

— Fall 2020 —

THE AGATE

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HENRY LARCOM ABBOT AND THE "MAGNETIC
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AND MUCH MORE!**



N.S. 14

DEAR AGATE READERS—

Welcome to AGATE XIV—which might be labeled the “in-spite-of-COVID-19” issue. Putting it together has involved some new challenges, like masks, “social distancing,” and of course non-coverage of regular historical society events, such as our April Dinner, the Harvest Festival, and the Annual Meeting/Ice Cream Social, all of which have had to be canceled—but they’ll be back, don’t doubt it, in 2021!

Meanwhile, here’s THE AGATE, which we had planned as a “non-theme” issue, but somehow the pandemic has influenced our planning, so that the lead pieces all hark back a century, to the late teens of the last century: the end of World War One, and inevitably the “Spanish flu” epidemic of 1918-9 and its local impact; Victor Shawe’s short story, set in Central Oregon around 1910, but published nationally in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1919, when the epidemic was still circulating; the story of Walter Eaton, the county’s first surveyor, and his death in December 1918 of the flu, or possibly something worse related to his Army service; C.E.S. Wood’s poem on the Metolius River, “Testament,” written around 1919-20, at his son’s retreat near Camp Sherman, and so on.

The influenza virus back then apparently hit this area pretty hard. I recall my mother, who grew up in Opal City, showing me the tombstones of victims of it when we visited the Gray Butte Cemetery on Memorial Day, and reminiscing about how whole households around Culver and Opal City fell ill with it, and how anxious her parents were. Somewhere we have a letter from a relative back then, in which the writer says that she was going to iron the letter before mailing it.

Records of cases and deaths from the flu here are very incomplete, and local coverage in the Madras *Pioneer* was remarkably spotty. The virus seems to have arrived in the county in early October, (not long after it hit Portland), but real news about its rapid spread rarely appeared on page one. Reading the “Neighborhood News,” however—from Ashwood, Warm Springs, Culver, Grandview, and so on—conveys a much fuller impression of its impact. Oregon Health Authority records give a total of about 48,000 cases statewide (compared to the current total so far of over 25,000), and over 3700 deaths through 1919 (compared to COVID-19’s total so far of 444 as of the end of August 2020).

By mid-October 1918, the disease was widespread on the Warm Springs Reservation, with “5 or 6 deaths” reported, and the Indian Health Officer, Dr. Eddleman (who had been ill himself) observing that because older more traditional Indians were trying to treat it with sweat-



Nurses in masks, “Spanish fl u” epidemic in 1918

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Don Henderson and Mel Ashwill

Two longtime and valued members of the Historical Society, Don Henderson and Mel Ashwill, passed away in late September. Don, with his A/V expertise, had an indispensable part in just about every public event put on by the Society over the last twenty years; and he supported his wife, Elaine, in all of her endeavors for the Society. Mel crucially enriched the Society’s engagement in natural as well as human history; he was a recipient of the JCHS “Beth Crow Award.” Our best wishes to their families—we are grateful for who they were, and what they did.



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The mission of the Society is to research, gather and preserve the history of Jefferson County and Central Oregon for public education through the display of artifacts and archives.

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Cover painting, “Leapfrog,” by Norman Rockwell, originally appeared on the cover of the June 28, 1919 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, which featured Victor Shawe’s story “Rye Hay Williams” (pp.3 ff.) Reprinted here courtesy of the Curtis Publishing Company: image by Curtis Licensing.

RYE HAY WILLIAMS

By Victor Shawe

Edited by Jerry Ramsey

(first published in *The Saturday Evening Post* on June 28, 1919, and re-printed here for the first time courtesy of the Curtis Publishing Company)

Between 1917 and 1926, a writer who had homesteaded and taught school in Jefferson County attained national prominence by publishing seventeen short stories in America's premiere magazine then, *The Saturday Evening Post*. In one year, 1919, five of his stories, most of them set in rural Oregon and Idaho, were featured in the *Post*, alongside such eminent writers as Ring Lardner, P.G. Wodehouse, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Edith Wharton, and Sinclair Lewis, in issues with cover art by Norman Rockwell and other major American artists.

His name was Victor Shawe. In 1910, he and his friend Jud Vincent (then both living in the Willamette Valley) decided to take up homesteads southeast of Madras. Jud quickly found farm life to his liking, starting a lineage of ranching Vincents that continues in these parts to this day. Like his brother, Bruce Shawe, Victor tried to combine homesteading and schoolteaching (at McDade School along Willow Creek, for a yearly salary of \$60). That led to a brief stint as assistant school superintendent of Crook County, and then he sold his acreage and moved to the Oregon coast to become Principal of Toledo High School.

It was during his Toledo years that Shawe (perhaps missing Central Oregon and mulling over his experiences here) began to write short stories, and, remarkably, to sell them to *The Saturday Evening Post*. When he was later profiled by Alfred Powers in his *History of Oregon Literature* (1936), he recalled that his first stories in *The Post* brought him more income than his annual salary at Toledo!

In the early 1920s, married and with two sons and a daughter, he moved to Idaho and managed several mines in the Silver City area (the setting of some of his later *Post* stories), served as educational administrator of the Civilian Conservation Corps around Boise, and for a time was executive assistant to the



Victor Shawe, around 1920

governor of Idaho, H.C. Baldrige. Shawe's last position was as public relations director for Whitman College in Walla Walla. He died in 1944.

Why, after such remarkable early success as a writer, did he abruptly stop publishing his stories in the late '20s? It may be that he came to feel that he was running out of material, and that maybe his *Post* readers' initially strong appetite for stories about the "New West" was fading. More specifically, the basic formula of many of his stories—a bright, independent, resourceful young man makes his way successfully in the West—was probably losing its appeal to editors and readers alike, as the Great Depression approached. In several of his tales, a canny character named "Seattle Slim" prevails over daunting odds on the basis of what he calls "the two-percent theory": namely, if you work and scheme two percent harder than the other guys, you will prevail, whether in business, mining, ranching, or romance. Such self-reliant optimism was one of the casualties of the Depression. (At some time in the '20s, Shawe actually wrote a novel based on these stories, titled *Seattle Slim* and the *Two-percent Theory*, but it was never published. The manuscript of it was donated by his son, Donald Shawe, and is in the JCHS Archives.)

But in the story at hand, "Rye Hay Williams," optimism and western-style self-reliance are given free play, with splendid consequences both for the hero and for his Central Oregon neighbors. From his time in early Jefferson County, Shawe undoubtedly knew about the brave beginnings of the North Unit Irrigation Project in 1916 and probably knew local proponents of it like Harry Gard and Dick Anderson, and if they read "Rye Hay Williams" in the *Post* in 1919, in the midst of the early stages of their thirty-year struggle to create the North Unit, they must have been wryly amused by how expeditiously Shawe's hero gets his irrigation project established. But my hunch is that they would have identified with him warmly, as a kindred optimist and do-er.

Shawe's story is solidly founded on the historical realities of its time and place:

homesteading Central Oregon, just prior to the coming of the railroads; cattle and sheep ranching thriving on the rangelands east of the Deschutes basin, but with land-use and grazing and water-rights tensions mounting; newcomers like Williams coming in from the Midwest and the East to see what they could do with the new land; improvised townlets springing up mushroom-like. And Williams' project vividly registers the enthusiasm for irrigation that swept this country even before the railroads arrived. It may well be that Shawe modeled his hero's exploits on the early (1905-10) Arnold, Swalley, and Central Oregon Irrigation projects around Bend—sanctioned like the later North Unit by the Federal "Carey Act," which sought to encourage private development of irrigation districts in arid homesteading areas of the West. Alas, none of the local irrigationists had the chutzpah that Shawe's protagonist shows in getting the support of both Jim Hill and Edward Harriman!

The geography of the story is intriguingly vague. When Williams arrives as a hobo in north Central Oregon, he travels on a well-marked route—from the California Southern rail terminus in Shaniko, he rides south into Trout Creek/Pony Butte country, spends a night at Hay Creek Ranch, follows the stage road from there around Grizzly to Prineville, and so on to his friend Saunders' headquarters ranch somewhere up Crooked River—but where? And if Saunders' summer range lies "on the upper Deschutes," where? How far south? South and west of Alfalfa, maybe? And where along the Deschutes does our hero's irrigation canal head? And where (if anyplace except in Shawe's brain) does the town of "Pleasant View" spring up? Maybe the old Shumway Ranch, now Brasada Resort? Given that Williams and Christy are re-united at a place with a special view of Mt. Jefferson, it must be further north—Powell Butte, Pleasant Ridge or even Terrebonne?

Finally, beyond our 21st century local-historical fix on Shawe's story, it's good to remind ourselves that it was nationally published and presumably enjoyed as an entertaining, well-made work of fiction. That's a true claim for all of the stories he published in his brief career. As the immediate predecessor of Oregon's only Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, H.L. Davis, and as a writer who treated the homesteading of Central Oregon more knowledgeably and sympathetically than Davis ever did, he deserves to be remembered—and read. "Rye Hay Williams" is a good starting point.

.....

Bookkeeper S-Smi methodically entered the large charge against one of the Smith accounts. Then he cleared his desk and beckoned the office manager across the room to him. "I have fired myself," he stated laconically. "Please make out an order for my pay."

The manager shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand such

men. Good pay and good treatment seemed to count for nothing with them. This particular bookkeeper had come into the office as an errand boy some ten years before. Now, at the age of twenty-five, he was making twenty dollars a week and was being considered for the position of head bookkeeper. The manager watched with ill-concealed contempt as the fellow stopped for a whispered word with one of the stenographers before he left the office.

At the street entrance the ex-bookkeeper waited impatiently until the girl left the home-going throng and joined him. He took her to a nearby restaurant and ordered elaborately.

"Why the celebration?" she asked.

Many times Christy O'Connell had almost persuaded herself to waste no more time with this man. There had always been a suggestion of indefiniteness in his attitude; a lack of purpose that boded ill for his future. And yet from the beginning she had liked him. His eyes were always steady, humorous, friendly. His mouth was wide, generous. In their friendship he had maintained a jestingly impersonal attitude that made possible a comradeship she valued highly.

It had been whispered in the office that he was soon to be given a better position. Apparently without reason, he had sacrificed whatever prospects he might have had.

"Tell me the story," she urged.

"You know Eggleston, the head bookkeeper," he said. "He is going to quit soon. I was afraid they might give me his job."

"His is a good position," Christy protested.

"Do you think so? I had dinner with him and his family the other evening. I learned something. He is past fifty now. Dyes his hair to keep looking young! He has been in the office more than thirty years and is making thirty-five dollars a week. He has been able to save about twenty-five hundred dollars. Can you guess what he is planning to do? Answer: Buy a poultry farm! Wouldn't it get you?"

A light of sympathetic understanding was in Christy's eyes.

"A little dairy farm is daddy's ambition," she said gently.

"That's just it," he replied: "your father and Mr. Eggleston—all the old ones—are living, planning, dreaming this back-to-the-soil thing. And I have my dream of a home not in an apartment building—a home where children would have a wider horizon than a city street affords; and I have had my dream of a tall fair-haired girl who would delight to live in such a home."

"If I remain simply a bookkeeper," he continued, "it will be thirty years before I can save enough to buy such a place as I want. Think of scrimping and doing without things for thirty years in order to live contentedly when



Shawe and students at Willow Creek school, ca. 1912

I am old—too old to really enjoy life!” He flung his arms outward, disclaiming the drab prospect. “Not for me!” he declared. “No longer am I Bookkeeper S-Smi. Henceforth I am Mr. Williams, Robert Herndon—Bob, to my friends.”

“What of the fair-haired girl?” Christy whispered.

“I have been thinking about her,” Williams answered seriously. “When I marry I want my wife to have silks, jewels, leisure—the things every woman should have.”

“If a woman has the necessities of life and the man she loves —” Christy suggested.

“Oh, damn the necessities of life!” he burst forth. “Any fool can supply the necessities of life if he knows how to save. I hate saving! I have saved nickel by nickel and dime by dime until I have over six hundred dollars. And I hate every nickel and every dime of it. Tonight I am starting a new system. Instead of saving, I am going to begin spending. By the time this six hundred is gone I may know what I am good for. I may find that I am a promoter or a salesman. I may be of the material of which financiers are made or perhaps only a bookkeeper with a frown.”

Christy leaned forward, her eyes bright with the thought of adventure.

“Let me help spend the six hundred,” she coaxed.

For a month they reveled. Then one evening when he called for her at her home he left a small bundle. When they returned later in the evening he unwrapped the package and displayed overalls and a jumper.

“The six hundred is gone,” he told her. “These are my livery of independence,” he said, as he tucked the denims under his arm. He kissed a finger tip and laid it lightly against her lips. “It took me ten years to save six hundred dollars. When I can make six thousand dollars in one deal I’ll come back and play with you again.”

One night, nearly a year later, Bob Williams crept out from a stock car in a Northern Oregon railroad terminal. He was unshaved and dirty; clothed in ragged overalls; possessed of but a solitary twenty-five cent piece, his sense of humor, and an abiding appetite. He decided to save the quarter until morning; so he climbed into the loft of one of the livery stables and burrowed into the hay for the night.

Early the next morning the men at the barn routed him out. He washed at the watering trough and pressed into service a piece of newspaper for a towel. Then he took the quarter from his pocket. “Come heads, I eat you,” he said as he spun the coin in the air. “Come tails, I drink you.”

A chuckle of amusement roused him to the fact that he had an audience. “Do you always flip to decide whether you eat or drink?” he was asked.

“Not when I have two quarters,” he replied.

Harvey Saunders, a rancher, smiled in comprehending amusement. “Do you ever work?” he asked.

“Work is my middle name,” Williams assured him. “I’ve had nineteen jobs the past year. The first I lost because I didn’t know enough; the next because I knew too much. Since then I’ve been fired for all sorts of reasons. The heck of



Hay Creek Ranch HQ, where Williams and Saunders spent a night

it is, I know I must be good for something, but darned if I can find out what it is.”

“Ever work with horses?” Saunders asked.

“Nope.”

“Perhaps you can cook?”

Williams shook his head sadly. “But I can eat,” he suggested hopefully.

Saunders burst into a roar of laughter. “I’m going to take you with me,” he declared. “I have an extra horse along. If you can’t ride now, you’ll know how by the time we get to the ranch.” He produced a long wallet

and gave Williams some money. “Get shaved and have your hair cut,” he said, “and buy a pair of riding boots and some new overalls. I’m taking a bunch of mares back with me. When you’re ready you’ll find me down at the corrals.”

A little later as they were leaving town Saunders advised Williams to stay in the road as much as possible. “This ride will be no picnic for you,” he said. “When the mares break for the sage, I’ll turn them.”

The road led southward across a rolling stretch of sage and juniper. Mile after mile they traveled at a steady pounding trot. Soon they came to rougher country, where the plain was broken by far-reaching rims of red basalt. Then the road dropped abruptly between the sheer walls of a narrow canyon that led into the valley of a turbulent mountain stream. Here the mares drank eagerly and would have been content to rest and graze; but Saunders drove them back to the road again. They left the valley and climbed steadily upward, traveling more slowly as the grade became steeper.

It was almost noon when they reached the summit. On the south, ridge after ridge from the timbered slopes of the Blue Mountains stretched like giant fingers westward toward a table-land that extended to the south and north as far as the eye could see. Beyond the plateau rose the jutting snow-covered peaks of the Cascades. For a brief moment Williams sensed the grandeur of the scene. Then the horses commenced trotting again, and he was conscious only of the racking jar of the horse he rode and of the stifling dust that swirled upward from the road.

The long shadows of the hills were blending with the haze of twilight when the road brought them round the shoulder of a low ridge. Beyond them and below lay mile-wide fields of alfalfa. Across the fields, half hidden by parallel rows of poplars, could be seen a group of white houses and red barns.

“A part of the Hay Creek Ranch,” Saunders said. “We’ll stay there until morning.”

When Williams went to bed that night his body was stiff-muscled, aching, lame. The next morning his every movement was an acute agony. He hobbled painfully to the barn, where Saunders was already caring for their horses. “You move round right spry for an old man,” the rancher jeered good-naturedly. “You think you took a ride yesterday, do you? Why, son, yesterday we rode only thirty-five miles! It’s nearly forty-five farther to my ranch. I’m figuring we’ll make it tonight.” Williams groaned.

They left the valley where they had spent the night and rode toward a timbered outpost of the Blue Mountains which Saunders called Old Grizzly. When they reached the summit of this mountain they could see far beyond

them the clustered buildings of a little town that nestles in the valley of the Crooked River.

"Only ten miles to Prineville," Saunders said, "and eighteen more to the ranch," he added, smiling at Williams' expression of distress. They passed through the town and, leaving the river, made their way up a dry canyon, timbered thickly with stunted juniper. Late in the evening they suddenly came to the river again. Here, on a high-walled close-circled flat, was Saunders' home ranch.

Williams adapted himself easily to the routine of his new life. Time passed swiftly for him. Unconsciously he began to adopt the dress and customs of the range. The agricultural possibilities of the great plateau appealed to him. He was loath to accept the opinion of the ranchers that the soil was not productive. It was admitted, as a possibility, that rye hay might be raised, but most of the stockmen spoke slightly of the crop. He had noticed, however, that Saunders had considerable land sown to rye. One day he asked him about the value of it.

"Good old rye!" Saunders told him. "Plant it anywhere, in any way, and it will always make a crop for a fellow. It is not the best hay that grows, but it certainly is better than a snowbank when the alfalfa is all gone."

In the beginning Saunders and his riders had called Williams by his initials, R.H. Because of his growing interest in the crop, they came to give the initials a new meaning and began calling him "Rye Hay."

Saunders had a ranch on the upper reaches of the Deschutes River, where he took his blooded cattle in the summer. Williams knew that the ranch consisted of an immense natural meadow. One day Saunders told him to bring in a couple of horses that they were going to ride to this other ranch. At midday they skirted the western slope of a long low butte. There, under a sheltering basalt cliff, they came to a clear, swift-flowing spring. They watered their horses and let them graze on the grassy flat below the spring. Williams and Saunders lolled for a while in the warmth of the sunshine. Below them lay the wide plateau of sage and juniper. On the west could be seen the bold outlines of the Deschutes Canyon. Beyond, the Three Sisters of the Cascades held their age-long vigil. Far to the north, like white clouds under the noon sun, could be seen the crests of Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams.

"What a location for a home!" Williams thought as his gaze returned from the distance of the mountains to the fertile meadow below the spring. He knew Saunders owned the subdivision of land upon which the spring was located. But a rancher from the Deschutes River had been taking advantage of the fact that the spring was always accessible to the range stock, and had been crowding his cattle onto the part of the range tacitly understood to belong to the Crooked River ranchers.

"Isn't Bud Wilson crowding this way on your range?" Williams asked.

Saunders' face darkened. "Bud is hunting trouble!" he declared.

With a gesture, Williams included the land below the spring. "Suppose I file on it as much as I can," he said. "I could shut Wilson out and prevent a lot of range trouble and maybe make some money for myself. Here is more than

three hundred acres of land that could be plowed without clearing either sage or juniper. For two seasons such soil should produce at least a ton of rye hay to the acre. The third year it should produce at least half a ton. At the end of three years I should have nearly eight hundred tons. The average price of such hay is seven dollars and a half. There have been years, I have been told, when the price has gone as high as twenty-five dollars."

He continued, "If you will stake me to the necessary horses and machinery, and loan me enough money to fence the place and buy seed, I'll give you a mortgage on the crop. If the crop doesn't materialize, I'll give you a deed to the place, as soon as I get title to it."

Saunders studied over the matter for quite a while. The hay proposition seemed like a good gamble. He could easily drive cattle from his place in one day, and it was an even easier day's drive for stockmen on the Deschutes who might need hay. And, also, he saw a way to eliminate Wilson from this part of the range.

"I'll make you this proposition," he said. "If you will fence the place and leave an open lane to the spring, so range stock can have access to it at all times, I'll stake you to horses and machinery and loan you what money you may need. When you are ready to sell your hay let me make a bid for it, and after you get your patent to the land, if you want to sell, give me the first chance to buy it."

Williams agreed eagerly, and the matter was dismissed as settled. Later in the day, after they had left the open range and were riding in a forest of pine and fir, they came suddenly to the lava banks of the Deschutes River. They dismounted, and Williams crept down the jagged rocks until he could put his hand in the current. The swift chill power of the river fascinated him.

As he watched the relentless current, a great idea came to him. He pictured the river diverted from its barren channel and turned out over the table-lands. He pictured the stretches of sage turned into fields of grain. He saw the junipers give way to shade and fruit trees, the trails made into wide roads. "Why couldn't it be done?" he mused.

"Irrigation?" questioned Saunders, sensing his companion's thoughts. "Some day it will come."

"Why couldn't we start the thing?" Williams asked. It seemed that a little blasting and a little ditching would be sufficient to turn the water.

"I've thought of it," Saunders said, "but it's too big for me—too big! It will take millions to build the dams and ditches, and more millions to clear and cultivate the land. The surveys have already been made. A New York engineer, a man named Dunne, has done all the preliminary work. But for some reason capitalists seem afraid of the proposition."

Williams was loath to relinquish the idea. Whenever an opportunity offered, he questioned Saunders, until he knew all that Saunders knew of the preliminary work that had been done. "Someday," he declared, "I'm going to start this thing going. It isn't fair to all the people in the cities who had rather be in the country to leave so much good land laying idle."

"Go to it!" Saunders encouraged. "I'll put up a few thousand dollars any time to pay your expenses while you are raising the millions necessary to make the



A field of "rye hay," once prized here for its hardiness and keeping qualities

proposition a success.”

Under the old homestead laws there were various ways of securing government land. By means of his own right and with Veterans Scrip Saunders had obtained for him, Williams filed on four hundred and eighty acres of government land. After the first autumn rains he fenced the land. He plowed and seeded about three hundred acres. The following summer brought beautiful crops. He cut and stacked nearly four hundred tons of hay. The next year was not so favorable, yet he put up close to three hundred tons of clean bright hay. The third summer came, and with it a drought and dry hot winds that swept across the table lands and valleys, burning and shriveling the grass and hay as if with flame.

Williams had planted his crop early the preceding fall. It had made a good growth before winter set in and it started well in the spring. In spite of the adverse season, he put up more than one hundred tons of hay. Early fall rains started the grass anew on the ranges, and when the cattle were brought in for winter they were in fairly good condition, but throughout the district the hay crops had been unusually scant and many of the stockmen were threatened with a shortage of feed for winter. Williams planned to summer-fallow his place the following year, so he put off plowing until spring. One day in the early winter Bud Wilson met him in town and asked whether he had sold his hay.

“I’m not sure I need it,” Wilson said, “but if you want to sell I’ll take all you have at eight dollars a ton.”

“Saunders has the first refusal of hay,” Williams told him.

“Now let’s talk turkey,” Wilson persisted. “You’re not tied with Saunders. All he holds is your personal note. If he did not know that I stand ready to loan you the money he would have closed you out before this. You don’t need to stay on your place to get your title. I’ll loan you money to commute with. Then you set your price and I’ll buy you out—lock, stock, and barrel—and take your hay at ten dollars a ton.”

“My place is not for sale,” Williams answered quietly. “And that talk about Saunders closing me out is a lie.”

Wilson, good-natured, blustering, and crooked, studied Williams closely for a moment. Then he laughed. “Don’t mind what I say about Saunders,” he said, “but remember I’m offering you eight thousand for your hay.”

“Come see me in the spring,” Williams said. “Maybe I’ll talk to you then.”

Spring opened early and many of the settlers turned their cattle out on the range. Though nearly all the hay was gone, the more experienced stockmen

held their herds close to the feedlots. These early springs were treacherous. Often belated blizzards swept down from the Cascades, working fearful havoc with the cattle on the range. Williams, taking six workhorses and a gang plow, went to his homestead alone. Saunders had said nothing about buying the hay, and Williams had said nothing of Wilson’s offer, fearing Saunders might think he was trying to force the sale.

Day after day, the black ribbon of his plowing widened. The days were clear and warm. But one day the wind shifted from the south to the northwest, and the sun, a dull red disk, set behind banked and threatening clouds. During the

night snow began to fall. Early the next morning Williams rose and cared for his horses. Plowing was out of the question. During the day he could only wait and wonder, Had he won? Or would Saunders and Wilson hold their cattle in their feedlots, hoping the storm would pass quickly?

Hour after hour the wet snow fell steadily. In the afternoon the wind shifted around to the north and brought with it a penetrating chill. As the wind increased in fury an icy crust formed over the wet snow. Williams knew that the storm meant death to the stock on the range. As night was closing over the plateau he heard, faintly at first, the bellowing of cattle. The sound came from the west. In a few minutes Wilson opened the cabin door and crowded close to the little stove.

“We’ve made it!” he exulted. “In another hour the cattle would have been drifting with the wind and all hell couldn’t have turned them.”

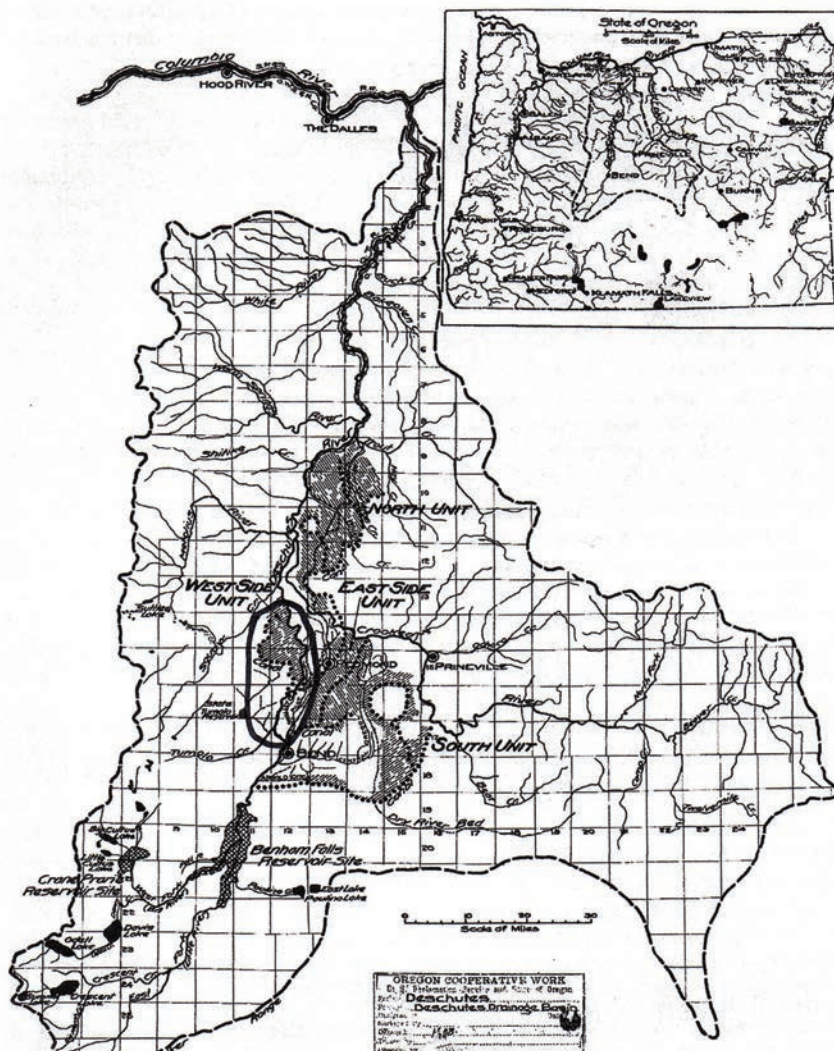
As he talked the noise of cattle increased; and the sounds seemed to come also from the east. Williams opened the door and peered into the storm. Listening, he heard the shrill crying of Saunders’ riders as they urged their cattle forward.

Wilson, too, realized that Saunders was coming, and wasted no time in preliminaries. “You hold the cards,” he said. “And I’m glad to see you win, even if I have

to pay the toll. I can give twenty dollars a ton for your hay and still break even, if the snow doesn’t last too long. I’ve been told that you have eight hundred tons. I’ll give you a check now for sixteen thousand dollars if you think that is fair enough.”

“How many cattle did you drive over?” Williams asked.

“I brought everything,” Wilson replied—“between eight and nine hundred head.”



1916 map of “Deschutes Irrigation Project,” with the Swalley Irrigation District (1910), a possible prototype for Williams’s project in the story, circled.

Williams believed Saunders would bring more than one thousand with him. The hay would be sufficient for two thousand cattle for about one month. Williams was doing some figuring on his own account when there came a tramping of feet outside the door.

"I'll give twenty-five dollars a ton," Wilson said, as Saunders entered the cabin.

"You're a lucky devil!" Saunders greeted as he sought the warmth of the stove. "You have us where you can cross-lift us to your heart's content."

"What do you think of him?" Wilson asked. "I just offered him twenty-five dollars a ton and he didn't even seem to hear me."

"He saw me coming," Saunders said with a wry smile. "He thinks he can stick us up for thirty."

"How much can you afford to pay?" Williams asked.

"It isn't a matter of how much I can afford," Saunders replied. "My cattle are here now and it is simply a matter of how much I have to pay."

"Then that is what it will cost you," Williams told him. "How much can you afford?"

"I can break even at twenty dollars," Saunders answered after a moment's hesitation.

"Then that is what it will cost you," Williams told him.

"But where do I come in?" Wilson objected.

thousand dollars for your cattle. You'll sign a bill of sale giving me title to them and to any other stock that ever shows up in Central Oregon with your brand, or any brand you may claim."

For a few moments Wilson paced the little cabin. He knew that for some time the honest stockmen had been trying to force him off the range. He realized he was known as a rustler. He controlled a large ranch by contract, but he was only a renter. For some time South America had appealed to him as a better field for his methods. Finally he faced them, smiling his easy good-natured smile. "Make out your papers," he said. "I have a few dimes in the bank now, and with your sixteen thousand dollars I'll be able to see a good bit of the world before I start rustling again." There was no rancor or hard feeling in his tone. He had simply played a losing game.

"I knew you would be sensible," Williams said. Then he turned to Saunders. "Write Mr. Wilson a check for sixteen thousand dollars, if you will, and take care of the bill of sale for me. We'll go fifty-fifty on the hay and the cattle. I owe you twenty-five hundred dollars already. Now I want to borrow a couple of thousand more to start that ditch we've been talking about."

Early the next morning Rye Hay Williams saddled a horse and rode north through the abating storm. For five long years he had dreamed of a tall fair-haired girl. Now he was going back to see if she remembered him.

Four years away from city life, four years on the range, four years of hard

"I'm a sort of simple-minded guy myself," Williams admitted. "All I expect to get is a bad reputation and a lot of experience."

"You are the villain of the piece," Williams replied. "You do not come in. You go out. Do you remember the day you and your boss rider were branding a big roan calf on the other side of the butte? Your horses whinnied and pointed toward the timber. You took your field glasses and searched for several minutes before you finished the branding. I was up there in the timber," Williams continued, without waiting for Wilson to speak. "You say you have between eight and nine hundred head of cattle. Your neighbors believe you got about half of them the way you got that roan calf. I don't aim to sell you any hay; and so you stand to lose the whole bunch."

Wilson realized that Williams was thoroughly in earnest, and his habitual good nature deserted him. "Don't think I drove my herd over here for the fun of it!" he shouted. "You'll sell one half of your hay to me and one half to Saunders or I'll cut your fences and let the courts decide what I owe you."

"I thought of just such an emergency," Saunders said, speaking for Williams. "My boys are riding guard at the stackyard just now."

For a moment Wilson stood studying the other men. "Put your cards on the table," he said at last.

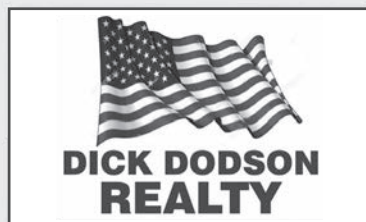
"I am going to buy your cattle," Williams told him. "It isn't going to be a question of what you think they are worth. I'm going to sell my hay to Mr. Saunders for sixteen thousand dollars. And I am going to give you sixteen

riding and hard work, had made a stranger of the man who called at Christy O'Connell's home a few days later. But it was the same adorable blue-eyed Christy who opened the door for him. Williams took both her hands in his and leaned forward eagerly, inviting her lips.

Christy drew away from him. "Aren't you rather impulsive?" she asked coolly.

Williams released her hands. As she drew away from him he had caught a glimpse of another man in the little living room beyond the hallway; a good-looking fashionably-dressed young fellow—such as he had been five years before. Williams hung his soft brown hat beside the smart black hat that belonged to the other man, and followed Christy into the living room.

He found it difficult to adapt himself to the situation. It was so different from what he had hoped for. He wished he had written to her more often. But he had felt all the while that a man should not try to hold a girl's affections unless he had something of material success to offer. Now he wanted her to understand and appreciate the life he had come to live. How could he, in formal words, bring to her nostrils the tang of the sage and balsam, of the pines and firs? How could he bring to her eyes the magnificent distances of the mountains and the purple haze of the hills, and the crimsons and golds of the skies?



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For a while they plied him with questions. He answered in short constrained sentences. Then the other man described a new dance he had learned. He went to the piano and played the music for it. And he and Christy sang some of the new popular songs. When Williams rose to leave, Christy asked whether she would ever see him again. He had told them something about the Deschutes River and the possibilities of using its waters for irrigation.

"I leave for New York in the morning," he said. "I am going to see an engineer there. When I return I'll surely call again--if I may."

Williams knew this was an evasion, and untrue. He knew he would not return again. At the door, in parting, he kissed a finger and laid it lightly upon her lips, as he had done once before. "Bye, little girl!" he said. "I wish you had wanted to be impulsive too." If he had taken her hands again; if he had leaned forward as he had done earlier in the evening—who knows? But Williams would not have her see the sorrow of loss that was written in his eyes. He turned away abruptly and left her.

The girl at the information desk in the outer office of Dunne & Co., Engineers, appraised Williams with eyes that missed no detail of his unpressed gray suit, his soft-collared shirt, his square-toed shoes. No need to ask such a man for a card, she thought. "Who shall I tell Mr. Dunne is waiting?" she asked.

"Mr. Dunne does not know me," Williams replied. "Tell him a man is here from Central Oregon, who wants a dam built across the Deschutes River." A moment later he was admitted to the engineer's office.

"Irrigation?" Dunne inquired. Williams nodded an affirmative. "Whom do you represent?"

"My partner—a stockman named Saunders, and myself."

"Archie Saunders!" Dunne exclaimed. "How long have you been in partnership with him?"

Williams grinned. "About ten days," he replied. "I sort of wished the partnership business on him. But I've been riding with him for several years. We've been cooking up this irrigation idea for quite a while. We figure that, where a hundred men are making an uncertain living out there now, a thousand can make a sure living if we can make irrigation possible."

"You've said it!" Dunne exclaimed. "I've been preaching that thing for years. I made a survey of that whole district several years ago. Some day the project we planned will be put over." The light of enthusiasm died from his eyes. "But the time isn't ripe yet," he said. "The men who control the railroads won't build into that country until irrigation is an accomplished fact. And the men

who could finance the irrigation project will have nothing to do with it until a railroad is built."

"You're pessimistic," Williams said. "There are several hundred thousand acres of a military road grant extending across Central Oregon. Have you ever talked to the men who own that land?"

"What would be the use of talking to them?" Dunne asked.

"Their land is for sale," Williams replied. "I talked to them a few days ago. They realize that any movement which will draw attention to the farming value of the land in that locality will be of direct benefit to them. They represent millions of capital. If this irrigation project is started, it's logical to believe that they will lend their influence to carry it to a successful completion. I stopped for a few days in St. Paul. I talked to Jim Hill. He is strongly in favor of the proposition. And yesterday I talked to Harriman. He said he'd be glad to see the project gotten under way."

"Hill and Harriman are at each other's throats all the time," Dunne objected. "If one would express himself in favor of this thing, the other would fight it."

"I believe not," Williams argued. "Both of them can see the worth of changing a desert into a grain field. I believe they would have no quarrel over the proposition until one or the other started to build a railroad into the district."

Dunne pondered over the matter for quite a time. "I believe you have a regular idea," he admitted, finally. Are you going to let me build the dam and dig the ditches for you?"

"That's what I've come to you for," Williams said. "I've been told you are a sort of simple-minded, honest guy. If there is

a lawyer in the city like you we want you to find him. He'll have to be smart enough to organize us so that we can keep control of the outfit until the project is done."

"I know the right lawyer," Dunne said. "And he is smart enough to organize us so that he'll get his fees out of the organization. But it is my personal opinion that these Carey Act projects are going to go on the rocks before they are completed. The chances are that all I'll get out of this will be the fun of engineering the job. I'm curious to know what you expect to get out of it."

"I'm a sort of simple-minded guy myself," Williams admitted. "All I expect to get is a bad reputation and a lot of experience."

"You'll get both," Dunne assured him.

The organizing and financing of that project is history now. In the money



The Arnold Irrigation Canal east of Bend—possibly an inspiration for Shawe's story



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centers of the country the wise ones still tell, marveling, how a lad of thirty—a clear-eyed smiling fellow, with a curious sobriquet of Rye Hay—came from the West, with a vision of a desert country transformed, and accomplished the impossible in finance. They still recall the wide publicity the newspapers gave him. Christy O’Connell read the newspapers. At first, she was only casually interested in the news of a remarkable irrigation project that was being undertaken. But one Sunday she read an article about the man to whom the newspapers gave credit for making the thing possible. It is true that the picture of the man did not resemble the picture of Bob Williams she had framed on her dressing table. And, even though the article said that he was a man just past forty, and a product of the Central Oregon he loved so well, Christy simply shrugged her shoulders. She knew newspapers could not be depended on for accuracy.

Christy’s father could never quite explain how he came to join a colony of settlers who were going into Oregon to take up land under the new irrigation project. He was content with the knowledge that at last his dream of a little dairy farm was to become a reality. Christy helped him select eighty acres of level land not far from the Deschutes River. They favored that particular location more because of the scenery than for any other reason. Quite a community grew up around them. They called it Pleasant View. One of the men in their party opened a store and established a post office. A school house and a community hall were built. Then a town-site company started a boom and the town grew up almost overnight.

The O’Connells took part in all the public and social activities of the community. They became acquainted with Mr. Dunne, the boyish-looking engineer who was in charge of the irrigation construction. But the man of whom the newspapers had written so much, “Rye Hay” Williams, had become a figure of romance, a person seldom seen, but about whom all manner of stories were told. “A queer fish,” was the summary of public opinion: “a man who could have been elected to Congress and who was content to become a county commissioner; a man who would go a mile to look at a good horse, but who wouldn’t walk across a street to meet a pretty girl.”

Little by little the lands that were to be irrigated were cleared and ditched and made ready for the coming of the water. Finally a day was set for turning the water from the river into the main canal. And that day was chosen by the settlers as a day of celebration.

The day before the celebration Williams and Dunne decided to ride the length of the canal to make sure that there were no breaks or barriers to divert the water from its course. It was a long ride and hard. So they grumbled at each other and scolded as they rode, for they realized that this would be almost their last day together, and each feared lest he show the affection he felt for the other. Their instinctive liking for each other had developed into a warm attachment during the months they labored together.

“Where are we now?” Williams demanded; the sun was setting behind Mt. Jefferson and he was hungry.

“We are about four miles from Pleasant View,” Dunne told him. They had come to a road crossing the canal.

“If we go by the road can we shorten the distance any?” Williams asked.

Dunne consulted a pocket map. “Yes,” he said; “we can save more than a mile by leaving the canal here and turning to the right on the first crossroad we come to.”

“Are you sure?” Williams asked querulously. “These darn settlers are establishing so many new roads a fellow never is sure of where he’s going!”

“Didn’t I just look at the map?” Dunne replied. “I’m telling you the map shows that if we turn to the right on the first road we come to, it will bring us right to Pleasant View.”

Williams went with him, grumbling again. They rode for a little distance and

found their way barred by a wooden gate that opened into a well-kept yard. A cozy-looking bungalow stood a short distance from the road.

“It looks like an honest-to-goodness home,” Dunne said. Maybe we can get something to eat here . . . Hello, the house!” he called.

A girl came out and walked down to the gate. She was enveloped in a snowy white apron. A sunbonnet rested across her shoulders. Its ribbons were tied in a wide bow under her chin.

“The map was right,” Dunne said to Williams triumphantly. “I told you if we took the first road we would come straight to a pleasant view!”

Christy O’Connell crossed her arms on the top of the gate. She bowed gravely to Williams, but she smiled her most inviting smile to Dunne. “Good evening, Mr. Dunne,” she said.

“We’ve lost our way,” Dunne explained. He did not even glance at Williams as he continued. “My ditch rider here told me this lane was not the right road. He seemed peeved because I insisted on coming this way. Perhaps we might be able to ride across your place and find a road on the other side that will take us into town.”

“Sorry,” Christy answered, “but there is a canyon on the other side which is too steep to cross. You’ll have to go back the way you came and turn to the right at the first road you come to.”

“Thank you!” Dunne said. He hesitated a moment and then started to turn his horse. Williams stopped him.

“Wait a moment!” he said. “The young lady is most likely from the East. If she knew the custom of the West she would say, ‘Dismount, strangers. Put up your horses and I’ll get you a bite of something to eat.’”

Christy made a polite little curtsy. “Dismount, strangers,” she said. “Put up your horses and I’ll be pleased to get you a bite of something to eat.”

The men dismounted and Christy led the way to the barn. While they were caring for their horses she went to the house. Dunne began whistling a weird little three-note tune.

“Why all the hilarity?” Williams demanded.

“There is to be a dance tomorrow night,” Dunne explained. “I’m betting something,” he added. “I’m betting I dance the first dance of the evening with our tall fair-haired hostess. And I’m betting I dance ‘Home Sweet Home’ with her too.”

“I’m calling your bet,” Williams said promptly. “I’m offering any two horses I own against that little knotheaded fuzztail you ride that she dances neither of those dances with you.”

“Who will?” Dunne wanted to know.

“I will,” Williams said calmly.

“My steed against two of yours?” Dunne said. “It’s a bet. Why, you piece of cheese, you don’t have a chance in the world! Because she knows who I am. You heard her call me ‘Mr. Dunne’ didn’t you? And I’ve put the poison in your hash. You’re just a ditch rider!”

As they started to the house, Dunne realized that he didn’t know Christy’s name. “I’m going to get in bad right at the start,” he complained. “I met her once at some irrigation meeting and she’ll think I should have remembered her.”

“You should have,” Williams replied. “Now I’m going to convince you I’m a regular sport. If I’m not mistaken, this is where that little Irishman O’Connell lives. I hear he has a right good-looking daughter.”

“That’s who she is!” Dunne exclaimed. “Christy O’Connell! Now I remember her.” Then he looked suspiciously at Williams. “Where do folks get the notion that you never notice girls?”

Christy had dinner ready in a surprisingly short time. “Is it proper to eat with the menfolks?” she asked. “Or should I wait until you’ve finished? I’m awfully hungry,” she added plaintively.

They decided that, though it wasn't quite the proper thing, she might sit down with them. As they went to the table Dunne remembered his manners. "By the way, Miss O'Connell," he said casually, "this is Mr. Williams. He's one of our most faithful men—has been with us since we started this irrigation project."

Williams acknowledged the introduction gravely. Miss O'Connell hesitated and then offered her hand. When the dinner had finished Christy told them she was going to leave the dishes until after she had milked.

"Why not let Williams do the dishes?" Dunne suggested. "He is a homesteader, you know, and is accustomed to batching and doing dishes. And I am good at milking," he added. "I'll go with you. And help."

"You're awfully good," Christy told him. "But I hate milking. So I'll let you do it tonight, and I'll help Mr. Williams with the dishes."

A moment later Dunne found himself on the porch with two milk buckets. He had never milked a cow in his life. He feared he was in for an unhappy experience. A quarter of an hour later he started slowly back to the house. He hadn't had any luck at all. He found no one in the kitchen, and the dishes were still on the dining table. He went out on the porch and then walked slowly around the house. He found Williams and Christy where they had gone to see a certain view of Mt. Jefferson Christy was fond of. They were in silhouette against the gold of the evening sky. Williams stood with one arm across Christy's shoulders and the other around her waist, and both her arms were around his neck as she drew his lips to hers.

"You kids come right back to the house!" Dunne called sternly.

Obedient, they came slowly, loitering as they came. Williams kept his arm around her waist shamelessly. Once he stopped and whispered to her, and her laughter rang pure and silvery.

"Fast work!" Dunne said, when they stopped in front of him. "But where do they get this skirt-shy notion about you?" he asked Williams. But then, with a sudden suspicion, "Let me see that picture in your watch."

Williams opened the watch, and showed the picture of Christy he had treasured for so many years.

"And you told me you were a sport, when you told me her name tonight!" Dunne said reproachfully.

It was Dunne who washed the dishes that night, and Christy and Williams who milked the cows. Christy would not listen to their proposal that they would ride on to the town for the night. "Daddy and mother are there now," she said. "They have put in the day helping prepare for the celebration tomorrow. I was with them most of the day, but came home to milk the cows. I am going to ride in as soon as I'm through milking in the morning," she told them. "And I like good company," she added.

That night Christy readjusted the dreams she had cherished since the hour she had persuaded her father to leave their Eastern home. It had been her belief that she would meet Williams again and that they would find their happiness together. But she had always thought of him as the man who had made possible the great irrigation conquest, the man whose achievement had been featured in the newspapers throughout the country. Now she had

found her R.H. Williams, and he still loved her. She didn't care if he was just a homesteader and a ditch rider.

The next morning, after the cows had been milked and the breakfast dishes washed and put away, they saddled their horses and set out for the town. "Let's do this right," Williams suggested. "Let's go back to the canal and ride in as we intended."

So they went back to the canal and rode along its banks. And as they rode they heard such a sound as one hears along little ocean-flowing streams when the tide turns the current back upon itself—a birling sound, as the Scotch say. Soon beside them came a trickle of foam, yellow and slow moving; and then, like a flood, the water came. For a distance they raced with the stream, shouting like children at play.

Then they came to the town, and the people who crowded the streets recognized Christy's escort. They waved their hands in greeting and cheered. "Oh, you Rye Hay!" someone shouted, and others took up the cry. Christy had reconciled herself to the thought that her R.H. Williams was a ditch rider. Now he was being cheered and greeted as the famous Rye Hay Williams. She couldn't quite figure it out. There was a puzzled look in her eyes as she turned to him.

Williams reined his horse close to hers and squeezed her arm. He was smiling whimsically, teasingly. "Don't look at me like that!" he said. "Act as if you knew me!"

.....

LIST OF VICTOR SHAWE'S PUBLISHED STORIES:

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COUNTY'S FIRST SURVEYOR WAS AN ARMY FLU VICTIM IN WWI—OR WAS HE?

One of Jefferson County's victims of the WWI influenza pandemic was U.S. Army 1st Lt. Walter M. Eaton, who before he enlisted in May 1918 had served as the county's first surveyor since 1915. A chemistry and engineering graduate of the University of Oregon, Eaton became an officer in the Army's Chemical Warfare Service, and was stationed at a top-secret installation near Willoughby, Ohio, which was producing "lewisite," a poison gas whose combat use by U.S. troops was prevented by the end of the war in November 1918.

According to most notices and records (Ancestry.com, for example), Eaton died on Dec. 17, but a page one article in the *Madras Pioneer*, based on communications with his wife and mother, gave his death date as Dec. 12, just a month after the armistice, and that date is confirmed by the State of Ohio death records. The *Pioneer* article indicates only that "he had contracted a sickness," with hopes of recovery, but died in a hospital in Cleveland. He was buried with military honors in Redding, California, where his wife, Edna, had moved with their son Richard, 4, to be with her parents during his military service. Richard Eaton grew up to become a prominent lawyer and district judge in northern California.

Before his fatal engagement in WWI, Eaton—a native of Ohio—had volunteered in 1898 for service in the Spanish American war, but was still in training when that brief war ended. By the time WWI engulfed Western Europe, he was busy here in his position as county surveyor. But after the U.S. entered the war in April 1918, he spearheaded the organization of a county "home guard," a local militia that was one of the first of its kind in Oregon and became a model for others like it across the state.

According to a 2019 on-line article from the Oregon Secretary of State's office (drawing on records in the state archives), "About 60 men

gathered at the Athletic Hall in Madras on Sept. 5, 1917. They had heard about German atrocities and about the enemies lurking in the shadows of American society. They had seen many of their friends and relatives enlist or be drafted. With so many young men leaving Madras and other Oregon communities, many citizens felt vulnerable to sabotage and other illegal activities. The volunteer organization resolved to call itself 'The Jefferson

County Home Guard,' and it went on to define two primary purposes: (1) to train in military tactics in order to be prepared for later military service; (2) to provide an organized body of men under definite leadership to assist local or state officials in any emergency that could arise as an outgrowth of the war."

Walter Eaton was elected the founding captain of the local home guard, assisted by the following officers, all Jefferson County residents: 1st Lt, F.N. O'Connor; 2nd Lt., Earl Kingsbury; Top Sgt., Bert Boylan (who was like Eaton a county official, as county district attorney); Sgt., M.C. Athey; Quarter Sgt., George Pearce; Physician, Dr. A.B. Haile; Bugler, L. Cornwall.

Weekly drills and military training were immediately initiated, but with little or no military experience in their ranks except for Eaton and a few others, their exercises were understandably pretty ragged at first. A local wisacre's comment on their efforts—"Give me a couple of drinks and I'll clean up the whole bunch!"—was duly quoted by the *Pioneer*, and denounced as unpatriotic. Later that fall, the esprit de corps of the guard must have been lifted when the state adjutant general's office supplied it with Model '84 Springfield rifles, and in 1918 the county court provided uniforms for the members of the guard—not regular Army gear, evidently, but authentically "military" judging from photos.

In June 1918, a home guard platoon was



Walter M. Eaton and fellow Jefferson County officials, 1916

Madras Pioneer

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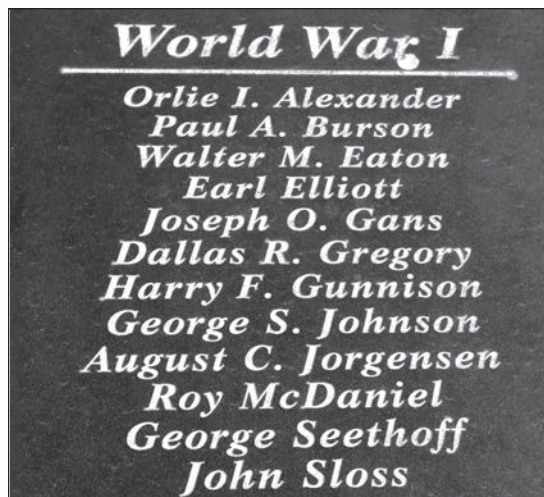
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formed in the Opal City district, with the specific duty of guarding the Crooked River Railroad Bridge at both ends. In August of that year, County Sheriff James Wood asked the guard to provide nightly protection for four grain elevators in the county, “against the danger of disloyal prowlers.” In August, of course, the elevators would have been filling with that year’s bumper dryland wheat crop.

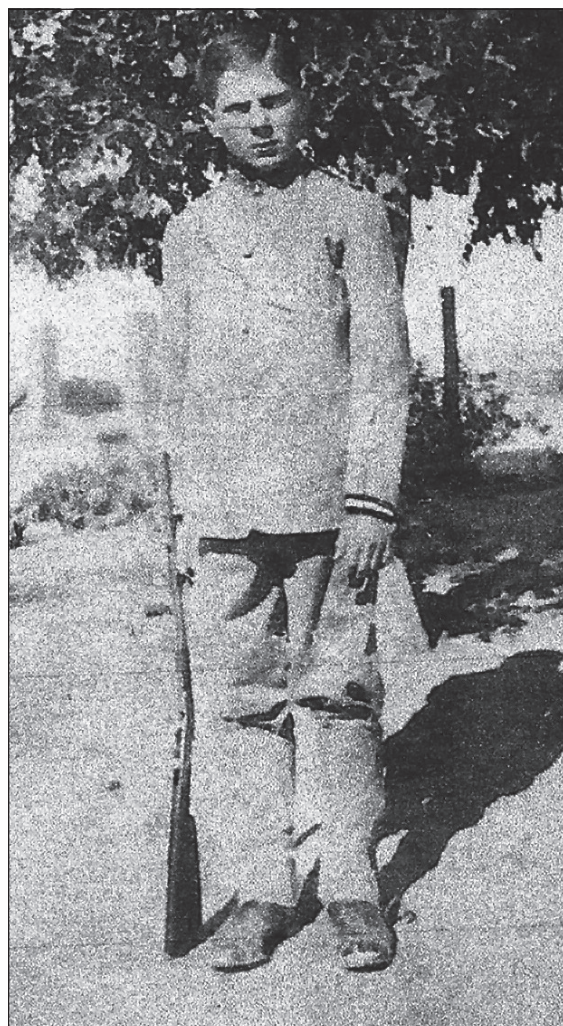
In June, after Walter Eaton had taken up his regular Army duties with the Chemical Warfare Service in Ohio, the Jefferson County Home Guard and others like it around the state became part of the “Oregon Volunteer Guard,” and with the signing of the armistice on Nov. 11 and almost simultaneously the outbreak of the influenza epidemic throughout the Northwest, the guard ended its active service. At its peak in mid-1918, it numbered 161 men, a significant portion of the local male population, and especially so considering that after our entry into the war, the home guard was constantly losing members to enlistment and the draft.

While doing his official surveying and map-making part to pull the new county together, Walter Eaton served his adopted community by helping to launch the home guard, and then, sadly, lost his life as a regular Army officer. He was 39 years old when he died. Given the circumstances of his death, and the reporting of it, it’s tempting to wonder if the official account of his untimely death from influenza might cover an even darker cause, related to his work in the poison gas facility. Again, the initial news of his passing in the *Pioneer*, which had come directly from his wife through his mother, who was still residing in Madras, does not identify what “sickness” took his life, even though by this time “the Spanish flu” was rampant, and very much in the news. Then there is the peculiar confusion about the DATE of his death—clearly, according to official Ohio state records, it was Dec. 12, and was so reported in the *Pioneer* on the authority of his wife’s message. The *Pioneer* also, on the same basis, reported that at the Ohio facility he “was in charge of the manufacture of war gases, and he was engaged in this work when he contracted the sickness which resulted in his death. . . .”

In all subsequent articles about Eaton’s death, including obituaries in late December in the Redding and other California newspapers, the date is given as Dec. 17, the cause is noted as “influenza” or “Spanish flu,” and there is no mention of the work he had been doing at the facility in Ohio. In fact, both the facility and its military purpose were supposed to be top-secret. The Army went to great lengths during the war to conceal that purpose locally: soldiers working at the site (presumably including Eaton) initially had to live there, and reportedly nicknamed it “the Mousetrap,” because once you were stationed



Eaton’s name on a Madras City Hall plaque listing local WWI military fatalities



Gus Ramsey, 13, trying on his older brother Bernard’s Jefferson County Home Guard uniform, 1918

there, you stayed put. So the *Pioneer* got it right, both as to Eaton’s actual death-date and the nature of what he was working at before he died.

Given these odd details in his story, it seems possible that “death by Spanish flu on Dec. 17” was a way for the Army to cover up what actually led to Eaton’s tragic demise. Could he have died as a result of an accident at the Willoughby facility, exposing him to a fatal dose of “lewisite?” Perhaps such an accident could have occurred in the course of the dismantling of the facility, which was begun immediately after the Nov. 11 armistice. Or, perhaps because of cumulative effects of the extremely dangerous chemical work he had been doing for several months, he was especially vulnerable to the influenza virus if indeed he caught it, and so died because of a weakened respiratory system?

A century later, we’ll probably never know the full sad story as it played out for Walter Eaton in Ohio. But back home in Madras, his grieving comrades in the Jefferson County Home Guard met one more time and passed a resolution in his memory and published it in the *Pioneer*:

“Whereas Capt. Eaton was widely known and universally loved and respected because of his high sense of justice and honor;

Whereas he responded to his country’s call in its time of need, and gave his all to its service;

Therefore be it resolved by the Jefferson County Home Guard that we extend our heartfelt sympathy to his wife, child, and mother in their great bereavement.”

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C.E.S. WOOD ON THE METOLIUS RIVER

A recent announcement that the Nature Conservancy has transferred stewardship of part of the Erskine Wood property on the Metolius River near Camp Sherman to the Deschutes Land Trust brings to mind a notable bit of Jefferson County literary history.

Erskine Wood (of Portland) bought the property from C.W. Allen about 1910 and made it into a family retreat. A frequent visitor from about 1916 was Erskine's father, C.E.S. Wood (1852-1944), in his time a celebrated writer and cultural leader. The elder Wood used the place as a writing getaway and delighted in hanging out there with his numerous grandchildren. In 1921, he wrote a long poem, "Testament," in which he poetically bequeathed to them, one by one, what he most loved about the Metolius—its trout, birds, insects, and other wildlife, trees, wild flowers, and so on. The poem's title page says "Metolius River, Jefferson County, Oregon."

C.E.S. Wood is one of Oregon's historically indispensable figures. As a young Army officer out of West Point, he served in the Northwest Indian wars of the 1870s, and in 1877 he witnessed the surrender of Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph at Bear Paw, Montana and recorded and immortalized Joseph's surrender speech, ending "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever." The experience changed Wood's life: he left the Army, set up as a lawyer, and for the rest of his life championed Native American causes, including restoration of Nez Perce homelands.

He also left an indelible mark on Portland. He helped found the Multnomah County Library and the Portland Art Museum (he was a lifelong patron of the arts and a talented landscape painter), and he is generally recognized as the main instigator of the Portland Rose Festival. An outspoken progressive and libertarian (he liked to call himself a "philosophical anarchist"), he

was a close friend of Mark Twain, John Reed, Lincoln Steffens, Emma Goldman, William U'Ren and other political notables and strongly advocated women's suffrage.

After 1910, Wood left his wife Nanny and—to the scandal of Portland society—took up with a much younger poet, Sarah Bard Field, and moved with her to the Bay Area but frequently returned to the Metolius family retreat to visit with his family, meditate, and write. His most important books include *Heavenly Discourse* (1927), *The Poet in the Desert* (1929), and *Collected Poems* (1949). The C.E.S. Wood Award for distinguished

lifetime achievement by an Oregon writer was created in his honor; its recipients include Ken Kesey, Alvin Josephy Jr., Jarold Ramsey, Barry Lopez, and Ursula LeGuin.

"Testament"—not included in his posthumous *Collected Poems*—expresses his deep love of the Metolius River and its natural surroundings. His son Erskine's namesake son, nicknamed "Erskinson," was as a boy an avid angler on the river and in recognition of his passion, his grandfather fondly "gives" him all the trout therein! Here's an excerpt:

...To ERSKINE BIDDLE WOOD, called ERSKINSON,

I give all trout in the Metolius,
The pretty dottings their bright sides upon,
And the red streak; the sudden splash and
fuss
When quick they show a golden-gleaming
side;
As swift they dart through the green waters
cool,
A long hour by the watch and by the sun,
Valiant fought, praying the gods to power
To land him, and that Daddy would but come.
But who can hold or stay the hand of Fate?
When conquered, only gasping, sudden gone
By the mere lifting of his giant weight.
So sink we in the pool Oblivion
By our own weight. To stout-hearted
ERSKINSON

I do bequeath this trout and his estate

I give him mornings on the river-bank,
Song of the river when the new sun shines
On the ripples, and the grass with dew is
dank,

Also the solemn discourse of the pines,
At evening when the melting shadows fall
And Peace sits on the bank with folded wings

....



C.E.S. Wood, ca. 1920

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ON TOP OF FAMED DOG MOUNTAIN

(Anonymous; notes by Jerry Ramsey)

The following ballad was found in the 1970s, written in pencil on crumbling paper in a drawer of the kitchen cabinet in the old farmhouse at our “Sky Ranch” summer-range place east of Hay Creek Ranch. Our family acquired the place in 1945 from its original 1909 homesteader, Tom Power, who served as Jefferson County Judge through WWII and into the 1950s. It’s possible that Tom Power, who grew up in an Irish family in Newfoundland and liked to sing, composed the poem—but more likely he heard it from some sheepherder in the Ashwood/Blizzard Ridge country and wrote it down. Its irregular lines and stanzas might suggest that he was recording it the best he could, from memory.

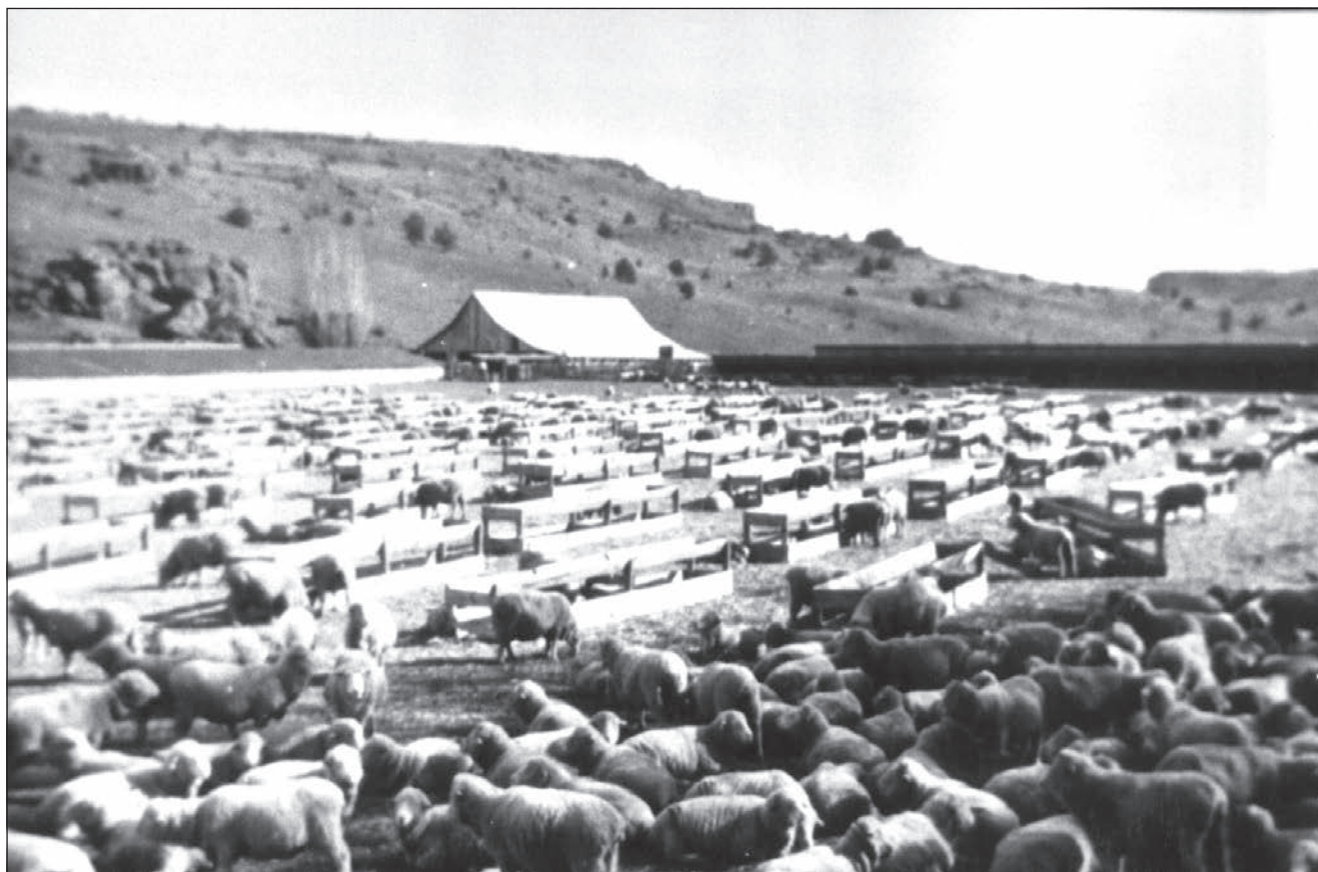
There is no “Dog Mountain” in Central Oregon, but there is one in Lake County (6935’ high) in the hills about five miles

west of the north end of Goose Lake in the Fremont National Forest and maybe twenty miles from Lakeview. Given the poem’s reference to how “people out from Lakeview/And Paisley they do come/To the top of famed Dog Mountain,” it seems likely that this is the setting of the poem. As far as I know, in the early 1900s the area was open to grazing by sheep—and maybe the singer’s companions there—“Collins and old Jim”—were Lake County Irish sheepherders who could be identified.

It is well-known that in the early 1900s Lake County was a magnet (rivaling Morrow County) for young Irish émigrés, many of them from County Cork and many of them, once here, herded sheep. There’s a legendary letter from an Irish sheepman in Lake County urging his nephew back in Cork to come on over without delay: “Mikey, me boy, come straight to Lakeview, don’t bother stopping in America at all!”

What’s clear and poignant is the singer’s awareness of his

restless, displaced condition—having left “old Ireland” with regrets for Dog Mountain, he resolves to leave it for “Frisco,” but after a weekend there he finds that he is broke and “tired of the city, and longing for the pines” and so is heading back to the mountain. Does the fact that his poem turned up



Sheep near Hay Creek Ranch, early 1920s

later in the hills of eastern Jefferson County indicate that his footloose ways continued?

“On Top of Famed Dog Mountain”

May God be with old Ireland
Where we had no hills to climb.
We had no discontentment
But pleasure all the time

THE AGATE

I have no place to sleep,
In snow and rain I must remain
In the tail end of the sheep.
The cougar, too, resorts the place,
The wildcat makes his home
On the top of Famed Dog Mountain
That put me on the bum.

So I think I'll go to Frisco
And try longshore again,
And I'll bid goodbye
To the rimrocks high,
To Collins and old Jim.

There's plenty men in Frisco,
In San Quentin I will end,
For there's nothing but misfortune
On Dog Mountain's lonely rims.

Tourists from Seattle,
Frisco and elsewhere,
They all come here in the summer time
To take this mountain air.

People out from Lakeview
And Paisley they do come
To the top of famed Dog Mountain
And put me on the bum.

So fare ye well Dog Mountain,
My time is nearly through;
To your hills and lonely canyons
To them I'll bid adieu.

Where I did stay, both night and day,
For six long months gone by,
With my bed upon my shoulder,
I climbed the rimrocks high.

Where I did stray, both night and day
And I was filled with fear,
The barking of coyotes then
Was the only noise I'd hear.

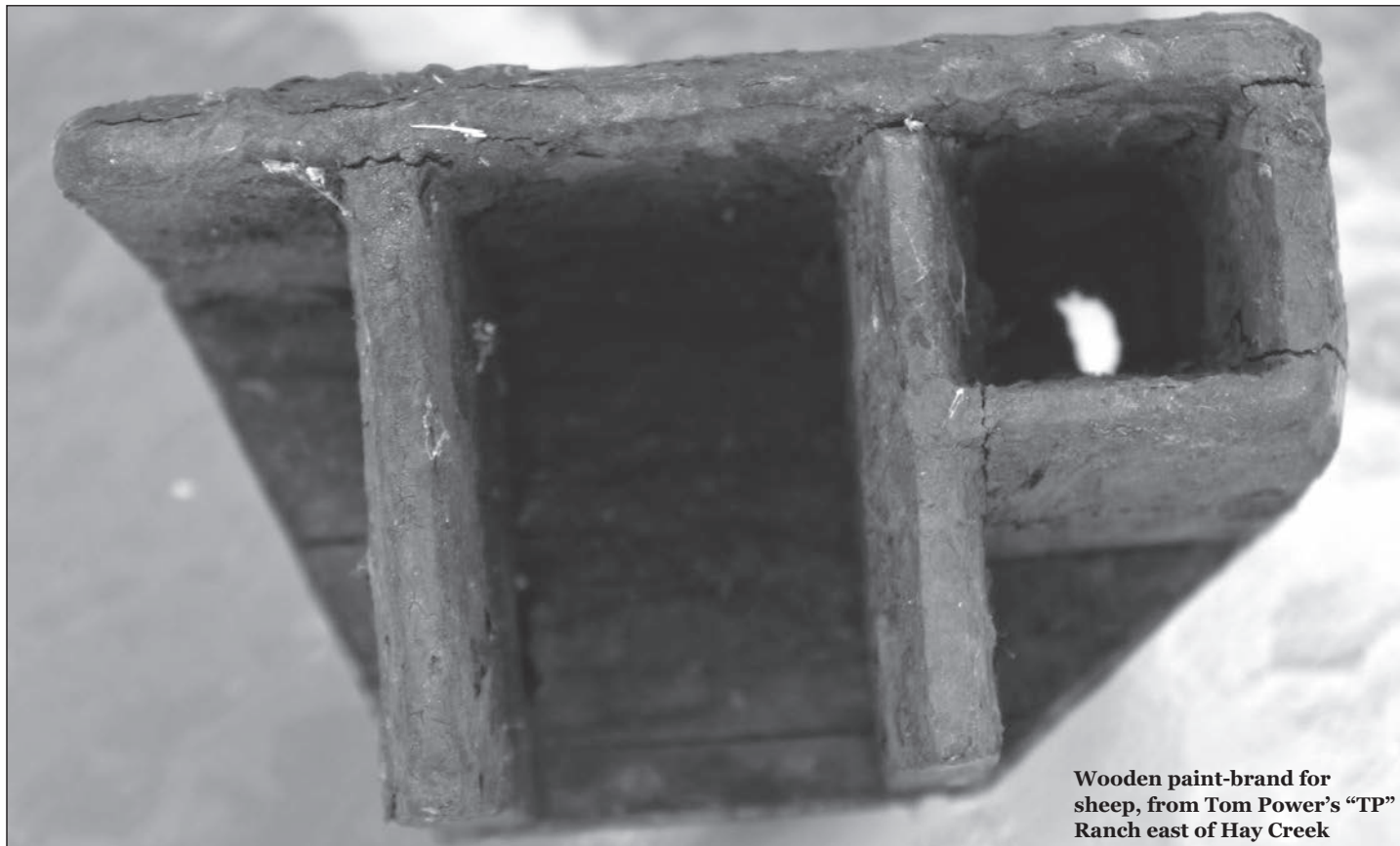
Now I'm down in Frisco,
I'm cold and broke, I have no place to
sleep;
I wish I was in Dog Mountain,
On the tail end of the sheep.

I hear the street cars clanging by,
The policemen's lusty bawl.
I'm longing for the rimrocks,
And for the coyotes' call.

I now don't blame the tourists
For leaving the city behind,
For I've just been here a weekend
And to my surprise I find
I'm tired of the city, and longing for the
pines.

I'm going back to Famed Dog Mountain,
I'm going back to stay,
Back to your hills and canyons,
Back to your rimrocks high.

To the city's noise and skyscrapers
I'm going to say goodbye,
For they now have all my money,
And I'm no longer welcome here.
So look for me, Dog Mountain,
Your name to me is dear.



Wooden paint-brand for
sheep, from Tom Power's "TP"
Ranch east of Hay Creek

THE “MAGNETIC ANOMALY” AT HIGH ROCK: A 165-YEAR-OLD MYSTERY

by Jerry Ramsey

High Rock is a prominent and well-known landmark in the Mt. Hood National Forest, about nine miles southwest of Clear Lake off Highway 26. Its rocky summit (4953') commands a magnificent view in all directions—northeast to Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, Mt. Rainier; south along the Cascades crest to Olallie Butte, Mt. Jefferson, and Three-fingered Jack; west and northwest over endless timber to the margins of the Willamette Valley. Due west of High Rock, around Frazier Forks, lie legendary huckleberry grounds that have drawn Indians and then Anglos over the centuries.

It was the panoramic view from High Rock that drew 2nd Lt. Henry Larcom Abbot and his party of 17 mounted men, 60 pack-mules and a young Tygh Indian named Sam Anaxshat to the summit on Oct. 10, 1855, but not for the pleasure of sublime scenery. Abbot, who had been since early summer second in command of the first systematic survey of the Deschutes Basin in the “Pacific Railroad Survey” under Lt. Robert Williamson, was trying to get his bearings for a route northwest out of the Mt. Hood wilderness and on to “civilization” in the form of the settlement of Oregon City.

He had started out from Tygh Valley October 5 with the hope (based on Indian reports of a system of trails around the mountain) of finding a new, more passable emigrant route south and west of Hood than the notorious Barlow Road—and in fact he did find it, with help from Sam Anaxshat, but never had the opportunity to publicize his discovery, except in his official narrative of the survey, published in 1857. When he and his men reached Oregon City on Oct. 19, they found that, contrary to plan, Lt. Williamson had already left by ship for San Francisco, and the expedition's designated protectors, a detachment of Army “dragoons” under Lt. Phil Sheridan (of later Civil War fame), were off fighting hostile Indians along the Columbia!

So Abbot and his party had to complete their survey of possible railroad routes through the Willamette Valley and southwest Oregon with uncertain military protection in the face of the Rogue Indian

War taking place precisely where they were going. They managed to carry out the survey, and today's Southern Pacific rail line south from Eugene into California mostly follows their route. They finally reached Fort Reading on Nov. 15.

Even back in the eastern approaches to Mt. Hood, Abbot had been anxious about being bushwhacked by hostile Natives following their party west and assigned guard-duty every night en route. When word of their arrival out of the woods reached the settlements around “Clackamas Prairie” near Estacada, they were met by a posse of settlers proposing to kill Sam Anaxshat on the spot to keep him from going back around the mountain and leading marauding bands of Indians over the trail and into the valley. In fact, the tribes of the Oregon interior didn't join with those along the Columbia and the Rogue and Umpqua in rising up against the whites in 1855, but the threat to Abbot's guide was real. He faced down the settlers, sent Sam Anaxshat back to Tygh Valley that night, and in his official report emphatically credited his young Indian guide with very possibly saving his life and those of his men.

So it was a nerve-wracking passage around Mt. Hood, as well as physically punishing, requiring endlessly picking a way uphill and down through dense timber, and often through long stretches of blowdown, and with water uncertain along the way for their horses and pack-mules, and scanty grass. Still, dedicated West Point-trained topographic engineer that he was, Abbot

persevered with his diligent recording of compass headings and astronomical observations so as to locate their route. Doing so depended in part on use of an *odometer*, mounted on a two-wheeled cart pulled by one mule or in brushy terrain by two men: it had been an impediment to the expedition's overland progress since leaving Fort Reading in California. The odometer made a clicking sound, and Sam Anaxshat nicknamed it the “chik-chick.” Ultimately, near Bear Springs, seeing how it was increasingly impeding their travel, he gave Abbot an ultimatum in Chinook Jargon: *Mamook memaloose*



Lt. Henry Larcom Abbot at West Point, about 1853

tenas chik-chik! (“Kill the chik-chik!”) So with great reluctance, Abbot abandoned the odometer cart in the deep woods—no doubt to the silent relief of the others in his party.

Perhaps this loss of one of his critical surveying instruments only served to intensify his zeal for scientifically surveying his uncertain way around the mountain. On his way from Frying Pan Lake to High Rock (along what is now labeled on some maps “Abbot Road”) and then on the peak itself, he noticed something very odd in his frequent compass readings in combination, as he says, with taking “fixes” on the peaks when he could sight them. What he saw on his instruments were extensive deviations from magnetic north. In his official narrative of the survey, for Oct. 10, Abbot says this:

“Near the mountain [High Rock] we noticed an extraordinary variation of the magnetic needle, which numerous bearings to well-known peaks enabled me to measure with considerable accuracy and place, about two miles from the mountain, both before reaching it [from the northeast] and after leaving it [to the northwest]. The variation, as usual in this region, was about 18 degrees east. At the top of the great precipice encountered about a mile before reaching the peak [probably Wolf Peak], it was only 11 degrees degrees east, while on the summit it was 16 degrees west. The needle was thus actually disturbed 34 degrees by some abnormal cause. It soon, however, settled readily [as the party moved on north toward Linney Butte]. The mountain was principally composed of slate and basalt, like those around it, and we could see no indication of iron or other local cause of disturbance in this vicinity.”

When Robert Sawyer (publisher of the *Bend Bulletin* for many

years and one of the parents of Central Oregon historical research) was editing Abbot’s field journals in 1930, for publication in *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (Vol.33, No’s 1 and 2, March and June, 1932), he re-traced most of the explorer’s Central Oregon routes, and when he got to High Rock himself, Sawyer took his own compass readings and confirmed what his predecessor had discovered 75 years before—that something on or near High Rock was causing an extraordinary

compass deviation. Sawyer’s footnote to this effect: “This phenomenon is noticeable in this vicinity today.” (p. 314)

What Abbot and Sawyer were observing is now called a “magnetic anomaly,” in which something, most likely an iron deposit or more rarely a ferrous meteorite, magnetically deflects a compass needle from its usual invariable fix on the North Magnetic Pole. In the Northwest today, the deviation between magnetic north and true north is about 18 degrees East, whereas Abbot and Sawyer found that their compass needles on the summit of High Rock pointing off 16 degree WEST—a remarkable 34 degrees deviation.

Anybody who has ever tried to use a compass close to a vehicle or a metal shed will have noticed this phenomenon, throwing the needle’s trustworthy north-seeking habit off dramatically. Moving away fifty feet or so usually brings the compass back to its proper line—but whatever was befuddling Abbot’s and Sawyer’s compasses on High Rock must have been a substantial chunk of iron or iron ore, such as hematite. Natural “magnetic anomalies” are nowadays mapped from the air, with the use of a very sensitive instrument for detecting and measuring the force of magnetic fields, known as a magnetometer. Such maps are often used for prospecting for iron and other metallic ores, and even for oil. There are “magnetic



Abbot’s hand-drawn field map showing his route through north Central Oregon and around Mt. Hood. Hand-written note at lower left reads: “Drawn in the Field”

anomaly” maps of the Oregon Cascades, but as far as I know nothing seems to have registered any indication of an anomaly around High Rock. And the Mt. Hood National Forest seems to have no records on the phenomenon there.

Pondering all this over several years led to an irresistible urge to go see for myself, so recently on a three-generation family outing with my wife and our son and his family, I carried Abbot’s 1855 account, Sawyer’s footnote to it, a USFS quad map, my trusty lensatic compass, and an Apple tablet with a non-magnetic GPS app on it, to the top of High Rock. One hundred sixty-five years after Abbot’s visit, what would we find?

We started at his last campsite before High Rock, a lovely little lake several miles to the east known to Sam Anaxshat as “ty-ty-pa,” but now prosaically labeled on maps (because of its shape) as “Frying Pan Lake.” At the lake, compass readings were normal; likewise along Abbot’s route (“Abbot Road”). Closer to High Rock, however, the compass needle began to veer to the west, per Abbot’s record. And on the summit, with Mt. Hood, Mt Adams, and Mt Rainier on magnificent display to the north, using the tablet’s GPS compass to fix true north, we re-confirmed Abbot’s 1855 reading of a deviation of about 34 degrees.

So whatever it was that provoked his curiosity back on Oct. 10, 1855 (what if he had trusted those readings and tried to follow them out of the wilderness!), must still be *there*, buried in the north side of High Rock, or possibly a little northwest of it . . . a big iron-ore deposit? (There is an “Iron Creek” a few miles north of High Rock—a clue?). Or a metallic meteorite, most likely bigger than the giant specimen found in the 1880s south of Portland and now on display in the Museum of Natural History in New York? Or an alien mothership from the mid-nineteenth century? If you’re looking for a wild-goose-chase into beautiful country, take your compass and GPS in hand, and go see for yourself.



View from High Rock summit August 2020, where Abbot’s compass was “off” 34 degrees in 1855. Mt. Hood on right skyline.

Sources and further reading:

Henry Larcom Abbot, *Pacific Railroad Survey Reports*, Vol. 6. Washington D.C., Department of War, 1857.

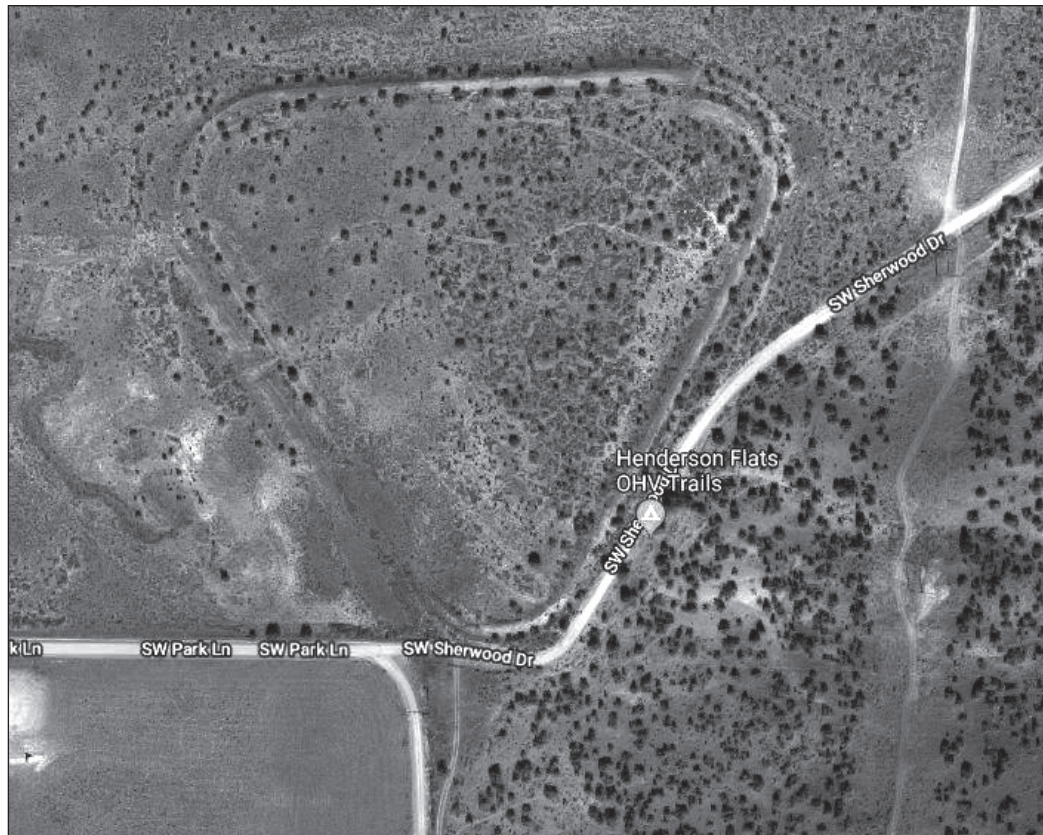
Robert Sawyer, “Abbot Railroad Surveys, 1855.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* Vol. 33, No’s 1 and 2 (March and June 1932).

Jarold Ramsey, “Henry Larcom Abbot in Central Oregon, 1855,” in *Words Marked by a Place: Local Histories in Central Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2018).

UPDATE ON THE WWII “GUNNERY TRIANGLE” SITE NEAR HENDERSON FLAT

Readers of the *Pioneer's* magazine supplement *Sageland* may remember a feature in the summer 2018 issue about the (re) discovery on Crooked River National Grasslands property east of the Trail Crossing community of a mysterious WWII-era military installation, in the form of a giant equilateral triangle. The triangle, 1000 feet on a side, is made up of monumental earthen berms, with a double concrete track running completely around the inside of the triangle. The consensus opinion, based on scanty local history and the existence of similar installations at WWII airbases in Arizona, is that it was built in 1943-4 by the Army for training bomber gun-crews, who would fire with .50 caliber machine guns at an elevated target mounted on a jeep running around and protected by the triangle.

So far, no military records or local newspaper notices of the site have been found. But as of January 2020, a “task force” of local historians, archaeologists, and military historians has been mobilized to tackle the mystery, under the direction of Jay Kinsman, historian/



archaeologist for the Crooked River National Grasslands in Prineville. To date, the searchers have found WWII aerial photographic evidence that the triangle was not constructed before early August 1943, and they hope to find further evidence in military records and on the site that will reveal when it was in fact built, and by whom, and whether it was ever operational, perhaps to train B-17 bomber crews stationed in 1943-4 at Madras and Redmond Army airfields. Plans for on-site investigations by the task force are currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because the site is on federal property, excavating and removal

of artifacts from it is strictly prohibited. Readers who have information, anecdotes and oral history about the triangle are urged to contact the task force, through Jay Kinsman, at jay.kinsman@usda.gov, or Jarold Ramsey, at ramseyjarold@yahoo.com.

Discover this interesting place for yourself, and ensure that its next visitors can have the same experience you’ve had with it by leaving everything on the site exactly as you found it!

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— BOOK REVIEW —
WALKING THE HIGH DESERT:
ENCOUNTERS WITH RURAL AMERICA ALONG
THE OREGON DESERT TRAIL

by *Ellen Waterston*
 (University of Washington Press, 2020)

Review by Dan Chamness

From the subtitle I thought I was about to read a backpacker's tale of hiking the Oregon Desert Trail but *Walking the High Desert* is more *Travels with Charley* than *The Thousand-Mile Summer* (see references below). It is a strong treatise on the value of public lands written by a former rancher who is a friend of the Oregon Natural Desert Association, which created the Oregon Desert Trail.

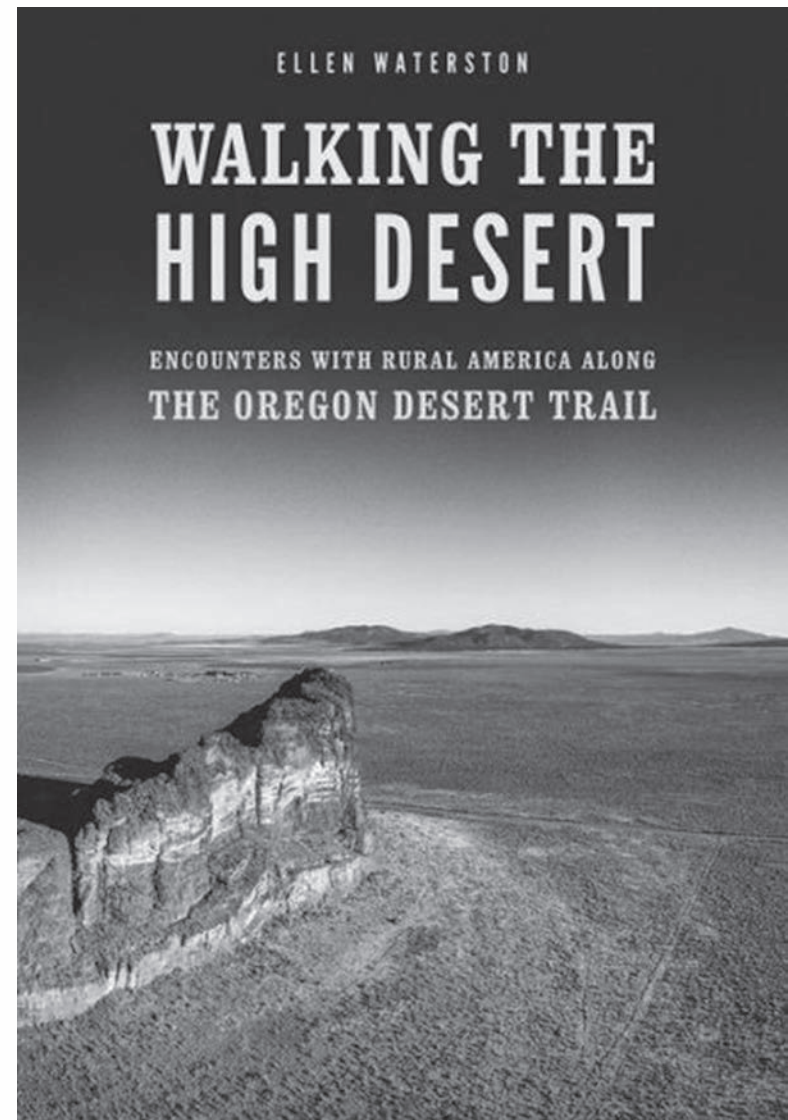
It is nice to read something written by a rancher that isn't about "the dumb things that city folks say." I am a farm boy who grew up knowing more about noxious weeds, thanks to the North Unit Irrigation Weed Holiday, than I did about native plants. I have learned more about native plants and birds of the Great Basin from city folks than I ever learned from farmers and ranchers with one exception, a retired Jefferson County farmer turned naturalist.

The author was planning a different book when the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife took place in the winter of 2016. The occupation so infuriated the author from the sheer ignorance of the perpetrators that the focus of the book shifted to emphasize the value of our public lands. Our county is fortunate to have lands administered by the Deschutes National Forest, Crooked River National Grasslands, the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Parks and the sovereign nation of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs within its borders.

This book is very good and I recommend it for your library. Just remember that when the author talks about running down Wildhorse Canyon on Steens Mountain that she is using a little poetic license. I count myself lucky when I don't fall in Wildhorse.

References: *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck. (Viking, 1962)

The Thousand-Mile Summer: In Desert and High Sierra by Colin Fletcher. (Howell-North Books, 1964)



— CAMPBELL'S CORNER —

The Harvest Must Go On: Public Events Canceled, but JCHS Activities Continue

By Jennie Smith & Photos by Katherine Smith

What goes up must come down - oops - what came down went back up. The Jefferson County Historical Society has not been idle during the COVID-19 pandemic. Events have been canceled but activities have continued.

The new/old shed for the Pioneer Homestead site was taken down last fall and it went back up this spring. David Campbell, JCHS board member, spearheaded the removal of the old show barn from the fairgrounds and the rebuilding of it on the Pioneer Homestead. Many hands and various degrees of expertise helped raise the shed back up. Another shed was needed due to the original one on the Pioneer Homestead being crowded with donations of vintage farming items and more. Some of the items will go into the new shed along with recent donations. Both sheds are located in the north west corner of the homestead site.

The new shed will get siding on the south and west sides. One dream is to make a working blacksmith, turn-of-the-century, machine shop. It will have a line shaft and be able to run flat belt equipment. The line shaft will be driven by a one-cylinder engine or possibly a steam engine of one or two horsepower. It will be for viewing and also to give demonstrations to the public when the area is open.

Trees have been pruned around the homestead and dead trees removed. Currently fairgrounds staff is working with historical society members on how to irrigate the area to keep the lawns green but not water the buildings.

The 4th Annual Threshing Bee had to be canceled as a public event. But, as is typical of farming, and regardless of the situation, the harvest must go on. For Jefferson County the little wheat field located in the north end of the three fields had a good-looking stand of dryland wheat. On August the 8th the wheat was cut and bound by the Mike McIntosh family with their antique binder and team of draft horses. The bundles were dropped from the binder out in the field as the team worked its way through the heritage Sonoran wheat. Some folks came by to help; others saw the activity and joined in as well and helped throw the wheat bundles up onto an old Model T truck bed. The bundles were then taken to

the lawn near the Pioneer Homestead at the Jefferson County fairgrounds.

There, with the help of more volunteers, the bundles of Sonoran wheat were fed into David Campbell's antique thresher which was run by his little "get-er-done" tractor. The grain was put into sacks and will be used for next year's crop. The straw from the wheat was made into straw bales using an older baler belonging to Sara Vollmer. Physical distancing and masks were encouraged for folks that came by to help or watch. Approximately 30 people assisted with this year's harvest, some from as far away as Portland.

Field work was started earlier this year on the fallow fields in preparation for next year's threshing bee. It has been a mission of the group to eradicate the puncture vine from the fields by frequent rod weeding and hand pulling the weeds where the rod weeder did not reach.

The field just harvested will be put into summer fallow. In the spring the wheat from this year's crop will be planted in the field south of the recently threshed field. The Jefferson County Historical Society has great hopes for a successful 5th Annual Threshing Bee next summer in August of 2021.



Mike McIntosh harvesting the 2020 JCHS wheat with antique reaper-binder



Dan O'Brien pulling rye on JCHS pioneer wheat field at Fairgrounds, July 2020



Volunteer builders under the roof of the "new" machinery shed at the Fairgrounds. L to R: Dean Roberts, Dan O'Brien, Tom Manning, Rodman Campbell, Dave Campbell, Steve Fisher



Threshing the 2020 crop (a good one) with Dave Campbell's antique thresher

Continued from page 2

baths, there would probably be more fatalities.

An exuberant Armistice Day celebration on November 11 drew big crowds to downtown Madras—but a few weeks later the flu was rampant, and most schools were closed, including Madras High School. Sometime in later November, county health officer Dr. William Snook declared a county-wide “ban” on all public events, including church services. But on Dec. 8 he lifted the ban, as the epidemic’s spread seemed to be slowing, and schools opened until Christmas.

January 1919, however, brought a “surge” (as we say in 2020) of cases around the county, and reports of deaths, including on January 23 the demise of Henry Croft, the son-in-law of prominent Ashwood rancher Tom Hamilton, and on January 30 of Russell Mason of Grandview, while en route to Madras for medical attention. Both were young men. There were some more school closures in the outer reaches of the county, and continuing mention in the community-news columns of families “down with the flu;” but there were no more public-event bans, and by mid-March the virus seems to have run its course hereabouts.

A very incomplete picture, but it’s clear that the county had endured a frightening and costly ordeal. So, again, it’s remarkable that it was so sketchily reported at the time, and that there seems to be virtually no oral history of it after a century, even among long-time pioneer families here, whose forebears lived through it. And there is no mention of the 1918-9 epidemic in the entries in our county’s primary history of itself, *Jefferson County Reminiscences*, written by oldtimers. Maybe the experience of living through the epidemic was so unpleasant for its survivors that they wanted to forget about it, at least in terms of story-telling and writing it down for the historical record.

As for the *Pioneer’s* negligent coverage: if, as current editor Tony Ahern likes to say, “Newspapers are the first drafts of history,” in this case that didn’t happen, in any systematic way at least. Given what we have been going through with our “coronavirus” ordeal a century later, the lack of an adequate

record of what our forebears went through in 1918 and 1919 is regrettable. Even in the scanty record of the “Spanish flu” outbreak here, there are hints of interesting and potentially instructive parallels between then and now—efforts at “social distancing” and masking, quarantining (the Ballmon family was “quarantined” in Gateway because they had visited Portland), official “bans” on public gatherings (but then as now, ill-enforced and prematurely lifted).

If our ancestors had been more given to thinking along “local-historical” lines, they might have left us some valuable clues about how to manage our current ordeal better. In truth, given the grossly inadequate way the nation at large was prepared for and initially responded to COVID-19 when it arrived on our shores last winter, the same complaint might be made about our neglect of this chapter of our national history, both the recording and the studying of it. As has often been said (but less often heeded), “Those who don’t know their history will be condemned to re-live it.”

So how about it, AGATE readers? If you have stories, family lore, information about the influenza epidemic here in 1918-9, let’s have it! And likewise, for the edification of our posterity, what about anecdotes, artifacts, and reflections on how we are making it now, “for the record?” (JR)

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Sources and further reading: Ian McClusky, OPB; Bend *Bulletin* March 31, 2020; Gilma Endicott Greenhoot, *Rattlesnake Homestead* (Springfield, 1980) (Greenhoot’s book is the only one in our treasury of local homesteading memoirs to notice the epidemic, which afflicted her family and their Agency Plains neighbors. She says that her father, Bill Endicott, may have survived because oven-heated bags of cornmeal were placed on his chest!); Madras *Pioneer* issues October 1918-March 1919. (In Dec. 1918, the *Pioneer* told its readers that Doc Haile would be dispensing free flu vaccine shots in his office—when the State of Oregon provided it. Evidently the state did not provide, and in fact no effective vaccine was developed during the epidemic.)

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Yes, I'm interested in becoming a History Volunteer

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I have artifacts, photos, written material I would like to donate to the JCHS Museum