

John Minto, Many-Sided Man

Late Pioneer's Life Reviewed

The late John Minto, from a photograph taken in the later years of his life.



By C. E. Hoge.

Born to the miner's estate, deprived of the childhood learning that was his due by the penny that forced him into the collieries of Newcastle-on-Tyne, John Minto rose from his humble station to become a man of influence, of science, of letters. His death at Salem last week revives many memories of the old Oregon of the long trail, the turbulent redskin and the primeval wilderness.

When one says that John Minto was one of the strongest characters of Oregon history, it implies no reflection upon other strong characters of his time; it merely asserts anew that determination to win breaks down the natural barriers to advancement. It was a seizure of opportunity that made John Minto, that transformed him from a grimy toiler underground to a ruler of the westward. And this is not all to his credit, at that, because his father was virtually expropriated from England for a principle—the principle of mercy to the little children. “Children must not work more than 12 hours a day,” he had asserted, and because mineowners could use children in their dark tunnels they put this impertinent fellow on the blacklist.

That is why the family came to America in 1849, and America's vastness and freedom convinced the son that better things than pick-swinging awaited his hand.

“When I came to breathe the free air of the United States,” he was fond of telling his friends in the evening of his life, “I began to imbibe the idea that I

never would follow the pursuits of the coal miner.”

Starts Westward in 1843.

But he did follow those pursuits, though for barely more than two years. In late 1842, at the age of 21, he forsook his father, who was still toiling in the Pennsylvania mines, and set his face westward, with Iowa as his goal. In the trading settlement he met the frontier average resident of the Atlantic states could conceive. By river he reached St. Louis, where he began to hear of lands beyond even Iowa. To Oregon, then!

He followed the Missouri to St. Joseph, until then only vaguely aware of the perils that were in store. It was at the trading settlement he met in with the Gilliam company, and contracted with R. W. Morrison to drive the advance teams in an overland caravan.

The story of this trip is the story of hundreds of other trips across the plains and over the Rockies. The same hardships befell him, the same thirst and heat and weary tedious weeks of plodding. But when it was over Minto found himself at the Oregon City settlement. It was nearly a month ahead of the train. When he had tightened his load, he went back over the trail and helped his companions into the promised land. It was on October 13, 1843, that he found himself at the end of his journey and afterward accompanied the party to Astoria.

Mr. Minto, though deprived of school advantages at any rate, the fact that he had to spare when he reached Pittsburg and found a job was spent for books on the western frontier, as it was then known. Possibly it was his adventures of Braddock, Washington, Boone, Brady, Putnam and Crockett that gave him the inspiration to seek out like adventures. At any rate, the uncertainties of life in the coal field did not please him. In a memoir he wrote many years ago he says: “I tried to make a fortune in the coal mines, but I found that they were not for me. I had to dig to him, dig to him and shoot him in it; climb a fir tree, find a lynx in it and shoot him; hunt the panther to his lair, and on a few inches of fresh fallen snow, as he passed round a doorless cabin without waking me.”

Work had become futile at the Pittsburg mine. Immigrants of English and Welsh origin had gathered there, and failure of a fresher to swell the ranks prevented the barging down to market of the season's mining of coal. There were many mouths to feed, a vast supply of unused coal and no money. At a public meeting of miners, Mr. Minto advised them to seek new districts of new occupations, and he was one of the first to follow his own advice.

Efficiency Early Established.

When he reached Oregon, he severed for a time his association with the Mr. Morrison party. Mr. Minto's work he obtained was the work that had to precede any development whatever of the resources of the state—drilling land, the harnessing of common labor, digging, anything and everything that met his hand. This took him over the whole northwest, and especially around Astoria, for work there. Friends of his later life characterize his efforts at this time as evidence of his thorough dependability and efficiency. And when he began to employ men, he showed the same traits of speed, thoroughness and dispatch on whatever task was to be done.

His first new living, among those who knew him best, are George H. Himes, of the Oregon Historical society, and John Gill, of Portland. Mr. Himes first met him on the fair grounds at Salem September 24, 1884. Mr. Gill met him first about 10 years ago, though he had known of him before for 20 years. Because of his activity and influence, Mr. Minto felt he had never thought before that the man could find anything in common with him.

So intimate became their association during the last decade, however, that Mr. Minto entrusted to Mr. Gill all his papers and documents bearing on his Oregon work of the early days, and Mr. Gill is preparing a biography to be given to posterity.

His letters probably 50 pounds of various kinds,” said Mr. Gill. “Once, while both of us were at the beach, and Mr. Minto was telling me some of the events of the early days, I saw that why he had not compiled them all into a history. ‘You have no right to keep these facts from posterity,’ I told him. And so a bargain was struck from his notes. It is a mammoth task, for Mr. Minto's part in the development of Oregon was so great and appears in such various ways.”

Probably the first property Mr. Minto acquired in Oregon was the old Mission house, north of Salem, where the Methodists established their mission in 1834. That was after many years of hard work in the woods, saw-

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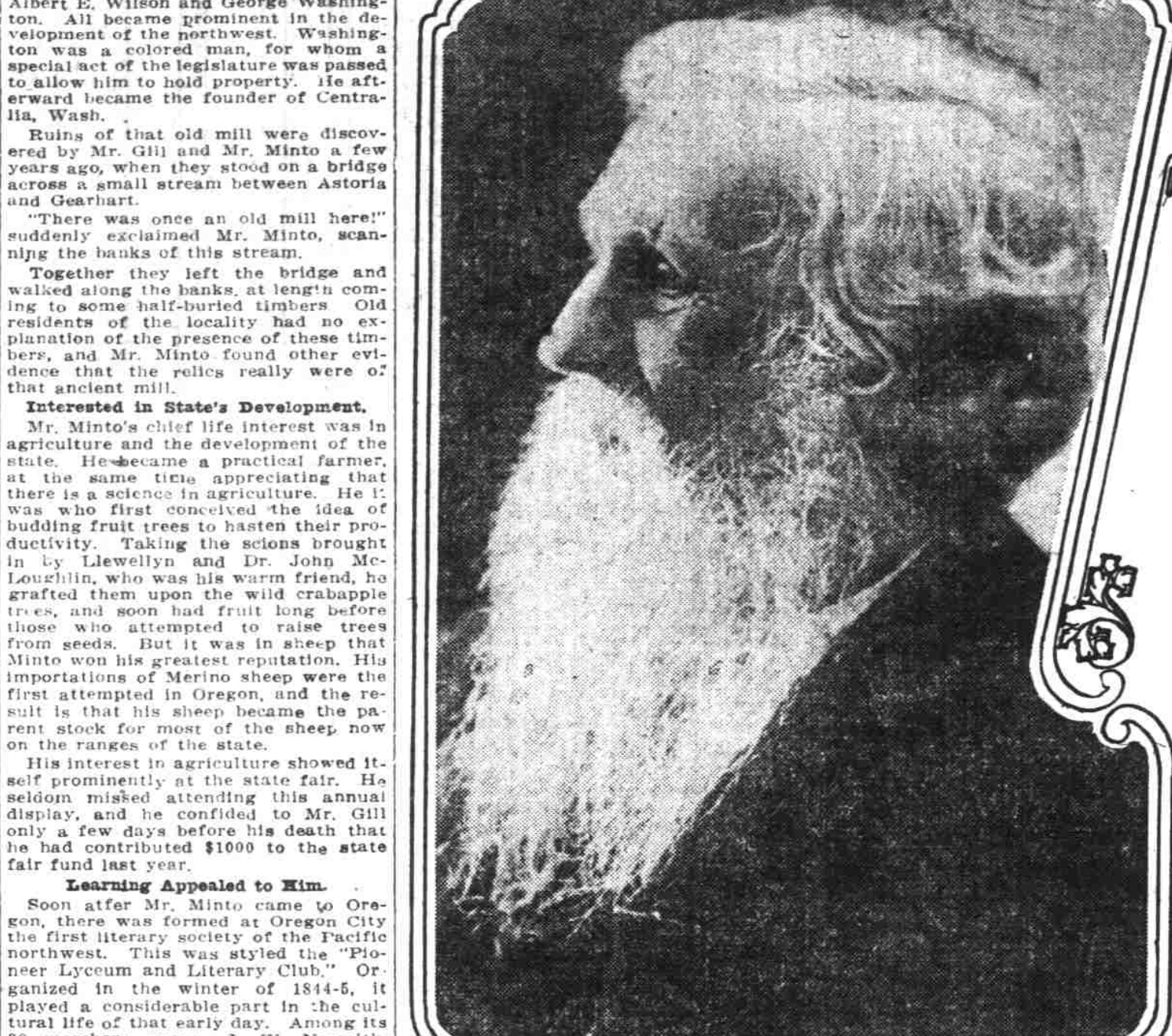
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Old Scenes to Be Reproduced

Celilo Canal Dedication Event

Tom Beall of Lewiston Idaho, pioneer river man.



The week long Celilo canal celebration in May will include reproduction of nearly a score of the historic features that gave the Columbia valley its fame.

Mr. Minto was one of the founders of the Oregon Pioneer association in 1872, and was its president for several terms. He died at Astoria, Ore., in 1894, after his death last year Mr. Minto was left as the oldest ex-president. Mr. Minto was enthusiastic in politics. A Republican in principle, and of other stubborn opinions along this line, he was willing that others might have their opinions also. He served in the legislature for four terms, being elected first in 1862, after a notable campaign. He was elected subsequently in 1868, 1880 and 1890. In 1892 he was commissioned by the secretary of agriculture to investigate and report on the sheep industry of the northwest, and this report is one of the valued records of the department at Washington. In 1892 he was appointed by Governor Lord as a member of the state board of horticulture, and for three and one half years he served as its secretary. For two years he served as secretary of the State Agricultural society, and was chosen to edit its official publication, "The Willamette Farmer."

In 1872 Mr. Minto was commissioned by the Marion county commissioners to investigate reports that hunters had found a natural pass through the Cascades into eastern Oregon, where the Santiam cuts through the range. After he had investigated the western portion, true and the old trail mentioned in Indian traditions was reopened. This break in the mountain barrier still bears the name of Minto Pass.

That Minto was a many-sided man is indicated by a hasty survey of his long and active life. Scholar, politician, hunter, road-builder, fruit expert, lumberman, livestock enthusiast, historian and poet. Though of Scotch-English birth his lifelong boast was that he was an American.

“But he was not such an American as he thought he was,” commented a friend yesterday. “His speech, his point of view, retained a touch of the English that it was wonderful how he was in all respects one of Oregon's best loved and most loyal citizens.”

The romance of Minto's life developed on the long journey across the plains. In the party was Miss Atcheson Morrison, the demure daughter of his employer. Three years after crossing the plains, in his first company Minto married her, and they lived together as happily as any story-book pair throughout their long lives. Mrs. Minto's death occurred about a decade ago. A considerable family has since developed. One of the characteristics of the family since the old days in Scotland has been that the oldest son is named John. This custom began with Mr. Minto's great-grandfather, named John, who named his first-born after himself, and the custom holds to the present day.

Saved From Gibbet

But Shot Escaping

Canadian Murderer Killed on Day Set for His Execution After Arrival of Commutation of Sentence.

Ottawa, Ont., Feb. 27.—News of an unusual tragedy in northwest Canada has reached the dominion government.

Luigi Casari, under sentence to be hanged at White Horse, Y. T., for murder, attempted to escape and was shot by Constable Hayes of the north-west mounted police, who was guarding him. Two bullets took effect and the man died.

A few minutes before this occurred a telegram from the Canadian minister of justice had reached White Horse directing the authorities not to proceed with the execution, as the government had commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. The sheriff was on the way to convey the news when Casari made his fatal dash for liberty.

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Injured Aviator

Real War Hero

Man Who Seemed Drunk is, in Fact, Victim of Accident, and Will Never Recover His Health.

By William G. Shepherd, United Press Staff Correspondent.

London, Feb. 13.—(By Mail to New York.)—I want that man moved from here. He is spoiling my dinner.

The waiter paid no attention to the demand. His maker—a pompous person—was referring to a man at a nearby table who seemed to be drunk. Finally, when the man who seemed intoxicated clumsily tipped over a glass of water, the pompous person left.

The man who “seemed drunk” could not control his hands. His fork could not find its way readily to his mouth. His head twitched and his face twitched. He coughed and his complexion turned purple.

The waiter followed me when I left. “I am sorry you were sitting so close to that man,” he said. “But if you knew him as I do, you wouldn't care.”

Then I heard the story. The man was one of England's best known aviators. His work is part of the history of the war. Three months ago, while flying near Dixmude, he was shot down. The Germans did not take him prisoner. Something had happened to his backbones and his brain was twisted. The doctors patched him up. He came back to London, discharged from the war, because, like an old horse, his usefulness was over. The doctors say that he will never be any different. He likes to frequent the restaurants where he used to be so welcome when he was the pampered dandy of all Britain.

And the proprietor of the place where he was tonight declares that he will come there whenever and as often as he likes, even if it costs him his last customer.

Will Study Our Schools.

Vera Cruz, Mexico, Feb. 27.—One hundred women school teachers have been selected to go to the United States to study educational methods in that country. The expenses of the teachers will be paid by the Carranza government.

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