

2014

STORIES FROM MEET THE PIONEERS

Living History Tours presented in Jacksonville Oregon's Pioneer Cemetery

[2014 –Year Nine](#)

[Merritt Bellinger and Caroline Ritter Bellinger](#)

[Peter Emil Britt and Amalia \(Mollie\) Britt](#)

[Thomas Chavner and Margaret Brennan Chavner](#)

[Julia Cheetham Fielder](#)

[Auguste Petard and Marie Petard](#)

[Sadie Trefren Perry and the Mysterious Neuber-Long House](#)

[Josephine Lucretia Martin Plymale](#)

[Judge Alex Sparrow and Ruth Withington Sparrow](#)

[John Bennett Wrisley and Eliza Jane Jacobs Wrisley](#)

MEET THE PIONEERS 2014



Character

Caroline Bellinger
Merritt Bellinger
Amalia Britt
Emil Britt
Margaret Chavner
Thomas Chavner
Adra Edwards
Julia Fielder
August Petard
Marie Petard

Player

Constance Jesser
Gary Miller
Emma Abbey
David Sours
Vivienne Grant
Robert Hight
Maddy Schwartz
Peggy Peffley
Steve Casaleggio
Ann Wilton

Character

Josephine Plymale
Alex Sparrow
Ruth Sparrow
George Trefren
Sarah Trefren
Eliza Jane Wrisley
John Wrisley

Player

Carolyn Kingsnorth
Steve Carlson
Mary Ann Carlson
Seth Weintraub
Lynn Ransford
Anne Peugh
Neal Anderson

[\(Return\)](#)

Merritt Bellinger and Caroline Ritter Bellinger

Merritt was born on February 2, 1833, in Princeton, Canada to Honicle and Catherine Bellinger. His parents relocated to Princeton from Pennsylvania in 1832, just shortly before his birth. The family later moved to St. Joseph County, Indiana and later to Michigan, and finally to Missouri before heading west in 1850.

Merritt was a strapping seventeen-year-old when he and his family arrived in Linn County, Oregon after crossing the Oregon Trail by ox team. While many of the newcomers came in search of gold, his family came west for the rich soil that they heard was just waiting to be claimed and farmed. They took up a Donation Land Claim of some six hundred and forty acres near Albany, Oregon and a year later his father sold his right to that claim, and took up another land claim in nearby Lebanon, Oregon. Then in the spring of 1853, Honicle Bellinger sold once again, and this time brought his family to Jackson County where he took up a six-hundred-and-forty-acre land claim two miles east of Jacksonville. At the same time Merritt, now a young man and eligible, took up a Donation Land Claim of his own, one hundred and sixty acres one mile from present day Medford. The area is known today to golfers as Stewart Meadows.

Not long after arriving in the Rogue Valley Merritt enlisted with the local Volunteers and served under Captain John F. Miller during the Rogue Indian Wars. After about three months a peace agreement was reached, and Merritt returned to farming his one hundred and sixty acres. However, less than three years later he found himself back with the Volunteers as a Sergeant as once again problems between the settlers and the Indians resurfaced. Several months later a peaceful settlement was reached, and Merritt returned to farming.

Caroline Ritter was born on February 16, 1844, near South Bend, Indiana and came across the plains with her parents in 1853, the same year as her future husband Merritt. Both the Bellinger and Ritter families were among the early Pioneers to Oregon.

Merritt's brother Francis stayed in Linn County when the rest of his family moved down to Southern Oregon in 1853. It was through visits to his brother that Merritt was introduced to Caroline. In 1860 and after turning sixteen, Caroline's parents gave their permission for her and Merritt to marry.

As Merritt's parents were getting on in age and needed help on their large farm, Merritt traded his one-hundred-and-sixty-acre farm for his younger brother Edward's interest in the "home place" where he and his new bride Caroline set up housekeeping and started their family. Over the next twelve years six children would be born to the marriage, four daughters, Lucinda, Rachel, twins Emaline and Eva and two sons John and Francis.

Merritt's mother Catherine helped Caroline with the children while Merritt and his father, Honicle, worked long hours side by side caring for the farm. The farm prospered and by the end of the 1860's, the Bellinger found that they were now in a position to be able to lend money, something that they and most farmers were not accustomed to. The money was used for the construction of the new Redman's Hall in Jacksonville, on which they held a mortgage.

Jacksonville at the time was a busy and thriving town but wasn't without its troubles. Merritt, who was considered to be some sort of a town elder, was always involved with some trouble, emergency or disaster. In 1875, an Irish sheep rancher by the name of Daniel McMahon was murdered, and a large amount of his sheep had been stolen. It wasn't long before Chester Bardon was arrested in Canyonville and brought back to Jacksonville. His partner in crime, Dilworth Carey, confessed to the District Attorney that he and Chester murdered McMahon and stole his sheep. Merritt was selected to serve on the Jury. The first order of business was to determine if Bardon, who had stopped eating when he was placed in jail, was sane to stand trial. The four doctors who all examined Bardon found him to be sane. In the end, Merritt and the others on the jury found him sane to stand trial, but he was too weak to do so from not eating. A short time later Bardon died while still a prisoner in jail.

Merritt, along with other residents were thankful that Dilworth Carey confessed to the crime which allowed them to recover McMahon's body and give him a proper send-off and decent burial.

The Bellingers sold the family farm and ended up on one hundred and twenty-five acres near the old homestead. In 1884 they hired Jacksonville cabinet maker and carpenter David Linn to build them a new residence. On August 16, 1884, the Oregon Sentinel reported that "Merritt Bellinger is going to put on a style soon, having commenced the construction of a new residence."

By the turn of the century Merritt, who knew most everyone in the valley, and was very familiar with Donation Land Claims, land swaps and property, opened a real estate business. They built a new home on Holly Street and moved to Medford in 1901.

On what was Caroline's 58th birthday, and after just moving into their new home, a knock at the door announced the arrival of all their children, their husbands, wives and grandchildren along with some good friends. They arrived with baskets of food, enough for a small army, and ready to celebrate Caroline's birthday.

Both Bellinger Hill and Bellinger Lane are named after the Bellinger family who farmed the land for generations.

Merritt Bellinger died on September 4, 1910, and Caroline Ritter Bellinger died on November 7, 1919. Both were buried in the Masonic Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 261.

[\(Return\)](#)

Peter Emil Britt and Amalia (Mollie) Britt

Emil (pronounced "E-mul") Britt was born in Jacksonville, Oregon on March 22, 1862. His sister Amalia, called Mollie by her family and friends, was also born in Jacksonville on August 1, 1865. Their parents were Peter Britt and Amalia Grob Britt who married in 1861. Amalia's son from her first marriage, Jacob Grob, was just seven years old at the time she married Peter. He was raised by Peter as his own son and later became an older brother to Emil and Mollie.

The Britt children adored their parents and while they themselves would contribute much to Jacksonville and its society, they would live in the shadow of their famous father, a place where they most likely felt very comfortable.

Emil and Mollie spoke fondly about how after their mother died in September 1871, at the age of forty-nine, their father looked after them and their stepbrother Jacob. Mollie was just six years old; Emil was nine, and Jacob was sixteen. They later agreed that despite losing their mother at such a young age they couldn't imagine a more interesting life growing up or a more devoted father to have raised them. Somehow in addition to raising his family he still managed so much in his life, from recording Jacksonville's history through his photography, to introducing many of the agricultural crops that are the basis of today's wine and orchard industries in Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley.

Mollie recalled the Giant Sequoia that Peter Britt planted on the day Emil was born. He wanted to celebrate the day with the biggest and most impressive tree on the planet. The tree continues to grow on the old Britt homestead and is now over 200 feet tall.

Their parents made sure that the children had a proper upbringing and a good education. Not a religious man, Peter and Amalia saw to it that they were baptized in Jacksonville's Presbyterian Church. Emil didn't make it easy! For some reason on the day Emil was baptized he was panic-stricken and tried to duck under a table. Pastor Moses Williams tried to grab Emil by his waistband before he could get away completely, but all he came up with was Emil's, pants! Needless to say, their parents were mortified!

Emil recalled going to Crater Lake with his father when he was twelve as his father wanted to take photographs of the lake. It was a long journey back then with very few roads. His father took three photographs which were the first ever taken of that magnificent body of water. In one he posed Emil along the rim of the crater and looking out at the lake. Despite being cold and shivering with a cough, Emil somehow managed to hold still for the time it took his father to make the glass plate exposure. Those photographs helped to convince Congress to make Crater Lake a National Park in 1902.

The children all attended school in Jacksonville, and all were involved with music. Jacob and Emil sang with a singing group on summer evenings and Mollie learned to play the piano on the beautifully carved Steinway piano, a gift from her father.

Emil went off to San Francisco to attend photography school. While his father taught him a lot, San Francisco was the place to go to learn the latest techniques and really develop his skills. When he returned home, he found that his father, in honor of Emil joining him in the photography business, had added a second wing to the home so they could expand the studio. Emil was touched and said that once again his father was exceedingly kind and thoughtful.

Mollie, who was finished with school, was delighted to have Emil back in Jacksonville. She was kept busy keeping house for the four of them and helping her father with his ever-expanding garden. At some point Mollie decided that the home needed new rugs and drapes and after getting Jacob and Emil to agree, they hatched a plan to come up with the money to purchase them.

Since Independence Day 1884 was just around the corner and July 4th was a much-celebrated holiday in town, they decided to make and sell ice cream! Needless to say, making ice cream in the summertime back then was not an easy undertaking. Emil and Jacob drove a buckboard to the crest of the Siskiyou where they packed snow in burlap and sawdust and returned home where they made the ice cream. They offered it in small butter dishes for twenty-five cents and made a small fortune, or at least enough for a red Brussels carpet and heavy white lace curtains. They ordered them and they were shipped by rail from Portland in time for Christmas. The "ice cream" venture was considered an entrepreneurial genius idea by their father!

Peter Britt always paid very close attention to the weather, and he made daily weather reports to the Army Signal Corps. In time the U.S. Weather Service came into being, and the daily weather reporting chores were turned over to Emil. He faithfully submitted weather observations for fifty-eight years and never missed a single day!

Emil ran for a seat on the Jacksonville Board of Trustees in 1908 on a platform of building a dam on Jackson Creek to store water. He was elected and soon, the Jacksonville Reservoir was a reality. He served on the Board for nearly twenty-five years, six of them as Mayor of Jacksonville. Emil also had 2,000 acres of ranch and orchard lands to manage on his own since the passing of his stepbrother Jacob on July 5, 1896, and his father on October 3, 1905.

Mollie continued to care for the house and gardens and of course, receiving all the visitors who came to see the home, which had become sort of a museum with her father's passing.

In 1947, the Weather Service recognized Emil for fifty-six years of continuous service and ranked him among the top four of the 5,000 observers in the volunteer service. In 1950, after Emil's passing, the Weather Service declared him one of the "deans of the cooperative observer service" and presented Mollie with a medal in his honor.

The Oregon Street Bridge that crosses Jackson Creek was dedicated as a tribute to Emil for his years of service as Jacksonville's Mayor.

Mollie found great satisfaction in keeping a wonderful home for her father, Jacob and Emil.

None of the Britt children ever married.

Emil Britt died on January 13, 1950, at the age of eighty-eight and Mollie Britt died on October 13, 1954, at the age of eighty-nine.

They are buried in the City Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 129, Plots 7 and 9. Jacob Grob is also buried in the Britt Family Block 129, in Plot 4.

[\(Return\)](#)

Thomas and Margaret Brennan Chavner

Thomas was born in 1814 in County Tipperary, Ireland. His father died when he was quite young and in 1820, he immigrated to America with his mother and older brother. Thomas and his mother settled in Philadelphia. Sadly, Thomas's mother died not too long after they settled in their new homeland, and he was left in the care of his older brother who lived in Pittsburgh.

While living with his brother he apprenticed to learn the trade of a tailor but found the work not to his liking, so he ran away. He made his way down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and for the next few years served as a cabin boy on various boats that operated on the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. At the end of one of those trips, from New Orleans to St. Louis, Mr. Chavner became associated with trappers from the Rocky Mountains whose stories of adventure in the west captivated him.

Thomas signed on with the American Fur Company for a one-year tour to trap and trade furs for which he would receive \$10 a month for his services. After the expiration of his one year contract he signed on with Thompson and Craig, traders from Brown's Hole on the Green River and went north. It was around this time that he met Kit Carson among others, whose names live on as famous trappers and guides. Thomas traveled to Texas with Kit and once settled along the Brazos River, Thomas began operating a trading post. Later he would meet General John Fremont and served as interpreter during the Mexican-America War. Thomas learned the Comanche language during his years of trading with the various Indian tribes. After the war Thomas went to California with a number of disbanded soldiers. He remained in California until 1856 when he headed to Jacksonville, Oregon.

Margaret Brennan was born in County Carlow, Ireland in 1828 and came to America and Jacksonville, Oregon in 1861. This was the very same year that she met and married Thomas Chavner. Five children would be born to their marriage.

Thomas who came to the Oregon Territory after hearing about all the gold strikes didn't have much luck. He bought a land claim across from the Dardanelles on the Rogue River and started a farm. He leased the farm for a year and traveled north to the Fraser River in search of gold with no luck. However, upon returning to his farm everything changed. In 1860 one of Thomas's hired hands handed him a bright quartz rock he found on a ledge near the farms. Thomas could see it was laced with fine gold. He filed a claim that resulted in one of the richest pockets of gold ever found in the valley. In eight months, more than \$700,000 dollars in gold was removed at twenty dollars an ounce. It was called the Gold Hill Load.

Margaret had no idea of how wealthy Thomas was when they married. He lived a fairly simple life and used his wealth to help the community and his family. Similar to Cornelius Beekman, the banker from Jacksonville, he made personal loans to his neighbors and helped where he could. In 1876 he built a very sturdy covered bridge over the Rogue River near Gold Hill and called it the Centennial Bridge in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Revolutionary War. When the railroad came through the valley, Thomas sold them the rights of way and land to make a station greatly helping in forming the new and growing community of Gold Hill.

Margaret died on August 22, 1880, from consumption, leaving Thomas with two teenage sons and two daughters, age ten and twelve to care for. In 1882 Thomas married Rosa Riley who was a widow with children. Rosa was also Irish, Catholic and owned property. Together they raised their two families.

Thomas Chavner died on September 8, 1888. Both he and Margaret are buried in the Catholic Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block C8, Plots 3 and 5.

The Chavners left their audiences with an Irish Blessing:

May love and laughter light your days,
And warm your heart and home.
May good and faithful friends be yours,
wherever you may roam.
May peace and plenty bless your world
with joy that long endures.
May all life's passing seasons
bring the best to you and yours!

[\(Return\)](#)

Julia Cheetham Fielder

Julia was born on February 11, 1876, in Coldwater, Michigan. Her parents, Robert and Mary Fielder were originally from New York, later relocating to Michigan. In 1880 the family, including Julia and her sister Rose, came west to Oregon and settled on a farm in Central Point.

Julia's family farmed the land until, sadly, on June 1, 1888, her father died while working in the pasture. Her mother Mary was left a widow with two daughters to support and care for, Julia who was age twelve, her sister Rose age ten. The new house her father started to build in 1886 wasn't finished, so mother and her two daughters moved to Medford. They returned to the farm after the school year and spent the summer months on the farm.

It was said that one of the reasons Julia was inspired to go into teaching was watching her mother work so hard to keep the family together, she realized she had to be able to work and care for herself in the future.

Julia graduated from Medford High School in 1893 and began teaching that fall. She also attended the Oregon State Normal School in Drain, Oregon. Julia explained to those inquiring that a Normal School was like today's teachers' college. Even after graduating, Julia continued to study and spent several summers attending the University of California in Berkeley and even went to New York to study.

Julia taught school for twenty-nine years, including several terms in Jackson County's rural schools, and at the Ashland Normal School in Ashland, Oregon. However, her happiest and most rewarding time was as a first-grade teacher in Medford. She taught for one year at the Roosevelt school when it opened, but soon returned to the Washington school where she taught for twenty years and until she passed away. It was said that among the population at the time, you were either a student or had a schoolmate who was one of Miss Fielder's students.

Julia, who never married, considered her young students as part of her family and enjoyed seeing them move on and succeed. She was one of the most beloved teachers in Medford. She was loved by her students, admired by her fellow teachers and parents and respected by all. Julia died on July 14, 1922, at the age of 46.

In 1923 a ceremony was held and a granite and bronze memorial in the style of a sun dial with the inscription "I count only the sunny hours, In memory of Julia Cheetham Fielder, a friend to all children" was placed. In his tribute, Principal Hanby spoke of Julia's life and work, of the universal love for her in the hearts of her students and of the great work of education which she carried forward until her death. Things taught by her to her students will be passed on from generation to generation.

Julia Cheetham Fielder is buried in the City Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery, Block 164, Plot 4. The memorial to Julia stands today at the corner of Laurel and West Main Streets in Medford, near the site of the old Washington School.

[\(Return\)](#)

Auguste and Marie Petard

Born in 1845 in the Loire Valley of France, Auguste and his oldest son Auguste II, who was twenty-one years old at the time, left France in 1897 and after arriving in Canada, soon set off for North Dakota. Then hearing stories of gold in the west they headed to California. Upon arriving in Weaverville, California they soon learned that the easy gold discoveries in that area were a thing of the past. They decided to head for Alaska where there was still promise of gold to be found in the Yukon.

On their trip north they came through Oregon's Rogue Valley, first stopping in Ashland and then Jacksonville. It didn't take them long to fall in love with the valley and they scrapped any thoughts of continuing their trip to Alaska and the search for gold. Auguste purchased a small farmhouse and some land just west of Jacksonville. He sent word back to his wife Marie and younger son Albert who remained behind in France to come and join him and their son. Marie and Albert arrived in the Rogue Valley in 1899.

Marie was born on Christmas Day in 1846 in Normandy, France and was reportedly of royal lineage. She and Auguste were married in 1875 and had two sons, Auguste II and Albert. The family lived near Nantes, France and most likely worked in the Muscat vineyards in that city.

Mining in Jacksonville, while not striking it rich, did enable Auguste to purchase some additional land adjoining his property where he and his sons planted grape vines on the slopes. They had some twenty acres of wine producing grapes.

Over the years Auguste continued to mine for gold, they built a small winery to make enough wine for the family and bottled both red and white. They had a nice farm, two devoted sons and a number of French speaking friends who had also settled in Jacksonville. They attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Jacksonville and were content with life in their new homeland. In fact, Auguste filed his Declaration of Intention to become a citizen of the United States.

In 1922 the Petards life changed when they first heard the word "Prohibition." For a family who devoted its life to growing grapes and making wine, Prohibition and not being allowed to make wine was just beyond their comprehension.

With no market for the grapes, the Petards gathered the crop and made wine for the family to use and stored it in barrels in the winery. Members of the Medford Women's Christian Temperance Union complained that the Petards had illegal wine on their property and were ignoring the Prohibition Laws. Rumors soon spread that Auguste was selling bootleg wine.

Under pressure Sheriff Terrill, armed with a search warrant and accompanied by his deputy and the County Prohibition Enforcement Agent, went to the Petard farm. They discovered some six-hundred gallons of wine in barrels and fifty quarts of wine in bottles. Reportedly they were covered in cobwebs and dirty with age. Sheriff Terrill placed a padlock on the storage area and took legal action against Auguste who was released under his own recognizance.

The W.C.T.U. members, who were pleased with the discovery of the wine, were not happy that the sheriff hadn't immediately destroyed the barrels, bottles and their contents. Sheriff Terrill stood by the law, refusing to confiscate any of the property until directed by the circuit court. The court later decided that it would be best to remove the wine from the Petard winery until a final decision was made on the confiscation orders. The barrels were removed and placed in the field at the Jacksonville school house. A couple days later the justice court ruled that the wine had to be disposed of. An estimated \$4,000 worth of wine soaked into the ground.

Auguste plead guilty and was convicted to two charges: one, for the manufacture of intoxicating liquor and the second, for possession. He was fined \$50 and sentenced to thirty days in jail on the first charge and fined \$25 on the second charge. The jail sentence was suspended despite the uproar from the W.C.T.U.

Auguste Petard paid his fines and retired to his little farm and abandoned his vineyard.

Their son Albert died in 1924 from tuberculosis at the age of forty-one. In 1925 son Auguste II traveled to France where he met his future wife, Mlle. Laure Eugenie Pousseur. She later came to America and Jacksonville where they were married at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Auguste and Marie Petard deeded their property to them.

Marie Petard died on October 24, 1928, and Auguste Petard died in 1931. They are buried in the Catholic Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery, Block F4, Plots 6 and 2.

[\(Return\)](#)

Sadie Trefren Perry and the Mysterious Neuber-Long House

Sadly, little is known of Sadie's life, only of her brief happiness as a young bride, and her very tragic death.

Sadie Trefren and her twin sister Hattie were born on August 18, 1873, in Iowa to George and Sarah Louise Sandusky Trefren. At some point the family came west and settled in the Grants Pass area.

The Trefrens lost their daughter Mary Emma to typhoid fever in late 1894 when she was just seventeen years old. Unfortunately, tragedy struck again just a few months later when their eldest daughter Sadie burnt to death.

Sadie had been living and working at the U.S. Hotel in Jacksonville, most likely as a chamber maid. She met Albert Perry, a local young man who managed the farm of George Neuber. The two were married on Sunday, April 21, 1895, by Pastor Moore of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Jacksonville.

On Monday morning the young couple departed Jacksonville and headed out to the Applegate and the Neuber farm to start their life together. On Tuesday morning Albert went off with his employer to survey some boundary lines which were located some distance from the farm.

Sadie, who was all alone on the farm at the time, was carrying some ashes from the stove when she placed some loose paper on top of the ashes. As she reached the door and opened it a draft caused the paper to go up in flame and blow onto Sadie's apron. Sadie with her clothes now fully engulfed ran out the door screaming. A woman who was passing by the farm on horseback heard Sadie's terrible screams and so horrified by the sight, rode off seeking help. When she and a nearby neighbor returned, they found Sadie in shock and her body horribly blistered. A messenger was sent to alert Dr. Robinson, some nine miles away in Jacksonville.

Upon his arrival Dr. Robinson soon learned that there was little that could be done for Sadie other than to try and alleviate the intense suffering until death. A buggy was dispatched to Grants Pass to bring Sadie's parents to her bedside but unfortunately, she had already passed by the time they arrived.

Sadie died on the evening of April 23, just two days after her wedding and was buried in the Jacksonville Cemetery on April 24, 1895. The same minister that married her conducted the graveside service and among the flowers on the ground was Sadie's bridal bouquet.

Sometime before, while making plans for the wedding, Sadie told her closest friends that she had an ominous feeling that her wedding gown would soon be her funeral dress.

At the time, some thought the Neuber-Long House where Sadie died to be haunted or jinxed. It had a mysterious past as Sadie's death was not the first tragedy to occur there.

Thirty years prior, in 1864, Mrs. Margaret Long, a middle-aged widow, lived in the home. She was George Neuber's great aunt and was brutally murdered in the house. It was the most cold-blooded and shocking murder in the area. Mrs. Long was known to have money, making robbery a motive for the murder, but it was such a violent crime leaving many in doubt. To this day the murder remains a mystery.

Then, in 1893, Charles Offenbacher rented the farm. Shortly after he married Miss Mamie Cameron, he was kicked by a farm horse and died.

Adding to the anguish of the family was a cruel story that appeared in the Ashland Tidings just a week after Sadie's funeral saying that her husband, Albert, was going to marry Sadie's twin sister Hattie. It reported they filed for a marriage license just three days after Sadie's burial. There was no truth to the story, and the paper printed an apology declaring the story was entirely unfounded.

Sadie Trefren Perry is buried In the City Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 73, Plot 9. When she was buried, in 1895, her grave site was never marked with a headstone. The two actors who told Sadie's story were so moved they purchased the headstone that now marks her grave site.

[\(Return\)](#)

Josephine Lucretia Martin Plymale

Born in Missouri on June 3, 1845, Josephine Martin came across the Oregon Trail with her family in 1846. She most likely spent a few months of the first year of her life riding in a covered wagon. The Martins were among the earliest Pioneers to settle in Oregon, first in Lafayette, then Winchester, Roseburg and finally Myrtle Creek.

In 1862 and at the age of seventeen, Josephine left her family and moved to Jacksonville and became a schoolteacher. On July 9, 1863, she married William Jasper Plymale, a local farmer and rancher and set up housekeeping on his farm. The Plymales were also an early Pioneer family arriving in Jacksonville in 1852. Being a wife to William and mother to their twelve children was first and foremost to Josephine.

While a wonderful wife and an indulgent and affectionate mother, Josephine was concerned about her children's future and the lack of a mother's and a woman's right to have a say about the future of the country they and she lived in. She did not understand or accept why she was not allowed to vote.

To say that Josephine was a woman ahead of her time is truly an understatement. She was a writer, and her articles and editorials were happily published in the Ashland, Oregon Daily Tidings as well as the Oregonian. She was the Jacksonville correspondent to both papers.

Josephine, who lived and worked the farm with her husband William, was a recognized orchardist and, in 1875, was asked to give the inaugural address for the Jacksonville Grange. Two years later she gave the annual address to the Siskiyou County Agricultural Society in Yreka, California. She received frequent requests to speak to numerous groups and organizations on various subjects. Josephine gave a reading at the Teachers Institute, spoke at the Legion of Honor and addressed Southern Oregon's Pioneer Association.

In 1875 the family moved to Jacksonville where they operated the Excelsior Livery Stable, previously owned by William's brother. Josephine worked alongside her husband running the business. She even drove horse teams for clients when required. One gentlemen customer praised her as a "gallant lady pilot, efficient and successful."

At one point Josephine, who was the Vice President of the Oregon State Women's Suffrage Association, planned a meeting of the women suffrage activists to be held at her local Methodist Church, only to be locked out by the pastor! Another time there was a violent mob protesting women's rights in the street directly in front of her house! Both she and William were afraid to show their faces. This certainly could have something to do with the fact that many of the suffragettes were associated with the Temperance movement against the excess consumption of alcohol. Of course, none of this sat well with the gentlemen who liked their liquor. Josephine just happened to be the treasurer of the local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, thus making her a target for the protest in front of her home. She found a little irony in the situation as, at one point, her husband was licensed to sell liquor.

Josephine's husband appears to have been understanding of her causes, but they didn't always see eye-to-eye, especially on politics. Politics ran in both their blood. Josephine's father was a representative to both the Oregon Provisional Legislature and the Oregon Territorial Legislature. He was an Indian Agent and, later, he was appointed to the Land Office. Husband William Plymale was a member of the Oregon State Legislature. He also served as Jackson County Surveyor, the Deputy County Clerk and Justice of the Peace.

Josephine tried running for office in 1892 when she filed as a candidate for Jackson County Recorder. Unfortunately, her name never made it to the ballot. She did manage to obtain positions as a committee clerk for the Oregon State Legislature in the Assembly and the Senate. At one point she took her two youngest daughters with her to Salem so they could get a taste of politics and learn how laws were made. Josephine also filled in for the Town Clerk of Jacksonville when the regular clerk was absent.

Josephine was accused by some of being too passionate and spending too much energy on civic affairs. However, no one seemed to be concerned with the time and energy she put into her involvement with the Eastern Star, or the Odd Fellows Rebekah Lodge, or the Southern Oregon Pioneer Association. Perhaps these were all seen as being appropriate activities for women!

There were several family tragedies that Josephine and William coped with. Their little son McDonough (Mackey) died on June 30, 1882, at the age of just under six months from a scarlet fever epidemic. Then in 1888 they lost everything except the clothes on their backs when their home burnt to the ground resulting from a fire at David Linn's furniture factory.

Josephine Martin Plymale died on June 5, 1899, following a long illness. She never attained the right to vote, something she was so passionate about, but her daughters did. In 1912 Oregon finally gave this basic right to women. Imagine what more she would have accomplished had she not died so young at the age of fifty-four.

She is buried in the City Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 295, Plot 5.

[\(Return\)](#)

Judge Alex Sparrow and Ruth Withington Clemens Sparrow

Alex was born in Toronto, Canada in 1871. His love of horses and perhaps a sense of adventure were some of his reasons for lying about his age and enlisting with the American Cavalry to help in the Spanish-American War.

He spent six years in the United States Cavalry before joining the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Alex fought in the Spanish-American War and served tours of duty in the Philippines and Cuba. He was with the Corps of Engineers for eighteen years and, in 1912, retired from the U.S. Army after serving a total of twenty-four years with the rank of Sergeant Major.

Following his retirement Alex returned to Toronto for a short period. He started to receive engineering assignments and did work on the locks around The Dalles on the Columbia River. Then came the one job that would change the course of his life; he was appointed assistant engineer and then superintendent of Crater Lake National Park in Oregon.

Ruth Withington Clemens was a quiet and private person. It was said that she was in an "unfortunate marriage" that led to her taking her two young daughters, Francis and Harriet and leaving her husband. Ruth did what she had to do for herself and her children and felt the details were nobody's business.

In 1921, and at the age of thirty, Ruth found herself at Crater Lake National Park, seeking quiet while recovering from a severe case of ulcers. While at Government Camp she took an interest in the horses used by the engineers and rangers and started riding.

One day while out riding, Alex, whom Ruth described as the most handsome man she ever met, came up to her and introduced himself. Ruth was immediately taken with Alex, as he was with her. Alex, who had been moved around the world from one assignment to the next while in the Army never had the opportunity to become romantically involved. However, when he saw Ruth riding along the rim of the Lake, he had a feeling all that was about to change. Alex and Ruth spent many happy hours riding together around the park and getting to know each other.

While their interest in one another grew, Alex was kept very busy as Congress had just allocated \$627,000 for trails, access roads and, most importantly, a road around the rim. He had the task to make sure the money was spent wisely and that the various jobs were done well. Alex, who was familiar with Peter Britt's photo of Crater Lake, the one that helped make it a National Park, thought what better way to let my bosses know about our progress than with photographs, so he started taking photos.

In the end the government was thrilled with the results. One year after the rim road was completed, visitors to the park increased by 4,000 people, mainly because of the new road system. It took practically a year just to complete the rim road alone. Alex was the first person to drive the entire circle in an old government pick-up truck. At that time, it was a lot windier and much more treacherous than it is presently.

As anyone who has visited Crater Lake knows, the winters can be quite cold, and the snow fall can be very heavy. When the weather conditions prevented work from being accomplished, Alex would visit Ruth and her children in Medford. The two were deeply in love, but Ruth was concerned about two things. One, she and her family were Episcopalian, and she could not marry in the church while her first husband was alive. Secondly, she was worried about thrusting a stepfather on her two girls.

Ruth decided to confront the girls with the possibility of her marrying Alex, and him becoming their stepfather. They were thrilled! It seems they had succumbed to Mr. Sparrow's charms as much as Ruth had. Then out of the blue, Ruth's ex-husband unexpectedly died, clearing the way for a church wedding.

On May 9, 1922, Alex and Ruth were married. The day after they departed on their honeymoon, Alex's buddies down at the Medford Elks Lodge put a notice on the bulletin board; "The Sparrows Have Flown."

In 1923 Alex resigned as superintendent of Crater Lake to try, once again, to retire and spend some time with his new family. That thought lasted almost five years, until he was asked to fill out the term of County Judge Hartzells who had just died. Alex was not a lawyer and being one was not a requirement for the job as a County Judge. The position at the time was more like being the head of the county commissioners is today. When the term was up, he was asked to run for the office in his own right. Alex was so well liked and respected that no one ran against him, not a republican, nor democrat, or anyone. Alex was elected for six more years.

Judge Sparrow used his experience as an engineer to the county's advantage. He was especially involved with the construction of the Jackson County Courthouse at the corner of Main Street and South Oakdale Avenue in Medford. The building was envisioned to be one of the most dignified and impressive buildings in the state. Then on January 20, 1932, while Judge Sparrow was inspecting a new heating system in the basement of the Hirvi Building in Klamath Falls, he stepped backward in the dark plunging into a coal bin and striking his skull. Four days later he died of his injuries. He was just sixty-one years old.

The courthouse that Alex never got to see completed was dedicated on September 1, 1932. The county memorialized Sparrow by designating the new public health wing of the courthouse the Alex Sparrow Memorial Clinic. Sadly, the Sparrow wing, along with other monuments, vanished as new administrations and new needs transformed the public building.

On January 29, 1932, Alex Sparrow was buried in the Masonic Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 358, Plot 5. His funeral procession was reported to have stretched for five miles between Central Point and Jacksonville.

Ruth Sparrow died on May 29, 1956, and is buried next to Alex in Plot 4.

[\(Return\)](#)

John Bennett Wrisley and Eliza Jane Jacobs Wrisley

John was born on August 16, 1819, in Middlebury, Vermont. His father owned and operated a large manufacturing business at Hoosac Falls, New York. As a result of some financial difficulties the family relocated to western New York State in the Genesee Valley.

When John turned thirteen the family moved on to Silver, Michigan. Michigan at the time was a wild and untamed Territory with the families nearest neighbor some eighteen miles away. John learned farming and blacksmithing, both of which would help him in the future. In 1840 he moved west to work in the lead mines of the Territory of Wisconsin.

Eliza Jane Jacobs was born on January 1, 1826, in Fulton County, Illinois. Her ancestors were originally from Preussdorf in Alsace and settled in Maryland in 1753. Eliza Jane's parents moved the family to Wisconsin in 1844. That is where she met and married John Bennett Wrisley on June 15, 1845. Over the years, ten children would be born to them.

In 1848 when Wisconsin voted on a state constitution, John was there and voted for it. John felt strongly about the importance of having the right to vote and doing so.

The following year, 1849, John left his family behind and headed for the gold fields of California by way of the Panama Isthmus. He worked the gold fields at Auburn, in Placer County. He also mined at Yankee Jim's on the north Fork of the American River and on the Trinity River. Unfortunately, John was having health issues and was unable to work his claim, which was reportedly a rich one. In 1850 he returned home to his family in Wisconsin. John who had regrets about having to give up his claim was happy about one thing; he did get to vote for California's state constitution.

John did not remain in Wisconsin long as he missed the free wildlife of the frontier. So, in 1852 he, Eliza Jane and their family packed up and headed west across the plains. They traveled in a covered wagon pulled by oxen with a large band of cattle. They arrived in Yreka, California in the fall of 1852 with just two yokes of oxen and one cow. After spending a few weeks in California, they moved on to Oregon and the Rogue River Valley. They settled on a Donation Land Claim just north of Jacksonville near Table Rock.

During the 1850's trouble began between the Indians and the new settlers to the valley. John, as many of the men did, went off to fight in the Rogue Indian Wars. While the men were off fighting, the women and children would on occasion flee to Fort Wagner, present day Talent, for safety. Eliza Jane was fondly known as the Hostess of the Inn for her kindness and thoughtfulness for others and was loved by all who knew her.

In 1859 John got to cast his vote for Oregon becoming a state. He was very proud of the fact that he was able to vote in three states, Wisconsin, California and Oregon.

In 1865 John and Eliza Jane purchased a fine farm near Central Point. The rich soil provided for some very productive years. John would say that the lush loam of the new Goshen was unlike any soil he worked elsewhere.

Eliza Jane Wrisley died on March 31, 1902, and John Bennett Wrisley died on April 19, 1905. They are buried in the Masonic Section of the Jacksonville Cemetery in Block 305, Plots 7 and 4.

[\(Return\)](#)