HISTORICAL NOTES OF CURRY COUNTY

BRAINARD TELLS OF GOLD BEACH MERCHANTS IN EARLY DAYS

By M. S. BRAINARD

(The compiler of these notes will welcome any authentic corrections or additions to them).

A reference recently come upon stating that the firm of Riley and Stewart were "pioneer merchants at Gold Beach," aroused this writer's curiosity to the point of digging into the records to find out just who preceded them.

The first story concerning merchandise landed at the mouth of the Rogue appears not to have been intended for there because, with the beaching of the schooner HACKSTAFF (NOT Flagstaff) which sailed out of San Francisco in the summer of 1849 and was forced in to shore because they ran out of water. During the fore part of August of that year they were stranded trying to get into the mouth of the Rogue and had to abandon their vessel and cargo, part of which consisted of a stock of merchandise belonging to William Shively and—Hughes with which they proposed to start a store. Some of this was hardware, especially mining tools, but the whole was abandoned to the Indians after the voyagers had taken from it some of the pickled pork, raisins, and rice, to eat while being guided out to civilization by James M. Chapin, who showed his companions where he had made a campfire, the previous year, at the base of what is now called, Elephant Rock, a short way up from the mouth of the Rogue. The lengthy chronicle of their trip, from San Francisco to the Willamette Valley, written by Jason Wheeler, one of the party, is a tale of real hard travel and mismanagement typical of the gold rush days.

Contemporary writers of the '51-'52 period, tell of the stores burned by the Indians during the uprisings and as there were no newspapers or other records extant during those troublous times we can only assume that there was business of sorts being done in the settlements which were on both sides of the river mouth.

However, because of the disturbances, many of the survivors had left the area. Their homes had been burned and several of them went off with the various companies chasing the Indians upriver. Besides, diaries of the times tell of the great amounts of supplies brought in by the federal and territorial governments and probably the folks lived off them as it is written that these stocks of stuff disappeared remarkably fast. Field notes of the times state that the country was well nigh abandoned.

Dodge's History notes the early businesses at Ellensburg (Gold Beach) as those of Gus and John Upton, Huntley and O'Brien, and Platte and Blake. It is quite probable that Mr. Dodge interviewed folks about the mouth of the Rogue who, then, (1897-8) could remember those early establishments.

But no "Gus" Upton appears in the records available at the moment but John W. Upton was indicted July 25, 1855, at "County of Coos, Village of Empire City," for selling liquor on Sunday but the case was transferred to Curry County as defendant, "had fled the country." The authorities caught up with him and John was hauled before the courts, the second circuit court case in the county, July 14, 1856.

F. H. Pratt was found guilty on a similar charge at the same session. Pratt came to Oregon in '49, at the age of 25, and "was in business in Gold Beach during the Indian Wars of 1855-56." No record has been turned up of any "Platte" around Gold Beach in the early days nor of Huntley and O'Brien being in the grocery business there. The records are full of Huntleys but neither they nor any O'Brien indicate affiliation with merchandising.

Pratt (or Platte?) and Blake—probably Harrison G., ("Harry"), who married the oldest Geisel girl, owned the schooner RAMBLER, which brought goods north from San Francisco to the Rogue, if the weather permitted them to cross in but passed it up or only came as far as Crescent City if the seas were too rough, and the merchandise either packed north by horses and mules or brought up in a whale boat converted into a sloop, and named "GOLD BEACH." William Tichenor's boat also dropped goods at the Rogue.

Diverting somewhat from the Rogue's mouth, the first receipts of the new county is recorded as being $12.50, paid by Ripley Dodge for a license to sell liquor at the "Mouth of Shix River," dated July 14, 1856, and that Fall other liquor licenses were obtained by Peter Ruffner, A. J. Edson, and F. Unican, all of Port Orford. And, incidentally, the county treasury for the year 1856-57 showed receipts of $1,521.48, fully three quarters of which came from liquor licenses.

Going according to the calendar, in the field notes of the survey of Daniel and M. O'C. Murphy, dated Feb. 19, 1857, these gentlemen recorded that about the mouth of the Rogue, at that date, there were about 60 miners and in the entire township there was, "one store and one-half dozen groceries."

April 6, 1857, George McPherson, Peter McGuire (or McQuire), and Louis Doucette, obtained the first ferry license at the mouth of the Rogue, paying therefore $50 per year.

Now, the county probate records of McPherson's estate, filed Sept. 7, 1859, says McPherson, "surviving partner of Peter McGuire," who died April 6, 1856, so it would appear that the partnership was continued after his death. In '83, a son, Enoch McPerson, showed up from Coldweil County, Kentucky.

The court records previous to 1860 are full of the squabblings over this estate and these estates, with numerous inventories attached, much of which mentioned as being potable so they, apparently, were quite early merchants.

Peter McGuire, (or McQuire), apparently was a relative of the same family name. Anyhow, on March 16, 1866, one Thomas Cain posted notice of a 160 acre land claim on "Jerry McQuire's Flatt... at or near the mouth of Rogue River."

(Continued Next Week)

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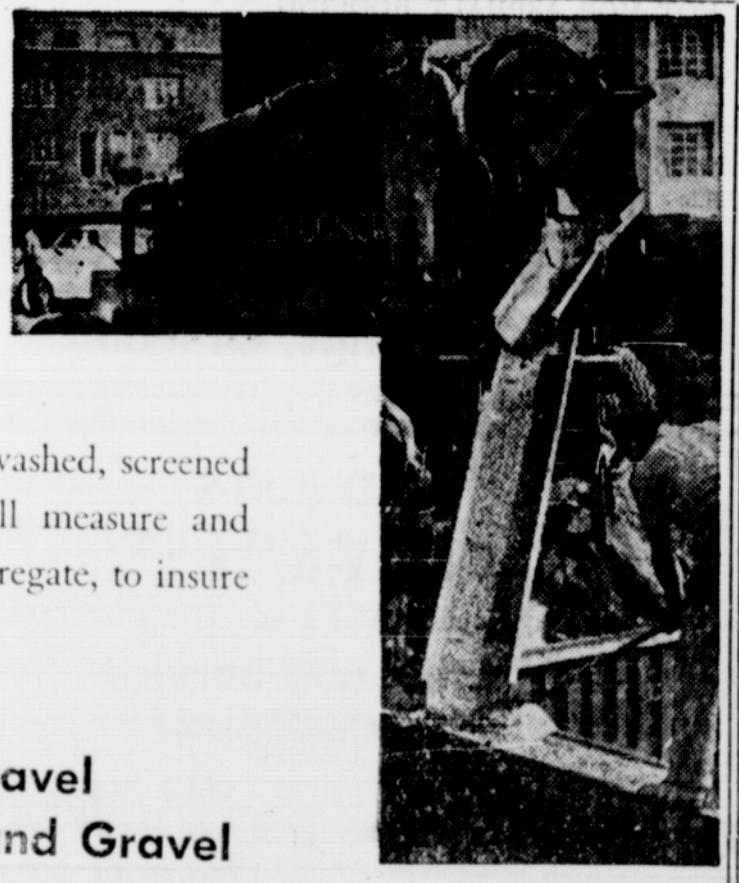

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