



Northwest Trails

Newsletter of the Northwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association

Volume 23, No. 4

Fall 2008

OCTA Membership Report

Duane Iles, OCTA's national Membership Chair, reported at convention that OCTA membership declined to 1,660 in August 2008 from 1,687 in August 2007. The Colorado Chapter newsletter recently printed statistics that reveal the nature of OCTA's declining membership. The article noted that the Idaho Chapter currently has 199 members, 59 new this fiscal year. Many of the new ones were bought by Jim McGill. Approximately 20 new student memberships were purchased for the "In Pursuit of a Dream" project this summer.

In spite of the new memberships, we are actually down almost 80 memberships over the year. This is nearly a 5 percent decline, and that was with the pressure from the contest conducted over the past year to increase membership. This disturbing trend will only accelerate in the future, as more and more of our members simply get too old to participate effectively or decide that a membership is not the best use of their dollars.

One of the reasons why the membership contest last year did not have the hoped for results is that the majority of memberships are at the individual and family levels, where the dues are \$45 and \$60. The focus of the new membership drive will be to increase membership revenue by encouraging people to upgrade to a higher level when they renew. One suggestion has been to promote life memberships by allowing them to be paid in installments. If you have any suggestions on how to increase membership and membership revenue, please contact Duane Iles, 96cruisin@embarqmail.com.

Please consider upgrading to one of the higher levels
– *Trail Patron* (\$125), *Merrill Mattes Society* (\$250), or *Life Member* (\$1,000) –
when you next renew.



Shop & Donate to OCTA

Shop at **Fundraising Solutions** at the OCTA website with vendors like Wal-Mart, Hallmark, Office Depot, Staples, Dell, Circuit City, Overstock.com, Orbitz, Travelocity, Barnes & Noble, Eddie Bauer and over 1,000 other nationally recognized companies to assist OCTA in raising money to help fulfill its mission. For every purchase you make, these cooperating vendors will contribute up to 25% of your total to OCTA on the 7th of each month. Thanks for helping OCTA when you shop!

Details at www.octa-trails.org

NW Chapter Directory

President

Roger Blair
541-966-8854
rblair@oregontrail.net

Vice President

Jim Tompkins
503-632-4557
tompkins@bctonline.com

Secretary

Lynne Alvord
509-697-6818
lalvord@msn.com

Treasurer

Joyce Bolerjack
425-454-7118
jpboerjack@comcast.net

Past President

Glenn Harrison
541-926-4680
glennharrison@cmug.com

Preservation Officer

Chuck Hornbuckle
360-352-2113
hornbuckles@juno.com

Directors

Rich Herman
360-576-5139
buddy359@comcast.net

Wendell Baskins
503-655-0311
wlbaskins@msn.com

Jenny Miller
541-567-2468
rutnut@eoni.com

COED

Sallie Riehl
541-812-0233
salliek@comcast.net

Marking and Mapping

Stafford Hazelett
hazelett@zzz.com

President's Message

Approaching the winter season, there is little on-the-ground trail activity to report. There are, however, the usual activities and potential threats to the trail from developments, especially windmill farms. Stafford Hazelett keeps a keen eye on these activities and we owe him a grateful "thank you" for his efforts.

There have been several meetings to mention. The August national convention went very well, from my standpoint, if I might take a moment to boast. Most of the glitches were pretty much invisible to the membership. I was very pleased with the attendance, given the situation with gas prices this summer. A total of 429 attended, the first time in the past five or six years that we have topped 400. A special thanks to all the NW OCTA members who volunteered to help, even if we ended up not needing you. The willingness to step in, if needed, was comforting.

The fall picnic in September was also a success. About fifty chapter members enjoyed Karen Haas's portrayal of Narcissa Whitman and the arrival of the Territorial Express Stagecoach as it came through Centralia on its run from Puget Sound to Longview, Washington. I also took the opportunity to present awards to Stafford Hazelett, Gail Carbiener, and Marley and Gary Shurtleff, all of whom were unable to be present at the annual meeting last March to receive their awards then. Congratulations again to each recipient. The raffle and silent auction were popular as usual.

Be sure to keep your March 2009 schedule open for the annual meeting. We hope to settle on a date and site soon.

Finally, Duane Iles, the national membership chair, reports that membership is still declining. I urge each of you to read the article in this newsletter and consider ways you can help to turn the decline around. A strong membership is the foundation of any organization. Help keep OCTA strong. Do your part to make OCTA better, rather than just "belong."

—Roger Blair

Announcement from the Ezra Meeker Historical Society

"Ezra Meeker" and the Meeker wagon is scheduling appearances next June. Ezra and the wagon will travel from Puyallup and end in Jacksonville June 13-14. If you are interested in scheduling the wagon and program, please contact Andy Anderson, president of the Ezra Meeker Historical Society, 253-845-4502, or email to *historyandy@comcast.net*. More details in the next newsletter.

The Annual Fall Picnic, Centralia

Photos by Hanne Gwilym



Karen Haas as Narcissa Whitman



Voices from the Trail In this case, a Stagecoach

The stage whirled along at a spanking gait, the breeze flapping curtains and suspended coats in a most exhilarating way; the cradle swayed and swung luxuriously; the pattering of the horses' hoofs, the cracking of the driver's whip, and his "Hi-yi! g'lang!" were music.

—Mark Twain, *Roughing It*

Tri-City Mormons Re-enact Trail Journey

Tri-City Herald, July 31, 2008

On July 29 to August 1, 171 teens from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints trekked through farmland south of the Tri-Cities to re-enact the journey their ancestors took to find religious freedom. The students were from the Kennewick East Stake. In all they traveled about 21 miles on foot, lugging handcarts filled with their clothes, sleeping bags, and Dutch ovens they used to cook their food.



Several teens said the sweat and blisters helped them appreciate what the pioneers faced on their trip. About 70,000 came to the Salt Lake Valley by horseback or covered wagon, and another 3,000 traveled using handcarts, according to the church website. The first group of pioneers arrived in the summer of 1847. It's a tradition for Mormon youth to re-enact the journey through treks of their own in the summertime.

All the kids wore period clothing. The girls in the group made their own aprons and bonnets, and some of them also sewed the long skirts or dresses they wore. The boys had loose trousers and button-down shirts. Some of them used straw hats with wide brims to shield their eyes from the sun.

Each teen carried a tin cup for drinking water because no plastic bottles were allowed. Some of them had leather strips on their wrists with the name of an ancestor who'd made the journey more than 160 years before. At night the kids slept in sleeping bags under the stars.

They traveled together in a caravan of handcarts over the rolling hills. The kids were divided into "families" of about nine people, with at least two adult chaperones, a "Ma" and "Pa." Each of the families had a cart. One of the carts had a large American flag on it. Elizabeth Scott, 18, said she won't soon forget the days she spent reliving the history of her faith. "I knew it was going to be a great experience," she said as the caravan took a short break in the morning sun. "I always wanted to be a pioneer."

Midwinter Historic Trails Symposium in Yuma, January 16-18, 2009

Be sure to mark your calendar and save the dates of January 16-18, 2009, for OCTA's Midwinter Historic Trails Symposium, which is being held at the Yuma, Arizona Shilo Inn. Great speakers and tours are planned, and OCTA's midyear board meeting will precede the festivities. Start making your plans to attend now! Paper registrations will be included in a special four-page insert in the next issue of *News From the Plains* (due out in October), but you can register online now at the [Yuma Symposium Registration page](#).

If you're already pre-registered, be sure not to pay the registration fee again. Space at the symposium will be limited, and tour spots will be even more limited. If you're pre-registered, you are guaranteed a spot on one of the tours. Because we had such a strong pre-registration at the Nampa Convention, tours are already half full. So don't delay. Register immediately to ensure your spot at the symposium and on the tour of your choice!

Call for NW Chapter Director

The NW Chapter needs nominations for Director for the upcoming elections. If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, please submit your name to Glenn Harrison, 541-926-4680, glennharrison@cmug.com, or in writing.

The Gunfight at Farewell Bend

By William J. Wilson

“They had a quarrel, & it ended in drawing pistols when Wilson recd 4 balls out of 5 fired at him & died immediately leaving a wife (who was present) & 9 children to lament his frightful death.” Sounds like a script for a Hollywood movie, doesn’t it? Such was my thought when I first chanced to read this diary quote in May 1991. I was intrigued by the knowledge of this shooting because of the man’s name. My Wilson ancestors had traveled to Oregon in 1851, and since I didn’t know any of my great-great-grandfather’s siblings, I wondered if this might have been a relative coming out soon thereafter.

The quote is from the diary of John Fothergill, an emigrant to Oregon in 1853, and was included in John W. Evans, *Powerful Rocky: The Blue Mountains and the Oregon Trail* (La Grande, Ore.: Eastern Oregon State College, 1990). The entire quote begins with Fothergill’s entry for Sunday, August 14, in which the train he was with traveled 20 miles and arrived at Birch Creek, Oregon. Monday, August 15, 1853, was the day of the shooting:

[Aug] 15 Decamped at 2. o’c p.m. a fine breeze but very hot & traveled 8 miles 3 from “birch c’k” to the Columbia River [Snake River], 4 miles to “Burnt C’k” 1 mile down the river. all this road rough & hilly plenty of grass, water & fuel (sage and willows) this part has a more mountainous appearance than any we have yet seen it is very beautiful, perfectly wild, most irregular with very high hills, principally peaked up. 3 miles from us this morning a man of the name of Wilson was shot by a fellow emigrant (Jessey Varner) they had a quarrel, & it ended in drawing pistols when Wilson recd 4 balls out of 5 fired at him & died immediately leaving a wife (who was present) & 9 children to lament his frightful death. Wilsons pistol would not go off they talk of trying the culprit tonight Saw 6 graves 19 dead cattle

Since Fothergill says they didn’t leave Birch Creek until 2:00 p.m., and that the shooting took place 3 miles away, it would appear that the train that Wilson was in was probably in the valley that the Oregon Trail crosses before it starts up the hill to Huntington. In subsequent days, as they traveled up the Burnt River, also quoted in *Powerful Rocky*, Fothergill didn’t mention anything else about the shooting, so evidently the people didn’t proceed with “trying the culprit.”

I continued to wonder about this incident, and in October 1991 my wife and I traveled to Farewell Bend with our travel trailer for a weekend outing and spent a day looking for signs of a grave, without success. Much of that area is private property, so it was hard to be thorough in looking for indications of a grave. Or possibly I-84 covers the site. But this was early in my membership in OCTA and my interest in the Oregon Trail, so it was fun to see trail ruts in that area anyway.

For some years following, I occasionally thought of this incident and pondered what my connection, if any, was to this Wilson. Some time in the late 1990s, as my memory of the quote grew fainter, I purchased my own copy of *Powerful Rocky* so that I might re-read the quote. To my surprise, the name Wilson was not in the Index. So I had to re-read the entire book to find that quote, which was on page 228. I immediately penciled it in the Index—it probably wasn’t that important to the indexer, but it sure is to me.

Fast forward to April 29, 2007. I received an email from Sharon Hobart from the Fort Worth area of Texas. She was researching a Willson on the Oregon Trail in 1853, and Don Clark suggested she contact me. Her email said: “Samuel Willson and his wife Sarah Delaney Willson and their children left Cass

Co., MO in 1853 and went to Oregon in the Corvallis area. In researching the land donation forms, Sarah recorded that her husband died on the Oregon trail 8/15/1853 on the Snake River and then in another source she stated the Burnt River.” My mind immediately jumped to the Wilson killed at Farewell Bend, given that the Snake River and the Burnt River are fairly close together only in that area. But I didn’t remember the date of the quote about Wilson’s death, and I suspected Sharon was not aware of the diary.

Monday afternoon I looked at the quote in *Powerful Rocky* again. The date for it was 8/15/1853! I sent Ms. Hobart an email, introduced myself, explained about the Fothergill diary, my interest in its possible connection to my Wilsons, and included the quote from *Powerful Rocky*. That evening I got this ecstatic reply from Sharon:

You are wonderful!!! Did you hear my screams all the way up in Idaho from Texas? I haven’t finished your entire note but when I got to the part about a man named Willson killed – I know that is my Samuel Willson and that has to be my man! Even though his wife Sarah stated Samuel died on the trail, there’s an Old-Timer Interview with her daughter’s husband and he stated that Samuel Willson was killed on the Oregon Trail by a white man. But that’s all it had. I figured that being “killed” is what happened since he would have known the family lore with his mother-in-law being alive while he was married to her daughter.

It was obvious that Sharon had not seen the Fothergill diary. So I was pleased to be able to add this extra bit of information for her. She concluded her email by telling me that her mother, her niece, and she were planning a trip by car to Oregon the last couple of weeks of May. They plan to drive to Nebraska and follow parts of the Oregon Trail out to Benton County, Oregon, to do research.

I sent her a second email, telling her about how she might buy *Powerful Rocky* on Amazon.com. But she was way ahead of me; she had already located and ordered it from the OCTA Bookstore. So then I had to write and tell her of my connections to OCTA.

In subsequent days after that first email, Sharon sent me numerous emails with copies of several documents she’d located regarding Samuel and Sarah Willson and his death. One was a multi-page document with all the details of a probate of Samuel’s death, done in Benton County a couple of years after his death. I expect it was done to legalize Sarah’s widowhood, in preparation for a later marriage to her second husband.

I forwarded these emails from Sharon to my cousin, Kay Coffman (also a member of IOCTA), who shares my interest in the genealogy of our Wilson ancestors. Kay’s father was a Callison, and her Callison ancestors traveled to Oregon in 1852. One of the documents that I’d forwarded to Kay was an interview in 1875 in the Waverly, Ohio, newspaper with William Dulany, part of which states: “Father left Franklin and went to Greenbrier county [now West Virginia], where he married Mary Kellison, a sister to Samuel, father to John J. and Richard H. Kellison of Waverly, and Alexander Kellison of Piketon. Samuel Kellison was an Irishman.

Kay then wrote me on Wednesday after reading the interview forwarded from Sharon: “Kellison is one of the 22 variations of the Callison name that are all considered to be of the same original family from Scotland. My branch Callisons were Scots-Irish from Northern Ireland who came to Augusta County VA in 1749. So I found it interesting to come across the Kellison name from a nearby county in the early 1800s.” Possibly Kay may be related to Sharon—even if we never find a Wilson relationship!

In a postscript to this story, I wrote Marley Shurtleff, complaining about my problems in trying to search the Emigrant Names 2 CDs, and telling her about the above story. She forwarded it to Jim Riehl, who sent me instructions for searching the CDs, and he later identified the published version of the Fothergill diary: John Fothergill, *With Man and Beast on the Oregon Trail*, edited by Rex Morgan (Manly, Australia: Runciman Press, 1993.) I tried Amazon.com and Powells.com, without success. I searched Australian used book stores via Google, and I finally found one that had a copy and ordered it.



Sharon Hobart, her niece, Ashley, and her mother, Flo Brown, at Huntington.

Sharon Hobart, her mother, and her niece met my cousin Kay and me at the restaurant at Farewell Bend. We took the three of them in Kay's car up to the crossing of Birch Creek. On the way we spotted the old weathered 6"x6" wooden post, just across the fence towards the freeway from the frontage road that takes you to Birch Creek (perhaps a 1/4 mile south on the frontage road from the Farewell Bend interchange). There was supposed to be a post there to mark the re-interment of emigrant graves of a female and a male that they moved out of the way of the freeway when it was built (according to Greg Franzwa, *Maps of the Oregon Trail*—on the page opposite the Farewell Bend map). I suppose it's entirely possible that the male's remains are those of Samuel Willson.

I had brought my replica of an 1851 Colt's Navy .36 caliber, which I had bought a dozen or so years ago, to show them the type of weapon that must have been used by either Willson or Varner (or both). When we got back to the restaurant, they followed us and we showed them the ruts going up the hill towards Huntington, stopped at the Van Ornum graves, and then on into Huntington. We showed them the OCTA sign at City Park, then the Meeker monument at the west end of town. Then they headed on to Baker City, and Kay and I went back to the restaurant at Farewell Bend for supper, then home. Short visit, but lots of fun showing them this area.

Varner and Wilson are noted in OCTA's *Emigrant Names* CDs as being in an 1853 diary by George Bond. So I looked in my copy of Merrill J. Mattes, *Platte River Road Narratives*. Mattes mentions its brevity, and quotes August 15 as example: "set wagon tiers. Varner shot Williams." This appears to be the wrong name.

So I found a typescript copy on the Internet, history.donandjan.org/BondDiaryOregonTrail.pdf, which opens a PDF version. Mattes may have written "Williams" incorrectly, because the typescript of Bond's diary says "Wilson" for August 15. But the most interesting thing is that Bond writes: "M15 [Monday, Aug. 15] layed by and set wagon tiers Varner Shot Wilson 5 miles back on Snake

River.” Bond spent the night of August 13 at Birch Creek, then moved on to Burnt River by noon of August 14. So when he writes “5 miles back on Snake River,” that’s about the right distance from the Huntington area back to where the Oregon Trail crosses the valley at Farewell Bend. So, with Fothergill saying “3 miles” from Birch Creek, and Bond saying “5 miles back” from the Burnt River, that pretty well pins the killing to that valley—and maybe even on the south side of it. This then puts it pretty close to where the post is that marks where the Oregon Dept. of Highways re-interred the two emigrant graves. Thus adding a slight bit more evidence that it may be Willson’s re-interment.

The Gunfight At Farewell Bend—Once Again!

by William J. Wilson

A point was finally reached where we were to bid farewell to the dread Snake river. Several trains camped there that night. Among them was a man named Wilson, a brother of ex-Senator Henry Wilson of Colusa county. Cattle had been rounded up and oxen placed under the yoke. Wilson became involved in a quarrel with a young man in his employ. Suddenly both drew revolvers and began firing at each other. The duel ended by Wilson falling from his mule, a dead man. The young man rode away and was seen no more. A grave was dug, the dead man buried and within two hours the train was in motion. There was no time for tears or ceremonies. Winter was coming on, and the terrible mountains must be crossed. Besides the dread of an Indian attack was ever present.

—Col. William Thompson, “Reminiscences of a Pioneer,” 1912

Jerry Eichhorst, IOCTA, researching Oregon Trail diaries of the early 1850s, discovered this excerpt and forwarded it to me, along with the website where the entire *Reminiscences* can be found: infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/1/1/5/0/11508/11508.htm. As I read the entire story of the trip west in Col. Thompson’s “Reminiscences,” I discovered that he indicated his family came west over the Oregon Trail in 1852. But documentation not only in the Fothergill diary but also in several others indicates the gunfight incident took place on August 15, 1853. So, did Thompson relate a story that took place the following year, to spice up his tale of his travels as a young boy out to Oregon, or did he get the year wrong?

I forwarded Jerry’s email to Sharon Hobart, the Willson descendant in Texas. She was naturally excited by this find, as well, and also questioned the year that Thompson said it happened. She brought to my attention a couple of mentions of “Fathergill” as being a member of the train with whom Thompson’s family traveled. Later, she also found two mentions of “Thompson” in the Fothergill diary, possibly referring to Col. Thompson’s father or some other relative. Just enough clues to further whet our interest in solving this apparent disparity in the year of travel.

Checking the 1860 census on *Ancestry.com* I found a William Thompson, age 14, which appeared to be near the correct age for Col. William Thompson at that time. His father was Samuel Thompson, age 50, mother was Margary, age 47, and he had two older brothers, Samuel, age 18, and John, age 21. This census information would be pertinent in comparing with Donation Land Claim records of his father’s claim.

Chapter II of Col. Thompson’s *Reminiscences* is titled, “Our First Winter in the Willamette Valley.” The first sentence is, “The winter of 1852–53 will forever be memorable in the annals of pioneer days in Oregon.” He continues, explaining about the privations they endured that first winter. In the first sentence of the third paragraph he again refers to “the terrible winter of 1852–53.” Col. Thompson clearly believes that they arrived in the fall of 1852, when he would have been six years old. He explains that they spent that first winter on the claim of a man named John McKinney, two miles from the town

of Jefferson (just east of Albany). That first spring he tells how his father went looking for a claim. “Nine miles north of Eugene City he purchased a ‘claim’ of 320 acres, paying therefor an Indian pony and \$40 in cash. To this place we moved early in May.” Again, this location, “nine miles north of Eugene” is pertinent for comparing against their DLC location.

In the next paragraph he relates how, after moving to their DLC, they had to return to Mr. McKinney’s place and harvest the winter wheat they had sown. “Accordingly, my father, accompanied by my two older brothers, the late Judge J.M. Thompson of Lane County, and Senator S.C. Thompson Jr., of Wasco, then boys of 12 and 14 years, went back and cared for the grain.” These would appear to be the two older brothers before mentioned in the 1860 census, Samuel and John, who would have been about 12 and 14 in spring 1854 (if their first winter was actually 1853–54).

Now to Samuel Thompson, father of William Thompson, in the 1860 census. There is only one Samuel Thompson shown to have a Donation Land Claim. He and his wife were issued DLC 1503 from the Roseburg office, 330.34 acres at T16S, R3W, Sec. 6 & 7. That location plots out on a Linn County (Metsker’s) map as being about 2/3 in Linn County, and 1/3 in Lane County, about 1 ½ miles west of the current I-5 freeway. Harrisburg, the nearest post office noted on the page they’re on, on the 1860 Oregon census, is about 5 miles northwest of this claim. And this claim further plots out almost exactly 9 miles north of the center of Eugene, OR (as Col. Thompson claimed in his story).

It is as follows:

1503 THOMPSON, Samuel G., Linn Co; b 1809, Ky; Arr Ore 23 Sept 1853; SC 11 Aug 1854; m Margary L. 3 Sept 1834, Tenn. Rights to this c were sold to Thompson by James H. Carter, Mar 1854. Aff: Iredon (X) Baber, Henry Hays, Hiram Smith, John M. Thompson.

This tells us that Samuel would have been about 50 years of age at the 1860 census (depending on what date his birthday fell on). He was married to Margary, which again agrees with the 1860 census. And he purchased the DLC from another emigrant, which is what Col. William Thompson says. But, the “kicker” in all this is that Samuel Thompson’s DLC records declare that the Thompson family arrived in Oregon on 23 Sept 1853!

THE REST OF THE STORY: Several other diaries mentioned this incident, but Thompson’s says: “Wilson became involved in a quarrel with a young man in his employ. Suddenly both drew revolvers and began firing at each other. The duel ended by Wilson falling from his mule, a dead man. The young man rode away and was seen no more.” This makes us aware of the new information that the murderer was employed by Wilson. And it explains how he escaped punishment by hurrying ahead. Fothergill’s diary entry says: “They talk of trying the culprit tonight.” But I could find no mention of that happening—and now we know why.



EDITOR’S NOTE: Congratulations, Bill Wilson, for this fascinating story of outstanding trail detective work.

Northwest Trails

Editor

Susan Badger Doyle
524 NW 3rd St
Pendleton, OR 97801
541-966-8854
sdoyle@oregontrail.net

**PUBLISHED QUARTERLY, SUBMISSIONS DUE
January 1, April 1, July 1, October 1**

Material may be submitted via email or on disk or as email attachment in Word or Text format.

Pictures can be sent via email, on disk (JPG format), or originals for scanning. Please send pictures separately from text document.

MASTHEAD: Replica of *The Old Oregon Trail* bronze relief sculpture created in 1924 by Avarad Fairbanks for Oregon Trail monuments.

It's Time to Report Volunteer Time and Expenses

In order to provide an accurate accounting of OCTA members' volunteer time and expenses related to OCTA activities, each participant is asked to report hours and non-reimbursed expenses annually to the Chapter Volunteerism Coordinator by **January 1**.

NOTE: Time and personal expenses should be reported "home-to-home." A form is available.

Submit or mail to:

Chuck Hornbuckle
7245 118th Ave. SW
Olympia, WA 98512-9264
360-352-2113
hornbucklecs@juno.com

Northwest Trails

Joyce Bolerjack
10813 NE 20th St
Bellevue, WA 98004