

Peeps Into Grande Ronde's Early History

Emigrant Train In Which John Baker Journeyed West Met Many Strange Vicissitudes—Sketch of the Early Settlement of This Territory by a Member of One of the Parties to Answer the Call of the West.

Little is generally known of the very early history of La Grande—the time before men thought of recording the events incident to their coming into this favored spot—or of the life of this sturdy band when it was struggling with numerous adverse conditions, when the ingenuity of every member was taxed to the limit to keep body and soul together. Thus far little of this history has been recorded, as far as can be ascertained, and it is with a view to perpetuating facts as told by members of the first settlement, that this brief story of the first settlers is now written.

Back in the little town of Corydon, Wayne county, Iowa, the fever to go west took hold of a number of men, who, after much conversation on the matter, induced other men and women to the number of 170 or more to join in the proposed exodus. There were no railroads at the time and the only method of transportation was by wagon.

Thought crystallized about a place to settle and Walla Walla, Washington, then a town of some 3000 souls, was selected as the place where all thought they would be able to make a living. But they had not seen all of the west, as matters later turned out, for instead of going to that place the entire train settled in the Grande Ronde valley. But we are ahead of our story.

Wagons were fitted out and loaded with necessary provisions, such as bedding and foodstuffs. Each wagon had an average of two grown men. There were in all sixty of these "steamer" wagons, as they have been aptly described. Fifty women, both married and unmarried, joined this emigrant train amidst the shouting and tears of friends and relatives in the little Iowa town. Those who remained behind predicted all sorts of catastrophe for the stout-hearted seekers of new homes. There were parties and entertainments for these prospective travelers, among the many preparations that had to be made for so long and arduous a journey. It is likely that most of those who signified a willingness to go, did not realize in a vivid way just what the whole undertaking would mean to them. It was a time when everybody was stirred by the gold fever and saw visions of wealth accumulated in a hurry, and the attendant comfort it would allow them to live in. Others had gone before and sent back stories of rich finds, of how the expanseless west could take care of untold millions of people. They had heard of the riches that could be accumulated in the fur trade and many a tale was told in the little homes at Corydon of how this man had become almost a king in a domain without bounds.

Slowly, on the 7th of May, 1862, sixty wagons with bright new covers of canvas wound through the unpaved streets of Corydon on the long and tedious journey to that spot where the sun sank in a bed of gold. There were wagons drawn by sturdy horses; others followed the slower pull of oxen and cows. It was a spectacle rarely seen in this town and many tearstained eyes followed the long caravan of wagons until it was lost to sight. It was an exodus that took much of the life of the little city. For many days the houses that heretofore quivered with the life of robust children were now silent and dark. It was almost like the expulsion of the Acadians from their fertile fields in the Basin of Minas on the Island of Nova Scotia. But the travelers started with strong hearts and full of hope.

The train departed on what was then known as the Southern Pacific Pass and Landers Cut-off, and gradually wended its way across Nebraska following the north side of the North Platte River. The march through the bad lands of Nebraska offered hardships which many of them had not anticipated and which made some of them wish they had not listened to the thrilling stories of the wonders of the western world. Some days they were compelled to travel until far into the night to find water for themselves and families. Here and there they saw the ghastly remains of some wagon train which had been waylaid by the everpresent Red Man and despoiled of animals and goods.

Dry bones of man and beast bleaching in the sun were constant reminders that they were traveling with their lives in their hands—that at any turn of the road they might be the unwilling victims of the same marauders. After leaving Nebraska they saw no town, could stop no man on the road and inquire about conditions that confronted them on the untraveled part of their proposed journey. Here and there stood a lonely hut that told of some venturesome life, perhaps snuffed out by

savage butchery, or the daring of a man who thought he could settle down and battle with life unaided, and without the society of human beings. But once did they meet with the protectors of the white men, Uncle Sam's cavalry. This was on Wood river in Western Wyoming.

But it seemed providential, for none of this band met with an accident that caused his or her death directly. On one occasion the animals stampeded and made things exciting for a few hours. One man was injured in this melee and afterwards died of his injuries.

After reaching the present site of Huntington they met miners traveling between Umatilla and Boise, of whom they learned about the Grande Ronde valley. Up to this time they had fully intended to move on to Walla Walla, but they now began to talk of the valley that held so much promise and which lay among the hills, protected on all sides. When they saw the beautiful basin with its hills standing guard, saw the fertility of the soil, with its running streams and dreamed of the possibilities in an agricultural way, they decided that they had gone far enough. At the foot of picturesque Mt. Emily the train went into camp for the winter. This was in November of 1862.

Men immediately busied themselves with making cabins for themselves and families. The single men banded together and built humble habitations for themselves and others sought about for provender for the animals and for food for the men and women and children. Pine boughs strewn about in these rude structures served as a floor. There were no windows and light was scarce. During the first winter every man, woman and child was compelled to put up with many things of a hard nature, but it is remarkable that the general health of the entire colony was very good. Not one person died during this time and there was but little sickness. As a matter of fact everybody was so busy trying to make an existence that they hardly had time to contract disease. The trip across the plains had made them rugged and put into their system the necessary energy to ward off the possible disease that lurked in unfavorable conditions.

About this time a party of cattle men from the Willamette valley brought in a herd of steers which were sold to the settlers and in this way they managed to live. All provisions had to be brought from Walla Walla over the so-called Thomas and Ruckles route down the Walla Walla river as far as Milton and from there over the Woodell toll road, which entered the valley near the present site of Summerville. Some of the first flour sold as high as \$22.50 for

fifty pounds, and that was but a lesser grade, now known as middlings. Calico sold at 50 cents a yard, bacon at 50 cents a pound (we are coming back to those early days) salt at the same price per pound, and coffee at a like figure. As a matter of fact things were hard to get even at this price and the settler considered it the height of luxury to have sugar in his coffee. The cost of transportation was responsible for these prices. The rate from Umatilla to La Grande was 20 cents a pound and from Umatilla to Boise it was 40 and 50 cents. It will be seen that there could not be much profit in coffee, for instance, after the grocer paid 20 cents for freight per pound, unless the coffee was a very poor grade.

In the spring of 1863 the Iowa camp pulled stakes. Some of the settlers had been busy during the winter splitting rails and staking off land which they intended to farm, and now moved into different directions, some going towards Cove, others towards Union and some taking to the lower end of the valley in the neighborhood of Summerville. A goodly portion of the men took to freighting. This was a remunerative business because there was cash in it. Miners who were prospecting always paid cash. Besides it took no great amount of capital to start in this business and the returns were quick. Umatilla Landing and Boise were the extreme points between which these trains moved. About this time Old La Grande was just having its beginning. There were in the neighborhood of twelve tents set up, in which teamsters and their families, or blacksmiths and wagon-repairers lived. There were but two wooden buildings at this time, owned by the Rineharts who had a butcher shop, and a little blacksmith shop—four logs high—owned and occupied by Tom Russell and Henry Trimble. All of the cattle up to this time came from the Willamette valley. A party had come into the valley in the fall of 1861 but in the following spring had gone back presumably for more cattle. But in the winter of '62 and '63 they returned with plows and other equipment and engaged in farming.

It will be seen that immigration into the valley was from both sides and that the Iowa camp formed the contingency from the east. From this time on things began to shape themselves. In the summer of '63 a number of log cabins sprang up. Shingles were being made by John Baker and his brother-in-law Joshua Gooden, which articles might be called the first article of commerce manufactured in La Grande. There was quite a market for horses, for

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CHURCHES OF LA GRANDE SHOW HEALTHY GROWTH

By REV. W. H. DRAHN
(Pastor of Zion Evangelical Church.)

La Grande has been as active in ecclesiastical matters as in other things. In fact these have been no year in the history of the city in which so many changes and so much development has been recorded as during the year just closing. Nearly all the congregations have made improvements in their property. One new church was built and another moved and so completely rebuilt that it is practically new. Several new names have been added to the list of the clergy of the city and a good deal of interest taken in the public life and general development of the community by the ministerial association and the individual pastors and congregations. Activity among the churches of a community is always a good indication of a sound, healthy development of the public spirit and the good morals of that community. While it has cost the city and neighborhood some sacrifice to help in the financing of the church projects, the community as a whole derives the benefit from any strengthening of the churches, in the form of highest standards and better citizenship.

It is impossible to give an exhaustive review of the different churches here, but a glimpse of the congregations as they are at work during 1913 gives a suggestion of the energy expended and the influence set in motion by the churches in La Grande.

The Presbyterians.

This large and influential congregation, with its place of worship in the heart of the city, stands as a bulwark for righteousness and equity. The Rev. Dr. A. G. Lane, a man of sterling character and high ideals, is ever leading his flock against all forms of unrighteousness and baneful influences private and public. A large host of willing workers in this congregation are ever willing to up-

hold the hands of their faithful guide and leader in the cause of truth and light. While no extensive building activities have been maintained the congregation has added more facilities and larger accommodations for the primary department of the Sunday school and other branches of the church. Street improvements and the general work of the church has run the expenses for the year up to large figures. It is planned to construct a chapel on the north side of the tracks, to serve the branch Sunday school that has developed there. The plans are to have the pastor hold services in the chapel in the evening. The funds for this project are practically all in hand.

The Baptists.

The Baptist church has experienced a year of prosperity and growth. Many improvements have been made in the building and the different departments of congregational activity. The affable and energetic pastor, Rev. Close, having formerly been a specialist in Sunday school work, has been especially successful in building up this department of his church. Also the auxiliary organizations of the church have taken on new life during the year, and the ladies' society organized during the year has taken an important place in the life of the church. In addition to the general forward movement the congregation has re-arranged and improved the facilities of the Sunday school and social rooms in the basement at considerable cost and the ladies have completely furnished the kitchen with the needed utensils and dishes. With a pastor fearlessly proclaiming the Word of Truth and a faithful people laboring in unity and strength for the cause of the Great Leader of the generations, much is being accomplished that will make La Grande a better place to live in.

The Lutherans.

This is in a sense the youngest of

the congregations in the city. While the Germans of this city have for many years maintained services in the native language, the present English congregation is only about two years old. The older members still desire an occasional German service, but the younger generation and the many American-born Lutherans have made a distinctively English congregation a necessity. Much credit is due the Germans, however, for their early efforts, faithfulness and great sacrifices in establishing and maintaining the Church of the Reformation, and the present English congregation has at a recent meeting formally extended a vote of thanks and appreciation to that part of its members that acted as pioneers in the work and still are numbered among the very active members. There is probably no church in the city that looks forward with more hopefulness to the future than this mission that was organized with nearly a hundred members, for there are hundreds of Lutherans in the city and vicinity who have not yet been identified with the work, but will no doubt be added to the list of members. Rev. Wm. C. Drahn, for many years secretary of missions, and formerly connected with the Pacific Seminary, is the pastor.

Episcopalians.

This parish has had a quiet year as far as building operations are concerned, but it could well afford to rest on the oars in this respect considering the achievements of the immediate past. Considerable improvements have been made in the interior of the chapel, but the chief activity of the congregation has been directed toward benevolences and missions. Faithful, steady progress has been made in behalf of the development of spiritual life among the members and in the Sunday school. The faithful and beloved pastor, Rector Gibbs, has just entered upon his tenth year in the local parish. He has now the distinction of being the oldest rector in point of service in Eastern Oregon, of all his colleagues in the Episcopal church and also among the ministers of La Grande. He is universally esteemed and his deep interest in the welfare of the community is reciprocated by his fellow citizens. The congregation has already built the splendid Honan hall and a magnificent rectory under his leadership and a substantial amount has been raised as a fund for a new church to be built in the future.

Methodist South.

This little church has gone through troubled times during the year owing

to the vacancy caused by the removal of Rev. Nelson, and deserves much credit for its courageous effort to not only hold its own but to actually gain ground. Serving a district separated geographically from other districts and especially active in taking care of the children of that district. The auxiliaries have practically carried on the work since Pastor Nelson left and have done splendid work. Visiting pastors have served the congregation and Rev. Mr. Cross of Wingville, Wash., has been conducting a series of revival meetings. Much credit to a splendid community work is due to faithful workers in the Sunday school and the congregation.

The Christian Church.

The Christian church started the year with a great deal of activity and accomplished much in the way of building operations. By moving and re-modeling the church building, the congregation has a modern plant for all departments of church work and is centrally located as well. Rev. Adams has been the faithful pastor up to a short time ago, when much to the regret of his many friends, he resigned, from his charge, though still filling the pulpit in the absence of a successor. The Sunday school and ladies' society have been doing splendid work both for the church and for benevolences and missions. It is expected a pastor will be called some time in the near future.

Methodist Episcopal Church.

The year has been one of such activity in the Methodist church that each month was an epoch in its history. During the year many events, including the district conference, the different steps in the erection of the magnificent edifice at the corner of Spring and Fourth streets, the purchasing and selling of property, have been reported in the columns of the Observer and many of these are fresh in the minds of our readers. The dedication which took place on Sunday, December 14, without a doubt was the greatest event in the church activity of the city during the year. Not less than \$10,000 was raised on the one day. To the congenial pastor, who is a financier as well as a preacher, must be given credit for the raising of the enormous sum of \$28,000 for this church building. Those who escaped his vigilance in this regard during the year are few in number, and a splendid monument to the efforts of the pastor and people of the Methodist church is their spacious and beautiful new building. Latter Day Saints.

The Latter Day Saints' church has

been active especially in behalf of the young of the congregation. A gymnasium and tennis court were completed at a cost of \$500 in cash and labor amounting to more than that amount given by the young men. Members totaling 60 in number were received and five missionaries are laboring in foreign fields. The public spirit of this congregation is evidenced by the manner in which the doors of the Tabernacle have been thrown open to the Farmers' Union and the G. A. R. Some men and women very high in the boards of the church have visited the congregation during the year, including Ruler Wells, Mrs. C. W. Nibley and Mrs. Jennie Hyde. A carnival was held during this month by the united societies which resulted in the raising of \$501.60 toward the debt of the ward. The Sunday school has been an especial credit to this congregation.

The Catholic.

Plans for the proposed new Catholic church building have been made but the parish is still undecided as to the time when work on the edifice will begin. It is the purpose of the pastor, Father Driscoll, to have a goodly sum of money in the treasury before actual work begins. Then, too, no decision has been reached concerning a location. The property on the hill opposite the court house and the Central school is desirable but is too far for members living at the other extreme of town. For this reason there is some talk concerning a downtown location where access will be easier for many of the aged members of the parish who find it hard to climb the hill.

The frame building now occupied by the parish is inadequate for the constantly growing membership, but the demands made upon citizens during the past year will make it impossible to do anything until people have gotten their breath.

The review of the churches active during the year shows many signs of life, wide-awake activity among the different denominations and a splendid spirit of fraternity and mutual helpfulness maintained. It would be hard to find any city in eastern Oregon where the churches maintain a more loyal spirit to the interest of the community in matters of public morals and standards of living without any obtrusive methods or ungenerous attitude. Plans for active work in all departments are being freely discussed, and while not much building is looked forward to for the coming year, the religious influence will be an important factor in the life of the city.

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