

EARLY SETTLERS OF LACEY

A Lacey Museum Publication

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The early settlers of Lacey left homes in the East and Midwest and traveled across the vast American continent for months in covered wagons, enduring many hardships, in hopes of a bright future in the West. Once at their destination, they struggled to make a new life for themselves. In the process, however, they laid the foundation for this community and participated in developing the territory that was to become Washington State. Here are the stories of some of those pioneers.

David J. Chambers married Elizabeth Harrison on April 8, 1845. Less than three weeks later he and his bride left Missouri for Oregon Territory in a wagon train that included his father, Thomas M. Chambers, and seven brothers and sisters. At Independence Rock they encountered a wagon train



David J. Chambers
Courtesy of the WSHS

whose members had measles. The disease spread quickly through the Chambers family, endangering the life of David's brother, Thomas. Luckily, they all recovered and once on their way, the Chambers often had to make boats out of their wagons to ford the numerous streams between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers. Near Laramie, Wyoming, to their amazement, they encountered huge numbers of bison, which posed the threat of stampeding.

On October 27, 1845 they reached the Dalles and headed down the Columbia for their destination, the Willamette Valley. After a short time there, however, they heard that better land was to be had in the Puget Sound area, so off they went again in 1847. After a year's stay on the Cowlitz, David joined his brother, Thomas, on what was already being called Chambers Prairie. In 1850 David took out his own Donation Land Claim of 624 acres in an area north of his brother's, an area now known as Panorama City. Although their father went on to Steilacoom, five of the Chambers brothers had Donation Land Claims in the Lacey area. David eventually acquired another thousand acres of land where he planted numerous fruit trees and raised cattle. The butcher shop he opened in Olympia remained in the family for years to come. He and his wife had seven children. He died on March 4, 1896.

Nathan Eaton, a native of New York, arrived in the Oregon Territory with his brother Charles in 1843. In 1846 the brothers came to the area that was to be called Chambers Prairie, but restless like other pioneers, they left to fight in the Cayuse War in 1847. In 1849 they joined many others in seeking gold in California. They returned by 1850 to stake out claims.



Nathan Eaton
Courtesy of the WSHS

Charles Eaton's claim was on Tenalquot Prairie; Nathan Eaton's east of Meridian Road by the Yelm Highway. In 1853, Nathan built a sawmill on Eaton Creek, the first mill in Western Washington away from the Sound. In 1865 he added a photography studio to his property. He married Lestina Himes, daughter of Tyrus Himes, in 1872 and they had four children together. He sold his property to George Collins in 1882 and moved to Elma, where he died just a year later.

Jane Willey Pattison was born in Ayreshire, Scotland in 1828. She moved to New York City with her family when she was only three years old. Four year later they moved to Illinois where, in 1847, she married James Pattison. In the spring of 1849, her father-in-law, William Pattison, decided that the entire family should move west.

Although unenthusiastic about leaving her well to-do home, Jane gathered up her three month old son and followed her husband, his six brothers and her in-laws on their trek. William Pattison led the train, but none too skillfully. Winter had already set in by the time the family reached Cascade Falls above Fort Vancouver. At the Dalles, they made a raft of logs to float down the Columbia. The nine mile journey took twelve days. The cattle strayed from the brother leading them along the trail next to the river and were never to be seen again. The family would have starved except for the kindness of some Indians. In payment, William Pattison offered them any clothing they would like. The Indians chose all of Jane's clothes and she was left with rags.



Jane Willey Pattison
Courtesy Lacey Museum/
City of Lacey

They passed through Portland, consisting of just a few cabins at the time, on their way to Oregon City. Here Jane was able to make some money by sewing clothes for other immigrant women. After about a year, she was feeling comfortable in her new home, when her father-in-law decided to move north. At the mouth of the Cowlitz she and her husband accepted an offer to work on Newaukum Prairie, since the job provided not just distance between her and her in-laws, but a house as well. When they arrived, however, they found that the house was not ready. Undaunted, Jane moved into an abandoned sheep shed. Alone she dragged boards from a barn that had blown over to the shed to make a floor. She used hay for a bed and tree stumps for chairs. They lived in the shed all summer, moving into a house in fall. While there, tragedy struck. Her baby died after being exposed to a contagious disease by some visiting Indians.

The Pattison family decided to take advantage of the offer of free land from the government and moved north by ox team in the spring of 1852. They took up a Donation Land Claim by the lake that bears their name, Pattison Lake. In George Blankenship's Early History of Thurston County, Jane Pattison recalled the cabin that they built and the "hard, lonesome life" that they led. In all James and Jane Pattison had seven children. In 1865 they sold their land to David Chambers and moved to Olympia.

Stephen Duley Ruddell left Missouri in 1851 headed for California with his wife, Winifred, and four young children. They were accompanied by her two sons from a previous marriage, Thomas and Urban



Stephen D. Ruddell
Courtesy Lacey Museum/
City of Lacey

East Hicks, and Urban's young bride, Eliza Jane. They encountered many of the same difficulties that the Chambers had faced six years earlier, in particular in crossing the various streams and rivers. The buffalo, still numerous, provided a good supply for food. At Fort Hall the wagon train was fired on by Indians, but the pioneers managed to outdistance them. Their destination, no longer California, was to reach the Columbia, where they piled their possessions on to boats and floated down as far as the Cowlitz.

In 1852 they reached Chamber's Prairie and here Stephen Ruddell took out a 320 acre Donation Land Claim. He quickly became an active member of the new community. He was a delegate to the 1852 Monticello Convention which petitioned the U.S. government for a territory separate from Oregon. He served as the first assessor, as Thurston County Commissioner and as a member of the Washington Territorial Legislature. Winifred died in 1856 and in 1857 he married Margaret White, whose first husband was a casualty of the Indian War in 1856. He died in 1891 and is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery on Ruddell Road, the same land he donated to the community for a cemetery.

Urban East Hicks provided many pioneer stories for the *Tacoma Ledger* in the late nineteenth century including the above story of crossing the plains with his step-father, Stephen Ruddell. Born in Missouri

in 1828, he apprenticed as a printer and shortly after marrying Eliza Jane Leedom, he headed west. When the Ruddells turned north at the Columbia, Urban remained to teach in Monticello and then to work briefly in Portland for the *Oregon Times*. He eventually followed his step-father north and filed for a



Urban E. Hicks
Courtesy of the WSHS

Donation Land Claim not far from the Ruddells. Appointed County Assessor 1853, he made a harrowing overland trip to Grays Harbor. Shortly after his return, his wife died. In 1855 he married India Ann Hartsock, but in the same year he left this area to fight in the Indian Uprising, his task, to build blockhouses at strategic locations. By the time he returned he was unable to make a go of it as a farmer, so he returned to the printing business. Over the years he published papers in Vancouver, Olympia, Salem and Portland. He gave up his Donation Land Claim, but lived on his father-in-law's claim on Rutledge Lake, now known as Hicks Lake. Urban East Hicks died in Orting.

Martha Ann Conner's charming story of early life in the Lacey area is recounted in the September 11, 1892 issue of the *Tacoma Sunday Ledger*. Her family left Iowa in 1852 and after brief stops along the way put their few possessions on a sled and pulled it over the snow from Hawks Prairie to their land claim on Conners Prairie, east of where the Evergreen Forest Elementary School is now. It was Christmas time and the family was so delighted not to be moving any more that they didn't mind that their log cabin lacked a fireplace, doors, windows, a floor or any furniture. All that was to be added later using local material.



Isaac Ellis
Courtesy of the WSHS

From the newspaper Martha learned the Chinook jargon, a hodgepodge of various Indian dialects, and became the interpreter for the local tribes. During the Indian Uprising of 1855 the Indians spared her family only because they saw many women and children around the cabin and assumed wrongly that large numbers of men were nearby. In 1861 Martha became the first wife of Isaac Ellis, who was to open the Woodland Driving Park and Woodland Hotel in the Lacey area and who was part of the group which convinced the Benedictine Brothers to locate their college in Lacey.

Tyrus Himes left Illinois in 1853 with his wife, Emeline, and four children for the long trek west despite the fact that he had been crippled with a knee injury since he was eighteen. Their goal was always Puget



Tyrus Himes
Courtesy of the WSHS

Sound, so their wagon train took a more northerly route along the Natches River. Within sight of Mount Rainier and near the Greenwater River, they reached a perpendicular bluff thirty feet high that extended as far as the eye could see. The only way to proceed was to lower the wagons, thirty-six in all, over the bluff with ropes. The process took two days, and only two wagons were lost.

Once here Tyrus staked his claim next to Isaac Wood's on what is now Lake Lois. To support his family he opened a boot and harness shop in Olympia, hobbling the five miles to work on Mondays and returning on Fridays. He died 1879. His daughter, Helen, married Stephen Ruddell's son, William. His son, George became prominent in Portland and was charter member of the Oregon Historical Society.

Henry G. Parsons left Michigan in 1852, crossing the plains with his parents, brother and sister, and spent his first winter in Salem, Oregon. The next year his father took up a claim just south of the Conners on the east end of Chambers Prairie. In 1854 Henry set up a cabin on his own claim south of what is now the Seasons subdivision. When word of the Indian Uprising reached this area, he helped build the block house on Chambers Prairie. Later he served in the war against the Indians.



Henry G. Parsons
*Courtesy Lacey Museum/
City of Lacey*

In 1857 Henry married Mary Jane Mercer, daughter of Thomas Mercer of Seattle. The house that they built would sometimes provide overnight shelter for families traveling the then difficult trip from Yelm to Olympia. Their daughter Nancy Ellen married David Fleetwood of Lacey and daughter Lela married D.M. Kagy. The Kagy lived in the Parson house.

John Melvin Hawk, on March 1, 1852 left DeKalb County, Indiana with his wife Mathilda and six children. From the beginning they encountered bad weather and had difficulty crossing the Mississippi River due to ice and high water. At the Missouri River, they had to wait behind 2000 immigrants for the ferry. By the time they reached the plains, a hot summer and the high number of wagon trains had taken a toll on the grass and water. They had to go out of their way to find a place for the animals to eat and drink. The greatest problem they encountered, however, was the threat of cholera. The family was spared, but the disease killed hundreds of people that summer. The Hawk family passed numerous graves and abandoned wagons along the side of the trail.



John M. Hawk
*Courtesy Lacey Museum/
City of Lacey*

At the Snake River they stretched cow hides over the wagon beds, converting them in make-shift boats. The plan was to float down the river to save time, but they encountered a series of rapids. The boats were swamped on more than one occasion and the Hawks lost a lot of their clothing and bedding. At the sight of a drowned man caught up in the rapids, Hawk's wife fell and hit her head, an injury from which she never recovered. Once the family left the river, they were on the brink of starvation until they reached the Dalles. They arrived in Portland November 10, nine months after they had left.

Mathilda Hawk died on January 12, 1853 in Portland. That summer John Hawk went north to scout out the area around Puget Sound. On his way back to Portland he stopped in Astoria where he married Sarah Ann in 1854. Shortly thereafter, he returned to the Puget Sound with his children and new wife to stake out a claim on what is now known as Hawk's Prairie.

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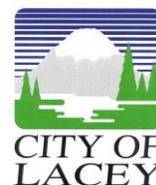
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