

Heppner Gazette Times

Heppner, Oregon, Thursday, March 24, 1955

Early History of Area Told by Long-Time Resident

(This is the first of two recent articles prepared for the Gazette Times by Bert Mason, one of Morrow county's pioneers. Mr. Mason spent most of his life in or near Ione and has one of the best memories of early times in Morrow county. He has written for us another one of his very interesting recounts of the early day history of the area.)

By Bert Mason

When the immigrants crossed the plains their only object was the Willamette valley and the 640 acre donation claims which soon occupied all the open lands and when the young folks wished to establish homes they had just one chance, that was to go into the dense forests and cut and burn the timber, then grub stumps for a lifetime. They remembered the vast tracts of bunchgrass covered hills through which they had traveled in Eastern Oregon and they decided to return and claim homes and raise cattle. Most of those who came to Willow Creek came from Eugene, Brownsville, Salem and Oregon City. The names best remembered by me were the Adkins, Casons, Clarks, Cochrans, Farrans, Hales, Matlocks, Padbergs, Petseys, Sperrys and the Weatherfords.

Soon every spot along the creek that would afford room for homes, cattle, corrals and a few acres for gardens and hay for saddle horses and a few cows was claimed.

All those settlers had to go to The Dalles for provisions, and it was also their post office until A. C. Petseys secured a post office at Willow Forks which was opened on June 3, 1872. It was changed to Petseysville on Dec. 24, 1878 and was closed May 5, 1887.

Mr. Petseys was the handyman of the community—he was postmaster, mailcarrier, blacksmith, photographer, dentist, broom maker and finally was assessor. He had a device with which he made brooms, each farmer raised a few hills of broom corn and if they would take their old broom handles and a bundle of corn to Mr. Petseys he would put a new

brush on it.

My first need for dental attention caused me to mount a pony and ride to Petseysville. Mr. Petseys was sowing grain for a neighbor when I arrived. He put the pliers into my pocket and told me how to find the doctor. He was sowing oats for Mr. Jordan and I located him and told him my troubles. He set a sack of oats on end and sat down upon it and stretched my neck cross his knees and the operation was soon over.

To show how thickly the creeks were settled I will recall those whom I knew who lived along the first 10 miles of Rhea Creek. They were John Jordan, Purkeys, Haneys, Padbergs, Riggs, Simpsons, Masons, Kimseys, Elig, Rhea, J. P. Rhea, T. A. Rhea, T. Dodson, Jim Dodson, C. A. Rhea, James Adkins, Spencers, J. J. Adkins, and Tom Morgan.

Everybody started raising cattle, and their only market was among the miners around Canyon City, Eastern Oregon and Idaho.

The beef market was soon oversupplied and the price of cattle went down to \$10 per head. John Jordan and others drove surplus cattle to Wyoming and Montana and a buyer, Lang, established a receiving point, in Eastern Oregon and bought cattle by the thousands and drove them across the Rocky mountains to sell to eastern markets.

Many of the settlers gave up and left the country and most of those who remained took up raising horses and sheep. William Penland became the sheep king—he operated as many as 20 bands of 2,000 each. Lum Rhea operated five bands.

J. W. Smith located on the last ranch down Willow Creek and he opened a store and post office one mile west of Heppner Junction on Dec. 17, 1878.

J. W. Smith felt the loss of customers from Willow Creek and moved his store to Alkali, now Arlington.

The stock raisers met more disaster when W. W. Weatherford sold his Willow Creek holdings and moved to Shuttler Flats in

1880 and began plowing up the bunchgrass and sowing wheat. He was followed by the Casons, Cochrans, Hales and others.

When my father, Joseph Mason went looking for a cattle ranch he went into south eastern Oregon and ended up by finding a place which suited him. William Hughes had a claim 5 miles up the west fork of Willow creek and had burned brick along the bank and had erected a 16 x 20 single room house. This evidently was the first brick house erected east of The Dalles. That house has been occupied continuously for the past 86 years and is now equipped with all modern builtins and electric appliances. Does anyone know of a house which equals that one?

My father moved his wife and worldly goods from Salem via boat to Oregon City, then up the Columbia to The Dalles, then over the Oregon Trail to Cecil and on up to Rhea Creek. They had a few cows and mares and a Pathfinder stallion. They were accompanied by the Frank Farrans family and were many days arriving at their new home. Father had a 10 inch single bottom plow with which to plow up the rye grass and sage brush and it took many years to get the 100 acre bottom into cultivation.

His method of harvesting was to cut hay with a cythe and the ripened grain was cut with a

cradle, not the same one in which we kids were rocked. The grain was bound with a wisp of straw and hauled to the barnyard where a spot was leveled off and the bundles were broken and the grain scattered in a circle and then horses were driven over it for a while. Then the straw was removed and the grain was thrown into the wind to remove the chaff and dirt. After some years he bought a small fanning mill and cleaned his grain. As the first children became old enough to sit on a horse, two horses were tied together and a child put on to ride them around over the grain. When my legs were long enough to sit on a horse I joined the other children and we had quite a merry-go-round in threshing grain. The first threshing to come to the community was in 1883. Fred Geinger bought a machine and with four men he went up Rhea Creek and down Willow and did threshing. Neighbors would follow up and exchange work in order to have a crew. The threshed grain was put into sacks and the men carried it to the granaries.

These creek stockmen met their doom when immigrants began plowing up the bunchgrass and growing grain. They fenced the land and then the stockmen had to dispose of their horses and cattle and take up a new method

Three School Bands Present Concert at Ione

By Echo Palmateer

A band concert was presented in the school gym Wednesday evening March 16 by the combined bands of Echo, Umatilla and Ione. Each band played three numbers under their leaders, Mr. Springer, Ione; Mr. Lennville, Umatilla; and Mr. Hamilton, Echo. Echo presented a saxophone quartet, Umatilla, a brass quartet and Ione, a brass trio. A select band, consisting of members from each band, played selections directed by Mr. Springer.

Cake and coffee were served afterwards by the band mothers. The audience also enjoyed the television program in the school cafeteria.

The American Legion and its Auxiliary celebrated the Legion's 36 birthday at the Legion hall Tuesday evening March 15 with a pot luck dinner and a party afterward. This was a no host affair.

Lee Palmer has enrolled in the Oregon State college sponsored sheep shearing school to be held at Milton-Freewater March 29-30.

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of making a living.

Many present residents of Morrow county may not know where the names Clarks, Canyon, Rhea Creek, McKinney Creek, Jordan Butte, Rood Hill, Eight Mile and numerous other names originated. Les Matlock, Bill Padberg and others can identify all of them.

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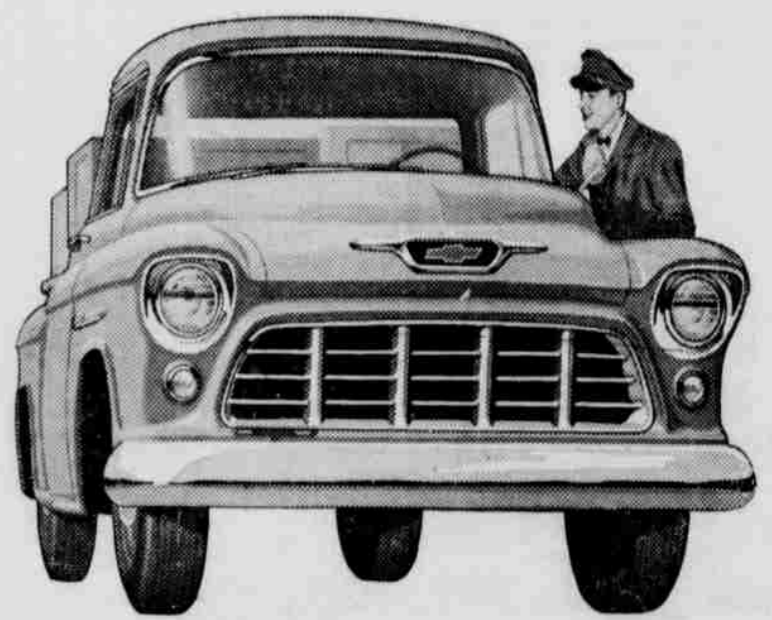
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