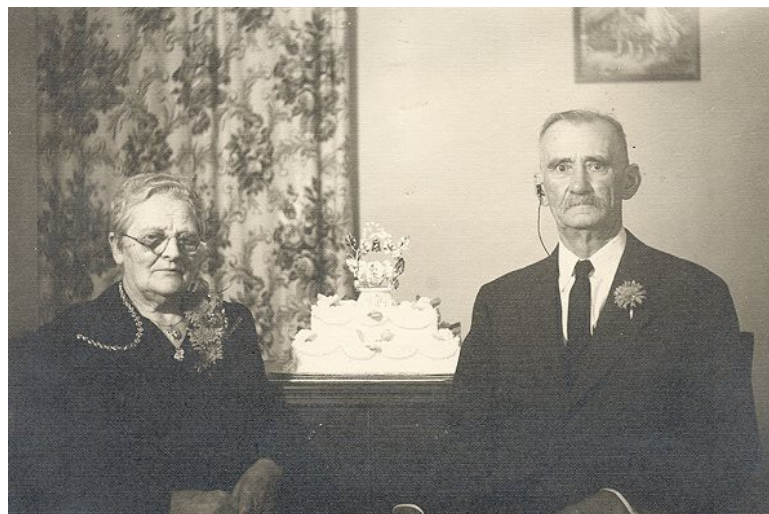


The P.C. Freres Farm at Fern Ridge
By Junetta Freres Pietrok and Charlene Pietrok Pierce, Dec. 2005



Photo ca. 1885. Back row: Susanna, Nick, P.C. Jr., Katie, and Wendell L.
Front row: Helena, Peter Charles Freres Sr., John and Angela.



Emma Schnakenberg and P. C. Freres Jr.

Peter Charles (P.C.) Freres Jr. was born Feb. 10, 1868 in Besch - Saarburg, Prussia. P.C. came to the United States when he was 7 years old, with his parents, Peter C. Freres Sr. and Angela (Mersch) Freres and their other 4 other children in 1875. P.C.'s grandfather was Mathias Freres, born about 1820 in Besch, Prussia, in the region of Saarland.

General Ulysses S. Grant was the 18th President of the United States during this time (1869 – 1877). The Freres family settled on a farm in Keokuk County near Sigourney, Iowa where two more sons were born.

By 1892 there was an acute depression, business failures, unemployment and farm mortgage foreclosures across the land. Grover Cleveland was elected the first Democrat president (1893-1897) after the Civil War. The State of Oregon was only 34 years old at that time. Sylvester Pennoyer was Governor of Oregon (1894-1901) and Stayton had existed as a town for only 21 years.

When Peter (P.C.) Jr. was 25 years old he married Emma Matilda Snakenberg on December 12, 1893. She was born and raised in the Sigourney area. The day after their marriage, they left Iowa for Oregon by train. They came as far as Portland then had to take a stagecoach on to Aumsville, Oregon. Over the muddiest places, where the stagecoach would become stuck, the passengers were obliged to become foot passengers. When they reached Aumsville they stayed with Mr. and Mrs. John Highberger, good friends who were also from the Sigourney area.

After several months of different types of employment Peter and Emma decided to buy the western half (160 acres) of the Creed T. Biggers land donation claim, LDC #5813, T9S R1E for \$2,925.00. This property was at Fern Ridge, in Marion County, about 6 miles east of Sublimity and Stayton. There was an old house on the property which they made do for a few years until around 1900 when they built a new house to accommodate their growing family. P.C. and Emma had four children, all born at home on the Fern Ridge farm near Stayton, Oregon:

- Helen Catherine Freres was born Nov. 04, 1896 and later married John Etzel.
- Theodore George (Ted) Freres was born July 24, 1898 and later married Tresa Forrette. After her death he married Frances Silbernagel.
- Wendell Peter Freres was born June 08, 1901, and later married Georgina Mable Gehlen.
- Louise Angela Freres was born February 24, 1907 and later married Joseph Parrish.

Emma worked from early morning to late night. After dinner she would sit down at the kitchen table to read the newspaper and before long she would be asleep with her head on her arm on the table. P.C would be asleep in the dining room on a day bed. He'd get up, listen to the news on the radio and then go to bed. It was often 10 or 11 p.m. before they would retire to the bedroom.

Emma made her own laundry soap, putting it into large flat pans and cutting it into bars when it was cold. She would then shave off what she needed to put into her wash. She used a wash board in a large galvanized tub in the early days and later P.C. bought a washing machine from Sears and Wendell hooked up a small gas-powered engine to it.

They raised some beef cattle so that they'd have meat for their own use year around and any extra cattle would be sold. Home-canned beef is very good. They always had 5 or 6 milk cows. They sold cream to a creamery, which came around to the farm every couple of days picking it up in 5 gallon cans. Emma regularly made fresh cottage cheese from the skim milk. P.C. would eat cottage cheese with jelly almost every meal. No wonder she made so much jelly!

They always raised 3 or 4 litters of pigs, some for their own use and the rest to sell off. Every fall with the help of several neighbors they'd have a "butchering day" and 4 or 5 hogs would be slaughtered so that they would have enough pork meat for the year. The hams and bacon were salted down, then smoked and cured so as not to spoil. A couple kinds of sausages were made and smoked and would also hang in the smokehouse. Pork chops and ground patties were fried and put into large crocks, layered and covered with the rendered lard to keep for several months. Every bit of the pig was used. They made liver sausage and blood sausage. Emma even made head cheese and pickled pigs feet. They also raised a lot of chickens, probably between 125 and 150 each year. They had two large chicken houses for the laying hens and one smaller house for the young pullets. After they got big enough they could be moved from the brooder house. They would buy the baby day old chicks from a hatchery. When the young pullets started laying, they would sell the older chickens and just keep the young ones. They sold eggs by the case.

They had a large orchard with about 4 different kinds of apples, Royal Ann and Bing cherries, pears, Italian prunes, plums and a couple of walnut trees. They also had a huge garden plot and raised all kinds of vegetables, enough to eat all summer and fall and still some for canning. Cabbage was made for sauerkraut and kept in large crocks for wintertime as were dill and sweet pickles. Emma had a raspberry patch and would make jelly and a sweetened juice that she canned and called "shrub." In the hot summer time she would mix some of the shrub with water and make the best cool raspberry drink. P.C. was also a very good wine maker and always had a couple of barrels of good white wine stored out in the woodshed, and of course he raised his own grapes for this.

P.C. and Emma would spend some time in the fall after harvest at Breitenbush Hot Springs and there were the trips over to Cascadia to get jugs of mineral water. He would also go huckleberry picking up at Monument Peak in the fall about 10 miles south of the town of Gates. Some berries were canned and of course more were made into jelly.

Some time after the new house was built they added a four-story water tower, which provided a gravity flow water system. A gasoline engine pumped the water from a hand-dug well on the north side of the house, up into a huge redwood tank on the top floor of the water tower. The wooden tank was about 8 ft. high and about 12 ft. in diameter. There was a float in the tank attached to a board outside which indicated the water level. There was an overflow pipe that drained out over the porch roof, but it seldom over-flowed. Water was pumped up into the tank perhaps an average of once a week.

The ground floor of the water tower is where the cream separator was. The milk and cream were also kept there. One corner was double walled, an area about 8 ft. by 8 ft., and the walls, door, and ceiling were packed with sawdust to make an insulated fruit cellar to prevent freezing. It had shelves on 3 sides to store all the canned fruits, vegetables, jams and jellies, as it stayed fairly cool in the summer and never froze in the winter.

Wendell and P.C. built a windmill to the north and east of the house, to pump water for irrigation purposes, but it never pumped much water, only about enough to provide water for animals.

After P.C.'s new house was built, the old house was used as a granary. They grain-farmed the property, raising wheat, oats and some rye. They used horse-drawn binders to sickle-cut the standing grain. Stalks would fall onto a draper and be tied in bundles. The bundles would drop off to the side. Men would place about 8 bundles into a shock, then bend another one over the top to keep rain off the heads of the bundles. The shocks stood until dry. Later the seeds would be "thrashed" from the bundles.

In 1909 P.C.'s brother, Wendell L. Freres, was mayor of Stayton and he reported that common labor received from \$1.50 to \$2.25 per day and a man and his team of horses would make from \$4.50 to \$5.50 per day. E.D. Alexander had taken over [the Stayton Mail newspaper] in October of 1901. He published the paper until 1909 when he sold to W. L. Freres, mayor and cashier of the Stayton Bank, though Fred G. Conley was the name on the masthead as editor and publisher.

As busy as P.C. always was, he still made time to be secretary for the Stayton Switchboard Association for years. When the so-called "farmer" line of the Stayton Fern Ridge Telephone Co. was established in 1906 there were 17 members on the party line. He was also a board member of the Sublimity Fire Insurance Co. and for years a Marion County Assessor. He also worked part time at the Stayton State Bank from 1904 to 1911, which was started and owned by P.C.'s father, Peter Sr., who along with his wife, Angela, had moved to Stayton from Iowa by that time. P.C. and Emma also boarded schoolteachers in their home. Stayton's population in 1915 was reported to be 900 people.

By the mid to late 1920's P.C. had started growing strawberries along with his grain crops and always had 10 to 20 acres of berries which he sold to the Stayton Canning Co. He even built 4 cabins and a couple of tent frames for some of his strawberry pickers to live in during the picking season. Wendell had built a long flat trailer to haul behind what he called his "whoopi" truck. The berry crates would then be taken to the cannery in Stayton.

P.C. had his own threshing machine but relied on a neighbor's steam engine for the power to run it. I can remember in the early 30's seeing Joe Silbernagel's big old steam engine puffing and steaming up the road at harvest time, which was always a busy and exciting time. Several neighbors and their hired men would help each other and went from farm to farm with their horses and wagons, staying on with their teams overnight, tying them to the sides or back of the empty bundle wagons. The men would roll out their bedrolls and sleep in the barn or sometimes even at the straw piles.

The neighbor women would come along to help with all the cooking and baking of homemade bread, cakes, pies and meals that it took every day to feed 12 to 15 hungry hard-working men. They were fed three big meals a day and a snack of sandwiches and cookies in the middle of the afternoon out in the field as they worked long hours. Lots of times they 'd be at one farm for 3 or 4 days at a time. Of course the crew always had their favorite places for the best meals and best cooks.

Wendell and his older brother, Ted, worked hard on the farm doing all of the usual general work it took to run the farm. When not needed at the farm, they worked at the small sawmill, owned and run by Mr. Shelton and Mr. Baltsing. It was located just southwest of the Freres

farm on the Siegmund property. When the mill owners went broke in 1922, Ted and Wendell formed a partnership and bought the mill and its holdings and debts. A lot of the debt was their own back wages. When the timber supply near the mill was gone in the mid 1920's they closed the sawmill and took their teams of horses and worked at the Oregon coast helping to build the highway around Newport, much of which is now Highway 101. In late 1926 when Wendell and Ted returned from working at the coast they moved their sawmill from its Fern Ridge location to a site up along the Little North Fork Road, 6 miles northwest of Mehama. There they set up a bigger logging and sawmill operation, complete with a log pond, cabins and cook shack for workers. A steam boiler powered the mill and horses were used to do the logging. Wendell was the fireman, or boiler operator and Ted was the business manager. Wendell would take most of the summer off to help his father with the harvest at the farm, as both he and Ted lived at the mill site. From the Stayton Mail, dated Sept. 19, 1929: There was a bad fire around the Freres, Crabtree, and Nubert sawmills the first of the week. E.D. Crabtree went to Portland Sunday for hose and a pump.

Wendell Freres and Georgina Gehlen married in 1927 and had two children: Junetta Barbara Freres born December 04, 1927 in Salem, OR and Richard (Dick) Peter Freres, born October 13, 1931 in Stayton, OR. In 1946, Junetta married Vincent Peter Pietrok, born November 25, 1920 in Stayton, OR.

1929 brought another depression, but most farmers fared pretty well as they raised their own food and were self supporting and bartered with their neighbors for the things they didn't produce.

During the summer months P.C. always had a full time hired man to help with the haying, cutting and threshing of the grain and general farming chores as it all had to be done with teams of horses. P.C. had a small old tractor, a Sampson, with big iron wheels with spikes for traction, but it wasn't powerful enough for farming. In the mid 1930's P.C. bought his first rubber-tired tractor, a John Deere. All the neighbors came for a look. With the new tractor, he retired the horses and purchased or converted all his equipment to use with the tractor. About that time, he started raising grass seed and phasing out the other grains.

They also bought a new thrashing machine and used the tractor to pull and run the thrasher. Later they purchased a self-propelled combine, thus doing away with the old horse-drawn binder.

The original old house which been turned into a granary was getting really dilapidated, was torn down and a new building put in its place which was set up to hold a grass seed cleaner along with the different bins for different kinds of grasses such as Bent grass and fescues. After being cleaned and bagged, the seed was sold to a seed company. Wendell and Georgina ran the seed cleaner by themselves and only cleaned their own crops. They didn't do any custom cleaning. Cleaners were relatively expensive, not everyone had their own equipment.

In 1932 Wendell built a small house on the farm just south of his folk's house. It was only a small two bedroom with kitchen and living room and a half basement. It had a large unfinished attic which was later turned into a third bedroom.

In the mid 30's a Delco light plant was installed in one corner of the large woodshed that was attached to the house and water tower at Peter and Emma's house. It ran on about 20 big batteries, thus making electricity (as long as the batteries were charged up). A gasoline

engine was used to run the charger. The plant only produced 32 volts of electricity, instead of 110, so special appliances had to be used but it supplied both P.C. and Wendell's houses. It wasn't until later in the 1940's that REA, a rural electric company, came through the area and all the farms converted to or had regular electricity of 110 and 220 volts.

On May 25, 1942 Wendell sold out his interest of the sawmill holdings to his brother Ted. With the money, he bought his father's 160 acre farm for \$12,000 and later on February 8, 1944, he purchased the eastern half of the Creed T. Biggers Land Donation Claim #5813 from Jack Richards for \$8,000, thus giving him 320 acres all together.

After Junetta married Vince Pietrok in the fall of 1946, Vince and his brother, Norbert, moved their little 2-man sawmill up onto the back part of the Jack Richards part of the farm, which Wendell had purchased, and ran their business there for several years.

P.C. and Emma moved off the farm in 1943 to 209 E. Washington St. in Stayton. P.C. and Emma celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary in December of 1943. P.C. died in his sleep from a massive heart attack on July 9, 1944. Emma's health had begun to fail after suffering a stroke which left her partially paralyzed. Emma died August 8, 1948. Both she and P.C. are buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Stayton, OR.

In 1959 an article appeared in the Oregon Statesman newspaper that mentioned the Centennial of Oregon's Statehood. One hundred years previous, Sublimity was Oregon's 2nd largest city, with a population of 1,221, compared to Portland's population of 2,874 and Eugene's population of 1,183. It reported that the 1860 census showed a total of 52,465 people living in all of Oregon and this did NOT include some 7,000 Indians "who retained their tribal characteristics."

Wendell, Georgina, Junetta and Dick moved up into the much larger old farmhouse. Wendell and Georgina lived in the old white house until March 8, 1965 when Wendell was no longer able to work such a large farm they sold the entire place to Don and Louella Neilson and Richard and Nancy Hartman. Wendell and Georgina retired and moved to 4970 State St. S.E., Salem, OR. In 2002 the Fern Ridge farm was sold to Jay Lamb who has planted it to Christmas trees.

The area of Fern Ridge, about 7.5 miles N.E. of Stayton had originally been settled by Jacob Siegmund and his wife, Mary Klumb. This area was sometimes referred to as the "Klumb" community. It even had its own registered Post Office called Klumb and was run from within the Jacob Siegmund house for 3 or 4 years. The Heater family later lived in this house. In the early years, the address of the Freres farm had been known as simply Route 1, Stayton. In fact, all residences within a 6 to 7 mile radius of downtown Stayton had the address of Route 1. In later years, that original Freres farm site was known by the address of 10238 Siegmund Rd., Stayton, OR 97383.