

## **Pioneer Days in the Nestucca Valley**

*This was published in the Headlight-Herald in 1946  
and typed by Dean Bones in January 2023.*

My father, Lester Ray, Sr. came to South Tillamook County in April 1880, and filed on 160 acres of land. At that time my brother, Lester Ray Jr., was 30 years old, my sister, Anna, who later became Mrs. John Lucy, was 13, and I was 5 years of age.

My father and brother started to build a cabin of hewed cottonwood logs on the homestead, but in hewing the logs my father broke his leg, and Lester Ray Jr. finished hewing the logs alone.

The few neighbors who had at that time come and helped complete the cabin were our nearest neighbors - John Knifong, Jasper Smith, Mr. Fuqua, Elam Butts, William Butts, Sr., William Butts, Jr., Andrew Anderson, Nels Hanson, Lars Jensen, George Bodyfelt and Jerry Lewellen.

In the fall of 1879 we had come to South Prairie and had wintered near where the Blimp Base is now. In the spring Jeff Wallace who used to buy cattle all over the county moved us to the Nestucca River valley on pack horses. Father took the cook stove to pieces and packed it on a horse. He and Mr. Wallace also packed the dining table, bedsteads, bedding and cooking utensils all on horses.

The cattle which Jeff Wallace bought he drove through the Nehalem Valley over the Cape Carney trail to Astoria. His saddle horse and his shepherd dogs knew the business as well as he did.

Willburn Thacker bought hogs all over the county and drove them to the Willamette Vally on foot. As there were no bridges in those days the hogs swam all the streams.

Mr. Thacker's oldest daughter, Alice, told me she was the first white girl born in the Nestucca Valley. She was born in 1875. That was before I came to the county, so most of the people in the southern part of the county must have been Indians at that time.

Our first road which, of course, was a dirt road became very muddy when it rained. It was so muddy that, in fact, in many places the mud was knee-deep, and in some holes the wagon would dip until the jockey-box would be filled with mud and water.

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I was 8 years old when I went to my first 3 months' school. The schoolhouse was built of split cedar shakes, and it stood on a flat across the present highway on the opposite side of the Nestucca River in front of the Dee Sander's place. A creek ran near the building.

William Rhoades who lived 1 mile from Cloverdale on the road to Hebo was the father of 8 girls. These girls and I went to the above-mentioned school, and we had to cross the Nestucca River to get there.

About 4 years after we settled in Tillamook County my brother, Charles Ray, came and filed on a homestead joining our place on the east. As soon as my father could prove up and give clear title to his land he sold 40 acres of it to Charles.

Perry Mattoon came to Nestucca and bought a part of the Rhoades' place. He was our country blacksmith for a good many years.

Then my brother, Charles, bought 80 acres more from my father and built the first cheese factory in Cloverdale and started the first general mercantile store in 1894.

My father then moved to the nearby town of Woods which was named for Joe Woods, an early settler. Al Phelps owned and operated the first mercantile establishment in that town. He afterwards sold the store to W.R. Robedee. T.J. Lucy and Frank Wilehart also had stores in Woods.

In early days, Charles Johnson, a Russian-Finn sailor, filed on a 160 acre homestead at the mouth of Clear Creek about 1 1/2 miles west of Cloverdale. He had a piece of cleared land adjoining the old dirt road which followed the river bank between Cloverdale and Woods. He had built a ten-rail stake and rider fence around this piece of land, and here he pastured 2 young horses. Instead of trying to jump over the fence, the horses would back up against it and push it down. Once out in the road they joined other roving horses and would sometimes stray as far away as Hebo before being caught.

One day I was coming home from Hebo when I met Charley Johnson with his halters on his arm. He asked me if I had seen his horses, and when I told him I had seen them in Hebo he was mad. He went on his way talking to himself. He didn't swear, but he said, "Conдум 'em, I fix 'em!" Could he have had an

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electric fence like they have nowadays his horses would not have backed up against it more than once, and then they would have got away in a hurry.

Charley Johnson was a bachelor, but a few years later he married a widow named Mrs. Lizzie White. They lived on the ranch until Charley died. His widow married a Mr. Scott and now lives near Grand Ronde. Her son, E.N. Johnson married my niece, Eleanor Lucy, and they live on the old home place where they operate a dairy milking 40 or 50 cows.

In 1887 my father, George Steele, and a Mr. Streams were the head carpenters in building a cannery on the Nestucca. Jerry Lewellan made the shingles for the cannery. He hauled them about 3 1/2 miles with his team and then floated them on ebb tide about 8 miles to the place where the cannery was being built.

On Saturdays I would row 9 miles with the ebb tide to bring my father home. One time we stated home, and a strong northwest wind was blowing. It blew so hard we couldn't row against it, so we stopped at the home of Walter Barnhart and stayed all night. Barnhart was a bachelor who lived about a half mile from the cannery. He wore long black whiskers and long hair braided and hanging down his back like a woman's.

There were several years when the cannery did not run, so we fishermen sold our salmon to the fish peddlers. At time when there was a big run of salmon we sold large chinooks as low as ten cents each. One time I had several fine bright silversides and 1 large black-skinned and pale-meated chinook. An old Indian woman came along carrying a large good-looking basket she had made of willows. She offered to trade me the basket for that old pale salmon. We made the trade, and she was as well-pleased with her bargain as I was with mine. Indians always preferred the chinook to the silversides.

Fish peddlers hauled the salmon to the Willamette Valley where they sold some for cash, and some they traded for fruit and groceries which they brought back and traded to us for more fish.

Dances were held often in pioneer days, and nearly everybody attended them. Baskets of lunch were brought, and coffee was made in a 5 gallon oil can. Young married people would bring their babies and put them to sleep on beds made of quilts and blankets which they brought from home. All the beds would be full of babies who slept while their parents danced.

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Many older people, grandmothers and grandfathers, attended the dances and enjoyed them as much as the young folks did. Favorite dances were the waltz, polka, schottische, 2 step and minuet not to mention the ever popular square dance or quadrille. Music was furnished by fiddlers of whom there were as many in the locality "as there are in Hades" to quote an old saying. The musicians would take turns playing for the dancers.

Frank Owens worked for Charles Ray for 7 years part of the time driving a 4 mule team hauling cheese to Tillamook taking 2 days for the trip. Part of the road was surfaced with gravel, part with planks, and part of it seemed to have neither surface nor bottom.

At that time I lived with my parents in Woods. My boat was my buggy, I was the horse, and my oars were my harness.

In those days Frank Owens and Guy Ford were courting the girls who afterward became their wives. Frank Owens married Eva Nelson, and Guy married Viola Hogan. In the wintertime I used to come to Cloverdale and take the two couples in my boat to dances in the Oddfellows' hall over Weatherley's drug store in Woods. That was better than driving through mud that was belly deep to a horse.

After Frank's marriage he settled down on 40 acres he bought from my father and 80 acres purchased from his father-in-law. He later acquired more land from Charles Ray. He now lives on the 40 acres which was once a part of our old home place.

A man by the name of Gardiner built a house on his ranch as the mouth of Nestucca Bay on top of a high point which is now called Gardiner's Point. He could see the ocean from every window in his house. The house was firmly fastened to a large redwood timbers which were buried in the ground. Otherwise it would have been blown away, for when it stormed the southwest wind blew with such force that a man could hardly stand against it.

Often in winter dances were held in the Gardiner house. Dancing would begin at dusk and last until daylight the next morning.

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Jerry Lewellen who lived near Hebo would have dances at his house, and there, too, the dancing would last from dark until dawn.

During the 1890s Preacher Bailey held revival meetings in the schoolhouse on the north side of Nestucca near Cloverdale. One Sunday he baptised 18 people in the river near Clark Gist's place where a gravel bar had been formed.

I worked for Clark Gist several summers in hay harvest for \$1.20 a day. Charley Johnson and Andy Rhoades pitched in the field. Micky Sanders loaded wagons, and I moved the hay away into the barn. Arthur Dimick pitched the hay off the wagons by hand, and the Gist brothers, Archie, Forrest and Ivan, tramped it down solid in the mow. Mr. Gist had a large herd of cows and young cattle.

Sometime during the 1880s and 1890s a man named Priestly had a cooper shop in Woods. He made his own staves out of spruce timber and also his barrel heads. Some of his hoops were made of wood, and some were galvanized. Ranchers bought the barrels to salt their meat in, and fishermen used them for packing salt fish. A man named Lineweber started a fish cannery on the bay and paid 60 cents apiece for large chinook salmon.

Artie Gage had a ranch on Little Nestucca Bay which was mostly tideland. On this land he pastured a herd of milk cows, and from these cows he made butter which he packed in 50 pound kegs and hauled it to the Willamette Valley towns where he sold it.

At Meda, Oretown and Neskowin the following pioneers were already here when we came: Jerome Dunn, John Craven, Hardy Rock, Job Foster, Chris Christensen, Fred Scherzinger, Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Hellenbrand and Mr. Page. Lars Redberg and sons came soon after.

In 1896 I went to Balston, Oregon, to drive a bundle wagon for Noah Gregg and Nate Conner who owned and operated a threshing machine. For 6 weeks I worked from the time it was barely light in the morning until dark at night and slept in a strawstack. The going wage at that time was \$1.25 per day.

I drove Noah Gregg's buggy team, and they would run away at the drop of the hat. One day the man who was pitching bundles into the self-feed across from me lost his pitchfork tines which came off the handle and fell into the cylinder making a loud rattling noise. This noise frightened the horses hitched to my

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wagon, and they started to run. About half the load was still on the wagon, and I crawled on my hands and knees until I could reach the lines. I soon had the horses under control as their bridles had J.I.C. bits. It didn't take much sawing on the lines to stop them, but their mouths were bleeding having been torn by the severe bridle bits.

In 1897 George Tucker and I worked for William Conder who lived between Hebo and Nestucca Bridge. For sawing, splitting and piling rotten logs we received \$10. a month. That was an average of 5 dollars more than other ranchers paid their hired men.

During the fall months of 1900, 1901, and 1902 I pulled boat for Dryden Baker while he fished in Tillamook Bay. In 1900 and 1901 we sold chinook salmon to Sam Elmore at Garibaldi for 30 cents each, silversides for 12 1/2 cents each and received 5 cents each for chums. In 1902 we received 2 cents per pound for chinooks, but the price remained the same for silversides and chums.

In those days we had some real Fourth of July celebrations when people from Sheridan, Willamina and other Willamette Valley towns would come in their covered wagons with their tents and camping outfits all prepared to celebrate for several days. Tom Handley, a lawyer from Tillamook, would make a patriotic speech in honor of the occasion. Some pretty girl dressed in white and decorated with flags would Goddess of Liberty. A hayrack all decked out with bunting and flags on a wagon drawn by a high-stepping team of horses also decorated with flags would be the coach in which the Goddess was driven about the parade grounds. Many girls and boys carrying flags would also take part in the parade.

Masked pug-uglies went around among the crowd making all kinds of fun.

There would be soda pop, lemonade stands and firecrackers for the youngsters. Large firecrackers would be placed under an anvil or something else that would make a loud noise, and these would be shot off early in the morning. Later in the day there would be foot races and sack races, and when the tide was low on the beach there were horse races on hard sand. There were boat races on the river also. No celebration was complete without a baseball game and a dance. Some folks would dance all day and all night. These celebrations would be held sometimes at Woods, sometimes at Pacific City, and sometimes at Cloverdale.

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Jess Kennedy brought the first car into the Nestucca Valley. At Cloverdale one Fourth of July he charged each person a dollar for a 1 mile round trip. Passengers rode on the seats, the running boards, the top and all over the car. He kept it up all night.

One time at Woods a man brought some bunch grass horses from eastern Oregon and sold them for saddle horses. Most of them had never been saddled. Dorr Shaw was known as a bronco buster, so we made up a purse of \$20. to see him ride one that would really buck. Mounting one of the broncos he put the spurs to it, and the horse jumped over a pile of lumber in John Krebs' mill-yard. Durr stayed on him, and after that got several jobs breaking such horses to ride.

In summer people came to Nestucca from all over the Willamette Valley coming in covered wagons and camping in tents while they fished for trout, trolled for salmon, caught deep-sea fish off the rocks at Cap Kiawanda and hunted seashells. In the fall when huckleberries were ripe they would come back to pick berries.

The Indian women had the best system for picking berries. They would spread blankets under the bushes, shake the berries off onto the blankets and then sit on the sand while they picked out all the leaves and stems leaving the berries nice and clean.

The settlers used to make crab-apple butter from wild crab-apples which grew in abundance before so much brush was slashed off the land. Many went up on Mr. Hebo and picked wild blackberries which they canned.

Guy Ford who is dairy inspector for Tillamook County was the first cheesemaker at Cloverdale. Doctor Linton at Woods was the only physician this side of Tillamook.

Church services were held in the schoolhouses, and the preachers traveled on foot, on horseback or in buggies if they were lucky enough to own such vehicles.

I should like to mention here some of the early settlers whose names do not appear elsewhere in this account of pioneer days in Nestucca Valley. In Woods there were Peter Belleque, Harrison Booth, William Booth, D.C. Collier, and Frank Norberg. In Pacific City there was John Malaney, Tom Malaney, Al

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Southmayd, and R.C. Magarell. Between those towns and Cloverdale lived Louis Hushback, Mr. Compton, Dick Allen, Jasper Dimick, George Landingham, Sam Hunter, William Glick, H.H. Miller and Charles Waymire.

A great many of the old-timers have passed away, and many have moved to other localities while new people have come to take their places until there are many people in the southern part of Tillamook County that I do not know. Yet, at one time I knew every man, woman, and child within a radius of 20 miles or more.