

Joseph L. Meek Emerges As More Than Robust Trapper

BIOGRAPHY TELLS OF HIS INFLUENCE BEYOND PHYSICAL PROWESS AND DRAMATIC LEADERSHIP

By Hervey S. Robinson
(Continued from last week)

Within the past few days we have thoroughly enjoyed the perusal of a new book by Dr. Harvey E. Tobie in which gives us a scholarly and accurate biography of one of the founders of Washington county's earliest settlement, Joseph L. Meek.

Perhaps no resident of Washington county, old or new has had so much written and published about him as this colorful and dynamic leader in Oregon pioneer affairs with so little resulting appreciation of the man and his work.

Commenting upon this situation in his notes Dr. Tobie says, "In spite of his superior knowledge of things pertaining to the Pacific Northwest of literature and politics, he was universally belittled as uneducated and even illiterate—Unfortunate emphasis on his mountain adventures, his physical prowess and exuberance and a few spectacular acts such as his dramatic leadership at Champoege have tended to obscure his continuing importance and influence. His true greatness has not been recognized because his memory has been used largely as a basis for amusement."

Dr. Tobie has given us in his book a vivid biography of Meek, the man interwoven with an absorbing narrative of the period of frontier life in which he played a leading part. This well written book with all the movement and appeal of fiction is a must for every student of Oregon history and a true adventure story that will hold the interest of almost any reader.

With the consent of the author and of the Oregon Historical Society which is sponsoring its publication we are basing the following account of the coming of the first white settlers to the Tualatin Plains upon data assembled by Dr. Tobie in this work. Direct quotations, unless otherwise indicated are from Dr. Tobie's book, *No Man Like Joe*. Arrangement and interpretations are our own and not necessarily those of the author or sponsor.

As stated in an earlier installment, a group of American trappers in the Rocky Mountains decided, in 1840, to abandon their way of life and join the settlers in the

Willamette valley. Leaders in this undertaking were Robert Newell, Joseph Meek and Caleb Wilkins, sons of good American families who had in their youth been drawn into the Rocky Mountain fur trade through love of adventure.

They were brothers-in-law. In a country where there were no women of their own race, they had taken for their wives three Indian princesses, daughters of Kowesote, a chief of the Nez Perce tribe. Associated with them in their plan were three other American trappers, George W. Ebberts, William Doty and Joseph Gale who also became noted in the annals of Washington county and the territory.

The inception of the plan was Newell's "Come," he said to Meek, "we are done with this life, in the mountains done with wading in beaver dams, and freezing or starving alternately done with Indian trading and Indian fighting. The fur trade is dead in the Rocky Mountains and it is no place for us now, if it ever was. We are young yet, and life is before us. We cannot waste it here."

"Let us go down into the Willamette valley and take farms. There is already quite a settlement there made by the Methodist mission and Hudson's Bay company's retired servants—What do you say Meek? Shall we turn American settlers?"

Meek agreed but inquired, "What have you got for me to do? I haven't anything to begin with but a wife and baby."

"Well, you can drive one of the wagons and take your family and traps along. Nicholas will drive the other, and I'll play leader and look after the train. Craig will go also, and we shall be quite a party with what strays we shall pick up."

Newell, who had piloted a party of missionaries, Harvey Clark, Philo B. Littlejohn and Alvin T. Smith to Fort Hall, then traded fresh horses for their jaded mounts and accepted their two wagons in payment for his services as a guide. Brother-in-law Caleb Wilkins secured a third wagon abandoned by Joel Walker an immigrant of the preceding year.

Newell traded one of his wagons to Francis Ermatinger, the Hudson's Bay company's superintendent at Fort Hall, who agreed to furnish one man and material assistance for an attempt to "start with wagons and open a road from Fort Hall to Walla Walla," an experiment which had never yet been undertaken.

On September 27, 1840 the party started from Fort Hall. Meek was driving Newell's wagon, Caleb Wilkins drove his own, and the wagon provided by Ermatinger was driven by a German named Nicholas. Other members of the party included the leader, "Doc" Newell, William Craig, John Larison, other friends, the families of some of the trappers and a Snake Indian who cared for the cattle they drove with them.

"Doc" rode ahead as a leader, followed by others on horseback. Then came the wagons, with Joe driving four horses and a mule, Nicholas a four horse team, Wil-

kins was in the other drivers seat, while the cattle brought up the rear.

"The wagon train was obliged to break a trail over lava beds into and out of canyons, across fords, through mountain passes and over everlasting sage brush, often as high as the horses heads, crashing under the lurching wagons. At last the wagon boxes were abandoned but still they struggled on with the running gears—Thus they arrived at the Hudson's Bay company's trading post, Fort Boise, where Whitman had left his wagon in 1836. Here they remained five days to recuperate.

"Somewhat refreshed they there toilsome journey—With sweat and discomfort they broke their way over the Blue Mountains, through a forest, over hills, whose slopes were covered with loose rocks, to the pleasant plains of the Umatilla and Walla Walla rivers.

"With less difficulty, they proceeded, about the first of November to a point near the Whitman mission from which they could see adobe walls gleaming in the setting sun beyond a cultivated area that must have reminded them of farms they had seen in Missouri—it seemed that they might be coming home.

Doctor Whitman received them enthusiastically, and when the travelers expressed doubts as to the advantage that might come from bringing the wagons the missionary assured them "Oh, you will never regret it you have broken the ice and when others see that the wagons have passed, they too will pass, and in a few years the valley will be full of our people."

The Indians walked round and round the "horse canoes" as they called them, and then, as Newell put it, "Seemed to give it up." Joe Meek was much impressed on observing the Indian children, wards of the missionaries, "as they learned housekeeping, sewing, reading, writing and farm labor as well as religion." Here, says Dr. Tobie, in his narrative, "He was content to leave his little daughter, Helen Mar, by a former Indian marriage to be brought up by these good people. Mrs. Whitman—readily ac-

cepted the additional responsibility. She dressed the beautiful little half-Indian girl in clothing left by her own Alice Clarissa, who had drowned in 1839, and took Helen Mar to fill a vacant place in her heart and household."

From the Whitman mission the little party proceeded to the Hudson's Bay company's Fort Walla Walla near the junction of the Walla Walla and Columbia rivers. There they left their wagons. Craig and Larison went east to Spaldings mission at Lapwai and Newell and Meek with their families proceeded on horseback to the Willamette valley driving with them with the help of the Snake Indians two cows and a bull furnished by Dr. Whitman.

The remainder of this momentous journey of Washington county's earliest settlers must be left for a later installment.

(Continued next week)

Oregon Dentist Buys Interest In Beaverton Clinic

With his purchase of one-third interest in The Tualatin Valley Clinic, Beaverton, Dr. Jack W. Dutro, D.M.D., has announced his affiliation with Dr. Vernon D. Hansen, M.D., and Dr. Everett A. Sorenson, M.D.

Dr. Dutro, who is now practicing as a doctor of dentistry in Corvallis, will open his office at the expected opening of the Clinic sometime in January. At that time he will renew his residency in the Tualatin valley, and will be accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Wanda Dutro, and their three children, all boys.

Dr. Dutro claims Hillsboro as his home where his parents Mr. and Mrs. Glen Dutro now reside. He attended Laurelwood Academy in Gaston, then schooled at Glendale Junior College in California, following which he attended the University of Oregon Dental School and graduated in 1946.

Subsequent to his graduation he established his practice in Corvallis.

Driving In Cold Weather Brings Accident Perils

Cold weather spells and carbon monoxide poisoning go hand in hand, motorists were reminded today by the Secretary of State's Traffic Safety Division.

The division said many traffic accidents in which the driver apparently fell asleep might be traced to carbon monoxide fumes seeping in through loose floorboards or defective exhaust systems. The gas is colorless and odorless, and will induce drowsiness even though the concentration is not strong enough to be lethal.

Drivers are advised to keep a window slightly open to allow entrance of needed fresh air even in coldest weather. In addition, the following rules for avoiding accidents in winter weather were listed:

1. Keep windshields and windows clear of fog or frost.
2. Avoid sudden starting or stopping on slippery surfaces. Apply brakes with a pumping action to avoid skidding.
3. Keep far enough behind the vehicle ahead of you to allow you to stop safely if necessary.
4. Slow down well in advance of intersections and curves.

THANKSGIVING PRAISE

Thanksgiving Praise Service will be held in Reedville church Wednesday Nov. 23. Public welcome.

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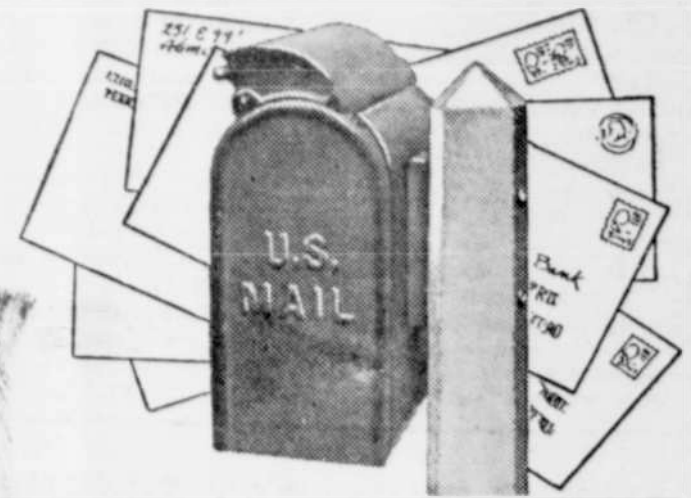
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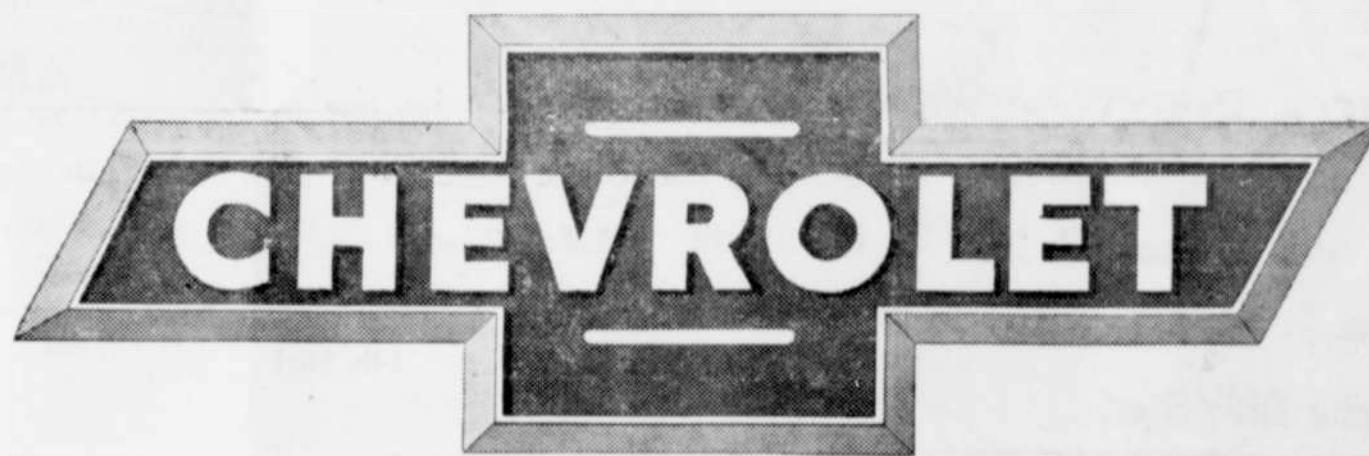
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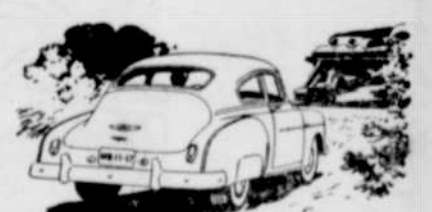
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