

CFR 0434

Gladys and Carrie (Wilson) Rogers

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FAMED MESPLIE FARM, known for a good many years as The Pines, is shown in this recent picture of the attractive Mill Creek property, with its artesian well irrigation system, and program of balanced agriculture. Members of Mesplie family have lived on this place for 107 years.

Oldest of the Old—a Mill Creek Family

Theo. Mesplie Family Retains Same Farm Holdings For 107 Years For Wasco County Centennial Honors

(This article on the pioneer Mesplie family is the third in a series appearing in The Optimist. This is the first installment. The concluding installment will appear next week.—Editor).

By Wm. H. McNeal
Wasco County Historian

The Theodore Calliste Mesplie family is the oldest Wasco County farm centennial family we have. This family has continued to hold on to and occupy their same ranch holdings for more than 100 years (1851-1958). Floods, drouths, storms of cloudburst proportions and snow 6 feet deep, depressions, wars, bank failures, inflation, high prices, joys, sickness, deaths—they weathered them all and are still with us to lend their stabilizing hand and help of encouragement to more timid and faltering families, to have more faith in God, in their country, their community and themselves.

This year the Oregon State Historical Society will bestow upon each eligible heir of Theodore Mesplie, a Century Ownership Document at a colorful ceremony this fall at the Oregon State Fair, presided over by Governor Robert D. Holmes. Besides the Governor's signature the document will bear the signatures of the president of the Oregon State Historical Society, the director of the Oregon State Agricultural Department, the chairman of the Ore-

gon State Fair Commission and County Judge James Hunt.

First Mill Creek Settler
Theodore Calliste Mesplie (1825-1914), son of Peter and Jeanne (Alabare) Mesplie, a native of Narbonne, France, became an 1851 Donation Land Claimant as the first settler on Mill Creek. The Donation Land Claim Act was passed by Congress Sept. 27, 1850 to donate land to settlers in Oregon. It expired in December 1855.

When Theodore Mesplie moved on to his Donation Land Claim in 1851 he had no neighbors. The soldiers at Old Fort Dalles were the closest white people and remained the closest until 1854 when Charlie Denton established his nursery on his Donation Land Claim north of the first bridge. In 1855 Lafayette Caldwell settled on his Donation Land Claim south of the third bridge.

The Mesplie Donation Land Claim laid between the first and third bridges with his house near the second bridge. The Dalles Chronicle for June 19, 1914 stated in his obituary:

Came Around the Horn

Theodore Calliste Mesplie was born in Narbonne, France June 15, 1825. He crossed the Atlantic ocean in a sailing vessel and came around the Horn to California (in the gold rush days) a journey of six months duration. He was employed in California for a number of

years as a baker, having learned that trade in France. In 1831 he came to The Dalles and was married June 19, 1856 to Nancy Geneveive MacBean (of Canada) at St. Peters Mission by the brother of the bridegroom, Rev. Father Toussaint Mesplie who came here in 1851.

"Theodore Mesplie" was the last of 4 brothers to make Oregon a great state. Father Mesplie preceded his brother Theodore, to The Dalles by (about) one year and was in charge of the Catholic Mission. It was under his supervision that the Mission buildings were erected. John Peter Mesplie arrived here directly from France in 1853 and became a worker at the Mission and remained a resident of The Dalles for 52 years until his death in 1905. Theodore Mesplie was a highly respected citizen and will be much missed among the older generation of residents.

Theodore Mesplie was a continuous resident of his Donation Land Claim place for 63 years.

His brother Victorin Mesplie lived on what is now the Albert Hazen place on Mill Creek and had one son Antoine who died single. After the death of Victorin his wife married Theodore Miguet and they lived where Miss Gladys Rogers now lives on The Pines—Mesplie place. John Peter Mesplie lived on what is now the Jack Mar-

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THEO. MESPLIE FAMILY

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Early Water Rights

Besides the above obituary published by the family in 1914 early proof of first residence was established at the Mill Creek Water Decree Hearing of May 21, 1924, in the local Circuit Court and on file in the County Clerk's office:

Water Claim No. 75 for a 6 acre irrigation right extends back to 1850 as granted to Carrie Mesplie Wilson. Claim No. 74 for 4½ acres irrigation right bore the date of 1856 as granted to Carrie Mesplie Wilson and later transferred to Gladys Rogers December 15, 1925 by the State Water Board. Water Claim No. 35 to the Albert Mesplie heirs including Julius Mesplie, Melanie (Mrs. John Stegman, Marie (Mrs. Richard) Chatterton, Carrie Mesplie Wilson, Cecelia Mesplie (Mrs. Wm. Thomas Rogers) was for 1.2 acre and bore the date of 1856. Water Claim No. 34 for 8 acres to Julius Mesplie, Melanie (Mrs. John) Stegman carried the date of 1856. All of the above claims were in Section 13, Township 1 North. Some of them pertained to the Theodore Mesplie place and others to his brothers John and Victorin who left no heirs.

By these recognized claims all of the Mesplie brothers were residents of Mill Creek more than 100 years ago.

Fort Dalles Military reservation extended out to the first bridge on Mill Creek until the fall of 1853 when the size of the reservation was cut down from 10 square miles to one square mile. That compelled Theodore Mesplie to locate his claim in 1851 beyond Fort Dalles Military Reservation and that is why he located his claim between the first and third bridges. After the reservation was cut down then in 1854 Charlie Denton located his Donation Land Claim north or closer to town than the Mesplie claim.

When Dalles City wanted to run their water line through his place Mesplie gave an easement for the duration of use of the line only and a perpetual right for water for house use. When the county road went through his place it was again an easement and in case the county abandons the road it reverts back to his heirs. The telephone and power service was the same. There were never any sales of his real property as long as he lived.

Beautiful Home

His residence was located near the second bridge. Part of the lumber for part of his first dwelling came from the Fort Dalles sawmill at 9th and Mill Creek. After 1854 he obtained more lumber from the Scholl and Noble sawmill located near the first bridge on what was in 1860 known as the Andy Urquhart place. When construction was finally completed he had a two story 11-room country home with a double fireplace between the master bedroom and living room. The lovely flower gardens about the old home were showplaces of beauty that reflected his loving personality

books, pictures, furniture, records, pictures, furniture, books and relics of pioneer days.

In 1851 when Mesplie arrived in The Dalles Major Tucker and his troops at this place were still being quartered in the Old Methodist Mission buildings at 10th and Washington near the High School. The Dalles was called The Dalles Landing. The Nathan Olney store building, a log structure on the banks of Mill Creek and the Columbia River at First and Union, built in 1849, was occupied by William Gibson who ran a store and post office there. The post office is therefore the oldest business institution in The Dalles, now being 107 years old.

The name The Dalles Landing was used from 1851 to September 1853 when the name was changed to Wascopam. This latter name prevailed until March 22, 1860 when the name was changed to The Dalles. All of these changes in names of the local post office and city within a period of nine years added much to the confusion of mail problems for the Mesplie families whose closest relatives lived in France, a six months mail journey by sailing ships.

An estimated 8000 emigrants passed through The Dalles in 1851 adding to food and trading problems of the little city of one log store and a few tents, and Theodore Mesplie foresaw the need for raising livestock and farm products to feed those hungry hordes of people, worn out and famished for an American meal after six months across the dusty plains from Missouri. Mesplie bought and traded for and rounded up many head of "worn out" stock which were abandoned at The Dalles by the emigrants. These fattened into good animals with the spring grasses of 1852.

Rapid Growth in 1852

The "big emigration" of 1852 brought an estimated 13,000 to 18,000 emigrants into The Dalles, and many thousands of head of starving livestock. Theodore Mesplie traded one fat steer for five skinny ones; sold to other emigrants; bought more thin animals and had a really prosperous year cattle and horse trading with emigrants who moved on to the Willamette Valley often abandoning their wagons and poor stock here at The Dalles.

The firm of Allen & McKinley built the steamer Allen at The Dalles for the middle river trade that year and they (it) gave passage to hundreds of emigrant families on the downstream trip and returned with its passenger space filled with miners, prospectors and traders. It was replaced by the Mary in 1854.

In 1862 the Oregon Steam Navigation Co. was organized and continued to operate as a river traffic monopoly for the next 20 years or until the railroad was built into The Dalles. Theodore Mesplie had to pay \$20 to go to Portland by boat in those days and \$20 for his return trip so he didn't go to Portland often, except by passes obtained for furnishing fresh beef to the kitchen crews on the boats.

Indian hostilities cut the emigration of 1853 to about 8,000 but still the livestock trade with the emigrants was an important matter for Mesplie. In 1853 the Military Reservation at The Dalles Landing was cut down to one square mile allowing many merchants and residents to be established here. W. D. Biglow came to The Dalles and established his store and Donation Land Claim. Victor Trevitt put up a saloon on his 38 acre Donation Land Claim. W. C. Laughlin was living at the foot of Laughlin street on his Donation Land Claim.

Union street was known as A street, Court was B and Washington was C. There was a Water street, a Front street, first, Second, Third and Fourth, all between A and C streets. Laughlin lived "out in the country" at the foot of Laughlin street. The Old Oregon Trail came down Third street as far as the Union street park. Horses and cattle were watered in Liberty creek which flowed from a large spring on Liberty street, since piped into the sewer system. Cattle and horses roamed at will on the bluff east of the city and over the rocks and sands west of the city. There was a large Indian village at the mouth of Cheno with creek. This was the way The Dalles looked to Theodore Mesplie in 1853.

Fort Dalles

As stated above, in 1851 Major Tucker and his men were

was a big event in the first years of his life here.

Wasco County Created

When Theodore Mesplie came to The Dalles it was a part of Clackamas County and it was not until January 11, 1854 that Wasco County was taken off both Clackamas and Champoeg counties to become the largest county ever created in the history of the United States. Its boundaries extended from the summit of the Cascades to the summit of the Rockies and from the Columbia River to the California line embracing 250,000 square miles of land and reaching east to what is now Green River, Wyo., included Yellowstone Park and Butte, Mon., be-

more than 100 years ago by Lafayette Caldwell, a Donation Land Claimant of 1854 adjoining the Mesplie claim at the third bridge. The Yakima Indian War of 1856 increased the demand for food and hay which made prosperous years for Theodore Mesplie's sale of beef and hay to the government.

The Golden Years

The magic word Gold which was struck at Fort Colville in 1855, just as the California fields were "panning out", brought a big wave of miners, prospectors, outlaws, gamblers, and Mexicans to The Dalles to mix with the emigrants from the east. The next 30 years were the "golden years" of The

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and that of his wife. Trees from the C. W. Denton nursery supplied shade and fruit for his orchard. It was the oldest and most beautiful pioneer home on Mill Creek. It burned in 1946 taking everything with it including all the old family records, pictures, furniture, bibles, books and relics of pioneer days.

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Fort Dalles

As stated above, in 1851 Major Tucker and his men were

quartered in the Old Methodist Mission buildings at 11th and Washington streets near the present location of the high school. He had started construction of the old log fort buildings (at 14th and Trevitt) but it took two or three years for him to complete construction of the six larger log buildings. In the meantime the Mesplie brothers cut and sold hay for government mules at the fort, and traded hay for supplies and lumber.

With the construction of the government sawmill at 9th and Mill Creek stables were added to the log buildings, then a wagon shop, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, saddle and harness shop, shoe shop, mess house, bakery. The Mesplie brothers worked occasionally, like other Dalles residents, at the government sawmill which employed 100 men at the peak of each season's run, many were civilians who traded their labor for lumber. Theodore Mesplie had to drive through the Military reservation to get to his Mill Creek Donation Land Claim so the reality of its existence and improvements was a big event in the first years of his life here.

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sides all of southern Idaho and eastern Oregon.

It was still the Territory of Oregon and remained so until 1859 when Oregon became a state. This was an exciting event, they saved a \$40 round-trip boat fare to Oregon City when they had to transact legal business.

Indian Treaty Of 1855

Another important event in the history of Mill Creek witnessed by Theodore Mesplie was the signing of the famous 1855 Indian Treaty, under the Treaty Oak which still stands in the Chas. Denton-Nielsen Donation Land Claim place near the south city limits on Mill Creek. Joel Palmer, U. S. Indian agent for Oregon, signed for the government. Most of the Indians on the Oregon side of the Columbia complied with its provisions to live on reservation but to hunt and fish where they pleased and when they pleased. But the Washington Indians had to fight the Yakima Indian War of 1856 before they would consent to live a restricted reservation life.

The next oldest tree up Mill Creek is a pear tree on the Julius Sandoz place planted more than 100 years ago by Lafayette Caldwell, a Donation Land Claimant of 1854 adjoining the Mesplie claim at the third bridge. The Yakima Indian War of 1856 increased the demand for food and hay which made prosperous years for Theodore Mesplie's sale of beef and hay to the government.

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Dalles. All areas east of The Dalles came here for supplies which added to the prosperity of the city and surrounding farms. The prices that Theodore Mesplie got for his livestock, fruit, grapes, berries, garden products, grain and hay went up and stayed up until 1885 with the coming of the railroad into The Dalles.

Pack and saddle trains were as popular in the 1850s as automobiles are today. The six and eight horse stages of the Wells Fargo and other lines made their appearance in the 1860s between The Dalles and Salt Lake City, The Dalles and Canyon City, The Dalles and Ellensburg.

The boats did a land office business hauling passengers between here and Portland. At no time between 1862 and 1884 were they ever able to haul all the passengers who wanted to come aboard, nor all the freight offered to them. From 1869 to 1885 cattle and sheep drives were made from The Dalles to the railroad near Ogden, Utah. Buyers would come out to see Theodore Mesplie and his neighbors offering premium prices for cattle suitable for the eastern markets.

Mill Creek Quarry

By 1865 enough gold was passing through The Dalles to the U. S. Mint at San Francisco on Wells Fargo and other stages to warrant legislation creating a U. S. Mint at The Dalles, and \$125,000 was appropriated for its construction by Congress, to provide a 75 foot square stone building located on Third street (Old Oregon Trail near Madison).

The stone for this building was quarried on the Alphonse Sandoz place just above the Mill Creek school house in 1865-66. The two foot square stone blocks were dressed to shape at the quarry and hauled

the five miles to The Dalles by wagons and six-horse teams. The ringing of the lead bells, which kept the horses in rhythmic step, was pioneer music to Theodore Mesplie and the mule skinnners who lined the road with their outfits for two years. Hauling all that stone down the narrow Mill Creek road kept it knee deep in dust during the summer and a quagmire of mud in wet weather. In good weather it generally took about one-half hour for a buggy team to come to town, but those slow freighters took an hour and a half.

The stone in the Mill Creek quarry split better than like stone nearer The Dalles and the quarry continued to be used for rock foundations up until the advent of concrete in the 1920s. The stones for the window ledges and the doors were one piece and fit as perfectly as wooden ledges. Those old Civil War Veteran masons were masters at their trade. Their rock walls, put up without concrete in The Dalles, have withstood 90 years of weather.

Mill Creek School

The Mill Creek School land was leased to District No. 11 by Theodore Mesplie about 1870. Like his other land he would not sell any of it but he allowed the school district free use as long as they maintained a school and he was one of the largest taxpayers in the district. The first school was known as the "black school" because it was never painted and turned dark. In 1896 J. E. Heroux built the second school house which still stands. Julius Sandoz and Caroline Turner went to the black school in 1892. Teachers were mostly student teachers from Hood River and The Dalles.

The writer of this history went to the Mill Creek School in 1909 when his parents

farmed four acres of The Pines — Mesplie farm raising corn and potatoes. Del French, one of the school teachers, afterwards became a college professor.

(Next week concluding installment which will give details of the early history of St. Peter's Mission, and Father Toussaint Mesplie, pioneer pastor, and other interesting facts in history of the family.)

The Pines, is shown in this Russian well irrigation system, and he lived on this place for 107

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