

Early Days in Coos

By Emil E. Peterson
Fossil, Southwestern Oregon
Historian

Editor's Note. — It is with great pride we announce the beginning of a historical feature on Coos county and Southwestern Oregon by Emil E. Peterson, radio speaker and newspaper columnist, who is now engaged in putting down for future reference, stories of the colorful early days of our locality. We welcome any comments you may care to submit to Mr. Peterson by writing him in care of this paper.

It is nearly three years now since I began telling about the early settlement of Coos county, over KOOS. Cards, letters, telephone calls and personal comments have encouraged me to continue the program. These encouraging words have come from many sources, but from two classes in particular. First, there are those whose parents or grandparents were among the very first to brave the wilderness of what was "Cowes," "Kowes," or "Cowan" bay. That was less than a hundred years ago. It is natural to expect that the descendants of those true pioneers would show the greatest personal interest. But next in interest is indicated from those who have come most recently. This, too, can be understood: everything here is so new to them that they are keen in their desire to know something about the history of their new home.

To present a story of the settlement and development of Coos county in chronological order would require a great deal of study, research, arrangement and elimination of material; all of which would take much time and delay. It will be my aim, therefore, to follow a very simple plan. First, to give a very brief outline of Coos in the making; second will be stories of persons, places and activities that have contributed to our development up to now. No attempt will be made to keep these stories in chronological order, for they will be taken from whatever source that may be available. I hope that many of them may come from interviews and from letters that our readers may see fit to send in.

You may wonder, just as I have wondered, why this little paradise that we call Coos county remained unsettled by any white people for a hundred years after the Russians began to move into Alaska, and for more than three hundred years after the Spanish had settled in California. Spanish ships sailed north from California long before there was a United States, but if they ever came near enough to the Oregon coast in those early days to see land, they left no record to tell about it.

Drake Famed Here

Drake passed this way in his trip around the world in 1579, touching at a point on the coast reported to have been 43 degrees north latitude, the present location of Coos Bay. A description by his man Fletcher gave a very unfavorable report of the country. This may have had something to do with keeping the settlers out.

The Hudson's Bay Company, with its post at Vancouver on the north bank of the Columbia river was sending its trappers and traders up and down the coast. Their journals show that some of their men came into the Coos Bay region as early as 1824.

In 1828 Jedediah Smith with a party of eighteen men and an unbelievable number of horses journeyed up this way from California. He



HERE ARE THE BOYS who added sparkle to the loggers' banquet in the Osborn hotel in Eugene November 16th at the annual loggers' convention attended by many Coquille residents and at which Al Smith was elected president for 1946.

represented a company of fur traders from the Mississippi valley, competitors of the Hudson's Bay Co. Smith and his party crossed the Rockies and the Sierras into California. They were halted by the Spanish and ordered to leave. Coming up the Sacramento valley, they turned west, crossing through extremely rough mountainous country, and reached the coast not far from the present southern border of Oregon. Smith river in northern California was named for the leader.

Smith Describes Coast

As Smith and his men came north through what is now Curry and Coos counties, they described the streams that they crossed and each place where they camped. "Campsite of Jedediah Smith" is the name of an article recently published in the Oregon Historical Quarterly. The article was written by Alice Maloney, widow of the late Mike Maloney, publisher of the Coos Bay Times for many years. Mrs. Maloney grew up on Coos Bay and is the author of several stories and articles based on historical events in this region. She made the trip as nearly as possible over the same ground covered by Smith and his party, attempting to locate each spot where they camped and to name each stream that they crossed. She lists Chetco river, Pistol river, Brush creek, Sixes river, Coquille river, Whiskey Run, Cape Arago, Shore Acres, Sunset, Charleston, a place near Empire, and the ocean beach across the bay from Empire. When Smith reached the north side of the Umpqua, his party was attacked by Indians. Smith and one or two of his men escaped. All the others were killed. That was in July, 1828.

Our next mention of Coos bay is dated in 1836, when the small trading schooner, Cadborough, entered the harbor, according to entries in the journal of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Schooner Katie Heath

S. S. Mann, first county judge of Coos county, is the authority for the statement that the schooner Katie Heath entered this harbor in 1850, mistaking it for the Umpqua. We have no record of its having landed.

The event which, perhaps, led most directly to the first settlement of Coos county, was the wreck of the Captain Lincoln, a U. S. transport.

It left San Francisco in December of 1851 with some thirty-five or forty dragoons, to be landed at Port Orford, where Captain Tichenor's men had been attacked by Indians. The transport was caught in a severe storm, sprang a leak, was unable to enter Port Orford, and was driven north. Pumps were kept going night and day, but the water in the hold increased. Finally the Capt Lincoln was driven ashore about two miles north of the Coos Bay bar. Sails were made into tents and Camp Cast-a-Way became the first settlement of white men in what is now Coos county. As these men did not know where they were and had no authority to abandon the ship and supplies, they remained in Camp Cast-a-Way for nearly four months.

Indians came with ducks, geese, fish of various kinds, venison and elk meat, to exchange for hard tack, trinkets, articles of clothing and other things. News spread to the Umpqua and other places. Perry B. Marple with a party of six men came down from Jacksonville. On their return, Marple gave a most glowing report of their new discovery: beautiful harbor, schools of fish, thousands of ducks and geese, wild fruits, deer and elk, croppings of coal, agricultural lands, wonderful forests. Soon a party of forty men was organized; came down by way of Camas Valley and the middle fork of the Coquille and on down that river to the mouth, then up the coast to Coos bay. More than half the men had turned back without completing their journey. But the nineteen who came on through organized the "Coos Bay Company," set up headquarters at Empire City. That was in 1853, and thus was born the first permanent settlement of white men in Coos county. Some of their families followed a little later, the same year.

Arago News Items

Held Over One Week

Mrs. Ed Detlefsen of Coquille visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Carl last Thursday evening, while Mr. Detlefsen attended the factory meeting.

Mr. and Mrs. Merle Burtis of Portland came in last Saturday and have been visiting at the J. L. Burtis home in Arago, the past week.

Choir practice was held Friday evening at the home of Mrs. O. H. Aasen with the following attendance: Mesdames Albert Lillie, Werner Piep, S. C. McAllister and Messrs. Meiden Carl and R. L. Vanderburg, with Mrs. Aasen at the piano.

Mrs. Chester Willson and Chloe drove to Fairview last Thursday and visited with Mr. and Mrs. Arney Willson. Last Wednesday, with Mrs.

Ward Evans, they visited at the home of Mrs. Louise Schroeder.

Mrs. Ward Evans returned home Wednesday after accompanying Mrs. J. L. Burtis to Portland on Tuesday. Mrs. Clarence Schroeder of Corvallis also accompanied Mrs. Burtis as far as her home, after visiting relatives in Coos county for a few days.

The church has voted to buy \$24.00 worth of vetch seed for the relief of war sufferers.

Mrs. Nile Miller visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Fish last Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Woodward were Sunday guests of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Halter.

Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Myers of Myrtle point visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Halter Saturday evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Alden Butler of Empire visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Everett Doyle, Sunday.

Mrs. Earl Edgmon and Kenneth left Tuesday for Klamath Falls, where they will visit friends over the Thanksgiving holidays.

Miss Evelyn Leeper spent Monday night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Widmark.

J. D. Carl drove to Coos Bay Saturday and attended the football game

while there.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Fish were Sunday guests at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Fish.

Misses Jerene Mast and Ella May Walker and Bud Reisberg of North Bend visited at the Ward Evans home last Monday.

Mrs. Bert Davenport and Mr. and Mrs. Farrell Goble and small son of California visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ward Evans last Monday.

Get your order in early for Woodstock office and Remington portable typewriters. We are now getting machines. Call H. S. Norton, 224J. 44tt

Old papers be a duns!

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Brooks Used Furniture

Greyhound Announces NEW LOW FARES in OREGON

Pacific Greyhound Lines is applying to the Public Utilities Commissioner to reduce Greyhound bus fares in the Oregon Coast area. These new fares should be in effect the latter part of December. This is in line with Greyhound's policy of providing the finest travel service at the lowest possible fares.

**Reductions up to 25% will apply between
Portland and Brookings and all intermediate points along the Oregon Coast**

*Watch for announcement
of the effective date*

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