

AN INTERESTING CHAPTER IN
THE EARLY HISTORY OF
ROGUE RIVER VALLEY.

BY WELBORN BEESON.

The discovery of rich mines on Scott river in northern California by captain Scott and others in the winter of 1851, and a little later of the placers on Yreka Flats by the late Dr. Hearn, caused numbers of the hardy pioneers of the Willamette valley to leave their homes and hazard a trip over the Calapooia mountains through the famous Umpqua canyon, along the rocky banks of Rogue river and make their way over the then almost trackless Siskiyou mountains. Among the adventurers was an old gentleman who had been a resident of Lane county five years.

He started with two yoke of oxen and a wagon that he had traveled across the plains from Iowa with in 1846. He had with him his two sons, George and Charles, also three or four young men that he had known in Iowa. They made their way through all the difficulties; sometimes all united to lift the wagon over the immense rocks in the canyon and to push the wagon to aid the weary cattle over the steep rough mountain. When they arrived at Yreka they were disappointed for as yet but a small portion of the afterwards immense diggings was known; but hearing of a fine prospect on Illinois river, a tributary of Rogue river, they started back over the Siskiyou. When they arrived on Rogue river, near where Grants Pass now is, they met a number of prospectors returning from the Illinois river, with discouraging news. Here they held a council and it was decided that the old gentleman and his son George should return home, while Charles and his three companions should take the only pony, with blankets, provisions and tools that they could pack and again return to the Yreka diggings.

The four young men, three of whom are now prosperous and respected citizens of our community, toiled their weary way up Rogue river and Bear creek to the place where Phoenix is now located.

There, much to their surprise, they

found a company of U. S. dragoons encamped under command of Major Phil Kearney, afterwards a noted general. He was marching from fort Vancouver on the Columbia to fort Benicia on San Francisco Bay, and had come over from the Umpqua on what is now known as the Elk and Trail creek trail. On arriving at Rogue river opposite the mouth of Indian creek, he was attacked by the Indians, and Lieutenant Stewart had received a mortal wound. The Major made camp where Phoenix now is and Stewart there died of his wound, and was buried under the oak tree that now serves as a gate post to the gate leading from Colver's across Bear creek. His remains were afterwards taken up and sent back east at his mother's request. Major Kearney named this place Camp Stewart, and Bear creek was called Stewart's creek for several years afterwards.

Our four young adventurers arrived at the camp just as the major had performed the last rites of burial to his young officer and wishing to avenge his death, called for volunteers from among the traveling gold seekers, as there were several others besides our particular four. Charles being the only one of the four that was armed volunteered, the major furnishing him a government mule to ride. Just at dusk in the early days of June, 1851, the little company of dragoons, accompanied by perhaps a dozen volunteer gold seekers, crossed Bear creek near the present ford and, traveling all night, came to Rogue river at Indian creek, the scene of the attack a short time before; but no Indians could be found. The troops crossed the river and followed down skirting the brush. When they came to the place where lower Table Rock approaches the river, making a very narrow passage between the rock and river, on what is now known as the Billy Wilson donation claim, suddenly a shower of arrows came whizzing among the company slightly wounding several. A retreat to open ground was ordered and after consultation, it was decided to make charge on foot which was contrary to the idea of Indian warfare entertained by our Charles, who had had some experience in the Nez Perce