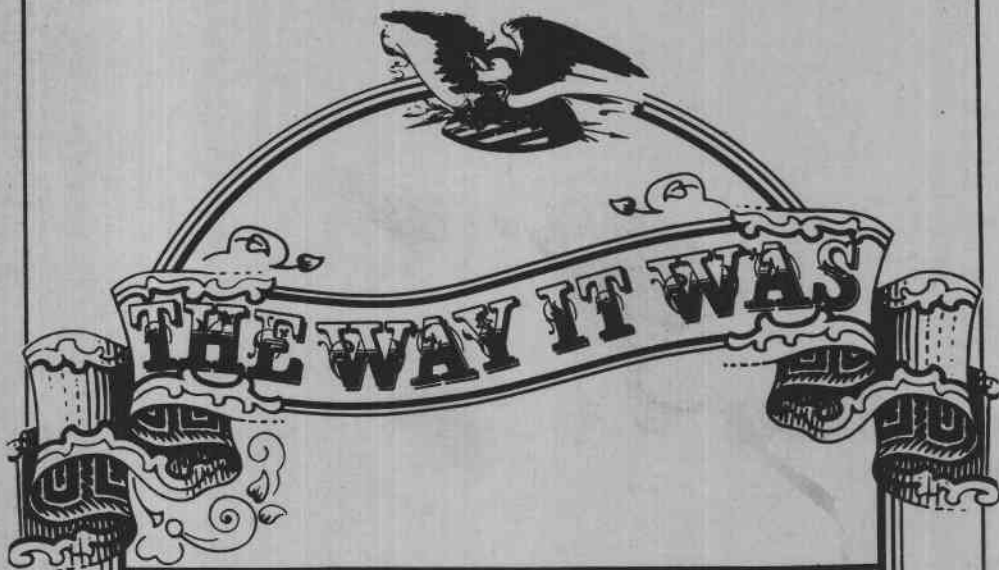


# Lane County Historian



The Seavey Ferry. —Courtesy Smith Mountjoy Collection, Lane County Museum

**The Lane County Historical Society**  
**Vol. XXIV, No. 2** **Fall, 1979**

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# LANE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**Lane County Historian**

**Vol. XXIV, No. 3**

**Fall, 1979**

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

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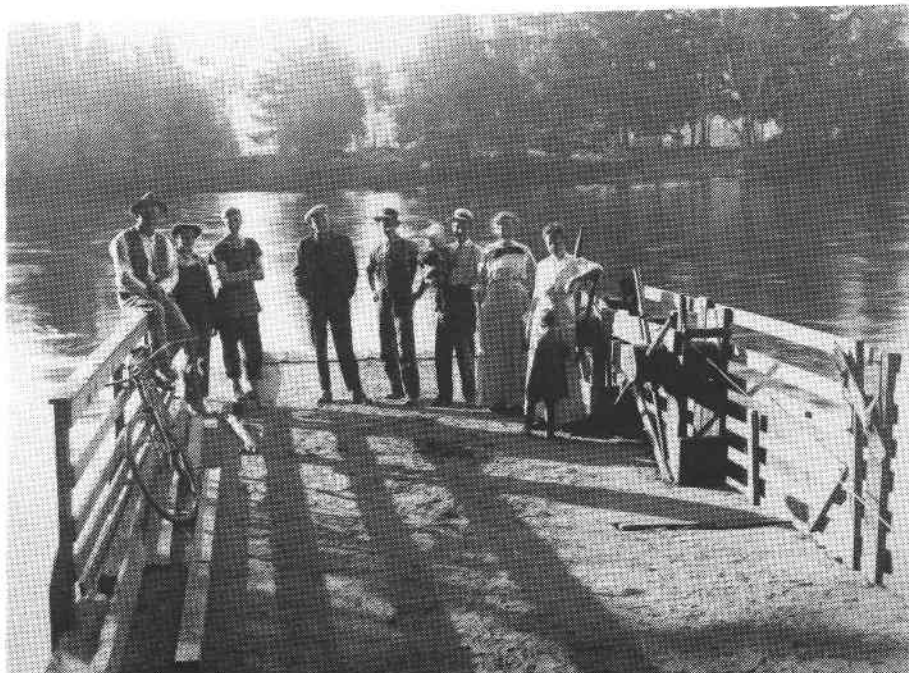
## THE SEAVEY FERRY

*(I am indebted to the following persons for information about the Seavey Ferry: George Logan, Hazel Seavey Kienzle, Alice Forrester, Kate Elkow, August Rodakowski, Farmer Franklin, Harry Harbert, Veda Chase, John Jaqua, Palmer King, Grace Small, the staff of the County Museum. — Editor)*

The Seavey Ferry crossed the McKenzie River about four miles east of Armitage Bridge. It was put into service by Alexander Seavey, probably shortly after he took up residence on the north side of the river in 1855. There was a trail (in later years a dirt road passable by horse and buggy in the summer) running from the Seavey ranch along the north side of the river to the Armitage crossing, but the ferry provided the main access. During the years when Seavey's grew hops and until the CCC completed an improved road along the north side of the river in the '30s, all the hop pickers as well as the hops on their way to market crossed on the ferry.

In 1979 Harvest Lane in north Springfield gives access to the old ferry landing. The river channel has changed since the ferry quit operation. There is a gravel bar along the north side. That bar was building the last few years the ferry ran. Users built a platform out about one-third of the way across to drive out on because the river had become too shallow for the ferry to get up to the bank.

George Logan of Springfield remembers a time when the cable broke and the ferry swung down river 150 yards. They pulled it back up with a team of horses and repaired the cable. When George Logan went to work for Seavey in 1927 the ferry in service was fairly



Passengers crossing on the Seavey Ferry.

—Courtesy Smith Mountjoy Collection, Lane County Museum

new. The old one was pretty well rotted out, but still sitting on the bank. He couldn't tell me whether that old one was the original ferry or one in a series.

There was a "fin" about 2 x 14 feet on the upper side of the boat which could be let up or down that helped propel the craft across the water. When it was lowered into the water the current ran against it, pushing the ferry across the stream, guided by the cable from which it was suspended. Mr. Logan said you could set the ferry after you got off and it would go back across the river by itself.

Rodakowski's lived on the farm at the south end of the crossing in the early years of the twentieth century. There was a big tree on their place to which the cable was anchored. Mr. Rodakowski said the ferry was used occasionally for a year or two after his marriage in 1941. Then it remained tied to the bank until purchased for use in a movie being filmed in the area. He pointed out that Bob Goodpasture also had a ferry before the Goodpasture bridge went in. That ferry also was sold to the movie makers.

One recollection tells of a time when the river got really high and brought the ferry right to Alexander Seavey's door. He, being a seaman, knew how to get it back to the river. Alexander's youngest son, Jim, was in charge of running the ferry one summer. When people came to the south bank and wanted to cross they would halloo to raise somebody at the house, and sometimes had to wait an hour or more before they could reach anyone to bring the boat across to them.

Another recollection of a former user was that this ferry was still in operation after Spores and Deadmond's had both discontinued service. Fishermen who had been fishing the McKenzie River found it very convenient and appreciated the crossing service because it saved Springfield residents a good many miles.

There is no record that this ferry was ever licensed for public service or ever charged a fee for crossing. Since it

served primarily to link the Seavey ranch with the outside world, it was really a private transportation system made available to others as a convenience.

The ferry platform could accommodate two model T's at one time. It would haul a team and wagon with 30 two-hundred-pound bales of hops, plus the driver and the ferry man, a total of four tons or better. It was important for the load to be well distributed during late summer months because there was danger of going aground if the load got off balance.

Harry Harbert, who began work for Seavey at the age of 14 and worked for several years between 1918 and 1924, was one who crossed the river hundreds of times on that ferry. Mr. Harbert was born on the Deadmond place down river about two miles, and remembers that the Deadmond Ferry was still operating in 1914. "Everybody who had to cross the river in those days built a ferry," he said, "because they couldn't afford to build bridges which were likely to go out during high water."

Mrs. Elkow began working at the Seavey hop yards soon after she came to Oregon in 1919. She hoed and trained hops during the summer months, then picked hops in the fall. She remembers that it took 10 to 15 minutes to cross the river. During hop-picking season when the rains began, often the river would be high and it was a fearsome crossing and went much faster.

She said whole families used to come, bringing their cow and sometimes chickens as well. The cow would go in the pasture with Seavey animals, to be milked morning and evening for the family table. The family spent the month in a cabin or tent provided for hop pickers. Seavey's ran a store where the pickers could buy staples. Back of the store was a dance hall where dances were held on Saturday nights. Usually some of the pickers had musical instruments and provided music for the dances. Many of the buildings burned years ago, but the store and dance hall



Hop pickers' tents, Seavey hop yards ca. 1920.

—Courtesy Lane County Museum

building still remains.

During the growing and picking season, hop-yard workers who did not live on the ranch would come to the river bank each morning and wait for the ferry. A man from the ranch brought the ferry across about the same time each morning. During the depression years many people from Springfield would join the regular hands at the river bank, waiting for the ferry in hopes that they might get a day's work. If there was nothing for them that day they walked back to Springfield after the regular help had been ferried over to work. When the picking began there was work for everyone.

W.T.D. Franklin was foreman at the hop yards for many years. His son, Farmer Franklin, arrived from Missouri with the family in 1912. He started high school in Springfield in 1913. He went to school on horseback from the Seavey ranch, crossing on the ferry and riding into town each day. He recalls that everything went out from the Seavey ranch by ferry until about 1930.

His mother was a friendly person who enjoyed other people's company and felt isolated on the Seavey ranch, partly because it was almost impossible for a woman alone to wind those windlasses. A husky man was hard put to it to manage alone if the water was low and motive power came primarily from the cable. There was a pike pole on the ferry to help them along when needed. He noted that the ferry hauled 500 people and their rigs in and out during the picking season.

In the winter when the river was really raging they couldn't cross at all. And the Franklin's were there until 1937. One Thanksgiving and one Christmas stand out in Mr. Farmer's memory as times of isolation. There'd be lots of drift in the river, even big trees, and it was too dangerous to attempt a ferry crossing. Sometimes they'd be marooned for two or three weeks at a time. Once a child died on the ranch during high water and his body had to be taken on horseback to Mohawk and across





Alexander Seavey in living room of home he built for his bride, Sara Anne Blachley. The fireplace is dated 1858.  
—Courtesy Hazel Kienzie

Hayden Bridge to get it to the mortuary.

This brief excerpt from WILLAMETTE VALLEY PORTRAIT AND BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD, page 909, describes the man who first put the Seavey Ferry into operation.

"Alexander Seavey was born in Rockland, Maine, April 1, 1824. As a lad he played in the sands of Penobscot Bay . . . As he grew older he used to go out in fishing boats, and his joy and sorrow was gauged by the size of the catch which he sold as a means of livelihood. Gradually the shore limit grew tiresome, and to realize his dreams he embarked in a sailing vessel in the West Indian trade in 1849, shipping as mate on the bark Challenge. The Challenge . . . burned off the Brazilian coast, the crew making their escape in boats. For three days the faithful mariners wandered around the open sea, and after reaching land remained on Brazilian territory until the following July.

Taking passage on a Scotch ship, Oughtertyre, from Aberdeen, Scotland, Mr. Seavey learned that the former

crew, with the exception of the captain and the cook, had died of yellow fever. This boat was destined for San Francisco, and one hundred and seventy-three days were required . . . on the trip. Once in California Mr. Seavey went to the mines of Trinidad . . . where he ran a pack train. Then he started a little store on Althouse Creek, Josephine County, Oregon, in partnership with George O. Collins . . . At the end of five years Mr. Seavey sold out to his partner and went on a mining expedition to the Rogue River. In 1855 he came to Lane County and took up one hundred and sixty acres of land in the hills, three miles north of Springfield, and there engaged in stock-raising on a large scale, starting with a band of 350 cows and calves. With the money made from this successful enterprise he purchased his present farm of eleven hundred acres, and in 1883 started hop-raising on a small scale, gradually increasing until his one hundred acres are invaded by an army of pickers every fall and reap for their employer a handsome fortune . . ."

## **JUDGE WALTON TO THE RESCUE**

(Notes from the life of Caroline Sexton, Oregon Pioneer)

Caroline Sexton was born in Ohio on the first of May, 1826. At the age of eighteen she married Hiram Niday. They became interested in the far west, finally crossing the plains with ox teams and arrived at the old Foster place in the Willamette Valley in the year 1852. In the spring of 1853 they came south to Applegate, Josephine County, and located a farm. The Rogue River Indians, under the leadership of chiefs John, Sam and Limpy, went on the warpath. Mr. Niday flew with his family to Fort Vannoy on Rogue River, a distance of three miles. The next morning three men, Tom Frazell, Tom Mungo, and a friendly Indian, went out a short distance from the fort to get some horses. The Indians attacked them. Frazell was killed, Mungo fatally wounded, and the friendly Indian severely injured. Mungo, however, managed to crawl into brush and fight the Indians off until the friendly Indian, wounded as he was, ran to the fort for aid. The company set out, rescued Mungo and brought him to the fort. There being no doctor at the fort, my mother dressed his wounds and cared for him. He died the next morning at daylight. The friendly Indian recovered.

There were not enough men to defend Fort Vannoy, so after staying there two days, Mr. Niday decided it was unsafe and on a dark and rainy night took his family on horseback, slipped by the Indians and ran to Fort Halstead on the Rogue River just above Grants Pass. The next day the volunteers captured a young Indian chief by the name of Taylon, who, with his band had murdered seven white men on Galice Creek. He was tried by the volunteers and sentenced to die. He was then taken out of the Fort and tied to a laurel tree, and while hollering to his Indians to rescue

him, was shot by the volunteers. My mother witnessed the execution in 1854.

Mr. Niday located a donation claim on Jump-Off-Joe Creek near the present site of Hugo.

In April, 1855, Mr. Niday died, leaving Mother with three small children, one a baby eight days old, in an unsettled country full of hostile Indians.

On the morning of October 5, 1855, the Rogue River Indians again went on the warpath. On that day occurred the greatest numbers of murders of the early pioneers that Southern Oregon ever knew. The details I do not care to enter here.

At the time, my mother and family had just finished their breakfast. Mother came to the door looking south along the Jump-Off-Joe valley and saw smoke rising from the scattered farms and houses. She had an idea that the Indians had broken out and began to gather her gems together and bar her doors, preparing a defense for the children and herself. She was determined to sell her life as dear as possible. (Another narrative of Mrs. Hiller's in the file from which this story comes mentions Mrs. Niday's three hired men working in the field October 5th, and she was washing. She called the men to the house and prepared for defense.) Just as she had almost completed her preparations, four men came running by and Mother asked them to help her get away. The Indians had shot one man's hat off and another's bridle rein in two. One of these men was Judge Walton of Eugene. The other men I do not know. Mr. Walton said to my mother, "Have you any way to get away from here?" Her reply was, "No, all I have is my race mare in the barn." And he said, "Good. So much the better. You will need a race horse to outrun those red devils."

The other three men began to get uneasy and scared and started to go on. Mr. Walton, seeing this, drew his six-shooter and called, "Halt! I will shoot the first man who attempts to leave. Now there are three of you here and three little children. Each one of you take a child and it will not be good for the man who fails to take a child to the fort. I will bring the woman with me, or the Indians will get my scalp."

By this time everyone had left the place except my mother and Mr. Walton. He then asked my mother if she had any money in the house. She said, "Yes, I have two thousand dollars in buckskin sacks in the trunk."

He said to her, "You go and get the money." She went into the house, but the trunk was locked and she could not find the key. She then came out of the house again and Walton asked her if she got the money. She told him she couldn't find the key.

"Take the axe and break the trunk. I will watch, and if I holler you come." They expected the Indians any minute. With the aid of the axe she broke the trunk open and got the two bags of dust and ran out of the house and gave it to Walton. He said to her, "Get on that horse and we will go. Don't attempt to ride sideways. Get on squaw fashion."

As they left the house Walton looked down the road and saw the Indians. He said to my mother, "Here come the Indians now, two or three hundred, as near as I can guess."

Now comes the ride for life to Fort Leland, a distance of five miles over rough mountain trails. My mother and her children were the first family from Fort Ben Halstead above where Grants Pass now stands to her place near Hugo that escaped being murdered by the Indians. My mother's race horse ran away with her and Walton was soon left behind. She passed the three men who had the children about where Mr. Ward lives now (1927). They asked her to stop but she couldn't stop her horse, so they told her to keep on the trail and to tell them at Fort Leland that the

Indians were close upon them. After getting to the top of Grave Creek, she succeeded in getting her horse stopped, and jumped off to tighten the saddle. In doing so, she broke the cinch and then waited until the men came up. She asked them to fix it, but they told her that the Indians were too close; to throw that saddle off and jump on bareback. She did as she was told and took off down the mountain. Just as she started the Indians fired upon her, but luckily did not hit her.

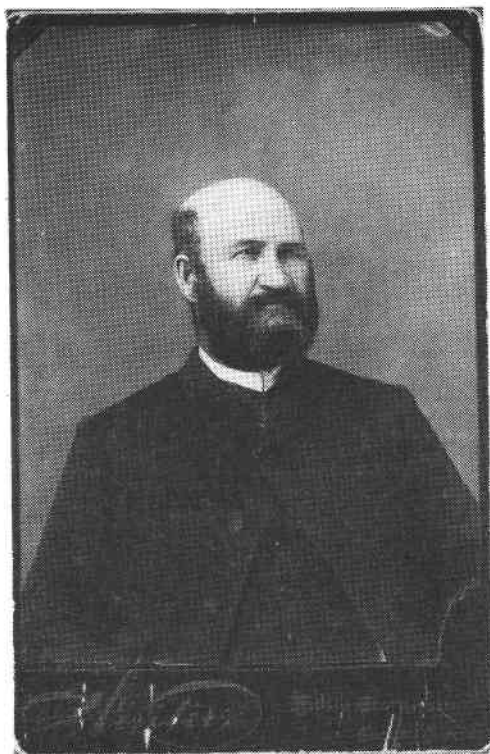
The party was fired on several times during the chase down the mountain, but they reached Fort Leland unharmed. The Indians surrounded Fort Leland and fired on the fort all day and all night. At daylight a company of volunteers from Jacksonville drove the Indians away.

With the volunteers was an Indian scout by the name of Hank Brown, who walked into the fort and said to my mother, "Was you scared yesterday when the Indians were after you?" She said, "Yes, Hank. I wish they were all dead." Just then he threw seven long-haired scalps into her lap, saying, "There are seven good Indians, my part of last night's fight."

After staying at Fort Leland a few days, my mother and her children were taken to Fort Eliff on Cow Creek. The Indians came into Cow Creek Valley and began to murder the settlers there. There were only a few men there, for Mr. Eliff took his family and my mother's family to Fort Levens three miles distant. They had just reached there when the Indians began to fire on the fort. There were only twelve men at the fort.

I will not go into details of that night's happenings, but will say that one of the men was a minister by the name of Miller who became so frightened that he couldn't shoot at the Indians. My mother took his gun from him and helped the men defend the fort. While she was fighting her little daughter Mary took suddenly sick and died in the room her mother was defending.





Judge J. J. Walton, Jr.

—Courtesy Lane County Museum

The Indians fired on the fort until just before daylight when, finding they could not take the fort by shooting at it, they commenced to throw fire brands on it, trying to burn them out. No doubt they would have succeeded, but at daylight a company of volunteers came from the Rogue River Valley and drove them away and helped bury the dead, including my little half-sister.

After this fight, my mother returned to Fort Eliff and remained there until after the war was over. In the spring of 1856 she returned to her farm near Hugo. She found that the Indians had stolen and killed all her stock, and burned all her buildings. Nothing was

left but the bare ground. But it seemed that nothing could discourage her. She had new buildings erected, the farm refenced, and commenced life over again.

In 1857 she married my father, David H. Sexton, with whom she had become acquainted during the Indian war. He died February 3, 1908, aged 80. She continued to reside on her old home place near Hugo until her death May 20, 1911, at the age of 85 years and 20 days.

Signed,  
C. D. Sexton

*(This story appeared in the  
Josephine County Courier of  
December 31, 1927.)*



## **TERRITORIAL ROAD EXTENDED INTO LANE COUNTY**

**By Olga Freeman**

An extension into Lane County of the East Side Territorial Road which ran from Oregon City to Brownsville was authorized by an act of the Territorial Legislature in 1851. The act provided for a road from Brownsville to Pleasant Hill and ordered a survey of the entire route from Oregon City via the Spores ferry on the McKenzie River to the Elijah Bristow house at Pleasant Hill.

The road to Brownsville had been authorized by the Oregon Provisional Legislature in 1847. It went through Molalla, Silverton and Lebanon to Brownsville. It made a bend to the west to cross Hale's ferry on the Santiam.

The new act directed that the lengthy bend should be eliminated. Appointed as commissioners to determine the more direct route and the extension were William Porter, a surveyor, and Elijah Bristow, pioneer settler in Lane County. The commissioners apparently lost no time in surveying the route, because their report was filed on July 31, 1851, with the Secretary of the Oregon Territory.

In this report they list the distance from Oregon City to Elijah Bristow's house over the proposed route as 103 miles and 38 rods. They meticulously set forth distances to various geographical stakes. The survey from Spores Ferry in Lane County followed approximately the present road from the McKenzie River to Springfield. The survey notes stakes near the house of William M. Stevens (Gamebird Village area), the west end of Mt. Misry, the north bank of the Willamette (at Springfield), the west end of Mt. Pisgah, and finally one at the Bristow house.

The report meticulously lists the expenses of the two commissioners. William Porter's bill as surveyor was \$238.00 with an additional \$38 for his notes. Bristow as chain carrier and flagman had expenses of \$232.00. Each

commissioner received a wage of \$3.00 per day. A few other expenses were detailed, making the total cost of the survey \$856.00.

As early as 1845, there was a trail of sorts through the foothills into Lane County. It was largely used by Indians and horsemen. When settlers came, they too followed the foothills for sound reasons. The level valley floor was usually water-soaked in the spring when most of the travelers began their journey from Oregon City. Frequent floods were a hazard. Access to firewood, water and luxuriant grass with which to feed their livestock was better near the foothills. And if they settled there, the well-drained foothill land made planting of crops and gardens earlier in the spring possible.

As the population increased in the upper Willamette Valley, the California Stage Company inaugurated stage travel over the East Side Territorial Road about 1860. The stage went north from Eugene to Spores Ferry, around the foothills to Diamond Hill, through the "Big Gap" to Union Point, thence to Brownsville, Lebanon, Albany and to Salem. It proved unprofitable and had ceased operation by 1865.

Perhaps this account by a disgruntled traveler may have had something to do with lack of patronage. "On the 15th inst. the rates of fare on the routes of the Oregon and California Stage Company were raised to 15 cents per mile. We suppose the advance is caused by bad roads. The more the passengers have to walk and the harder they work to pry the vehicles of that company out of the mud, the more they are charged for the privilege."

A marker near the bridge over the McKenzie River at Armitage State Park marks the site of the Jacob C. Spores Ferry. Spores arrived in 1847 and built his house, still standing, in

1854. It may be seen just west of Spores Butte and on the right-hand side of the road traveling toward Coburg.

The ferry business proved to be profitable due partially to travel generated by the California gold rush. The ferry was first licensed by the Territorial Government, and upon organization of Lane County, by the county. The county allowed the following charges: For each wagon and one yoke of oxen or span of horses, \$1.00; For man and horse, 25¢; For each pack horse and mule, 25¢; For each yoke of oxen, 20¢; For each head of sheep or hogs, 4¢.

From the ferry the old road went around the base of Spores Butte to the right following the foothills. If the Coburg interchange road is taken to the east, a close-up view of the foothills may be had. The VanDuyns, early settlers, had their holdings on the north side of the road.

If the next overpass road, the Wilkins road, is taken to its dead-end, the private road to the right leads to the old Huling S. (or Hulings) Miller place, the birthplace of Joaquin Miller. Mrs. Grace Wilkins Clark of Coburg was born here and well remembers, as a child, roaming over portions of the territorial road. It passed just below the present house.

The private road to the left off the Wilkins road leads to the fine home of Marvin Stoneberg, a great grandson of Mitchell Wilkins and a nephew of Mrs. Clark's. It stands approximately where the Wilkins house, long since gone, stood. In front of the house may be seen the osage orange trees planted by Wilkins and other foothill pioneers for a distance of many miles. The territorial road went in front of the house, around the north side of Centennial Butte and to the west of Rocky Butte, both readily recognizable from the freeway.

The Mitchell Wilkins family came in 1847. Two of the sons, Jasper and Amos, continued to farm in the Coburg area for many years. Mrs. Clark, daughter of

Jasper, owned and operated much of her father's holdings on the outskirts of Coburg. Jasper Wilkins was a member of the 1891 legislature.

Centennial Butte, the bald hill with a small clump of trees on top, was named by Mitchell Wilkins upon his return from the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial which commemorated the Declaration of Independence. He planted the trees on the top and painstakingly watered them until they took root.

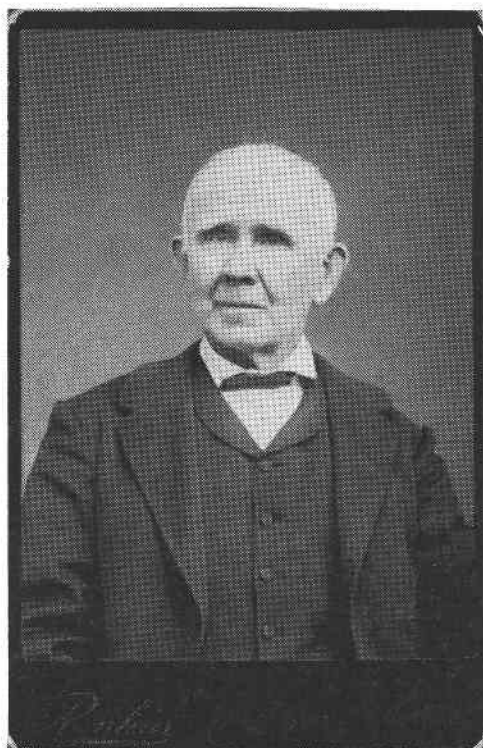
Rocky Butte, just north of Centennial Butte, was considered too rocky and therefore unfit for pasture. It is said that no claims to it were filed.

Continuing north on the freeway, just beyond Rocky Butte, is West Point, readily identified by the rocky ledge near the top.

The Coleman overpass road (named for Enoch Coleman, who represented Lane County in the legislature) ends at the foot of the butte. The freeway at this point is very close to the territorial road. At the base of West Point was a station on the stage line. Up the canyon on the north side was the donation land claim of Reason Willoughy, grandfather of Hubert Willoughy (who recently died), who farmed the land on both sides of the freeway here.

North of West Point, sharp eyes may detect a rock fence on the side of the hill. The territorial road ran just below the fence. A short distance beyond the fence was the location of the Pine post office, a somewhat later post office than the Willamette Forks office in the Wilkins home. Back of the post office and a bit farther up the hill was an asylum. One of the descendants of an early day settler remarked, "Our forefathers had their troubles, and some of them were of their own doing." (Pine post office was established originally on 8-19-1853 as Latshaw's Mill post office, with William H. Latshaw as postmaster. The name changed to Pine on 1-3-1855. Thomas M. Weger was postmaster. It closed 10-7-1887. . . . Ed.)

The freeway at this point begins to



"Uncle Johnny Diamond—An old bachelor—one of the nicest old fellows in the community—helped everybody—kept yokes of oxen—lived up in the mountains above Coburg" (inscription on back of photo). —Courtesy Lane County Museum

swing away from the foothills. To follow the old territorial road all the way into Brownsville, the Priceboro road should be taken. In the old days the Somerville school was located on this road just before the road turns north. At the Hotie Walker place, the location of the road was just below the fence on the side of the hill. From there it went to the right of the Luther White cemetery. A lone white tombstone is silhouetted against the trees on the knoll.

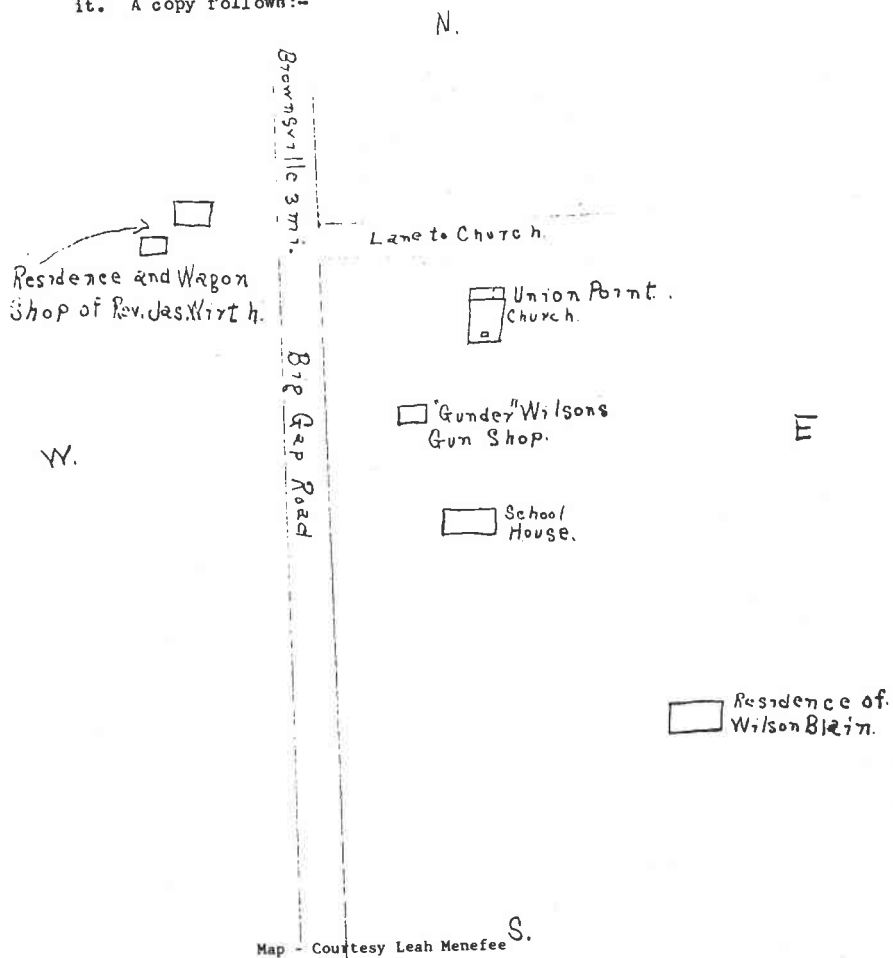
Luther White, an early day surveyor, deserves mention. He surveyed the county road from the pioneer settlement at Syracuse on the Santiam to both Brownsville and Lebanon. He established many of the early claims using the East Side road as his base line. His instruments are on display at the Lane County Museum.

Where the Priceboro road intersects the Diamond Hill road was the location of the Diamond Hill school and post office. The area was named for bachelor John Diamond, an Irishman. It is alleged that he laid out his claim in the shape of a diamond. Credulity may be somewhat strained by the reputed killing one spring of 3,000 rattlesnakes at Diamond Hill. The hill itself may be easily recognized by the huge gaping hole where rock has been excavated. (Diamond Hill post office was established on 9-16-1858 with J. Pierce as postmaster. It closed on 9-28-1869. Diamond Hill post office opened briefly again on 4-23-1887 with D.H. Pierce as postmaster, closing again on 10-4-1887. . . . Ed.)

The territorial road at Diamond Hill entered the "Gap" from which the pres-

# Union Point map

Mr. Glass here sketched a plan of the town as he remembered it. A copy follows:-





James Blakely—founder of Brownsville.

—Courtesy: Lane County Museum

ent road takes its name. The Gap road to Brownsville, a most pleasant drive, is the territorial road. It emerges from the gap at Union Point, 2½ miles south of Brownsville, an important settlement in the 1850s. All that remains today is one of the original homes. On a lane to the east from the house stood the church and the academy. The settlement also had a post office, a wagon and blacksmith shop, a store, a gunsmith shop, a school, and a number of dwellings. (Union Point post office was established 2-18-1854, with William B. Blaine as postmaster. It closed on 8-18-1859. Foundation stones of the church were found near the Menefe buildings in 1979. . . . Ed.)

Union Point was founded by the Rev. Wilson Blain, who came to Oregon as a missionary in 1848 for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. He organized a church on June 18, 1849, and founded and taught at Union Point Academy. he served as territorial printer in 1849-50 and was a member of

the first territorial legislature. A member of his church was Mrs. Henderson, his sister-in-law, a widow with seven children. She supported her family by making men's "Sunday-best" shirts, and darning socks.

The Gap road enters Brownsville past the memorial monument to James Blakely. He came in 1846, and laid out the town of Brownsville in 1853 upon part of his claim. He hired Luther White to do the surveying. He named the town for his uncle, Hugh L. Brown, who also came in 1846. Blakely lived to be over 100 years old and died January 29, 1913.

It is hoped that this historical background of the extension of the East Side Territorial Road from Brownsville to Pleasant Hill may give present-day travelers some concept of how the pioneers plodded slowly and laboriously over the rutted roads, spurred on by a vision of a new and better life for themselves and their children.





## **THISTLEDOWN FARM**

**By Lois Barton**

This lovely old house on River Road north of Santa Clara was built by Louis Vitus for his bride, Frances Masterson, in 1898. Frances was the daughter of Martha Ann Gay and James Masterson whose father, William Masterson, was captain of an 1851 wagon train.

Louis Vitus came to Oregon with his family in 1878. His father, Augustus Vitus, a weaver, had come to America from Prussia in 1852. He worked in "woolen mills in Philadelphia until 1865, when he removed to Springfield, Ill., where he secured similar employment. In 1872 he took up his residence in Caldwell County, Missouri, purchasing one hundred acres of land, upon which he contemplated making substantial improvements and passing the remainder of his life. Misfortune over-

took him, however, as a severe drouth ruined his crops and so crippled him financially that he was unable to meet his second payment on the land, which he accordingly lost. Courageously, however, he faced his first serious business calamity and decided to press westward to the Pacific slope. In the spring of 1878 he arrived with his family in Albany, Oregon. With the greater part of their capital tied up in a cook stove and provisions, he and his sons found employment on the surrounding farms and earned enough to get them through. In the following spring, in company with his sons, who for many years had been in partnership with their father, he rented a farm in Lane County, upon which they began to work most enthusiastically. This venture also



Francis Hortense Vitus.

—Courtesy Mrs. Robert Rankin



Louis Vitus.

—Courtesy Mrs. Charles Nelson

proved disastrous and at the end of a year the family found themselves facing debts amounting to \$4000 on which they were forced to pay 15% interest. After renting for five years they decided to purchase a farm, for which they were obliged to go into debt to the extent of twelve thousand dollars. Such a burden would have discouraged the average person but the father and sons set bravely to work and within a reasonable time the obligations were all met and the family was thoroughly established both in its credit and in the

respect and esteem of the community. The father . . . has held but one political office, that of postmaster of Junction City." (from Centennial History of Oregon by Joseph Gaston, Vol. II, p. 567.)

The land purchased by Augustus Vitus and his sons was the donation land claim of George W. Evans. The Gaston article goes on to say "on this farm in the early days they made as much as \$13,000 in a single year on grain and stock. The farm comprises six hundred and ninety-five acres and on it the father and his four sons labored continuously for sixteen years, establishing a standing of the highest order and a reputation surpassed by none in the community."

The 1880 census for Lane County lists the Augustus Vitus household in Lancaster precinct, naming the following children: Oscar, Bruno, Rose, Agnes, Mary, Robert, Augustus Jr., and Louis, who was 11 years old in that year.

It was in 1901 that Louis bought out his father's and brother's interest in the property which became known as Thistle Down Farm. According to the Fred



Grandfather August Vitus with granddaughters Zine and Zona.

—Courtesy Mrs. Charles Nelson

Broughers who later lived on the place, Louis raised clover and wheat. He kept a number of horses to do the farm work and had steam engines for thrashing.

In 1934 the farm was purchased by Agnes and George W. Bond, and Fred Brougher became their manager, a job he has stayed with up to the present (1978). Broughers lived in the Louis Vitus house for 33 years.

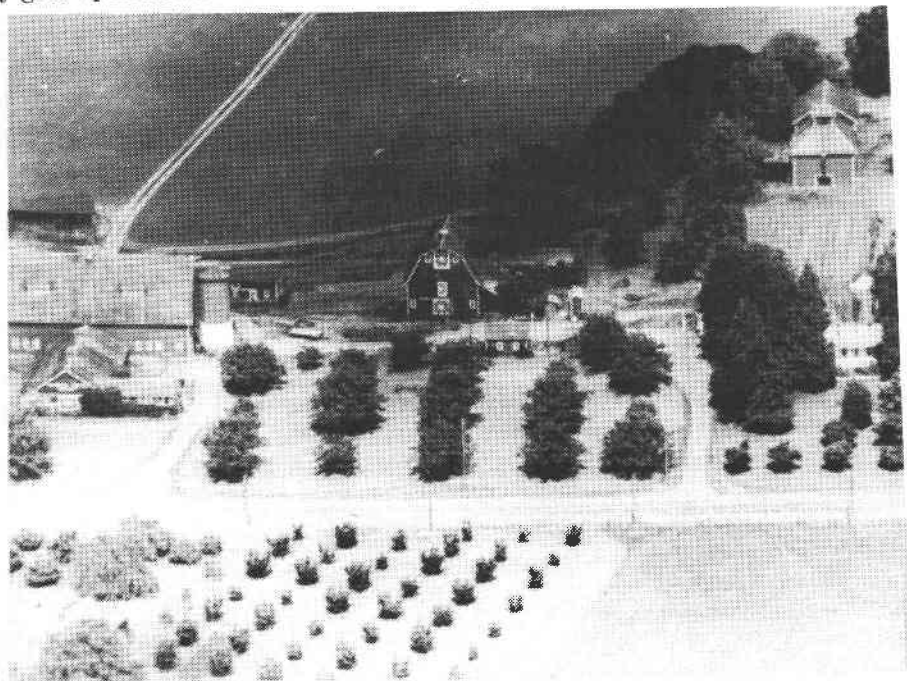
Dorothy Brougher described the house. "Mr. Vitus had the huge two story frame house built for his bride. Upstairs, a hallway leads to three bedrooms, one with a bay window on the southwest. The attic windows were bordered with stained glass.

A master bedroom downstairs has a bay window to the north. The immense living room downstairs also has a bay window on the southwest and is surrounded by a veranda. The front door had a stained glass window. The stairway goes up from an entrance hall and

double doors open into the living room. Over the large fireplace that warmed the room was an ornate wood mantel with a plate glass mirror also framed ornately into the mantel.

The dining room is also large and the kitchen has room enough, and a pantry. The water came from a hand pump on the small back porch. In 1934 the house was modernized. An electric pump was put in, and plumbing. Electrical wires had been strung across the ceiling, so light fixtures and wall sockets were installed.

Giant maple trees, planted in 1834(?) bordered the Vitus place. The purpose was to keep the rail fences from washing into neighboring property during high water from the over-flow of the Willamette River before the dams were built. Boats could navigate down State Highway 99 (now River Road) in front of the Vitus place during flood time. Wagons went hub deep in mud in some spots before the road was paved.



Thistle-down panorama, 1930s.

—Courtesy Dorothy Brougher

Mrs. Vitus loved flowers and trees. She had three hundred rose bushes, three or four varieties of cedar trees, an oak and two large maple trees planted in the yard. There was also a mountain ash and a grafted 25-foot holly tree and a sugar maple.

A half-circle driveway at the north of the house proceeded past the old barn and on out again to the highway. The stage coach used to stop at the barn and change horses. That old barn was torn down in 1935. Wooden pegs held the heavy beams, and square iron nails held the rest of the structure. When the barn went down the horses standing by were startled by the crashing sounds and ran into the 40 acre walnut orchard, newly planted, back of the barn.

Altogether, 5,000 fruit and nut trees were planted into orchards in the years 1934-35. Fertile ground and an overhead irrigation system supported diversified crops such as sweet corn and beets for the cannery. Alfalfa, grain and hay were grown for the dairy and beef cattle. Also hops were raised while we were there.

We ran a dairy for a long period before World War II and during the war. Now they raise mostly grain, mint and dill. The Columbus Day storm in 1962 took some of the nut trees and the freeze that followed some years later destroyed the walnuts and some of the filberts." (From a taped report by Dorothy Brougher [Mrs. Fred] December, 1978.)

Lucille Nelson, daughter of August Vitus, Jr., remembers visiting Uncle Louis and Aunt Frances at their farm when she was a child. "Aunt Matty" (Martha Gay Masterson) lived with her daughter in her declining years, and used to entertain the children who came visiting with stories of the Gay family trip across the plains and life on the homestead south of Eugene. They thrilled to hear of the visits of the Indians and other adventures. Martha was a "great story teller" who kept the children busy so they wouldn't upset childless Frances who worried about her lovely home when children were present.



Ziniker's "German Castle"

—Courtesy Elsie Sutton

Lane County Historian

*(This story continues from the Summer issue the report about Rueggers and Zinikers who bought the Martin Baker Gay homestead.)*

## THE ONION KING

by Lois Barton



Ziniker family gathering onions

—Courtesy Marie Erdman

The Sunday OREGONIAN of July 25, 1915, carried a story about Edward Ziniker, Onion Grower, under the headline **THREE ACRES AND ONIONS MAKE A FAMILY WEALTHY**. Recent interviews with some of his children and former neighbors have uncovered interesting details about Ziniker's rise to "fame and fortune".

Edward Ziniker, then sixteen years old, came to the Spencer Butte area from the German border of Switzerland in 1887, with financial help from his uncle and two brothers who had preceded him by a few years. At first he hired out as a day laborer. Ziniker became a land owner when he purchased his first fifty acres from Albert Ruegger by

working out the purchase price at 50¢ a day (about \$3.00 an acre).

In 1890, when he was twenty years old, Ed married Emma Ruegger in Creswell, borrowing money to buy the marriage license, according to the OREGONIAN article. By 1915 they had ten children and owned 320 acres of land. Their son Paul says 100 acres of that was bottom land in what is now known as the Christensen Valley, and may have been partly beaver meadow.

Quoting the OREGONIAN again: "I worked hard those first years," said Mr. Ziniker. 'I had no money to buy horses or tools with. I did everything myself in the hardest way.' . . . Two acres he planted to prunes. Three acres he



planted to onions. (Paul says he spaded the onion field those first years.) On these five acres he concentrated his efforts. During the many years that he has been at the business, Mr. Ziniker has raised on that three-acre tract at Spencer Butte 1,500,000 pounds of onions. He has usually received about a cent and a half a pound for them. Approximately he has grown \$25,000 worth of onions. This year (1915) he has three and a half acres. He expects a yield of 50 tons. This is the average annual yield."

The OREGONIAN goes on to say that for nine successive years the prunes bore heavily without a single crop failure, and that he has planted six more acres which "will soon be bearing".



"Speaking of the Spencer Butte country," the OREGONIAN quoted Mr. Ziniker, "You'd hardly expect a man to make more than a living there. It's hard to do that raising general crops. I have made everything I've got by cultivating just a few acres."

One secret of the onion field's productivity was undoubtedly liberal dressings of chicken manure. The Zinikers kept 300-400 laying hens. They had an incubator and brooder and raised their own replacement flocks. The old hens were sold live for meat when they passed productivity.

His children remember with pride the "handy" way their Dad fixed the chicken house to make care and feeding of the flock easy for Mother. Wheat storage bins were upstairs in the barn, with a built-in chute and a trap door at the bottom so grain could be drawn into a bucket right in the room where the chickens ate. A clean-out bin, accessible from the outside, had been built under the roosts, so raking out the manure was as simple as possible. All the convenience didn't make the job any less smelly, however. And that was the work the boys "got to do".

Edward Ziniker was known in the Spencer Butte area as the Onion King. The title may have been earned in part by the "castle" he built to house his growing family. The work was done by Ziniker and his sons, without outside architectural or carpentering help, at a cost of \$4000. Mrs. Florence Murdock, who lived in the house after Zinikers moved to town, said the interior was all beautifully finished with first grade tongue and groove paneling—walls, ceiling and floors. The living room was large enough to accommodate three sets of square dancers, and was used for community dances during the '20s when neighbors would come from miles around, by horse and wagon, to dance all night. Old timers in the area still refer to the building as the "German castle". Unfortunately, it burned to the ground nearly fifty years ago.



The house, completed about 1910, had an acetylene light plant which provided good illumination through gas lights in each room. There was a bathtub upstairs and hot and cold water. "Oh, we were modern out there," says Edward Jr. "We had running water in the house, —except the toilet. It was a three or four-holer out there over the creek." (A common practice in those days! Even the outhouse at neighboring Fox Hollow School was set over the creek, according to a former teacher, Janet Brown.)

Marie Ziniker Erdman recalls with pleasure the evenings of singing around the fire in their home. Both parents were yodelers. Her mother had special skill. The children learned Swiss yodeling songs from them and from neighbors who often came to sing with the family.

Nephew Leonard Ziniker of Creswell remembers his Uncle Edward as something of a mechanical wizard—with an inventive turn of mind. He designed and built a unique fruit dryer—a wheel dryer. The drying trays were stacked around a revolving central post within a circular shaft having the furnace at the bottom, instead of the usual slanting tunnel arrangement. A door into the upper part of the shaft allowed trays to be moved to lower shelves as the fruit dried. The first such dryer Ziniker built was sold to his neighbor Charles Swaggart. In the summer of 1976 Elsie Swaggart Sutton and I counted room for about seventy trays in that dryer. According to the children, the second one built by their father was larger. The family dried prunes for neighbors as well as their own crop.

Ziniker's garden and orchards flourished with minimal irrigation because they practiced dust-mulching. Farmers of the period in the Spencer Butte area raised successful dry-land commercial crops of strawberries, sweet corn and tomatoes using this technique.

"It used to rain more in the summer time," Edward Jr. told me. "Every time it rained Dad would make us stir the topsoil in the orchard with the harrow



Edward and Emma Ziniker, Paul, Otto & Helen, 1895.  
—Courtesy Paul Ziniker

to break up the crust. We even had to hoe the potatoes the same way."

"I used to didn't see any sense in hoeing when there was no weeds," Marie said of the mulching operation.

The onions took more water. Ziniker purchased water rights from some of his neighbors to augment his supply. He built a tank above the orchard in which spring water was collected and then released down a homemade wooden flume to flood-irrigate the first onion patch near the house. Later when the beaver meadow in the valley was developed into an onion field, the irrigation system was more complicated. Harry Taylor, Jr. explained the set-up. "Ziniker laid a line of field tile under the ground every four feet or so. He stood one tile on end at the beginning of each line. Then he'd fill all those tile with water to sub-irrigate.

"He must have had a small fortune in 2-inch galvanized pipe," Lester Swaggart said.

"A lot of the springs dried up when the timber was cut off," Edward Jr. remembers. "Used to be a lot of fish in that creek down by the onion field. Used to be big pools there, and my goodness, we used to catch lard pails full of trout. And there was two-three nice swimming holes, too."

After he moved to Eugene, Mr. Ziniker and some of his sons became brick masons. By the time he retired in the late '20s they had more than 700 fireplaces to their credit, including the one in the farmhouse where the writer lives, not far from the former "Onion Kingdom".

The OREGONIAN article concludes with a description of the new house which was located at 29th and Portland streets in Eugene.

"The house in town was designed by Mr. Ziniker, though the plans were technically drawn and modified by a Eugene architect. It is one of the best residences in Eugene and stands in the College Crest addition. When completed, it will cost about \$10,000. Ordinarily it would have cost much more, but Mr. Ziniker and his sons have done most of the work themselves. One son wired the house, another supervised the concrete work and all did the carpentry work. When he was a boy it was Mr. Ziniker's ambition to become a cabinetmaker and his love and ability

for construction is this early ambition cropping out.

The house is unique and ingenious in its architecture. Every bedroom is a corner room with five windows. No space is wasted. The house has three stories and a basement. One attractive feature is a balcony on the second story around the chimney over the living room. The house has a wide area of porch and contains 14 rooms.

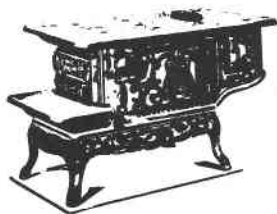
"I have to have a big house," said Mr. Ziniker. "I have a big family." So he has. Ten children, five boys and five girls . . . Mr. Ziniker has moved his family to town so his children will have better educational opportunities.

The older boys will look after the farm which now consists of 320 acres, the original 50 having long since been paid for and added to. Mr. Ziniker will devote his time to the two acres of black onion land which he has at his town house in Eugene.

"I expect these two acres to make me a living," he said.

Mr. Ziniker is only 45 years old and has no intention of forsaking the onion for some time yet."

*(Mr. Ziniker's property is now known as Christmas Tree Land, and is located on Murdock Road, an extension of South Willamette Street, south of Spencer Butte.)*





Ziniker's town house - 29th and Portland Streets.

—Courtesy Lane County Museum

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**Hop stringers**

**—Courtesy Smith Mountjoy Collection,**

**Lane County Museum**