

Orphan Fashions City From The Wilderness

By FLOYD L. WYNNE

Who was George Nurse?

Klamath Falls voters will be confronted with a measure on the November 8 ballot which proposes to change the name of Veterans Memorial Park to that of the George Nurse Memorial Park.

Who is this man, how can he be so important that they would want to change the name of a park in his honor?

Why aren't there streets, schools or buildings named in his honor?

Much of the history of this strong-willed, open-hearted man, has slipped into obscurity, although he died shortly before the turn of the century at the age of 75.

Born in Courtland County, New York, of Scotch parents on June 7, 1820 . . . George Nurse is the small lad that stood on the docks at New York waving sadly to his beloved parents as they sailed away aboard a four-master, returning to their native Scotland to clear up some family affairs.

With tears in his eyes, little George clutched firmly the hand of the man and woman who were to become his parents. Perhaps he knew or maybe just feared he would never see his parents again. In either case, he was correct.

The ship was never heard from again, and little George Nurse was an orphan.

Into Obscurity

At this point he again slips back into obscurity from which he does not emerge until 1855, when at the age of 35, George Nurse found his way to the booming state of California where the gold fever was still rampant.

Here, he tried his hand at gold mining and other jobs, finally accepting a job eight years later in 1863 to fill hay contracts for the soldiers at Fort Klamath.

A year later, 1864, he asked for and was given permission to set up a sutler's store at the Fort, where he traded with soldiers and Indians alike. He was financed by Alexander Miller, who remained Nurse's silent partner in much of his transactions.

In 1867, he applied for and got permission from the government to take up a piece of land about 60 miles south of the Fort on a little stream located between two big lakes. He packed up his sutler's stores in a big wagon and set out for the site.

It took several days to reach the land he had purchased, but when he did, he proceeded to unload his wagon and set up a temporary shelter.

It had been a long road from New York in 1820 to this spot in the Oregon wilderness in 1867, but the inevitable tides of destiny had carried George Nurse here.

He may not have realized, but he was now embarking on one of the greatest accomplishments of his lifetime . . . the establishing of a town . . . first known as Linkville . . . later to become Klamath Falls.

As Nurse looked over the site of his future home and business, he viewed an area familiar to Indians of this vicinity who used to come here for trading purposes.

Two miles below the Nurse site, another Pioneer, Wendolen Nus, had already constructed a cabin and was starting a ferry across a wide sweep of lower Klamath Lake.

Orson A. Stearns and Lewellyn Colver, soldiers at Fort Klamath, had taken up land about seven miles southwest of this spot, and slowly the forerunners of a large city to come began to take shape.

Ferry Started

Realizing that he must have a ferry or bridge across the narrow neck of the river that linked

Upper Klamath and Lower Klamath lakes, Nurse arranged with the government for permission to run a ferry across Link River.

Edgar Overton supervised work on a boat which was begun in March. Nelson Stevenson, a carpenter, did most of the work.

While this was going on, Nurse was operating his sutler's store out of temporary quarters. He was dealing almost exclusively with the Indians, exchanging articles for furs.

Meantime, Nurse had sent to Fort Klamath for lumber to build a cabin. There was a rough cut mill at the Fort, and the lumber was floated down the lake and then ported to the ferry site where building of a cabin commenced in late spring. The city of Klamath Falls now had seen its humble beginning.

From this single cabin, today's city was destined to grow.

The cabin was built on the bank of the river. Later, another cabin was built across the street which led to the river.

Slowly, Uncle George's store became the gathering place for those in the area. The white settlers were few in number, but were drawn together by common bonds in this wilderness.

Nurse prospered, and in 1869, after more than two years of operation, the ferry was replaced with a wooden bridge which was built by Nurse at a cost of between \$1,200 and \$1,500, a princely sum at that time.

A town began to take shape as other cabins were added, and Nurse constructed a hotel for travelers, something badly needed for the few travelers there were.

Saloons, blacksmith shops and other dwellings gradually appeared, with George Nurse shepherding the fashioning of a town.

In many cases, he gave the land to those who would build. It was said, one time, that he would give a piece of land to any person who wanted to build on Main Street, and certainly, his extreme generosity was visible on all sides.

Joseph Conger

He gave land to Joseph Conger at the far end of what is now Conger Avenue. Here, Conger cultivated many fruits and vegetables, became a familiar figure, and after his death was to have a school named in his honor.

A family home was constructed also by the Nurses. It was built across from the courthouse in a location now occupied by a service station. Later, this home was to become the Marshall Rooms.

Land was given for the establishment of a school, all by George Nurse. The town of Linkville was now taking shape stretching away from the river in the vicinity now occupied by the Southern Pacific locomotive and the West End Grocery.

Nurse filed a plat of the town of Linkville, then later refilled the plat in 1878 when some difficulties were encountered.

Five years after he first arrived at the site, in 1872 when the Linkville community numbered 40 persons, the Modoc War broke over the area like a bloody cloud.

Linkville was worried, and plans were made to defend the community. Volunteers poured into the area and troops were stationed in the town.

The generosity of Nurse is noted in some historical accounts of the war which indicated that some 60 volunteers arrived in Linkville on their way to the battlefield, and Nurse fed them at no cost.

The bloody dispatches that were sent out to the world on the Modoc War were datelined Linkville. A post office was set up and Nurse became the first postmaster.

The Modoc War faded with the capture and execution of Captain Jack and his crew, and Linkville was again consigned to its sleepy existence.

In 1874 a new boost was given the town when Lake County was created and Linkville became the county seat. It was short lived, though, and a subsequent election established the present site of Lakeview as the county seat although at the time of election, it was nothing more than a log cabin.

Town Plotted

When the community was 11 years old, Nurse filed another plat for the town.

In his filing, Nurse said, "This is to certify that I, George Nurse, am the original owner and proprietor of the land on which the town of Linkville, Lake County, Oregon, has been laid out, that said town is situated on section 32, township 38, south of range 9, east of the Willamette Meridian, and that the above is a correct plat of said town. All former plats of said town made by me are hereby revoked and canceled, the same not having been recorded as required by law. Block No. 12 is dedicated to common school purposes, and is hereby granted to the school district in which said block is situated. Witness my hand and seal 26th day of February A.D. 1876."

During this period, Nurse served as proprietor of the town.

Under his able direction it continued to grow and by 1880, when the town was but 13 years old, it numbered 250 people.

Nurse and H. M. Thatcher filed the plat for West Linkville this same year.

The stirrings of a municipality began and Nurse was in the forefront of the development.

However, the sands of time were running out for George Nurse and his influence in the town he had founded.

In 1882, official machinery was set in motion to make Linkville the county seat of the new county of Klamath. It marked the third county with which Linkville had been included, starting first with Wasco, then Lake, and now Klamath.

In 1883, George Nurse's limitless generosity was his undoing.

He agreed to countersign a huge note for personal friends, who then left him holding the note.

Nurse pulled his holdings together, sold all that he possessed, managed to pay off the note, with a little money left over, packed all he owned and departed, leaving behind a thriving town which he had begun, built on land which he had owned in its entirety at one time, and populated by people who had all partaken of the generosity of this man at one

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS



GEORGE NURSE in his later years is shown in this picture. It was taken only a few years before his death in 1895.

time or another.

Behind him he left a legacy of having given property for schools, for cemetery space, for part of the courthouse site as well as many home sites.

Crushing Blow

It was a bitter, crushing blow for a man who now was 63. But his was a spirit not to remain crushed. With his little remaining funds he purchased a ranch just outside the town of Yreka and settled down to begin over again.

Here he spent his remaining days.

A great lover of horses, they proved to be his undoing.

On November 26, Nurse attempted to break up a fight between two horses, was felled by one of them and died soon afterwards.

This was 1895.

The town he had founded was 28 years old, but it knew him not.

His name graced no street in that town, no school was known by his name, no store . . . its name had now been changed from Linkville to Klamath Falls and the town was already speeding toward its future destiny of greatness, with no thought for the

man who had the foresight and courage to carve it out of the wilderness.

Today, there still is no street with his name, no school, no business. The spot where his cabin and later his hotel stood now are only grassy spots of a park of the remains of a cement foundation.

The long string of stores and shops that spread from the river along Main Street have disappeared one by one and the spot that was originally Linkville is today mostly park.

Even this park does not bear his name.

Yet, surely this is one little honor that the city of Klamath Falls . . . alias Linkville . . . alias the George Nurse store . . . owes as a debt of gratitude to this founder.

Today, he lies buried in the Yreka Cemetery alongside his wife, Mary.

And voters in Klamath Falls have an opportunity on November 8 to pay special tribute to his memory. One of the ballot measures calls for the renaming of Veterans Memorial Park into the George Nurse Memorial Park.

Small tribute for a giant of a man who founded the city of Klamath Falls.



THIS WAS LINKVILLE at the age of seven. The picture was taken in 1874 from the far side of Link River, shows the first bridge that spanned the river, built in 1869 by George Nurse at the cost of \$1,200 to \$1,500. Across bridge on left can be seen the cabins constructed by Nurse for his store, and on the right, his early hotel. Only a few buildings marked the location of Linkville in those days.