

CLARENCE B. BAGLEY: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

An aeroplane soared high above the city. From that height two earnest eyes gazed in wonderment upon stone structures spread far beneath. To the north, the east, south and along the outline of the bay which lay in a great graceful curve to the west, an elderly gentleman looked down upon Seattle¹ in the year 1928. Rightfully, the city might be considered his for, indeed, Clarence Bagley's life paralleled the growth of the city over a period of seventy-two years and his work was an aid to all of her development.

Clarence Booth Bagley arrived in the pioneer village of Seattle in the fall of 1860. It was the second trip of rather rough travel the boy had experienced within his seventeen years. The purpose of this journey was to establish a new home on Puget Sound.² For this reason the Bagley family left Salem, Oregon, where they had lived since the year of 1852. This sojourn, however, was short and far less arduous than the first one which covered the vast territory from the State of Illinois to the Oregon country. At the time of the first overland journey Clarence Bagley was a little boy of nine, just old enough to remember the unique beauty of the Illinois woods. There were groves of oak, hickory, butternut, and wild plum among the other trees of which he afterwards wrote: "I can still remember the scent of the red cedar, which was quite common and considered of no more value than the other woods—the lands were rich and crops abundant."³

The land of abundant crops was forsaken by the Bagley family for the evergreen territory of the far west. In the spring of 1852, the Reverend Daniel Bagley with his courageous wife, Susanna Whipple Bagley, and his eager son, Clarence, made preparations for the prolonged trip across the plains. As the boy looked back upon this event he later wrote, "At this late date it may seem strange that any man who owned a good home in Princeton, Illinois, and in his right mind should leave to encounter all the dangers, hardships and privations of a five months trip across about two-thirds of the continent. Every day en route was sure to bring some anxiety and annoyance; and the end of the adventurous and often dangerous journey meant beginning life anew among strangers where the conditions were altogether different from those to which he and his family had been accustomed.⁴ The Bagley family, it has been shown, were of the character that is able to endure hardship. Upright, courageous and

¹ Seattle *Daily Times*, June 13, 1928.

² Clarence B. Bagley, *History of Seattle*, II, 748.

³ *Washington Historical Quarterly*, July, 1922, XVIII, 163-180.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-180.

strong, its members became true and worthy pioneers in the settlement of the western country.

Clarence B. Bagley was born on November 30, 1843, in Troy Grove, near Dixon, Illinois. His father, the Reverend Daniel Bagley, moved about as the work of his profession, itinerant minister, called him from place to place. His son, Clarence, remembered these short trips, Abingdon, La Fayette, Princeton and Chicago, but the momentous event of his childhood was the part the little boy played while a member of the caravan that moved westward. It was not only the thrill of adventure which lies in the breast of every sturdy boy, nor the mysterious reaching out into the unknown with the unexpected shriek of a vengeful Indian, but included in the travelling party was a cheerful little girl of three and one-half years who was to become Clarence Bagley's companion throughout life. Her name was Alice Mercer and she became Mrs. Clarence Booth Bagley just thirteen years later.

There were also, among the one hundred and twenty men and women of the wagon train, men whose names remain fixed in Seattle's history: Thomas Mercer, Dexter Horton, William H. Shoudy and John Pike, all of whom became outstanding citizens in the development of Washington.⁵

From April 20th until autumn of the year 1853, the pioneers journeyed towards the Oregon country. For six days of each week their wagons creaked along over rough and unmade roadways, while Sunday was given over to much appreciated and well earned rest.

It was September 17th before Reverend Bagley and his family reached their destination in Oregon, but the day following their arrival found the family settled in a small home in Salem for the winter. When summer came, however, Daniel Bagley moved his family into a home which he had built six miles from Salem.⁶ In building the new home he cleared but few of the native trees although he planted an orchard close by. Shortly, he was to acquire cattle and several horses. Then at a later date he took over more land, thereby establishing the Bagley farm.

While here the boy Clarence learned something of pioneer life. He worked and played among the trees of Oregon and at the same time grew to love the sweetness of the western forest. Practiced in the art of sawing timber, Clarence Bagley enjoyed this form of exercise throughout his entire life.

⁵ Edmond S. Meany, "Living Pioneers," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 18, 1915.

⁶ *Washington Historical Quarterly*, op. cit., 163-180.

Now that Daniel Bagley had his family comfortably settled in his Oregon home, the next step was the education of the boy Clarence. In 1852, his studies began in the Willamette Institute, later known as Willimette University in Salem.

The father, interested always in the religious education of the people, as well, began his work by the establishment of churches in the Methodist Protestant denomination, throughout the territory. His labor was difficult and ungratifying as the differences of opinion arose on the slavery question, largely, in the denominations of northern and southern states, which in turn influenced members of the northwest branches. The governing body then split, which resulted in the failure to pay Reverend Bagley his yearly allowance. As a means to additional income he was now dependent upon another occupation. So it was that he entered the service of the American Tract Society, in which capacity he travelled over the Oregon country in order to sell and distribute books. On one of these trips in 1859 he visited Puget Sound where he found two old friends, Mr. Mercer and Mr. Horton, agreeably situated. This fact may have influenced Reverend Bagley in the decision to remove his family to Seattle. However that may be, the whole beautiful region greatly attracted him. In October, 1860, Daniel Bagley, accompanied by Mrs. Bagley and their son, Clarence, drove into the small waterfront town of Seattle. That is to say, the parents drove in. Some years later Mr. Clarence Bagley spoke of his introduction to the young city:

"I was the first and only one to run into town. It was a fifteen day run, too, all the way from Salem, Oregon, holding onto a buggy—the first vehicle to reach Seattle on its own two wheels."⁷

The roads of Washington Territory in 1860 followed along the line of ridges so that big trees were avoided by merely going around them in a circular sort of fashion. Stumps of the smaller ones left standing on either side as well as in the center of the road made the way exceedingly difficult to traverse. Through Puyallup to Seattle, the three Bagleys passed over a road just recently laid out. It was one of the few government passages, called "Military Roads" in 1860.⁸

Seattle, in 1855, had the scanty population of fifty people with about an equal number of buildings.⁹ There was a saw-mill, boarding house, hotel, a few stores, carpenter and blacksmith shops. This

⁷ Seattle *Daily Times*, Feb. 26, 1932.

⁸ Clarence B. Bagley, *Along the Oregon Trail in 1852*, 17.

⁹ Bagley, *History of Seattle*, I, 69.

group comprised the business center while the residence district of small frame houses formed a semi-circle not far above the bay.

When the three Bagleys arrived in 1860 they became the city's twentieth family. About this time in the town's development the people of the community felt a need for educational guidance and wished for some direction in the formulating of their ideals. Reverend Daniel Bagley was quick to sense this need; thus began his work in both church and school. His ever eager son, Clarence, assisted with the instruction of the village children that first year.

Before long the progressive pioneers of the territory talked of higher education. Furthermore, they pressed an act that resulted in the building of the Territorial University in 1861.¹⁰ The act authorized the selection of land to be taken from public domain. This "public domain," let it be understood, consisted in part of the dense green woods close to the village.

When after a time, the legislature located the Territorial University in Seattle in 1861, the Reverend Daniel Bagley was made president of the Board of Commissioners. Through his constant effort he helped secure the ten-acre tract that was finally donated by Arthur A. Denny, Charles C. Terry and Edward Lander. Within the same year the first building made its appearance.

Clarence, who was eighteen years old at the time, became an enthusiastic worker. He helped to clear the land, nailed woodwork and painted fences. By August 1, 1862, the main building, the home for a president together with a dormitory or boarding house were practically completed.

On November 4, 1861, however, the Territorial University was opened and class work began. Among others who helped teach the first two years were Daniel Bagley¹¹ and on occasion, his son, Clarence.¹²

Ready for instruction, thirty pupils entered the new building on the "knoll," that opening day, but these were not serious university students. Indeed, they were little sons and daughters of the pioneers with but one among them who was far enough advanced for university work. This boy was Clarence B. Bagley.¹³ Others were below high school years. Therefore, the next year Clarence went to the eastern coast in order to have more advanced education.

During the school year of 1863 he studied at Allegheny College

10 Meany, "Living Pioneers," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 18, 1925.

11 Bagley Hall on the University of Washington Campus was named in memory of Reverend Daniel Bagley, in 1911.

12 *The Alumnus*, by Edmond S. Meany, March 21, 1932.

13 Roberta Frye Watt, *The Story of Seattle*, 282.

in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Both parents accompanied him on this trip to the east, where they remained until spring.

On his return to Seattle, Clarence worked at the painting trade. Young, industrious, with exceptionally good health, he continued this occupation profitably, for some time. There was also to be seen many new frame buildings along the thoroughfare as the community grew and its social life increased. It was then possible for the young man to carry on the trade for two years after his marriage in 1865.

Among these recently erected buildings in Seattle at the time stood two small churches on Second Avenue at Madison and Columbia Streets, respectively. One, known as the "Brown Church" where alternate Methodist Protestant and Presbyterian services were held; the other, the "White Church," of the Methodist Episcopal denomination. It was in this church that Clarence Booth Bagley married Alice, the daughter of Thomas Mercer.

Several years later, Mr. Bagley spoke of this event: "In it (the white church) all the young folks went to Sunday School. Among the children was a little girl who was to be my wife on Christmas Eve, 1865. She and I trudged through two feet of snow that led around stumps standing in Second Avenue to the little building that was already filled by friends, young and old." In the little "Brown Church" on the same evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bagley received these many friends; so began their long companionable life together.

In the office of the *Pacific Tribune* that Mr. Bagley entered two years after his marriage, he learned the printing trade. There was a definite attraction for the young man to be found in the production of periodicals. Not only was this true of the mechanical side of the work but more so in the gathering together of material. In this manner Clarence Bagley came to realize the documentary value of current news for future reference. When he was employed by the *Territorial Republican*, his interest in western history grew. It was not, however, until a few years later that he began the systematic work of collecting journals.

In Olympia, Mr. Bagley bought the *Echo*, a temperance paper which he published for a short time. He also worked on the *Commercial Age* but when this paper discontinued, Clarence Bagley with his family returned to Seattle.

Then in May, 1871, Mr. Bagley received an appointment which gave him the opportunity to gather first hand material from "old

14 Bagley to Huggins, Letter, Sept. 7, 1904, in the Bagley Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

settlers."¹⁴ As Deputy in the Collector of Internal Revenue's office, the position he now held, it was Mr. Bagley's duty to travel about in the capacity of inspector. It was his intention "to get from the pioneer his true story as well as any other information which might prove valuable in the reproduction of Washington's history."¹⁵

Mr. Bagley believed that in this way only could true accounts be written. He did not wish to see the state's history portrayed through imagination nor did he wish it "to be manufactured by successors."¹⁶

When he became business manager and city editor of the *Puget Sound Courier* of Olympia, he sought all information concerning the settlement of Northwest history. The next year, 1872, with Thomas Reed and Samuel Coulter, the paper was purchased. While Bagley helped to run the paper at the time, he also became territorial printer. Now for a period of ten years he had ample opportunity to collect periodicals, reports or records. With exceptional care he guarded every paper that came into his possession. Moreover, from 1880 until 1885, he systematically filed away all exchanges of journals.¹⁷

Pioneer life, the recording of their work and the development of their communities was, perhaps, Clarence Bagley's deepest interest. The search for historical evidence continued although his occupation varied. In 1884, he disposed of his printing interests and in returning to the office of Collector of Internal Revenue, made a permanent home for his family in the city of Seattle. By 1886, the new house was ready to receive Mr. and Mrs. Bagley and their daughters, Rena, Myrta, Ethel, and Alice Clair. Two years later, their son, Cecil Clarence, was born.

It was not long before Mr. Bagley again took up newspaper work. This time he and some of his friends bought the *Seattle Port-Intelligencer*, a daily and weekly publication. Bagley became its business manager and again job printing followed. He was also associated with the *Daily Press*.

Now Clarence Bagley reached out in every direction to glean pamphlets, articles, in fact, all forms of material that had to do with any phase of the State's development. He felt a keen appreciation for the history of his fellow citizens. Next to this, he loved the physical environment of Washington and as well, he held a great respect for the laws governing her people. A fundamental principle of Clarence B. Bagley's was this: each man should give the best of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1904.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, April 10, 1903.

himself for the betterment of the community.¹⁸ The pioneer, therefore, was due the greatest credit, for it was he who made the state. Furthermore, Mr. Bagley wrote many letters to pioneers throughout the territory in which he made the request—"jot down their reminiscences so that the people who come after us will have the benefit of all our labors."¹⁹

Much as Clarence Bagley liked the collecting of pioneer stories, one finds that he gave over some time to business ventures. Early in life he held an interest in the Newcastle coal mines, and Seattle Coal Company, but this did not last. From the year Washington Territory came into the Union until 1893 he was interested in banking and took some part in city politics, as he was elected to membership in the City Council and served there for a period of two years.²⁰

Washington's Governor, E. P. Ferry, appointed Mr. Bagley an alternate commissioner of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, but the pleasure of the visits to Chicago ceased rather abruptly when the panic of '93 brought on financial disaster. The bank failed in which Mr. Bagley had recently accepted the managership, resulting, of course, in heavy losses. So, deeply concerned, he quit the banking business for all time.²¹

As always, Mr. Bagley had a personal interest in the city's welfare. Now for the time there was a noticeable advancement in municipal affairs and as he was discouraged over the late financial reverses, he willingly devoted his time to the position of deputy, granted, through an appointment in 1894, in the office of City Comptroller.

Seattle's officials in 1899, must have regarded character equally as essential to the management of city affairs as ability was considered necessary. Appointments were then made for a trial period of three months. Therefore, in October, 1899, C. B. Bagley's read: "Should your conduct and efficiency during such probationary term prove satisfactory you will at its close be deemed regularly appointed; otherwise your appointment will cease . . ."²²

More than fulfilling his contract, Clarence Bagley was appointed Secretary to the Board of Public Works the next year. From the first day's entries, "a petition for a six-foot sidewalk on Belmont Avenue—a request for a permit to place a lamp post at 213 1st Avenue South and a permit to operate a lunch wagon on Washington

18 Bagley to Huggins, Letter, April 10, 1903, in the Bagley Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *History of King County*, II, 270.

21 Bagley, *History of Seattle*, II, 749.

22 From File I, C. B. Bagley's probationary contract, in Letters from Pioneers in the Bagley collection.

Street"²³—through the gradual creation of a splendid city, Mr. Bagley witnessed the improvement of every public work.

Throughout this thirty-two years of service to the city he devoted some time and energy to the collecting and compiling of all forms of written testimony. These precious letters, certificates, deeds and stories pertaining to pioneer life, Mr. Bagley meticulously filed away for future use. In so far as this gathering together of the detailed accounts of yesterday proved of permanent value it should be called this man's life work.

Today in the Northwest Library of the University of Washington one may find more than a dozen files each of which contains the source material from which history is made. Letters in the original concerning the happenings of pioneers with the dates now slightly dimmed, of 1840 or '45 and on. There are also filed there alphabetically, first accounts of pioneers together with deeds, grants, certificates and manuscripts concerning the acquisition of Old Oregon, information on Marcus Whitman, and the correspondence of some notable early figures.

Just how conscientiously Mr. Bagley worked to preserve these valuable papers may readily be seen by examining the files where hundreds of bits of evidence have been carefully put away. For a period of over half a century he collected and protected these pieces of information for the student in Northwest history. It was, in all respects, an enterprise of generous intent.

On May 21, 1903, Mr. Bagley wrote to Edward Huggins concerning the Puget Sound history:

"Hardly a square mile but has its history and its romances. Those old journals of everyday life at the old fort are as full of fascination to me as the latest and best novel, and I shall endeavor to write something ere long that I feel sure will be read with general interest, not because of the language it may be clothed in but the incidents it may present."

When the first issue of the *Washington Historical Quarterly* appeared in October, 1906, C. B. Bagley was named President in the list of officials and trustees for the Washington State Historical Society.²⁴

In the preface of his *History of Seattle*, volume one, Mr. Bagley speaks of his work as editor-writer and compiler and the subjects of his publications show a broad and varied field. The list follows chronologically:

²³ *Seattle Daily Times*, May 19, 1929.

²⁴ *Washington Historical Quarterly*, 23, April, 1932, 132.

Sketches of Early Events, while Western Washington was still a part of Old Oregon, 1905; "George Wilkes," 1914; *History of Seattle and Supplement*, three volumes, 1916; *The Waterways of the Pacific Northwest*, 1917; "The Acquisition and Pioneering of Old Oregon," 1924; "Along the Oregon Trail in 1852," *Reminiscences*, 1924; "Pioneer Seattle and Its Pioneers," 1928; *History of King County*, 1929; *Indian Myths of the Northwest*, 1930; *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*, 1932.

His last piece of research concerned the life of Chief Seattle.

It was in 1929 that Mr. Bagley retired from the office of Secretary of the Board of Public Works. At that time he was working on the *History of King County* and wished to do also a "day-by-day history of Seattle" from periodicals in his possession.²⁵

In July of 1929, he left the old quarters at the board office for a mountain climbing trip to the headwaters of the Naches River. Now in his eighty-sixth year he again viewed the trail of the emigrant train of 1852. He enjoyed the sight of the old stumps that were marks of the first hazardous trail.²⁶ He related, "I shall marvel for the rest of my life at the wagon train ever having made such a trip."

Pioneers and pioneering well might be called the dominant factor in Clarence Bagley's life. Born during the time of a western land movement and of a family admirably adapted to pioneer life, he was devoted, primarily, to the welfare of the community and the recordings of its people.

The year, 1927, he published *The Early Days in Seattle in 1851*; there were two thousand copies issued in the city as gifts to the Seattle school children. At the time of presentation, Mr. Bagley said, "Pupils are taught the outline of our national and world history but little or nothing of their home city where most of them were born."

That Mr. Bagley loved Seattle was most apparent, for he fought every influence destructive to its advancement. His long well regulated years gave proof of proper living. When once he was asked concerning longevity of life he answered, "Be active, keep interested in your fellow men, have a hobby or so on tap, and stay in this part of the world, which is better than all the other parts put together."

Here, Clarence Bagley took part in many forms of social activity. The public ceremonies and events commemorating historical significance found him a gracious worker. His last public appear-

²⁵ Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, May 19, 1929.

²⁶ Seattle *Daily Times*, July 14, 1929.

ance was on one of these occasions. It was during the Boy Scout week that he accompanied Professor Meany with Mr. Denny to the grave of Chief Seattle at Suquamish.

Clarence Booth Bagley's death occurred on Saturday, February 27, 1932. His life of eighty-eight years was a life well lived.

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