

THE CASTLE

Since I heard of your project to restore the Castle, I have been remembering incidents and approximate dates in a way I never thought to do before. With the perspective gained by almost 80 years of life, I've come to a new appreciation of my father's and mother's life together. What a working team they must have been-before they left the woods and moved into town.

My grandfather, James A. Flippin and Ben Cornelius were lifelong friends. They came to Oregon together, driving a herd of cattle for Jess Applegate. My grandfather was 19 years old and Ben Cornelius was 21. They wintered the cattle at Wapato Lake. Both picked out what they would like for Donation Land Claims. This was in 1845.

After the cattle were delivered to Applegate at Yoncala, Ben Cornelius stayed on in Oregon and took his claim where the town of Cornelius now stands. My grandfather, being too young, went on to California. He was at Sutter's Mill when gold was discovered and panned gold until he had what seemed to him like a small fortune (a little upwards of \$5000).

He then secured passage on a sailing vessel bound around Cape Horn to New Orleans from where he returned to Tennessee and married the "girl he had left behind." The next year they started for Oregon again with a family party consisting of the parents of both my grandmother and grandfather and three of grandfather's brothers.

They were unfortunate in joining a "cholera train." My grandparents first child and all four of their parents died from cholera, along with many others; and the train broke up. My grandparents and the three brothers made their way back to Independence, Missouri, for the winter. The next spring they

organized their own train and piloted it out here. At Fort Bridger, the brothers split off and went to California. Too late for the gold rush, they became successful orange growers.

By this time several years had passed, but the land chosen by Grandfather was still open to entry, so he filed on it. The location was at Cedar Mill-just over the Washington county line, about six miles from downtown Portland-now a close-in suburb.

James A. Flippin had a built-in curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

He was a great reader and a lifelong student, especially of law. His knowledge of law was highly regarded by Washington County pioneers who often brought their disputes to him instead of going to court. I saw him only twice. He must have recognized a kindred spirit of curiosity in his little grandson, for he left me his books.

My Grandmother Flippin, I never saw. I know that the family name was Patton and there my information ends. My father had four brothers and three sisters that I know of. His youngest brother, Ed Flippin, was City Marshal of Clatskanie for many years. I visited his oldest sister a number of times, the last time when she had reached the age of 86. Another sister I saw only once, and the third sister, not at all.

Will was the only one who had a part in the building of the Castle. During all his life, his main occupation was making hand-hewn shingles, not shakes, but shingles.

Will made the shingles for the roof and siding on the second story of the Castle. The roof has been replaced but the siding is still there. I have never looked at the Castle without thinking of the enormous amount of labor, and the artistry, that went into that shingle siding. I doubt if such an example of the craft still exists on any other building in this western country.

Tom Flippin walked from Cedar Mill to Marshland when he was 17 years old. He got a job as "Skid Greaser" on a "Bull Team" logging operation. This was "Low Man on the Totem Pole" in an old-time logging camp.

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Hours were long, a working week was six days, and the pay \$1 per day.

He could have worked for my grandfather Elliott, Henry Colvin or Westport Logging Co. They were so close together that meeting the Elliott girls would have been a normal event. I suspect the Westport Lumber Co. employed him because somewhere he learned a lot about the operation of a sawmill.

In this Bicentennial year, it may be appropriate to mention some of pioneering history of the Flippin family.

The first one was among the very earliest settlers in Virginia. I have been told (on what should be good authority) that he was living there before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, in 1620. Many of his direct descendants still live in Virginia, but there were always a few who pushed on new frontiers.

My great grand-father and three of his brothers were friends of Daniel Boone and followed him into Kentucky and Tennessee. Three of them founded towns- two of which have apparently faded away. One of the brothers crossed the Mississippi River and founded the town of Flippin, Arkansas-which is now a flourishing small city.

Pioneering was never easy and seldom profitable. Any progress the earliest pioneers made was very slow, and the price was hardship. The second generation was close to this and many of them had a driving ambition to get away from the rigors of pioneering living as fast as possible. My father was a shining example of this spirit.

To others, pioneer life was a challenge. Learning and practicing the skills and arts of comfortable living under pioneering conditions was meat and drink to them. My mother was of this type. Like my father, she had a great physical strength and endurance- and an amazing variety of skills she loved to use.

Looking back on it now, I believe that here was the underlying motive for building the Castle and the reason for the separation of my father and mother such a short time later.

The Flippin brothers and sisters born at Cedar Mill were: Jim, Will, Wood, Tom, Ed, Lizzie, Nannie, and Leila.

When my mother Florence Elliott, became old enough to take a timber claim, they were married and each took a 160-acre (adjoining)

claim- about 5 miles from Clatskanie.

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My father was then 23 years old. In the six years he had then been in the Clatskanie area, he had saved up \$750. With about half this, he bought 200 acres more timber. This stretched their land across Roaring Creek where someone had built a mill-dam and the frame for a sawmill, than abandoned the enterprise.

J.C. Ainsworth, in Portland, was interested in the shipping business and looking for cargo. He backed my father for machinery and equipment to make the dam and mill frame a going concern. This was the beginning of the West Oregon Lumber Co.

Both my parents were from large families. They took a large family for granted. By the time I was born, six years after they were married, they had about given up the idea. When my sister was born, 14 months later, their hopes were revived. Then came the question of education.

They agreed that by the time I was old enough to start school, they would have a house close to the school in Clatskanie. Dad bought the property adjoining the school yard, where the Castle now stands- and began cutting lumber for a house and barn. The barn has been moved toward the street and remodeled for a residence.

My father regarded the sawyer as the "keyman" in a mill and did all his own sawing. When a choice log came through the mill, he would cut out a little lumber for the house and barn. Every bit of lumber in the Castle is his handiwork and his choice.

The same is true of the house next door that once was a barn.

While the Castle was being built, he sold the West Oregon Lumber Co. to E. D. Kingsley. We moved from the sawmill cookhouse into the Castle in late spring of 1900. The kitchen was in process of being painted and the carpenters were still working on the door and window trim in the first floor bedroom. It was being made by hand, on a long workbench, with a variety of hand planes, cabinet scrapers and sandpaper.

Here was a paradise for two little kids. The room became our headquarters. The floor was littered knee deep with yellow fir shavings that were so curly, so adaptable; that smelled so good and felt so good after playing so long in sawdust and bark chiggers.

When the carpenters were through and started to clean up the

shavings, there was a big howl from the kids. Mother told us to take all the shavings up to our playrooms in the second story of the round towers. We were generous to ourselves and never did give up our shavings as long as we lived there.

From my father's viewpoint, progressing from a skidgreaser on a bull-team skidroad at the age of 17 to a home like this (with a backlog of money to support it) at about the age of 35, was a tremendous accomplishment. He was proud of it.

From my mother's viewpoint, the house represented more than she had bargained for and a way of life she didn't care for. Here was no opportunity to use her many skills as a pioneer woman. Keeping a town house and entertaining was pretty tame business. She left all the housework she could to hired help and spent most of her time landscaping the yard.

She was the fourth of twelve children born to William Watson Elliott and Eliza Jane Bryant who married Jan. 18, 1865 on the north beach of the Columbia River near Oak Point, Washington Territory; three of them died in childhood.

Those who survived to adulthood were known around Clatskanie as Oscar, Edgar, Frank, Florence (my mother), Electa, Daisy, Jenny, Mark and Malcolm. Mark was the only one who lived beyond 1949. He died March 17, 1976, at the age of 92.

William Watson Elliott was born in Portage County, Iowa in 1839. He arrived in Oregon in January, 1859, with a sister, Mrs. Oliver Clay. Their route was down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, thence by ship to the Isthmus of Panama, across the Isthmus and again by ship to the Columbia River. The Oliver Clay family lived in Portland. Clay Street was named after them.

Grandmother Elliott was born in Davis County, Iowa in 1846. She was the oldest daughter of Z.S. Bryant. They came overland to Oregon. Oscar Elliott once showed me where their home was located about halfway between Clatskanie and Marshland.

Grandpa Elliott started as a bullwhacker for Captain John West at Westport. Shortly thereafter, he took up his Donation Land Claim.

The east boundary of the lowland was the road past the house which now you own as well as the Castle. This the fourth house on the place. The west boundary was just beyond the area of the big slide.

The first house was a log cabin, located just west of the old schoolhouse - put there to take advantage of a fine spring at the foot of the hill. The spring is now under pavement of the old Columbia River Highway. The daffodils that for so long were a spring feature of the hayfield here spread from bulbs planted by Grandma Elliott around her front door.

The second house was also a log cabin located almost a mile west. It was surrounded by a fine orchard, most of which was covered by the slide.

The third house, as a farm house, was almost on a par with the Castle as a town house. It was also in the slide area, but burned down while it was still very new. One of the boys threw a firecracker on the roof when we were having a big family gathering and Fourth of July celebration. The summer wind did the rest.

The house you now own was built in the same location but after the slide knocked down and covered the big barn and took the woodshed and storage wing off the house, it was moved to its present place- almost a mile.

If I could live another eighty years, I would never see anything like the Elliott household. Here was the freest and easiest, the most tranquil harmonious home I ever visited. From as far back as memory goes, up to where I left home to enter college in the fall of 1912, I visited often.

At work, the men were loggers and farmers. Their recreation was hunting. Guns were considered household tools. Each man had at least three. Hunting dogs were as numerous as horses and cattle.

The women kept house, gardened harvested, and preserved the food crops. Their recreation was the Saturday night dance or "social" with occasional neighborhood parties in between.

Dairy stock and working stock were cared for twice a day, and the barn cleaned. Seasonal farm jobs were done strictly in season. Other than these things, there was no routine.

If Grandpa wanted to log, they all worked in the woods. If the dogs started to run, they put the bull team in the barn and those that wanted to, went hunting.

My mother learned the household arts essential to a pioneer way of living. In addition to that, she liked the outdoor activities. She spent a great deal of time with her brothers. It was here that she became expert with rifles and handguns, and with the care of the axes and saws used in falling and bucking the big trees.

Years later, an old man stopped me on the street in St. Helens and asked me, "Are you the little white-haired boy that used to live in the cookhouse for the West Oregon Lumber Mill back of Clatskanie?"

I told him, "Yes."

"I've worked in the woods as a bucker and faller all my life," he said. "I remember your mother well. In the afternoon she would put you down in the sawdust pile for your afternoon naps, and relieve the fireman while he cleaned up under the mill. Then she would go up to the filing room and work on our saws. I would rather work with saws filed and set by your mother than any professional filer I ever knew."

Then we had "old home week" for a while and he passed on, But I've never forgotten his tribute to my mother. No higher praise could come from an old-time logger.

She had a serene confidence in her ability to handle anything that confronted her. I've seen her in a number of very dangerous situations, but I never saw her scared. She met danger with caution, but not fear.

Shortly before we moved to the Castle, Grandpa Flippin came on his last visit to the mill. He had walked from Cedar Mill by way of Will's place in the upper Nehalem Valley. During this visit an incident happened which showed how two members of the family met an emergency.

The cookhouse was a long rectangular building divided by a full-length partition approximately down the middle. At one end of the front half was a large porch-closed in on three sides, but open towards a big woodshed a few feet away. The woodshed was kept well-supplied with thick slabs of bark from the old-growth fir trees. This is our fuel - and a better fuel for cook stoves would be hard to imagine.

On the porch was a large box for the bark after it was reduced to stove -wood size. Next to that was a smaller box full of fir heartwood, together with an axe and chopping block to make it into kingling for starting the fires.

In one corner was a big wooden water barrel, supplied by a hydraulic ram located by the creek down in the canyon. The lift was so high that each working cycle of the ram put only a little squirt of water into the barrel.

Near to the porch was the kitchen, then the long dining room, then a living room, we called "parlor" (with tongue in cheek). In the kitchen a ladder led up one wall to a trap door in the ceiling that could be opened for ventilation when the kitchen was hot. Dad had taken off the doors between the dining room and the other two rooms so I could have a target range for my air rifle the full range of the house. This made the front half virtually open from the kitchen to the parlor.

In ordinary times, the hydraulic ram banging away down the canyon every few seconds, all day, and night, kept the barrel full and a little surplus. On wash days, it was different. Then the use of water got really low.

On this particular washday, Grandpa Flippin was sitting in the parlor reading a book. The job in the kitchen was almost done. The range was going full blast, boiling the last of "white" wash, when Mother looked up through the roof-jack.

She yelled to Grandpa that the roof was on fire and dashed for the porch. There was just enough water in the barrel that she could get a quick fill of a 10-lb lard bucket. On the way back to the kitchen, she grabbed the axe from the kingling box and tossed it up through the trapdoor. She followed it by way of the ladder with her little bucket of water and closed the trapdoor to stop the strong draft coming up from below.

With the axe she chopped out the burning section of the roof and got it down on the attic floor. Now she had several little fires instead of the large one. She sprinkled these out by dipping her fingers into the water and sprinkling them as she would clothes before ironing. Hot coals she stomped out with her feet.

Thomas & Florence
Flippin, circa 1900



After she had come down for a another bucket of water, and gone back to be sure the job was finished, she came into the parlor. She was covered with ashes and cinders, her hair was singed, holes were burned in her clothes and her shoes were ruined, but she wasn't hurt.

Grandpa was still sitting in the same chair and still reading. He closed the book on his finger to mark his place, then asked my mother, "Well, Flo, is the fire out?"

She said, "Yes."

"How did you do it?"

After she had given him a blow-by blow account, he said, "That was good. I've always thought what a fine thing it is to have a resourceful woman in the house," and went back to his reading.

I have reached an age and condition, where I can credit Grandpa Flippin with good judgement. When you get so old you no longer have the strength to help in a fast-moving situation, the best thing you can do is stay out of the way. I sincerely wish you a long and happy stay in the Castle.

T.J. Flippin Jr.

May 1, 1976