

Gold Rush from Alonzo Turner's notes: by Greg Walter

Alonzo P. Turner, His Record of Activity In The Illinois Valley, Southern Josephine County In The Oregon Gold Rush 1852-1856.

Part 1 of 7
This landmark early history of The Illinois Valley is assembled by Greg Walter of Jefferson State Financial with support from The Kerbyville Museum and The Josephine County Historical Society. A very special thank you to Michelle Binker for her contribution that helped to bring this story to the readership.

The article will be published in consecutive fragments across seven issues of the Illinois Valley News, so make sure you pick up a copy each week to get the full account.

Gathering regional information of our earliest miners and settlers here in Southern Oregon can be challenging because so many of these people did not stay long or settle, so these insights into our historical record must be found from sources outside our region. Some recently discovered letters give us a glimpse of Alonzo P. Turner's correspondence with his wife and children he left back in Wisconsin in 1852 so that he could travel west and make enough money to pay his travel costs and cover expenses back home. Travelling out to the Oregon Territory in the 1850s

was an expensive endeavor with costs exceeding \$800 at that time. If they were lucky and did not succumb to the many ailments and accidents that could kill them, lose their possessions to fire, or get victimized by robbers, they could make excellent money out west, but often had to settle debts incurred by mortgaging the farm and obviously they had the goal of making the whole venture a profitable one.

These new documents will provide us with insights into life in the new gold diggings in southern Josephine County in the early 1850s by a Donation Land Claimant that was the first one in the Illinois Valley and the second one in Josephine County (see "First There Was Twogood"). The other note of significance in this was a rare photograph of the ranch as it stood in 1854. So please enjoy the letters and images assembled from the relatives of Alonzo Payne Turner, early gold miner, rancher, farmer, Indian War veteran, schoolteacher, clerk and judge. He would not stay long in Josephine County. Rather, he would move on to Idaho and establish himself there in mining and legal affairs.

Turner was born in Northampton, Ohio Aug. 5, 1824 to Alexander and Betsy French Turner, and then moved to Wadsworth, where he lived until adulthood. His childhood home

still stands today. He married Clarissa Beckwith there in 1845 and soon after, moved to Wisconsin and had three children- Zachary, Helen and Maria. Turner would leave his family and go out west to engage in mining. Clarissa died in December 1855 and the children were then raised by their grandparents.

Turner traveled out west with the Bethel Company in 1852, and was mentioned in the account titled, "Crossing the Plains" by Clarence Bagley. In 1852, the Oregon Trail would see a record number of 70,000 travelers going westbound, landing first at Oregon City, then traveling two hundred miles south in October. Turner found himself at first in the vicinity of Jacksonville and then in what was the western part of Jackson County in December 1852, filing on what would have been one of the first Donation Land Claims in the Illinois Valley, and the second in what would later become Josephine County in 1857. This was located a few miles south of Cave Junction in what was called the "Turner Ranch". He resided there until June 1855, when out on a scouting, Native Americans would arrive at the Turner Ranch, burn the buildings and kill the clerk along with all of the cattle.

By December, he would learn of his wife's death back in Ohio and May 1 would begin service

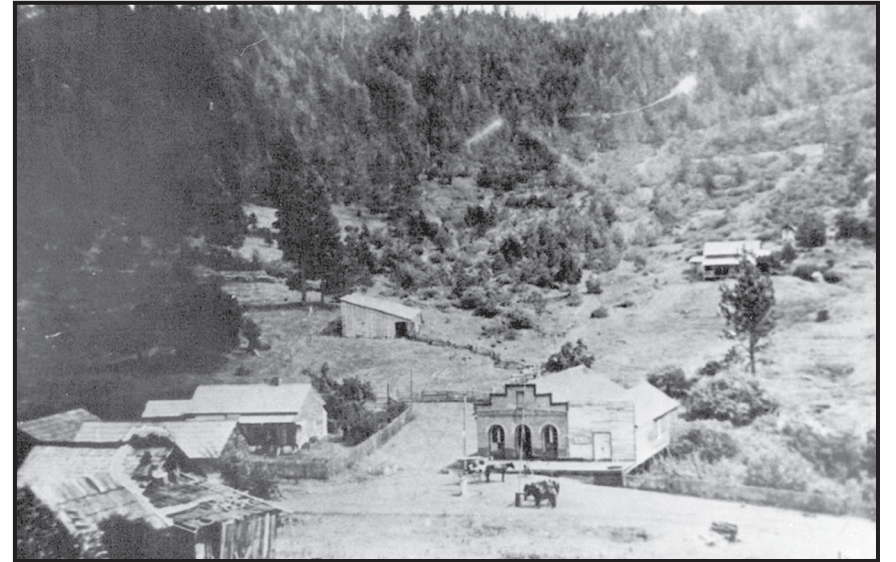
at Fort Hays under Colonel John Kelsey, commanding the second regiment of Oregon Volunteers under brigadier General John Lamerick. Turner would continue in this service until he was discharged June 20, 1856, having been wounded in the leg by an arrow.

After this incident, Turner filed for a position (unsuccessfully) in the newly formed county government being formed at Sailors Diggings. He stayed in the area and lent a hand at teaching as noted by a relative in a letter; "Teaching as a last resort in the business of making a living is credited to A.P. Turner, first teacher of the first school in Kerbyville".

The early records reveal

that Turner lived with a Matilda Stafford and children in Josephine County around 1860, and by 1870 was living near Idaho City, Idaho with their three children aged 11, 8 and 2. Soon thereafter, Turner met and would marry Sara Luisa Smith, who was born Oct. 28, 1849, and was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Smith.

Turner married Smith in 1881, his third wife at this time, and lived out the rest of his days involved in mining in the Hailey, Idaho area where he eventually became a judge. Our focus here will be the letters of correspondence with his wife Clarissa in the time he spent getting here and while he was at the Turner Ranch in southern Josephine County.



Waldo in the 1890s

Tall Trees Rendezvous celebrates life of the mountain man in Smith River

Tristan Stocker
 IVN Contributing Writer

With summer in full swing, 2018 marked the 40th annual Jed Smith Mountain Men Tall Trees Rendezvous wherein men and women descended on Smith River for a historical week of paying tribute to the ways of the Old West.

From June 29 to July 6, muzzleloader and archery enthusiasts as well as people drawn to the rich history of our country's rugged past convened at the Del Norte Rod and Gun Club to participate in a slew of family-friendly activities that included primitive camping, black powder shooting, tomahawk throwing, archery and more.

As spectators made their way through the grounds, men and women dressed in traditional garb (pre-1840)

were actively engaged in the myriad daily tasks they confronted on the frontier.

"I've always been mesmerized with the past, you know," said Nancy Alex, a Jed Smith Mountain Men club member and attendee of the rendezvous. "I was born maybe 150 - 200 years too late."

According to Alex, campers were awakened every morning with cannon fire at 7 o'clock sharp, and then at 8 o'clock, another blast signaled the Shooter's Meeting wherein the daily activities were discussed.

People armed with guns, knives, bows and tomahawks (and scorecards) then took to the trails to test their accuracy on a variety of targets. Prizes were awarded to the top scorers.

A new event which went over quite well this year - Survival Bow - allowed people to put together and shoot their own bows with materials supplied by the

event organizers.

"They fully expected some of them to break or who knew what would happen," Alex said. "But it was an utter blast. Next year, I think they'll add an instruction class before we go off to widdle on our bows since there were so many interested participants."

The public was also invited to peruse the Trader's Row - an encampment of sorts set up to resemble an old-fashioned trading post wherein gunsmiths, bead crafters and bowyers bartered their wares.

And to much delight from the residents, costumed campers also walked in Crescent City's Fourth of July parade, shooting off their guns at intervals.

For information regarding next year's rendezvous, please contact Brian Scott 707-954-6032; Trapper John 707-722-4259; or Joyce Lockhart 707-458-3585.

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