

KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON, SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 1963

West Side Story-Tears And Joy Of Upper Klamath Lake Pioneers

By RUTH KING

An assignment from the managing editor to "do a story" on the development and population growth on the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake was received with "open arms." It meant a bit of time away from the typewriter on extensions 26 and 31, a covered typewriter for a day, and a trip into loved country above the valley to visit some of the folks whose earlier efforts had laid the foundation for this present Klamath country. This was the kind of an assignment that reporters welcome.

This one grew like Topsy . . . it mushroomed and ballooned. One tip led to another and penciled notes stacked up. The one-day trip became several. Old pictures and clippings, memories, "Do-you-remember-this" sessions when two people got together, gave new leads.

The story of the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake couldn't possibly be told at one sitting . . . there are too many people involved, too much hard work, too many successes, failures . . . laughter and good times the pioneer way, elation and disappointments, pride in accomplishment and discouragement . . . a panorama of human emotions.

Many of these stories can only be repeated by sons and daughters of those who came more than half a century ago from the Middle West, the states east of the Mississippi, from the South where peanuts and cotton grow, and the newer West. They are still fresh in mind for many of those who have heard the stories from parents now gone, were born here.

This one has to do with homesteading, and while it cannot be told without lapses in time, it recalls those days before astronauts, beehive hairdos and jet travel.

It was told in part by two homesteading couples who still live in Klamath Falls, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Totten of 323 Front Street and Mr. and Mrs. James Blair who live at 1527 Oregon Avenue. Not too long ago they spent an afternoon together "remembering when."

Names and places were also recalled by Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Wampler at Odessa, Mickey's father, Marion H. Wampler had the first butcher shop in Klamath Falls, located where the Van-Fleet Electric now operates at second and Main.

Marion Wampler homesteaded in 1905 on Upper Klamath Lake at Coon Point when King Gray, almost a legendary figure, homesteaded there too. The names of Casey Jones, a homesteader in the 80s on Varney or Pit Creek, Harry Poole and Rose Torrey, who later became his wife, Frank Courtade, Ike and Jim Straw, Frank Davis, a man by the name of Swan at the head of Aspen Lake, Bob Perkins, Bruce Goddis came to mind . . . there were many others.

The Blairs and the Tottens were among 12 families who had hearts set on settling on homestead land near Odessa, 18 units then offered by the federal government. They believed the year was 1910, the month July.

Each household head could file upon 160 acres of land, largely covered with merchantable timber. The units of land lay to the left of the lake front above the old road to Rocky Point and a Harriman Lodge of today, some of it near the head of Rock Creek that flows into Upper Klamath Lake.

Men had tramped over the land, had "sized up" claim sites, and had made preparations to take their families, household equipment and timber tools with them.

Those same blocks of timber and land were also sought by timber men and this is what happened.

There was to be a "run" from a certain point on the lakeshore July set for the opening. Claim filings had to be made previously in Lakeview in the Land Commissioner's office on a "first come, first served" basis.

Everyone concerned knew it would be a race in which drivers of horsedrawn rigs would be the losers. There were over 100 rough miles of road between Klamath Falls and the land of ice.

There were few automobiles in Klamath Falls at that time. Some were owned by the lumbermen who also borrowed others, all of them they thought.

Lawyers had already advised that the first men to file had preference.

The necessary legal papers for the homesteaders had been prepared here by Deputy Land Commissioner Dick Richardson who found a car, the only one left in town. Ownership has been forgotten.

Richardson, the papers safely stowed away, "lit out" for Lakeview. He didn't stop by the way-side. The lumbermen apparently did. Richardson was ready when the Land Commissioner opened the door, and thrust the documents through.

Some timbermen filed on the same units with area specifications running in opposite directions. Court actions followed and the homesteaders won.

John Totten then owned the Winema.

The date for the legal opening of the land neared. None could cross the land lines until midnight, one moment past made the "run" legal.

There is no record for this chronicle of family numbers. John and Carrie Totten had one son.

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B-R-R-R! — Mrs. James (Sue) Blair stood beside the family home on the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake in early part of century. Icicles reached from eaves to ground and snow lay deep on the roof. Few trips were made, winter or summer, to the "outside." Snow frequently buried low buildings and covered fences. Mr. and Mrs. Blair were residents of Oakland, Calif., when Blair saw a picture of Klamath Falls and came in 1909 to take a look. They homesteaded the following year. Mr. and Mrs. Blair originally came from Council Bluffs, Iowa.



SNOW RIMMED — This small stream that heads below Harriett Mountain on the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake is known as Rocky Creek on the map, to others as Rock Creek or Denny Creek. It was near this fast flowing creek that the John C. Fremont massacre occurred in 1846. Three men, Basil, Delaware Crane and a half-breed scout by the name of Denny were ambushed and killed by the Indians. They were buried in shallow graves nearby. Fremont named the stream Denny Branch and later D. E. Alexander, owner of the Rock Creek Ranch, built a native stone fountain at the site of the death camp. Eulalona Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, placed a bronze marker at the fountain. It has since been moved to the location of a new road on the West Side.



GOOD FISHING — Jim and Anton Wickstrom took time out from business to drop lines and lures into Diamond Lake to catch a few beauties. The brothers built the Modoc, used for many years on Upper Klamath Lake. They brought sand from the Williamson River on a barge to Klamath Falls.



THE HARD WAY — These logs, hauled on a logging sled, were en route to be decked at Homesteader's Landing on Upper Klamath Lake near Rock Creek Ranch, once owned by D. E. Alexander, now owned by Mrs. Page Lamoreaux of California. Winters then were more severe

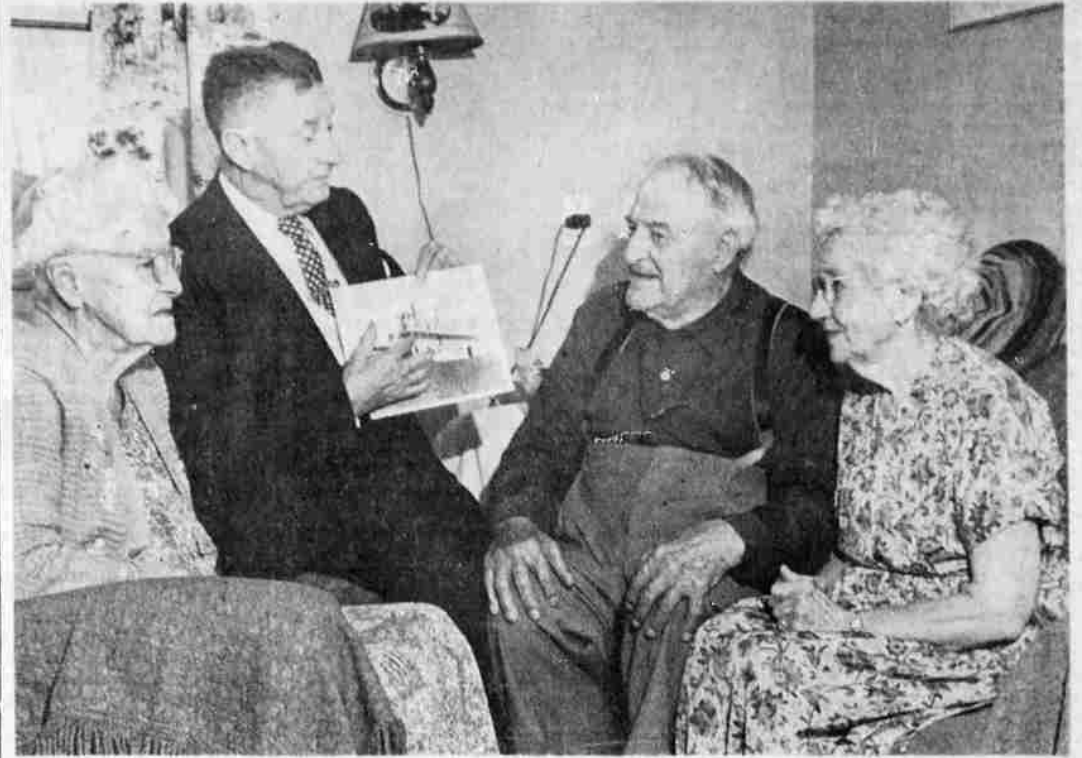
and snow was deeper than in recent years. Logs were towed to Klamath Falls mills when ice broke up on lake. Loggers are not identified.—Early Day Pictures Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. James Blair, Klamath Falls.



PLENTY OF MOISTURE — Sue Blair stood in path in snow in front of first homestead cabin to visit with unidentified guest on skis. Heat from wood fire had melted snow and left bare spot on roof of house. Other homesteaders built similar homes.



THERE WAS A TIME — Deer hunters in the Klamath Country were once allowed to kill 10 deer. Later the number was reduced to five, then to three when this picture was taken half a century ago. Hunting licenses were a dollar. Left to right are Jim and Homer Martin and Frank Courtade and their bags. Hunters were as proud then as they are now of the size of animals they brought down. Note spring scales near top of left hand side of picture at buck's shoulder.



THEY REMEMBER — Mr. and Mrs. James Blair and Mr. and Mrs. John T. Totten were two of the couples who took up homesteads on the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake in 1910. Mrs. Blair (Sue), 86, right, was born Feb. 4, 1877, at Mount Ayr, Iowa. Jim Blair, second from left, 88 last Dec. 2, was born in Dwight, Ill. Mrs. Totten, 88, left, is a native of Renton, Wash., born Jan. 23, 1875. Mr. Totten was born in Oxford, Ohio, June 24, 1869, which makes him 84. After homesteading, Mr. and Mrs. Blair operated the Empire Hotel for a time on Main Street; he owned a used car business, worked for the late Barney Chambers and for several years has owned a service sta-

tion, now leased. Mrs. Blair worked for many years from 1920 to 1938 in Underwood's Drug Store. They have no children. Mr. Totten, who came here in 1902, was employed by Klamath Lumber and Box, working on the Nancy K and the Cary Lou, handling log booms. The homesteaders and their families went to the West Side of Upper Klamath Lake for the run to their land on the Winema, then owned by John Totten. The Blair and Totten homesteads joined. Mr. and Mrs. Totten have two sons, Dave and Hugh, both of Klamath Falls. Both couples still live in Klamath Falls.



FINE NEW HOME — This is second home built on their homestead by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Blair. Small cabin, original home in which they lived three or four years, is at rear. A stone wall they built near homesite has now nearly disappeared. After family came to Klamath Falls to live, others carried away the contents that were left and eventually tore down and removed the houses occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Blair, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Totten and other homesteaders.



TROTTER TRANSPORTATION — Company came from California so Sue and Jim Blair took them for a spin. The bays are Jim and Bill. The dog is Chief. Jim Blair is driving. Mrs. Blair is on left in back seat.



ARMLOADS OF FRAGRANCE — Many years ago the beautiful pink and white Mountain Lillies grew in the forests of the Klamath country on long stems laden with as many as 37 heavy-scented blossoms. There were so many that they were taken out in quantities. As years passed bulbs were dug and taken away to home gardens. Possibly those left became diseased or insect ridden. At any rate the Mountain Lily has nearly disappeared. Some are growing where they have been transplanted but the foreign soils of the valleys are not kind to the plant, which is used to the mellow decay of forest vegetation and the cool shade. These were on James Blair homestead on West Side of Upper Klamath Lake. Left to right, standing, are Dorothy (Jolly) Sims, Idella Sue Blair, Jim Blair and Claude Starr. The lad on ground is Eddie, surname not known.