

REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER WOMAN*

My father was John Fenn, an Englishman, the son of Thomas and Nancy Fenn. He was born at Alesworth, North Hampshire, England, on November 26, 1810 or 1812, and in his youth learned the trade of plasterer and brick mason. In 1828, with an older brother, William Fenn,¹ he came over on a sailing vessel. I have heard my father say that he was only sixteen years old when he left England. In Canada my father took up his trade of plasterer, and later, with his brother William moved to Pike County, Illinois, where both brothers married.

My mother was Mary Jory, an Englishwoman, the daughter of James Jory and Mary Stevens, who were married in St. Clear parish, England, in 1812. James Jory's father (also named James Jory) was a game keeper and gardener on an English estate, and the son learned the trade of carpenter and mechanic. My grandfather's family consisted of two daughters, Mary (my mother), Elizabeth, who later became my stepmother, and six sons, John, James,² Henry Thomas, William, and H. S. All, except H. S. Jory, were born in England. My grandfather, James Jory, with his family emigrated from England to St. John, New Brunswick, where he took up a farm and worked in the ship yards. Later he moved with his family to New York, then to New Orleans, and from there to St. Louis, Missouri. The slave-holding system then prevailing in Missouri was obnoxious to his liberty-loving English spirit, and my grandfather moved, with his family, to Pike County, Illinois, in the fall of 1837. Here he bought forty acres of government land on which he settled.

In Pike County, my father, John Fenn, first met my mother, Mary Jory, and they were married in 1839. Four children were born, Mary Jane, born on May 17, 1840; ³Elizabeth Ann (the narrator, now living at Spring Valley, Washington; James William,⁴ born October 11, 1843; and Thomas Henry,⁴ born March 28, 1845. Mother died in Pike County, Illinois, in November, 1846, while the family was preparing to emigrate to Oregon. I remember distinctly the new linsey

*This relation was made by Elizabeth Ann Coonc of Spring Valley, Spokane County, to William S. Lewis, Corresponding Secretary of the Spokane Historical Society. The footnotes are by Mr. Lewis.—Editor.

¹William Fenn, when last heard of was living at Kaski, Illinois.

²A sketch of the life of James Jory, Jr., by H. S. Lyman appears in the Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. 3, pages 271-286.

³Now Mrs. Nancy Jane MacPherson, East Fourteenth St., Portland, Ore.

⁴Now deceased.

dress mother made to wear to Oregon, and the tent stretched in the yard of the old home in Illinois under which we children played.

Mary Elizabeth Jory, my mother's sister, took mother's place in caring for the four little motherless children, and when all was ready father, auntie and us children, with a large party including many of mother's relatives, started out overland by ox teams along the old Oregon trail, reaching the Columbia River district in the late fall of 1847.

Dr. Whitman came out from the Blue Mountains, a distance of about 150 miles, to meet our party and to pilot them over the trail to his mission. A stop of three weeks was made at the Whitman Mission and Dr. Whitman tried to persuade the emigrants to remain over at the mission until the next year.⁵

Before reaching the mission a considerable amount of property was stolen from the emigrants' camp by the Indians. This was just after the first robbery and massacre of an emigrant train, where but a small part of the people had escaped. Upon our robbery being reported to Dr. Whitman, he called the Indians together; they gathered in a half-circle in front of the Doctor, wrapped in their blankets, many with their faces painted with war-paint, and the Doctor began to arraign them about the theft. I looked on, standing beside father and holding his hand. As the Doctor proceeded, and the guilty consciences of the Indians were awakened, from time to time a knife, fork or frying pan would be dropped by an Indian from beneath his blanket, and when Dr. Whitman had finished most of the stolen property was lying about on the ground at the feet of the Indians. One of the Indians threw down a skillet with considerable force, and, as I thought, threw it at the Doctor, but father said, "No, they are mad." This was only a short time before the massacre of Dr. Whitman by the Indians.

Among the property surrendered by the Indians was a large chest. No one knew to whom it belonged, so Dr. Whitman gave it to my father to carry on to Oregon, hoping that the owner might be found there. Father's team was, however, giving out and he was compelled to leave the chest by the roadside in the mountains. After we had reached Oregon I remember we were all gathered around the old fireplace one night when auntie said, "John, I have often wondered what was in the old chest you put out by the roadside. There might have been something in it which we could have used for the children."

⁵The Whitman massacre occurred on November 29, 1847, and the eagerness of the emigrants to reach old Oregon probably saved them from sharing the fate of Dr. Whitman. The emigration of 1847 did not pass by the Whitman mission, and it was not customary for Dr. Whitman to go out to meet and pilot emigrants. He went to the Umatilla River with some provisions to sell them, and was gone several weeks that fall at The Dalles where he purchased the Methodist Mission property. (T. C. E.) It is probable, however, that many of the emigrants made the "out of the way trip" to visit the mission, and rest for a few days.

And father answered her, saying: "No, Elizabeth, I never could have used anything that did not belong to me."

From the Whitman Mission we traveled down the Columbia in canoes, and at first settled at Clatsop Plains in Clatsop County, Oregon, where in 1847 father married my aunt, Elizabeth Jory, who had taken care of us children during the trip. My step-brother, John S. Fenn,⁶ was born at Clatsop Plains.

After remaining at Clatsop Plains for about a year, in 1849, the family moved to Salem, where we remained two years. In 1852 father moved with the family to Linn County, Oregon, a place about six miles north of Albany. Here my step-brother, Joe Fenn,⁷ was born in 1852, and my step-sister, Mary Fenn,⁸ was born in 1854.

In the spring of 1854 my step-mother, Mary Elizabeth Fenn, took sick and died. We all had a very hard time while she was sick. Sister and I had to care for her and cook the meals and do all the house work, father and the boys being all hard at work on the farm. After my step-mother's death my oldest sister, Nancy Jane, then fourteen years old, and myself, kept house for the family until sister was married to William Angus MacPherson, a Scotchman, who afterwards became State Printer of Oregon, and who was later associated with the late Harvey Scott on the Oregonian.

Except for occasional visits to our grandparents, who lived about twenty miles away, the rest of us children stayed at home until we grew up. Times were very hard among the early pioneers of Oregon. Some of us children spent a great deal of the time with our grandparents, the Jory family. Several of the Jory family have died on their old donation claim in the Salem Hills, and some of their descendants still live there on land first taken up in 1850. In that part of Oregon the "Jory Settlement" is a section as well known as the "French Prairie Settlement," where the French Canadian employees of the Hudson Bay Company settled. There were a great many volunteers for the Indian wars of the fifties from the "Jory Settlement" and the vicinity.

In 1849, my father, John Fenn, with one of my uncles, joined the gold rush to California, sailing across the Columbia River Bar and down the coast of California in an open boat. My father was fairly successful in his mining operations and returned from California in 1850 by a sailing boat, which was compelled to lie off the Columbia River Bar three weeks before it was safe to cross and enter the Columbia.

⁶Col. J. S. Fenn, of Spokane and North Yakima: Col. Fenn in 1855-6 represented Spokane County in the Territorial Legislature.

⁷Mr. Joseph C. Fenn, of Spokane and Seattle.

⁸Mrs. Mary C. Adams, now residing near Lewiston, Idaho.

As a child I remember hearing of the killing of the Indian Pu-Pu-Mox-Mox⁹ by the soldiers in 1856, and of hearing that some of the volunteer soldiers from our neighborhood had brought back razor strops made out of his hide. His ears were cut off and pickled and brought back as trophies by one of the neighbors.

As a young girl I remember meeting Dr. McLoughlin, with the Hudson Bay Company. With the money which he brought back from the gold mines in California my father bought some horses, and he was the only man in the neighborhood who had horses, most of the settlers having only cattle which they had driven across the plains. Father used to loan his team to the neighbors to haul their wheat to the Hudson Bay Company's mill at Oregon City. On one occasion the supplies of grain and flour became very short, and even the Hudson Bay Company had barely enough for its own use. Being an Englishman, the neighbors selected my father as their delegate to go to Dr. McLoughlin and try to get sufficient flour for their winter use. Dr. McLoughlin asked father how many women and children there were, and then told father that the settlers could have some flour, but that they would have to take shorts to mix with it.

In 1860, I, Elizabeth Ann Fenn, was married to David M. Coonc,^{9½} at Scio, Linn County, Oregon, and in 1864 moved with my husband to The Dalles, Oregon. In 1864 we moved to White Bluffs on the Columbia River. White Bluffs was then on the east side of the Columbia at the crossing of the Mullan Road, and an attempt was made to start a town there in opposition to Wallula. A warehouse and a store were built there. There were two white men, bachelors, there, Nevison and Boothe. My husband, Mr. Coonc, had several teams of mules and teamed freight from White Bluffs.¹⁰

⁹Pu-Pu-Mox-Mox, with several other Indians, were held as hostages by the white settlers in the Walla Walla country during the Cayuse war and in December, 1855, the command going into sanguinary conflict with the hostile Indians at the Touchet River, the guards killed all the Indian prisoners and mutilated their remains. The usual plea was made that the Indians had tried to escape, but the act seems to have been an uncalled for and cold-blooded massacre equal in savagery to any similar acts committed by the Indians. For an account see the History of Klickitat and Yakima Counties, pages 71 to 73. See Statements of General John E. Wool, Serial No. 822, 34th Cong., 1st S. Ex. D. 66, pages 39 and 58.

^{9½}David Madison Coonc was born at Keokuk, Iowa, in 1832, of German parentage. In 1849, as a boy of seventeen, he left home and came overland with a party of emigrants to California, where he worked a mining claim at Eureka, during the gold excitement. In 1859, he came overland to Oregon, settling in Lynn County, where he married Miss Fenn on October 25, 1860.

¹⁰In the early '60s when the old Oregon Steam Navigation Company extended its steamer traffic to White Bluffs to take care of the shipments to Montana and built a steamboat on Lake Pend d'Oreille they had a freighting road built across the country, following some old Indian trail. (T. C. E.)

The White Bluff Road, as shown on Lieutenant Symonds' map of the Department of the Columbia, went north from White Bluffs northeast to Crab Creek, thence to Sheep Springs; thence northeast by Duck Lake draw and thence northeast to Ivy Lake, thence six miles to Booth Springs, thence thirteen miles northeast to Cottonwood Springs (now Davenport), thence east to Mondovi, Deep Creek, and Spokane Falls; thence

There was then a big mining excitement near the head of Pend Oreille Lake, and the machinery and materials for the first steamboat were landed at White Bluffs to be hauled to the Lake. On the first trip, Abe Hines and his wife, who had been married in our house in Oregon, accompanied Mr. Coonc and located where Rathdrum, Idaho, now is and built a road-house—being a double cabin with a roofed porch between. The freight was landed at Cabinet Landing on Pend Oreille Lake. On the next trip with freight, I accompanied my husband, riding a mule while my husband managed his ten-mule team with a jerk line. We started in August and it took about three weeks to make the trip, most of the way being over an Indian trail. Our freight was the boiler for a steamboat. Mr. Coonc was a great hand to frighten the Indians. They crowded around the big boiler and asked him what it was; my husband opened up the firebox, showing them the numerous tubes, or flues of the boiler and told them it was "many guns," and that he had a shot in every barrel and only had to fire it up to commence shooting. Thereafter the Indians were careful not to get in front of the boiler.

Approaching the present site of the city of Spokane, we came down an Indian trail by Garden Springs¹¹ and camped on the little stream west of Hangman Creek. There were no white people at Spokane at that time. Mr. Coonc unhitched the mules and took them off a little distance from the wagons to pasture them. While he was gone an Indian came up to me with a fish to sell; soon there were about a dozen Indians about me, all offering to sell me fish. They looked at my hands and dress, and hollered and joked and laughed among themselves; looked at my feet, put their hands on my head. I think that I was the first white woman they had seen. Getting scared, I got off the wagon and ran to my husband. There used to be an old roadhouse or stopping place near Garden Springs in the early days.

Crossing Hangman Creek, it took Mr. Coonc all day to get up the west bank of the creek where Eighth Avenue crosses under the Northern Pacific Railroad. A bad time was encountered also in getting over the rim rock, down into Union Park, as there were no roads. I did not visit the falls of the Spokane but could hear their roar from the camp. We crossed the Spokane River at a ferry near where Cow-

east to Rathdrum, Idaho; thence along a line parallel to the present Northern Pacific Railway line for about twelve miles; thence east to Steamboat Landing at the southern end of Pend d'Oreille Lake. On this map, Splains' place is shown at about six miles below Ringold Bar; Kuntz' (Coonc) place about six miles above the bar and Perkins' place about eight miles above the Kuntz place.

¹¹Mrs. Coonc is mistaken; the Indian trail and road came down what is now known as "Brickyard Gulch" about a mile and a half south of the gulch occupied by Garden Springs creek.

ley's Bridge was erected. Part of the lumber for the first bridge was then on the ground.¹² Antone Plant had a ferry there. He lived on the north side of the river, on the river bank. He had married a squaw and had a lot of children. About the fattest cattle I ever saw were at Antone Plant's place. From there we went to Rathdrum, and I stopped with Mrs. Hines, while Mr. Coonc went on to Pend Oreille Lake with the freight.

We returned to White Bluffs and Mr. Coonc sold his mules for ox teams, six yoke. We wintered at White Bluffs. I then returned to Albany, Oregon, and Mr. Coonc began hauling freight from Wallula to Winnemucca, Nevada, where there was a big mining excitement at the time. He was gone eleven months on the trip. At Burnt River, Eastern Oregon, he lost two teams of oxen by the cattle eating some weed. In 1868, Mr. Coonc sold his ox teams at Minnemucca and went to San Francisco, and returned to Oregon. In the spring of 1869 we bought cattle and took them overland to Ocho-co, at Prineville, about 100 miles over the mountains east from Albany. Barney Prine was then king of Ocho-co.

The place was full of the toughest men I ever saw; every Sunday they would get drunk, quarrel and shoot up the town. They finally started to brand Mr. Coonc's cattle. Mr. Coonc couldn't kick, and I persuaded him to move to White Bluffs in 1872. The cattle were swum over the river and driven to Ringold Bar near White Bluffs. Here we lived three years. There was a large Indian camp up the river near us, but the Indians never molested us. Chinamen were then washing gold in the bars along the Columbia and frequently traded gold to me for flour and bread.

There was an Indian burying-ground near Ringold Bar and the Indians frequently passed, carrying dead bodies to that place for burial. I knew Joseph, the Nez Perce, and fed him many a dish of bread and milk. I knew old Moses and his tribe; they frequently came to the house. Mr. Coonc had the Indians bluffed; they respected him and were afraid of him. About 1878 he read in the almanac that there would be an eclipse of the moon. He told the Indians that he was a great man; that on a certain day he was going to place his hand over the moon. The eclipse came off on scheduled time. Mr. Coonc then told the Indians that if they stole any of his cattle he would blow "poof," and that would be the end of the thief. Mr. Coonc had been accidentally shot through the hand. This had left a bullet hole which he showed to the Indians as proof that shooting him with bullets could not injure him.

¹²The bridge was built by Joe Herrin and Tim Lee in 1864.

While at Ringold Bar we saw a great deal of the Indians; Mr. Coonc, myself and my two oldest girls could all talk "Chinook" fluently. When we moved to the "Bar" Mr. Coonc told me that if I would stay there three years after that he would move the family to town. In 1875 the family moved to Waitsburg.

At the time of the Nez Perce war, in 1878, a family by the name of Perkins was living in our house at Ringold Bar. Some of the renegade Nez Perce Indians tried to cross the Columbia at Umatilla to go to the Yakima country to stir up the Yakimas; they were shot while in the boats in the river and driven back by the whites; some of the Indians being killed and injured. The remaining Indians continued on up the east bank of the Columbia and crossed near our place. The Perkins family had gone to Yakima. Returning, they stopped at Rattlesnake Springs, turned their horses out and were eating their lunch, when they were surprised by these Indians and killed. The Indians got part of their lunch. Two weeks later Mr. Coonc, thinking something was wrong, swam his horses over the river. Later the body of Mrs. Perkins was found partly buried, the left arm sticking out of the ground. Old Jack Splain afterwards captured five of these Indians. It seems that they shot Mr. Perkins first; that Mrs. Perkins ran and jumped on a horse, but they shot her and she fell. They threw her body in a ravine and partly covered it. Three Indians were hanged at Yakima for this.¹³

While at the Bar we never had any trouble with the Indians. There was a big Indian camp above us—part of Moses' tribe. One day there was an earthquake and a big landslide somewhere up near Chelan. The Indians said that there was a rumble, a smell of sulphur and that the earth opened up in cracks, taking in some of the Indians, one of whom was left with a hand sticking out. The water of the Columbia was all muddy from the landslide, which for a time blocked the river. The Indians came to the house; they sat around on the floor against the walls, and I fed them bread and milk; then they smoked and passed the pipe from one to another, before they would talk about the earthquake and landslide with Mr. Coonc. This, I think, was in 1877.¹⁴

At one time Mr. Coonc was a partner of Dan Drumheller, now a pioneer of the city of Spokane. Mr. Coonc had lots of cattle and

¹³For an account of this murder see "History of Yakima and Klickitat Counties." Mr. J. B. Huntington, living in the Yakima Country at the time, states that the Indians crossed to the north side of the Columbia from Umatilla and proceeded overland, crossing the Yakima near Prosser, and thence proceeding north into the Rattlesnake Hills, where they encountered the Perkins family on their way to Yakima for safety from hostile Indians; and that the capture of the murderers was by Bill Splain, not by Jack Splain.

¹⁴This earthquake occurred in 1874.

horses. One spring we branded five hundred calves. Mr. Coonc used to drive beef cattle from Yakima over the mountains by Snoqualmie Pass to the Sound. In the winter of 1880 there was a big blizzard; there was a cold wind blowing and the cattle following and drifting with the wind, 1500 head broke through the ice on the Columbia and were drowned. That winter I think we lost seventy-five per cent. of our cattle. The early cattlemen trusted to the weather; they didn't winter their stock. One winter the weather was so bad, blizzards, snow and cold winds, that the cattle tried to get into the houses at Pasco. Some got into our house at Ringold Bar and died there. After the worst winter Mr. Coonc had only five hundred cattle left; he thought these too small to bother with so he went into raising horses.

In March, 1884, we moved to our farm at Spring Valley, near the depot.

My father, John Fenn, died at Waitsburg in 1882. Father was a man of sterling qualities whose word was as good as gold. He was a Christian also and read his Bible a great deal. It tried men's souls to live up to a Christian life in his time on the frontier. Father did not talk much to us children or relate to us things that happened, as many do, so many things of family history were not remembered by us children as they otherwise would have been.

My husband, Mr. Coonc, could ride anything; he was a daring rider. In 1869 he was in the saddle three months at a stretch, riding the range. He was killed by a horse at Rosalia on June 22nd, 1900.

While at Ringold Bar, he used to send letters back and forth to Waitsburg, 80 miles, by Indians; he often sent us salmon the same way. The Indians liked and trusted him. One old Indian, who thought a great deal of Mr. Coonc, wouldn't eat when he heard of Mr. Coonc's death, he felt so bad.

Several times in early days I was informed that my husband was dead. Once when he was freighting from The Dalles to Canyon City, Union County, Oregon, 150 miles away, near the Nevada line, it was printed in the paper that he had been killed by Indians. Mr. Smith, the postmaster at Waitsburg, once handed me a newspaper which stated that Indians had killed Mr. Coonc. A horse had been found with a bloody saddle, later a body was found which was identified as his. I did not know the truth for three weeks. I was just getting ready to go back to Oregon to my folks when Mr. Coonc returned.

My husband knew Mr. James Glover, the "Father of Spokane," in California, before Mr. Glover ever came to Washington Territory.

I am now living near Spring Valley, in Spokane County, Washington.

ELIZABETH ANN COONC.