

The Weddle Family in the Sweet Home area

By Martha Steinbacher

In 1850 Josiah Weddle followed the gold rush west. He fell in love with the new land he was seeing and vowed that he would come back again to settle. He returned to his home in Somerset, Kentucky and there he married Jane Malinda Weddle in 1860. After a period of fifteen years he decided to move his family to the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

By that time Josiah and Jane Malinda had two sons, John and George and four daughters, Eliza Ann , Jennie, Dora and Tessie.

According to family records the Weddles moved first to Kansas and then to Texas where they waited for the end of the Civil War. It was here that Vandalia Weddle, brother of Josiah, was captured by a gang of outlaws, probably for his money and was found hung from a tree.

George Weddle was nine years old when the family started for Oregon. Indians spotted the small red headed boy and tried to trade seven head of horses for him but Josiah really wasn't interested.

After the Civil War the Weddles started for Oregon again. They traveled in a caravan of ox teams and covered wagons and came across the Cascades in the Willamette Valley and Cascade Mountain Wagon Road.

The Weddles were a very religious family and had taught their children to obey the Ten Commandments. One of the wagon drivers was caught stealing supplies and was fired. Young John Weddle, aged twelve was designated to drive the wagon for the rest of the trip. The oxen had been trained with profanity and one day as the wagon train started down a steep hill, young John could not make the oxen stop. He knew if he swore at them they would obey but he couldn't do that,

Finally he yelled "Stop, God bless you, stop" and they stopped,

By the time the Weddles arrived in the Cascades they were having problems. Their oxen had died and they were using cows to pull the wagons. They got as far as Holley and a wagon broke down, The Weddles stayed there to repair the wagon and decided to take up temporary residence just beyond what is the John Miller place on Old Holley Road. The family did not realize that the water was contaminated and the whole family became ill.

In 1880 Josiah Weddle filed homestead entry on 160 acres of land in the Chandler Butte area about two miles south east of Sweet Home. A fruit orchard was planted (apples, pears and prunes) and a drier was constructed for processing the food for market. This satisfied their homestead requirements of occupation and cultivation for a period of five years.

The Homestead Act of 1862 said that a person or persons applying for the benefit of this act must

make affidavit that he or she was the head of family, was twenty-one years old or more or had been in the service of the country, had never born arms against the government of the United States or given aid and comfort to its enemies and that the property in question was to be used for his or her exclusive use and benefit for the purpose of actual settlement and cultivation and not to be used directly or indirectly for the use or benefit of any other person or persons and that they paid \$10.00.

But there were provisions - namely that five years had to pass from date of entry and the persons or person had to prove by two credible witnesses that he or she had resided on and cultivated the farm for five years before gaining ownership of said property. If at any time the person moved or abandoned the property for more than six months at any one time, it returned to the government,

The need for lumber to build their home with and also the needs of the community caused John Waddle to build Sweet Home's first steam powered saw mill. The lumber used in construction of the Evangelical United Brethren Church of Sweet Home (the upper church) was donated by the Weddle family. The mill continued to grow and George and Albert took their turns at managing it.

The Weddle family not only were growing fruit and running a lumber mill, they had a taxidermy business in Sweet Home. George Weddle married Alma Horner, daughter of the Rev. Amos Horner of Pleasant Valley. She was a licensed taxidermist and there were very few people in Sweet Home who did not own a hunting trophy mounted by Alma Horner Weddle. The East Linn museum is very fortunate to be able to display several examples of her work.

The youngest Weddle, Albert, was born in Oregon. He became one of Sweet Home's most successful businessmen. The pay roll for the original family sawmill, which he modernized and enlarged, and the logging operation and planing mill were very important to the economy of the community. He also had extensive real estate and at one time he either owned or rented through his business to people over forty business buildings and houses.