

Early Experiences in Tillamook, Oregon

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by Mabel Noyes Falks

(typed by Charlie Sutton in 2002 as part of his technology class at Nestucca Valley Middle School and edited by Dean Bones)

I came to Oregon in July 1906, from Kansas with my parents Winslow and Viola Noyes, my grandfather Horation L. Noyes (then 85) and my two sisters Violet and Eula.

We came to Sheridan, Oregon, by train. There my father hired a driver with a team and three seated open spring wagon which carried us passengers. A second team and light wagon brought our luggage and six trunks or big wooden boxes fitted with handles and weighed as packed so as to bring full amount railroads allowed with each ticket. There was also the hand luggage we carried including a large valise of lunch material to furnish our meals.

We left Sheridan very early in the morning. The roads we traveled were various but all rough. Some gravel, corduroy, mud and planks. Even the plank road was rough at intervals because of broken boards.

Our first stop on the last cap of our journey to Woods, Oregon, was at Dave Leno's on the Indian Reservation where we had a very satisfying noon meal. We continued over the toll road arriving at Woods, crossing the river on a ferry to be welcomed at the home of mother's brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Norton.

Everything was so strange to us, the rivers, timber, ocean, wonderful supply of fruit and vegetables and the fishing.

In August, Father rented the Chris Christensen ranch above Nestucca Bay, and we became an Oregon dairyman's family. Not that it was entirely new as Father had always kept some cows but not in numbers like this. I had milked cows from the time I could stand and milk into a tin cup but the number of cows here intrigued me, and I began keeping a daily record of the number I milked.

Father had charge of the warehouse dock where the Della came regularly, and a small stock of goods most needed was kept by Charles Ray of Cloverdale. Here dairymen hauled their portion of the cheese, made at the factory from the milk they delivered at the factory. This was a hard trip up over hill to the Christensen place from Oretown and a steep road down to the dock. It was a very busy place when the Della came in. Some cheese was brought down river from as far as Cloverdale by boat.

The cannery down the river from the dock was also a busy place. Farmers up the river put out set nets from their land, and many fishermen had small cabins on the bay shore and used drift nets.

At the cannery, Chinamen were brought in to clean the fish; local women did most of the filling of cans. Japanese men were hired to superintend the cooking. They could better stand the great heat from the retorts where the cans were rolled in on carts to cook. on being brought out each can had to be punctured to let steam escape and then the hole soldered shut at once.

We were always glad when the Della arrived earlier than the tide as Capt. Jones would stop up by Haystack Rock and fish bringing us ling cod, snapper or maybe salmon which he brought up and cleaned. The crew from the boat came to Mother's table for a home cooked meal.

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Often the boys fishing on the bay would bring up a steelhead they found in nets which could not be canned with other salmon and then all came for a fish fry and Mother's house made butter, bread and desserts.

After the cannery closed in the fall the men caught a big supply for their own home use. I remember Uncle Fred Norton brought us thirty salmon. These were cleaned by cutting down halfway on the side of the fish with the belly part left in one piece which was salted down. The back piece was filleted into two pieces which were smoked. We had a small closet behind the fireplace where we hung the smoked fish, and it kept so well never molding or drawing dampness.

Grandfather who passed away in 1907 and is buried in Oretown cemetery came from Bangor, Maine. He was so pleased to be back on the waterfront once again and also to find such a good supply of clams. We could get a mess anytime at the bay shore, but it was rocky digging so we preferred to take a boat and go over on the Little Nestucca River where we could get a bigger supply in a short time.

We also got many flounders on the Little Nestucca River at low tide. A hired man named Learned would wade for them. At low tide the flounders stuck their heads in the sand and by wading and stopping on them you could reach down and pick them up often getting twelve or fifteen at a trip.

My first school was at Otis, Oregon. This was a joint district, partly in Tillamook County and partly in Lincoln County. It was a three month spring term. Schools in districts with poor roads often had two terms of three months each; one in spring and one in fall.

Father and I started to Otis by going to Neskowin and then up Slab Creek with a team and light wagon. We stopped at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Taggart to ask about roads etc. They invited us in to eat dinner with them which featured roast bear meat. It was very tasty and our first experience in eating bear meat. They advised us to leave the wagon and go by trail and horseback as the road was impossible to travel.

Father decided to leave one horse. He would walk over the trail and ride back, and I would ride. Mr. Taggart told us where to find ford and foot log for crossing Slab Creek where the trail began. They also advised me to dismount after crossing the creek because the trail was very steep for a short distance and travel had worn it into deep steps. They said also to start the horse up the trail and get behind and hold on to the horse's tail and let it pull me up the steps. This I did, and we were off on a new experience. The trail was well worn in places. It passed through timber so high and thick you could not see sky through the tree tops. In other places it wound over fern covered hills.

We arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. West where I was to live during the school term. The school house was near. It was a small one room building made of sawed lumber. The home of Mr. and Mrs. West had living room bedrooms in the main part with bedrooms overhead. On one side was a long lean-to room for a kitchen and dining room. The house was built of small round poles for frame work and covered with split shakes. The sides, partitions, floor, upstairs floor and roof were all shakes. Leola, Hazel West and I had rooms overhead. The bunk-like beds were back under the slope of the roof. and you could see daylight, stars or moonlight between shakes over you as you lay in bed but never a drop of rain came through. Nice deer rugs covered the floor by our beds.

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Mrs. West was also the postmistress, so we had lots of callers coming for mail. Mail came Monday, Wednesday and Friday from Grand Ronde and Tuesday and Thursday from Taft. The same carrier had both routes.

Once we were low on sugar, and Mr. West offered the mail carrier a dollar to bring us 5 pounds of sugar. He refused, saying his horses had all they could do to get the mail through. If he started to carry packages for one, he would have to serve others. Mr. West then wrote to the grocery man asking him to send us 5 pounds of sugar by parcel post, which he did. So we received the sugar and the carrier only handled mail.

Mr. West made a business of buying day-old calves from dairymen around Neskowin. These he would bring across trail on horses putting one on each side of a pack saddle - two for each horse. He put these calves on his cows, first taking the cow's own calf away. Each cow was given two calves to raise but not her own as she would favor it. After knowing their two calves, the cows were put on tideland pasture for the summer. Mr. West built up a large herd and later opened his own cheese factory. Mr. West's favorite saddle horse was also exceptionally good as a pack horse. He could pack anything on her if she saw what it was, live calves, live pigs and the deer he frequently killed.

Mr. West loved to play the violin, and I would accompany him on the little parlor organ.

One evening Mr. West started after the cows afoot and without his gun. This was very unusual. Soon he was back to grab his gun and tell Hazel and me to put the pack saddle on the horse and come to a certain bend down the road. He had jumped a deer. Before we could arrive we heard the shot and upon reaching him we found the deer shot, dressed out and ready to be packed home on the horse. He had started his dog on the deer trail when he returned with the gun but just waited there - the dog ran a circle of about 3 miles and again jumped the deer very close to where Mr. West waited.

As I mentioned earlier I made a record of cows I milked. When this number exceeded 10,000, I told father I thought he should pay me a little for all that work. He asked what I wanted.

"How about a penny a cow?" I asked.

"What will you do with the money?"

"Buy a single seated top buggy so we won't always have to take the team and light wagon."

"O.K.," he said, and we went to town and purchased the buggy. It was a real comfort in rainy weather.