

Wallowa Chieftain.

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Editors & Proprietors.

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FRIDAY MARCH 10, 1899.

AN INTERESTING LETTER

TO THE CHIEFTAIN.

Inspired By One of Our Recent Editorials.

Editor CHIEFTAIN: Your recent editorial in regard to the organization of the pioneers of Wallowa county meets with my hearty approbation. I think it should be done, and soon, or there will be some that could give interesting experiences that will not be here to meet with us. Some have already answered the last roll call; others are far on the shady side of life. What remains need would be called up at a gathering of the first settlers of our now prosperous county.

In Nov., 1877 we arrived at La Grande and like many other immigrants found ourselves dead broke, having but fifty cents left. We stopped for the winter on the mountain side above old La Grande. The outlook for us was not very cheerful, with an Oregon winter before us and not a single acquaintance in the entire valley. But strangers as we were, it was not long until we had gathered about us friends of the grandest type. Our boys were strong and hearty and anxious to work. All we could do was to cut cordwood and haul it to La Grande with a doubtful chance of selling it. The merchants had already taken so much wood from residents, that they were slow to enter into an arrangement with an entire stranger, to let him have supplies and take wood for pay, when they already had plenty. We were in a fix and something had to be done. Surely we had not traveled thousands of miles to starve to death in the beautiful state of Oregon. While pondering over the difficulties that surrounded us, I remembered that I belonged to a certain secret society, in which the tie that binds is said to be a powerful one, so it occurred to me that my present extremity was the time to test its merits. I went to town, and selecting a business man I thought to be built about right to be a square sort of fellow, I gave him a certain sign that was quickly responded to. He knew that I was a stranger and supposed of course I wanted something and he was not mistaken. I explained to him our situation. We wanted tools to work with, and supplies to do us until we could earn something. "O!" said he, "that is easily fixed, just go to L. Baer and he will let you have anything you want."

"Why?" said I, "Good Lord, he's a Jew."
"Yes," said he, "and the whitest man in all this country. Come on, I will go with you." He gave me an introduction to Mr. Baer, and in shaking hands, he gave me evidence that our friend had not misrepresented him, and our dealings with him that winter proved that there is virtue in that mystic tie. He furnished us with all things needed, and when March came he had paid every cent we owed, and were ready to start for the much talked of Wallowa valley. It was amusing to hear some of the residents of Grande Ronde talk of this country. They would solemnly say that it was nothing but a hole in the ground, that there was not a single night in the year that it did not frost. In fact they painted in terrible colors what is now one of the best counties in the state, and would generally end up with the statement that they had a farm in Grande Ronde, which they would like to rent you. But we had not traveled so far to become renters, but to secure homes for ourselves, and notwithstanding their woeful predictions, we left for Wallowa, not, however, without some apprehensions. The road was not in good condition, and when we got to the top of the mountain, and looked down, we thought surely we had come to the jumping off place. The road to the bridge was a glare of ice, and thought came to me that we had better bid each other good-bye, but the experience of the boys in hauling wood from the mountains the winter

before stood us in good stead. They had provided a rough-lock, largely of their own invention, which answered admirably. We reached the foot of the mountain intact, where we found a toll bridge that had been erected by A. C. Smith, now an Enterprise attorney. We paid our toll and crossed, but from our long acquaintance with Mr. Smith, we now knew we could have crossed had we had no money. The ascent was then made without mishap, camped on top, and next day entered the valley which has been our home for 21 years.

We found a few settlers in the lower valley; Messrs. Bramlet, Powers and others, in middle valley were the Tulley's, White, Emory, Sturgill, Masterson, McCubbins, Womack, Halley, Sam and Aaron Wade, Francis, and others. At Alder was Veasey, Reavis, Miller, Davis, and a few others. On Prairie creek, I remember Roup, Wilson, Perkins, and Downey. These, with a few others were the pioneers of Wallowa county. We were here to make homes and were not easily discouraged. As we had no stores, and no mills, we had to go to Grande Ronde for all our supplies, which, over the then poor roads, was quite a hardship, especially to those of small means. I will give you our own experience. When harvest came on in Grande Ronde, our boys would take a four-horse team and go there to work. The wages were \$2 per day, the price of wheat was 40 cents a bushel and for every 5 bushels of wheat they could get a barrel of flour. They could get work long enough to load their team with flour and quite a supply of groceries, not forgetting a liberal supply of tobacco for dad, so we were fixed for the year.

The first store was opened at Alder by one McConell. A school was run in connection with it by another McConell, and between them they swindled some settlers out of a good many hard earned dollars. I think they brought in one 32 gallon barrel of whiskey, but it was like the widow's cruse, never failing. They must have sold at least four hundred gallons out of that barrel, of as vile stuff as any fool ever put down his throat. Don't ask me how they did it; I don't know, but I imagine that when they drew out a gallon, it was replaced with a decoction of drugs, so that at last it became rank poison. At about the final wind-up of that wonderful barrel of whiskey, there was a sudden death in middle valley. They called it heart failure. That is what the doctors say when they get a case they know nothing about. Why not be honest and say poisoned by a vile decoction labeled whiskey.

There was another tragic death in the early settlement of the valley. A grand old man in the lower valley by the name of Wilson went out with his son-in-law to gather berries, and never returned. The son-in-law fixed some kind of a story about their having separated and that the old man would soon return, but the night passed and he did not put in an appearance. After 11 days his body was found hidden by some brush. It was reported at the time that the son-in-law, upon seeing the body, exclaimed, "Father has committed suicide and cut off his own head!" I cannot understand why he was not hung to the nearest tree. Nothing was ever done with him, and believing in his innocence, his wife still clings to him.

Another thing of interest to the early settlers, was the Joseph scare. Stockades were built in the middle valley and at Alder. At the former place occurred one of the saddest things I ever witnessed. A. B. Finley had brought his family, consisting, I think, of a wife and 7 children, for protection. Diphtheria broke out in the family, and if memory serves me right, we buried six of them in five days. It was pitiful to see the father trying to save the two little ones by keeping them at the smoke house, but in vain. All the children except the oldest daughter, who is now Mrs. Jack Johnson, of Imnaha, died. There was no physician in the valley. We cared for them the best we knew how, but fate was inexorable and the children passed away one by one until all were gone save one. I have stood on the battlefield amidst the dead and dying, have seen the dead laid in trenches by the hundreds, but it was a sadder sight to see those innocent little ones dying, with no power to help them. In war we expect such sights, but in peace it is terrible.

But we will leave the sadder memories of the past and take up the social conditions existing in our then new country. You must not think that because our homes were some distance apart, we were an unsocial set. On the contrary the latch string was always out and visits from one neighborhood to another were frequent. I will tell of one of these visits and what came of it. One morning quite early, we were surprised to see Judge Reavis approaching our cabin. He was in too big a hurry to let us put his pony up. We sat down to have a good chat and the Judge forgot his hurry until it was nearly night before he started home. Tom Veasey learned of that visit, and connected a most diabolical plot against us. Meeting one of his chums he detailed to him what he pretended to be

part of the conversation between the Judge and myself. Here is what he told. He said we were telling our war experience in Missouri. Among other things we told the Judge of a scout under our charge; that while traveling along a country road, we met a little man with long black beard, whom we informed would have to go to camp with us, that when passing the little man's dwelling he asked permission to stop and bid his wife good-bye. We not only granted him permission, but went in with him, and noticing some fine blankets and bed spreads, we confiscated the best of them. Now according to Veasey, while we were telling this war incident the Judge had been using his eyes to some purpose, for when we finished he said, "Sir, I was that little man with the black beard. It was my house you went through, and by George, there are some of my quilts on your bed now!" Our government made a great mistake in not sending Tom Veasey to treat with Spain. He would not only have secured all her colonial possessions, but would have earned them out of the best hall of Spain. Years after when we were so unfortunate as to be a candidate for the legislature, one of our citizens was in Grande Ronde valley and was approached by an individual who wanted to know how things were going on politically in Wallowa, and incidentally remarked: "Of course you people will down Rex." "Well," said the Wallowan, "I don't think so, we rather like him." "But," said he, "he is a thief." "Oh!" said our friend, "that is just one of Tom Veasey's yarns." "Why it can't be, for Judge Reavis saw the quilt that had been taken from his house many years before, right there on Rex's bed," said the man. That is what one pioneer did for pure cussedness. For a long time we waited for a chance to get even with him. It happened that in an early day that Tom was Justice of the peace, and among the many trying duties of the office, he was sometimes called upon to perform a marriage ceremony. Now Tom is a thing if not dignified, and in the performance of his official duties, tries to make himself impressive by putting on all the style possible. There is only one point on which he is vulnerable. He does not like to be made ridiculous and this we set out to do. We sent his marriage ceremony to a La Grande paper for publication. It attracted wide spread attention for it was odd, unique, and such as would emanate from the brain of one reared in the state of Maine, and I have always been glad that only two men from that state ever found their way to this valley. Perhaps I gave away some of the secrets of the ceremony, but I have it nearer correct now.

Upon arriving at the house where the marriage is to take place, and the scared couple being brought before him, with that deep resonant voice habitual to him, says to the trembling pair: "Stand up; join your right hands, hold up your left. You and each of you do solemnly swear that you will support the constitution of the U. S. and of the state of Oregon; that you will vote the republican ticket and join the Grange as soon as possible. The answer is, I will. Now by virtue of authority in me vested as a judicial officer of the commonwealth of Oregon I pronounce you man and woman, and let no man attempt to bust up the union. Five dollars please." Tom never swears, but we were informed that when he read the above, he exclaimed "O God! show me the man that wrote that, and I will kill him on the spot." But his ire had cooled before he found us out and he has permitted us to live. So you see that amid all the hardships of pioneer life, there was an under strata of fun, and we had our practical jokes.

During those early days there was very little theft. Occasionally there was one that seemed to forget the golden rule, and would appropriate for their own use, the property of another. One incident I particularly recall and wife insists that I shall write it. It was the arrest of a young man who had caught a couple of work horses and was watching his opportunity to run them off. Someone suspected his plans and watched them until the thief came. He was brought to our house, as we had just been elected a J. P., but we had not yet qualified so could not act. He was left in the house, while his guard remained on the outside. He told the wife a pitiful tale; how it was his first offense, and he would never do so again and it would break his poor old mother's heart, etc. He cried and wife cried in sympathy with him, and when A. C. Smith, who had charge of him, came in, she began to plead for him. "Ah, Mrs. Rex," said A. C. "I have to do too much hard riding after such as he, to feel any pity for him." The funny part came soon afterward. Our own horses were missing and we thought they were stolen. Then wife said she hoped Mr. Smith would catch and hang the last one of them. So after all it depends on whose ox is gored. Do you remember the incident Bro. Smith? There was another incident in which Mr. Smith figured and it was so funny that I know he will pardon me for telling it. A man had been arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, a large knife. A witness swore to the size and keenness, and in his speech,

Mr. Smith showed how, in the hands of a desperate man, the seat of life could be easily reached. Taking the knife in his hands he continued: "See, your honor, how deadly this weapon is, how sharp and keen of point." Just here he opened the knife and to his surprise found about half an inch of the point broken off. He looked at the knife, and then at the court, and I tell you the court had all it could do to maintain its dignity. A. C. thought checked, did not falter long, but closed by saying that it was a nasty looking weapon at best.

One more incident that particularly affected the residents of Lostine. Some one had reported fine grass at Lost Prairie and a number of the residents of Lostine and vicinity took their cattle there late in the fall, and left two young men to watch them, promising to take them provisions. This, for some cause, they failed to do. The boys remained until the snow fell to the depth of four feet and then came out on snow shoes. In the Spring they gathered up what cattle were remaining, which were few. I think the Wade Bros. were the heaviest losers. They were not discouraged, but kept right on, and to-day are counted among our thrifty and best citizens. I have written the foregoing from memory, and if I have used the personal pronoun "I" quite frequently do not charge it to egotism for it is our own experience we are writing, and if this shall stir up the pioneers to organize and perpetuate the early memories of the settlement of Wallowa valley, it shall have accomplished all it hoped for. Everyone knows us, but we are rather partial to our pen name so we sign ourself—Rex.

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Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before D. W. Sheahan, U. S. Commissioner at Enterprise, Oregon, on March 24, 1899, viz:
EBNER BRUMBACK,
H. E. No. 6280 for the E 1/2 SW 1/4 & W 1/2 SE 1/4, Sec. 20, Tp. 2 N R 43 E W. M.
He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz:
Horace G. Chase, Waldo Chase, John S. Pratt, and William A. Hayden, all of Imnaha, Oregon.
E. W. BARTLETT, Register.

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Enterprise Ore., Dec. 23, '98.
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