

Lane County Historian



Disston Saw Mill

The Lane County Historical Society

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LANE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hallie Hills Huntington, President, 89239 Old Coburg Road, Eugene, OR 97401
Mrs. Daye Hulin, Membership Chairman, 1600 Adkins St., Apt. 4, Eugene, OR 97401

Lane County Historian Vol. XXV, No. 2 Summer, 1980

Lois Barton, Editor, 84889 Harry Taylor Road, Eugene, OR 97405

CONTENTS

DISSTON — MILL TOWN	24
BIRTH OF DISSTON & DORENA - Nettie Gawley	24
BILL PATTEN INTERVIEW	27
FRANK JONES INTERVIEW	28
LENA CARR INTERVIEW	31
ROW RIVER AREA MAP	33-34
JOHN CARR, JR. INTERVIEW	37
SIGNE PITCHER INTERVIEW	41
EXCERPT FROM LOYAL & FRONA HACK JOURNAL	42
JEFFERSON IRISH — A MEMOIR - by Roger Houglum	43

Correction

The party moving to Eugene, pictured on the front cover of Vol. XXV, No. 1, Spring 1980, was incorrectly identified as Dr. Madison Canaday. It was Ambrose Canaday's maternal grandfather, Silas McMurphy.



George and Sarah Kerr family. Back row l-r: Nellie K. Pitcher, Ella K. Pitcher, Ray Kerr, Edna K. Blackburn, Clyde Kerr. Front row l-r: Mary K. McNeil, George Kerr, Sarah Kerr, Clara K. Kirk who ran a store at Dorena. Courtesy Signe Pitcher.

From the *Bohemia Nugget*

Star, Oregon 2/23/1899 The day is not far distant when the Bohemia mines with countless tons of base ore, and the timber of the hills and mountains adjacent to Row River will attract the attention of men with enterprise and capital that will build a railroad up the valley from Cottage Grove to the mines.

Star, Oregon 3/10/1899 Uncle Billy Sabin of Star has taken a contract to cut 20,000 ties and 80,000 cords of wood for Dr. Oglesby and his Cottage Grove and Bohemia railroad next summer.

7/23/1902 ADVERTISEMENT FOR BOHEMIA The Pacific Times of the 15th contains a half page write up of Cottage Grove and Bohemia and a picture of the Mosby Creek bridge on the new Bohemia Railroad . . .

1/30/1903 Eighteen miles of the Oregon and South Eastern railroad up Row River has been completed . . .

3/31/1899 Mr. and Mrs. George Kerr, of Wildwood Hotel fame, passed through town Wednesday enroute to Creswell, where they will spend a few days visiting Mrs. Kerr's sister.

6/9/1899 Dr. Oglesby who is at the head of the proposed Bohemia railroad . . . was in the city . . . He was now making arrangements for survey of the route, and as soon as done capital could be at hand providing the route is feasible.

DISSTON, OREGON — MILL TOWN

Your editor has chosen to present the story of Disston largely through first-hand reports by those who were there. All the interviews used were conducted by me except the one Hallie Huntington recorded with Bill and Elsie Patten in 1969.

For years, both before and after the logging and mill town heyday, Disston was primarily a staging area for the mining camps. A few scattered farms dotted the valleys, but as our reporters tell us, those farm folk often found employment at the mines, or as packers or hostlers for the mine traffic. There is some overlap in the following accounts, and memories about a given person or event don't always jibe exactly, but you are as competent as I to sort out the essentials.

THE BIRTH OF DISSTON AND DORENA

by Nettie Gawley



Nettie Gawley on her 91st birthday, 1980. Courtesy Nettie Gawley.

Forest Grove, Oregon March, 1980

The O.S.E. Railroad was started out of Cottage Grove in 1902. The first year it reached the Christman place which later became "Dorena". The school was named the Christman school because it was built on land that belonged to the Christmans. The name Dorena was made up of the names of two girls who lived there and went to school, Dora Burnet and Rena Christman.

At the time Disston came into the picture the railroad extended only to "Forks" about a half mile or more from the location where the mill was built. The mill was built by four men who

came from Aberdeen, Washington (Harry Crites, William and Robert Gawley and Tom Hornsby). They somehow made contact with J. I. Jones who owned the timber and the mill site.

In the summer of 1906 I worked at the camp where the men who were building the "Y" and the railroad on up to the mill site were fed. An aunt of mine was the cook and my job was to wash dishes and wait on the table.

Two of the men who were building the mill were single men and they were camped close to where the mill was being built. They would come down to the Railroad camp to buy tobacco and to grind an axe. They were Tom Hornsby and Robert Gawley, and I got to know them quite well.

Later in the winter of 1906 the mill was operating. Jones was doing the logging and he provided the cookhouse for the entire crew. His sister, Mrs. Orpard, was the cook and I went to work for her in late December, 1908. I was paid \$3.00 per week and I liked it because I was out in the "wilds".

Mrs. Orpard baked biscuits for breakfast and 12 loaves of bread every day. The bread had to be done early enough so it would be cold by suppertime, so

there was six loaves for supper and six for dinner next day.

After about a week or ten days my mother called me and said I was to come home. My father had broken a leg and she needed me. There was a "washout" at Teeters Creek near Dorena, and the train came only to Dorena, so I left my suitcase, took my nightgown in a bag and walked down that railroad all alone through the timber to Wildwood, where I stayed with friends, Hunts. Then next morning I went on down to the Star community and stayed with friends, Wicks. On Monday morning I walked on down to Dorena where I got the train and went home to Cottage Grove.

Later, some time in January, 1907, Jones called me and said Mrs. Orpard was ill and would I go up and take over until he could get a full time cook. So I went back.

Now it was in that winter of 1906-07 that the Post Office was finally set up. Crampton Jones was the first postmaster.

At that time the mines in Bohemia were in full operation and there was a great deal of mail that had to be sent through Disston.

When they started to build the mill they bought their saws from the Disston Saw Works in Pennsylvania and the company asked the mill men to name their company and the location Disston, and they sent a large picture of the plant to be hung in their office. I was there when that picture came. Also I was there when Crampton Jones received his official notice of his appointment and the stamp that was used to cancel the postage on all mail.

The timber was all up on a high flat and was logged by donkey engine. It was hauled to a point where the logs were skidded down a long chute which landed them on the flat between the cook house and the mill. One day a log coming down that chute with great force came on and hit the cook house

and took off one corner of the kitchen and damaged the range, so Jones had to build a new boarding house.

I am a bit ahead of my story. It was late in January, 1907, when I went back up there to take over until a new cook could be found. I had a young bride whose husband worked in the mill as my only help. She didn't keep the fire hot enough and the bread was slow to get done, so it was still warm at supper time and the crew ate eleven loaves, so I had to bake biscuits again for dinner.

It was the custom to feed the train crew if they arrived at the noon hour. So that day was the first day the train had been there for nearly a week due to a slide about a mile down below Disston. So I saw the conductor and brakeman coming and I told them they could just go back to Wildwood, as I wasn't feeding any more that day.

There was trouble between the mill owners and J. I. Jones over the logs. They were shot down that hill with such force that one log would jam into another and split it. There were so many damaged that way that the manager, Harry Crites, refused to pay for them. Jones had cut all the timber there and they were forced to either buy from the Forest Reserve or a tract nearby that belonged to Weyerhaeuser. Crites would not accept the Weyerhaeuser's cruise of the timber and had a cruiser come from Aberdeen to cruise



Robert L. and Nettie Gawley, July 1910. Courtesy Nettie Gawley.

it. He told Crites that the Weyerhauser cruise was much over estimated and if he bought that timber he would lose money.

Now Jones was suing the mill company for not paying for the logs and Crites was suing Jones for the damage to the logs, so there was an impasse. Two of the mill men, William Gawley and Tom Hornsby, left and went back to Aberdeen. So that left Crites and Robert Gawley "holding the bag." So Crites made a deal with Jones who wanted the mill so much. He got the mill, bought the Weyerhauser timber and almost went broke.

Crites and Gawley went down below Dorena and bought the Doolittle mill, but that's another story.

On October 20th, 1908, Robert Gawley and I was married at the home of my grandfather, who was a Presbyterian preacher, and he did the ceremony. We lived in a house at Disston until the breakup of the company. During that time in the winter of 1908-09 the forestry department at Roseburg sent a bundle of trees to be planted at the forest station on Prather Creek. It later was named Rujada. Robert and me walked over there and planted the trees, but the only one I could identify later was a red oak and it became a beautiful tree.

Now about me and my family—it's really quite a long story but I love to tell it. In 1853 two of my great grandfathers with their families arrived in Oregon. One was Samuel Barton Knox and his wife Cynthia Stockton from Kentucky. There were five daughters and several brothers and they settled on a large donation land claim east side of Row River directly east of where the Village Green is today. He later acquired the farm land on the west of the river and it includes the Knox Butte in E. Cottage Grove.

Great grandfather Morss and grandmother settled at Creswell where he

filed on a large donation land claim. There were three daughters and one son in the Morss family. The son, John Meade Morss was 23 at that time. He married Caroline Knox and they lived out their life at Creswell. Their son Samuel Benjamin Morss was born at the Knox home on January 18, 1860. My mother's parents were Wallaces. They came in 1864 and Mother, Frances E. Wallace, was born at Coburg October 10, 1865.

My father and mother were married on May 6, 1883. Grandfather gave them a good farm, about 150 acres, one mile east of Creswell and that is where the first three children were born. I was the third one, born February 6, 1889.

Grandfather Morss was a real farmer, but my father did not like to work with horses, and he loved Sunday School and church work. He wanted to be a preacher. Now that is a long story too, so I will just skip it and go on to the year 1901 when he sold a part of the farm and moved to Cottage Grove, where all of Mother's family lived. (She had 6 brothers and one sister.) That's where I went to school from the sixth grade to the end of my sophomore year in high school in April 1905. I quit school and started those jobs of washing dishes and waiting tables in cookhouses. My father had a nursery at Cottage Grove.

I knew all the Pitchers. Wilbur's father was Ben Pitcher and his mother was one of the Kerrs. Ben Pitcher's father lived in the Star community, very near to the Star school house. The place is now known as the Sphar place, and the Dorena school is located real close. It was moved there when the river was dammed.

I am sure there was no one anywhere between Cottage Grove and Disston that I did not know. The Carrs, the Damewoods were "come latelys", long after I left Disston. At Wildwood there were the Hunts and Kerrs; the Slagels

at Red Bridge which later became Culp Creek; the Bales on Rat Creek, Doolittles up on the high place north east of Cerro Gordo; the Currins, Mosbys, Allens and more Pitchers.

There is one thing more that I remember about Disston.

In the summer of 1909 the mill was all shut down and everything loose about the place was locked up in the store-room. Robert was working at the mill at Wildwood. One day Ben Pitcher was burning some trash and the fire got away from him and set the timber all along the track north of Disston on fire. There was no one in Disston but me and two other women and the two Crites boys. We had no place to go if the mill and houses caught fire, except into the river. We took pails and doused any sparks that fell. After a long while Robert came and broke the lock on the

supply room door, got a five gallon can of kerosene and poured it all on the wood in the firebox under the boiler and in half an hour he had steam enough to run the fire pump. That was a close call!

This additional story about early Disston was part of an April 28th, 1980, letter from Nettie Gawley.

One time the manager of the Champion mine came out to Disston on his way to Cottage Grove. He arrived in Disston and had to wait there until the train came, about 3 p.m. He had a gold brick in a sack. He took it over to the mill office, laid it on the floor and went out to talk to someone. Robert Gawley went into the office, took the gold brick out and held it in his hands, then put it back in the sack. The man collected the brick and went on his way when the train arrived.

Hallie Huntington interviewed Bill and Elsie Patten December 4, 1969 about early times in the Dorena area. Excerpts follow:

Bill Patten speaking:

"The first winter that I worked in the woods away from home was the winter of 1911-12 at Rujada. I fired the first donkey that set there. It was an old Seattle wideface? Clay Cleaner was running the donkey and Clyde Hastings was runnin' another one there. Wayne Owens was runnin' a loader. Old Father Smith fired the donkey for Hastings. That was the old Brown Lumber Company—one of the mills. At that particular time there was a good many mills on Row River. From where Disston was, in to Cottage Grove, including Wolf Creek, there was about 21 different saw mills, big and little. Small mills. Tie mills.

"When we used to live at Row River camp, the railroad went in there and we had planks on the ties to drive on. Every once in a while someone would slip off the planks and we'd have an awful time getting the car back on."



The J. I. Jones family at Disston, 1907. L-r: Marie, J.I., Inez, Gertrude (Mrs. J.I.) Grace, Robert. Missing is Frank who was probably "tending store" in the building to the right with the ladder on the roof. Courtesy Lillian Coffman.

From an interview with Frank Jones (son of J. I. Jones) at his home on Green Acres Road, Eugene, 3/13/1980.

I had the store there in Disston when my father ran the mill. I was 17. Dad gave me the job of runnin' the store. I did the buying, kept the records and everything. It was a general merchandise store with clothing, overalls, shirts, 3A cutter boots. They had the low ones and then the high tops and they had them with spikes in 'em. We had groceries and a medicine department—patent medicines. And bacon and ham. I didn't carry any fresh meat. And then the post office. I had a good business because at that time Rujada was a logging set up.

The folks spent the summers up there at Disston. Dad came back and forth, but I stayed up there. Chet Vandenburg and I had a bunkhouse together. So he took care of me, bein's I was the kid. Chet was the yard boss. He took care of

everything out in the yard. The shipping and all that.

Dad owned the mill. He was the head boss. Did the hiring and firing. Ralston, I don't remember his first name, he was the buyer for the Southern Pacific. We cut a lot of timbers and ties for the SP. That was mostly what we cut. It seems to me we cut around 85,000 a day. And the Southern Pacific got most of it, so we had a good steady market.

Crites started the mill. He'd built a little mill there. Dad took it over. George Smith was the sawyer in Dad's mill. The Vandenbergers were cousins of the Jones. Reeves was the millwright. Al Whitman run the engine.

That was quite a place in Disston up there. I hated to come home on Saturday. Mother was wanting me to come down. I'd get off the Old Slow and Easy

and it just seemed like the whole town was dead. Cause all that noise up there, the saw a-running and the whistlin' and everything. I stayed up there most of the time.

I did a lot of huntin' and fishin'. I used to close the store from one o'clock till three. Wasn't much business those hours. And Ralston, if anybody came in he'd take care of them. He was right there in a room beside the store. There used to be a skating rink down where Ben Pitcher lived. It was about five miles. They had a dance hall and we used to go down there and skate of an evening or on Sundays. There were quite a bunch of young people up there.

The mill office—they had a room off to the side of the store. And the door come out right into the store. He'd take care of the mail when I wasn't there.

I started the store. I bought from Allen and Lewis and the old fellow come down. We set there in the hotel in Cottage Grove. He helped me make out the list of goods that I ordered. Then he come up and helped me mark it up and told me what to sell it for and get it on the shelf. The Pitcher girl was about my age. She used to come down to the store and help me put things on the shelf, and stuff. I was goin' with her some. then there was another girl moved in up at Rujada. Margarite Bailey. I got to goin' with her and that made the Pitcher girl pretty unhappy.

I carried the mail for Alec Lundberg sometimes, up to Champion camp. Alec would start drinkin' if the train didn't get there on time. By the time the train come, if he was so drunk he couldn't get on the horse, then Mrs. Lundberg would come over and ask me if I would take the mail up. That's when Ralston would mind the store for me. She'd make me ride her horse. It was just an old plug of a horse. His was frisky, and I wanted to ride Alec's horse, but she wouldn't let me.

They had a house up there (at the

Musick). I slept there but I ate at the cookhouse. They had a cellar—they called it. I never saw so much huckleberry wine. "You leave that alone", she'd say. "I know exactly how much there is, and I'll know if you have." Alec told me once, he said, "Right there in the barn underneath the manger there's a bottle of that. If you want a drink, take it." It was good.

I forget how many miles that was. I'd go through Lund Park. I'd stop there and talk to the boys a while and then I'd get on my horse and go on.

I was in Disston till Dad sold out everything and moved away. He bought logs from Chambers at Rujada for a while. Then they run out of timber and couldn't get any more. He decided to move the mill and he dismantled it and moved it over to Reedsport.

I sold the store to McIntosh. He lived there for a while, but nobody liked him so they didn't do any business with him, so I guess he sold out and left. Mrs. Carr had the post office after that.

It took just about all day to get to Disston from Cottage Grove on the "Old Slow and Easy". I never saw such a slow train in my life. The sawmills—going up, they'd go in to the mills and switch cars and freight and stuff. We'd leave Cottage Grove about 7:00 a.m. if they got ready. Sometimes it was about 8. They'd get to Row River and by gosh sometimes it was two hours before they'd get through there. We used to get off the train and walk clear up to where the water tank was. Sometimes we'd just keep walking, and when the train come up they'd stop and let us on. Settin' there, you didn't have anything to do.

Later I had the mail route from Cottage Grove to Disston. When I had that route I had quite a few passengers. They paid taxi fare. That's the reason the railroad tried to get the contract to carry the mail—because I was takin' all their trade. I used to leave at 7 or 7:30.

I'd get to Disston about 11:30. Then I had to wait up there about two hours and then I come back. The contract with the government included that wait, I guess so people that got the mail would have time to read it and write back if they wanted to. I never had much mail to pick up. I went right straight



Cranston H. Jones, first postmaster at Disston. 1898 photo, courtesy Lillian Coffman.

through. No side roads. I went by Ben Pitcher's place. I used to go up, and on the way back I'd stop there and have my lunch. Bought my dinner from 'em. Damewood had the mail route from Red Bridge to Bohemia, so I had Al Whitman carry it for me from Red Bridge on in to the mines, and I carried it from Cottage Grove to Disston. That was in 1916. We were married in 1917 and we moved up to Red Bridge. One year while I had that contract I carried mail from Red Bridge to the Vesuvius mine. There was post offices both there and at the Champion. That one year, was it '19 they had that twenty-two feet of snow? It was the worst snow storm they ever had. From Red Bridge to the foot of the hill there was six-seven feet of snow. You couldn't even take the horses up.

I got married while I was carrying the mail. Dad was gone long before that. I was 21 at the time, having been born in 1895. Dad started in the sawmill business out at Gowdyville. That's where I was born. Then he went to Saginaw. He sold out to Booth-Kelly. After that's when he went to Disston. And when I was runnin' the store in Disston Mrs. Tennis was in charge of the cookhouse.

Lela Ward of Cottage Grove provided the following information from her grandfather's diary of 1906 and 1907:

"In my grandfather's diary (C. H. Jones, father of J. I. or Ike Jones) he tells of helping build the mill, working on the office building, cookhouse, making benches and tables, building bunkhouses, pig pens, chicken houses and cow stalls. Later he scaled logs, kept books and was postmaster, the first in Disston, which was established October 25, 1906.



Post office, Disston, Oregon. L-r: Florence Carr. Hattie Smith. Virginia McAllister. Courtesy Lena Carr.

Excerpts from an interview with Lena Carr, whose home is still in Disston near the "Miller" store and former post office. Taped 2/7/1979.

My husband was John Carr. He went first to New Mexico to homestead near his uncle, taking a younger brother who was too young to sign for land. They had barely got their tent up and started to settle when a sand storm came, blew away their tent and their hopes for a satisfactory home there. So John wrote to my cousin in Cottage Grove about jobs in Oregon. He was told there was work in the mills and the woods, so they came on here, within a month, as I remember. When they went to New Mexico they took a team, a cow and some turkeys and farm machinery in a railroad car, riding the train to look after the stock. I waited in Arkansas with the two boys till he could find a place to live.

We got here in 1911. John got a job in Disston, working on the dock at the mill. The mill owners donated lumber, rough lumber enough to put up a little two room shack for him and my cousin, one for each of them. That's where we lived when we first came out here. My husband got moved up here in April and it wasn't but a short time till his birthday. My father-in-law had put a ham in the trunk when we moved from Arkansas and my cousin and I cooked that ham and she baked a cake and we got everything ready and when our men came home at noon (we hadn't told John anything about it—he hadn't even remembered it was his birthday)—when Leo didn't go on to his house just beyond ours, but come right on in with

John, John felt funny. But when he saw the table he remembered. So we had his birthday dinner and he really enjoyed it and then after that we lived in this little shack for quite a while and Lawrence was born there. I had a midwife from Dorena.

J. I. Jones was runnin' the mill. I think it was about 1919 they moved it away because I believe it was the year Paul was born. They was still a lot of people lived around Disston after the mill closed down. We kept the store goin' for quite a while, but afterwhile it got so it was just too much for me, so we give it up and just had the post office in the front part of the building. I had the post office for 32 years, and then we leased the store out to some people by the name of Miller.

Lundbergs and Pitchers and Whitmans were some of the other people that lived there. Billy George was one of the first people to settle in the community. There was Smiths, too; George Smith. And McIntosh had the post office before me.

We had a little one room school house right close to the railroad bridge that went to Rujada. There was a man by the name of Roberts taught there for about half a year when Florence and Johnny went to school. I imagine there was twenty kids in the school when we first went there. It was a mill camp, you know. Then after while they kept drifting away to other places and for about a half year my five boys was all there was in the school.

We had one teacher I'll have to tell you about. His name was Nance and he was the funniest person that we ever run across. He and his wife lived in a little house up on the Pitcher place. She'd come down there during the day and they'd just fight back and forth right there in front of the children. One of my sons was in the first grade, and Austin Pitcher was another and the Williams boy. There were three of them

that started to school together. This Nance would take those little kids on his lap, to have their lessons,—set those little ones up, and the older kids put them up to a thing. He wore his watch (son John remembered it as an alarm clock) around his neck, and they'd turn it so they'd get out sooner. He couldn't ketch 'em at it. He didn't know how it happened, and oh he had an awful time. Didn't seem like it was time for school to be out, but it said so, and he'd let them go. It was quite a while before he found out what was happening.

He had a boy about 11 years old that would steal every pencil and everything he could get his hands on. The teacher did so many funny things, and was fightin' with his family all the time. Finally the directors of the school asked him to resign, and he didn't want to, of course, so they sent to the county superintendent and asked him to get rid of Nance. He called Nance down and told him to resign, and afterward we found out that down in Texas where he had lived he had really been in the asylum. He had all kinds of recommendations written out. 'Course he'd done it himself. He'd read 'em and make us think it was other people recommending him. But they found out nobody had.

In the beginning we had the post office inside our house. We had it screened in with chicken wire, and they got the mail through a window that went out on the porch. The porch was boxed in at that end, and I'll have to tell you something that happened one day when I was lookin' over the mail. There was a woman by the name of Cox that lived right there close and she was always right there when the mail come. Several women would come and sit in my sitting room there. She got up and was standin' there lookin' through the wire and I had ordered a chamber for the bedroom, so I'd have it when the baby came, and it was in a box that was

pretty good sized. She saw that box and said, "Oh, there's my hat."

So then after the menfolks had all got away and there was some of the women left there yet, I told it on her. I told them what it was. In our family the chamber pot has been Mrs. Cox's hat from that day to this!

Mrs. Cox was one of those kind that always managed to get in on everything and have her say, and she made it kind of hard on me, in a way, because my house stood back of where the post office and store building was, and she lived right close and she got water at our well. We had a pump outside and she'd always manage, when I'd go up to get my box that had the money orders in it to take home for the night;—well, if I happened to be up there after that box when my husband came home from work she'd make it a point to be over there, and if he asked where I was why, "Oh, up there with Mac."

Anybody that went up toward the mines, if they had to stop in Disston they usually came to my house because there was no other place around that would take 'em in, and I let those that had to stay all night and get up to the mines the next day, why I just let them stay at my house.

They tried to pay me but I never would take anything. There was one man I never had seen before that came there. He was quite a young man and he came. He had no way to get to the mines till the next day, so he stayed all night, and he wanted to pay me for the night's lodging and I wouldn't take anything, so the next time he went to town why he come by in the night, I guess, going up to the mine. The next morning I found a nice casserole outside my door—a glass baking dish. Then afterwards while that man was working at the mine, He got married to a woman that lived at Philomath and they stayed up at the mines for quite a little while.

There is a church building in Disston

that has been turned into a dwelling lately that was built by some North Carolinians, quite a number of years ago.

Our children all finished the eighth grade in the Disston school except Roy who finished his eighth grade in the *new* school house. Roy and Claude went all through high school, but Lawrence and Johnny, there wasn't any way for them to go. When the other children came along there was a bus.

After the mill closed down John worked for the railroad. They had one of those speeders, those little hand cars that they went back and forth on. He was working a lot down towards Dorena. There was three on the crew.

I used to bake bread for my family, then after while there was a bakery went in at Cottage Grove and I used to get my bread. It would come up on the train or the speeder for the store.

Mr. Lundberg used to carry the mail on horseback up to the post office at the Champion. He was a real busy man. Besides the mail route he used to pack people in to the mines. He had a cabin up at the Musick mine that is still there.

Signe Pitcher is Mrs. Lundberg's niece and when she was 17 years old she came over here from Sweden to live with Lundbergs. She had a very good education in Swedish, but she couldn't talk our language, so she went to school with Ethel Scott who was teaching then. She translated their language into ours. And you know, she doesn't talk very broken.

Three of our boys worked up at the mines. Paul and Claude worked there. Mrs. Plank was teaching the school here when Claude went to school. She had only boys, and little old Claude, he learned to embroider. He just took to that so much, and once up at the mine when Irma was workin' a scarf he said, "Let me show you how I can do that." So he started in and did quite a little of

ROW RIVER & VICINITY

Scale: 1 inch = 2 miles

LEGEND

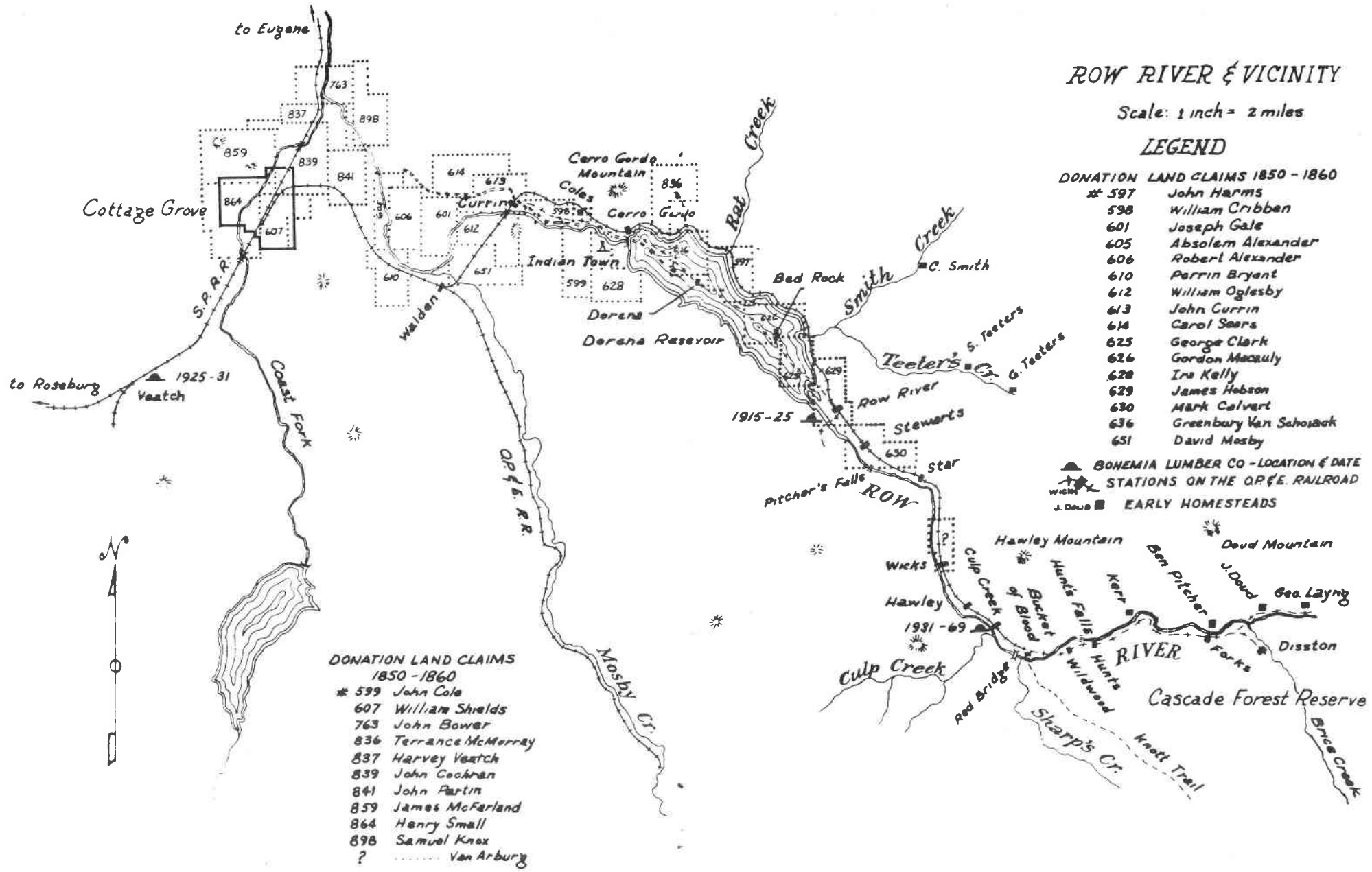
DONATION LAND CLAIMS 1850 - 1860

- # 597 John Harms
- 598 William Cribben
- 601 Joseph Gale
- 605 Absolem Alexander
- 606 Robert Alexander
- 610 Parrin Bryant
- 612 William Oglesby
- 613 John Currin
- 614 Carol Sears
- 625 George Clark
- 626 Gordon Macaulay
- 628 Ira Kelly
- 629 James Hobson
- 630 Mark Calvert
- 636 Greenbury Van Schoisack
- 651 David Masby

▲ BOHEMIA LUMBER CO - LOCATION & DATE

⊙ STATIONS ON THE O.P. & E. RAILROAD

■ EARLY HOMESTEADS



- ### DONATION LAND CLAIMS 1850 - 1860
- # 599 John Cole
 - 607 William Shields
 - 763 John Bower
 - 836 Terrance McMurray
 - 837 Harvey Veatch
 - 839 John Cochran
 - 841 John Partin
 - 859 James McFarland
 - 864 Henry Small
 - 898 Samuel Knox
 - ? Van Arburg

Map of the area, from *The Bohemia Story* by Wally Hunter



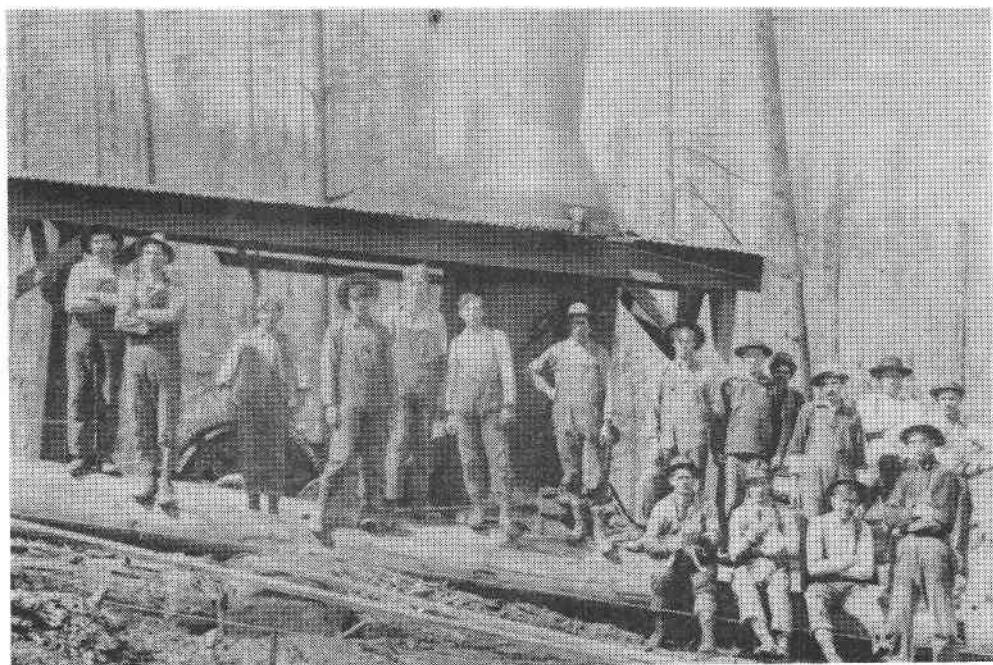
Four generations in front of Disston post office, 1919. L-r: Florence Carr, Grandpa Egbert, Lena Carr, Grandma Egbert (seated), Florence Proudft. Courtesy Lena Carr.

it. Pretty soon Irma said, "Well, you can do pretty good. Do you want to finish that up for me?" So he did. She told me here a few years back that she still had that scarf.

Mrs. Plank had brought flour sacks and thread and things to school and got the boys started at it, you know. I'd save

all the patterns I could find and when Florence was expecting her first child those boys got in and made a baby quilt.

The foreman at the mill when we first came to Disston was quite a clown. His name was Chet Vandenberg. During the first Bohemia Days celebration he rode one of the floats, dancing with a dummy.



Donkey engine at Disston, 1907. Courtesy Lillian Coffman.

Excerpts from an interview with John Carr, Jr. (oldest son of John and Lena Carr), taped 2/22/1979 at his home in Culp Creek.

By the time I remember much the mill at Disston was shut down. That was our playhouse. I can remember when it did run. The railroad brought logs over from Rujada. They had a spur round the back side of the pond. And the track was tilted and they had a big pole they stuck in there, and pull ahead with the train. It pushed the logs in the water. I can remember watching that.

My first year in school Signe had just come from Sweden. She was 17 years old but she started the first grade with me to learn the English language. I can remember that. She only went one year.

When the loggin' camp at Rujada was running there was a good many kids in school. The loggin' camp was over where the ranger station was. All the woods workers lived there. My first teacher was Ethel Scott. Her father was Wes

Christman. He had a farm down here at the mouth of Peters Creek. She taught my first year. I had a man teacher in the second grade. His name was Bousard. The kids called him Buzzard. Then a little gal from Texas. Her name was Winifred Fair. She was a great friend of Signe's. She boarded with the Lundbergs, where Signe lived, while she taught school.

I worked with Alex Lundberg when I was a kid quite a lot. Packin' surveyors to the hills. And I went with him one trip clear back to mountain meadows on the headwaters of the North Umpqua and up to Umpqua hot springs. We packed a doctor from Eugene. He was vacationing, and he also wanted some samples of the hot springs.

There was 11 tents in this outfit. Took 22 pack animals. The doctor, and Bake

Stewart and his daughter, and then they had a cook. They even had a tent for their dogs. They stayed about a month. I didn't go in when they took 'em in, but I went with Alec and helped to pack when he brought 'em out. They came down through Bristow Prairie and Fall Creek to Camper's Flat on the middle fork of the Willamette. -

We usually started from Disston when—two summers he packed government surveyors and I wrangled horses for him most of the time. We'd load it on a wagon—put four horses on a wagon. We had to go up Sharps Creek then. Champion Creek road only went to the foot of the hill. To the old Champion mill. That was all the road there was. The rest was a trail. But we'd go up Sharps Creek with a four-horse team and wagon to the Musick mine. Then we'd leave our Wagon and pack out from there. They had to move their camp about once a week. We'd move them and give 'em fresh supplies, then we'd have to come back down and git the wagon and git another load and go up. They'd be ready to move again. All summer long we did that. I see'd a lot o' those old trails. Got a lot o' bumps o' yellow jackets. I remember one time we was goin' down Horse Heaven. It was a steep bank down into Windy Creek, and right up the other side and right on top of that bank was a big yellow jacket nest. And Alec led the pack train and I followed behind to watch the packs. I was behind and those yellow jackets they—my old horse went buckin' down hill. I landed up right out in the middle of those boulders and never broke a bone.

Lundberg must have been in his fifties about then. Little short Swede. He always wore a full beard. I never saw him without it.

Alec had the mail route. There's quite a lot of tales about him. He was quite a boozier. He'd get drunk—he didn't show up. They found him settin' down there,

leanin' against his wagon wheel. If the horses moved, they'd a killed him. He'd passed out. He took off one day. One old horse got into clover hay and got the colic. They didn't dare let him stop or lay down. We finally got it to work when we poured two or three bottles of Alec's home brew down that horse.

He made his own. He made beer. He made wine out of elderberries and huckleberries and blackberries—everything. Dandelion wine. But he made his own beer. Used a malt. I think you could buy it in a can—malt with hop flavor, put yeast in it and it would work.

Disston was real quiet after the mill moved out. There was loggin' goin' on at Rujada and they run the speeder up. The folks had a store there (in Disston) for several years. Lundbergs and Carrs that was the only families that lived here. Charlie Herrington had a house down there by the old school house. He went to southern Oregon. When Pitchers moved up where they are now, McAllisters bought the old homestead that Ben Pitcher started. That's all there were when I was in my teens.

Once in a while we'd have Sunday School in the school house. They'd have a little Sunday School class and then we'd have to set for a whole hour's preachin'. That didn't enthuse me very much.

We lived on the river—the creek. We fished all the time. We caught trout. That's all there was in there—lots of trout. I remember people would come up—"No fish in there". I'd just git in the river with an old pole. No weight. Just put a pin on and let it float with the current. We'd catch a whole string of fish. With a worm or salmon eggs if we could git 'em, or huckleberries or whatever. We used to git those little minnows that would go in schools in the summer time. We'd herd them up under a rock and then hit it with another rock, and kill the minnows. We used those for

bait. If we got a great big school of 'em we'd wiggle a dynamite cap out of someone and use a dynamite cap on 'em. To stun 'em enough to take up a bunch. Then there was the little bull heads. We used an arrow on a little bow with a sharpened nail on the end of it. We'd lift a rock over, and there he set. Just put it down under and plunk him in the head. We used those for bait. And crawfish tails. Take the tail off and peel the white meat out of it.

I have caught them bull heads in my hand but you'd bring your hand around like this, and then they'll dart. They are so fast you can hardly see 'm go. But they set still while they *are* still. You'd put the nail down almost to 'em and hit 'em before they took off. A lot of 'em would git away, but we got a bunch. Our bait can—you remember the old Prince Albert tobacco can with the flip lid? That was our bait can we'd carry in our pockets. There was a lot of fish in Brice Creek. Not very big, but we caught 'em up to fourteen inches. A lot of 'em would run around 6 to 8 inches.

You know them Scandinavians liked fish. I used to ketch a whole string of them fish. I'd go by and give 'em to old Alec Lundberg. Didn't want to clean 'em. I've fished for him a lot. He never did fish much. But he liked 'em. He'd clean 'em. He'd take 'em down to the creek and clean 'em.

On the bench back of my Dad's place they had the old log chutes. There was one up on the east side of the canyon that went up there maybe a mile. I've walked it many a time when I was a kid. They put cross logs and then a big one on the bottom and then some on each side. They put their logs in that chute and run 'em down—a whole string of 'em. Hooked the donkey on the back one to pull—push the whole string. They'd come off o' that hill wild and down into the pond.

They made the chute with a big log in the middle and then two here (parallel

lengthwise at the sides of the big log). Then they put big metal bolts, with the heads stickin' up about three inches, in the steepest places to keep 'em from—hold 'em from runnin' wild—foulin' the chute. They fouled the chute a lot too, but they had a haulback and the main line that followed the chute, they ran over big old metal drums. That was the roller to keep their lines from foulin'. 'Stid of using a block like later loggers did, a regular block, it was jut a big old metal drum with grooves in it to fit the cable. It had to rub against something, and it rolled on that instead of wearing a stump out or gettin' fouled.

You can still see where the old mill pond was. Where they used that first old chute. I don't know how deep that old bark and stuff was, but it got afire after they burnt the old mill down, and it burnt for over four years. It was at the foot of the hill. It must have been awfully deep. I can remember when there was snow on the ground where it would break out, bein' old blue, hot flames comin' right up out of the snow. That burnt for about four years.

That's just a jungle in there now. Things grow awful good there where it burned all the rosin out of the ground.

The logs come out of the chute and they rolled down the hill and into the pond, and this place before they'd get to the pond just kept buildin' up. Old bark and knots and limbs that was shook loose.

They had a donkey up on the hill to get the logs to the chute. Then they used a big machine with big drums like they pulled cars up and down the old gravity roads, to pull the logs down the chute. They just set them in there, run them ahead till they got a whole string, then they'd pull the back log. That run the whole thing. That just guided 'em down to the pond.

They had a yarder up on top. They had a machine there that set 'em in the chute, 'n kicked 'em down. Then—they

got so many—they'd just hook the main line on to the back log, and they took off down. Yeah, I can remember back—"Don't you get on that other side of that track! You stay right on this bank!" The water would really splash when them things come rollin' down the hill. 'Course the kids liked to watch that. When that old donkey'd take off we was always there to watch it. I was pretty small, but I can remember it. Yeah, it was pretty dangerous to be around and they wouldn't let us get close when the railroad was unloading over there, either.

I remember that teacher, Nance. He was a dingbat. He had an old Westclock alarm clock for time. He'd pick the little kids up on his lap. We'd git the little kids to turn the clock up. He had it settin' up there and while he was busy everybody would sneak by and turn the clock ahead. He found out we was turnin' it ahead and then he wore it around his neck, so we'd git the little kids to set it. He was runnin' around there with an alarm clock hangin' around his neck to keep us from settin' it up. Then while he was tryin' to teach the little kids, why they would set it up. Myron's sister was settin' on old Nance's lap and he was explainin' all this and she was turnin' the clock the wrong way. We had an awful time gettin' *that* straightened out.

Some of the kids come down from the loggin' camp at Rujada. All the woods workers lived there at that time. O'course they run a big boarding house for the loggers too. It was four or five miles up to the old Upton camp. That was—well, I was just a kid then, but it was built stationery, but the one I can remember was the Anderson-Middleton camp. They had what they called Camp Two up there built right on the railroad. Their cookhouse and bunkhouse was all right on the track. Right where



Alec Lundberg on the right. Courtesy Signe Pitcher.

they were working. People ate and slept right in the cars.

My Sis was three years older than I was. We'd wait on customers in the morning when Mom was busy with the mail. She had the post office for 32 years. They built that store, the one that's there now, that Miller was in, in 1940 or '45. The earlier one was before I went to school. It was on the railroad—faced the tracks. It hadn't been there for years, but it was on the railroad. There wasn't any road then, just the railroad.

Oh, there was an old road down along the river. Come up through the stumps a single track.

From an interview with Signe Pitcher at her home in Disston, 8/17/1978.

I came from Sweden to start with. My aunt and uncle, they had come here in the early 1900s. They had a home at Disston and one at the Musick. I used to go up to the mines, afoot or on horseback.

Uncle Alec carried the mail. He'd go in one day and back out the next because it was too far, and then when it snowed—kept piling up—then the miners along the way would have to raise the mailboxes, and by spring those mailboxes was way up on the trees.

My aunt's maiden name was Olsen. Elizabeth Olsen.

This right here was my husband's home. The Pitchers bought from some of the first homesteaders. Ben Lurch was one of them, but that was way back. My husband's grandparents, the Kerrs, homesteaded down this side of the river about 4 miles. And she used to go up to

the mines and cook—at the Annie mine. Then my husband's mother, when he was a little tiny—before he ever could walk, I guess—used to go up there, and his mother would cook, and his father would work for the miners. So that's the way he grew up. When his dad passed away why we stayed right here and took care of everything, and his mother passed on before that so we just took over, and here I am. We raised hay and cattle. We have 500 acres.

From the Eugene Register-Guard, 3/13/1979

Signe Pitcher of 39935 Layng Road, Disston, died March 11, 1979 at the age of 81. She was born April 8, 1897, in Stugun, Sweden, living in the Disston area for the past 64 years. She was predeceased by her husband Wilbur, on October 8, 1972 . . .

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Loyal R. and Frona Hills Hack, circa 1910. Courtesy June Awbrey.

June Awbrey has provided this glimpse of her parents' record book, kept during the first year of their marriage. She says, "They were Mr. and Mrs. Loyal R. Hack, married June 29, 1910. They lived in a house at 8th and Willamette, Eugene. Mother was Frona Hills, daughter of Shredian Hills and granddaughter of Cornelius Hills. She was a school teacher and my father was a carpenter."

August 1910

Aug 1	Sugar	.50
" 1-2-3	Bread	.15
" 3	Oranges	.20
" 6	Bread	.05
" "	Sweet potatoes	.25
" "	Cheese, Milk, Olives	.40
" 8	Tomato Catsup	.15
" 9	Milk & Matches	.15 ¹⁰
" "	Lemons & Bananas	.35
" 11	Sweet Potatoes	.25

"	"	Bread, Crackers & Peaches	25-
"	13	Lemons, B.N. Powder	.60
"	"	sweet potatoes, salmon	.41
"	12	Sausage, Bread	.05-
"	13	Peaches	.15-
"	12	Butter 2 lbs. eggs 3 doz.	1.50
"	13	Sugar	.25 ⁰⁰
"	"	Wheat flakes & Milk	.20
"	15	Bread & doughnuts	.10-
"	16	Salmon	15 ⁰⁰
"	"	milk	10 ⁰⁰
"	"	Water Melon	20
"	17	Rice, Peaches, Milk	.60 ⁰⁰
"	"	Tanglefoot, Bread	.15-
"	18	Bread	.05-
"	20	Sugar Peaches	.65-
"	"	Olives	20
"	19	Bread	.05-
"	21	Bread & Cookies	15
"	22	Mush, Bread	15
"	"	Peaches, Melon	30
"	23	Peaches, starch, coffee	50
"	"	milk	.20 ⁰⁰
"	24	Mush, cake, bread	.55-
Aug	25	Peaches & Sard	\$ 1.65 ⁰⁰
"	"	Milk & Bread	25 ⁰⁰
"	27	Bread, Crackers, Soap.	60
"	26	Bread, & Doughnuts	20
"	29	Sugar	.50
		Total.	<u>12 20</u>

JEFFERSON HENRY IRISH: A Memoir

by Roger J. Houghlum

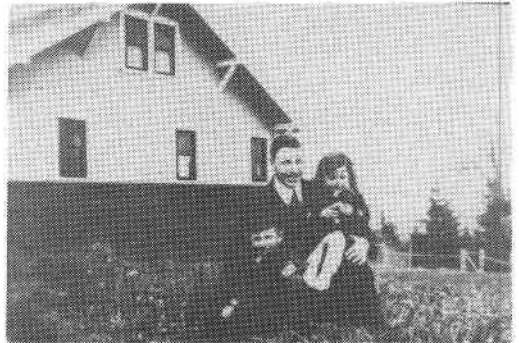


Jefferson Henry Irish, 1859-1941. Photo circa 1915. Courtesy Romane Studios.

My grandfather, Jefferson Henry Irish, at the age of 50 decided to change completely his "life style", giving up a lucrative legal and business career in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, to become a hard-working farmer on a hill-top ranch overlooking Eugene and the upper Willamette Valley. Born in Pontiac, Michigan in 1859, he taught country school briefly, then went on to earn his law degree at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Entering legal practice in Detroit Lakes, he was soon serving as district attorney of Becker County, and operating his own law office as well. With savings from his law practice, he purchased an entire business block in Detroit Lakes, and managed that for a number of years. In

addition to these activities, he was very active in church affairs, and in wide demand as a public speaker. Then, suddenly, in 1911, he completely gave up this colorful life; moved to Eugene; and started to carve a profitable farm out of 20 reluctant acres of pasture and woodland just west of the summit of Chambers road. He used to recall with a chuckle that his first task upon moving to Eugene was that of pronouncing "Willamette" correctly. In Minnesota everyone had pronounced it Willamette in the manner of Wilmette, Illinois—well-known throughout the Middle-West.

The property sloped up and westward to The Braes whose natural amphitheater was the occasional site of summer drama by a group from the University; then southward to just north of the line of the present Lorane Highway; while the east boundary was Chambers road. Only the southeast quadrant of this rectangular tract was cleared, the balance was covered by a thick growth of scrub oak with an occasional fir. Between the small temporary ranch house and Chambers road were at least three magnificent white oaks, perhaps 200 years old, and well over 50



The newly completed Irish farmhouse at the crest of Chambers road, circa 1918. L-r: Roger Houghlum, his father Oluf A. Houghlum, Kathleen Houghlum. Courtesy Roger Houghlum.

feet in height. Access to Eugene was only by horse and buggy during the winter months, and the only practical route was south on Chambers to its junction with the old Lorane road at the bottom of the hill; then east over the ridge near the present Crest Drive Elementary School, then northeast to a junction with South Willamette near Dunn School. During the dry season an automobile *could* be driven over the same route, but until the Lorane road was improved by blading, and Chambers graveled, it was considered both dangerous and inadvisable. The nearest telephone was at the Rutherford place at the intersection of Chambers and Lorane roads, but it was frequently difficult to get the attention of the Eugene operator with the hand-crank unit installed there.

When grandfather took possession of his new ranch, first priority was given to the construction of temporary living quarters, and that of a series of large chicken houses that stair-stepped down the hill to the south. This was soon followed by two "brooder houses" to the west that housed the batteries of incubators and provided a warm environment for the newly hatched chicks. Next major project was the planting and care of both loganberry vines and fruit trees in the sunny southeast quadrant. These required one pail of water each during the dry season for the first several years, so Grandpa Jeff would pump two pails of water, and then carry them at least 200 yards downhill to the orchard; empty them; and then walk back to the pumphouse in the blazing sun for the next load. Since there were about 50 vines and trees, at least 25 round-trips each day were necessary. No wonder Grandpa was lean and wiry!

Jeff (and everyone called him that) decided to raise only pure-bred White Leghorn chickens, and he was one of the first in Lane County to specialize in

this comparatively new strain of poultry. By 1920 his flock of laying hens was at least 1500, and their watering and feeding required constant attention. At the same time, he was developing a lucrative market throughout the Pacific Northwest for "hatching eggs" from his purebred stock; and these sales always "peaked" during March and April of each year, requiring constant trips to the S.P. depot with crates of carefully packed eggs.

The presence of so many chickens, of course, attracted the attention of hawks from the nearby woods, and it became necessary to have several loaded shotguns always at hand in case one dove on an unsuspecting hen. Grandpa was quite an expert shot, but unfortunately the blast of pellets from the gun usually dispatched both the hawk *and* the chicken. After such an incident, one could be nearly sure that our next meal would feature chicken in some form—usually stewed.

Construction of the two story, four bedroom ranch house proceeded very slowly at first, principally because of the problems in hauling large quantities of lumber from town by team, and that of finding skilled carpenters who were willing to work on such a remote job. Commuting from Eugene was impractical unless you owned a car, and few carpenters owned automobiles in those days! Meanwhile, other members of the Irish family lived in town in a newly-built house on Taylor street, just south of 11th Ave. This included: Edith Irish (my grandmother); Sue Jacobson (her mother, and my great-grandmother); Merwin R. "Pat" Irish (my uncle, and founder of the Irish Cash Stores chain); and Gertrude I. Irish (my aunt). When the new ranch house was finally completed, Edith and Sue moved in, but the children remained in town to attend public school and the university. It obviously was completed some time prior to the date of the photograph

shown (1918), and was still standing in 1976. However, today, nothing occupies its former site, and the entire ranch area is part of an extensive real estate development.

Now that you've seen this 1918 photo showing both the Irish home and the author at the age of perhaps 7 or 8, the question might occur to you: How did you feel about your grandfather at that time? Frankly, I was a little scared of him! He wasn't a large man—perhaps 5'6" and 140 pounds—but he always stood ramrod straight, and appeared taller. His complexion was ruddy, his hair bristly and unruly, and his eyes a penetrating blue. When he spoke, his voice reflected years of experience in dealing authoritatively with miscreants in the courtroom—no wonder a youngster who had disobeyed his grandmother would literally quake in his shoes! But I had one thing in my favor—I was his first grandson, and he considered me very important for that reason. Time helped too, for as I very slowly matured, and finally "topped" him in height, this relationship changed, and we found much of common interest to talk about.

The white-steeped First Baptist Church, located on the northeast corner of 8th Ave. and Pearl, was the center of much of the Irish family's social life in the period centering around 1920. Jeff Irish was a gifted and eloquent public speaker with a powerful delivery. He was much in demand as substitute pastor, Sunday School superintendent, and as a teacher. When he stood at the pulpit, or before a class, everyone heard perfectly, and few dared to fall asleep. Sunday, of course, was always the most important day of the week. First there was Sunday School; then a long morning service that usually lasted until at least 1:00 P.M. Most Sundays there was an evening service as well. On Thursdays, there was always the traditional Prayer Meeting that would seldom

dismiss until 9:00 or 9:30 P.M. Seldom a week passed at the church without some sort of a social affair, such as a pot-luck dinner, or a lecture on the Holy Land, illustrated by hand-colored stereopticon slides.

Evenings at home, the family gathered around the living room table in the circle of light cast by a green-shaded kerosene lamp. Reading fare was quite sparse. I can recall such periodicals as the Sunday School Times, the Northwest Poultry Farmer, and the fascinating issues of the National Geographic. The lights of Eugene, quite limited in number in those days, were readily visible to the northeast through the front windows; the wood stove sputtered and hissed with its load of green oak wood; and on stormy winter nights the towering firs just to the south of the house creaked and twisted in the southerly gale. Nine o'clock was bed-time for a poultry farmer's family since everyone had to be up and dressed by at least 6:00 A.M., ready to start collecting eggs, and feeding and watering the chickens. (One always took a large hot rock wrapped in a newspaper to bed with them to blunt the chill since none of the bedrooms was heated!)

In the fall or early winter months, one might wake to an unforgettable sight—the entire upper Willamette Valley filled with a tumbling sea of fog, lapping against the blue Coburgs to the north, the Cascades to the east, and the Coast Range to the west. Yet the sky was cloudless, and the morning sun shone brilliantly.

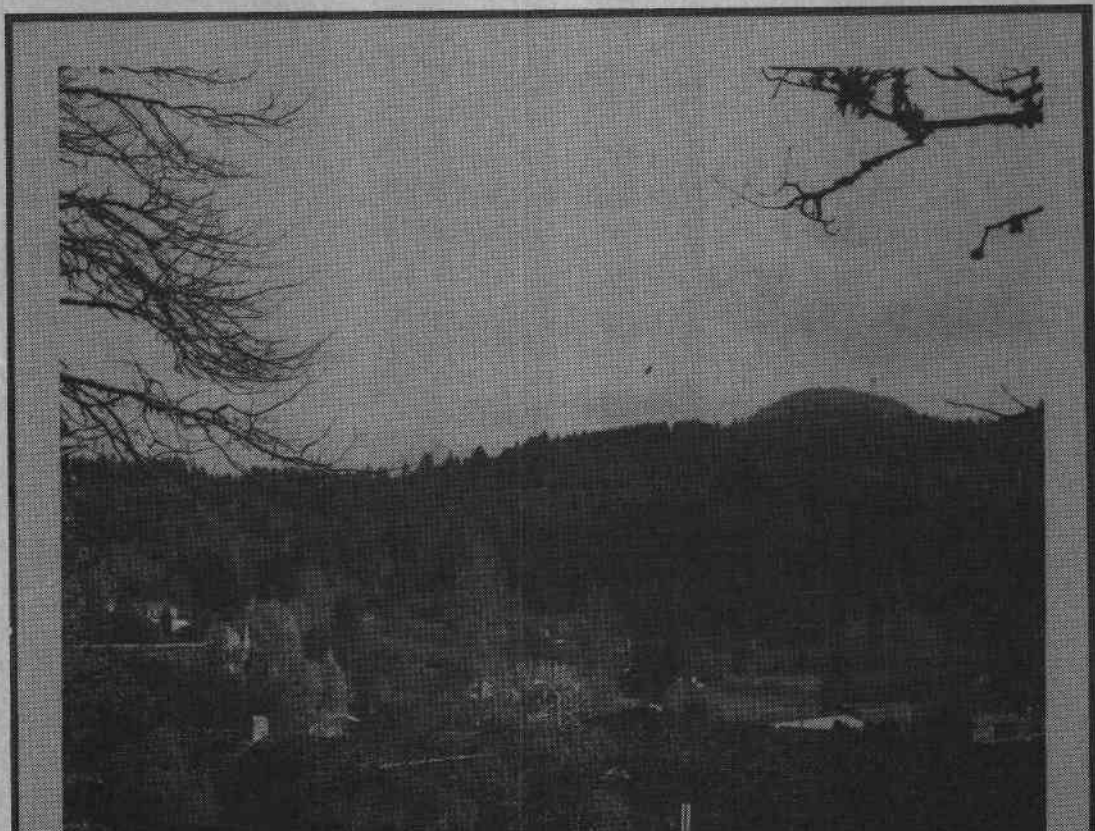
Today's ecologists to the contrary, the air purity of the Eugene area was considerably less than "crystal clear" in the period prior to 1920. Weeks would drag by in the summer months during which the city of Eugene and the valley floor were almost completely hidden by a pall of smoke and haze—some of it from forest fires and local industry, and some stemming from the widespread

use of woodstoves for family cooking! But by far the most noticeable environmental change has been the amazing growth of vigorous stands of timber on what were previously brush lands of very little value. And many well-groomed pasture lands, in turn, have returned to plots of worthless, or at best marginal, grazing lands in the span of some 60 years.

Eventually, the Irishes tired of this stressful and isolated existence, and Jeff decided to retire, and move his family to Eugene. (He was well over 65 at that time.) Once Merwin Irish's business venture, the chain of Irish Cash Stores in a dozen or so Oregon cities, seemed solidly successful, Jeff

chose to move again, this time to Newport, Oregon, where he could be near his youngest daughter, Gertrude (Mrs. Harrison Bradshaw). Buying a house on a large lot in nearby Nye Beach, he tried his hand at flower and vegetable gardening, and soon established a reputation with the neighbors as a man with a truly "green thumb". His dahlias, I recall, were especially spectacular.

On August 25th, 1941, after a long, exhausting bout with pneumonia, Jefferson Henry Irish died in his sleep at the age of 82. His life had touched those of many of the early residents of Lane County and Eugene, and there are still a few of us who fondly remember him.



Jeff Irish's favorite view from his ranch home (looking southeast). Just visible over Blanton Hill is the tip of Spencer's Butte. 50 years ago much more land was in pasture and crops; and only 2 houses could be seen! Courtesy Roger Hougum.

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