

THIRD IN A FOUR-PART SERIES

Baker's Founding Fathers

■ Baker County historian Gary Dielman profiles four men who were instrumental in the creation of Baker City, continuing today with Charles B. Fisher, who moved to Baker County in 1862 and build a cabin in the middle of what became Baker City and designated some of his property for what would become Mount Hope Cemetery



Dielman

Not much is known about Charles B. Fisher before or after he left Baker County. Nevertheless he should be considered as one of the founding fathers of Baker City for three reasons:

First, his cabin is on the 1864 Baker County Township Map in the middle of the future Baker City town site.

Second, Fisher acquired land between Powder River and Main Street and from Auburn Avenue to Campbell Street, which today is known as Fisher's Addition.

Third, he designated some of his farm land on the southeast side of Baker City for a cemetery.

Charles B. Fisher came to Baker County in 1862 during the first flood of emigrants after gold was discovered the previous October. Some time before the spring of 1864 Fisher located in what became the middle of future Baker City. Surveyor field notes tell us whose "house" was symbolized by a tiny square on their map located between two shaded-in agricultural fields along the east side of where Main Street runs today. Surveyor notes tell us that, when surveying north on the boundary between sections 16 and 17 of the township (one section equals one square mile, or 640 acres), the surveyors entered the south edge of a field (today's Court Avenue) and 850 feet further north left the field, crossed a road (Auburn Road) a few feet later, and 264 feet further north they saw "Fisher House" located less than a football field distant to the east.

Those surveyor field notes are corroborated by a 1909 article in the Morning Democrat (today's Baker City Herald).

"His (Fisher's) cabin was located where Mr. P. Crabill's residence now is."

The 1903 Baker City Directory gives the address of Philander Crabill's two-story house as 2300 Resort, present parking lot of the Dollar Tree (earlier occupied by Albertsons). That would place Fisher's cabin about 500 feet from the south side of Geiser-Pollman Park, exactly where the 1864 township surveyors placed it on their map.

According to Isaac Hiatt, "Mr. Fisher owned the land east of Pierce's claim, and he made an addition to the town between Front (Main) Street and the river," the area known today as Fisher's Addition. North of Fisher's cabin was a grove of cottonwood trees, which early residents of Baker City called "Fisher's Grove." Later the area was called "Rust's Grove," apparently acquired from Fisher. It was named for Henry Rust, the Baker City owner of a brewery and

Rust Hall, where US Bank is located today on the east side of Main Street.

The 1870 federal Census tells us that Charles B. Fisher, 29, came from New York, occupation mail carrier, with real estate worth \$2,000 and personal wealth of \$2,000 (totaling \$80,000 in today's dollars). Fisher must have been a bachelor, since the Census lists no other persons living in the residence. The 1870 census says nothing about Fisher being a farmer with land on the east side of Baker City. That's where Fisher planned to make land available for a cemetery.

A newspaper article (date unknown but probably before 1874) recounted that Baker City's first cemetery was on Hillcrest before the hill became a residential neighborhood. Placing cemeteries on a prominence like Hillcrest was, and still is, a common practice. The newspaper article explained why present Mount Hope Cemetery, on Fisher's property, was a better site.

The article, in describing the Hillcrest site, notes that "Owing to the very rocky character of the ground now used as a cemetery, the time will come when it will be abandoned for a better site. In some instances the ground is so full of boulders that it is almost impossible to dig a grave; and in every instance the cost for digging one is double or treble of what it would be were the ground free of rocks and boulders. We understand that C.B. Fisher, Esq., of this place has a piece of ground situated in the northeast corner of his farm, adjoining Baker City, which he proposes to survey and lay off into lots for burial purposes. This ground is free from rocks, hence a grave can easily be made, and at much less cost than in the graveyard on the hill, besides it is in a fine site and is just about the right distance from town."

In 1880 Fisher left Baker City, according to an item in a December 1891 issue of the Morning Democrat.

"Charles B. Fisher, the original owner of a portion of the town site of Baker City, after an absence of eleven years, returned last Friday on a visit to his sister, Mrs. J.M. Swift."

The article reported that Fisher was in Long Valley, Idaho, engaged in stock raising.

Fisher did not stay in Baker City, but he left a lasting legacy by planning to put a cemetery on part of his farm land southeast of the city. The man who carried Fisher's plan to fruition was Joseph W. Cleaver, who purchased the land Fisher intended for a cemetery. That is the transaction described in this Dec. 16, 1874, Bedrock



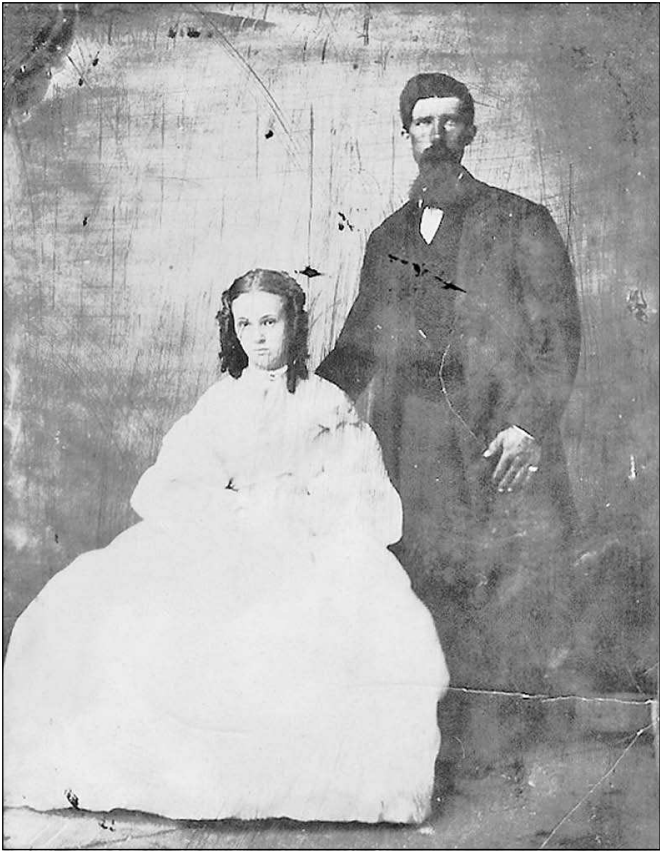
Baker County Library District Historic Photo Collection

In 1873 Baker City's first banker, James W. Virtue, built the Virtue Block, which housed three businesses with Virtue Bank on the southwest corner of Main and Court, present site of a Chinese restaurant. It was the first stone building in Baker City and supposedly fireproof, but the building burned down in about 1883. This photo, taken several years later, shows the completed Virtue Block including Virtue Bank, City Brewery Depot, Bamberger & Frank. The photo was taken from the balcony of the St. Lawrence Hotel (notice railing).



Baker County Library District Historic Photo Collection

Photo taken in 1900 of women in costume, probably a theatrical group. (Back Row: Miss McIntyre, Amy C. Haines, Mrs. Swan, Mrs. Horner; Front Row: Mrs. Curry, Ada Cleaver, Beulah Bowman.) Ada Cleaver, daughter of J.W. and Sarah Cleaver, was born in 1878, graduated from BHS in 1896, and later taught at BHS. Ada died in 1904 and is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, which was founded by her father. Reason for her early death is not known.



Baker County Library District Historic Photo Collection

Wedding photograph of Joseph Cleaver and wife, Sarah. Date of their wedding is not known, but it must have taken place quite a few years before they moved from Portland to Baker City.

Democrat article.

"J.W. Cleaver has procured some fourteen acres of ground about three fourths of a mile southeast of our city, which he has surveyed and laid off into small lots suitable for Cemetery purposes. The locality is a very suitable one for the purpose intended; the ground is accessible of being easily beautified, and can be made a beautiful resting place for loved ones who may pass from time to eternity. Those wishing to procure lots in this Cemetery can, by calling on Mr. Cleaver, seek a plot of the ground."

Joseph Wraith Cleaver (1825-1901) is not one of the four Baker City Founding Fathers, but readers may like to know more about the

founder of Mount Hope Cemetery, where so many family and friends are buried.

The 1870 federal Census listed the Cleaver family as residents of Baker City. Joseph W. Cleaver was 45, a hotel keeper, originally from Canada, with real estate worth \$3,000 and personal worth of \$1,000. His wife, Sarah, from Illinois, was 31 and their three children were Isabella 9, Charles 6, and May 2, all born in Oregon.

According to the 1880 federal Census the family grew by one child, Frank, age 9. Joseph's occupation in 1880 was furniture maker and origin listed as England, probably by way of Canada.

Cleaver's 1870 occupation of "hotel keeper" is

documented in a couple of sources. An undated newspaper article reported that "a Mr. Peters of Portland, who first went to Auburn, then moved to Baker, built the Peters Hotel, a large two-story frame structure on the site of the present IOOF temple. After its completion he had it about one year when he sold it to Joseph W. Cleaver."

Jacob W. Peters was the father of Joseph Cleaver's wife, Sarah. Baker City House was one of the earliest structures built in Baker City.

More detail was added by local historian Helen Rand, who wrote a note on the back of a photo of Baker City House, which is in the Baker County Library historic photos collection.

"The original of this picture belonged to Mrs. May Cleaver Wright. She said that it (hotel) had been started but was bought in an incomplete state by her father, J. W. Cleaver, and finished. He ran it as a hotel and this picture was taken in 1868. Mrs. (Jessie Mae Cleaver) Wright thought that she was the baby being held on the upper porch. This building was between Valley and Auburn on the east side of the street. I took these notes from Mrs. Wright herself."

A little later Cleaver built a two-story building on the southeast corner of Resort and Bridge streets. On the ground floor was his cabinet shop, a furniture store, and an undertaking business. In those days it was common to combine furniture, coffin making, and undertaking in a single business. The second floor was called Cleaver Hall, a large room for meetings, dances, and performances by traveling shows. In 1910

Cleaver's building and others on the block burned down.

I ran into a mystery when researching Cleaver and his family. Curiously, Cleaver is not listed as buried in his own cemetery. However, the Mount Hope Cemetery database shows that his wife, Sarah, daughter Ada, and sons Arthur and Frank are all buried there. Sarah, Ada, and Arthur are buried in IOOF No. 25, lot 273, graves 1, 2, and 3, but "exact locations unknown," which I interpret to mean it is not known who is buried in which grave. And none of the three graves is marked by a memorial stone. I thought that if the records are not complete, then perhaps Joseph Cleaver's burial record had been lost. Employees at Baker City Hall, where Mount Hope Cemetery burial records are kept, could find no record of Joseph Cleaver being buried in his own cemetery.

Searching www.findagrave.com solved the mystery of the missing grave and added earlier information about Joseph W. Cleaver. He died in 1901, not in Baker City but in Portland, where he is buried in Lone Fir Cemetery. I have not found the reason for Cleaver's leaving Baker and going to Portland, where he died about a year later. This death notice appeared in a Portland newspaper.

J.W. Cleaver, Who Died Yesterday

J.W. Cleaver died at his residence on Mount Tabor yesterday morning, at the age of 76. His demise is notable from the fact that he was the pioneer furniture manufacturer and undertaker of the Pacific Northwest. He was of English birth (Kent, England), and went to Canada in his early youth, and to California in 1849. In 1850 he came to Oregon and started a chair factory in Portland, and to this day many of his chairs are yet in evidence, so thorough was his workmanship. He combined with his furniture business the undertaking of funerals, and made the first interment in Lone Fir Cemetery. Later he transferred his business to Baker City, where he remained for many years, but returned to Portland about one year ago, leading a quiet and retired life. He was married to the second daughter of the late J.W. Peters, and left his widow and three adult children to mourn his loss.

Visitors to Mount Hope Cemetery entering at the north entrance find themselves on Cleaver Lane, so-named in recognition of Joseph W. Cleaver's importance to the founding of the cemetery.