson Bay Company explorer who is thought to have been the first European to see the mountain called it Mount Sastise—naming it after the nearest Indian tribe, the Shastas. In the 1830s an map-maker named it Pit Mountain because it was thought to be near the Pit River in Northern California, which got its name because of the pits that the Indians there dug to trap deer. Some of the fur trappers began calling the peak Mount McLoughlin to honor Dr. John McLoughlin, the chief factor for the Hudson Bay Company in Oregon. Others, less enamored with Dr. John, sought to have it named Mount John Quincy Adams, or Mount Clearview, or Big Butte, or Snowy Butte, and as folk early on began to distinguish our peak from Mount Shasta, that is when Mount Pit began to be used. No one knows when the occasional spelling of “Mount Pitt” began, but contrary to popular thought, it was not named after the English prime-minister William Pitt. In 1905, the Oregon State Legislature officially authorized the current name Mount McLoughlin. Pretty neat mountain to been called by at least 12 names...so far!

**If your income taxes seemed a bit high last year, a donation to the Talent Historical Society before December 31, 2011, will increase your deductions and perhaps lower your actual taxes. We're willing!**



## Historical Sketch of Stearns Cemetery Noted

The Stearns Cemetery takes its name from one of the first families which traveled the Applegate Trail. Six adult children with their widowed father, the Reverend John Stearns, a Baptist minister, arrived in the Wagner Creek area in late August 1853 on the Preacher Train. Two of his sons who arrived with him were also Baptist ministers.

Actually, there were four families (all Stearns- related) who left Taylor, Illinois in the early spring of 1853. During a storm in Iowa the families got separated. Two families came west on the Oregon Trail over Mount Hood and settled near Springfield in Lane County. The other two families came to Southern Oregon via the Applegate Trail, and settled on Wagner Creek. It took the families more than a year to learn that all of the families had arrived safely in Oregon. It took that long for letters to arrive from the relatives back in Illinois.

“Judge Avery P. Stearns was buried near David Stearn's wheat field,” according to the Welborn Beeson dairy. He was buried on October 28, 1857, and is the first person to have been buried in the cemetery. Shortly thereafter, upon the death of one of David's daughters, Orson Stearns donated 4.5 acres from his original land claim for a public cemetery. An additional six acres was added to the property by the Odd Fellow's Lodge some years later.

The graveyard is operated by the Wagner Creek Cemetery Association, which has been the official group operating the cemetery at least since June 1, 1893, for an article describing the “perfecting of the organization” appeared in the Talent News on that date. At that time 315 people had been buried in the cemetery; as of September 2011 a total of 876 have been laid to rest there. In 1889, the original cemetery was laid out with 71 grave plots, and at that time an iron arch with the inscription “Stearns Cemetery” was erected over the gate. Before that date, the cemetery was called Grave Hill. Incidentally, the original iron inscription, weathered by the passage of time, has been replaced recently with a brand new inscription.

Now many of the 876 people buried in the Stearns Cemetery no longer have family members to care for their graves, so the Wagner Creek Cemetery Association operates and maintains the cemetery. The Stearns Cemetery has been memorialized by the the Oregon State Legislature; and is now an Oregon “Historic Cemetery.”

“Bud” Gleim, former president of the Talent Historical Society now spearheads the Wagner Creek Cemetery Association. Prior to Memorial Day each year the Association members gather to spruce up and clean up the grave sites, and end the day with a potluck dinner and an annual meeting of association members. Gleim noted that any interested person is welcome to join the group on the annual clean up day. For more information about the cemetery, he urges interested folk to call him at 541-512-9483, or Secretary Jan Reichstein at 541-535-6594.

**In 1992 the Oregon Historic Cemeteries Association was formed to watch over more than 3,000 Oregon cemeteries. Contact [ohca@oregoncemeteries.org](mailto:ohca@oregoncemeteries.org)**

## For Early Oregon Pioneers Clothing One's Self Was Not Easy

To get to Oregon in the 1850s cost a \$1000 a wagon (today's dollars would make that expenditure \$39,000). Most pioneers walked the nearly 2000 miles to Oregon to make sure that the oxen did not have to carry the extra weight of human bodies. For if a team of oxen developed sore feet, or weakened under the strain of transporting all the food, tools, household goods, ammunition, keepsakes, and an occasional family treasure, things would have to be abandoned along the trails to Oregon. Oregon in the 1850s did not have anything like today's shopping centers. What you brought was what you had!

Consider what has been recorded about clothing. One pioneer said the women's dresses "were very full skirted and lasted entirely too long!" Underwear had become commercialized for with the invention of the spinning jenny machines and the cotton gin in the second half of 1700s, cotton fabrics became widely available. This allowed factories to mass-produce underwear, and for the first time, people began buying undergarments in stores rather than making them at home. But Oregon had very few stores and was at least 1500 miles from Missouri. So pioneers had to improvise. By the way, union suits (long johns) were not invented until 1868. Guess what flour sacks were used for!

And instead of overcoats, for example, men wore homespun blankets, with holes cut out in the center allowing the material to fall loosely about the shoulders.

For buttons, old spoons and other pieces of worn out tableware were melted and cast in molds made of blocks of soap stone to make buttons.

Consider footwear. Buckskin moccasins were worn by the very first Oregon settlers, although later shoes were made at home. Almost every family had someone who could form a last, usually from wood, over which leather was placed to create rough shoes. These shoes were fairly comfortable and did offer more protection to the feet than the soft moccasins. However, because at first folk who knew how to tan leather were few and far between, rawhide was used to make boots and shoes.

In winter, when the wearer waded through the mud and water, as one often had to do in pioneer Oregon, the rawhide boots became soft and many sizes too large. So large that at times, they would slip off the wearer's feet. When recovered, it took hours of drying and cleaning to make the boots comfortable enough to wear again.

Eventually traveling shoemakers went from settlement to settlement making shoes and boots to order. One pioneer woman recalled that the traveling cobbler measured the shoes for her family by using broom straws to secure the length of the shoe to be made. No attention was paid to the width of the shoes, and they were made so they could be worn on either foot.

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**Current exhibits at the museum include a full page copy of the New York from April 16, 1865, describing in detail the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.**



## J. W. Briner and the brickpile at Brickpile Cabin

When James W. Briner died on June 30, 1930, the correspondent for Wagner Creek, Mrs. W. R. Lamb, as the correspondent for Wagner Creek, wrote the following lines in her column for the Medford Daily News on July 6, 1930.

“J. W. Briner, more familiarly known as 'Jim' Briner, passed away Monday, June 30, at the Community hospital in Ashland, where he was taken a week ago. He was never married. He followed mining all of his life until the last few years. He would have been 75 years of age October 28, having been born October 28, 1855.”

“Mr . Briner came across the plains with his parents at the age of five years, landing in Yreka, California from Iowa, where they lived for one year, coming on to this valley, where he grew to manhood, and followed mining, going to Beaver and Hungry creek for 20 years or more, coming back twice a year for supplies. “

“He lived many years at the Sam Robison and E. K. Anderson homes. Later in life he lived at several different homes in this locality, the last three years at the home of his nephew, Everette Beeson.”

“He had been in poor health for some time.”

“Mr. Briner was a great friend of one of Mrs. Beeson's children whose birthday came in October as his did, which pleased the old gentleman very much.”

“The funeral will be held at Wagner Creek Cemetery {now called the Stearns Cemetery}, Saturday, at 2:00 p. m. Conger Funeral Parlors are in charge of the arrangements.”

Visitors to the Talent Historical Society Museum will note that there is a picture of Jim Briner in the Brickpile Cabin exhibit. Briner was the man who found a bed of red clay on the Little Applegate river, built a kiln, made bricks, hauled them up by burro back to the Robison/Beeson homestead located at the Cinnabar Trail crossing of the Little Applegate and made a brick fireplace for the new cabin being built there in 1903. It was extra bricks left by the gate to the homestead that caused that new cabin owned by Everette Beeson to be called the Brickpile Cabin. Robinsons built the first cabin in 1863.

Years later, after cattlemen, hunters and others carved names and put brands on the door of the cabin located at 3250 in elevation (that is carved into the door, too!), that the door was removed and has been stored in a barn on Foss Road for years. The Brickpile Cabin is long gone, only a memory now, except for pictures and in this case the Museum in Talent, has the door and a shake from this storied cabin mounted as an exhibit for visitors to inspect.

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**Besides a variety of brands burned into the door of the cabin, and a notation that the elevation at the site of the Brickpile Cabin was 3520, the following family names which are carved into the door include these decipherable family names: Klimek, Skeeters, Gleim, Beeson, Wiloby, Toon and Burnette. And if anyone knows who owned the JP brand, do contact the Talent Historical Society. It's on that door!**

**Since July the following individuals have joined the membership of the Talent Historical Society. We welcome them.**

**Individual Memberships:**

Genevieve Windsor, Michael Hall, Anita Nevison, Carol Kehrig, Kurt Bailey,  
Diana G. Hunt, Linda Cooley

**Family Memberships:**

Bob & Annie Dreiszus, John & Nancy Miller, Ron & Jackie Wagner.

**The Annual Meeting of the Talent Historical Society will be held on Sunday November 20, 2011 at 2:00 p. m. in the Meeting Room of the Talent Public Library. After a brief sketch of the year's actions of the Society, and the election of board members, Jan Wright will present her program about the Jackson County Poor Farm. Refreshments provided. The museum and its exhibits, which is just next door to the public library will be open at 1:00. We will meet in the library so Jan's pictures can be projected.**