

## OREGON IMMIGRANTS OF 1844

Willard Hall Rees was the first secretary of the Oregon Pioneer Association and was one of the prime movers in its organization. He was born at Dover, Delaware, September 17, 1819, and was of Welch stock. He crossed the plains by oxteam and prairie schooner in 1844. He secured a contract for the building of a church from the French Canadian settlers on French Prairie in what is now Marion county Oregon, in the summer of 1845. This church at St. Louis which was located on the edge of what was then known as Big Prairie was about seven miles from the church of St. Paul, which was built from funds of the Catholic Missionary Society. Mr. Rees bought a 640 acre claim from a French settler for \$975 which he later proved up on as his donation land claim. Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Hall crossed the plains in 1845. Mrs. Hall ran a hotel at what was then known as The Bute, now known as Buteville. At this hotel on January 21, 1847, Mr. Rees and Miss Amanda M. Hall were married, Rev. J. L. Parrish performing the wedding ceremony. Twelve of the thirteen children born to them lived to maturity. In the summer of 1848, with Peter H. Burnett and other settlers from the Willamette Valley, Mr. Rees went overland to the newly discovered gold diggings near Sutter's Mill in California. Prior to this he served in the Provisional Legislature. With O. S. Thomas and Wm. Keating he built the first grist mill on Deer Creek near where the town of Aurora now stands. He was one of the enthusiastic members of The Pioneer Lyceum and Literary Club which met at Oregon City and was the first club of this kind to be organized in the Pacific Northwest. Among the members of the club were Jesse Applegate, S. W. Moss, Capt. John H. Couch, F. W. Pettygrove, A. L. Lovejoy, H. A. G. Lee, Medorum Crawford, John Minto, Daniel Waldo, Mark Ford, Philip Foster, P. G. Stewart, J. W. Nesmith, J. G. Campbell, Ransom Clark, Joe Watt and a number of others. Mr. Rees devoted the last ten or twelve years of his life to gathering manuscripts and historical data for the purpose of writing a history of the settlement of the Willamete Valley. He accumulated an almost priceless store of historical material consisting of overland records, reminiscemoes of early settlers and other similar material. He wrote to those of his old time comrades who still survived and

secured from the descendants of those who had passed on records of their experiences in the settlement of the Oregon country. He made copious notes of his talks with such men as F. X. Matthieu, Etienne Lucier, William Cannon, Philip Degie, Louis Labonte, Joseph Gervais, Andrew Longtain, Rev. F. N. Blanchet, Donald Manson, and others of his old neighbors on French Prairie. He wrote his history to which he devoted many years and when it was completed he put the manuscript with all of his original documents and other source material in a leather trunk which he placed in a closet beside the fireplace in his home at Butteville. He decided not to publish his history during his life time as he thought with the passage of time there would be greater interest in the early history of the settlement of the Oregon country. When an old time friend visited him some years after he had completed his history he decided to consult him about certain features of his history and getting out the old leather trunk he opened it and found that the mice had gotten into the trunk and made nests of his manuscript. The letters and documents which he had secured were nibbled and ruined. He was so discouraged that his material was ruined and realizing the hopelessness of replacing most of his original documents he did not attempt to rewrite the history. A few of the old letters and some pages of miscellaneous manuscripts of his composition were saved and the rest burned in the fireplace after the death of Mr. Rees. Recently it was my good fortune to be shown a few pages of Mr. Rees' manuscripts that had been rescued from the ravages of the mice. Few men had a better knowledge of the early history of the Oregon country than Mr. Rees. I am going to quote in part from his pages that I was permitted to read. In speaking of the emigration of 1844 he writes:

"The Pioneers who came to Oregon in the first years of the 40's had to meet and overcome nearly the whole catalogue of imaginable difficulties—all the vast empire of the wild west—reaching from the Missouri and Iowa border to the Pacific Ocean was in undisputed possession of wild savage tribes. This strangely isolated settlement was far beyond government aid, or national jurisdiction, yet these pioneers had come by hundreds with their families and all they possessed—self-reliant, depending alone on their own resources to meet future events, they were not the people to become discouraged or intimidated. The situation was of their own choosing and they had come resolved to face it and

stay. Finding themselves in a new world as it were, where all nature seemed to have fashioned on a scale of colossal grandure. Here on this ocean bound shore, they pitched their tents and deliberately proceeded to lay the foundation of their Anglo-American government based on civil and religious liberty, the dearest rights of a free spirited people.

"It must be written and eventually accepted as the truth of history, that it was those pioneer settlers in the aggregate, and not one, nor three score of them, to whom the credit is due for having made it necessary that the long controverted boundary question should be terminated and Oregon, to the 49° N. lat. acknowledged as a territory of the United States.

"Among the pioneers who did good service on the plains, and during the formative change from savage to civilized government, when Oregon Territory was bounded by the summit of the Rocky Mountains, is the subject of the following sketch.

"Captain Robert Wilson Morrison, born in Fleming County, Kentucky, March 14, 1811, of Scotch parentage, at the age of eleven years with his parents removed to Montgomery County, Missouri, where he grew to manhood on the farm, was married to Miss Nancy Irwin, March 10, 1831. Two years later they moved a hundred and fifty miles westward to Clay County on the Missouri River, which separated it from the Indian Territory that reached west to the Pacific Ocean. He had resided but a short time in Clay, when they removed to the adjoining county of Clinton. After the consummation of the Platt Purchase, some three years later, they moved to the newly acquired part of the state, settling in the portion soon after organized as Andrew County. This last location was some ten miles north of St. Joseph and two miles east of the great wild territory of the West. It was on this new farm where he had labored for some six years that the writer in company with John Minto first met Mr. Morrison in April, 1844, then busily engaged, preparatory, as he said, to making his final remove to Oregon, the last land in the West.

"A few words in reference to one who became so intimately connected with the subject of this sketch will not be inappropriate here.

"John Minto a miner from Pennsylvania, arrived at St. Louis, Mo. early in April, 1844, enroute for the copper and lead mines of the upper Mississippi. After a short acquaintance, he was

informed that the writer was on his way to Oregon and giving him some information in regard to the manner of getting there, Mr. Minto at once abandoned his intention of going to the mines, a few days later with the writer embarked for St. Jo on the Missouri River, some three hundred miles above St. Louis, and nine miles below the emigrant rendezvous which was on the Indians side of the river, opposite Caples Landing. Arriving at our destination, we found some thirty families encamped on the open timber-land of the river bottom, where some had been sojourning for two months grazing their stock on the rushes that grew in great abundance. At the time of our arrival in camp some families had not yet left their homes and others were on their way to join the expedition which had not yet been organized, but by common consent, Captain Cornelius Gilliam appeared as leader. Seemingly not far from forty years of age, he was about five feet ten inches in height, florid complexion, robust health, weighing some two hundred pounds, a heart overflowing with blunt kindness toward stranger and friend. He was an unlettered man, possessed of some strong common sense traits, but seemed to give loose reign to his temper, Cornelius Gilliam was a fair representative pioneer of the Southwest borderland of half a century ago—Making our wishes known to the captain, he promptly offered one of us a place in his own family and the other a situation with the family of a friend. At the same time Mr. Gilliam referred us to Mr. Morrison on the opposite side of the river, as a very worthy man who was without help and anxious to secure assistance.

“Accepting the situation offered by Captain Gilliam for a friend (the late O. S. Thomas of Tillamook, who with the writer had set out from Peoria, Illinois, for Oregon and now awaiting our report at St. Jo). Thanking our new-found friends at the rendezvous for their kind attentions and information conferred, we took our departure and as above stated, soon found ourselves in the presence of Mr. Morrison and family. Mutual interest made the meeting a very congenial one. The time for cutting loose from the western border of civilization was near at hand. Mr. Morrison with a family of six children, two ox wagons and quite a band of loose stock on learning the object of our call, expressed himself as having for some time felt an anxiety to secure suitable assistance to make the journey, while we were heartily willing to render the required service which was to drive



one team of three yoke oxen and such other help as occasion might require. We were to be furnished board and such accommodations as were consistent with camp life and a rolling home while crossing the wide expanse of mountain and plains that separated us from our far off ideal homes on the western shore of the continent. There was still considerable preparatory work to be done before Mr. Morrison could leave his old home.

"He handed to the writer some money and a bill of goods for his outfit to be purchased at St. Jo. Taking an ox-team I left early on the following morning, had the bill filled, got my trunk and my friend O. S. Thomas.

"The distance being some ten miles or more, we did not reach home until late at night, Mrs. Morrison remarking to the writer that she had been trying to reconcile her husband to the truth of her prediction that he would never again see that stranger nor his money.

"The Spring of 1844 was an unusual backward one and thick broken ice was still to be seen in places along the timber line that skirted the sand bars, sometimes fifty yards from the water's edge where it had been left at high water when the ice of the upper river was broken up. The grass on which the stock was to subsist was short, but it was now near the first of May when the old camp was broken up and the trains began to move west in the direction of the Iowa Indian Agency some twenty miles distant and appointed as the place of general rendezvous where officers were to be elected and the emigrants trains organized in suitable divisions for safety and convenience. Reaching Wolf Creek it was found too deep to ford. A bridge was soon thrown across the stream when the trains moved on, passing the agency building a short distance, went into camp where we remained several days. We found Mr. Richardson, the Indian Agent, a very kindly disposed man. The first death among the emigrants occurred at the crossing of Wolf Creek. It was that of an invalid from St. Louis, traveling for his health. The Agent furnished lumber, tools and shop. O. S. Thomas and the writer made the coffin. The funeral services were conducted by the Rev. William Hamilton, who, with his young wife, had been sent by the Presbyterian Board of Missions of Pennsylvania to the Iowa Indians some years before. Mr. Hamilton preached in our camp and distributed Bibles to those who had none and wished to receive a copy. The weather continued warm and rainy

while the prairies in many places were almost impassable for heavy loaded wagons. It was now May 7. Many of the emigrants were becoming impatient of delay and the first thing in order was to organize. Cornelius Gilliam who, as captain, had recruited a small company and participated in the Seminole Indian war, marshaled the men of the camp, bringing them into single file. The captain then addressed the men in a serious yet encouraging manner, reminding them that they had left their old homes and many friends beyond the Missouri River, that they were now in the Indians' country and perhaps would so continue to be for several years to come. He would especially recommend a strict military organization as best for the protection of life and property while on the long dangerous march through the country of savage war-like tribes. The time had come for the election of their officers upon whose judgment and conduct the gravest responsibility must rest.

"Uncle Benjamin Nichols placed in nomination Captain Gilliam for brigade commander. Requesting those who favored the nomination to step one pace forward, the column advanced unbroken to the front. That vote made Cornelius Gilliam general of the brigade. In like manner the other brigade officers were chosen and by request of the general, the writer was made adjutant, ordered to enroll all the men, and youth above sixteen years old being subject to guard duty, ascertain what arms and ammunition they had and report the same at headquarters as soon as the muster roll was complete.

"The brigade was divided into three companies with an average of 27 wagons each. (There were some half dozen wagons joined the companies later.) R. W. Morrison was chosen captain of one company, and the writer, then twenty-five years of age, was made his sergeant of the guard, each performing their respective duties until the company arrived at The Dalles Mission. Captain Morrison was thirty-three years old, about five feet ten inches in height, round shoulders, fair complexion, slow of speech, generous, prudent and brave. Captain Morrison was a good hunter and was in the saddle during the greater part of the journey, usually a few miles in advance, looking for suitable places for the noonday lunch and camping grounds, which were not unfrequently found at a considerable distance to the right or left of the direct line of travel.

"At the time the first report was made to General Gilliam

after the organization of the brigade, the muster roll contained 108 men rank and file and was subsequently increased to 115.

"The general had been advised by traders accustomed to traveling through the country between the Missouri River and the Platt, to push forward and cross the streams before the usual spring rains made them too deep to ford, yet the trains lost unnecessarily, at least ten days of most valuable time before making the final start. This delay was caused by the vain-glory that could only be satisfied by a pompous military display and was the cause that ultimately led to greater loss and more suffering among the faithful-laboring men, women and children, than all other misfortunes combined.

"General Gilliam issued an order directed to Captain R. W. Morrison, William Shaw and Richard Woodcock to have their respective companies ready to leave the agency on the morning of May 15. The weather continued showery, the prairie lands so soft that only by following the dividing ridges could any progress be made.

"The night of May 18th was lower, the stock consisting of horses, mules, oxen, cows and young cattle, numbering between eight and nine hundred head, were sent out to graze with guards placed to keep it in certain designated bounds. In the latter part of the night the stock on the eastern side becoming frightened, the guards were unable to keep it within the lines. At early dawn one of the men was sent in who reported at the guard tent that a general stampede of the stock had taken place. A few horses were every evening picketed near the camp. They were hurriedly brought in, mounted and some half dozen determined men dashed off in the direction of the agency where the stampede had first commenced. The horsemen were followed by half the men in camp on foot. By nine o'clock the greater part of the stock had been driven in. The mounted men found the Indian trail and discovered that they had driven off some of the cattle. A spirited pursuit commenced. After a gallop of some eight or ten miles they overtook the Indians who were engaged in butchering the cattle and who, seeing that they were discovered, mounted their ponies and retreated to a grove on a creek near at hand. Our men returning, made their report. The general ordered the writer to muster forth with forty mounted riflemen to march directly to the agency and mission villages where he would demand redress. As soon as horses could be got

in readiness the men were in the saddle and off, over the rolling prairie at a rapid pace. Reaching the place where the first pursuing party had overtaken the Indian thieves, it was soon discovered that three oxen belonging to Mrs. McDaniel had been butchered and their hides hid in the creek. It was near nightfall when the cavalcade reached the agency and went into camp. Soon after candle lighting, Mr. Richardson, who had been informed as to the cause that brought so formidable an appearing company to the agency, came out and invited General Gilliam into his council chamber, who with his witnesses and a few others went in, stated the facts so far as they had been learned, then made a peremptory demand, the terms of which were that the agent and principal chief of the Iowas (who numbered something over 700 souls) must replace the widow McDaniel's oxen, furnish one good beef steer and surrender to General Gilliam the Indians who had committed the theft, to be held as hostages until all the stampeded horses and cattle should be returned to emigrant camp.

"These terms were agreed to by the agent. Early the following morning Mr. Richardson made known the terms to the chief and Mr. Hamilton the missionary. The chief agreed that the slaughtered cattle should be replaced, that one good beef extra should be given for the benefit of the emigrants, but he could not promise to deliver the men who had committed the depradation. The situation was made known to the men who had their horses in readiness. The order was given to mount and march directly to the Indian village perhaps a mile distant, situated in the edge of the timber that bordered the river. As we neared the village the troopers deployed right and left forming a semi-circle. The sun just above the eastern horizon and but few Indians were yet astir. The chief soon made his appearance with his snow white blanket wrapped about him. He said to the general through an interpreter that he did not know the men who committed the theft, therefore could not surrender them.

"The general replied that he would hold him as prisoner and responsible for the butchered oxen also for the horses that were yet missing when his company left the camp—until all were found or paid for.

"The chief asked for and was granted permission to go among his people in search of the guilty men. There were several villages in close proximity. The old chief's voice could be heard above the barking of dogs and tumult of the people who



were now all astir. It was nearly an hour before the chief returned saying he had found the guilty men, thirteen of whom had been engaged in the theft. They were all good mission Indians but did not believe the emigrants had paid them enough for grazing their stock so long in their country, denied having knowledge of the missing horses, charged that the trespass committed by the army of emigrants while in their country had damaged them greatly, in excess of the worth of the three oxen.

"General Gilliam then addressed some complimentary words to the chief, told him that he was at liberty, that he would hold the guilty prisoners, that they should return with him to camp and not be released until all the missing stock had been brought in. Three fine steers were selected from those belonging to the man who had died on Wolf Creek and were left in care of Mr. Richardson, also one beef steer belonging to the agency. A price per head was agreed on which was to be deducted from the government's annuity paid the Indians.

"All were mounted and ready for the return march. The prisoners under a strong guard were ordered to drive the four oxen to camp. The old chief accompanying the cavalcade took a position some fifty yards to the left of the prisoners which he maintained until they arrived at the camp where they were assigned quarters just below the guard tent on the creek bottom, a branch of the Nemaha. We reached camp late on the evening of May 20th and were surprised to find Mr. Richardson there awaiting our arrival. He had taken a nearer route across the country. Knowing well that under excitement, this undisciplined army of frontiersmen could not be restrained in case the twenty missing horses had not been brought into camp. Fearing serious trouble, Mr. Richardson was there to act as mediator. Fortunately for the Indians, the horses had all been recovered but it was deemed best to hold the prisoners until the trains were ready to move the following morning. During the night there came on one of those terrific rain storms common to that section of the country which in a few minutes swelled the little stream to an overflowing torrent, causing the prisoners hastily to seek higher quarters, while the foaming tide carried away some of their stolen beef, two saddles and other camp equipage. In the flurry of excitement which followed, it was thought best at headquarters to permit the Indians under cover of darkness to pass out unobserved as it were, believing their escape to have

been stealthful. That was the last act in the play performed by the Iowas and Missouri Sacs who belonged to the same mission and together numbered 1,200 natives."

Fred Lockley.