

OLD PIONEER BROUGHT FAME TO GRANDE RONDE

LIFE STORY OF ELIAS RUARK HORNER
INTENSELY INTERESTING, OLD
HOMESTEAD STILL STANDS



Elias Ruark Horner (Taken in 1914)

Pulsating with the hardness of frontier life, and punctuated with incidents that befell the early circuit riders doing a skypilot duty when Union county was an unsettled wilderness, a life-history of one of Union county's early citizens has come off the press. The story is told in booklet form and is published by the family of the late Elias Ruark Horner for gratuitous distribution among immediate relatives and friends.

The Horner family will be remembered with interest by many early Grande Ronde settlers; Mrs. Sevilla DeLong of this city is a sister of the subject of the biographical sketch.

The history is brief, to the point, and full of historical lore. Here it is:

Elias Ruark Horner was born in Zanesville, Ohio, May 5, 1835. He was of Scotch-Irish descent. His parents were very poor; but they were hard-working, honest people, who were inclined to the worship of God as taught by the Methodist Episcopal Church. The family was very large; hence in the pioneer days in Ohio, opportunities for the boy were meager. While he was devoted to his father's large family, his lot seemed for a while cast with an older brother, John, whom Elias endeavored to educate, with the understanding that when John had finished his schooling, he in turn was to help Elias. There was a singular attachment between the brothers. John was retired in his habits, while Elias was talkative and brilliant in company. John was frail, while Elias was robust and generous in enduring hardships. What one lacked was supplied by the other. This strengthened the bond of affection between them and made them inseparable. That their most cherished hopes might be realized happily and soon, Elias at the age of eighteen years went to California, arriving in the gold fields in 1853. The journey, much of which was made afoot, was six months long. Hence he was gone a year before the first letter from the boy off in California was received by the folks at home. The home leaving of Elias was the first break in the family circle. The first letter from home bore news of the second break in the family, for John had suddenly died. News of his brother's death blasted the hopes of the boy away from home. His life plans were instantly changed. He never returned to the home of his childhood; and to the day of his death, his mother never ceased to mourn the absence of her boy. Furthermore he never obtained the college training which he had hoped so long to receive. But till the day of his death he thirsted for learning as an infant craves its mother's milk.

With some knowledge of carpentry, he soon obtained employment in building flumes and bridges in the Sacramento valley. Then he went to Folsom, then to Virginia City, then to Walla Walla, where he arrived on the 10th of May, 1862. It will be remembered that this was the spring after the hardest winter known to white men on the Pacific slope, and because of freshets, the Snake, the Powder and other rivers along the way were impassable to wagons. Consequently the journey was made on horses and mules. In the party there was a Moravian by the name of Frank Swadlenack, who was in deep distress. His health was

ruined by exposure in the Gould & Curry mine in Virginia City, Nevada, so that he was unable to do any work or even mount his horse without assistance. Yet he had a wife and a little son and daughter to care for. Out of sympathy for the unfortunate family, who were strangers to him, Elias Ruark Horner gave such aid as he could to them. Upon arriving at Fort Walla Walla, the sick man, who had been a soldier in the Austrian army, was accorded military courtesies and medical relief by the officers and soldiers at Fort Walla Walla, Surgeon Steinberger being in charge of the hospital. But the disease prevailed and the patient died ten days later, the funeral services being performed at the Fort with the assistance of Father John Flinn, now living in East Portland.

Widow Becomes Bride

The episode which resulted in the death just mentioned is related so as to explain how and when Elias R. Horner came to marry his first wife, a woman of rare spiritual endowments. White women were scarce on the frontier, hence courtship was greatly simplified. Therefore within a year, Elias R. Horner became the husband of the widow Swadlenack, Rev. John Flinn officiating in the marriage ceremony.

While there were many good people at this time in the little town of Walla Walla, there were also many outlaws. Pistol shooting could be heard down town any night and the outlawry of the place resulted in the organization of a vigilance committee to which many of the best citizens belonged—we are told—as sort of honorary members just to indicate that they were in favor of law enforcement. Under these conditions, moral and religious matters were appalling.

Unannounced and unheard there came to the town from the Willamette Valley one day five strange ministers, with no congregation to welcome them nor church to preach in. They were Seneca Coston, Obediah Asburn, Jerry Kenoyer, and the two Gallaher brothers, William and Jackson, all of whom became well known throughout the Northwest. They were men of Western vehemence and sterling power. Uncle Jerry Kenoyer, the revivalist preaching at a protracted meeting, and "Whispering Thompson," the freighter, driving 10 span of horses from



Mary Anna Horner (Wife of E. R. Horner, Died 1899)

Pendleton to Walla Walla, had voices like thunderbolts turned loose in a sawmill and the remainder of the quintet were quite as vigorous.

Church Excitement Attracts

"The use of the Methodist Church was tendered to the ministers. There was something very ardent in the spiritual services conducted by the strangers, and the talk of the town was the excitement going on at the church. The air was astir with interest; and a tremendous revival resulted which proved to be the beginning of the United Brethren Church in Walla Walla County.

Among the numerous converts was E. R. Horner, who at once felt that he was called to preach the gospel. Soon he was granted a license to exhort and later to preach. His first sermon was preached at the Pileas School House, on Mill Creek, about ten miles above Walla Walla, the text being: "In my Father's House are Many Mansions."

He immediately began a course of reading prescribed by the conference. But he soon found himself in a most peculiar plight. Organs were not used by western United Brethren

which enabled him afterwards to combine singing with the regular Then Sent to Grande Ronde

At the following annual conference he was sent to Grande Ronde Valley, Union County, Oregon, whereupon he located near Summerville, living in a log cabin with the DeMoss family, who subsequently became noted for their musical attainments.

Wholesale Arrests Some

One morning after Reverend Horner had been preaching some months in Summerville, a Mrs. James Chitlers the mother of a large family of splendid boys, came to the front gate and said to Mrs. Horner: "The United States Marshal came last night and arrested several men in our neighborhood, for robbing the United States Mail, in the Blue Mountains near Meacham." All but one of the ten men arrested were found guilty and were sent to the San Quinton prison, notwithstanding the fact that they ranked among the leading citizens of the place, one of them being the only physician in Summerville. This naturally affected the size of Mr. Horner's congregation. Accordingly he soon moved



Elias Ruark Horner (1872) (E. R. Horner in clerical attire made with a needle in the hands of his faithful wife.)

Churches at that time and leaders in singing were few. Rev. Horner had never been able to carry a tune. Hence he frequently held divine services without music of any kind. This of course detracted from the effect of the meetings and would have discouraged the ordinary preacher. But Rev. Horner said, "A man with the grace of God in his heart will sing;" and with this grace of God in his heart and a little instruction from his wife, he soon learned to carry three hymns and the doxology.

farther up the valley and located a homestead four miles north of La Grande, at a place called the Fort, being the point where the soldiers made their first treaty with the Indians in that locality. His principal congregation regularly assembled at what was latter called Moss Chapel, but at that time it was known as Saw Buck School building, being so named for the reason that it was claimed that of the early settlers many could only make a cress resembling the end of a saw buck when they undertook to affix their signature to legal documents.

At the time of his death, Reverend Horner was a Mason in good standing, having transferred to the lodge of Beaverton by an act of the Grand Lodge of California, inasmuch as his mother lodge had been dissolved after the gold excitement of that state subsided. Likewise he was in favor with his neighbors, especially with young people who regarded him as a refined Christian gentleman who sought to develop the beautiful and good in those about him. Not infrequently he was referred to as "that good old Christian." Such was the life of a faithful servant who had been in the frontier ministry nearly half a century.

develop the character and courage of anyone. Hence she was well prepared to endure the privations of a minister's wife on the western frontier.

Pitch Knots for Lamps

Now and then for weeks, wheat was the only food in the house for the family. The minister's wife ground the wheat in a coffee mill and made it into porridge, pancakes, dumplings, and bread. She parched the wheat, and the children carried it about with them and ate it with the same relish that children eat popcorn and candy now-a-days. The attire of the family was necessarily simple and the home comforts were few. After the busy day's work was over, the mother sat and sewed with her brood of little ones about her knee, while the room was lighted with rich pitch-pine knots taken from the mountains near by. And while she swiftly plied her needle, she told beautiful stories of the Divine Master, thus teaching the children to emulate the Christ life so precious to her. Under these influences, the family was happy and healthy; and the lark never sang a sweeter song than the joyous hymns that rose day by day from the family altar of that poverty-stricken circuit rider's home on the Oregon frontier.

Saloons Helped Churches

In the early seventies he transferred his membership to the M. E. Church, whereupon he was received into the Columbia River Conference. Being a rugged man of the Dow and Cartwright type, it was his custom to offer his services as carpenter gratis, wherever a new church was to be built under his supervision; and it was his practice to fill all his regular appointments on Sundays regardless of the week day service he had rendered. This will explain how it happened that he built churches wherever he was sent. Among those he erected was the first Methodist Church at Pendleton, some of the largest donations being contributed by saloon men and knights of the green cloth. He made the shingles of pine trees in the mountains near Meacham station, and he plied his carpenter tools in the erection of the structure.

He was not accustomed to preach for a stated salary. Hence at different times his support was so meager that he was compelled to resort to physical labor in order to sustain himself and family. During such intervals, however, he made it convenient to preach wherever Sunday overtook him, and in this way, organized new congregations and established Sabbath schools. Frequently silver offerings were made; and in one instant the miners melted silver of their own digging for "the parson that frequently visited the mining camp."

During the Snake Indian War, he served as scout, under General Miles and Howard, and he rendered the settlers such aid as he could give them. Later he came to the Willamette Valley, where he accepted charges in Marion and Polk counties. Upon the death of his wife, which took place in Fall City, Oregon, January 1, 1899, he moved to Beaverton and gave up his active work in the ministry, but preached occasionally until his last illness.

Marries Second Time

About four years after the death of his wife, he was married to Mrs. Emma Rosa Cain, an accomplished lady whom he had met and known in Walla Walla as early as 1864.

Rev. Bell On Scene

He died at the Good Samaritan Hospital, in Portland, Oregon, April 30, 1914, of cystitis. He was buried at the side of his first wife in Crystal Lake Cemetery near Corvallis, Oregon, on the following day, Doctors J. C. Rollins and J. R. N. Bell officiating at the funeral services; and a few months later his grief-stricken wife too crossed over the mansions not built by hands, eternal in the heavens.

His surviving relatives are his brother Rev. J. S. Horner living in Iowa, three sisters, Mrs. Sevilla DeLong, living near La Grande, and Mrs. Martha Johnson and Mrs. Sarah Clark, both of Salem, and his children, Mrs. Elizabeth A. Aiken, of American Falls, Idaho; Elias Dow Horner, of Halfway, Oregon, and a stepson, Professor J. B. Horner, of Corvallis, Oregon.

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Finally, Reverend Horner, in the days of his vigor, was a physical giant, especially equipped for hardships common to the western circuit rider under pioneer conditions. Intellectually he was richly endowed, although his school privileges were meager. He was a man of high ideals, and was naturally chaste of

speech. He was proud, but his pride came from a sense of honor. He was brave, knowing no fear till the end. When told he was dying, he looked up as calmly as a wounded veteran long accustomed to the hardships of battle. His face brightened with a smile for a moment, then gradually grew pale, his tongue became speechless, and his countenance beamed with faith in Him, whom he had oft proclaimed as the avenger of mankind. Then closing his eyes for the last time upon the sweetness of earth, he died the death of a good soldier; and the voice which had oft been heard in western sanctuaries was stilled forever.

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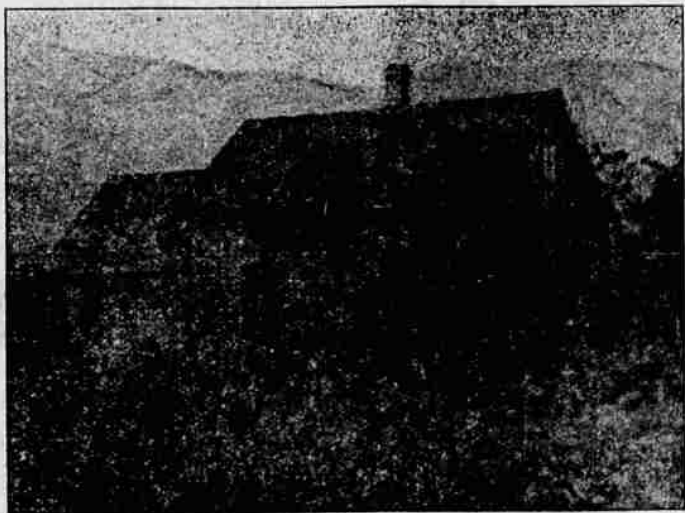
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