

Historic Birdseye Home Is 100 Years Old

By OLIVE STARCHER
 Mail Tribune Women's Editor
 More than a century ago a young school teacher arrived in the Rogue valley from Ohio, drawn by tales of rich gold

mines and the promise of free government land in a new territory under the Homestead act. A few years later, in 1856, he built a substantial log house for his wife and family—a house in

which family members have continued to live for the entire 100 years.

The man was David Nelson Birdseye, and 100 years ago in October he and his wife, the former Clarissa Fleming, moved into their new home, a mansion by the standards of those early pioneer days. Today the widow of his youngest son, Mrs. Victor Birdseye, and one of her sons, Glen, still make their home in the now historic house.

A fire burns almost daily in the fireplace in which David Birdseye undoubtedly lighted the first warming blaze; the same bookcase holds the family Bible and literary treasures; the same chairs, marble topped dressers and the same hand-made whatnot stand in their accustomed places.

David Birdseye, born in Bridgeport, Conn., in 1827, came west from Ohio with an uncle, Charley Birdseye, who always followed the lure of gold. David filed his homestead claim on 320 acres of land on the banks of a creek between the present Gold Hill and Rogue River, a creek which now bears his name.

More interested in farming and commerce than he was in gold mining, David Birdseye opened a trading post in Jacksonville—the first entry in his old ledger was made on April 10, 1852—and freighted goods from Portland and from the coast for his post.

While he ran the trading post, another settler by the name of Bob Mulligan lived on the Birdseye farm and looked after the stock.

Although the Indian uprisings were beginning to subside, a stockade which the settlers had erected still stood on David's farm; the pioneers took refuge in the fort during the uprisings, or families lived in it while houses were being erected.

David Birdseye selected a spot not far from the stockade for his home site, and first built a small cabin. When he made plans for the large home, neighbors and his farm hands helped him to build it.

They made the house of sturdy pine logs, and since it was the custom of the times, probably the neighbors held a "log raising." Sam Stickle had hewed the logs, and the house was finished inside with four-inch battens over the log cracks.

The house was made two stories high and had nine rooms. Since most of the neighboring settlers with extra rooms "took in" travelers, David Birdseye planned his new home with this in mind. There is a kitchen, dining room, living room, master bedroom and children's bedroom downstairs. The upstairs has four rooms; the four are divided by one unbroken wall and each two are reached by separate stairways. One leads from the master bedroom, and the other from the living room. Hired hands and men travelers used

the two bedrooms which are reached by the living room stair; his children and women travelers used the two reached through the master bedroom.

Those of today's generation are usually interested and amused by another precaution which must have originated with this pioneer building—the stairway and door leading to the children's room are constructed in such a fashion that when the door of the master bedroom is closed, the door leading to the family upstairs rooms cannot be opened.

The interior was white-washed in the early days. Later it was papered.

While some of the furniture came from the east, other pieces are the work of a cabinet maker by the name of John Campbell. He made the door and window frames, a wardrobe which is still in use in the master bedroom, and a combination table and bookcase which still stand in the living room. Mr. Campbell later became a Grants Pass banker and was one of the residents of that area who worked to open a stage route from Grants Pass to Crescent City.

David and Clarissa, who were married June 18, 1853, in Portland, had five children. Clarissa's family, from Wellsburg, W. Va., had crossed the plains by covered wagon, and some of the possessions in the Birdseye house originally belonged to the Flemings.

The pioneer couple's oldest child was James Gould Birdseye, who was an early-day sheriff of Jackson county. Next born was Adelaide (she and her older brother were born in the stockade) and the others were Theodora, Fred and Victor Wesley Birdseye, born in the new house. Adelaide married William Colvig, well known early-day attorney of southern Oregon. Theodora became the bride of William Jones, pioneer merchant of Woodville (now Rogue River). Fred remained a bachelor and the youngest, Victor, took as his bride the pretty and vivacious Effie Cameron. She has lived in the Birdseye home ever since her wedding in February, 1901.

Effie's family originally lived in McMinnville but Mr. Cameron, trading in the Oregonian how Rogue valley residents pulled up clumps of grass and found gold nuggets clinging to the roots, moved to Jackson county to seek his fortune.

Effie learned to love southern Oregon and the farm. She helped her mother-in-law to take care of the house—its oak and walnut furniture with marble-covered tops, so fashionable in those days, the cut glass and the painted china. She helped to wash and iron, to plant and grow the vegetables and flowers, to milk the cows, to make butter, and soap, she sewed and helped to care for the sick.

Effie and Victor had three sons, Victor Frederick Birdseye, Jackson county dairyman who lives on the Elliott farm on the Jacksonville-Central Point highway; Glen Cameron, who has lived all his life in the old log house, and David Nelson Birdseye, who lives in Springfield, Ore.

Farms are always hard work, but the Birdseyes had a lot of fun out of life too. David had bought a Chickering grand piano for his daughter, Clarissa, when she was 10 years old, and he himself played the violin. There were others who sang and played and Effie recalls that "the house was always full of music."

The years have passed swiftly. The older generation passed away, members of the younger generations scattered to other parts of the west—births, weddings and deaths were duly recorded in the large family Bible. The only remaining members of the family in southern Oregon now are Effie Birdseye and her son, Glen and Victor; her husband's niece, Mrs. W. J. Warner, daughter of William and Adelaide Colvig, who lives at 519 South Oakdale avenue in Medford; and Mrs. E. E. Gregory, the former Grace Birdseye, youngest daughter of James Birdseye, who lives near Gold Hill.

While Effie Cameron Birds-

Bedroom Furniture To Become Smaller, Realtor's Prediction

Rochester, N.Y.—(U.P.)—Smaller bedroom furniture may be in the offing as a result of the architectural trend to cutting the size of the household sleeping area.

Charles B. Cook, a real estate man, said that because of rising costs, architects find it advisable to put the bulk of building money into the living area of the

home and to condense the size of bedrooms.

"The result should bring about a furniture change similar to that which followed the shift from full-sized dining rooms to dining L's and dinettes

after World War II," Cook said. "Massive dining room furniture simply didn't fit into the new houses. The same should hold true in the case of bedroom furniture."

New York—(U.P.)—Sandwich

Sunday, November 4, 1939

MEDFORD (OREGON) MAIL TRIBUNE—31/39



This butter churn—made in the valley, wooden bowl and paddle were used by the pioneer wife and mother, Clarissa Birdseye, to make butter, and continued in use until a few years ago. For the picture, the early-day butter-making equipment were placed outdoors on the hollowed out log in which the Birdseye women made and stored soft soap. The log, now beginning to weather away, still lies in the yard.



This enormous Mission grapevine on the Birdseye farm grew from a cutting which Clarissa Birdseye planted. Rising in Jacksonville one day near Granville Sears' winery, Mrs. Birdseye asked Mr. Sears for one of his grapevine cuttings to use as a whip on her reluctant saddle horse. Arriving home, she planted the cutting and now the vine covers a large area near the house.

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