

Discover Stories on the Land

Below is the second excerpt from the unpublished 1996 book, Stories on the Land: An Environmental History of the Applegate and Upper Illinois Valley, by George McKinley and Doug Frank. The Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc., will be publishing the book in its entirety in 2018.

Early in 1827 a party of Hudson's Bay Company trappers from Fort Vancouver—around 40 French-Canadian and Indian trappers, led by Peter Skene Ogden, with their native wives and over a hundred horses—became the first known whites to enter the Applegate watershed. They traveled west along the Klamath River, then turned north over the crest of the Siskiyou into the Rogue drainage, skirting the southern and eastern edges of the Applegate drainage to pass north and then south again along Bear Creek. On April 7, 1827, Ogden and his men descended Onion Creek, south of present-day Grants Pass, into the lower Applegate.

The party explored and trapped the Applegate area for about a week. Ogden's trappers split up, presumably ranging widely across the landscape. There are no expansive descriptions of the Applegate region, nor of the activities of the trappers. It seems likely that Ogden himself ranged into the middle stretches of the Applegate watershed, where a camp was established near the mouth of Thompson Creek.

Ogden's journal laments the lack of beaver available for easy trapping in the Applegate and shows his preoccupation with traveling on: "I now feel more than ever anxious to leave this Country being now more than ever fairly of opinion it is not a Beaver one nor was it ever intended it should be one." The trappers moved from the Applegate back into the Rogue, where they established a camp in the vicinity of Evans Creek.

Ogden's observations provide a glimpse into the ecosystem of this country at that time. There were wolves: Ogden says they ran off fifty of his horses. There were impressive oaks along Bear Creek: "Nearly double the size of any I have seen this season." There was good pasturage: "In all my travels, I have not yet seen a finer country for pasture." Along the Siskiyou Crest above Cottonwood Creek Ogden noticed that "in many parts wood appears scarce and in other parts abundant Oak and Pine." He called the Rogue River "a bold stream and also a very strong one

and both sides of the River well lin'd with Rocks and Stones." He remarked on the mildness of the winter, writing on February 9-10, 1827:

"The Indians inform us the winter is now over and I am almost inclined to believe them from the singing of Birds of all kinds, grass green and at its full growth. Flowers in blossom certainly entitles them to be credited but we are yet in February."

Ogden's main goal in the Applegate region was to further the Hudson's Bay Company's resolve to create a vast "fur desert" surrounding the Company's lands along the Columbia River. Logic presumed that if there were no beavers to trap, there would be no American trappers to compete with the British in the expanding northwest, and the region would remain British. Since 1821, when the English Parliament stepped in to consolidate the feuding North West and Hudson's Bay companies under a single title, the Company had helped further British goals. Although Ogden seemed sometimes less than happy with the beaver opportunities in the Applegate, he does record taking well over 1,500 pelts, the stated harvest goal for the trip. At the peak of the trade, between 1834-1837, "nearly half a million skins were handled by the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver."

During the next two decades, the only Euro-Americans to visit the area were the several parties who entered the periphery and a yearly flow of fur trappers from the Hudson's Bay Company. The environmental impact of these groups seems minimal, except in two regards: the removal of beaver from riparian communities and the resultant channelization of streambeds and alteration of streamside environments. Probably the impact of beaver decimation ceased in the latter part of the 1840s, when the saturation of the beaver hat market, combined with reports of trapped-out beaver throughout the range of the Hudson's Bay Company, caused the British and European fad for beaver hats to plummet, and fashionable people began to look elsewhere for their headwear. It is quite likely, however, that this impact from beaver trapping was soon over-laid by a similar consequence of mining, whose impact lay just around the corner.

Note: Excerpted by Diana Coogle from pages 18-19 of Stories on the Land: An Environmental History by George McKinley and Doug Frank.

Back in Time: Watkins School now under water

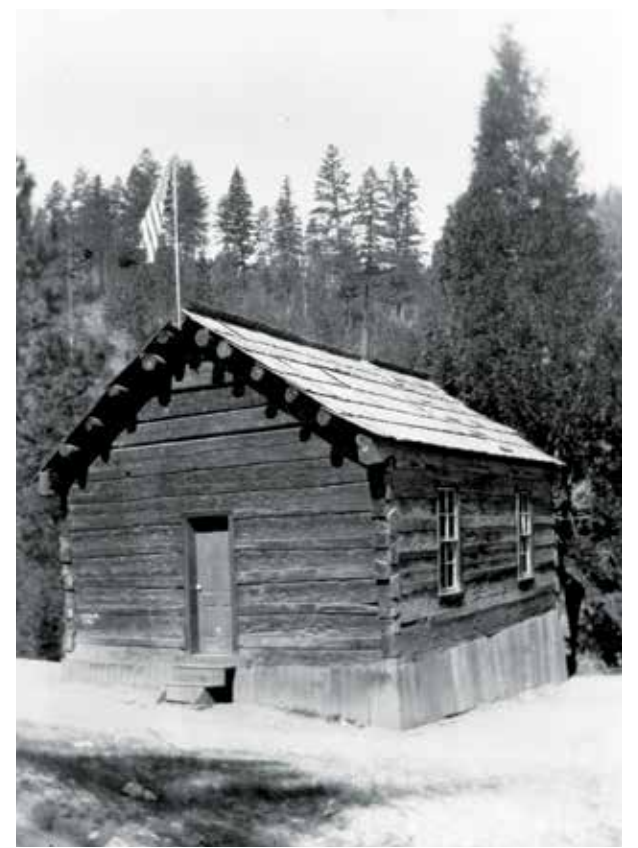
BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

Some of Applegate Valley's early one-room schools were made from logs harvested from a nearby forest. The Watkins School, which was built on a bluff high above the Applegate River and very close to the road, was one such school.

The children played games of baseball, races, marbles, and touch tag in the roadway, as the teacher was always worried about a pupil falling off the cliff behind the school. Seldom did a vehicle pass by on the road, but when a copper ore wagon from the Blue Ledge Mine went by, play would stop for an exchange of greetings, especially if the children knew the driver.

Our family was quite involved with this school. Aunt Katie, my dad's youngest sister, attended the later grades, and her older sister, my Aunt Margaret, taught there. When my brother, Morris, was six in 1922, he attended first grade there. His teacher was Ina Stoker (later Pursel), a dear friend who boarded at my family's home during the school year.

This photo is of special interest because of the flag flying above the doorway. There does not appear to be a pulley system, so the flag must have stayed up during the entire school year and some brave soul had to climb a ladder to remove the flag at the end of the school season.



Watkins School was built on a bluff above the Applegate River, but is now under Applegate Lake.

A new school was later built on the Bert Harr property to accommodate the growing population, and the logs from the old school were hauled several miles down the road by Cary Culy to build a garage. So many years have gone by, and the old Watkins School is now only a memory beneath Applegate Lake.

Evelyn Byrne Williams
with Janeen Sathre
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Applegate School welcomes two new teachers

Grade K/1

Karen Hirschmugl is the new K/1 teacher at Applegate School. She brings 16 years of experience gained in the Gresham-Barlow School District, where she taught first, third, and fourth grades.

"I am very excited to be joining the staff at Applegate Elementary School," Karen said, "because I love the Applegate Valley and am looking forward to living, working, and being involved in the community."

Karen has been married to husband Alan for 32 years, and has three children: Paul, Nellie, and Kyle. She also calls herself the "proud owner" of three dogs: Bella, Tucker, and Zane. Karen's favorite free-time activities, which include hiking, camping, and running, are all well suited for the Applegate.

"I can't wait to meet my students and am looking forward to watching them as they learn and grow this school year," Karen said.

Karen attended college at Concordia University and Lewis and Clark College, and replaces Vicki DiStefano, who accepted the role of Title One Coordinator at Manzanita Elementary.



Karen Hirschmugl



Brad Studebaker

Grade 6-8

Brad Studebaker will be teaching core classes in math and science to Applegate students in grades 6-8.

This new teacher will be busy—in addition to core classes, he will teach other courses and take a leadership role in co-curricular activities such as the National Junior Honor Society.

Brad's background has provided multiple opportunities for him to teach. Not only has he taught at the college level, but he has also worked in the medical industry producing and delivering training to doctors, nurses, and other health professionals.

Brad's background also includes 12 years as a ski instructor in Aspen, Colorado!

He grew up in Ashland and attended college at Southern Oregon University, Claremont College, and the University of Nevada, Reno, earning degrees in mathematics, nursing, and business.

Now Brad has returned to his roots to enter the teaching profession. "I am looking forward to guiding students to understand the world around them and to begin to imagine their place as adults," Brad said.



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