

Historical Guesses Made About Eola and Popcorn

By BEN MAXWELL

Dr. Thomas Condon, early Oregon geologist, viewing creation out of the surge of the inconceivable, believed that in tertiary times, 30 or 40 million years ago, the Eola hills were islands in the Willamette trough that extended northward and included Puget Sound. Then the mammoth and broad-faced ox prevailed and waters of this inland sea then measured nearly 160 feet deep above what is now the site of Salem.

Lewis A. McArthur, eminent Oregon geographer, points out that the Eola hills extend from Eola on the south to a point near Amity 15 miles to the northward and that their greatest elevation is 1170 feet. The northern extension of the range is known as Amity hills.

Eola hills derived their name from a hamlet founded on the donation land claim of William Duran in the late 1840s. Then the place was called Cincinnati and was accessible to small steamboats that could crowd their way a few hundred yards up the bursy Rickreall creek from the confluence of that stream with the Willamette.

Early in the 1850s Cincinnati became Eola. Decades ago someone suggested that this unique name was inspired by Lindsay Robbins, a local music teacher who was fond of the Eolian harp. Others more grounded in classical mythology liked to believe that the place was named for Eolus, a god of wind, since wind along the river seems to be a natural condition in this locality.

A later, cynical generation accepts Eolus as the namesake for Eola but for a different reason. Joshua (Sheep) Shaw and his son, A. R. C. Shaw, promoted Eola though the townsite was some little distance from their own claim. They advertised in the Oregon City Spectator for June 13, 1849, that the site commanded a fine view of the La Creole valley, was well supplied with excellent water from several large springs, had timber and rock of excellent quality and was sustained by a back country as rich and flourishing as any in the Willamette valley.

Oldtimers read that, heard more and laughed in their whiskers. They knew, as a later generation came to know, water in the locality is where you find it, that today there may be more timber than there was then and that the tough, igneous rocks are just as abundant as ever. This later generation came to suspect that the oldsters called the place Eola because the early promoters were pretty windy about the natural advantages of the locality. And Eolus, you know, was the pagan god of the wind.

Anyway, the town (and it became incorporated in 1855 though the legislature was told it consisted of but two houses and a barn — a perfidy) did not flourish long. Capital Journal for January 7, 1893, said the road at Eola was so bad that chickens became mired in the mud. At the turn of the century the hamlet consisted of a store and a brandy distillery patronized by some and deplored by others.

Ascending steeply from Holman state park is a gravel road that leads past Leo Spitzbart's farm, "April Hill" and deteriorates markedly in passability as it continues sharply upwards to form a junction with what was formerly known as Gehlar road, now Eola Drive. That road is described in old documents as the military road leading from Doak's ferry to Corvallis.

Military road as it applies to the Doak's ferry route is a misnomer in all respects save one. In early days congress granted the states and territories funds for construction of roads ostensibly for military usage — fighting Indians, for instance. That a corporal's guard ever trudged over this steep, and in winter almost impassable, route appears unlikely.

That this road may have been a vague link in the road authorized by the legislature of 1846 to extend from Portland to Marysville may be true. Doak's ferry, established by Andrew J. Doak, was at the Valfontis crossing that became Lincoln when the post-office changed its name in

1854. Marysville had its name changed to Corvallis (heart of the valley, if you please) by the legislature of 1853. So, the road from Doak's ferry to Corvallis received that description after 1853.

But the matter of nomenclature becomes involved. A map of the locality made by a government surveyor in 1851, now a possession in transcript of the Union Title Insurance company shows a highland road well above Eola, where the chickens got mired in 1893, crossing the Rickreall where the ground remained reasonably solid in winter.

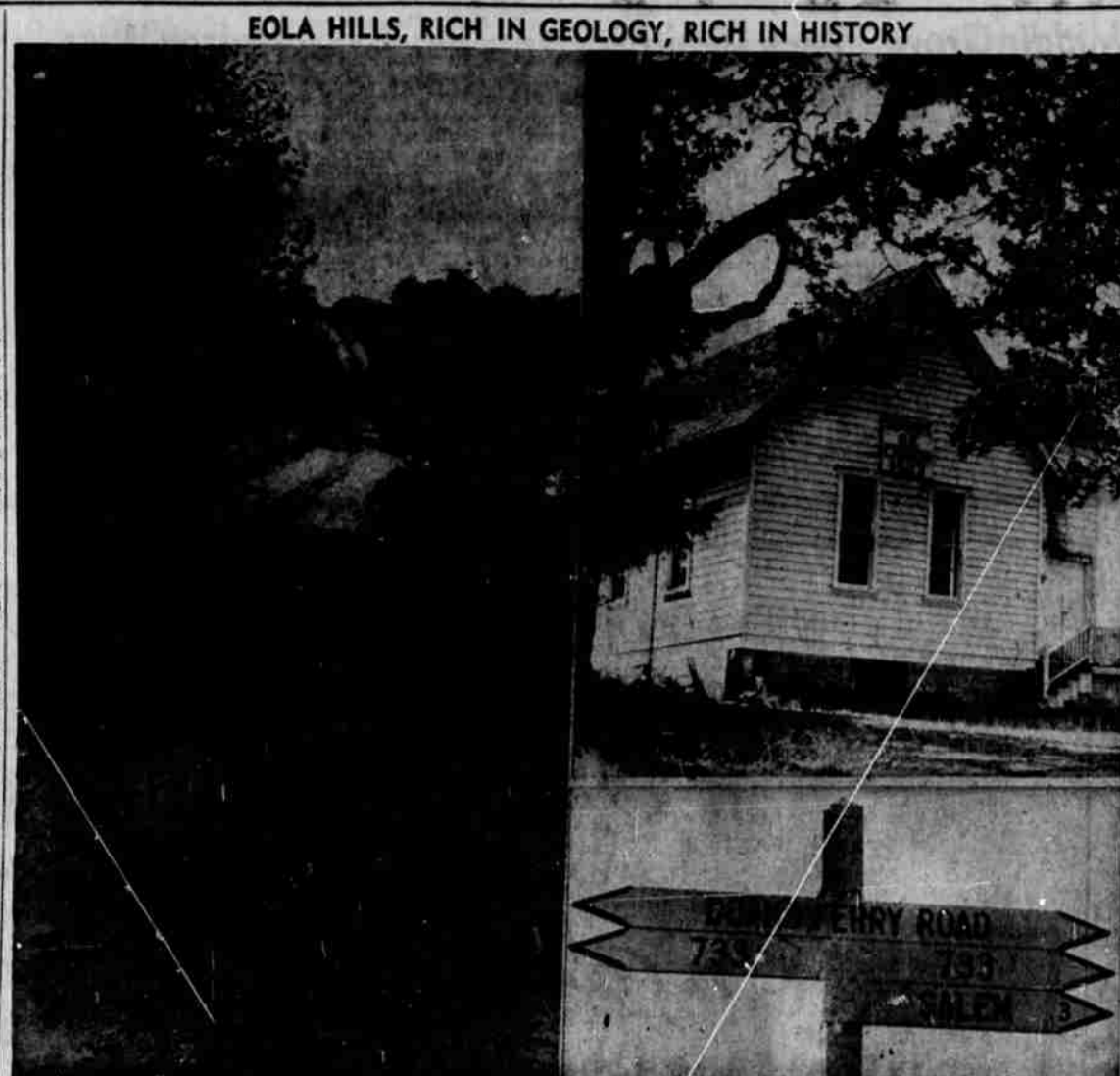
One leg of the Doak's ferry road merges with the more familiar highway that crosses Eola hills by way of Popcorn school.

Popcorn school, says McArthur, got its name in early days when rebellious pupils locked their teacher in the schoolhouse. He had both popcorn and plenty of time so he proceeded to pop. The youngsters, hopeful of sharing the popcorn, opened the door and let the teacher out.

A more convincing account is related in the Clara Pearce Smith memoir, a possession of C. A. Martin, 710 Thompson street. Mrs. Smith was one of 11 children in the Thomas Pearce family that arrived in the Eola locality in 1852.

The Pearce memoir mentions that Popcorn school district No. 36 was organized in 1867. Even before that date it is probable that an earlier school stood on what is now the James Best place since Mrs. Smith and James Best have both observed the relics of this pioneer construction. In 1867 volunteer labor built Popcorn school for district No. 36 and the structure stood until the present school was built in 1912.

First teacher at Popcorn school in the Smith memoir was Napoleon Franklin Nelson, familiar in the neighborhood as "Polley." Polley was a man of small stature in a rural school



Left: So-called military road from Doak's ferry to Corvallis becomes impassible in winter as it wanders steeply from Holman state park upwards to intersect with Eola drive; segment of a pioneer Polk county road shown on a government survey for 1851. Top right: Summit Methodist church, erected by Rev. R. C. Blackwell, was dedicated

September 27, 1903. Fifty years ago the membership was 28, now 54. Lower right: Sign at the intersection of Eola drive with the old "military" road from Doak's ferry to Corvallis. History does not reveal that this pioneer road built by federal aid ever had any military significance.

that contained many pupils larger if not older than he. At the end of the first term the pupils demanded that Polley treat the school. Polley refused and was promptly seized by his insistent pupils who proceeded to hustle him along to a nearby brook. There they dunked Polley and dunked him again until he did promise to treat. On his return to the schoolhouse, Polley brought a flour

sack filled with popcorn. That was his treat to pupils whom he may have considered as knuckle-headed extortionists. Hence the name, Popcorn school. Later teachers at Popcorn school were Miss Sally Cavitt, Viola Ruble, Mrs. Thomas Gardner, Ellen Sykes, Thomas Starbuck, Miss Sears and Dan Finley. Summit church near Popcorn school has an authentic

EOLA HILLS, RICH IN GEOLOGY, RICH IN HISTORY

history dating back more than 50 years.

Rev. Sweeney, an Irish Methodist preacher, conducted revival meetings at Popcorn school in 1890. He also promoted the organization of Summit church. A diary kept by Mrs. Guy McDowell reveals that Summit Methodist church was built by Rev. R. C. Blackwell, an itinerant minister who lived in South Salem, in 1903. He did much of the carpenter work, the community contributed labor and funds. The church was dedicated September 27, 1903 and Rev. John Coleman, D.D., president of Willamette university was speaker for that occasion. Rev. D. H. Leach was first pastor through Rev. Sweeney preached there and at Oak Grove on occasion.

Mrs. McDowell recalls that membership on the occasion of dedication was 28. Rev. F. H. Pemberton, 2055 Virginia street, Salem, is now entering the third year of his pastorate at Summit church. Lately the edifice has been refinished on the inside and a pipe organ installed. Soon the exterior will be repainted and the church steeple reconstructed. Present membership in the church is 54. Dr. Condon would have appreciated a visitation to the fossil bed in the Eola hills indicated on the government map for 1851. Those who settled there 100 years ago knew little about the geology of primitive gastropods discovered in these fossil beds. Rather, they busied themselves in agricultural pursuits to accomplish the promise made in the Spectator: "A back country for Eola as rich and flourishing as any in the Willamette valley."

Offer Eyes to Save Child

Tacoma O.E.—A man and wife offered an eye piece for sale today in a hopeless effort to preclude what is considered inevitable—death to their four-year-old son Randy. Mr. and Mrs. Dean Booth said they want to know if there is such a thing as an "eye bank," someplace where they can sell their eyes.

"We need money to buy more medicine for Randy," Booth said. Randy has acute lymphatic leukemia. There is no cure. Death, although Randy has outlived doctors' predictions, is believed sure to come.

Randy's courage was typified when he told a nurse: "If God can't make me well, I'm going to heaven where he can take care of me." Randy's hopeless plight isn't the only tragedy to strike the Booth household. Tragically is all too familiar to them. A daughter two and a half years old drowned before Randy was born and a 10-year-old daughter is recovering from a severe case of scarlet fever. Booth said he has tried every way he can think of to raise more money, but he said it looks like the end, unless...

The Vermont legislature in 1895 made the red clover the official state flower. Oddly enough, this is not a native of Vermont but was "naturalized" from Europe.

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PARTING GIFT

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