

FRANK BAKER

EARLY LIFE ON ISLAND RANCH

When I was eleven years old I went to make my home with my sister and brother-in-law Charley Jones on what is known as the Island Ranch, owned then by Devine and Todhunter, that was in 1882. Charley Jones was cattle foreman for John Devine then.

That fall John Devine built a big two story house about 1/2 mile from the ranch where the ranch hands stayed, over towards Wrights Point in the willows. The house was just partly furnished and on Christmas Eve my sister and brother-in-law went to the dance at Egan, there was no Burns then. There was no automobiles them days and there wasn't snow enough to go in a sleigh so my sister and Charley rode horseback.

All that was left that night at the new house was an old man his name was Mac Mineme and old Toy the Chinaman and myself. The old Chinaman slept out in a little house by itself. Charley had sent and got me a pair of Roseburg boots made to order for Christmas and they had just come. I was sure proud of them, they just fit me. My sister had laid my clothes out to wear up town the next day, Christmas. Mac and me were going horseback, I could hardly wait for morning to come for I wanted to wear my boots.

Well what happened, Mac and me went to bed about nine o'clock, we slept together in a bed at the head of the stairs. We had gone to sleep about an hour I guess, when Mac awoke, my God Frank the house is on fire, so he grabs his pants and down the stairs he goes and me after him in my night clothes. When Mac opened the door he made it to the door that led into the kitchen from where the fire was, but the heat and smoke drove me back up the stairs. I ran back over the rooms that was burning to the far window and broke it and swung out and jumped, I lit on the ice and snow a running. I was scared so bad that I didn't notice the cold. The old Chinaman give me a pair of old brown overalls and a pair of wooden shoes. So you see it was a dull old Christmas for me. I didn't care so much for the house burning down but I did hate to lose my boots. When the ranch hand saw the blaze they came running through the snow.

Johnnie Morill Sr. was the first to get here, just in time to see the roof go down, there wasn't a thing saved. I think the old Chinaman did run in and get his old meerschaum pipe. So a year or so after that Devine built another house on the same foundation and later on it was moved to where it stands now. Known as the White House at the Island Ranch.

1923

## NOTABLE PIONEER DIES

### CROSSED THE PLAINS IN 1845 - FIRST EMIGRANT TRAIN TO PASS THROUGH HARNEY VALLEY FOR THE WILLAMETTE

Mrs. Eliza Riggs passed away at the family residence on Saturday, February 17th, aged 87 years and 6 months.

In the death of Mrs. Eliza Riggs, Burns and vicinity loses one of the oldest and most respected pioneers.

Mrs. Riggs was formerly Eliza Hampton, the daughter of Jacob and Elizabeth Hampton, natives of Kentucky, and was born at Lafayette, Mo., August 1835.

In 1845 Captain Te'Vault organized an emigrant train for the Oregon country. In this train, among others, were Jacob Hampton and the wife, a son, Henderson Hampton, of 17 years, and who drove one of the ox teams, and the daughter, Eliza. This is the first train that made the attempt to find a short cut to the Willamette Valley and, the first that ever traversed the Harney Valley.

Among the members of the party Mrs. Riggs recalled the following: The Packwood's, Tethrow's, Bagley's, Herron's, Riggs, Wilcox's, Waymeir's, Forrest's and Statts.

This train of 1845 was one of the largest that ever came across the continent with ox teams. It followed the old Oregon Trail to the Snake River. When they reached the mouth of the Malheur River the train was met by Stephen H. L. Meeks and Dr. Elijah White, who was identified with the Methodist mission in the Willamette Valley. Meeks and Dr. White induced 200 of the train of 1845 to abandon the old trail and seek a short cut to the Willamette Valley by way of the Malheur River and Central Oregon. As stated before, in this train was Mrs. Riggs, then ten years old.

After describing the terrible sufferings of this train, history says: "What Stephen Meeks' private reasons might be for undertaking to lead a party through a country utterly unknown to himself will probably always remain an unsolved mystery in Oregon history." Mrs. Riggs took issue with the above statement and said that Stephen Meeks was a good man, and apparently knew what he was doing. Mr. Meeks had been through the country with the Hudson Bay people and as evidence of previous knowledge he found water holes for his camps. Mrs. Riggs said that the train did not divide as has often been stated, but remained together until they reached The Dalles.

Mrs. Riggs insisted that the "Blue Bucket" mine was a myth and that the story was never mentioned by the members of the train who settled in the Willamette, until after gold was discovered in California in 1848.

When the survivors of the ill-fated Meeks party reached The Dalles they constructed rafts, loaded the wagons on the rafts, and after many exciting adventures with the turbulent waters of the Columbia, landed at what is now Linton on the Willamette River. The members were given aid and assistance in every way by Dr. McLaughlin and later most of them settled in the Willamette Valley.

Mrs. Riggs, in speaking of the early life of the first settlers stated the pioneer home was a log cab in with a puncheon floor, without sawed lumber, glass or nails. Sugar, coffee, tea and sometimes salt, were not every day luxuries. Moccasins made of deer or elk hides and soled with rawhide were used for shoes. Buckskin and leather were used for men's clothing and hides of wild and domestic animals were used in many ways. The men were clothed with buckskin jackets and leather pants, and the women with dresses made from wagon sheets, dyed with native barks.

Regardless of the poverty of the early pioneers, they were happy and contented, knowing that at last they had reached their fondest ambitions --- the ambition to own and improve a home.

Mrs. Riggs was of a deep religious nature and many were her acts of Christian charity. Always living the life of a frontiers woman she developed that bigness of character that always characterizes the freedom-loving frontiersman in hospitality and generosity. Her loss to the country is great.

She was married to Milton Riggs in 1851. In 1874 Mr. and Mrs. Riggs moved to Summer Lake, Oregon, and to Burns in 1887.

She is survived by eight children: Mrs. Mary Farrow, Mrs. George Estes, Lulu Pain, Mrs. Thomas Short, Mrs. Frank Baker, Harry, Matt and Charles Riggs. The funeral was held from the family residence Sunday, February 18th, the services being conducted by Rev. McAfee Wilson, and internment made in the Burns Cemetery.