

## THE MARCH 2013 NEWSLETTER OF THE

Talent Historical Society



Located at 105 North Market Street, Talent, OR. Send mail to: P. O. Box 582, Talent, OR 97540

Note: The following item originally was an editorial written by John Morrison, the former mayor of Ashland, who grew up in Talent. After college he became a newspaper man and in the 1990's edited the Phoenix-Talent Record. His July 5, 1995, editorial is reprinted below. It is a native Oregonian's response to the sudden growth of places like Talent.

### Oregon Is No Accident!

One of the themes that came through loud and clear in a recent research project conducted here in Talent involves the hostility many "old timers" hold toward those considered "newcomers," particularly those from out of state.

And while this may be viewed as the "curmudgeonly grumping" of an intolerant minority, there appears to be a common undercurrent of concern among a high percentage of residents that a way of life is being threatened by the very people who are moving here to enjoy it.

And in talking to these people, we find that what upsets them most is that so many newcomers don't seem to have a clue about what makes Oregon tick.

Nothing drives a native Oregonian up the wall faster than the view held by many newcomers to Oregon that our special way of life is some sort of accident of nature.

They look around in awe at the superb natural beauty and, (as compared to where they come from) the social harmony, and say, "Eureka, I have found it"

Well, this may come as a shock to our recent arrivals, where ever they may have come from, but you did not just "find it."

#### **Oregonians made it.**

Oregon is no accident. It is the result of generations of conscious caring, of love and respect for this beautiful land. It is a product of vision, sacrifice and hard work.

Oregon today is the result of the actions of a people who instinctively understood that quality of life is to be found in nature as well as in "progress."

Of course we had our share of cattle barons and "cut and run" timber profiteers, but somehow the common folk who came, and stayed, and cared, won out.

Oregon today is the product of people who were moved to preserve, as well as profit from our state's extraordinary gifts. Decades before the term "conservationist" became a household word, Oregonians thought in terms of fairness and responsibility to the land and its people.

The danger many now see is that those who come to Oregon today appear to bring with them the seeds (and we might add, deeds) of its destruction. Developers are among the in-migrants. They see California (or similar congested overbuilt areas) as the land of

obstacles to their plans. Oregon is their new land of opportunity. In other states, the economy is sagging; Oregon is enjoying a robust economy, fueled in part by the building boom to house new arrivals.

Developers come here and marvel at the ease with which they can meet or, in some cases, get around building requirements. They smile at the low costs and high profits they encounter in building in our communities.

Unfortunately, many see Oregon simply as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make millions off a demand for housing here created by those desperately seeking to flee from the physical and social disintegration of California.

They don't care that Oregon doesn't operate on such "get rich quick" values. Or that that may be exactly the reason Oregon is still a "liveable" place while others are not.

Most residents of Talent seem tolerant enough of the newcomers if they make a sincere effort to learn our ways.

But there's the rub. Are there enough "Oregonians" left to pass along the values of the past? Or are more and more of our neighbors likely to say, "Well, the way we used to do it in California was. . . .!"

If so, we are likely to hear more of the old timers saying, as did one respondent to the survey, "As soon as I can, I'm moving out of the state. I need space, and there's none left around here." John Morrison, editor, Phoenix-Talent Record.

**Note: Records indicate that 80 percent of native Oregonians who moved from Oregon from 1900 to 1950 went to Alaska. Alaska's current 2012 population is 731,449, most of whom live in Anchorage, Fairbanks or Juneau. The remainder of the population is scattered over 586,412 square miles. It is over twice the size of Texas, the next largest U. S. state. Alaska is larger than all but 128 sovereign countries. Counting its territorial waters, Alaska is larger than the combined area of the next three largest U. S. states: Texas, California and Montana. It is also larger than the combined area of the 22 smallest U. S. States. If it were placed on the land area of the lower 48 states, Alaska would reach from Florida to California.**

## **IT ISN'T A MUSEUM YET! BUT IT OUGHT TO BE!**

When the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society moved from its location in Phoenix to its present location on Highway 99 north of Phoenix, the old location sat empty. Now 95 Houston Road at Phoenix is filled with 3500 maps, old maps, orchard maps, Jackson county maps of all shapes and sizes dating from 1854 to 1923. Roger Roberts, the county's former land surveyor, assisted by Chuck Eccleston and Nick Jacobson have its walls and tables filled with exceedingly unique maps from all over Southern Oregon.

The maps were formerly housed with the county, and date from 1854 to basically 1923. Roberts has labeled the various cities and areas so that a person viewing the walls and tables on which the maps are displayed can easily know what they are viewing.

Maps graphically display human history as well as physical features. Many of the maps on display indicate land ownership at a specific date. Some of the city maps show subdivision additions by name. Here is a general list of the kinds of maps available for viewing, although even though the space in the building only provides a sampling of the maps now collected. The small Map Viewing Guide provides location data for maps of

this kind: Cities and towns; forest and timber; Gold Hill's High Line canal; Canals, Irrigation dams, Jackson County maps; Medco mill; Medford maps; Mining claims; Maps with land owners listed; Orchards; Public roads, Pacific and Eastern Railroad; and Evans Valley. Additional maps on display include Josephine and Klamath Counties.

The following telephone numbers will put you in touch with folk who will open the facility for viewing: 541-664-5146; 541-261-9891, or you can email Roger Roberts at [roger1656@gmail.com](mailto:roger1656@gmail.com).

## **Camp Baker Road? Over by Phoenix Isn't It?**

Every wonder why places get their names? Like Talent, of Phoenix, or Medford, or Ashland, or Mt. Grizzly? Newcomers to an area often ask those questions. In fact there is a whole cottage industry providing answers to such questions called "place name geography."

Camp Baker Road has a fascinating history. First of all it was named that because a Civil War U. S. Army camp named "Camp Baker" was located on that particular road on the south side of Phoenix, and the road takes its name from that military installation. But why Baker? Why Baker City or Baker County? Or why Fort Baker, Nevada; or Fort Baker near Sausalito, California; or Fort Baker in the District of Columbia; or San Francisco's Baker Street, or why is there a statue of Edward Dickinson Baker in the U. S. Capitol Building? Or why did Oregon's present governor John Kitzhaber designate February 24 as Edward D. Baker Day here in Oregon.

So the real question is who was Edward Dickinson Baker? He was born in 1811 in London, England, into a Quaker family. His family left England for Philadelphia in 1816 where his father established a school. Ned, as he was called, became an apprentice as a loom operator in a weaving factory. In 1825 the family left Pennsylvania moving to New Harmony, Indiana—a utopian community on the Ohio River led by the famous communitarian Robert Owen. Leaving there in 1826 the family moved to Belleville, Illinois near St. Louis. Where Ned and his father started a drayage business that Ned operated. Baker met Governor Ninian Edwards who allowed Baker access to his private law library. Baker left St. Louis and moved to Carrollton, Illinois, where he was admitted to the bar in 1830. A year later he married Mary Ann Lee. Their marriage produced five children.

Shortly after marriage, Baker affiliated with the Disciples of Christ and engaged in part-time preaching, which is probably where he honed his famous oratory skills. In 1832 he participated in the Black Hawk War, but did not engage in any hostilities. About 1835 in Springfield, Illinois, Baker became acquainted with Abraham Lincoln, and soon became involved in Illinois politics, and was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives on July 1, 1837, and served in the Illinois Senate from 1840 to 1844. While in Springfield, he defeated Lincoln for a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives as a Whig. Dickinson and Lincoln became fast friends, leading to some credibility that he may have baptized Lincoln.

Baker served in Congress from March 4, 1845 until he resigned on in 1847. He resigned in a dispute over the legality of his serving in Congress and the army for the U. S. Constitution prohibits an "officer of the United States" from serving in either house of Congress. Lincoln and Baker remained close friends, Lincoln naming one of his sons Edward Baker Lincoln....and the two men occasionally competed in a game of handball.

In September 1844, Baker was involved in an incident arising out of the murder of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter Day Saints. Smith was killed by a mob in a jail in Nauvoo, Illinois. As a colonel in the local militia, Baker was part of the group pursuing the mob leaders who had fled across the Mississippi River into Missouri. Rather than waiting for others to join him, Baker crossed the river and apprehended the fugitives.

In 1846 Baker dropped out of politics and was commissioned a colonel of a regiment of the Illinois Volunteer Infantry and went off to the War with Mexico. At the Battle of Cerro Gordo, General James Shields' Illinois Brigade was badly wounded, and Baker led the brigade against an entrenched artillery barrage, where Baker succeeded in capturing the guns. Baker was commended by General Winfield Scott for his "fine behavior and success." Soon after that battle the enlistment period for the men of the 4<sup>th</sup> Illinois ended, and after returning to New Orleans, Baker was discharged in May.

Baker returned to Springfield in 1848; but, rather than running against Lincoln again for nomination to Congress, Baker moved to Galena, Illinois, where he was nominated and elected to the 31<sup>st</sup> Congress. He was not a candidate for nomination in 1850. Turning to business, Baker proposed to the Panama Railroad Company that he recruit men to help build the railroad across the Isthmus of Panama. He said he would pay the men's expenses from St. Louis to Panama, and the company would send them on to San Francisco to board the ship for Panama. However, Baker became ill in Panama with a tropical disease and had to return to the United States.

Politically Baker had hoped for a Cabinet position under President Zachary Taylor but he did not get that appointment. So in 1852 Baker moved to San Francisco where he operated a successful law practice, even though his inattention to detail that had marked his legislative career still shadowed him. It is said that Baker did not keep records and relied upon his memory and a bundle of papers he carried around in his hat. He abstained from preparing for legal cases, preferring to speak extemporaneously to a jury.

California had been admitted to the Union as a free state in 1850, but later in the decade the state was pulled in different directions over the issue of slavery. Baker became a leader in the movement to keep California in the Union. In 1855, he ran for a seat in the California senate as a Whig on the Free Soil Party party ticket, but lost because the Whig party had collapsed.

Baker became known as the "Grey Eagle" because his hair turned white. He was just under six feet tall. However, his inattention to legal matters caught up with him when he defended a gambler named Charles Cora who was accused of killing a U. S. marshal. The jury failed to reach a verdict, and a mob lynched Cora. Because of

criticism, Baker left San Francisco for Sacramento, and in 1859 failed to win a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives from California.

That failure caused him to look for greener political pastures in the north—in Oregon. Baker had former Illinois friends in Oregon, who told him that he could win the Senate election in that state. At that time the Oregon legislature elected the state's senators rather than thru an open election as is the current practice. Oregon, which had previous to becoming a territory had, like Texas, operated under a provisional government, which had been abolished when Oregon became a U. S. territory, achieved statehood on 14 February 1859. Oregon Republicans asked Baker to come to Oregon to run for the Senate, thinking they could counter the Democratic strength in the state.

By February 1860, Baker and his family moved into a house on what is now the campus of Willamette University in Salem. Baker opened a law office and started campaigning for Republicans around the state. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1860, he acknowledged the secessionist threats heating up the U. S. southern states, and vowed his willingness to die for the country, saying:

“Be it reserved for me to lay my unworthy life upon the altar of my country in defending it from internal assailants, I declare here today that I aspire to no higher glory than that the sun of my life may go down beneath the shadow of freedom's temple and baptize the emblem of the nation's greatness, the Stars and Stripes, that float so proudly before us today, in my heart's warmest blood.”

The Oregon legislature met in September 1860 and elected two men to the U. S. Senate. In an effort to keep Baker from receiving the required majority of 26 votes, six pro-slavery senators left the meeting and hid in a barn to avoid a quorum. They were escorted back, and the legislature reached a compromise and elected James Nesmith, a Douglas Democrat (Douglas whose debates with Lincoln was the presidential candidate for the Union Democrats, while Breckinridge—a senator from Kentucky as the slavery candidate in a divided Democratic party that branch of which had ex-territorial governor of Oregon Joseph Lane as its vice-presidential candidate) and Baker as Oregon's two senators.

Joseph Lane, who had been elected/selected Oregon's senator in 1859 when statehood for Oregon was achieved, was still a seated senator when Edward Dickenson Baker took his seat in the Senate on December 5, 1860. Lane disliked Baker so much that he refused to follow tradition and introduce Baker to the Senate, so Senator Milton Latham of California did it. James Nesmith did not become a seated senator until March of 1861.

Baker immediately got into the debate fray over secession. He countered a Louisiana senator's argument that the South had a constitutional right to secede, in a three hour speech before the U. S. Senate. When Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated, Baker and the former President Franklin Pierce faced backward in the presidential carriage as

they rode from the White House to the Capitol, and Lincoln and outgoing President James Buchanan faced forward. When the audience gathered on the east portico of the Capitol, Baker introduced Lincoln: "Fellow citizens, I introduce to you, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States."

The only reason Lincoln did not name Baker to his cabinet was because Baker's support in the Senate was so critical. If Baker had resigned his seat to join Lincoln's cabinet, Oregon's pro-slavery governor, John Whitaker, would have appointed a pro-slavery Democrat to take his place.

On April 12, 1861 the Civil War began when Confederate artillery fired on Fort Sumter, and three days later Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to protect the Union. Baker left the Senate to go to New York City, where he spoke to a crowd of 100,000 people for two hours in Union Square. Bluntly he told them:

"The hour for conciliation is past; the gathering for battle is at hand, and the country requires that every man shall do his duty....If Providence shall will it, this feeble hand shall draw a sword, never yet dishonored, not to fight for honor on a foreign field, but for country, for home, for law, for government, for Constitution, for right, for freedom for humanity."

The following day he met with 200 men from California who wanted to form a regiment that would show the rest of the nation the West Coast's commitment to the Union cause. On May 8, 1861, Baker was authorized by the Secretary of War to form the California Regiment with Baker as its commanding officer with the rank of colonel. Baker immediately telegraphed his San Francisco law partner, who was then in Philadelphia, and asked him to help him recruit and organize the regiment. When his law partner asked about rank, Baker replied:

"I cannot at this moment accept military rank without jeopardizing my seat in the Senate. But you know my relations with Lincoln, and if you do that for me, I can assure your that within six months I shall be a Major-General and you shall have a Brigadier-General's rank, and a satisfactory command under me.

Baker wrote to Lincoln on June 11, asking that he be given a command that would "not make him second to everybody." His efforts paid off, for on July 31, Lincoln sent the Senate names of men he was recommending for appointments as brigadier generals. On the list besides Ulysses Grant, Charles Stone and others, was Edward Baker.

Baker told the Senate he would refuse the commission because of its doubtful legality, pointing out that he was pleased that the government would allow him a command with his rank of colonel, "quite sufficient for my military aspirations," which indicates that he believed he could hold the rank of colonel and remain in the Senate. He wrote Lincoln on August 31 to decline the appointment as a major general. However, a

list of Civil War generals based on official records indicates that Baker did hold the rank of major general.

He was assigned command of a brigade in General Charles Stone's division, guarding fords along the Potomac River north of Washington. At a dinner with journalist George Wilkes in August, Baker predicted that he would die in an early battle of the war:

“I am certain I shall not live through this war, and if my troops should show any want of resolution, I shall fall in first battle. I cannot afford, after my career in Mexico, and as a Senator of the United States, to turn my face from the enemy.”

Baker stopped at the White House on October 20 to visit with his old friend. Lincoln sat against a tree on the northeast White House lawn, while Baker lay on the ground with his hands behind his head. Willie Lincoln played in the leaves while the two men talked. Baker picked Willie up and kissed him before shaking the President's hand as he left. Mary Lincoln gave Baker a bouquet of flowers, which he accepted sadly and said: “Very beautiful. These flowers and my memory will wither together.”

On October 21 at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, Baker was struck at around four o'clock by a volley of bullets through his heart and brain that killed him instantly. He had had brief discussion with his former law partner, now one of Baker's officers, just prior to his death, and Baker said then: “The officer who dies with his men will never be harshly judged.”

President Lincoln was at General George McClellan's headquarters that evening when he got the news of Baker's death. A reporter of the Boston Journal saw Lincoln crying when he received the news of his friend's death, writing:

“With bowed head, and tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks, his face pale and wan, his hear heaving with emotion, he almost fell as he stepped into the street.”

At Baker's funeral, Mary Todd Lincoln scandalized Washington by appearing in a lilac ensemble, including matching gloves and hat, rather than the traditional black. Despite Baker's close friendship with her husband, she retorted, “I wonder if the women of Washington expect me to muffle myself in mourning for every soldier killed in this great war?” After subsequent funerals in Philadelphia and New York City, Baker's body was sent by ship and the Panama Railroad to San Francisco for burial. He is buried in the San Francisco National Cemetery (Section OSD, Site 488) Of himself Baker once said: “My real forte is my power to command, to rule and lead men, I feel that I could lead men anywhere.” Camp Baker was built for army men to watch secessionist Jacksonville.

**Note: The editor willingly acknowledges the assistance of Wikipedia for details in the foregoing article. The editor of the Talent Historical Society newsletter, *The Historacle* is Robert L. Casebeer. Comments about the coverage, historical mistakes, spelling errors or suggestions for improvement should be sent to him either at [Casebeer@jeffnet.org](mailto:Casebeer@jeffnet.org), or at [talenthistory@gmail.com](mailto:talenthistory@gmail.com). Or come by the Museum at 105 North Market, Talent, Oregon or write to the him at the society at P. O. Box 582, Talent, Oregon, 97540.**

## Talent, Oregon, Is Unique! No Other Town Named Talent Exists

Note: The following article is a brief history of the early Talent area.

The town and the general area around it is the only place in the United States that bears the name "Talent." After the first pioneers settled in the Rogue Valley, the general area was initially called Wagner Creek, named after one of the first settlers Jacob Wagner. During the Indian wars of 1853, Jacob Wagner's house was used by the surrounding settlers for protection from the Takelma Indians who were annoyed at the way in which the miners and settlers had treated them.

Jacob Wagner was not the first settler to determine that the area where Wagner Creek joins Bear Creek was a most satisfactory place to settle. That first honor goes to two men, Stone and Poynetz, but they only resided here for a short time. An old man named Lewis took out a claim adjoining theirs, but he went up to the Willamette Valley and his claim was "jumped" after a short time. Another man named Duncan located a claim on Wagner Creek in December 1851. These early attempts to settle proved frail as the lure of the gold rush to the surrounding area drew attention. Duncan actually moved to Jacksonville.

So the first permanent settler to the area now known as the City of Talent, was Jacob Wagner who in the spring of 1852 filed a land claim on 160 acres along the banks of the stream that now bears his name. He lived on his claim for about ten years, engaging in farming and stock raising. At that time the Talent area farmers were supplying the hosts of miners in Yreka and the Illinois Valley with flour, garden vegetables, oats for their horses, as well as bacon, ham, and beef—a most lucrative activity for all other food had to be shipped into the Rogue Valley from either Scottsburg on the Umpqua River or from Crescent City on the California coast by pack train.

So it was in 1853 that Wagner, with the help of Captain Alden and his troops from Yreka, built a log stockade around Wagner's log cabin. This palisade served as a refuge for most of the pioneers who had settled in the upper Bear Creek area. That refuge has become known as Fort Wagner. This is what the diarist Welborn Beeson had to say about the Talent area Fort:

"We passed several houses and farms but they were all deserted, people] having fled to the Fort for protection from the Indians. The fort is just across the little creek from Albert's [Rockefeller] owned by Mr. Jacob Wagner. All the citizens of this part of the valley are collected in it. It is not safe to go away from it.  
(Beeson, 30-August-1853)

As far as historians can determine the fort was located quite near what today is 226 Talent Avenue, locally known as the "Van Dyke Place." It remained a place of protection until 1855 when the Takelma Indians were, like all the other Indian tribes west of the Cascades, forcibly sent to the Siltezh and Grand Ronde reservations west of present McMinnville.



Historically, the next major event that marked the fledgling community of Wagner Creek was the arrival of Eli and Firman Anderson. They established their claims on what today is known as Anderson Creek about the same time as Wagner claimed land. They were, as historian George Kramer wrote, the first settlers to realize the agricultural potential of the Upper Bear Creek valley. The Andersons produced the first commercial crops in the Rogue Valley. However, in 1857, the total population of the Wagner Creek area only numbered 42—only ten males of which were over 25 years of age, matched by six females over 25.

By 1856 the road over the Siskiyou, called the Road to Yreka, was being used by the California Stage Company which provided stage coaches three times a week south to California. That road running right through Talent stayed the main route of transportation for the next thirty years. In fact, as long as the main automobile route south was the Pacific Highway, rather than Highway 99, Talent Avenue was the road south to California. As soon as the Indian wars stopped, the cities of Jacksonville and Ashland became the population centers—Jacksonville because it was the seat of county government, and Ashland, then called Ashland Mills, because of its grist mills and its woolen mill. Areas like Eagle Point, Phoenix and Talent lingered in development due to their citizens concentration on farming and ranching activity. Here in the Wagner Creek area there was some commercial activity such as Granville Naylor's sawmill, and some gold mining efforts, but in the main farming and fruit production was the primary source of income. George Kramer, in his "Historic Context Statement for the City of Talent," cites the *Ashland Tidings* of 4 January 1878:

“[Wagner Creek] is one of the richest portions of the Rogue River Valley and has long been noted for its melons, peaches, corn and tall timothy.” *Tidings*, 4-January-1878)

In 1865 Jacob Wagner sold his land claim, which later became the eventual site for the City of Talent, to Horace Root for \$3500. The area that today is embraced by the City of Talent remained primarily agricultural land with little, if any, development. That all changed in 1877 when Aaron Patton Talent arrived in Wagner Creek from Tennessee. A skillful carpenter and veteran of the Civil War, A. P. Talent bought eleven acres of land of the original Jacob Wagner land claim. In 1880 he purchased an adjoining 95 acres, and hired Welborn Beeson, who had surveying skills, to plat the property into town lots and blocks.

In the early 1880s, Talent opened a general store on one of his lots, which was the first retail venture in what today is the City of Talent. It was the only commercial store between Phoenix and Ashland. In addition to his store, A. P. Talent enlarged his farming activity by leasing the Maria Colver farm near Phoenix, just two miles north of his newly platted town. By this time the railroad south was being built from Roseburg, and Talent felt that the railroad would obviously go right through or right past his growing community, and his town would be able to ship out its rich agricultural products by rail. The “building boom” was just about to start.

