Jackson County Has Interesting History

Area Served as Crossroads Until Gold Discovered

(Editor's note: The following article about the history of Jackson county mining and farming was written by E. R. Jackman and W. B. Tucker and appeared in the Oregon Farmer earlier this month. Tucker is former county extension agent in Jackson county.)

E. R. JACKMAN and
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Jackson county's beginning, so far as white man's dominion is concerned, is all tied to gold and mules. It would have been settled anyhow, but gold and mules hastened it. Gold brought in miners–and all the good and bad folks it takes to supply miners–and the mules packed in the provisions.

Every little obscure gulch in northern California and southern Oregon had its miner, and somebody's mule was kept busy bringing him bacon, beans and boots. By the way, why is it a "canyon," or "draw," or a "coulee" everywhere except in the mining country, where it becomes a gulch? Baker county also abounds in O'Brien gulch, Sullivan gulch, Whiskey gulch, until the terrain is all gulched up.

But let's get back to Jackson county. Jackson, like Malheur, was for some time, just a place to go through while on the way elsewhere. The settlements had to start near water transportation.

Folks Tramping

So in 1835 to 1850, folks were tramping back and forth through Jackson county, trading shots with the Indians, but whites didn't live there. Too far from ocean shipping. And too many Indians. Everyone has read stories about the Indian depredations upon the immigrants. Actually, there wasn't much of this around Oregon except in two places; near the Snake river, and in southern Oregon.

The Rogue River Indians were pretty bad medicine. From '51 to '56 it was the same story, over and over. A white or an Indian committed some "outrage," whereupon the relatives or friends of the deceased, vengeance bent, seized and killed the first they could find–usually a perfectly inoffensive and peaceful person. If a white, it proved to the other white settlers that no Indians could be trusted, so they went out after all of them. But if a peaceful Indian, it showed the others that being peaceful didn't pay off very well, so, for a long time, the hotheaded ones took command.

Eventually there was an uneasy truce, then in a month or two it started all over again. Nowhere was this course illustrated any better than in Jackson county, and it didn't stop until all the Indians, both peaceful and bad, were either killed or shipped away to the coast.

Starts in 1833

It all started in 1833 when Ewing Young and Webbly Hawkhurst organized a company, bought livestock in California, and drove it overland to the Willamette valley. In southern Oregon the party was worn out and sick.

Two Indians came into the camp, peaceably enough, but the party was afraid that the two would notify their tribesmen of the weakness of the drovers, so they killed the Indians, hid their bodies, and passed on, making a successful trip, and starting stock raising in Oregon.

But the Indians found the bodies, vowed vengeance against a race that could not be trusted, and thereafter all white settlers, sooner or later, came to the conclusion that Indians couldn't be trusted either.

Probably trouble was ordained. The situation was full of it, so it occurred, and there is nothing gained from trying to hash over outrage by white followed by outrage by Indian followed by outrage by white. Anyhow Jackson county had more of it than any other Oregon county, except Malheur, perhaps due to the fact that southern Oregon Indians were a more hardy, more intelligent group than those in many other places.

Word About Oregon

Now just a word about Oregon. Etienne Lucier appears to have been the first permanent white settler in the Willamette valley in 1829. In 1832, a strange thing happened. Four Flathead Indians appeared in St. Louis, bewildered, totally unfit for their mission.

They were delegated by their tribe to go to the white man's village and bring back the white man's writings and word about his God. Two died and the other two left, their mission a failure. Their tribe had solemnly decided that the white man had more power than the Indian; therefore, it must come from God; therefore, the God was superior to theirs; therefore, they would better take steps.

Their trip, though, galvanized into action every Christian instinct for converting the heathen. Congregational, Methodist, and later, Catholic missions were established. The missionaries first came to the Willamette valley in 1834. The Indians really rolled out the red carpet; 21 were baptized within a month. The missionaries started to farm at once and in 1835 they raised quantities of potatoes, wheat, barley, oats and peas.

Immigration Starts

They were active in writing back home and in sending emissaries. By 1840 the tide of immigration started, partly due to bad times, floods, droughts, grasshoppers, and low prices in Missouri and Illinois, and partly due to the glowing reports of the missionaries.

The Hudson's Bay company had virtual control of Oregon then, granted by their charter and subsequent agreements, and looked with great disfavor upon this growing stream.

They had trading posts in Idaho and Walla Walla, where they traded the immigrants out of their eyeteeth, taking their cattle and horses or anything else of commercial value and giving down-river transportation and food. The immigrants thus sold on a forced market and bought on a monopolistic market, a condition that has raised many a hackle ever since.

Intense Irritation

All of this roused intense irritation. Jesse Applegate, a truly remarkable man, had come West with his two brothers in 1843. He settled in Polk county and was the true founder of law in Oregon. In 1846, in an effort to get around Hudson's Bay monopoly of goods and services on the Columbia, Jesse and others formed what they called the "Old South Road Company" and set out to find a new way into the Willamette valley.

They camped the first night where Corvallis is, then went south to the North Umpqua, thence across the hills to the Rogue river, following an old Hudson's Bay trail.

They crossed the divide, descended to lower Klamath lake (then in Mexico) and went on east. Trying to follow water, they wandered into Nevada to the Humboldt river, turned north and came out in the late summer at Ft. Hall, near where Pocatello is now. They led 150 wagons back over this route that same year, alleging a new way west, devoid of gouging for river travel.

Follow Trail

These immigrants lost most everything they had and cursed Jesse Applegate and all his kin, but in these days, if you could get through at all, it was a good road, so hundreds and even thousands followed this trail in later years.

It was called the Southern route, or Applegate cut-off. It wasn't much of a road–more like a poor trail. In the gold rush days many came that way. Trains divided in Jackson county, the adventurous going to California for gold, the more settled going to the Willamette valley for land.

Still they didn't stop in Jackson county.

Gold was discovered in California in January, 1848, by John Marshall, an ex-Oregonian working for John Sutter, also an ex from here.

Immediately the wagons in the Willamette valley were repaired and started their rolling, racking trip southward to get some of the stuff. The first trip had 50 ox-drawn wagons under Captain Peter Burnett, later California's first governor. They followed the Old South road to Klamath Lake, thence south. Streams of pack animals and wagons followed almost daily.

Gold Discovered

And then, suddenly the procession through the country stopped, due to mules and gold. Two boys, in 1851, searching for hobbled mules, found gold where Jacksonville is.

They told the story to two northern California miners, James Cluggage, and J. R. Poole, who wasted no time at all in staking out claims. By March 1852, Jacksonville was a city and Jackson county was on its way.

The gold was in peculiarly available form, mostly in nuggets or fabulously rich pockets, and it plunked into cradles and riffle boxes in a dependable sort of way for over 30 years.

Even now, especially in times of depression the creeks continue to give up the magic metal. As late as 1920, stores in the back country had gold scales and received pay in gold for overalls, lanterns, and beans.

15,000 Residents

Jacksonville was never the rip roaring kind of mining camp, though at its height it is reported to have had 15,000 inhabitants. These folks shifted dwelling places overnight, so any count was out of date next day. Many miners were not satisfied with a mere fortune, painfully but slowly attained by diligent use of a sweat encrusted shovel handle. They dug, found gold, gathered in the saloons at night and eagerly listened to tales of other strikes in Idaho or Montana, related by such expert geologists as Mexican mule skinners or professional gamblers.

Morning was likely to find them trading their claims for mules and feverishly hurrying to some remote mountain gulch in Colorado. They were like some fishermen who never catch many fish because they spend all their time seeking some better hole.

But here, with the boom gold town, really starts the story of white man in Jackson county. The year was 1852, for in those 12 months:

Moses Hopwood, from the Willamette valley, began to farm a donation land claim on Bear creek;

Twenty-eight new settlers came in search of land to farm;

Placer gold mining started, replacing pan and cradle;

Permanent merchants located;

Packers established regular mule train routes;

Potatoes were harvested and sold like gold bricks;

The legislature created Jackson county. (Since then, Josephine, Curry, and Coos have been carved from it);

First Sawmill

The first sawmill was built by A. V. Gillette. Lumber sold for $125 a thousand. This was called the "Ashland Sawmill," in honor of Ashland, Ohio. The town of Ashland grew up around it, so Ashland was named for a sawmill;

In the fall of '52 snow started to fall and kept falling until all roads and trails were blocked. Tobacco sold for $1 an ounce, flour for $1 a pound or more. Salt was not to be had. The considerable population of miners lived all winter on meat alone without salt. Vegetarians please note. It didn't hurt 'em a bit.

There has never been another year like 1852, when everything burst loose at the same time. Seems like a newspaper's paradise, but no paper started until 1855 when Col. William G. T'Vault came to Jacksonville from Oregon City where he was editing the first newspaper west of the Missouri river.

Table Rock Sentinel

He started the Table Rock Sentinel, later the Oregon Sentinel and for many years this paper, in the old tradition, moulded thought and promoted action in Oregon. T'Vault was a strong man, the first attorney general and first postmaster general for Oregon Territory. Also, the first prosecuting attorney for the fifth judicial district. He was in the territorial legislature and was speaker of the house in 1858. In 1869 he died from a smallpox epidemic in Jacksonville, and like many others was buried at night in secrecy.

As a study in ignorance and superstition, this epidemic is a classic, with its plethora of quack remedies, its weeks of billowing black smoke hovering over the town, the almost complete collapse of common sense, and the abandonment to fear. But this isn't a philosophic treatise on the advance of medicine, so back to Jackson county.

A golden age for farmers followed 1852. Two flour mills were built in 1854, due to big crops of wheat in '53 and '54. The largest crop of all was in '55, and averaged 30 bushels. Another and larger mill came to Phoenix.

Demand Noted

There was an insatiable demand for all of the wheat, flour, beef, bacon, beans, peas and oats the county could raise. By '55 Jackson was the most populous and by far the most wealthy of Oregon's counties. Farmers never had it so good.

Every day mule trains went in all directions. A traveler of those days, debarking from a ship at Scottsburg, marveled at the sea of mules. He counted over 1,000 before he gave up. The mules brought farm produce and gold to Scottsburg, took back to Jacksonville clothes, farm implements, salt, spices, stoves, nails, hardware of all kinds, musical instruments, and books. Other trains led south to Yreka, north to Willamette valley points, and over the mountains to Crescent City.

A good mule was worth $200. Most of the muleteers wre Mexicans and were a colorful lot. Even now the rigging of a pack animals has Spanish names, as alforjas and aparejo. Each man took care of 15 or 20 mules and a train might be a two-man outfit, or four-man. Trains of more than two-man size usually had a cook who traditionally rode the gray bell mare.

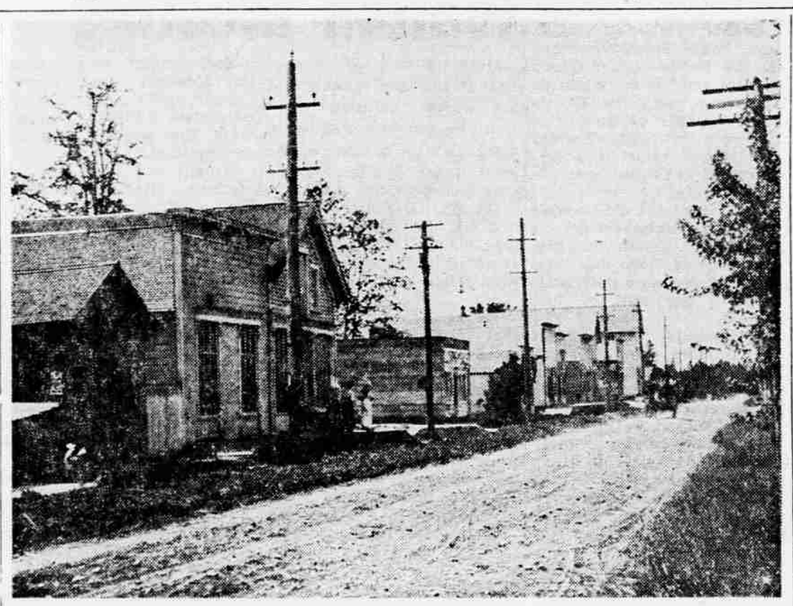
Mules were well trained and the drivers were expert. American miners somehow rarely came to have real rapport with mules, hence the Mexican tradition.

Stage Coaches

The mule trains were soon supplanted by stage coaches and then ushered in a character dear to the hearts of all romanticists and especially treasured by the history conscious in California, Black Bart.

He was a San Francisco dandy most of the time, fashionably and meticulously dressed, and evidently in the money. He consorted with bankers and other persons of unimpeachable character. But the stage coaches in Jackson county and on south to Redding were robbed with uncommon finesse by a smoothie who always got the gold, even from Wells Fargo, and never shot anyone doing it. This went on for years until finally the robber was traced by a laundry mark on a silk kerchief.

Things looked rosy in Jackson county in 1860, and were. A total of $3,000,000 in gold was taken out yearly, new business houses established themselves, fine new homes were built, and talks of roads and railroads were in the air.



PHOENIX STREET–This is the main street of Phoenix as it looked in the early 1900s. Notice the weatherbeaten store fronts and the women on the board sidewalk in the dress of the era.

PIONEER MINERS– Four miners pause for their photograph while doing some placer mining in the Jackson county area. Notice the shovels and the two pans on the wood troughs. The miners would wash gold-bearing stream gravel through narrow troughs (sluice boxes) lined with sheep pelts or felt. The lining would catch and hold the finer and heavier particles of gold.

An "Agricultural Society" was organized in 1860 and shortly began to put on a fair. The first apples shown were Gloria Mundi. They brought $1.25 apiece.

Tree Shows Age

In 1858 Peter Britt planted a Pound pear tree, which is still alive, though showing its age after 100 years. There were many other home orchards, nearly all the homesteaders had them, and they sold fruit to the miners.

But the real fruit business could not start until the rails came in 1887. J. H. Stewart, anticipating a market after the rails, planted a large orchard in 1885. The first Comice pears were planted in 1896 and have furnished the bud wood for all the Comice ever since.

A carload of Comice sold for $4,662.80 at auction in New York City on Sept. 30, 1907.

The real orchard boom got under way and 2,500,000 young pear and apple trees were set out in 1910 and 1911. If land proved worthless for other purposes, that was evidence that it was splendid orchard land. The drier and thinner the soil, the better. It hastened maturity–or something.

Gold was supposed to drop off pear trees just as it once dropped into sluice boxes. Pears are still the foundation of Jackson county's income, but tree numbers are now about 700,000.

Other Mills

Pears have been so spectacular that one is tempted to omit other kinds of history. For example, in 1868 a woolen mill started in Ashland and operated for 37 years, employing 60 persons. On the present site of the Southern Oregon Experiment station, Michael Hanley harvested alfalfa seed in 1865 and sold 50 pounds for $15.

Incidentally, this started a hornest' nest. At that time, alfala was virtually unknown in the United States, but the word got around and the market was brisk for some years until cattle began to die when turned into these wonderful fields. By 1867 the Oregon legislature considered a bill to prohibit growing of or sale of alfalfa seed because the infamous plant caused cattle to "blow up."

The Hanley sisters, Clare, Mary and Martha, still own part of their grandfather's farm. The gracious old Hanley house, built in 1872, is still standing, and was described in the "Oregon Farmer" July 18, 1957.

Another famous house in the valley is the old Birdseye place, built in 1856 and lived in continuously by the Birdseye family.

One of Best Counties

Agriculturally, Jackson is still one of the best of Oregon's counties. Its income is about like this: horticulture, $16,000,000; farm crops, $3,797,000; livestock, 3,011,000; dairy, $2,600,000; poultry, $1,056,000; total $26,464,000.

But this is taken from 2,647 farms, thus averaging almost exactly $10,000 a farm. Since many of the census farms are actually only rural residences the average income from the commercial farms is far higher.

The county also has considerable timber income. Foresters say that the Rogue River forest has the widest variety of conifers of any. Dr. Elmo Stevenson of the Southern Oregon college says there are 33 species of conifers within 100 miles of Medford.

In the same way the county has most of the wild flowers and wild plants that can be found elsewhere in Oregon and many that are not found in other Oregon counties. Trained botanists, such as Dr. Albert N. Steward, of Oregon State college, love to get far out in the hills of southern Oregon, camp there for days, collect specimens, and enjoy the priceless out-of-doors of this favored county.

And last is Crater lake. Discovered by a young prospector, John Hillman, in 1853, its flawless perfection is part of our National Park system. Visitors number 350,000 yearly, but nearly every year sets a new record.

It is probably the single most beautiful sight in the world. World toughened and life hardened souls stand on the rim, drink in the silent and incredible beauty of this spot. Poets have spoken of "the faint sound of beauty's horn."

The Rogue river is one of the more famous rivers of the West. Writers, nature lovers, fishermen from everywhere, come there to catch the fighting steelhead. Legends have grown up around it, fathered in some cases by an almost legendary character, Hathaaway Jones, who lived by its edge and spun hilarious, incredibly embroidered stories, with an air of scientific truth, in the best tradition of Mark Twain. Stories that depended upon the manner of telling, not the gag, as is the case with most of our present humorists.

River Gets Name

By the way, the Rogue was not named for any rogue, white or red. It was originally called the Rouge by a wandering Hudson's Bay man due to red clay along its banks. But the early settlers were not distinguished linguists and they did pretty well to get Rogue out of it.

Jackson has not been all prosperity, peace and pears. One of the last of the great courthouse fights occurred there, and finally, after many injunctions, faulty elections, anguished cries of "Fraud!" the Oregon legislature, in 1927, passed a bill removing the courthouse from the historic town of Jacksonville to the brash newcomer, Medford.

The future of the county is not too hard to see–for a time, at least. The smog-dimmed eyes of southern Californians become bright again in the clear southern Oregon air, and Californians flock here in increasing numbers.

The water of the Rogue and its tributaries will all be used eventually, instead of running all winter to the sea. That will mean, eventually, doubling the farm income, and that in turn will mean doubling the population.

Recreation money doesn't have the same effect as farm money, but the county is on one of the largest tourist arteries and they come and come and spend and spend, in ever increasing numbers and amounts.

Farmers of the county rank among the highest in quick adoption of new ideas. In fact, many of them, such as Otto Bohnert, Central Point, are the creators of the ideas. So the future would appear to be based upon fortunate geography, climate, water, and a quick, responsive farming personnel, eager to hydridize ever changing science with the eternal soil.

Veterans of WWI Install Officers

A. C. Lucas recently was installed commander of Barracks 540, Veterans of World War I at a meeting at the Girls Community club, Medford.

Other officers installed are G. M. Herbstruth, senior vice commander; T. B. Lynch, junior vice commander; Patrick Graham, quartermaster; Fred Strang, adjutant; Guy Davis, chaplain; S. R. Hale, judge advocate; and I. H. Watkins, three-year trustee.

The organization meets each first and third Wednesday at the Girls Community club. Barracks officers have invited all eligible veterans to attend meetings.

Five States Garner Dairy Product Prizes

Pullman –(UPI)– Five states shared top honors in the annual dairy products scoring contest held in conjunction with Washington State college's Institute of Dairying last week.

First place awards in the eight divisions of the contest were won by dairy processors from California, Oregon, Utah, Wisconsin, and Washington. A record of 235 entries from nine states and Canada were judged.

Last Thursday was a big day for Mrs. Dan Milhurst, 2315 Applegate St., who is shown here with her son, ready to take delivery of the New Ford Sedan which she won from the FORTUNE STATIONS.

The next car to be awarded by the FORTUNE STATIONS will be a NEW PONTIAC CATALINA SEDAN, Given on April 23rd

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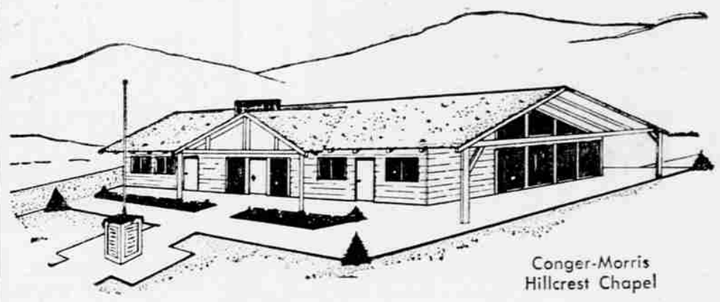

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