

**IMPRESSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS**

Fred Lockey's column in the Portland Journal contains some interesting stories. Recently he devoted space on two different days to C. A. Sweek, and old time resident of this place, who is now living at Corvallis. On the 10th and 11th of this month the following stories appeared.

**Fred Lockey in Portland Journal**

While in Burns not long ago I fell into conversation with one of the old-time residents and, in answer to my questions he said: "The first settlement in this country was at Egan. Monte Currey went to Winnemucca, Nev., in 1850, and bought a barrel of whiskey, some red bandanna handkerchiefs and a few other necessities, and brought them to his cabin. He had to knock the frame off his door to get the barrel of whiskey inside. He set the barrel of whiskey on end, put a brass faucet pretty well down on the barrel and set a few whiskey glasses on top of the barrel. The barrel was its own barkeeper. A customer would draw a glass of whiskey and put his change on top of the barrel. Any man who was so low down and ornery as to take a drink and not settle with the top of the barrel would have been run out of the country. Sometimes there would be twenty dollars in small silver on top of the barrel so a man could always make his change. If he could not make his change he left his silver dollar on top of the barrel and took an extra drink."

"Prior to 1880, the only store in this country was at the fort in Harney canyon. A man named Pete Stinger started a store at what is now Burns and called it Axe Handle. In 1879 Bill Hanley settled here. Along about then Devine and French bought most of the settlers out by buying their cattle. As a matter of fact they bought the cattle to get rid of the settlers. George McGowan came to Harney valley in the spring of 1882. He brought a four-horse load of general merchandise. McGowan started business at Egan, just across from Burns. Stinger was afraid that the town of Egan would build up and kill Axe Handle. Stinger went over to see McGowan and asked him to come over to Axe Handle and go into partnership with him. McGowan agreed with the proviso that he could change the name of the settlement from Axe Handle to Burns, for McGowan was a Scotchman and was very fond of Bobbie Burns. McGowan had only been here a short time when he decided it would be a good stunt to have a postoffice, so he sent a petition around the country to have it signed, asking that a postoffice be established. McGowan was appointed postmaster and his suggestion of calling the postoffice Burns was adopted by the postoffice department."

While in Corvallis a day or two ago I interviewed C. A. Sweek, a long time resident of Burns. In answer to my questions, Mr. Sweek said "I was born in the Tualatin valley, near Portland, on August 5, 1852. My father, whose name was John Sweek, was born in Missouri in 1822. His father was born in West Virginia and moved to Missouri when Missouri was the jumping off place to nowhere. My mother's maiden name was Maria Beard. My father took the gold fever in 1849 and started for California. He got as far as Fort Bridger when word was brought to him that both his father and mother had died within a day or two of each other, so my father had to turn around and go back to settle up the estate. On February 29, 1852, my father and mother were married, and a few weeks later they started across the plains by prairie schooner on their wedding trip."

"In 1882 I moved to Canyon City, where I opened a law office. I practiced law at Canyon City for the next seven years. Harney county was cut off from Grant county on February 25, 1889. Harney county was named from Harney lake and Harney lake was named after General William S. Harney, one of Oregon's old-time Indian fighters. The railroad that ran from Yaquina to Albany had been extended to the foot of the Cascade mountains. The name of the road was "The Corvallis and Eastern" and the plan at that time was to extend the road by way of Minto pass across the cascades and on to Burns. In fact, section men were working on the grade on the Eastern side of the mountains for the road to pass through Burns and go on to Boise. The bonds were issued and ready to sign when the Harriman interests purchased the road. The road stopped on the west side of the Cascades at Detroit and never came any farther. However, seeing the men at work on the grade and learning that the road was to run from the coast at Yaquina, I decided that Burns would be a live railroad town so I moved from Canyon City to Burns. This was in 1889. I lived in Burns 31 years. In fact, my wife and I are considered pioneers of Harney county. My wife helped organize the Harney County Pioneer association."

"The P ranch, which is now owned by the Corbett and Swift interests, was owned in early days by Glenn, Peter French was manager of the ranch, Peter French belonged to the old time cattlemen and believed that the county was made for cattle only, and that "neasters" or "homesteaders" were spoiling the open range. Consequently, when a homesteader tried to settle there French treated 'em rough. If hard words would not drive them out he used his quirt or saw to it that they were subjected to so many petty annoyances they pulled up stakes and moved away."

Many a destructive forest fire has been caused by a match thrown carelessly in forest litter. An obscure peasant in Europe kills someone, and we have a world war. Many an incident, small in itself, leads to unlooked for and disastrous results," said C. A. Sweek, when I visited him recently in Corvallis. "Three cowboys camped on the sand reef between Malheur lake and Harney lake idly kicked a channel in the sand so that the water from Malheur lake could flow into its nearby neighbor, Harney lake. This was in April, 1881, and the three cowboys, who were out rounding up horses, were Carl Cecil, Mart Brenton and Tom Allen. Malheur lake was unusually high. In fact, the sand reef separating the two lakes was not more than a foot above the surface of Malheur lake. The surface of Harney lake was much lower than that of Malheur lake, probably eight or ten feet lower. One of these cowboys, with the heel of his boot, kicked a channel through the sand reef, so that the waters of Malheur lake trickled through to Harney lake. A shovelful of sand would have stopped it during the first few minutes, but as the trickle of water washed the sand away and widened the stream the trickle of water became a stream

which in an hour was a rushing torrent, which continued until the surfaces of the two lakes were of the same height. This apparently inconsequential act was the cause of bitter and long continued litigation, to say nothing of bloodshed. Peter French, manager of the Glenn ranch, claimed the land to the shore line of Malheur lake. When Malheur lake drained its surplus waters into Harney lake, it left a strip of uncovered land ranging in width from a quarter of a mile to two miles wide, all of which French claimed. The settlers contested this claim, saying that French's line was established by the Henderson meander line, established in 1877.

"From 1881 to 1895, when the government ordered a new survey of the lake, which survey was made by John H. Neal, now living in Portland, there was constant friction about the ownership of this strip of land. French claimed the uncovered land by the ancient law of riparian rights, but that law does not hold in cases where the shore line is changed suddenly, as was the case in this instance. One day French was riding in what was called the "Rocky Ford field," when a man named Oliver came up on horseback hunting for cattle. French rode out to meet Oliver, and told him he would run him out of the country if he did not stay off his land. Oliver responded that it was government land, and that French had no more right to it than he had. French misjudged his man, for when he hit Oliver over the head with his quirt, just as he had done to many another settler, Oliver drew his revolver and killed French.

"Some day when you are up in Harney county you must interview D. H. Smith. Everyone up there knows him by the name of Rye Smith. He and A. W. Houser and Pete Stinger and John Chapman, and a few others, are among the early time settlers of that vicinity."

"You asked me a few minutes ago about my ancestors. My father, John Sweek, was born at St. Genevieve, Mo. His father, Martin Sweek, was born in West Virginia. I know very little about my mother's people. Her mother was found on the Wharf in New York city. Her parents had both died on the ship coming to America. My grandmother was a little girl, probably not over 3 or 4 years old. The only trace of her parentage we have ever had was a picture of a man and woman in the gold locket she was wearing, but what their names were and where they came from we never learned. My mother, herself, was left an orphan when she was a little child. She believes she was born in May, 1835, but does not know the day."

"I am the oldest child in our family and next to me came Alice, who married Milton W. Smith, an attorney in Portland. Lawrence was one of the pioneers of Multnomah in Grant county. He died two years ago. My brother Alec lives in Port-

land. Lily married Cal Harding of Portland. Thad worked for the Oregon Railroad and Navigation company for many years. He now lives in Seattle. My brother Alec was born in the summer of 1861 and like myself attended Pacific university until his senior year, when he quit school to study law. In 1883, he began reading law with Milton W. Smith. He has served in the legislature and on the county central committee of the Democratic party, and has been active in politics ever since I can remember.

"My father hauled the logs to build the twin bridges in South Portland. While father was working at this job, he was eating his lunch one day, when a young man smartly dressed and good looking stopped to talk with him. He told my father his name was J. H. Mitchell, and that he had just come to Portland. He said, "If I can secure financial backing till I can get a start here, I know I can make it." My father liked his looks and said, "All right. I will help you out," which he did. As long as United States Senator J. H. Mitchell lived, there was nothing my father would ask him that he wouldn't do if it was possible."

"In 1918 my wife with her two next children came to Corvallis so the children could attend the O. A. C. I got sick of keeping bachelor's hall at Burns, so in 1920 I moved to Corvallis. Our three oldest children and our two youngest children attended O. A. C. John, our oldest boy, works for Crane & Company, and lives at Spokane. Earl is working for the government, and is stationed at Seward, Alaska. Agnes died last year. Alice married S. R. Bennett, of the forest service. They live at Burns. Cyrus has passed on. Ella married W. J. McKinnis, Dorcas married Alvin Hariburt, a stock raiser in Harney county. Lois married Henry Casiday. She teaches here in Corvallis. Esther married Fred Baird. She teaches school at Woodburn. Alec graduated this year from the O. A. C., and is in the engineer department of the Southern Pacific company. I have 21 grandchildren, so you see with my children and grandchildren there is quite a family of us."

"Some of these times when you want to get the real facts about the Blue Bucket mine come to me, for while I was up in that country I investigated the whole subject thoroughly, and can give you some new light on that controversy."

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