

Letters From the People

Oregon's Civil War Volunteers.

Albany, Or., Jan. 27.—To the Editor of The Journal—I was saddened when I read in yesterday's Journal of the death of Comrade John G. Wiggington, formerly of Company B, First Oregon Infantry. He was one of our drummer boys—a good boy, too, always good-natured and faithful. I met him last June in Portland at the pioneers' meet.

Of about 90 enlisted men of Company B, I know of but few that are living. Some, no doubt, are alive that I have lost track of. Company B, made up from Yamhill and Washington counties, was mustered in December 26, 1864, at the state fair grounds, near Salem. The military name given was Camp Russell. We spent the winter at Fort Hoskins, head of King's valley, Benton county. Company F of Linn county was with us. On April 10, 1865, we left Camp Hoskins and went to Fort Dalles, and on May 6 left the same, accompanying a government supply train going to Fort Boise, Idaho. That we reached June 13. Crossing the Blue mountains, we often had to corduroy the roads for the 26 six and eight-mule teams to pass over. At Boise our company was broken up into detachments, and June 27 Captain Palmer and myself were ordered to go with 40 men about 100 miles eastward to Big Camas prairie, where on Soldier creek we established Camp Wallace. From there I was ordered to take 22 men and go to Gibson's ferry, on Snake river, 12 miles above old Fort Hall, about 150 miles from Camp Wallace. On our return trip we met orders to go back to the ferry, and there we camped until September, when I got orders to go down to old Fort Hall and prepare for winter quarters.

Here Captain Palmer joined us and we established Camp Lander at an abandoned stage station two miles southwest of old Fort Hall. The station buildings were erected from the adobes taken from the old fort. I was detailed as A. A. Q. M. and A. C. S. and receipted for the government supplies October 6. Next spring we were ordered home, reaching Boise on June 27, 1866, just one year after leaving it. Here I turned in the supplies on hand and we left for Fort Vancouver, at which place we were mustered out July 23, 1866.

As far as I am informed, Company B was the last volunteer infantry company mustered out that saw service in the Civil war. Our regimental commander was Colonel George B. Currey. He died some years ago at La Grande. Captain Palmer died at Dayton, Or., in the spring of 1910.

Our second lieutenant, John W. Cullen, had command of a detachment at Camp Reed, on Rock creek, in the Goose lake country, where he spent the winter of 1865-66. I met him and Mrs. Cullen in Portland last June. He was elected grand chaplain of the grand camp of the Indian War Veterans of the North Pacific Coast. His home is in California. I expect to meet him in Portland next June, and, I hope, others of our boys of the First Oregon.

In our service we did not march "through Georgia," but did march in irregular column nearly 500 miles from Fort Dalles to old Fort Hall, and a part of the way home, taking a steamboat at Wallula.

Our company, I believe, is the only one of our regiment that has two commissioned officers living. All of those of Company A are dead. C has one living, D one, and E one. Those of F are all dead, and, I think, all those of G, H, I and K.

Here's a hearty greeting to all old comrades. CYRUS H. WALKER, Formerly First Lieutenant Co. B.

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Early Day Flax Raising.

Albany, Or., April 24.—To the Editor of The Journal—As there is much being said about raising flax in this state, it might be interesting to your many readers to learn something of the early history of that industry in the Willamette valley.

Back in 1868 I was living with others in Yamhill county at a steamboat landing on the Willamette river known as Weston, three miles south of Dayton, on the Yamhill river, where we ran a wood yard, selling hundreds of cords to steamboats. At that time the Cartwright brothers of Harrisburg, Or., were operating the Pioneer oil mills at Salem, and sent their manager, Oscar F. Dennis, down into Yamhill to make contracts with farmers for raising flax for the seed, and he induced a number of farmers, mostly on Dayton prairie, to plant the seed he furnished them. In anticipation of quite an up river shipping trade, and still more of one down stream, we erected a warehouse on the bluff overlooking the river.

That summer was too dry for a large yield of most grain crops, and the flax did not turn out as it ought to have done. Still several hundred bushels were brought in to our warehouse and shipped up to Salem, it being put into sacks holding nearly three bushels, perhaps empty coffee sacks of that size and quality. That fall is also remembered for the "dark day" in western Oregon, September 13, when, owing to tremendous fires in the Cascade range west of Mount Hood, smoke and cinders borne by a strong east wind obscured the sun, and it was so dark that at 8 o'clock in the morning we ate breakfast by lamp light. The Yamhill farmers were so discouraged about raising flax that they gave up any further trial. I am told that Uncle Charley Miller (as he was familiarly known) of Jefferson took the first prize for flax at the Philadelphia centennial in 1876, where he competed against the world.

When the grain reapers and binders were first run in Oregon they used fine wire for binding. This was found to be such a nuisance—in some instances it being claimed that cattle eating the straw would swallow some of the wire, making them sick, if it didn't kill them—that twine was substituted. During the later seventies the "West Coast Flax factory" was established in Albany, mainly to manufacture binding twine. Many farmers raised flax, cutting it of course before the seed ripened. To prepare it for manufacture the fiber had to be rotted, and this was done in the water of a slough that ran through the Jason Wheeler home farm, Mr. Wheeler being one of the principal promoters. This slough during the summer months is made possible by seepage from the Albany canal from the Santiam river near Lebanon. Good sized basaltic boulders and railroad iron rails were used as weights to sink the flax. Some of these boulders can yet be seen along the slough, sunk nearly out of sight along the banks.

During the season of 1878 C. H. Stewart, Albany's present postmaster, sowed 20 acres to flax on a farm near Albany, and secured a good crop. He was induced to try flax by a man from Ireland, who told him this climate was similar to that of Ireland.

The West Coast Flax factory finally failed, partly from opposition by the Barbour linen thread manufacturers and partly from mismanagement.

CYRUS WALKER.

An 1856 Almanac.

Mr. C. H. Walker has left with the DEMOCRAT for inspection the Oregon and Washington Almanac. It is a very valuable relic. Besides the usual almanac information it contains the following among other things:

The growth of the United States to 39 states; census notes.

Postage had to be prepaid after April, 1855, the rate being 5 cents.

There were 418,000 Indians in the United States.

Mail from Portland for valley towns left every Saturday.

The actual strength of the U. S. army was 10,417 soldiers.

There were 254 daily newspapers and 2,600 weeklies in the United States.

George L. Curry was governor of Oregon and B. F. Harding secretary; Geo. H. Williams, Cyrus Olney and Mathew P. Deady supreme judges, J. G. Wilson clerk, William Farrer U. S. attorney, John McCracken marshal, Chas. Gardner surveyor general. Joel Palmer was superintendent of Indian affairs and R. R. Thompson, Nathan Olney and Geo. Ambrose agents, A. C. Gibbs, John Adair and R. W. Dunbar were collectors of customs, Gen. Jos. Lane delegate to congress, Nat Lane state treasurer, A. J. Thayer auditor, I. N. Smith notary public for Linn county, J. W. Nesmith was brigadier general. The Linn county member of the legislative council was Charles Drain, of the House of representatives Delason Smith, H. L. Brown and B. P. Grant all democrats. R. P. Boise represented Polk and Tillamook counties as a democrat. There were only two whigs in the house and one in the council.

The first telegraph was in operation in Oregon in 1855.

A biographical sketch of Gen. Joseph Lane was given, showing a remarkable career.

There were nine postoffices in Linn county as follows: Albany, Burlington, Calapooia, Central, Harrisburg, Latschaw's mills, Thurston, Union Point and Washington Butte, of which only two are now in existence under the same name.

C. H. Walker on Eastern Oregon.

Cyrus H. Walker has a very interesting article in the Homestead, on the Eastern Oregon Country. Of the 73 years of his life nearly 23 were spent east of the mountains, the first nine 1838 to 1847 in what is now Washington, one year soldiering in Idaho in 1865-6, and fifteen years at Warm Springs. He took up a claim near Warm Springs and resided on it 1887-9, where Clifford was born. He owned the agency ferry. In 1892 he sold his interests and returned to the valley, getting \$1000 for his place, which it is said is now worth \$25,000. He says:

"As an Oregonian I know no sectionalism and shall always be a booster for all parts of our peerless Oregon, and Idaho and Washington, too, since in God's providence I was born in the old Oregon of which they were once a royal part."