THE CLARK FAMILY - 3

THE CLARK MASSACRE

The two brothers, Thomas and James were so pleased with the country that they decided to bring the rest of the family out west. In 1851 Thomas went back, but my father cannot remember whether his father, James, said whether he went back by steamer or across the plains. Mrs. Leah Collins Menefee, an Oregon historian who made voluminous studies of wagon trains in her account “Cutoff Fever” states Thomas Clark went east via the Isthmus. (Pg. 214 “Cutoff Fever” in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Sept. 1977.) Anyway the Clarks sold out all their holdings in Illinois and bought fine stock such as race mares in Kentucky for breeding, fine cattle, pigs, turkeys, chickens, peacocks, etc., and loaded everything but the cattle and horses in wagons drawn by oxen and started west.

Great Grandmother Elizabeth was a very large woman weighing about 250 lbs. and she traveled in a spring wagon, called a hack, that they made a special rocking chair for her that they bolted to the wagon. My Father said that in the 1920-30s Otto Clark, one of Charles Clark’s Grandsons still had that rocking chair. Hodgson, the youngest son, drove the wagon and his sister Grace rode with his Mother. Uncle Thomas drove the thirty-five loose horses after the wagon and the slower oxen followed with the rest of the family followed.

Knowles Clark has written that they came by way of Nebraska, up the North Platte River, through Wyoming into Idaho, down the Snake River into Eastern Oregon where the Snake River flows into the Columbia River. From there they went to Bend, Oregon, then over the Cascade Mountains making their own road through the timber by Twin Sisters, the McKenzie Fork of the Willamette River which brought them to a point near Cottage Grove, Oregon where they settled. (The Clarks are honored by a plaque in Pioneer Park for camping on the future site of Bend during this 1851 trip and being the first non-Indians to ever do so. Leah Menafee, cited above argues persuasively that the party did not come through the Bend area but followed the usual route west along the Columbia River. The meeting with James in Walla Walla, mentioned below, tends to confirm the Columbia River route. The Clarks did, however, come through the future site of Bend in 1853 or 1854. – editor)

In August 1851 the wagon train led by Thomas Clark, and bringing his family and others had reached the Snake River apparently near the Raft River when they were attacked by Indians. The story of this attack is varied so I am going to describe the events as they were told me (and written down) by my Father, who had been told by his Father, James.

On the Snake River in southern Idaho at about its furthest bend south at about camping time, Uncle Thomas (Clark) saw some game about a mile away and went back to shoot it leaving the rest. The ox train was about a mile behind. Before he had gone very far he heard shooting and so hurried back. He found his Mother and Uncle Hodgson dead and Aunt Grace shot through the wrist and stunned from a blow on the head. A band of men dressed as Indians had jumped the party, shot Hodgson as his Mother put her arm around him trying to protect him. They shot her and supposed they had killed Grace, but she was only partially stunned and pretended to be dead. She said they talked American and some of them were blue eyed. What they were after were the fine horses. Subsequently some of these (horses) were seen among the Mormons at Salt Lake, which led to the belief that they (the men) were Mormons. Mormons had tried to buy some of the horses as they had traveled. They may, however, just have been ordinary outlaws who later sold the horses to the Mormons. Uncle Charles and some of the men went after the robbers, but they had fortified themselves well on a rocky peak and they were too many to deal with successfully, so they (the Clarks) buried their dead and went on.

James Clark (my Grandfather) had gone to meet them at Walla Walla riding a very fancy palomino horse, and some trapper in Walla Walla was so taken with the horse that he gave James a big price for it. Knowing that the family were bringing a bunch of fine horses with them, he sold the horse. News coming on ahead of the catastrophe, he was at his wits end to get a horse to meet them and finally went to the commander, Col. Carolton of the military post, who, however had no horses to sell, but gave him an order for a mule to ride. When he took the order to the quartermaster it was signed OK, U. S. Grant, quartermaster. James then rode to meet the family traveling at night.

There is no doubt of the attack, but the details vary upon whom is narrating. One account (see – Oregon Historical Quarterly, Sept. 1977, page 216) says the attack took place on August 6, 1851, that Great Grandmother Clark (Elizabeth Hodgson Clark), her daughter Grace and son Hodgson were shot with both bullets and arrows. The marauders robbed the wagon, mashed the skull of Hodgson, abused the women and threw them over the bank of the river fracturing Grace’s leg. The main part of the wagon train could see what was happening, but were too far away to lend assistance. This account says Great Grandmother died at 7 p.m. that night. Grace eventually recovered. Another version indicated that Great Grandmother lived for several days.

Even the exact location of the attack has several versions. Apparently the train had left Fort Hall, which was apparently a short distance from Pocatello Idaho, and had traveled about forty miles which I am guessing was about three days travel. A couple of accounts say it was at the Raft River, another says Black Rock Creek, and there is a family reference to Rocky Creek. In this same area a map shows Massacre Rocks. Maybe someday I can go there and see what may be found, both on the ground and in the records.

Also on page 216 of the September 1977 issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly is a statement accredited to Tom Clark that he met his brother, James, from California about 30 miles east of the Dalles. James told him that a Mr. N. Olney had some large fat oxen for sale. They bought 8 head for $900 and gave their sister Grace their note to be paid to N. Olney’s brother, Judge Cyrus Olney. When they got through to the Valley, James had money deposited in Portland, and Tom went and got it and looked up Judge Olney. Anyway, they settled in the Rogue River Valley, and somewhere along the line they were all given Donation Land Grants, because Mrs. Menefee has sent maps indicating the location of these Grants in the Cottage Grove area.

The three brothers, Thomas, James, and Charles all served in the Rogue River Indian Wars and Grandfather James came out a corporal.