

1840 – 1849

Settlers Along The Foothills

There were very few beaver left along the sloughs and streams of the Willamette Valley by 1840. Not long before 1840 the French Canadian trappers and their Indian wives and families had given up trapping and had taken up land claims around French Prairie. They had turned to raising stock and grain.

Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, which had been one of the best self-supporting forts of the Hudson's Bay Company, would sell livestock and seed grain to its former trappers, and enough supplies to start farming. This could be paid for with an agreement that they would return to the company in kind from what they produced. In grain they returned the original amount of seed plus one measure more. They had to return the parent animal and a young one, after they had a start for themselves.

Hudson's Bay Company offered the same arrangement to the pioneers who had lost all their livestock on their journey across the plains.

Settlers from the early wagon trains had taken up land in the northern part of the valley. Every fall found more settlers arriving. November found the Willamette Valley so wet and soggy that travel further south was difficult overland.

Pioneers wintered near Oregon City or in the Molalla Valley. They and their livestock were travel worn from the long trying journey on the Oregon Trail. They were ill prepared to travel further and select a claim on which to build a home.

The wagon train of 1846 had arrived late that fall, wintering near Oregon City. They planned to go further south and into the Willamette Valley with the coming of spring. The livestock were gaunt and footsore from the long hard journey over the Oregon Trail. During the winter small parties from the wagon train explored south and into the Willamette Valley seeking suitable locations for their land claims.

The Willamette Valley by the late 1840s had very few Kalapuya Indians. The Tk'ubi tribe that had lived along Muddy Creek were almost gone. There was little left of their lodges and sweat houses. The Kalapuyas were a declining race when a flu-like epidemic swept through the Willamette Valley, further taking its toll on this once strong and proud people.

When the Willamette Valley was green with the new growth of early spring, the settlers planning to settle along the foothills of the Cascades left Oregon City in high spirits. Here was the promise of the journey's end and a home in a new land. They found the valley floor swampy from the winter rains, so they traveled along the foothills.

East of today's Harrisburg the explorers had found unclaimed land suitable for homes. They had noticed tall Douglas firs growing on the slopes of the Cascade mountains and groves of fir trees on the valley floor where the soil was well drained. Large oak trees grew along the banks of the many small streams. There were also swamps and areas of wet land with an abundance of water fowl.

Those settling along the foothills from the wagon train of 1846 were: Thomas Wilson, his brother John, wife Mahala and children John and twins, Prior and Ann; Luther White, wife Mary and children, Sara E. and John W.

Also in this group of pioneers was David or Daniel Putman, who was 40 years old at the time of the 1850 census, his children Martha, Mahala, David, John, James and Mary E., who were all born in Illinois. William Vaugh, listed as a farmer, his wife Phebe with their children Boyd, Washington, John William, Lafayette, Amanda, Sarah, and Alice, who was listed as born in Oregon Territory.

Luther White was listed as a Presbyterian minister and also a surveyor. He at once set about surveying the settler's land claims. As soon as the claims were located, they built temporary shelters and cultivated enough land to plant some of the seeds they had brought for their gardens.

During the summer of 1847, the grass on the prairie grew so tall that a man on horseback

could have tied it together across his saddle. The grass dried, and by late summer the settlers became afraid of prairie fires. Livestock often became lost in the tall grass. Children were cautioned not to wander or they too, could lose their way. Livestock grazed at will because there were no fences, except the pole fences around gardens to keep the livestock out.

All summer long the pioneers worked long and hard to prepare for winter. Working together they built better shelters before the coming of winter storms. They cut and stored wild hay for winter feed. Trees had to be cut for a fuel supply. The women and children found wild berries to pick and dry. Hazel nuts were abundant and had to be gathered before the squirrels carried them to their nests. Sometimes children were able to locate a squirrel's winter supply.

William Alexander Forgey

William Alexander Forgey, eighth son of Alexander G. Forgey and Elizabeth Sawyers Forgey, was born January 5, 1821 in Knox County, Tennessee. He was married to Hannah Micheal at the home of her parents in Indiana on June 21, 1845. Hannah was just sixteen years old at the time she bade a tearful goodbye to her family in the fall of 1846. Forgey and his young wife traveled to Illinois where they wintered. In the spring of 1847 Forgey and his wife joined a wagon train traveling with ox teams to Oregon.

The Forgeys were expecting their first child. Hannah walked as much as possible because the jolting of the wagon made her ill. Out on the prairie on July 14, 1847, she gave birth to a daughter, Mary Elizabeth. The baby failed to thrive and on August 3, they buried her beside the trail. It was hard to go on and leave that tiny one but they knew they must. Due to good grass along the way this wagon train suffered fewer hardships than many of the later trains.

They arrived in Oregon in the fall of 1847, and spent the winter in the Molalla Valley, Clackamas County. During the winter William Forgey and Jason Clark along with several others of their wagon train explored south through the Willamette Valley.

William Forgey chose his claim closest to the Willamette River, and Jason Clark's was just to the east of the Forgey claim. They soon had comfortable cabins built. It was on the claim that the second child of the Forgey's was born. Sarah Jane Forgey was born on October 6, 1848.

Gold! Gold has been discovered in California! This was the big news in 1849. This was the news that sent William Forgey and many of his neighbors to join the rush to the gold fields of California.

Forgey located a claim that seemed promising. Although his claim was yielding a good return, Forgey had found that gold mining was not for him. Forgey soon had an offer for his interest in the claim. He sold the claim and returned to his family in Oregon.

David McCully, who had arrived in the fall of 1851, thought the Forgey's claim along the Willamette River a good location for a town site. McCully talked with Forgey about having the land surveyed and platted for a town. McCully told Forgey that he wanted to buy a lot and build a store. He also thought that Forgey would be able to sell other lots. Then, they talked about getting a post office. Deciding on a name for it, Forgey said, "Prairie Precinct," 'Mud Flats,' 'Crows Nest,' those are not good names for a town."

McCully asked, "What would you call it, then? I'd call the place Thurston after Samuel B. Thurston, Oregon's first delegate to the United States Congress." "Now that is a right fittin' name," replied Forgey. "You named the town. It's on your claim. You apply for a post office. I'll make room in my store for the post office."

"Luther White out here is a "good surveyor. He has just completed his survey of the Eugene City town site," suggested Forgey. "He'll treat us right," agreed McCully. Luther White was hired to survey the town site for Forgey and the first lot sold was to David McCully for a store.

Some records say Gamaliel Parish was the first postmaster. Another record says the first postmaster was Asa McCully. William A. Forgey's obituary says he was the first postmaster. An application was sent to the post office department asking for a post office using

the name of Thurston. The post office returned their application saying they would have to choose another name for their post office as there was already a post office of that name in Oregon.

A meeting was called for the purpose of selecting another name. Some early records say Harrisburg was named for the Harris family who had a donation land claim on Muddy Creek. The voting place called, "Prairie Precinct," was on the claim of Henry P. Schooling that bordered on Muddy Creek. Others claim the name was suggested by Asa McCully because it reminded him of the countryside near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in the spring. In 1855 the name of Harrisburg was accepted.

If, in fact, Forgey was the first postmaster it was only for a short time as he was buying horses for the government during the Rogue River war of 1853. We further learned that Forgey was a recruiting officer in the Modoc War in 1873.

Sometime before 1860 Dr. Henry A. Davis made a deal with Forgey to purchase the remainder of his land claim outside the town site.

Eight of Forgey's ten children were still living at the time of his death in 1892. The obituary also states that in politics he was a Whig, then a Democrat, and in religion he was a Methodist. He was a kind and loving husband, a good father, and a friend to the needy. He died at his home in Tapawa, Idaho, but requested that he be buried in Oregon.

1850 – 1859

The McCully — Thurston Renamed As A Town Site

Pioneers who had suffered the hardships of traveling the Oregon Trail for the promise of free land continued to file for donation land claims in the vicinity of Harrisburg all during the 1850s.

The fall of 1851 brought the Perry Hyde family. The Hydies took up a claim just north

of Territorial Street. When there were more than one hundred settlers in the area a polling place was designated on Muddy Creek on the claim of Henry P. Schooling. They called it Prairie Precinct.

John McCully was born in Nova Scotia in 1785, of Scotch ancestry. In 1810 he married Mary Kopp, born in Eastport, Maine, in 1788. The first son, Samuel, was born in 1812 followed by David in 1814 and Asa in 1818, all in New Brunswick, Canada. John McCully moved his family to Jefferson County, Ohio, in 1822. Two more sons were born after moving to Ohio: Dr. J.W. and William H. McCully. Mary Jane, the only daughter, was born in 1832. Mary Jane married John D. Love in 1850.

David worked his way southward to Hendersonburg in Belmont County, Ohio. It was here he met and married Mary Ann Scott on May 7, 1840. Mary Ann was born at Mt. Pleasant, Jefferson County, Ohio, on October 16, 1812. David then moved to Burlington, Iowa, where he and his brother Asa engaged in selling fanning mills for cleaning grain.

Then came the news of the discovery of gold in California; this caused a lot of excitement. David and Asa were among the first to try their luck in the gold fields of California. Here a fortune could be made with the turn of the spade. Early in 1849, William Scott and J.L. Starkey joined the McCullys for the journey to California. They had prepared well for the journey across the plains.

Arriving at the gold fields they first grubstaked a man who persuaded them that he was experienced in locating claims. They didn't agree with his methods and set out for themselves.

They made a lucky choice of claims and by November 20th they were ready to return home. Each had over \$10,000 in gold as his share. They had made their fortune.

The McCullys and J.L. Starkey returned to Iowa through the Isthmus of Panama. The food was bad all the way, on board ship and across the Isthmus. What little food there was had to be fought for. William Scott stayed on at the mines. He planned to return later to his family. He was a blacksmith by trade and was the brother

of Mary Ann Scott McCully. All trace of him was lost.

David and Asa McCully upon returning to Iowa opened a mercantile business in New London, Iowa. It was here the McCullys came down with a bad case of "Oregon Fever." The business was successful but the call of the west and the offer of free land caused them to plan a journey to Oregon. They soon found a buyer for their mercantile business and began preparation for the journey over the Oregon Trail.

The trip to California had taught them to prepare well for the journey across the plains. David's family traveled in a light wagon drawn by horses. They had both oxen and horses with them. All of this company of 100 people were well prepared and equipped for the long hard journey on the Oregon Trail.

David McCully was chosen to captain the train. The McCully train had very little trouble with roving bands of Indians. They were able to keep ahead of the cholera, but they too had their heartaches as well as all those who came west in those early days. They found many graves beside the trail. There were places where bodies had been wrapped in blankets for burial. Here wolves and coyotes had dug into graves and the bodies were scattered all about, a very gruesome sight. This sight disturbed 11-year-old Joseph McCully.

He became the most anxious of the party to reach the Oregon Country, but it was willed otherwise. Joseph was taking some mules to water when they were startled. Little Joseph could not control them. The boy was badly hurt by their kicking.

Joseph's family decided to try to go on ahead of the wagon train and get the boy to the doctor at Fort Hall. Joseph died before they could reach Fort Hall so they turned back. Before his death he cried and begged not to be left alone on the prairie for the wolves, coyotes or Indians to dig up.

Joseph's parents rejoined their wagon train just as a severe thunder storm broke. The winds were so strong the men had a hard time holding down the canvasses and tents to keep them from blowing away.

By morning the storm had passed. The men fashioned a coffin from a wagon box and the women lined it with muslin. They buried him beside the trail. Joseph's mother found it hard to go on, but she knew they must keep going.

When Asa McCully came along the trail the next year he put up an iron marker. It is said the grave can still be located because of the iron marker.

There were rivers to be crossed on the Oregon Trail. Storms sometimes caused delays when streams rose to overflow their banks. Though there were ferries on some streams a toll had to be paid for the wagons and each head of livestock. When the McCully train came to the North Platte the ferry man wanted a toll of \$6.00 for each wagon and \$1.00 for each head of cattle. Captain McCully scouted along the bank and found a good place to ford. They found a bridge across the Laramie. The toll was fair and the bridge sturdy.

Some accounts claim the arrival time of the McCully train to be late August of 1851 and others say October. The McCullys had planned to take adjoining land claims. They stopped at Salem, but found they would not be able to get adjoining land claims near Salem. It was then they decided to travel further south through the Willamette Valley and look for a better location.

When they reached the vicinity of Harrisburg, the McCully brothers found they could locate claims adjoining one another. This area was referred to as "Crows Nest" or "Mud Flats." However, the voting place was called "Prairie Precinct." It was unfenced and livestock wandered about grazing on the lush forage. Small groves of trees grew on the higher, better drained ground.

The land along the river was already claimed by William A. Forgey, but to the east lay large tracts of unclaimed land. Asa McCully laid claim to the land east of the Forgey donation land claim. David took a claim just south of Asa. Samuel and William H. McCully took claims to the north. Dr. J.W. McCully settled in Jacksonville.

The McCullys, with an eye to the future, felt the Willamette River would soon be used for