

EARLY FARMING IN UMATILLA COUNTY

(Paper read by the late C. A. Barrett before the annual meeting of the Umatilla County Historical Society in 1915.)

Asked to prepare a paper on the early growing of grain in Umatilla County, the writer is aware of the difficulties connected therewith, as it seems the fact is evident that grain and corn, in a small way, were grown by the early settlers some years before anyone even thought of this section as a grain-growing community, therefore the question of who raised the first grain in Umatilla County will always be an open question.

I have confined myself in this paper to the period when actual settlement was made and the information contained herein has been secured from living witnesses, for the period prior to my own personal observations, which commenced with November, 1872.

Pine Creek Rendezvous

I will confine myself to the period subsequent to 1863, although it appears that prior to this some grain had been grown for feed purposes.

In 1863 a man by the name of Dodge lived on Pine Creek, just below where the O-W. R. & N. trestle now is. This point at the time was the stage station between Walla Walla and Cayuse, at the foot of Meacham Hill. This station was the rendezvous and principal camping ground for packers and freighters, water, grass and feed being available.

In 1863, after Dodge had laid in a supply of feed for the station, some packers in a spirit of hilarity caused the barn and feed to be burned, in settlement for which the packers paid Dodge \$1500. In 1864 Dodge sold out to Taylor Green and the place has been known to all old-timers as the "Taylor Green" place ever since.

Beginning with these dates I have traced the development of grain growing with facts secured from living witnesses.

In the fall of 1862 one Tom Lieualen settled at the point where Weston now stands, followed by the settlement at that place in 1863 by Andrew Kilgore, who, from my research, leads me to believe that to him was due the honor of raising the first grain for a livelihood and from a money standpoint. At the time Mr. Kilgore settled at Weston he bought a claim from Robert Warren (who later settled near Adams), trading him a yoke of oxen for his cabin and garden patch, which was situated at the spring near where the dwelling of G. W. Proebstel now stands.

Stage Route Recalled

Prior to 1865 the stage route between Walla Walla and Cayuse station had been along the old Dalles trail, crossing Dry Creek at the same point, the road now below Weston, by the Richards crossing of Wildhorse Creek (now Athena) to Cayuse station.

In the fall of 1865 the settlers at Weston, Lieualen and Kilgore, decided to have the road changed and William Kilgore, now living at Athena, plowed the furrow marking the road from where Milton is now located, by Blue Mountain station and Weston, ending on Wildhorse Creek at the John Harris place. This placed the stage route through Weston and from this time on farming slowly developed in the Weston country.

In 1864 Andrew Kilgore planted and harvested a small crop of wheat at the point where Weston now stands. This grain was cut by hand with cradle, and threshed by being tramped out with horses, cleaned with a fanning mill, taken to Walla Walla and ground into flour at the Isaacs mill, then located at Walla Walla.

In 1868 several of the settlers in the vicinity of Weston and living on Wildhorse above the present town of Athena raised small fields of grain. That year the first threshing was

done with a small horsepower, hand feed machine by William Courtney. He threshed grain for Andrew Kilgore, Henry Hales, James Lieualen, Taylor Green, Thomas Linville, D. A. Richards and probably a few others. Some of the grain was cut by hand with a cradle, come cut with a mower and rake and some cut with a hand rake reaper.

Threshing Machine Appears

In 1871 a man by the name of Snyder, living at Wildhorse Grove, just above Athena, bought the Courtney threshing machine and ran it in the Weston country. In 1872 William Kilgore and Tom Fuson bought and operated a small horse-power hand-feed threshing machine. Prior to this date several small farms had been opened up in the foothills around Weston. In 1871-2 the first header operated by parties living in this vicinity was owned by J. W. Stamper, who had settled just north of the present town of Athena.

In the period between 1863-1870 the settlers were few and these few paid more attention to stock interests than grain, but it is a fact that Kilgore, Green, Lieualen, Hales, Barrett, Linville, Royse and possibly a few others did grow and thresh grain during these years.

In 1865 Lafe Warmoth had 20 acres of sod broken on land adjoining the City of Weston and planted to corn. Warmoth gave Taylor Green a pack mule to plow the 20 acres of sod and the planting of the corn was done by using an ax to cut the sod, dropping the corn by hand and covering same by the heel of the boot. Yet with this crude way of planting I am informed this field of corn made a satisfactory crop.

Many of the early settlers raised excellent fields of corn and demonstrated many years ago that corn would grow in this country.

In 1877 David Taylor raised corn, T. J. Kirk in 1878 and the writer in 1882 planted and harvested a good crop of corn on 35 acres of ground two and one-half miles northeast of Weston.

In the spring of 1870, J. C. Mays, father of Mrs. C. A. Barrett, of Athena, and W. B. Mays, of Pendleton, plowed and sowed 40 acres of wheat on his place at Weston, which place is now owned by J. M. Banister.

The grain was cut by hand with cradles and threshed with flails. Two of the men who helped cradle this grain are still living in this country, Henry Pinkerton, of Athena, and J. R. Brown, of near Pendleton. The grain was mostly used for flour and seed in the Weston vicinity. In 1871 Henry Pinkerton had a small acreage of wheat, and William Nichols, of Milton, brought a header into the neighborhood and cut and stacked wheat, the grain afterwards being threshed by horsepower and hand-feed machines.

In 1866 my uncle, Charles Barrett, settled on Dry Creek, two and one-half miles northeast of Weston, and engaged in the stock business. He commenced raising wheat and oats shortly after this, the grain being cut for hay. About 1872-3, he cut and threshed quite an amount of oats, and in February, 1873, the writer plowed 50 acres of ground for him, which was that spring seeded to oats, cut in the fall with a self-rake reaper and threshed, after being stacked. He also grew grain hay on the creek bottom for a distance of three-quarters of a mile up and down Little Dry Creek some years before this.

Stock-Raising Chief Industry

Although stock-raising was still the principal industry, about this time the settlers near Weston and on the mountainside above Weston had commenced to plow up the sod and raise grain. The winter of 1874-75 an 18-inch snow fell, which stayed on the ground for six weeks and feed was scarce. At this date the writer was working for J. F. Adams on his stock ranch on Wildhorse, near

where Adams is now situated. Mr. Adams being short of hay and not being able to buy sufficient hay, he bought up all the grain to be found in the Weston country, which consisted of two lots of wheat. One lot was secured from Mr. Mays and the other from a Mr. Rinehart, who had opened up a farm about three miles east of Weston, well up the mountainside.

This grain was hauled by the writer on bob-sleds with a six-horse team, and fed to sheep at one of the Adams sheep ranches located near where the town of Helix now stands. Thus it appears that all the available surplus wheat to be had in the winter of 1874-75 was fed out to one band of sheep. It was the custom to scatter the grain on the tramped snow and let the sheep eat it from the ground, afterwards to make trails to the hills and herd them and let them paw the snow from the large bunchgrass and feed on the grass.

Irrigation Begun in 1869

About 1869-70 one T. Dickenson commenced raising grain by irrigation at the junction of Dry and Pine Creeks, in the Hudson's Bay country. In the fall of 1873 the writer hauled threshed oats for feed from the Dickenson ranch, and also wheat, and had the same ground into flour at the Miller mill at Milton, for use on the Adams ranch. This mill was built in 1872 by John Miller and is still operated by his three sons, Henry, John and William.

In the spring of 1884 the writer hauled a load of wheat from Weston grown by Mr. Hartman (the father of Mrs. Lina Sturgis and the late Judge Hartman) and had the same ground into flour at the Indian mill on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, just below Cayuse station.

From the completion of the Dr. Baker narrow-gauge railroad to Blue Mountain station, in 1879, the development of grain growing in the Weston-Athena territory was more rapid. Among the early settlers then growing grain were H. McArthur, R. Jamieson, T. J. Kirk, Robert Coppock, P. Ely, William Pinkerton, Joe Lieualen, Richard Ginn, Tom Price, O'Harra, Downing, Gibbons, Winn and others. These people had engaged in the growing of grain in a small way prior to any railroad transportation in this country, when the nearest point was to haul the grain to Wallula and Umatilla landings, on the Columbia River.

Header Brought Into Use

In 1878, the year of the Indian War, the section about Weston had become mostly devoted to grain. The writer worked with the Edwards and Pinkerton threshing machine that harvest, the outfit being a header and old-style hand-feed thresher. The grain was all measured in a half-bushel measure, placed in seamless sacks and hauled to a granary.

Up to this time but little headway had been made in opening up the bunchgrass country west of Athena, but settlement was being rapidly made in this territory. There had been some grain hay grown on Wildhorse Creek by stockmen, but the only threshing that had been done prior to 1878 that I am able to learn was by David Taylor, who raised a crop of oats on the creek bottom of what is known as the Jackson Nelson place, about one mile below Athena.

From 1874-78 there had been considerable settlement west of Athena and about 1877 David Taylor plowed over 40 acres of sod on his claim, three miles west of Athena, and planted it to corn by sowing the corn broadcast and harrowing the seed in. In the Spring of 1878-William Scott seeded this ground to wheat, which was cut and threshed that Fall, the cutting being done with a Buckeye wire binder, that is, wire was used to bind the bundles, instead of ties.

Squirrels Early Destroyers

From this time on the development of the main wheat belt of Umatilla County steadily, but slowly, advanced. For many years the squirrels were bad and it was nothing uncommon for the settler to go to the mountains after wood or posts and on returning the next day to find his small patch of grain all cut down by the squirrels.

One of the first men to engage extensively in grain growing west of Athena was Moses Woodward. Others were the Stones, Gerkins, Walker, Scotts, Keen, Gross, Johnson, Russell, Willaby, Howell and Wilson.

In the territory west of Adams, the first farmers to construct a board cabin and break sod were James Bamford and William Junkins, about 1874.

The first person to grow potatoes on the bunchgrass hill land west of Adams was Bob Warren, who, in 1860, had sold out at Weston to Andrew Kilgore. These potatoes were raised on what is now the Ralston farm, in 1874 or 1875. Some of the early grain growers west of Adams were the Readers, Hales, MacKenzie, Morrison and Howells. Americus Hale and William Reeder were two of the earliest bonanza farmers of the county, being located northwest of Adams.

Not until the completion of the railroad between Pendleton and Blue Mountain station, in 1884, and of the Hunt road from Wallula to Athena and Pendleton, about the year 1887, did the main wheat belt become fully developed.

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