



Map of the Lafayette Area

Composed by Fr Martinus Cawley of the Trappist Abbey.

To Carlton

To Newberg

TRAPPIST ABBEY: Monks of the famous Cistercian Order (founded 1098). Their own group began in New Mexico (1947-48) as an offshoot of a monastery in Rhode Island. They moved here in 1953-55.

RED HILLS OF DUNDEE: This ancient flow of basalt covers some 12 sq. mi. & crests some 900 ft. above Lafayette. Today it is the heart of Oregon Wine Country.

LAFAYETTE: City Limits (roughly): Yamhill River on the South, Millican Creek on the W, Henry Creek & Duniway Rd. on the East and 16th St on the North.

OAK SPRINGS FARM: Author's family home, on a picturesque stretch of old Indian Trail from Wapato Lake to Lafayette Ford. Later extended to Portland, via Hillsboro & a northerly pass thru Portland's West Hills.

Hawn Creek

MASONIC CEMETERY

STEEL TRESTLE across Millican Creek, one of several historic bridges - road & rail, toll & free - serving Lafayette.

PIONEER CEMETER

Henry Creek

To Portland

47

99W

99W

St. JOSEPH: Lafayette was bypassed by the Railroad in 1870 (our p. 7) because the company building it was racing to reach California before its rival, so as to win Federal funding. At this point a bridge was needed, which it could not afford. Instead, McMinnville raised cash to divert the line its way. The route of 1870 was closed about 1980, but this short parking spur survives.

Yamhill River

18

RIFLES: Mini-rafts, used by Indians and settlers for fording the Yamhill River on their key North-South trail. As it blocked navigation during low water, it made Lafayette the head of year-round navigation and main crossroads for Westside transport.

233

To Salem

DAYTON: Lafayette's younger sister, as a town, founded by Joel Palmer, great friend of the Oregon Indians. Its park boasts a blockhouse from the Reservation at Grand Ronde. Dayton was an important river port.

To McMinnville

arose to the effect that, on the day Marple was hanged, his mother, a descendant of Gypsies, wove her way through the crowd and announced that if he was hanged she would put a curse of disaster on the town. No one paid heed to her and Mr. Marple was duly hanged. But, in the purple dusk of evening, before his body was cut down, the old Romany mother got down on her hands and knees and cursed the town, saying: "... Three fires will visit this town and the last will destroy it."²⁶ Perhaps the old woman did know her trade, for on the morning of July 2nd, 1904, the *Morning Oregonian* of Portland, was to carry the headline: "LaFayette swept by fire". This fire wiped out the entire business district of the town with the exception of one brick building, putting an end to LaFayette's commercial power and prestige.

In the early years of the West it was often impossible to properly punish the guilty. For instance, at one of the early trials held in LaFayette a man was tried found guilty and sentenced to three years of **imprisonment** for an infamous crime. Due to the lack of either a county jail or a state penitentiary, the care of the prisoner was passed on to the sheriff, to be kept until the proper provisions could be made for his imprisonment. In case the commissioners did not act, the sheriff had instructions to allow the prisoner to escape. This course was followed and the guilty man disappeared. This course of justice was common in the early days, when lack of the machinery of the Law made it impossible to properly punish crime.²⁷

LATER GLORIES AND LONG DECLINE

YAMHILL COUNTY is a fertile land, well suited for farming.²⁸ It was inevitable, then, that the County should take a lead in organized agriculture. The Minutes of a meeting held on October 5th, 1853, at the LaFayette Courthouse reveal that a **County Fair** had been planned for the following October. This fair was duly held on October 7, 1854, at LaFayette itself, and was the first such fair held in Oregon.²⁹

LaFayette was **incorporated as a town** on October 17th, 1878, and the first meeting of the city officials was held at the Courthouse later the

²⁶ Article. *Portland Morning Oregonian*, November 19, 1933. Section 4, p. 2. Columns 7-8.

²⁷ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

²⁸ Yamhill County Federation of Community Clubs. *loc. cit.*

²⁹ George W. James. "History of Organization of Oregon Agricultural Society". *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Salem vol. VIII (1907), p. 317.

divided into three judicial districts, and judges were assigned for the Supreme Court. Yamhill County was the center of the Second District, and to it was assigned the Honorable Orvill C. Pratt.²¹

A courthouse was built in LaFayette in 1851. The original wooden structure was destroyed by fire in January 1857, and was replaced in 1858 by a two-story brick building. This edifice was public pride for years, being **the first brick court house to be erected in Oregon**. A few years later a brick jail building was also erected.²²

THREE "NECKTIE PARTIES"

DURING THE TIME that LaFayette was the county seat, three men were convicted of murder and sentenced to hang. The first convicted murderer was a man by the name of Griff, who without provocation or warning shot a Mr. Shane in one of the popular merchandise stores of LaFayette.²³ This occurred sometime during the year of 1863. Griff's sentence was carried out at a public hanging.

The second doomed man, a Mr. Smith, was convicted of murdering a neighbor woman, but he beat the sentence by taking poison, which he had concealed in the lapel of his coat.²⁴

The third and most notorious of the murderers was Gus Marple. His victim was a prominent businessman of LaFayette, D. I. Corker. Mr. Corker was a bachelor and lived in a back room of his store. Marple entered the building through a rear window and killed Mr. Corker while he slept. Marple was not immediately suspected, for at his victim's funeral he went around with a band of crepe on his arm, offering his assistance to find the murderer. Tracks were discovered, which led from the window of the murdered man's store to Marple's residence and he was arrested on suspicion. A trial was held, at which Marple was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang. The authorities ordered that this hanging be a private affair, so the scaffold was surrounded by a high board wall. The curious, however, were not thwarted. Every crack, and knot hole held the attention of several spectators.²⁵ This man was the last person hanged in Yamhill County.

This was not the end of the little drama. Later on, an **urban legend**

²¹ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Mr. Hembree, although a very small boy at the time, had possession of one of the knot holes

the distributing point for Yamhill County.¹²

In 1851 the official LaFayette Post Office was established, with Hardin D. Martin filling the office of postmaster. For some time this would be Yamhill County's only post office.¹³ With the establishment of the Post Office, weekly mail routes were begun between Portland, Hillsboro and LaFayette.¹⁴ However, daily mail service arrived for LaFayette only in 1870 (July 1st). It was carried by the West Side Stage Company, with a four-horse stagecoach coming from Portland.¹⁵ This was one of several stage lines operated between the main towns of the Pacific Northwest in late spring and summer, as weather permitted.¹⁶

Already in 1855 LaFayette had been brought into closer contact with its neighboring towns by the establishment of telegraph service between Corvallis, LaFayette, Oregon City, and Portland. This company was known as the Alta California Telegraph Company.¹⁷

LAFAYETTE AND POLITICS

LAFAYETTE took an early lead in political affairs and was the first seat of Yamhill County. The first term of Circuit Court held under the Provisional Government in Oregon was convened here in 1846, with Judge A. A. Skinner presiding.¹⁸ Judge Skinner had instructed the sheriff, John G. Baker to secure a room in which to hold court, but no large ones were available and the court convened under an old oak tree near the edge of the town.¹⁹ The first session of a United States Court on the Pacific Coast was held in LaFayette, on September 15th, 1849.²⁰

President Polk appointed General Joseph Lane of Indiana to be Governor of the Oregon Territory. He had arrived in Oregon on March 2nd of that year, and the following day he had announced that the Territory of Oregon was duly organized. On May 15th, the territory was

¹² Hembree, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ MacArthur, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵ Lewis A. MacArthur, *Oregon Geographic Names*. (Portland, 1944), p. 299.

¹⁶ Leslie M. Scott, "The Pioneer Stimulus of Gold", *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Portland, XVIII (1917), p. 147.

¹⁷ William D. Fenton, "Political History of Oregon", *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Salem, vol. III (1902), p. 44.

¹⁸ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ This tree was known as the Council Oak. The Oregon Supreme Court now uses a gavel made from the roots of that tree.

²⁰ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

same year.³⁰ In 1886 the town had a population of six hundred people, and the following business houses were in operation:³¹

three hardware & tin stores.	one jewelry store.	one furniture store, and
two livery stables,	two butcher shops.	one Chinese laundry. Also:
two blacksmith shops	two real-estate offices.	one church building.
two hotels.	two doctor's offices.	one public hall, and
two millinery stores.	one printing office.	three lodge halls. (31)
one saloon.	one barber shop.	
one harness shop.	one flour mill.	

By the late Seventies, however, Fortune was ceasing to smile on LaFayette. The railroad was fast becoming the main means of transportation and communication. When plans were drawn up for the main rail routes in Oregon, LaFayette was left out. This prompted members of the community to combine their efforts with those of other towns likewise neglected in the plans of the railroad companies. After much effort they secured support and financial assistance from a Scotsman, Lord Airlie. With his and other Scottish aid, a narrow-gauge railroad system was launched. It was completed through LaFayette on September 16, 1881.³²

By 1889, however, LaFayette was no longer able to compete with the thriving town of McMinnville, which now won a contest to replace it as county seat.³³ The County Officials thereupon donated LaFayette's Courthouse to the Evangelical Church, to serve as a Seminary under the Educational Activities Department of its Oregon Conference.³⁴

LAFAYETTE SEMINARY-COLLEGE

THE COURTHOUSE was remodeled and the dedication services were held September 10, 1889.³⁵ A regular collegiate course was offered and degrees were awarded.³⁶ The doors were open to men and

³⁰ Hembree, *loc. cit.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Leslie M. Scott, "The Narrow-Gauge Railroad" *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XX, 149.

³³ MacArthur, *op cit.*, Vol. XXVII, p. 313.

³⁴ The Oregonian, *loc. cit.*

³⁵ H. Earl Pemberton, *Dead Colleges of Oregon*, (Salem, 1928), p. 76.

³⁶ Pemberton, *loc. cit.*

women alike. The discipline was very strict, and many unruly young men were sent there by their parents, just to have them subjected to a discipline they were unwilling to enforce at home.³⁷ Yet the existence of the Seminary was marked by another kind of turbulence, due to internal strife within the Church.³⁸

In 1900 the Church decided it would be more prestigious to have one large school of higher education, rather than the several existing smaller ones. Thus, in June, 1900, the LaFayette Seminary closed its doors in favor of La Creole Academy at Dallas in neighboring Polk County.³⁹ By September the combined college at Dallas was in full session.⁴⁰ Yet, although Lafayette's Seminary was short-lived, many who were educated there went on to become prominent Oregon citizens.

CONCLUSION

AT THE TIME OF WRITING (1946), LaFayette was a sleepy little town, reminding one of an old pioneer, who sits in the twilight of evening, facing the west and dreaming of bygone years.⁴¹ Nevertheless, in the course of its eventful career as a shire town of the West, its contribution to justice had earned it the title: the "Athens of Oregon".⁴²

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³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Yamhill county Federation of Community Clubs. *loc. cit.*

⁴² *The Oregonian*. *op. cit.* p. 260.

activities. Men came from all over the Willamette Valley to exchange merchandise. By 1852 more than thirty stores were in operation. A flouring mill was erected, which had the capacity of seventy-five barrels a day.⁸ This mill supplied all of the neighboring districts. Like other towns of the early West, the main street was bustling with traders. Indians and trappers might lounge beside the buildings, but busy settlers would hurry in and out of the stores with little time to visit.

TRANSPORT AND MAIL SERVICE

IN THE EARLY DAYS of the West, communication and travel were extremely difficult. Rivers were almost the only means of transport. In 1850 a flatboat began to run between Oregon City on the Willamette River and LaFayette on the Yamhill River.⁹ It took the flatboat three days to make a round trip. The boat did quite a business, hauling in supplies for the stores, and shipping out the produce of the farmers. However, not all the settlers had access to the river, and so much time was given to building and improving roads.

In 1851 a drive was made in the vicinity to finance a bridge across the Yamhill River at LaFayette. The money was duly raised and the bridge constructed.¹⁰ This was a toll bridge and it was operated until the early months of 1855, when it was swept away by high water. A toll ferry was then operated until the county built a free bridge across the river.¹¹

The first mail carried by the authority of the United States in Oregon was in the closing months of 1847. Prior to this time mail was carried by private persons acting independently of any government authority. These people chose their own rates, but the usual charge for carrying a letter to California was fifty cents. The volunteer mailmen would start from Oregon City, and circle the entire Willamette Valley. If they had time they delivered the mail from house to house, otherwise they would leave it at some accepted central point.

The first central point in Yamhill County was at the A. J. Hembree farm, four miles northwest of LaFayette. In 1847 Congress established six mail routes in the Willamette Valley, and LaFayette was chosen as

⁸ *The Oregonian*. *The Oregonian's Handbook of the Pacific Northwest*. (Portland, 1894) pp. 252-253.

⁹ Carey. *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 729.

¹⁰ *The Oregonian*, *loc. cit.*

¹¹ Hembree. *loc. cit.*

THE BEGINNINGS

IN 1843, the first large immigration of white people came to Oregon. A large number of these plucky pioneers settled in what is now known as the Willamette Valley.

The life of the pioneers was not easy. The conveniences of civilization had been left behind, and the methods of travel were slow and tiring, while communication was almost at a standstill. The perils of the new country were increased by the hostile Indian bands which still roamed the forests.

These courageous settlers helped the United States gain permanent possession of a large section of the Oregon Country.

FOUNDING OF LAFAYETTE

IN 1846 the town of LaFayette, Oregon, was founded by Joel Perkins, a member of the immigration of 1843.¹ Without hesitation he named the new settlement after his hometown of LaFayette, Indiana.²

The location of LaFayette was picturesque. The town was nestled in a bend of the sleepy Yamhill River, in the center of what is now known as Yamhill County.³

The section to comprise the town was laid off in 1847. This section was officially surveyed in 1848, and by 1849 it was a thriving community.⁴ The residential district was on a gentle slope with the business district spreading out before it.⁵ The houses showed a marked southern influence, indicating what part of the United States many settlers were from.⁶

In 1847 Joel Perkins built the first hotel in LaFayette, and about the same time, Hardin Martin and Captain A. J. Hembree set up the first store.⁷

In the early years of its existence LaFayette was the center of all

¹ Lewis A MacArthur, "Oregon Geographic Names." *The Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VIII (1907), p. 317.

² Charles H. Carey, *A General History of Oregon, Prior to 1861*. (Portland, 1936) Vol. II, p. 666.

³ A. J. Dufer, *Statistics of Oregon* (Salem, 1869), p. 63.

⁴ Carey, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Yamhill County Federation, *Yamhill County, Oregon*. (Portland, 1922), p. 24.

⁶ Carey, *loc. cit.*

⁷ George Hembree. Personal interview, (McMinnville, February 24, 1946).

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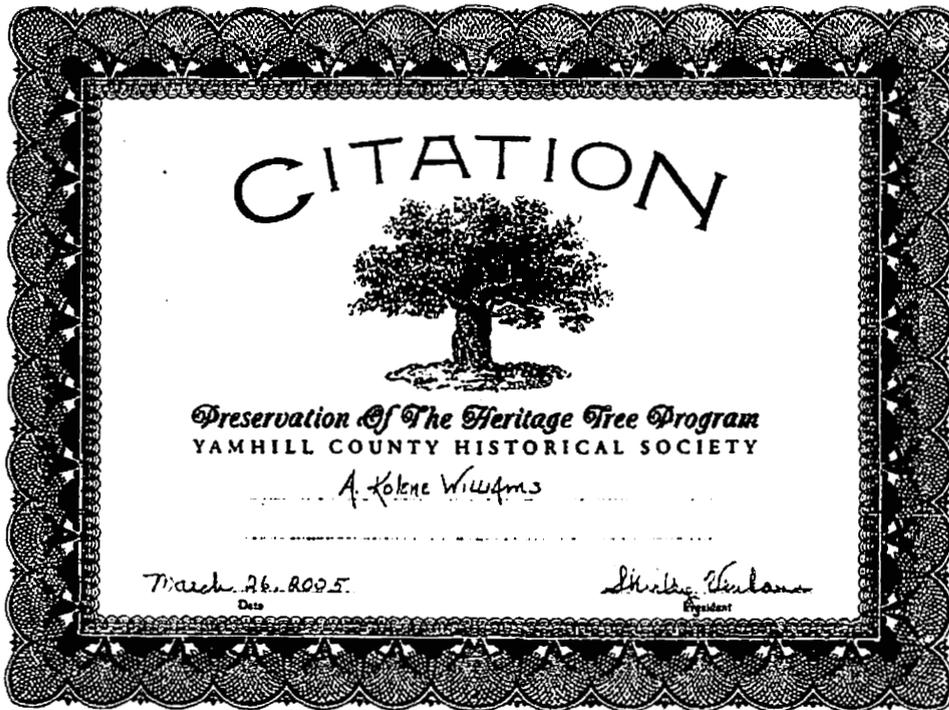
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EARLY HISTORY of LAFAYETTE, OREGON

Kolene Williams

University of Oregon, English Composition
March 6, 1946



-The Cary Oak-
Yamhill County Heritage Tree



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About the Author:

Kolene Williams, the daughter of Raymond and Alice Williams, and sister of Hugh Ed, attended school (Grades 1-12) in the building now known as the Schoolhouse Antique Mall. It was there that she and her friends started a little newspaper, to which they gave the title we are using for the current series: *LaFayette, We're Here*.

She went on to the University of Oregon, where she earned a Bachelor of Science Degree with a major in Nursing Education. In 1951 she was commissioned an Ensign in the Navy Nurse Corps. She retired as Captain in 1979, and returned to the family farm, where she had been born: Oak Springs Century Farm, near LaFayette. There she has continued in the tradition of the family by being involved in the care and preservation of LaFayette's two Pioneer Cemeteries.

Kolene is descended from two Pioneers of Yamhill County: Miles Cary and Eli Perkins; and also from two of Polk County: James Williams and E.C. Rose; and from two of Tillamook County: Elbridge Trask and Warren Vaughn.

One outstanding personal informant for this essay of 1946 was her relative, George Hembree (1878-1947). Like herself, George was descended from Eli Perkins, father of LaFayette's founder, Joel Perkins. He told Kolene of his witnessing the hanging of Gus Marple, but he made no mention of the so-called "Gypsy curse" — a detail no small boy would be likely to forget: hence her suggestion (p. 5-6) that the "curse" was just a later urban legend.

The Oak Tree on our Cover
stands beside Abbey Road,
close to Kolene's Oak Springs Century Farm
it was traced from a photo by Fr Timothy Michell
of the Trappist Abbey.

The Joseph John Cary Farm

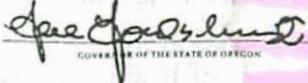
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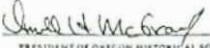
1875

WITH THE AWARD OF THIS CERTIFICATE
IS DULY ENROLLED
BY THE
OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AS A

 CENTURY FARM 

IN RECOGNITION OF
100 YEARS ENDURING SERVICE
IN THE FINEST AGRICULTURAL TRADITIONS
OF THE
STATE OF OREGON


GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF OREGON


PRESIDENT OF OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY




DIRECTOR OF OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Lafayette, We're Here!

Lafayette, nous voici! -- General Pershing, 4th of July, 1917

The Lafayette Pioneer Cemetery Association was established in 2005. Anyone who has a family member buried in this cemetery on Duniway Road is automatically a member. Anyone who is interested in the cemetery is also welcome.

The Association sends out a Newsletter several times a year. Anyone interested in the Newsletter may be added to the mailing list by contacting the Yamhill County Historical Society (YCHS).

The YCHS is the legal owner of the Pioneer Cemetery. The Association and its members are the people responsible for its ongoing maintenance, repair of headstones, and care of related historical documents. Any questions may be referred to the YCHS, to be forwarded to the Cemetery Association. automatically members of the Association. For its newsletter, contact Mrs Clark.

<http://www.angelfire.com/or2/lafayetteoregon/lafayettepioneer cemetery.htm>

A pamphlet series in which old-timers of Lafayette welcome newcomers by sharing with them the town's rich heritage.

For future issues, we invite more old-timers to share their memories. We also invite budding young journalists to contact the Managing Editor for introductions to resource persons whom they could interview for an article. Topics could include local landmarks, local businesses, institutions & services, as well as accounts of the town's long-established families.

The pamphlets are printed gratis at the Trappist Abbey and distributed free by courtesy of businesses around town. Boxes are provided for readers who wish to donate a coin to help the upkeep of the Lafayette Pioneer Cemetery.

For more information, contact Managing Editor, Debbie Clark, who is President of Lafayette's Pioneer Cemetery Association.

503-434-2829 Lpca@hotmail.com

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Lafayette, We're Here!

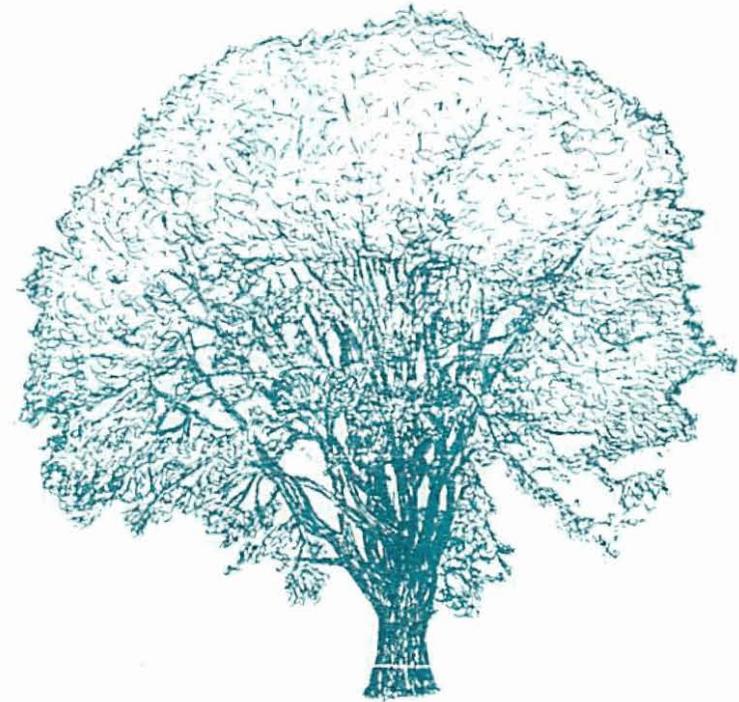
☪☪☪☪☪

Lafayette's Old-timers welcome its Newcomers
by sharing its Heritage.

☪☪☪☪☪

EARLY HISTORY of LAFAYETTE, OREGON

by
Kolene Williams



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