

Hood River 50 Years Ago

By H. C. COE

White Man's First Winter Here—Hardships Endured by Laughlin Party—Midnight Flight From Indians—Leaves From an Old Diary.

HOOD RIVER has just passed the half century mark of its first settlement. The ranks of those hardy pioneers, who alone can tell the story of its earliest settlement, are being so rapidly decimated by the Great Destroyer that very soon the last of these forerunners of civilization shall have crossed the dark river and passed into the great unknown beyond.

Those of you who now, with wondering friends, as you pass from farm to farm, point with pride to the magnificent orchards that are scattered everywhere; as you pass the steepled churches and overflowing schoolhouses, can little appreciate the vast wilderness—the utter loneliness that surrounded the pioneer settlers of this lovely valley. For lovely it was, even in its solitude. Deer, bear and elk roamed at will through the park-like forests; cougar, wolves and coyotes were in plentiful evidence; grouse and pheasants were found in abundance, while the streams were filled

FIRST SETTLER IN HOOD RIVER.



WILLIAM C. LAUGHLIN. He was born in Bourbon county, Kentucky, December 27, 1814; married in Quincy, Ill., to Mary Yeargan, April 8, 1836; died in The Dalles, Oregon, September 7, 1864.

with trout and the river with salmon. Nature was indeed lavish in her animal and plant life that could be used by the pioneer for himself and his herds.

But when winter came with its dreary snows and storms and he was unable, work however hard he may, to provide sufficient sustenance to properly care for his dumb beasts, then anxiety hovered over the pioneer's home; he eagerly watched the sunset skies for the first signs of the coming west wind that meant warmth and strength to his famished stock.

Summer, came at last; his herds became sleek and round as they fed upon the nutritious grasses, and all nature seemed to smile upon him. But soon distant rumors chilled his blood. They came nearer and nearer, until an Indian war in all its horrors was upon him. The sickening, monotonous beating of the war drum, the yells of the infuriated savages, the hissing walls of his neighbor's home—all these have been the experience of the early pioneers of Hood River.

I am under many obligations to Mrs. Elizabeth Lord, daughter of Judge William C. Laughlin, the pioneer settler of Hood River, for a very graphic and thrilling account of their awful winter's experience in our valley. You who, these winter evenings, sit by your comfortable firesides, the room flooded with electric light, let your thoughts wander back to the horrors of that dreadful winter just half a century ago. Imagine if you can the little log cabin almost buried in snow, and surrounded by hundreds of starving cattle; the desperate fight for life itself, the sickness, hunger and cold within, and then tell me if you can the quality and number of joys that paradise should hold to requite the pioneer, even in part, for the privations he has undergone.

First Winter Spent in Hood River.
BY MRS. ELIZABETH LORD.
Hood River was first settled by William Cateley Laughlin and his wife, Mary Yeargan. Both of them were born in Kentucky. They moved to Illinois in 1832; were married and moved to Missouri in 1840. They crossed the plains to Oregon in 1850, lived in The Dalles two years and moved to Hood River in the fall of 1852.

FIRST HOUSE IN HOOD RIVER.



Built by Nathaniel Coe, in 1854, near the site of the Laughlin cabin. Now the oldest home in Hood River. Mount Adams, the Columbia river and the Washington cliffs in the distance.

ing down until the immigration was all in, when they took all the stock they could get to winter for a stated price per head. Mr. Laughlin had about 100 head of horses and the same number of cattle of his own, and about 200 head of cattle to herd for others. Dr. Farnsworth had about 100 altogether.

Some time in October they engaged a flat boat to take the families and supplies down the river, the doctor going down with them. Mr. Laughlin, with two hired men and the doctor's 16-year-old son, drove the stock over the trail. The boat made the run down and landed where the ferry landing now is, in one day, while the stock took two days to make the trip. After driving the stock across Dog river, Mr. Laughlin and his men joined the families in camp, and the next day crossed the river by fording with ox teams.

Mr. Laughlin located on the Coe place and built a small log cabin. Owing to the lateness of the season and the serious illness of his eldest son, James, who had typhoid fever, he hastened to get a shelter over his family. Dr. Farnsworth took more time and built a better and larger cabin on the place afterwards known as the Jenkins place.

Everything now seemed propitious to the making of happy and permanent homes. But a short time elapsed until a very heavy snow fell. I have no date but know it was in November, and much of the snow remained on the ground until March. The cabin was in the edge of a beautiful grove of medium sized fir trees, and all of the cattle from far and near made their way to that grove. There were several men down near Mitchell's Point herding over 500 head of cattle, and they all came up to the Laughlin cabin.

STARVING CATTLE CRUSH IN CABIN DOOR. No one who has not witnessed such a condition can imagine what it was like. They came in the night, and all crowded around our poor little cabin, bellowing and hooting each other, until it seemed as if pandemonium had broken loose. On looking out, there appeared a sea of heads and horns as far as the eye could reach. They broke in the door several times. The family were terrified, as it seemed as if the walls would give way. Mr. Laughlin fought them away until morning, when he tried to drive them off, but they were all gentle animals and came to the grove for shelter. Our own cows came to us for protection and all the rest followed. Mr. Laughlin felled trees to make a large enclosure to keep them away. When the storm abated he sent an Indian with a message to those men to come and take their stock away. But the men abandoned the stock and went to their homes at the Cascades.

The cattle stayed in that grove until every one died. All of Dr. Farnsworth's and all of Mr. Laughlin's but 14 head also died. At that time there was

WIFE OF FIRST SETTLER IN HOOD RIVER.



MRS. MARY YEARGAN LAUGHLIN. Was born a Shelby county, Kentucky, January 28, 1818. Died, January 17, 1868, at The Dalles, Oregon. Mr. and Mrs. Laughlin had three children—Elizabeth, James and B. F. Laughlin—all born in Scotland, Missouri. James was drowned at Hood River in 1864; Elizabeth Lord and B. F. Laughlin reside in The Dalles.

quits a deep ravine running from just below the spring down through the grove. By spring that ravine was full of dead cattle.

After Christmas, Dr. Farnsworth became discouraged, so he and Mr. Laughlin felled a large fir tree, dug and burned and beaved out a very large canoe, in which he loaded everything he had and drifted away from Hood River forever.

This left Mr. Laughlin's family very forlorn. They had a winter of struggle and hardships. With the help of Indians whom he hired he felled trees to make corrals to separate the weaker cattle and try to save some if possible, hoping from day to day for a chinook wind. Finally God gave out. Then he hired Indians to go to the Cascades to buy horses. They were gone for a

long time and returned with shorts, and demanded half of that, of which they brought but little. Very soon this, too, was gone. Then Mr. Laughlin dug out a small canoe for himself and went up to The Dalles for supplies. While there he made arrangements with Major Alvord to lease land for a farm on the government reservation (the same land which he afterwards held as a donation claim). As soon as the snow had gone out he gathered what horses were left and hired the Indians from White Salmon, who had five canoes, to take the family up the Columbia to The Dalles, while he and his son James drove the pitiful handful of stock back over those hills where so few months before they had driven such a large herd.

From Portland to Fort Dalles in 1854

Early in the spring of 1854, a family excursion party consisting of N. Coe and wife and the writer, then a boy of 9 years, left Portland, Or., for a trip to Fort Dalles, at that time head of navigation on the Columbia river. Our first day's ride was on the steamship, the steamer Fashion, VanBergan, master. The James P. Flint was the pioneer boat on the middle Columbia, but trade seemed better on the lower river, so she was taken over the Cascades the year before and renamed Fashion.

An all day's trip brought us to the lower Cascades, where we were very hospitably entertained at the home of B. B. Bishop, brother-in-law to the Bradfords, who was in the transportation business at the Cascades.

OLD MULE PORTAGE ROAD AT CASCADES. The portage of six miles was a rather complicated process. Freight for transportation was first taken to schooners, which, when the wind blew sufficiently strong, were driven to the landing then known as Sheridan's Point, where they were unloaded onto a tram car that came around Sheridan's Point, and was hauled up by a windlass run by a very patient and intelligent mule. When the car reached the summit of the incline the mule was unhitched from the windlass, attached to the car and started for the upper Cascades alone over a wooden trolleyway, with a couple of boards in the middle of the track for the "engine" to walk on.

Arriving at his destination, the mule was unhitched, turned around and coupled onto an empty flat car and started on his return trip. A pole was lashed to his side and then to the car. This acted as a kind of automatic brake to keep the car from running over the "engine." This arrangement worked well for a while, and saved the services of a conductor, but the mule got onto his job, and when well out of sight would stop to get up more steam and incidentally to let good horses there, by seriously interfering with the transportation business. Eventually a fireman had to be added to the list of train hands.

At the upper Cascades the Bradfords had just completed a small schooner of about 40 tons burden, which was making trips to Fort Dalles when the winds were favorable. At this point stood Bradford's store, where two years afterwards a handsome frame store was built for three days held at by the savage hordes of Indians, in what is known as the Cascade massacre.

We boarded the schooner and with a fine breeze blowing we made good progress and reached Hood River, then known as Dog River. We were all very much pleased with the general aspect of the country and my father determined to return at his earliest convenience to the new lands with a view of locating in that vicinity. We reached our destination that evening at Fort Dalles, which then consisted of a government post located about half a mile south of the few scattered houses on the river. We remained over a day at this place, which had at that time but few attractions.

EARLY STEAMBOAT ON MIDDLE COLUMBIA.

The only steamboat that ever plied the middle Columbia was the little propeller Albatross, Captain Tom Gladwell, that was capable of carrying few passengers and a little freight. She only made a few trips, however, when she was wrecked or cast ashore and her hull may still be seen at any low water a short distance above Mitchell's Point on the Edgar Locke farm. As the schooner that we came up on would not be ready to return for several days, and a down river trip was likely to be tedious, we determined to take passage on the Allen, which was to start the next morning.

The trip down the river was a rough one, and after an all-day battle with the winds and waves we reached White Salmon, then the only settlement between Fort Dalles and Cascades. The sole white resident here was E. S. Joslyn, who with his wife had located there, if my memory serves me right, the year previous. It was determined to remain here over night, and as there was no accommodation on the boat—not even at the landing, very cordially invited all hands to his home, which invitation it is needless to say was gladly accepted.

It is remarkable how a man's personality is reflected in everything that surrounds him, and the welcome extended to the hungry and tired passengers and crew of the Allen by Mr. Joslyn and his estimable wife seemed to extend down to even the old watch dog, whose business it was during the night to post the moon on the events of the preceding day. The morning proved pleasant and the rest of the trip was uneventful.

N. Coe Builds First Permanent Home.

In the following article on the early history of Hood River I have referred largely on my memory from our arrival here until 1868, when our family record begins, to which I shall refer freely. Of that little band of pioneers who came to Hood River in 1854, James M. Benson of The Dalles and myself are the only ones living. Mrs. Phila Burt (nee Jenkins) died in Los Angeles, about eight months ago, at a ripe old age.

William Jenkins, with his son Walter, was drowned at the mouth of Hood river in 1864. Nathaniel Coe died at the homestead in 1868. Mary W. Coe died at Hood River in 1868. N. S. Benson died in Auburn, New York, in 1867; Charles C. Coe at Hood River, in 1872; Eugene F. Coe in Portland in 1893; and L. W. Coe in San Francisco in 1898.

The only landmark left of these early days is the old Coe homestead, on State street in this city, a picture of which is here given. Of our Indian friends, nearly all of those who were old enough to take an active part in those days have passed over to the happy hunting grounds. A notable exception is old John Silbinder, whose picture is here given. He must now be close to his centennial year and is still a hale and hearty old man. After an intimate acquaintance, lasting nearly half a century, I can truthfully say that I never knew a more honest, truthful or upright man, black or white, than old Silbinder—never wavering in his friendship to the whites, ever faking the anger of the hostiles during the troublous times of the Indian war of 1856. Charlie Copax, another Indian friend, still lives on his farm in the Yakima Indian reservation, and old George Kinney, the self-inflicted pen-

itioner of our little city, still lives, moves and has his being. Fat Williams and Jim Clucock were mere boys of about 10 or 12 years. All the rest have gone, faded before the breath of the white man, as the mist before the morning sun, and in the dreamland of their happy hunting grounds chase the red deer from his lair as in days of old.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME "DOG RIVER."

In the early part of June, 1854, N. Coe, with his son, E. F. Coe, accompanied by William Jenkins and his brother-in-law, Nathan S. Benson, acquaintances of ours from Auburn, New York, left Portland for Hood River. Hood River was originally known as Dog river, and obtained its name in the following manner. I can not give the date of the occurrence, though I conversed with a man only a few years ago who was one of the party. A band of cattle was being brought down from The Dalles and reached the river at dusk. The cattle were driven across the river, while the party camped on the east side. In the night a heavy rain storm came up, and in the morning the river was too high to cross. The rains continued for a number of days, and the party ran out of food and

CAME TO HOOD RIVER IN 1854.



NATHANIEL COE. Was born in Morristown, New Jersey, September 6, 1788. Removed to Rochester, N. Y., when a boy, traveling by ox team all the way. Was married to Miss Mary White in 1826, and removed to Hunda, N. Y., where he remained until he came to Oregon. He was twice elected to the state legislature. In 1851 President Fillmore appointed him special postal agent for the territory of Oregon, which then included all the territory lying north of California to the British line and west of the Rocky Mountains. Removed to Hood River in 1854, where he died October 17, 1888.

were compelled to kill old Towser, the dog. My mother, Mrs. Mary W. Coe, objected to the name, and as the stream had its head in Mount Hood, she proposed to call it Hood river. This name was thought very appropriate and was adopted by every one.

I have no written data to set the exact day of the departure of the party from Portland, only I remember a little circumstance that occurred the day before they left, when Mr. Jenkins brought to our house a little brown cornucopia containing 12 nice ripe cherries, for which he had just paid 25 cents. So I concluded that it must have been early in June.

The party were more than pleased with the country and decided to make their homes here. They returned to Portland for an outfit, and Mr. Jenkins sent for his family and another brother-in-law, James Benson, and then all hands returned to Hood River to prepare homes for their families. On what has of late been known as the Coe homestead they found a small log cabin, erected by Judge Laughlin, in 1852, and on the land selected by Jenkins, a house had been built by Dr. Farnsworth at the same date as the one built by Judge Laughlin.

Previously to our selection of Hood River as our future home, our folks had decided to start in the mercantile business at The Dalles and had a bill of lumber saved at the Cascades for a store building. This lumber was sent to Hood River, the old homestead was built of it, and in September my mother and country up from Portland. We were all domiciled in the old Laughlin house, as the new house was not complete but was finished so that we moved in before the rainy season set in. The house was no palace, though much better than our old home, but no partitions; only one large room 30x40. The winter, however, proved to be a remarkably mild one, so we managed to live very comfortably.

OTHER SETTLERS ARRIVE FROM THE EAST. In November, Mrs. Jenkins and her brother James M. Benson arrived from New York, making a very acceptable addition to our little colony. We had brought with us a sufficient supply of

WOMAN WHO NAMED HOOD RIVER.



MARY WHITE COE. Was born in New York city in 1808, where she lived until her marriage. Came to Oregon in 1854 and to Hood River the same year, where she died in 1888. She had five children—Lawrence W., Cornelia, Charles O., Eugene F. and Henry C.

flour, pork and beans, but vegetables were scarce and high, so having to depend upon our kind neighbors across the Columbia for them. These we had to bring from the landing on horseback, as we had no team. Our supply of candles gave out early, as we had been able to obtain but a few. We then resorted to tallow dips, but this supply also gave out, and our last resort was pitch pine torches. This soon became an unbearable nuisance, as it covered everything with soot, which got in our food and bed clothes; in fact we could have successfully posed as a band of Kentucky negro minstrels. So we gave up the idea of light and sat

(Continued on 4th page.)

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