

## LAST SURVIVOR OF THE OREGON MISSION OF 1840.

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Searchers in the field of history sometimes stumble upon the rare joy of finding a living witness of events in the long ago, events which may have become tangled in the confused records after the death of the principal actors. Such was my experience on the broad plains of South Dakota in the month of July, 1907. I was visiting the reservations of Siouan tribes with Edward S. Curtis, helping in his monumental work among the Indians of North America. He had photographed many of the chiefs and head men of the Brule Sioux and I had recorded their biographies, when Mrs. Clark, wife of the Episcopalian missionary at Rosebud, came into camp and announced that there was a very old lady in the village who would like to meet the historian from the Oregon country. Mrs. Curtis became interested, and so we three started for the home of Dr. E. J. De Bell, who for twenty-three years has been a physician and trader at Rosebud. In this home his aged aunt, whose maiden name was Sarah Ruhamah De Bell, is spending the last years of her long and eventful life.

"I am glad to meet you, friends. I cannot see you at all, and I cannot hear a word you say unless you talk right here," pointing a long-wasted finger to her forehead.

"Is it true, Mrs. Beggs, that you went to Oregon in an early day?"

"Oh, yes. I went there around Cape Horn in 1840."

"Then you must have known George Abernethy, who afterwards became the first governor of the Provisional Government of Oregon."

"Indeed, I did. He was in our party and he was a fine gentleman, too."

"Did you know Jason Lee, Daniel Lee, Gustavus Hines and H. K. W. Perkins?"

"Yes, yes. I knew them well, and many others. Name some more of them. Did you know any of these?"

"No. Most of them had died before I was born. Let me see. Did you know J. P. Richmond, who was the first missionary on Puget Sound?"

"Yes, he and his family came with us around the Horn."

"Did you know Solomon H. Smith, who taught a little school at Fort Vancouver and then married an Indian woman and settled near the mouth of the Columbia river?"

"Yes."

"Why, then you must have known Rev. J. H. Frost, who established the mission at Clatsop?"

"Glory be to God! He was my husband!"

"What!"

"Yes. You see, after we returned from Oregon Mr. Frost died, and on January 1st, 1866, I was married to Rev. Stephen R. Beggs. So I am the widow of two Methodist ministers."

This valuable clue was seized upon, and the interviewer plied the questions that brought forth a flood of information and gossip about those historic days of early Oregon. The chance dropping of a word of the Chinook jargon was like an elixir. The old lady's face brightened and she proceeded with a lengthy discourse in that language, though probably half a century had passed since she had heard it used. In those early days she and her husband had used the Chinook in their home at Clatsop, as well as in religious services among the natives.

Sarah Ruhamah De Bell was born in Colchester, January 1st, 1816, and on the same day in 1834 she was united in marriage to Rev. J. H. Frost, and sailed with him and their little son for mission work in Oregon late in 1839.

She was very emphatic in her praise of the officers of the Hudson Bay Company, especially of Dr. John McLoughlin and Dr. W. Fraser Tolmie. They were always kind and considerate. She earnestly scouted the idea that these men or any of their associates could have had anything whatever to do toward inciting the Whitman massacre by the Indians. She was equally emphatic in denying that the Catholics had incited that murder, as has been charged by some writers. She is undoubtedly the last living survivor of that missionary epoch. As is usual with such aged people, her memory was much more clear on those events of 1840 than on the events of the last half century of her life.

She remembered very well the wreck of the Peacock, one of the vessels of the famous Wilkes exploring expedition, on July 18, 1841. She says Captain Hudson was a religious man, and that very Sunday of the wreck he had held services, using as a text: "This day I will be with thee in paradise." In recording the wreck Commander Wilkes says: "It being Sunday, Captain Hudson, as usual, performed divine service." Mrs. Beggs also says that the missionaries and their wives did all they could to relieve the sufferings of the shipwrecked men. On this point Commander Wilkes bears this testimony in his final report:

"Mr. Birnie, the agent of the Hudson Bay Company at Astoria, Messrs. Frost and Koen, the missionaries, with several residents, came promptly to the aid of the shipwrecked crew with provisions, tents, cooking utensils, and clothing, all vying with each other in affording assistance."

The old lady remembers that soon after they had located at Clatsop the ocean beach was strewn with twenty large whales. Her husband's journal says there were forty black-fish, measuring fifteen to twenty feet in length, and two large hump-back whales. Some of these monsters took a long time to die, but all of them furnished food for the Indians. The white folks saved as much as they could of the oil. For these purposes they cleaned portions of the whale intestines and made of them rude bottles for holding the oil. Many of these rude bottles were hung in the trees until they could be carried to the mission homes. They had a few little lamps in which this oil would be used, and these were supplemented by what were called "slut lamps," an open vessel filled with oil from which the burning wick would hang, after the fashion of the stone lamps of the Aleuts.

Mrs. Frost was the richest woman in Oregon so far as china-ware was concerned. She had carefully packed her treasures and now proudly boasts that not a thing was broken in the long journey, not even the handle of the fine gravy ladle. Her largest platter had indentations in the bottom from which gravy could be ladled. Her mouth seemed to drool as she recalled those great Columbia River salmon on that large platter.

She and Miss Maria T. Ware were chums on the voyage around the Horn. At Honolulu they bought new dresses just alike. Arriving in the Columbia River, and while waiting for assignment to their several mission stations, Rev. Daniel Lee proposed marriage to Miss Ware and was accepted. On that occasion Mrs. Frost served her friend as bridesmaid.

This suggests one of the best incidents related by the old lady at Rosebud:

"When I left the States in 1839 I had a lot of fine gowns. These were all nicely packed in a barrel. When we got out to Oregon I did not need these gowns, so I just left them in the barrel. I had a bureau, too, and a fine bonnet. Now, I did not need that bonnet in Oregon, so I put it in the bureau and left it there. When I got ready to leave Oregon I took my bonnet from the bureau and found that a skunk had gnawed a hole in the top and made a nest in my bonnet. I was a good milliner. I say it, but I really was a good milliner. I learned of a good woman. So I just put a fine bow of ribbon over that hole made

by the skunk and had a good bonnet again. As we drew near Boston I had that barrel of gowns opened and selected the best one there. As my husband and I walked down the gang-plank and along the streets folks turned around and stared at us, and they fairly snickered as we entered a missionary meeting. You see, when I left for Oregon the style was short gowns with low neck and short sleeves, and I guess the style must have changed considerably before I got back and opened that barrel again. But, do you know, my husband and I did not care a bit for their stares or their snickers."

One reason for the sensation was shown by a picture of Mrs. Beggs in 1872, when she was fifty-six years old. She was then tall, plump and commanding in appearance, with a beautiful and intellectual face. Boston certainly must have been pleased at that Rip Van Winkle apparition from the Far West.

As the interview at Rosebud drew to a close, the last survivor of the old Oregon mission days said:

"I don't know how many more days there are for me in this world, but one thing is sure, you have brought a glad hour that I will not forget. Nika tiki closh tumtum copa mika (I have a good heart toward you)."

This is an appropriate time and place to rescue from complete oblivion the name of Joseph H. Frost. A year ago the interest of the whole Northwest was aroused when the bones of Jason Lee were brought across the continent from Lower Canada and reburied with fine and elaborate ceremonies in the little cemetery he had established near the old Oregon mission more than seventy years before. Ten years ago a monument was reared over the grave of the martyred Marcus Whitman, near Walla Walla, thus celebrating the semi-centennial of his cruel murder by the Indians he was cheerfully giving his life to serve. These two great leaders earned the right of having their names cherished throughout the Pacific Northwest, but, as is so often the case in other walks of life, in bestowing honors upon the leaders, the names of their colleagues and assistants are allowed to slip into the refuse heap of forgotten history.

Not only is this true in regard to Missionary Frost, but Hubert Howe Bancroft, in his thirty-nine volume history of the Pacific States, casts mean slurs upon his character and work. Bancroft takes peculiar delight in ridiculing the missionaries, and yet the footnotes in his volumes show that he made free use of their diaries and journals in preparing his work. In volume XXIX., page 185, are two thrusts at Frost, as follows: "Frost

spent most of the summer between the missions and the forts of the fur company, apparently waiting for some one to provide a pleasant place for him." \* \* \* "Frost being afraid of canoes, bears, savages, and, in a general way, of everything not to his liking, they made little progress, and the autumn rains came on before the green log-house was ready for use, or the mission goods had been brought from Astoria. However, by the time the December storms had set in, with the strong southwest winds and floods of rain, they had comfortable covering; but at night their floor was often covered with sleeping Indians of the filthiest habits, and through the leaky roof the water came down upon their beds."

Frost had been dead and his widow re-married for more than twenty years when Bancroft published those words, and yet it is not difficult to trace back to his source of information. When Frost left Oregon he had, as a fellow-passenger, Daniel Lee. The two planned, during the voyage, the publication of a book giving their experiences. The book appeared in New York in 1844 under the title of "Ten Years in Oregon." Bancroft drew frequently upon that little book, and from it drew the mean inferences quoted above, which a fair or impartial student would hesitate or refuse to do.

In the first place, the expedition that brought him to Oregon had brought a number of carpenters, blacksmiths and other artisans to aid the missionaries. He had a wife and child, besides himself, to shelter. He had never built a house. Now, what was more natural than that he should strenuously seek some of that expert help after he had been assigned to the lonely field of Clatsop, the farthest outpost at the very mouth of the Columbia River?

As to being afraid of canoes, every resident of Puget Sound or the Columbia River can readily recall the sensations of uncertainty, if not of fear, when first attempting to navigate in the frail canoes. It took me a long time to master one as a boy, and I combined the lessons with numerous swimming exercises.

Frost's portion of the little book referred to tells in a familiar way all about his trials and fears. In regard to Bancroft's slur that he was afraid of bears, I will let the missionary speak for himself out of his own book. He had been trying to get some of the expert help to build a shelter, but found them assigned to other stations and many of them sick with fever and ague. So he concluded to return and build the house himself with the

help of Solomon H. Smith, who was to locate with his Indian wife near the new mission home, and of Rev. W. W. Kone, who had been assigned to help him at the Clatsop station. The wreck of a large canoe manned by experts showed how well-founded was anybody's fear in such navigation. On page 282 of his book, Frost says:

"We now consulted upon the best mode of operation and determined that we would leave our families in the care of Mr. Birnie, while we would proceed immediately to the Clatsop Plain and put up a cabin. So after arranging matters as well as we could, and packing up our tools, and provisions, and tent, which occupied our time until the next day, we bid our families farewell, launched our canoe, and steered our course across Young's Bay, entered the Skapanowin River, paddled up to the head of canoe navigation, and hauled our crazy bark on shore. We now made up our cargo into packs, loaded ourselves, as we had no beast of burden, and by a circuitous route, through the marsh and across the plain, upon which we forded two creeks, reached the place selected for our dwelling about sunset. Just before we reached the place we discovered a large bear near the spot where we desired to pitch our tent; this caused us, strangers to this description of inhabitants, to hesitate; but as Mr. Smith said, 'I am not afraid of bears,' and marched on, not even deigning to notice our new neighbour, we took courage, and as we approached, the bear withdrew, and retired into the thicket so that we took possession of the place in peace, struck a fire, pitched our tent, and soon sat down to a hearty supper, which consisted of brown biscuit, pork roasted on a stick, and a cup of tea. We now united in prayer to Almighty God, imploring His direction and aid, that we might become instrumental in rearing the gospel standard in that wild place, where the enemy of all righteousness had from the beginning held unrivalled dominion."

Had Mr. Bancroft himself been educated in the East he would, under similar circumstances, manifest quite as much "fear" as is betrayed in this simple narrative.

In regard to Frost's being afraid of savages, the little journal is full of evidence that he had sufficient courage among them, and the sincerity of his efforts to improve them physically, intellectually and religiously did not, most assuredly, deserve the slurs in the Bancroft volume.

Even Bancroft has just a faint word of praise for Mrs. Frost as follows: "In February, 1843, Frost requested and received his discharge from the mission. He was suffering from a disease of the throat, which unfitted him for exposure, besides which Mrs. Frost, a kindly and cheerful woman by nature, was much broken down and discouraged."

This idea of Mrs. Frost's amiability was most likely obtained from the narrative of the famous Wilkes Expedition, published in Philadelphia in 1845, while the Bancroft book was published in 1886. In volume IV., pages 322 and 323, Commander Wilkes describes his visit to the Clatsop Mission as follows:

"On the 23d (Sunday) [May, 1841,] it was reported that a vessel was off the Cape firing guns. This made me extremely anxious to go thither, but as there was much difficulty in accomplishing this, Mr. Birnie proposed a trip to Point Adams, and a visit to the missionaries at Clatsop. This proposal I gladly accepted, and at an early hour the next morning we set out, crossed Young's Bay, landed, and after walking a mile, came to the mission, where we had the pleasure of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Frost. Mr. Frost gave us a kind welcome at his new dwelling, which I understood him to say had been built with his own hands. [Frost, in his own journal, published a year before the Wilkes publication, tells the help he had in building the cabin.] His wife appeared cheerful and happy, and made herself quite agreeable. The house is a frame one, of one story, and contains three rooms: it is situated in a young spruce and pine grove, which is thought to be the most healthy situation here. There are two American settlers, who are building houses here, named respectively Tibbits and Smith; both of them are very respectable men, and good mechanics. This place is not susceptible of improvement, and I understood that it had been chosen for its salubrity. I understood that Mr. Frost was engaged with the Rev. Mr. Koen in cultivating a tract of land, about four miles distant. The latter resides upon the tract, and is occupied in raising a large crop and superintending cattle. There appeared to me to be little opportunity for exercising their ministerial calling, though I understood afterwards that at particular seasons a number of Indians collected to hear them.

"After spending some time with them, Mr. Birnie, Mr. Frost and myself set off for Point Adams and Clatsop village. I think, in all my life, I had never met with so many snakes as I saw during this short walk: they were on the beach, where they were apparently feeding at low water. We looked from the sand-hills on Point Adams for vessels, but none were in sight; and then we walked on to the village. It consisted of a few rough lodges, constructed of boards or rather hewn planks, of large size; the interior resembled a miserably-constructed ship's cabin, with bunks, &c.; the only light was admitted from above, near the ridge and gable-end. Pieces of salmon and venison were hanging up in the smoke of their fire. Numbers of the Indians are always to be seen lounging about, and others gambling. On the bunk-planks are painted various uncouth figures of men, and in one was seen hanging the head of an elk, which it was understood they make use of occasionally as a decoy in the chase, for the purpose of taking their game more easily. Around the

whole is a palisade, made of thick planks and joists, about fifteen feet in length, set with one end in the ground, to protect them from attack.

"The Indians of this region even now make war upon each other on the most trivial occasion, and for the most part to satisfy individual revenge. The Hudson Bay Company's officers possess and exert a most salutary influence, endeavoring to preserve peace at all hazards. It is now quite safe for a white man to pass in any direction through the part of the country where their posts are, and in case of accident to any white settler, a war-party is at once organized, and the offender is hunted up. About a year previous to our arrival, an Indian was executed at Astoria for the murder of a white man, whom he had found asleep, killed, and stolen his property.

"He was taken, tried, found guilty, and executed in the presence of most of the settlers. The culprit was a slave, and it was some time before the chief to whom he belonged would give him up. It was proved on the trial, and through the confession of the slave, that he had stolen the property and committed the murder by order of his master, who took all the stolen goods. The master made his escape when he found his agency had been discovered; and I understood that he kept himself aloof from all the company's posts until the matter should be forgotten.

"As the tide had risen so much as to render it difficult to walk along the beach, we returned to Mr. Frost's in a crazy canoe, and were very near being upset. Had this accident happened, it must have proved fatal to some of us in the strong tide that was running; we therefore felt much relieved to get again to the beach. After partaking of Mrs. Frost's good cheer, we returned to Astoria, much pleased with our day's jaunt."

Wilkes was an officer of the United States Navy. He had been instructed to visit the missions in Oregon. So this is an official report. It shows some of the savage dangers confronting the Clatsop mission, as well as a glimpse of the life and work of the missionaries. In spite of a life spent on the sea, Commander Wilkes also expresses fear of the Columbia River canoe. How silly seem the slurs of Bancroft in the face of such evidence!

It may interest some readers to recall that one of the valliant officers of the *Peacock* at the time of her wreck at the mouth of the Columbia in July, 1841, was Lieutenant George F. Emmons, who afterwards led an overland expedition from Oregon to San Francisco, where he joined the Vincennes of the same expedition. He was the father of Lieutenant G. T. Emmons, who in late years has become famous as an expert on the Tlingit Indians of Alaska.



Another book of that missionary epoch was by Rev. Gustavus Hines, who calls his book, published in 1851, "Exploring Expedition to Oregon." Since Hines was a fellow passenger with Frost in 1839, I naturally turned to that book expecting to find a cordial and sympathetic record of his colleague's work and life. In this I was disappointed, for there is only the briefest possible mention of the Frosts in those pages. I suspect there are hidden reasons for this show of coolness on the part of Hines. Here is a quotation from his book, pages 235 and 236:

"Four missionaries had returned to the United States, the station at Puget's Sound had been abandoned, and the four appointments mentioned above [Hines at Oregon City and Tuality Plains; Leslie at the Wallamette settlement; Waller among the Indians along the Wallamette River; Parrish at Clatsop] connected with the mission school and the various secular departments, constituted the Oregon mission, when the Rev. George Gary, the newly appointed superintendent, arrived at Wallamette Falls on the 1st day of June, 1844.

"Mr. Gary had been appointed to supercede Mr. Lee in the superintendency of the mission in consequence of the dissatisfaction of the Board in New York with the latter, arising from the supposition founded in the statements of missionaries, oral and written, that they 'had been misled as to the necessity of so great a number of missionaries in Oregon,' and from the to them unaccountable fact that they had not been able to obtain any satisfactory report of the manner in which the large appropriations to the late reinforcement had been disbursed. These objections, however valid in the estimation of the Board, should not be considered as any disparagement to the character of Mr. Lee. Changes inconceivably great with respect to the Indians of Oregon took place betwixt the time the great reinforcement was called for, and the time of their arrival in the Columbia River. The natives were wasting away during the time, like the dews of the morning, so that Mr. Lee himself, on his return to Oregon with the reinforcement, was not among the least disappointed."

Then follows a discussion showing how much in error some of the estimates as to the numbers of Indians had been, how surprising the influx of white settlers since an appeal had been made for secular help for the missionaries and how the money matters had been placed in the hands of George Abernethy, who likely found his work too heavy to send regular reports to the Board in New York. All this explained the wrong impression that had resulted in the recall of Jason Lee.

No doubt there were a number of gloomy reports from the missionaries in Oregon. Mr. Frost is responsible for one of

these, for he writes, on pages 233 and 234 of "Ten Years in Oregon," as follows:—"those who have found the Indians of Oregon to be very anxious, as they have stated, to have missionaries sent among them that they might be taught 'how to worship the Great Spirit aright,' have been led into error, not being sufficiently acquainted with the beings with whom they had to do to understand the secret drift of their pretensions. And, no doubt, this is one, if not the greatest reason, why the church has been led to put an improper estimate upon the prospect of Christianizing and civilizing the natives of that region, and must now realize the consequences, namely, disappointment and regret—disappointment because the work which she expected her missionaries to be instrumental in accomplishing has not been accomplished by them; and regret that so many thousands, which ought to have been employed in the cultivation of a more promising field, have been spent in Oregon for the purpose of effecting that which, in all sober reason, ought never to have been expected."

However close to the truth, such reasoning as that would have been combatted by partisans of Lee during that period of misunderstandings.

Mr. Frost claimed no great things for himself. He was in Oregon three years and three months. During that time he endured the privations and hardships incident to his calling at such a time and place. He helped to build four houses in the wilderness, he helped to save shipwrecked men, he explored a route from Tillamook to the Willamette valley, he fed and clothed hungry and naked Indians and sought to improve them morally, physically and religiously, he strenuously and bravely opposed the degraded seamen who tried to inflame the savages with liquor, he preached the Gospel and prayed fervently on every appropriate occasion until bronchitis closed his throat, he returned to the States and published a plain, sensible account of his experiences and observations—a little book that is full of valuable information about the country and its inhabitants. This, in brief, is the record of Missionary Frost. No sensible man should slur or be ashamed of such a record. In fact, it is a page of our early history in which we may all take pride.

The mission immigration of 1840 was one of the most important events in early Oregon history. Never had so large a company sailed from the States to a mission field, and so the sailing was important also to the religious and political circles

of New York and the entire East. Jason Lee had taken with him to the East a memorial to Congress by the citizens of the Oregon country asking for the protection of the United States. This memorial was presented to the Senate by Linn, of Missouri, on January 28, 1839. On the 11th of the preceding December the same Senator had introduced a bill to organize Oregon Territory from the forty-second degree north and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The memorial and Lee's personal appeal must have had considerable effect. Bancroft gives Rev. Josiah L. Parrish as authority for the statement that, as Farnham and Fry, shipowners, could not carry the missionaries to Oregon for the price offered by the society, the cabinet at Washington drew on the secret service fund and paid fifty dollars a head for the entire passenger list. Parrish said he did not learn of this fact until he had been in Oregon seven years. It should be remembered that Great Britain and the United States were living under the Joint Occupancy treaty, waiting for the future to settle the ownership of Oregon. This is why the large mission company excited political as well as religious interest.

The ship *Lausanne*, under command of Captain Josiah Spaulding, sailed from New York on October 10, 1839. Her large "mission family" consisted of fifty-one souls, including the following: Mr. and Mrs. Jason Lee; Rev. Joseph H. Frost, wife and one child; Rev. William W. Kone and wife; Rev. Alvan F. Waller, wife and two children; Rev. J. P. Richmond, M. D., wife and four children; Ira L. Babcock, M. D., wife and one child; Rev. Gustavus Hines, wife and one child; George Abernethy, mission steward, wife and two children; W. W. Raymond, farmer, and wife; Henry B. Brewer, farmer, and wife; Rev. Lewis H. Judson, cabinet-maker, wife and three children; Rev. Josiah L. Parrish, blacksmith, wife and three children; James Olley, carpenter, wife and children; Hamilton Campbell, wife and children; David Carter, Miss Chloe A. Clark, Miss Elmira Phillips, Miss Maria T. Ware, Miss Almira Phelps, teachers; Miss Orpha Lankton, stewardess, and Thomas Adams, the Chinook whom Mr. Lee had taken with him to Oregon.

Many of those names became familiar in the stirring history of Oregon during the decade from 1840 to 1850. The *Lausanne* sailed into the Columbia River on May 21, 1840, and not long thereafter her living cargo was distributed to the various mission stations at the Willamette Falls, The Dalles, Clatsop and Nis-

qually. The earnest men and women started in with vigor to do the work for which they had risked their lives. It is not for human statisticians to attempt a tally-sheet on which to count the number of souls they redeemed from savagery. Their influence was for good among the redmen and among the pale faces who swarmed into the new lands. As the white children multiplied, the mission Indian school evolved into the Oregon Institute and that into Willamette University, which survives, a successful institution of learning at the present time. Such influences are like the tides of the ocean. No one can measure the entire length of the ebbs and floods, and yet upon them many a ship glides safely into harbor.

My chance meeting at Rosebud with the last survivor of this band of toilers for Christ will always linger in my memory. The trembling benediction she waved at our parting will brighten the pages of Oregon history, whether I read or write.

EDMOND S. MEANY.