

## The PORTERS and COFFEYS, PIONEERS of 1848 by Daraleen Wade

On April 7th, 1848, a group of close relatives and neighbors bid farewell to family and friends in Pike County, Illinois and headed "west". Nancy Porter Holmes, who was traveling with her husband, H. N. V. Holmes, and four children, did not dare look back to see her mother, Nancy Porter, waving goodbye - she knew she'd never see her again. Nancy Porter, the mother, also bid goodbye to two of her sons, William [my 2nd great grandfather] and Stephen Porter, and their families, the last time she'd ever see them, too. The next year her husband, David Porter, left for Oregon, dying enroute at Ft. Hall of apoplexy, and four years later, another daughter, Mary B. Gibson and her family also left Pike County for Oregon. Only three of Nancy's children stayed in Illinois, where she lived the rest of her life.

Also in the group were Nebuzaradan Coffey [my 3rd great grandfather], his wife, Elizabeth, and all but one of their children, several of whom were married and had families of their own. The children were Cassandra, the wife of Joseph M. Blackerby, with their three children; Martha, who was unmarried; Mary, the wife of Walter H. Tucker, with two children [Walter's father, Samuel Tucker, and his family were also along]; Sarah, who was the wife of William Porter, mentioned above, with their four children; Catherine Jane, the wife of Stephen Porter, ' mentioned above, with two children; Sidney J., German J., Elizabeth and Denton D., all unmarried. One son, Thomas C., remained in Pike County until 1852 when he and his wife, Lucilla J. Baker, came to Oregon with their six children, two of whom died on the Oregon Trail.

William Porter, my 2nd great grandfather, kept a diary of the journey, mostly just noting how many miles they traveled in a day, the places they passed through and any monies spent, i. e., feed, ferry fees, etc. He also wrote a letter to his father on 24 June 1848 at the Crossing of the North Fork of the Platte [this letter surviving to this day] and from these two sources we learn about the trip and those they were traveling with. They crossed the Mississippi River at Louisiana, Missouri and proceeded westward through Monroe and Randolph counties, Missouri, towards St. Joseph where they arrived the morning of April 23rd. They crossed the Missouri River at St. Joseph, laying by about six miles from St. Joseph until May 5th when they set out in earnest on the Oregon Trail.

The wagons were divided up into companies consisting of about 24 wagons in each company and the company William Porter was in consisted of, besides himself and his brother, Stephen, the wagons of Ira Hooker and John Purvine of Scott and Morgan Counties, Illinois, Samuel Tucker, H. N. V; Holmes [his brother-in-law], and J. H. Lewis of Pike County, Illinois and Isaac Ball of St. Charles County, Missouri. Eight families comprised this company, although the total number of people in the company is unknown. John Purvine, who had 5 of the 24 wagons in A their company, was the captain and William Porter the lieutenant, they having been elected to those positions by the others in the company. The company was organized into six messes or divisions, each one taking his turn to lead. The men were divided into seven guards or watches, three of which guarded the cattle and wagons every night. No man was excused from this duty. There were also nine divisions to herd the cattle mornings and evenings. When making camp, the wagons were driven, half to the right and half to the left forming a "carel" in the shape of a horseshoe. At night the mules and horses were brought into the corral with the cattle near it's mouth, so they could guard them.

The Coffeys and their other married children were in nearby companies and they saw them often, until they reached the Crossing of the North Fork of the Platte when it was decided they shouldn't travel so closely together, at least for awhile. This was done because of the lack of feed for the animals. They must not have been too far apart, however, as they went through the Barlow Toll Gate at the same time {September 20th, 1848}.

In William Porter's letter to his father, David Porter, in Pike County, Illinois, he gives advice "from experience, which you may profit by should you ever travel this road". He suggested bringing only wagons made of the best materials, thoroughly seasoned and to have blacksmith's tongs and harness

for setting tires [then he tells how to do that]. Make use of rosin and tallow to grease wagons, since black lead is very inconvenient to haul "it will black everything". Bring only stout active cattle, of the common scrub stock and have three or four yoke for each wagon and only bring those who can be worked in teams. He said all who brought loose cattle regret doing so and most sold them at Laramie. He advised bringing no horses, use mules instead and be sure to have a good Mexican saddle as a common saddle is of little value. An industrious, careful hand to drive your team and not leave his post at any time, is necessary. Five or six hundred feet of good strong rope would not be too much. The wagon bows should be strong and well turned and the cover should be fixed so it can entirely shelter the hind and front ends of the wagons when necessary. The covers should be of very strong material since there is a great deal of windy weather and rains generally accompany the high winds. The wagon bed should be fixed so rain can not drive in on the floor, either at the sides or ends. Use only wrought nails for nailing about the wagons. A good tent is necessary, common domestic is not fit for a tent. Tent poles should be ironed and the pins should be made of iron or buck horns. A light cook stove will be convenient to set at the mouth of the tent and have a stake to hold up the pipe. A small dog or two will be useful till you cross the Missouri River after which they are "more than useless", saying they caused teams to run away and one company even divided over the dogs in their group. He gives other advice about how to form the camp at night; what to do about night guards, scouting out camping spots, where to haul wood and he says to get Palmers' book and Fremont's map to use as guides because he doesn't have time or space to give a full account of the road to that place.

The Porters and Coffeys experienced no major problems on the trail, but had trouble finding wood and grass, had cattle stampede, needed wagon repairs, and some of them had to leave valuable things behind. William said it was a remarkable thing that teams, especially on the Platte, were apt to become frightened very easily and run off. Walker and Bristow's company had 24 teams to run at once, killing some oxen and crippling others. Their company had 19 teams to run and Isaac Ball suffered a broken thigh during one of the runaways [he was doing well]. He advised if there was about to be a general runaway to turn your oxen from the road and give them a fair start and stick to the wagon, otherwise you will be liable to be run over. He went on to say the cattle would run about 200 yards and then stop.

They passed Independence Rock on July 2nd, reached Pacific Spring on the 8<sup>th</sup>. "We are now in Oregon" [this would have been in Wyoming]. Their daily mileage averaged about 20 miles a day - traveling anywhere from 4 to 28 miles a day. On August 29th they reached the "Grand Round" River, the John Day River on September 11th and the Columbia River on the 13th. On September 20th they went through the Barlow Toll Gate and William and Stephen Porter, who each had one wagon, paid their toll with "1 quilt" apiece. John Purvine, who now only had 4 1/2 wagons, paid a toll of \$22.50; Samuel Tucker, who had 2 wagons, paid with a bedspread and \$5.00; H. N. V. Holmes paid \$10.00 for his two wagons; J. H. Lewis paid 2 shirts for his one wagon; Ira Hooker with 4 wagons was charged \$20.00, of which he was able to pay \$19.95, and Isaac Ball, with one wagon, paid \$5.00. They arrived at Oregon City on October 1st and continued south into what is now Marion County, arriving at "Mr. Pringle's" on October 8th. Their long journey was ended, they having traveled 2,016 miles, according to the figures in William Porter's diary.

Nebuzaradan Coffey's Donation Land Claim was just east of Aumsville and William Porter's was immediately south of Coffey's, in the area of Shaff and Porter Roads. Stephen Porter took one out in Stayton, in the area where the hospital is now; the Blackerbys claim was south of what is now Silverton, Walter H. Tucker's claim was southwest of Aumsville and H. N. V. and Nancy (Porter) Holmes settled in Polk County at what became known as Holmes Gap, which is where the railroad crosses Highway 99W between Rickreall and Amity. Thomas Coffey, who came to Oregon in 1852, had a donation land claim just west of Sublimity, and north of his father's claim. Most of these families stayed on their claims many years, but Stephen Porter sold his claim in the early 1850s and bought Samuel Tucker's claim near Downs Station, between Silverton and Mt. Angel, where he spent the rest of his life. The others in the same company with the Porters, Ira Hooker, John Purvine, J. H. Lewis and

Isaac Ball, all had donation land claims in Polk County.

William Porter, who was born in 1812 in Lincoln County, Missouri, married Sarah Coffey in 1840 in Pike County, Illinois. She was born in 1820 in Simpson County, Kentucky and moved to Pike County with her parents, Nebuzaraden and Elizabeth Coffey, in the early 1830s. William and Sarah were the parents of four children, all born in Pike County, Illinois: William German, who married Melinda Lewis; Elizabeth Nancy, who married Clifton Kittridge Read, Jr. [they were my great grandparents], John, who married Mary Ada Van Nuys; and Sidney, who married Mary Ellen Brownson.

Sarah died in November 1848, shortly after they arrived in Oregon, and is said to be the first person buried in Aumsville Cemetery. In 1849, William married Sarah's sister, Martha Coffey, who was born in 1813 in Cumberland County, Kentucky. They had three children: Henry, who married Minnie F. Welch; Sarah, unmarried; and Mary Jane, who married Henry Von Behren. William died on his donation land claim in 1899 and Martha died in 1903. They were buried beside Sarah in Aumsville Cemetery. A descendant of William Porter still lives on a portion of the land claim.

William Porter, who attended Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois in 1834 & 1835, taught school in Pike County, Illinois until coming to Oregon. He served as chief clerk in the territorial legislature in 1849; was elected Marion County Assessor in 1862 and 1864; was a delegate to the Republican State Convention in 1864 and served as clerk of School District No. 7, Sublimity, in 1856 and of Old District No. 49, between Aumsville and Sublimity, from 1859 until 1861. William Porter sold some of the first apples in the Sublimity area when an early crop brought him twelve dollars per bushel.

Nebuzaradan Coffey, who was born in 1789 in Wilkes County, North Carolina, was taken to Kentucky, as a child, by his mother and older brothers. He married Elizabeth Easley in 1810 in Cumberland County, Kentucky. About 1818 they moved to Simpson County, Kentucky and in the early 1830s moved to Pike County, Illinois where they lived until coming to Oregon in 1848. Nebuzaradan Coffey served as Marion County Assessor in 1851. He died in 1867 and Elizabeth died in 1880. Both were buried in Aumsville Cemetery, as are several of their children, and spouses, and grandchildren.

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