

# Disease common worry to Coquille

By Gary Newman  
Editor

When one looks at photographs of old-time Coquille, one gets the impression of a young new land, bright in promise and big with muscle. The forest pressed close to the city limits.

Emma Pierce was born in that land 95 years ago, in a house that stood where Bill Fortier's pool hall was later built. Late 20th century inhabitants of Coquille know it as "Bill's Place."

Her beginning was June 21, 1889. Her parents were Lawrence P. and Ora Heritha Maury. They had moved here from Jackson County.

Her early memories of Coquille are of a town much different than it is today. Highway 42 didn't go curving and swishing through town and the city hadn't turned its back on the river. The wharf on the Coquille was the town's link to the outside world. Dairy and farm products found their way to the outside on riverboats and groceries and manufactured products were carried up the river for dispatch at Coquille's docks.

It was a two day journey to Roseburg, an overnight trip to Marshfield and Bandon, too, was a time consuming trip on the river boats.

Diphtheria swept the town when she was 2 years old and claimed the life of

her older brother, Henry, who was 7 years old when he died in May 1891. Emma survived that epidemic, but other families were less fortunate than the Maurys. She recalls talk of Mrs. Messer who lost her seven children within a few weeks because of the disease.

Other epidemics would sweep the town during her life and she remembers the colored flags that hung in front of a house that was quarantined.

When she was 16 or 17 years old her family often took a trip up the Coquille River to a dairy farm owned by friends. Milk boats plied the river daily up to a narrow place in the river, this side of Myrtle Point, called "Nancy's Pinch." The boats would not stop, but simply slow down while a deck hand jumped off and passed containers of milk aboard from the dairymen's docks. The deck hands would lend passengers the use of a strong arm to swing aboard as well. "I remember them swinging me on the boat all the time," she says.

Mrs. Pierce, her mother and sister would sometimes pick a bag of corn to take home.

"It was on such a trip that my brother was sent home early because he was feeling ill," she says.

That evening, when Emma and the others arrived home, the doctor met them at the door. Her brother had

small pox. The family, except her father, who wasn't home, was quarantined. Authorities posted a yellow flag at their gate and no one was allowed to leave. The marshal came each day to find out what groceries they needed and would return and put the box just outside the gate.

Disease was something to be feared in those days. People didn't have the luxury of immunization. "Every disease that ever came along, we got one," she says now. Scarlet fever too, came to town, and a red flag was posted on Coquille gates for families that were infected.

Coquille must have been a rough town in those days, with a population of lumberjacks, river hands and coal miners. Some of Mrs. Pierce's late childhood memories are of whisperings of cat houses above the saloons on Front Street.

The establishments would generally have an outside stairway that ascended the building from the street as well as from the back so that some patrons could enter more discreetly from the river side of the building. The boys would go down by the river at night and watch the back stairs.

"The Monday morning news would be about all the bankers and church dea-



Emma Pierce

cons that were sneaking up the back stairs," she says.

Her boy friend, Hal Pierce, didn't meet the approval of the Maury elders and Emma had to use her wits. For a while she met him on a corner by the town library, but the librarian told her mother and she put an end to that.

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