

Lane County Historian



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The John Stewart Family
The Old Race Track
Lane County Fair

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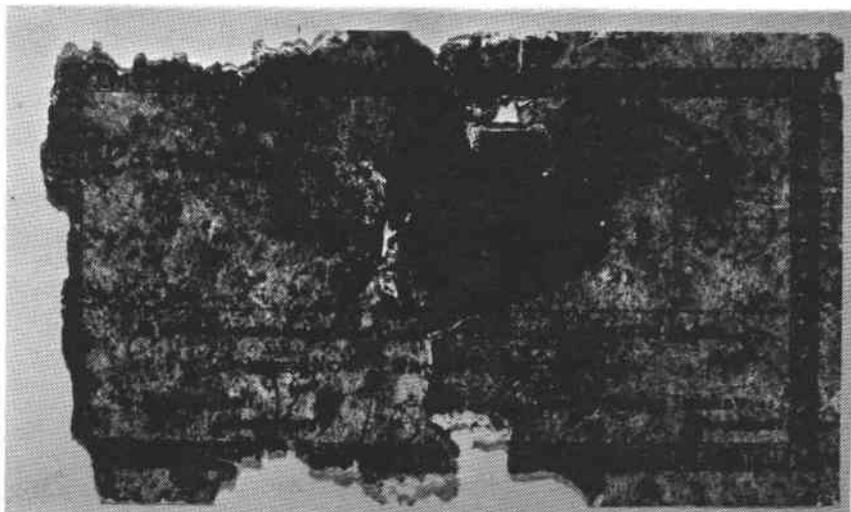
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This ticket to the Sixth Annual Lane County Fair, 1888, sponsored by the Lane County Agricultural Society, was found while dismantling the house on the Joe Jennings Donation Land Claim, now owned by Jonas and Ray Hofer.

THE JOHN STEWART FAMILY Oregon Pioneers of 1853

By
Leah C. Menefee

The background, character and motivation of those who chose to travel the long trail to Oregon during the years from 1843 into the late 1860's, makes a fascinating study.

Which one of the overland routes these emigrants used in crossing the plains, the length of time it took them to reach their goal in the valleys of Oregon and what sort of vehicles they used for the westward journey and how these were drawn are all interesting subjects. Yet the ethnic background of those who made the journey is equally fascinating and a study of what fired the minds of the men who drove the ox team or rode the saddle horse is of far more lasting importance.

The study of what manner of folk chose to come to Oregon, how they behaved during those days, weeks and months on the trail could be of great value to us today, when we, in our turn, are faced with the largely unfamiliar emergencies of yet another age. Who were these folk, these pioneers and why did they come to Oregon?

There is certainly one way in which to assess in some measure the character of the family which started across the plains for the west in one of the migration years. This is to note not only what possessions they loaded into their wagons at the beginning of the trek, but also with which of these precious things did they arrive at their destinations? What did they, somehow, save, when teams grew weary, oxen

died, wagons fell apart, rivers to be forded appeared across the trail and mountain ranges loomed to block the last few miles between them and the green valleys of Oregon?

Several things were almost invariably saved by the pioneer family. First of all was the Bible. The family-man who came to Oregon stowed the Bible safely within his wagon bed among the most treasured possessions of his previous life. This Book contained -- in addition to its wonderful singing text--the family record of his particular family. Here, somewhere between the covers of his Bible, were written the Births, Marriages and Deaths, that showed to which family unit he and his belonged. These dates, sometimes given with place names, told something of his background, his heritage and of the relatives whom he had left behind. In fact, these Bibles sometimes contained family records reaching back as far as the American Revolution.

It was not uncommon for the Bible to reach Oregon with no cover and with its pages stained by rain from some prairie thunder storm or from the waters of the Platte, Snake or Deschutes rivers, which often invaded the wagon beds and soaked their contents. Yet the Word of God and the family record included with it, somehow were brought through to Oregon to keep up the continuity of worship with those left behind and to show from which states and family background came those

who traveled so far to reach the west.

Some other things usually were saved when all else might have to be left, somewhere along the emigrant trails, piled in pathetic heaps beside the deep, dusty wagon ruts. These were the hymn and school books, for the pioneer carried Religion and Education with him wherever he went.

The ancient school books that crossed the plains to Oregon were often a motly lot. They came from log school houses in Iowa and Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee and even as far east as New York or south as Virginia. They represented many publishers and they went into the first schools of Oregon with the students whose families brought them across the plains. There was no uniformity of texts in pioneer days.

The pioneer often saved a volume of the classics or an almanac or a collection of poems. It might be a pocket-sized edition of Virgil in a worn leather binding or the poems of Robert Burns or Thomas Campbell.

The precious "doctor book" was also usually saved, with its pages full of remedies for everything from warts to the treatment of a foundered horse. Sadly enough these books contained nothing of much value in preserving the families from the ravages of the cholera epidemic which swept the wagon trains for several years, 1852 being the year in which most deaths occurred.

The important thing to be recognized is that the printed word, beginning with the sublimity of the Bible and ending with the almanac and the "doctor book" was treasured. Books were not only smaller and lighter than Grandmother's gaily-printed Pennsylvania Dutch chest, or the

shining walnut dresser that Uncle Job had made in Illinois, but these books -- the printed word -- were food for the mind and they served, as well, to buoy up the physical body of the human being often so badly nourished as the wagon trains wound their way across the plains.

Books could be read by the campfire's light. The Bible brought reassurance--and often tears--with its admonitions and its solace. Hymns could be sung from the worn old song books. Poems would lighten the long hours spent by families in the confining wagon beds as they swayed and bounced over the deeply - rutted road. Poems would serve, as well, in shy courtships as they developed in the evenings after supper was over.

Most of the pioneer families who came to Lane county have preserved their Bibles, with those invaluable family records written somewhere on the brittle, browned pages. One family, however, that of Scottish John Stewart, who arrived in Oregon in 1853 with his wife and daughters, married and unmarried, brought four Bibles with them, the oldest dated 1818 and printed in Glasgow, Scotland.

Before he came to America, John Stewart, born in Dundee on May 20, 1785, had served a five year term in the Forfar and Kincardine Regiment of Malitia. He was discharged on December 1, 1807 from this regiment commanded by Col. Archibald Douglas. At this time, his discharge, which is owned in Lane county by one of his descendants, stated that he was 24 years old, five feet, seven and a half inches tall, with black hair and a "fresh" complexion. He was from the parish of Munro, County Forfar, Scotland. He was a shoemaker, by trade.

In 1815 John Stewart married for the

first time. His wife was Annie Black and they were married in Dundee. They had one daughter, Annie, born February 16, 1816. In 1817 Annie Black Stewart died and on June 20th, 1820, John Stewart married Jannet Smilie (Smiley) also in Dundee.

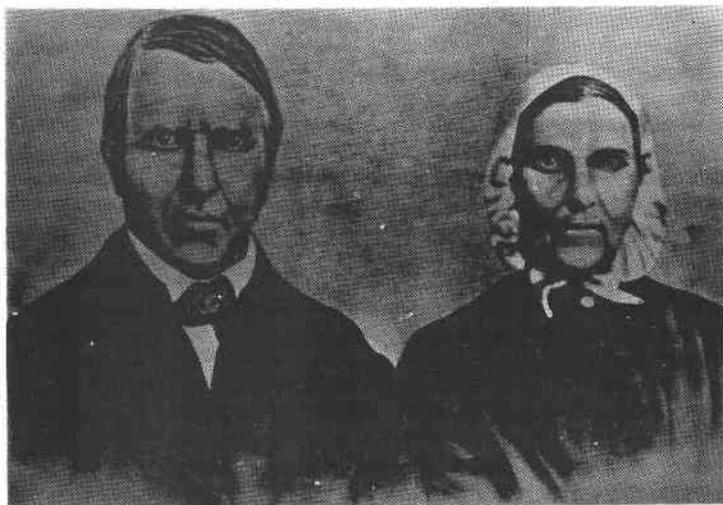
John Stewart and his second wife, Janet, had a daughter, Elizabeth Young Stewart, born in 1822. Her birth was followed by that of a son, born 1824 and died the same year, and by a daughter, Mary A. born in 1826.

At this point, plans for coming to the United States came to fruition and these descendants of Scottish Covenanters--with their worldly goods and their Bibles -- crossed the ocean in either 1826 or 1827. They settled in western Pennsylvania where they lived for several decades. Here John Stewart built a stone house for his growing family and lived near some

relatives, who had also come to America from Scotland.

In Pennsylvania, other Stewart daughters were born, Allison in 1829, Agnes in 1832 and Hellen in 1835. In 1833 Annie Stewart, the eldest daughter, married a man named James Stewart -- no relation. In 1845 Mary Stewart married John Warner, and in 1847 Allison Stewart married Alexander McGowan. She came to Oregon in 1859, after his death.

Here, in Alleghany City, which is now part of Pittsburg, the Stewarts were exposed to the "Oregon Fever" sweeping over the eastern United States, following the successful early emigrations to that far off land, which had begun in 1843. Like thousands of others, the Stewarts began their journey to Oregon in 1853 accompanied not only by their unmarried daughters, Elizabeth, Agnes and Hellen, but by the married ones, Mary and John



JOHN AND JANET STEWART, PIONEERS OF 1853

Warner and their three young children and by Annie and James Stewart, with their ten who ranged in age from a boy of almost twenty to a baby born January first 1853.

Also known to have been in the Stewart party from the Pittsburg area were the Loves, Mrs. Margaret and her three sons, James, John and David. David was later to marry Hellen Stewart, in Oregon. Also with the Stewarts were two unmarried brothers of John Warner, Frederick and Thomas, both of whom were to marry Stewart girls, one in St. Joseph and one in Oregon.

The party boarded the steamer ARCTIC, at Pittsburg on April first, 1853, and "started the 2" according to the diary kept by Hellen Stewart in a little leather-covered book, printed in London and given to her by her "Aunt Simpson". It has a silver clasp.

Agnes Stewart also kept a diary on the trip west, and both diaries show plainly what delightful girls these Stewart sisters were. Hellen became attached to newly-met fellow travelers on the ARCTIC and hated to leave them when, at St. Louis, the party transferred to the HONDURAS for the trip up the Missouri



AGNES STEWART WARNER

river to St. Joseph, one of the outfitting points for the westward bound emigrants. Hellen comments that the scenery on the Missouri reminded her of "some old ruined castle I have read about."

On the 20th of April, they had arrived at St. Joseph, but the women and children stayed on board the steamer all night. By the 29th of April, some of their company had started on the road to Oregon, but John Stewart and family still lingered at St. Joseph and on May 2nd, Elizabeth Young Stewart married Frederick Warner there. Record of their marriage in St. Joseph's court house states that the parties were "bound for Oregon."

On May 3rd, the Stewarts were off on their long journey across the plains. They would experience separation from members of their family, when James and Annie Stewart fell behind because of their over-heavy wagons and eventually took the Salt Lake road, wintering there in 1853-54. These Stewarts continued on to California where they settled near Yuba City and where their descendants still live.

They would also experience the usual deadly monotony of plains travel, broken by the violent thunder-storms, stampedes of stock, Indian scares and the constant search for sufficient water and grass for the oxen and horses. Occasionally they were faced with a choice of routes to be followed from a given point. And when they reached the ford of the Malheur river, in the present eastern Oregon, they were presented with one of these choices. They could continue on the well-traveled Oregon Trail to The Dalles, its terminus on the Columbia river, or could take a new cut-off across eastern Oregon purported to lead directly into the Wil-

lamette valley.

The Stewarts, with over one thousand others, chose the new route and thus became members of the so-called Last Wagon Train of 1853. This group of individual companies, each under its own leader or captain, wound its way during the fall of 1853 from the Malheur river to Eugene City following the Elliott cut-off, which proved to be far from easy or pleasant to travel. On this cut-off both Agnes and Hellen Stewart stopped writing in their diaries, perhaps because there was not time to do so, amid the complications which attended travel on this new route, or because they simply lacked the heart to describe their hardships.

Most families managed to arrive in Oregon not only with books but also with seeds to plant that first, most important garden. On the cut-off many families were reduced to eating their garden seeds. The Stewarts had started from Pennsylvania with cuttings of a small, white, single rose. These they managed to bring in over the cut-off and bushes descended from these slips still bear their dainty white roses in the yards of Stewart descendants in Lane county, Oregon.

The sturdy self-reliance of the Scotch-Irish pioneers who contributed so greatly to settlement of the Carolinas, western Virginia and Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Tennessee was brought on west across the plains to Oregon a generation or so later by such families as the John Stewarts. Their experiences on the Elliott cut-off were typical of those shared by emigrants who attempted the various "short-cuts" of the overland trails. At times these proved both shorter and easier to travel. At other times, depending upon such factors as the weather, the Indians, the guides

and the character and equipment of those who took the cut-off, the results could mean suffering or even death.



HELLEN STEWART LOVE

In the Fall of 1853, the wagon train which had left the Oregon Trail at the Malheur ford as a group of self-sufficient companies, each under its own captain and all following the wagon tracks of Elijah Elliott, the guide, had reached the summit of the Cascade mountains. Here they were still over eighty miles from Eugene City, Oregon Territory. The cut-off road, which Mr. Elliott expected to have been slashed through by community efforts and ready for his group to travel from the Deschutes river to Eugene, he discovered to have been but indifferently cleared out.

Men of the companies, already weakened by needless wanderings in the deserts around Harney and Malheur lakes, in the present Harney county, Oregon, were laboring ahead of the wagons to clear the way. Snow fell on the wagons as they

were drawn through the pass just south of Diamond's Peak, ready for the descent into the valley down the canyon of the Middle Fork of the Willamette river.



ELIZABETH STEWART WARNER

Men sent ahead for help, finally reached the first settlers below, and told of the situation of the people behind them on the cut-off. Rescue was swift and efficient. However, many of the emigrants became afraid of the many crossings of a river rising from fall rains and left their wagons in the mountains for the winter, packing their immediate needs and children on whatever animals they had left. Among these were the Stewarts and it is said that cuttings of the white rose remained in the wagon all winter and were not rescued until the spring thaw permitted the emigrants to return for their property.

The settlers already in Lane, Linn and Benton counties, took the Elliott cut-off travelers into their own homes or found vacant government lands upon which they

could settle. Friendships were made between rescued and rescuers that carry through even to this day between their descendants.

The Stewarts, John, Fred and Tom Warner and David Love all chose to settle on Little Fall Creek, Lane county. Perhaps the rugged hills and dark forests reminded the Stewarts of their native land. At any rate, here John and Janet took up their 320 acre land claim. Since their branch of the Stewart name had died with their only son, John, in Scotland in 1824, the name did not continue here. On December 26, 1857, John Stewart disappeared mysteriously while on his way through the snow to the home of his daughter Mary Warner, with a pair of small red shoes he had made for a little granddaughter.

Whether John Stewart drowned in Fall Creek, wandered off into the heavy fir forests and rocky ridges or was attacked and carried off by Indians has never been established.

Elizabeth Stewart and her husband Frederick Warner, had a land claim nearby and here, like hundreds of other Oregon pioneer wives, she stayed when her husband and his brother, John, left for California to seek their fortune. Here she awaited not only his return, but the birth of her first child, one of the amazing women of her time, who came from settlements where living conditions were comfortable and neighbors close and friendly, to a frontier land with the nearest neighbor often a mile away.

Agnes Stewart, her sister, who married Thomas Warner in 1859, became a teacher, the first in the community of Springfield, across the river from Eugene. This was in 1858 and 1859. Her picture, taken some years after her marriage, is



ALLISON STEWART PENNINGTON

typical of the Stewart women, showing a composed, dignified, attractive person, a far cry from the woefully home-sick young girl who crossed the plains in 1853 and poured out her fears on the pages of her diary. Taken from the comfortable stone house in Pennsylvania, Agnes Stewart felt that she would never again see the faces of the relatives and friends she loved so well. She never did see them again but as a middle-aged woman she and several of these friends were still corresponding with each other.

In fact, one of the most amazing things about this Scottish family of Lane county is that the diaries of two of the four sisters, Agnes and Helen, together with a letter written by Elizabeth, have all been preserved. These are priceless both to the descendants of the writers but also to any researcher on travel across the plains in the early days. All three have been printed by the LANE COUNTY PIONEER-HISTORICAL SOCIETY, in limited editions, as part of its series of pioneer travel diaries and narratives.

Many descendants of these four Stewart women, Mary, Elizabeth, Agnes and Helen, are deeply sentimental people and have preserved not only the diaries (now deposited in the Oregon Collection of the University of Oregon) but but also have kept photographs, clippings and many family letters. The latter include a letter from John Stewart's father, in Scotland, to his son in Pennsylvania in 1831.

From these mementoes and from the excellent memories of descendants of John and Janet Stewart and their daughters, Mary Warner, Elizabeth Young Stewart Warner,, Agnes Warner and Helen Love, who still hold annual reunions in the Eugene area each summer, the story of this Scottish family has been reconstructed.



MARY STEWART WARNER

Janet Stewart and others of her family lie in their own graveyard, on a gently sloping hill a half mile away from the spot where John Stewart built his first log cabin home, in December of the year 1853, the year he crossed the plains to Oregon.

STEWART GENEALOGY

By Shirley Larsen

1. John Stewart m. Elspeth Strahan
2. John Stewart m. Margaret Ray
3. John Stewart m. Elisabeth Young
4. John Stewart, b. 1785, m. (1) Annie Black, 1815
Annie Stewart, b. 1816; m. James Stewart issue: 13 children
4. John Stewart m. (2) Janet Smile, 1820, Dundee, Scotland. Issue:
 - (1) Elizabeth, b. Dec. 17, 1822, Dundee, Scotland
 - (2) John, b. Jan. 27, 1824; d. 1824, Scotland
 - (3) Mary, b. Jan. 20, 1825, Scotland
 - (4) Allison, b. Aug. 15, 1829, Alleghany, Pa.
 - (5) Agnes, b. June 7, 1832, Alleghany, Pa.
 - (6) Hellen, b. June 22, 1835, Alleghany, Pa.
 - (1) Elizabeth m. Frederick Warner, 1835, St. Joseph, Mo. Issue:
Hellen, b. and d. May 20, 1854
Mary, b. 1855; m. George Neet
Isabella, b. 1857, d. 1872
Frank, b. 1859; m. Emma Neet
 - (3) Mary m. John Warner, 1845 Pennsylvania. Issue:
Janet, b. 1847; m. Steward Brock
Fred, b. 1849; m. Elizabeth Nelson
John, b. 1851; d. on the way to Oregon
- Martha, b. 1854; m. Dillard Walker
- Geneva, b. 1856; m. Harmon Snyder
- (4.) Allison m. (1.) Alexander McGowan, 1847, Pennsylvania Issue:
Hugh, b. 1849
Agnes, b. 1851; m. S. J. Huntington
James, b. ; m. Louise Huntington
Alex McGowan d. 1859
- Allison m. (2.) Wm. Pennington 1862. Oregon. Issue:
Jessie b. 1863; m. (1.) Carlson; (2.) Hammond
William, b. 1865
Emma, b. 1867; m. Eugene McCorkle
Thomas, b. 1869
- (5) Agnes m. Thomas Warner, 1859, Oregon Issue:
George b. 1860; m. Vina Walker
Smilie b. 1862; d. 1875
Jessie b. 1866; d. 1870
Mason b. 1868; m. Celia Hyland
Clyde b. 1873; m. Daisy Matteson
- (6) Hellen m. David Love, 1854, Oregon. Issue:
Jeanette m. George Easterbrook
Walter m. Rosa Bonnet
Norval m. Mary Roy

THE OLD RACE TRACK
by
Nina Wilkins McCornack

(Ed. note: The following visit, related by Mrs. McCornack, took place a short time before the death of Mr. Fred Knox, early in 1964)

There are few subjects more enjoyable than recalling the early days in Eugene, especially when the conversation happens to be a person-to-person exchange of notes and memories.

This sort of afternoon I recently enjoyed in a visit with another early-day resident, Fred Knox.

On a dark, rainy afternoon, one of Oregon's best, of the sort, I sat before the blazing fire in the Knox home out Coburg way (on the old road to Coburg, remember it?). Beyond the rain splashed windows, clouds were as close as house tops. Such a day, however, is just made for reminiscing and we wasted no time in getting to our subject, the old race track in Merriau's Park.

That park was a pleasant part of early life in Eugene. It was especially so to me, for even in those very young years, I loved horses and there was great excitement on Saturday afternoon when I was allowed to go along to help Papa race his high stepping pacer, Babe, around the track.

The population of Eugene then could have been four or five thousand and the grown-ups liked it just the way it was. Then, pleasant homes lined the narrow streets, looking proud and a bit smug in behind white picket fences, or black iron ones, low evergreen hedges, or set far back from the road among tall evergreen trees, roads then deep in dust or mud, according to the time of year. There were narrow board sidewalks leading to hospitable doorways. There were no artistic curving

streets in town in those days. The roads were straight and narrow like the path to Heaven the preacher told us about. Sidewalks, too, were straight and narrow, though full of splinters and often wobbly, when in high floods they sometimes went floating off at strange angles. This could be misleading to a native on his way home from the brewery on Ninth street, with a tin bucket of "suds".

Eugene was a quiet, comfortable home town and every home owner, big and little, also owned a barn. Cows and horses were a part of family life, so barns were about as important as houses. Some homes sported a separate carriage house, though the lesser ones settled for a lean-to shed for carriages, hacks or phaetons, or the light sulkey especially made for racing.

Talking of those early days brought us to the special subject of the Race Track and Saturday afternoon at Mr. Merriau's park. Croquet at home simply couldn't compete with it! The race track was built by Mr. Merriau, a gentleman from England, who somehow had heard of this bit of land for sale in a far away place. He promptly bought it and was soon on his way to Oregon to make his home. Mr. Merriau loved what he found here and decided to build a park for his neighbors and the people in Eugene to enjoy.

I asked Fred what Mr. Merriau was like, as I seemed to have no definite image of him. "Oh," said Fred, gazing into the fire as though dreaming of a forgotten figure, "he was kind of small and dark; an awfully nice fellow, but he got pretty mad at Eli Bangs."

"Why? I asked. "Mr. Bangs was a nice man, too, and a good neighbor."

"Just the same," Fred went on, "Mr. Merriau didn't think so. You see he had built the park and the tract and in time he had to get a loan to make improvements. He got the loan from Mr. Bangs and it hurt him like everything when he had to give up the park later. It was a fine park, a bit northeast of town, along the River Road. It is still marked by that row of decapitated old trees that once marked the eastern edge of the park."

"I remember a lake there, too," I said.

"Yes, he built that lake. It covered about five acres. There were ducks and frogs and catfish in it, as well as a boat. It was a great place for boys to fish. I was about fourteen then and I knew that park better than our own back yard. The track cost a lot of money. He even bought a sprinkling wagon to use in the summer when the dust got so thick the horse racers could hardly see who was ahead!" Fred laughed at the memory of it. "You see all that expense was when Mr. Merriau had to get a loan; but it just didn't work out. Finally, Mr. Bangs took the park on a mortgage and hung up his own sign, **BANGS PARK**. I can hear yet Mr. Merriau's disgusted comment, 'Bangs Park; now what an ugly name to hang on a pleasure park.' I felt real sorry for him. You see he loved the place and wanted more than anything to some day give it to the town. He wanted his name on something so that the town would remember him and he would always be a part of it."

"Did Mr. Bangs do anything to improve the park?" I asked.

"No, he just cut down a lot of trees. They were first growth. People went there but it wasn't the same as when Mr. Merriau owned it."

"Do you recall what it cost to get into the park?" I asked.

"Didn't cost me a cent. We lived right next door and there was no fence. Father had come over from England, bought up ten acres of land on River Road for which he paid twelve hundred dollars. Some of

the neighbors thought the price pretty high, but I remember Father said, 'The time will come when it will be harder to buy land in the Willamette Valley than it will be to sell it' But it wasn't too high a price for the joy he got out of building his home in Oregon, or than we got out of living there. Why were you so fond of the race track?" Fred asked.

"Because I got to ring the starter's bell for the races. The bell was in a little tower on the north side of the track, remember it? On Saturday afternoon, sometimes, I was allowed to go along. You see, if I wasn't there then one of the drivers had to stay out of the race to do the ringing and that was the worst thing that could possibly happen."

"Did they bet on the races; any money change hands?"

"Oh, I don't remember. I probably never knew, but I'm sure Saturday afternoon at Merriau's was the high spot of the week. Papa's drug store could just go hang that day! Sometimes Dr. John stayed there to sell a few pills or keep loafers away from the bung in the whiskey barrel."

"Sunday at the park was more sedate," Fred recalled.

"Yes, it was different. On Saturday, Papa hitched Babe or Blackhawk, usually it was Babe because Blackhawk balked and a race track was certainly no place for a balking horse! Papa didn't own a sulkey so he hitched his pacer to the light buggy and she sometimes won, even with that added weight. But on Sunday it was different. Then he drove the team hitched to the carriage and the whole family went, and all was quiet and proper. Mama looked so pretty in her long driving coat and a big veil around her wide hat. Personally, I wasn't very happy on that day, for Duke, our jet black hound, was so crazy to go along, he always followed and ran all the way under the carriage. By the time we got to the park we hardly knew he was black, he was so covered with dust. His eyes were full of tears and his long tongue

hung out as he panted for breath. Sometimes I cried, I felt so sorry for him. About all I did on Sunday was to take Duke to the horse trough and use my best Sunday handkerchief to wash the dust off his face and out of his eyes. It certainly wasn't like Saturday at the races."

Fred agreed with me. "I remember Saturday all right. We boys spent all the time fishing in the lake or hanging around the stables watching the men take care of the horses. All summer long that park was a fine cool place under the big trees. The coast breeze made it just about perfect."

I agreed it was near perfect. There was always the grand smell of wild flowers and the sun on the dry grass. I remember the fence corners were filled with wild roses and the open fields were full of color, pink and blue and purple corn-flowers.

Fred added to the picture, "Yes, and the wild grass, the color of gold out on the prairie, was belly high to a horse."

"Papa was always in a hurry for dinner on Saturdays. I expect Mama gave a sigh of relief when we finally got started. Sometimes we passed Dr. Tom Harris on the way. Papa could never resist letting Babe out a little if he saw Tom ahead. I can see him yet; his tan linen duster flapping around his skinny legs, his Vandyke beard parted in the middle, wind whipped, as he raced. He wore very elegant gauntlet gloves of deer hide and his cap had a visor to keep the sun out of his eyes. There was a long black whip that he somehow, magically, kept in constant action over Babe's shining back. Tell me more that you remember about Mr. Merriau, Fred," I added, as I ended my own long dissertation on the race track.

"Well, for one thing, when he built the lake he had a dream, kind of impossible I guess, of piping water from the Millrace to keep the lake filled. It might have worked, too, the lake was six feet lower than the Millrace, but I guess he didn't have the money to do it. He planted that

row of fir trees along the east edge of the park to keep people from stopping their wagons there to watch the races for nothing. Sometimes the dust was so thick they couldn't see, anyway."

"I remember the sprinkling wagon. About the middle of the afternoon, Mr. Merriau drove it slowly around the track, the water dribbling out enough to settle the dust. After that, the air was clear again and we could see the exciting races better. They kept on until it was time to go home for supper. Mama said we were always late for supper on Saturday, and we were."

"Do you remember the pavilion?" Fred asked, a gleam in his eyes. "A lot of young folks and some not so young, liked the dancing there. We boys used to hang around and watch. There were high windows and benches around the wall where people sat and visited when they weren't dancing. Of course, they couldn't dance or horse race on Sunday, so it was usually nice and quiet, but sometimes there were extra things going on; extra exciting things like the time the militia boys camped there for two weeks. Why, they they even had a sham battle one day and everybody in town was there to see it. Half the troops were dressed up as Filipinos, in sheets and straw hats. The others were to fight them and were supposed to lick them!"

"It must have been hard to fight in sheets and hats."

"Well, it wasn't easy, but there was a battle, all right. The U. S. soldiers were stationed on a little rise of ground near the edge of the park. There was also a nest of hornets there that they didn't know about, and when the men started to race toward the enemy line of battle, they disturbed the hornets and were badly licked by them! The Filipinos never did get near. It was quite a war," laughed Fred. "And what's more, Mr. Merriau was good and mad before the encampment was over. He kept chickens, or tried to, but the soldiers kept stealing them. Finally, he went to the

captain and asked to have a sentry near his house. Then one night he found the sentry in his big cherry tree, stealing all the cherries, so threatened him good and sent him back to camp. He had his troubles that two weeks, but so did the soldiers, what with the hornets and the Filipinos."

Fred asked, "Did you ever hear about the horse? Naylor, I think his name was."

"No, I only knew the names of the race horses."

Naylor was a fine animal and a great favorite with all around the stable. When he died, they decided to bury him there where he had spent the last happy years of his long life, so Mr. Merriau sent two men to dig the grave. When he got the horse out there, they found the grave wasn't long enough and one of the men suggested cutting off the horse's head, as a solution. Mr. M. was mad as tophet!"

The story of the park seemed to be getting a little gory for me, as Fred went on talking.

"That's what Mr. Ray thought, too, when he happened along and heard of the plan. He was fighting mad and brandished something at the men, a pitchfork, I think it was, and they started digging again in a hurry."

I asked Fred if he recalled the names of the men who used the track regularly. I could remember only Father, Uncle Amos and Dr. Tom Harris.

"Why, there were Dad Tryne and Gairy Mathews, oh, and Eli Bangs and Mrs. Bangs.

"Did she drive in the races?"

"Only once in a while. She was a fine driver, though, always looked nice; I can see her yet, sailing around the track, handling the reigns like an expert. Bangs owned some fine horses. He and Dad Tryne spent a lot of time there training them."

"Wasn't he one of the early day athletic coaches at the University?"

"Yes, and as good with men as with horses."

The subject seemed to be a never ending one, but now the rain had stopped, evening shadows were beginning to fill the valley, so I said good-bye to Fred, got into my unglamorous little Ford and drove back to town, my mind still happily on the first park that Mr. Merriau built for his town.

Those were surely racy days around the Track.

List of Books Brought to Oregon by
The John Stewart Family, 1853

Tassy, John: THE SUPREME AND EXCLUSIVE AUTHORITY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST
Printed by D. and M. Maclean, for the author.

Stockton, J.: THE WESTERN CALCULATOR OF PRACTICAL ARITHMETIC
Printed and published by Johnson and Stockton, 1839

Loomis, Luke: NEW ENGLAND PRIMER
Published at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
(no date)

Baxter, Rev. Richard: THE SAINTS EVER-LASTING REST
Published by the American Tract Society (no date)

Bunyan, John: THE HOLY WAR
Published by the London Book Society

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THE LANE COUNTY FAIR

Thirteen years after the first pioneers had staked their claims in Lane County, there were sufficient settlers to organize a Fair Board and promote a county fair. The officers chosen were: Avery A. Smith, president; C. E. Chrisman, Mitchell Wilkins, Isaac R. Moores and Albert P. Gaines, vice-presidents; Stuckley Ellsworth, recording secretary; E. E. Haft, corresponding secretary; Feilding McMurry, treasurer. The board chose October 11-12, 1859 as the dates for the first Fair, to be held at Eugene City.

Provision was made for awarding \$80.75 in premiums to competitors in twelve classes: stallions; mares and colts, and colts; matched and single horses; cattle; sheep; swine; butter; cheese; field crops; garden produce; fruit; manufactures. Forty-four individuals exhibited and garnered seventy-one premiums. George Belshaw surpassed all others by winning seven awards, while J. Southwell received five, Lester Hulin, Sr., four and Hulins Miller and W. Vaughn, three each.

It is interesting to note the development that has taken place in the intervening years. One hundred and four years after the first Fair (1963) 516 premiums,

totaling \$17,005.00 were awarded to 800 participants who exhibited in the following departments: horses; dairy cattle; beef cattle; sheep and goats; swine; poultry; rabbits; land products; floral foods; textiles; industrial art; hobbies and collections; art; photography. Total attendance at the 1963 fair was 158,000.

In referring to the first Fair, The Oregon Farmer of October 22, 1859 says:

"The large and varied exhibition of farm products, mechanical skill, and the number of people on the grounds, were enough to convince anyone that Lane County possesses much of the enterprise and spirit of improvement which build up a prosperous and happy community. If Lane County does not contain more good stock than any other in the state, then the breeders have not brought them out, for we certainly saw more stock and pure blood at Eugene City than at any other point we have visited. . . Judging from the fair in Lane, her citizens are awakening to their true interest and will soon give the more populous counties of the state a tough pull for prominence."

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Cleishbotham, Jebediah: TALES OF MY LANDLORD, Vol. I, Heart of Midlothian

Published by J. R. Crissy, Philadelphia, Pa., 1826

Smith, Mrs Elizabeth Oakes: BOOK OF POEMS

Published by J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1845

PEOPLES' FREE ALMANAC FOR THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1853

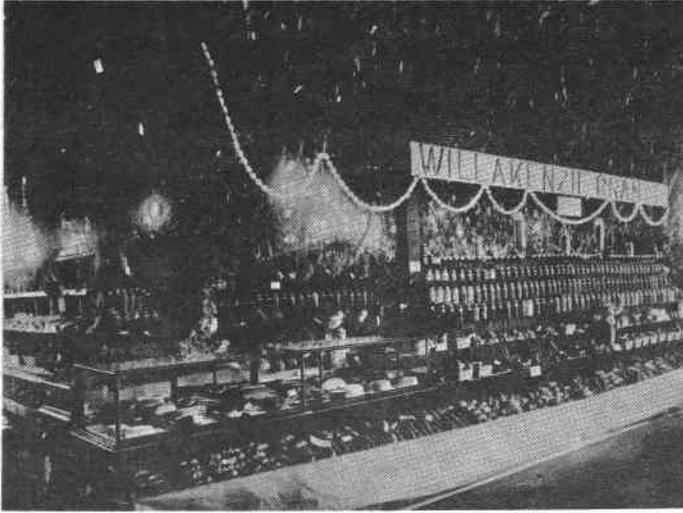
Published by A. G. Braggs and Co. Sole proprietor of the Mexican Mustang Liniment. Principal office 304 Broadway, New York and corner 3rd and Market, St. Louis, Missouri.

Scott and Barsom, Columbus, Ohio.

MITCHELL'S SCHOOL AND FAMILY GEOGRAPHY, with Atlas and Maps, 1839

BROWN'S DICTIONARY OF THE HOLY BIBLE, Vol. I and Vol. II

Printed by Angus & Son, 1800



Beginning with the first Lane County Fair in 1859, an important part of every fair has been the display of farm produce. In later years, the Grange exhibits have been works of art.

Lane County Pioneer-Historical Society
740 West 13th Ave., Eugene, Oregon

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