

# George Putnam Reviews 120 - Year Life of Oregon's Oldest Resident

(Editor's Note: The following story about Mrs. Mary Ramsey Wood, Oregon resident who lived to be 120 years old, is one of the reminiscences of George Putnam, editor emeritus of the Salem Capital-Journal and a former editor of The Mail Tribune.)

**By GEORGE PUTNAM**  
Mrs. Mary Ramsey Wood, born in Tennessee May 20, 1787, who crossed the plains with her family to settle in Hillsboro, Ore., here she lived until her death at 5 a. m., Jan. 1, 1908, was probably the oldest woman in the United States if not in the world. She was well past her 120th birthday when she died at Hillsboro.

Mrs. Wood had been honored the year before by the Oregon Pioneer society.

In November, 1905, the writer, then on the Oregon Journal staff, had a long interview with Mrs. Wood at her daughter's home at Hillsboro. The late George M. Trowbridge, for many years managing editor of the Journal participated in questioning Mrs. Woods on the story of her interesting life. The interview published in the Journal's Sunday edition, follows:

About the time that the American colonies realized the necessity of federation, while the United States constitution was as yet unwritten and the nation still unborn, there came into the world on a farm near Knoxville, Tenn., a girl baby who was destined to witness the marvelous changes that have since transformed the world and to survive out of the old time into ours. The child had learned to lisp when Washington was president in the eighteenth century, still lives to talk to President Roosevelt in the twentieth century, and eyes that a hundred years ago looked lovingly upon her firstborn, today smile with a fading light upon the "child of her old age," a woman now past 75.

**Born in 1787 in Tennessee**  
Mary Ramsey Wood was born as Mary Ramsey on May 20, 1787. Now in her 119th year, she is still quite active and maintains a lively interest in the world and its doings. Daily she walks



MRS. MARY RAMSEY WOOD  
Crossed Plains in Late 1700's

about the garden or sits upon the porch in sunny weather, to chat with neighbors, to sew, or to live over in memory scenes of long ago. And what a memory is hers! She was a tiny maid when the French revolution was dying the gutters of Paris red; she was a laughing school girl of 7 when Tennessee was admitted as a state to the Union; she was a blushing bride when the great Napoleon ceded Louisiana to the United States, and a proud young mother when Lewis and Clark tramped over a continent to "where rolls the Oregon." And she will remember her father taking down his old gun, shouldering his blankets and going out to fight the battle of his country in the war of 1812.

Though probably the oldest woman in the world, her intellect is still bright and keen, as is

shown by the fact that this last summer her testimony decided a lawsuit and settled the title to property which was decided over 40 years ago. Her answers were to the point and efforts to confuse her were unavailing. She testified regarding minute details, showing that the years have not dulled her recollection.

**Older Than Government**  
We can scarcely realize the marvelous changes that have taken place in the world during Mrs. Wood's eventful life. When she was a child people literally lived the "simple life," none of the comforts and conveniences of today were in existence. Gentlemen still wore the fancy costume, knickerbockers, frilled shirts and cocked hats, while the common people wore homespun. She was a babe of two years when this government began

business. She was 20 years old when Robert Fulton first ploughed the waters with his primitive steamboat, and 40 years old when the first railway was laid. In those old days the spinning jenny was not invented and the trust a thing undreamed of.

**Of Old English Stock**  
Mary Ramsey Wood comes from good old English stock. Her ancestors were all long-lived people. Her parents came from England just after their marriage and pushed on through the Carolinas to Tennessee, where they settled upon a farm that was afterwards the scene of the decisive battle of the Paducah Indian war. Here the couple settled and here their children were born and reared. There were five girls and boys in the family, and Mary was the sixth child, according to the old family Bible.

Kate Ramsey, the mother, died after a few hours' illness, at the age of 110, 65 years ago. The day before her death she had walked a distance of five miles, knitting all the way, as was her custom. A few years before, the father, Richard Ramsey, had dropped dead from heart disease. He was a bricklayer and contractor, and burned the brick used and built the first brick house in Knoxville.

**Married at 17**  
When Mary was 12 years old, she joined the Methodist Episcopal church South. For 106 years she has been a communicant and is still a devoted Methodist. Her folks were well-to-do, were slave owners and possessed considerable property. She was married at the age of 17 to Jacob Lemons, a prosperous farmer, and the couple lived happily together in their Tennessee home for many years. She was left a widow 73 years ago, about the time that Andrew Jackson was nearing the end of his first term as president. Four children were born to the couple, Mary J. Lemons, who died in Tennessee two years ago at the age of 98; Isaac Lemons, who died in Kansas City, Mo., 40 years ago; Nancy E. Bullock, who died at Hillsboro 38 years ago, and Mrs. C. B. Reynolds, who is now living in Hillsboro, and who, though 75 years of age, is devoting her life to the care of her aged parent.

For the next 20 years Mrs. Lemons lived with her children, sometimes with one and sometimes with another. They were settled in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky and Missouri, and the widow lived with first one and then the other. In 1852 she accompanied her youngest daughter, Mrs. C. B. Southworth, across the plains to Oregon, arriving in Hillsboro in 1853. She was then 66 years old, but rode a bay mare the entire distance from Tennessee, while her daughter and her husband rode in an ox cart. The party came leisurely, bringing a dozen slaves with them, some of whom are still alive.

After her arrival in Oregon, Mrs. Lemons built the first hotel in Hillsboro. Shortly after she married John Wool, with whom she lived until his death a score of years later. The couple ran the hotel until 40 years ago, when they turned it over to her daughter, Mrs. C. B. Reynolds, formerly Mrs. Southworth, her only surviving child. For many years, Mrs. Wood was postmistress of Hillsboro, until advancing old age compelled her to take life more easily. Since then she has done housework until the last few years, but now confines herself to the care of her person, sewing and knitting.

**Memory Very Good**  
Mrs. Wood talks in a quavering voice, but very distinctly, with a marked Southern accent. In speaking of her life, she said: "My memory of the past is very good. Sometimes things get a little clouded, but after I think a while, they straighten out. I have lived a quiet life and never had much excitement. I never had but one serious illness, which was 36 years ago, when I had typhoid fever, and as a result lost the sight of my left eye. My 'third sight' is well worn, and though I can see out of but one eye, I can still thread a needle or read large type. Since my illness I have been hard of hearing, too, and you have to shout.

"I lost my teeth 41 years ago, and since then have worn false teeth. A most remarkable thing happened last spring. I cut a tooth. Would you believe it? It caused some irritation and is considerable annoyance, interfering with the false teeth, but it is there all right. I haven't the least idea how it happened.

**Vegetable Diet**  
"My diet in recent years has been principally vegetables, though I have dieted myself. I eat three times a day, and have drank strong coffee all through life, and plenty of it. I have also eaten meat, principally pork, and still eat it occasionally. I was never any hand for sweetmeats, such as preserves and cakes.

"I weigh about 130 pounds, which is pretty good for a woman my height, about 5 feet 3, when I was young. I dress and care for myself, and do not need help from my daughter except when I have a sinking spell, as I do once in a while, when my extremities get numb.

"Until late years, I have always been in comfortable circumstances. We had land and slaves, which was wealth in the South in the old days. My daughter owns our home, and that is all that is left of our property now.

"I plainly remember the war of 1812. My father fought during the last six months under Andrew Jackson, but he was a paid soldier. We lived near the highway and I saw Andrew Jackson driving from his home to Washington to be president, and waved to him. We were all Democrats, and are still. I haven't much use for the Black Republicans.

**Horseback Across Plains**  
"It bewilders me to think of the many things that have happened in my life. I can remember when there were no steamboats or steam cars, and it was only yesterday that the telephone and electric light were invented.

"They called me an old woman when we came to Oregon, but

I rode horseback all the way, and that was 52 years ago. I remember the Mexican war plainly, and the Civil War seems like last week. I was 72 when John Brown made his raid at Harper's Ferry, and although the news didn't reach us for months afterwards, I remember the excitement it caused. In the same year, Oregon was admitted as a state. Why, 40 years ago they said I ought to take things easy, so I sold my hotel to my daughter.

"The friends of my youth have been dead for half a century, some of them a full century. My oldest boy would be a hundred this year if he had not died two years ago. Even the friends of my old age are gone, and I have only my daughter left. I am hard of hearing and blind in one eye, and yet I enjoy life, take an interest in the world, try to be as little bother as possible until the end comes, which cannot be long delayed now."

**A Cheerful Neighbor**  
Mrs. Wood can be found any sunny day walking about the yard or sitting in her favorite arm chair at her daughter's home in Hillsboro. She is always glad to pass the time of day with neighbors, and has a cheerful "how-de-do" and handshake for everyone. For many years the countryside has gathered upon her birthday to do her honor, and she greets all visitors cordially and makes tea for the assemblage.

One feels a sort of awe in talking with and gazing upon one who has seen so much and lived so long in this world of ours. Her face is a study in wrinkles. Her voice is a quaver, but her carriage is good and her manner alert. And yet, no one can see her and yearn to live 118 years.

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## Pledge Votes For Adlai Stevenson

Salt Lake City—(U.P.)—Utah's 12 votes in the Democratic National convention were pledged Saturday to Adlai Stevenson as the former Illinois governor concluded a two-day visit with Democratic leaders from the intermountain states.

The surprise announcement by National Committeeman Calvin S. Rawlings, that Utah's 24 delegates who will cast one-half vote each at the Chicago convention in August, would be pledged to Stevenson, brought an immediate protest from State Chairman Milton L. Wielenmann.

Wielenmann, his face grim, told a breakfast meeting that the state organization would support Stevenson. A few minutes later, Wielenmann told newsmen that he is resigning his state chairmanship.

## McKay Comments on Al Sarena Hearings

Baltimore—(U.P.)—Interior Secretary Douglas McKay said Friday night a recent congressional hearing showed there is "nothing to substantiate" charges of a "give away" in the Al Sarena mining case.

In a speech to the Maryland Press association, McKay said "the record shows that the department's action was dictated by law as written by Congress."

He referred to charges that the department granted mining claims on government land in Oregon which enabled the Al Sarena company to gain access to valuable timber.

He said "many of the same irresponsible sources have attempted to present a completely distorted picture" of oil and gas leasing on wildlife refuges.

## Man Accidentally Kills Himself

Spokane—(U.P.)—Harry A. Rehme, 24, Spokane, accidentally killed himself Friday night while practicing "fast draws."

Behme, whose hobby was guns, was found in his home by sheriff's officers. Rehme had called the telephone operator for help, but died before officers and an ambulance arrived.

## Girl Suffers Burns From Turpentine

Klamath Falls—(U.P.)—A 7-year-old girl was in critical condition in Klamath Valley hospital Saturday after suffering extensive burns while playing in turpentine.

The victim, Patricia Bowen, tried to light a fire with the turpentine with the aid of her brother, Robert, 10, and another 10-year-old companion. The children started the fire then tried to put it out with water. Patricia's dress caught fire and she ran from her home. A passer-by smothered the flames.

## Klamath Officials Question Suspects

Klamath Falls—(U.P.)—Klamath county police officers left here Saturday for Reno to question two possible suspects in the Edison Tupper Duffy murder case.

The 50-year-old Klamath reservation resident was found frozen and shot through the head near Klamath Falls last week end.

The Reno sheriff's office notified Sheriff Murray Britton that Burdette Ochihio, 38, and Zelma Joan Putts, 34, had been arrested in the Reno Indian colony as murder suspects.

The Putts woman is from Chiloquin, Ore., on the reservation, and Ochihio from Ft. Bidwell, Calif.

Authorities here said a gun taken from Mrs. Putts in Alturas, Calif., last week apparently was purchased at a Klamath Falls hardware store. Oregon crime laboratory officials said it apparently was the gun that fired the bullet found in Duffy's brain.

## Diphtheria Outbreak Serves as Warning

Portland—(U.P.)—The State Board of Health warned Saturday that the outbreak of four cases of diphtheria in Oregon this week "should serve as warning that communicable diseases can still strike if we let our guard down."

Dr. Harold M. Erickson, state health officer, said all children and adults should have protective immunizations against diphtheria, smallpox, tetanus, whooping cough and typhoid fever.

The health officer said the first series of injections against diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus should be given to children at about three months of age or earlier.

He said booster shots were usually repeated at 12 to 18 months of age, 6 or 7 years, 9 or 10 years and 12 to 14 years.

Dr. Erickson said children usually are given a smallpox vaccination when they are about six months old, again when they enter school and about every five to seven years thereafter.



**SOCIAL DIRECTOR**—The Rev. Ray Gibbons, New York, N.Y., pictured above, director of the council for social action of the Congregational Christian churches, will speak at Medford Congregational church Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 7:30 p.m. Delegations are expected from churches in Ashland and Klamath Falls. The council promotes church programs in racial relations, international relations, economic affairs and Christian citizenship. In the summers of 1951 and 1953, Dr. Gibbons conducted a group of Congregational Christian ministers and lay leaders on a study tour of Western Europe.

## Regional CD Plan Organized at Olympia

Olympia—(U.P.)—A regional civil defense plan for pooling transportation resources in an emergency was adopted Friday by representatives of eight Western states.

The plan for mutual aid includes rail, water, bus, motor freight and air transportation facilities. Philip D. Batson, regional administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, said the program would provide "a means of transporting people and urgently needed supplies as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Daniel Barbey, state CD chief, said individual states would be able to borrow facilities from other states in the event of critical need.

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