

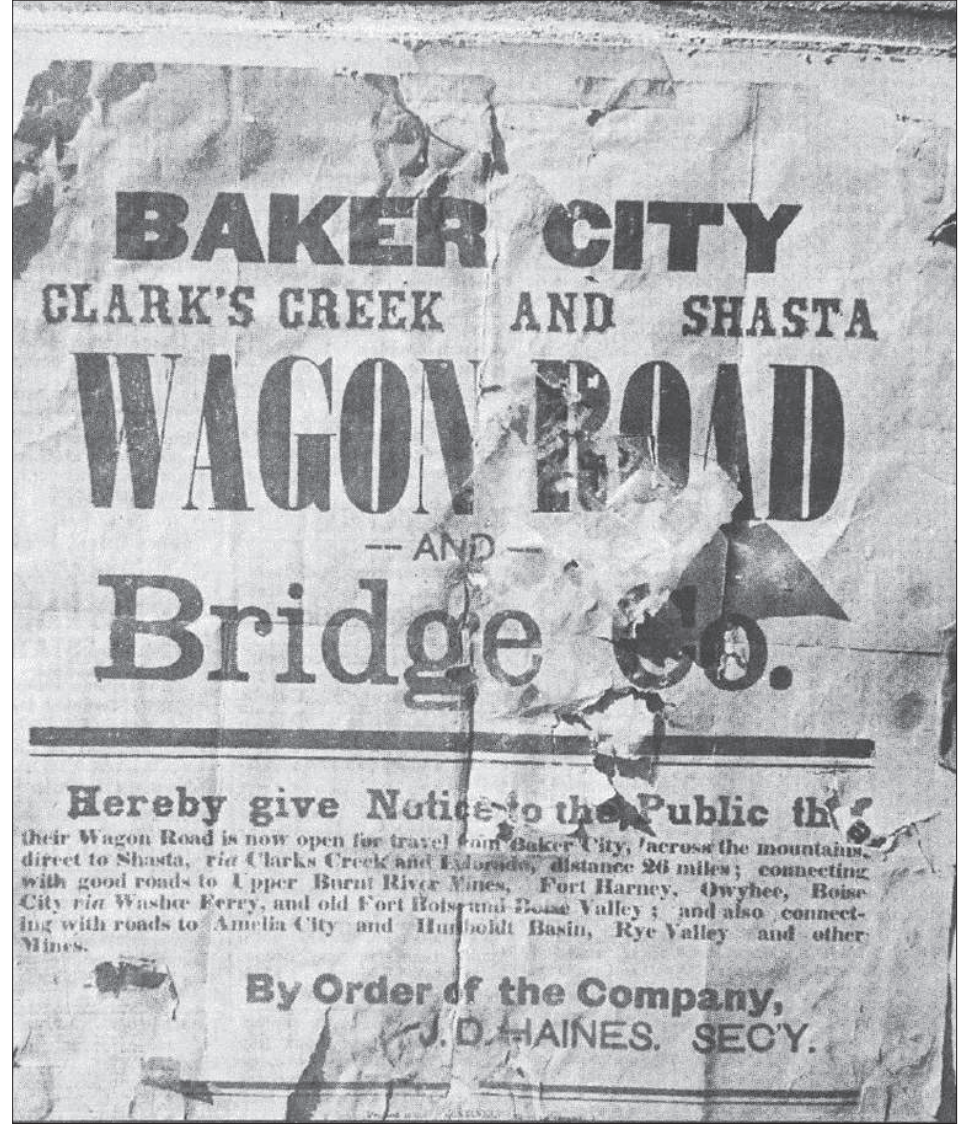
Local

Dooley Mountain's Hwy. 245: A History



Submitted Photo.

John J. Dooley (seated) and Jeremiah J. Dooley (standing).



Submitted Photo.

An old poster for the Wagon Road.



Submitted Photo.

Asa Knapp Dooley.



Submitted Photo.

An early photo of Bridgeport.

BY CURT DOOLEY

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Is it the windiest, scariest road in eastern Oregon? (It is if your first trip over it was with the late Bob Bowen, driving his big old Ford at 60 mph up the mountain with one hand on the wheel and the other hand holding his cigarette). Or simply a beautiful old mountain highway? (It is if Mrs. Dooley is driving at 23 mph, fretting about the lack of guard rails). Either way, it is the Dooley Mountain Highway, aka Oregon Highway 245.

In September 1862, my great-great-grandfather, John J. Dooley and his wife, Phoebe, arrived in what is now Baker County, in the then-bustling new community of Auburn. Their wagon train included I.B. Bowen and his wife Ann (who was also John's sister) and their children; John's brother, Jeremiah and his wife, Christiana; Honora Dooley, the widowed Irish-born mother of John, Jeremiah, and Ann; as well as Johanna O'Brien, a school teacher who subsequently married early Baker County pioneer William Packwood, and a few others. It was in early 1863 when the Dooley brothers followed

the gold strikes to Idaho City, Idaho.

Meanwhile in 1861, considerable gold had been discovered at Clark's Creek, several miles southeast of Bridgeport, Oregon. At that time, supplies were packed from Baker City over the old Creighton Road, crossing the Burnt River near where Hereford now is, and then down the river on the south side to these mines where there were some stores and a post office. Bridgeport is on the south bank of the river, which could then not be forded. There was a real need for a wagon road and a shorter route to connect Baker City to the placer camps of Malheur and the Eldorado district.

In response to this need, Dr. Jacob Boyd, James Virtue (another early pioneer who married one of the daughters of I.B. Bowen and Ann [Dooley] Bowen) and others formed the Wagon Road and Bridge Company to begin construction of a toll road that would connect Baker City to the placer camps of Malheur and the Eldorado district. This road went up Trail Creek to the heads of Beaver and Sutton Creeks to about the head of Dark Canyon, down Cutter Gulch to Auburn Gulch,

then to the Burnt River. A stage station was located at about the head of Trail Creek where the stage driver stopped for noon meals and to exchange the stage team for a fresh team. A tollgate was located on the north side of the mountain.

According to *The Oregonian* (August 7, 1926), the road was made passable for the entire distance over the mountain in 1869. At the south end of this road (on the south side of the mountain), where it crossed the river, there was a bridge some 200 feet long. Since this bridge was the terminus of the toll road, and since they wanted to give the point some name, they decided to call it Bridgeport.

In June 1871, John Dooley and his brother, Jeremiah Dooley, moved back to Baker County from Idaho City, where they had made a fair amount of money mining and selling water rights.

Later in 1871, John and Phoebe Dooley, with money they had saved in Idaho City, purchased James Virtue's interest in the Wagon Road and Bridge Company. This included land in Bridgeport on the south side of the mountain as well as the bridge over

the Burnt River, for \$500. In 1872 they bought Dr. Boyd's half for another \$500. The toll gate on the north side of the mountain was moved to the 200-foot bridge on the south side and a home was built, which they called "Tollgate."

The gate itself was a log that swung round and round. The toll was \$.50 for horse and rider, \$2.00 a team, \$4.00 for a four-horse team. The January 16th, 1935 issue of *The Democrat Herald* wrote, "The financial good fortune of the venture was often attested by the fact that many times as much as \$1000 was kept in the Dooley cabin for several days [nearly \$20,000 in today's dollars]. Fifty dollars was often collected in a few hours' time from wagon trains passing through." Despite that, Phoebe Dooley once said, "We rarely had a gun in the house; Pa couldn't shoot anyway."

Tollgate

John and Phoebe lived at the Tollgate for 17 years. Dooley's Tollgate served as a rest stop, stage stop, mountain house (providing meals and hospitality to travelers), and the wagon road was the most direct route between Baker City

and Bridgeport, as well as several booming placer mining camps. Because of this, large bands of Indians occasionally passed through Tollgate while on their migrating journeys. Also due to its strategic location, US Cavalry troops were stationed there from time to time when there were conflicts between the Indians and the whites.

In 1889, John and Phoebe Dooley sold Tollgate and the toll road to Baker County "for a sum sufficient for him to retire on." When asked why they sold Tollgate, Phoebe replied, "To educate the children." John and Phoebe then moved to Baker City. If anyone wonders where my inheritance all that toll road money went, one simply needs to look at the St. Francis de Sales Cathedral and photos of the old St. Francis Academy.

The mountain itself was subsequently named after John Dooley, though one is hard-pressed to find any signage to that effect, though it certainly existed at one time.

Wikipedia writes, "The Dooley Mountain Highway can be traced to a private toll road constructed in the mid-19th century. It was owned by John J. Dooley, an eastern Oregon pioneer

who arrived in 1862, and the mountain was subsequently named after him. In 1889, it was acquired by Baker County and became a public road.

"The road was made part of the Baker-Unity Highway in 1917. In 1932, the Baker-Unity Highway was designated OR 7.

"In 1981, the Baker-Unity Highway was divided between the Whitney Highway No. 71 and the Dooley Mountain Highway. The Dooley Mountain Highway was redesignated OR 245."

So is the Dooley Mountain Highway scary, or beautiful? Yes.

Editor's Note:

Curt Dooley also recommends a book "The Dooley Family: From the Emerald Island to the Inland Empire," by Bowen, available at Betty's Books in Baker City.

Dooley is the great-great grandson of John J. Dooley, the early Baker County pioneer. He was born and raised in Seattle but has been to Baker City many times (and loves it).

He is an Air Force veteran and currently the Manager of Security and Emergency Preparedness for a large healthcare company.