

## **Bowman didn't want to give up Emigrant Springs**

### ***Site is now popular state park***

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Oliver Purl Bowman (1862-1939); builder and owner of the Bowman Hotel in Pendleton, once owned Emigrant Springs.

Bowman and his wife, Laura Evelina Stickler Bowman (1868-1930), acquired Emigrant Springs in the early 1900s.

Bowman came by wagon train, as a six-week-old infant, with his parents Lydia and John Bowman, leaving Winterset, Iowa, and arriving at Emigrant Springs in the fall of 1862.

Bowman purchased the property as part of a 4,000 acre tract and used the property for grazing sheep and cattle in the early 1900s. The Bowman family drove their livestock to Emigrant Springs every summer from the home ranch on Tutuilla Creek and camped at the springs. They had a one-room cabin with a tent pitched in back for living quarters.

Travelers going east pass Emigrant Springs 30 miles from Pendleton. Those who stop at Emigrant Springs State Park will find an Oregon State Highway marker with a brief history of Emigrant Springs.

On July 3, 1923, some 30,000 people came by wagon, buggy, car and horseback to hear President Warren G. Harding. It was a glorious day for Eastern Oregonians, but not so for O.P. Bowman who was saddened by the prospect of losing his old livestock watering place and the beautiful yellow pine forests surrounding natural mountain springs. He was fighting a losing battle to keep the land and reportedly said, "I would have given them land anywhere else in the area."

The park was originally part of some 320 acres adjoining a larger tract of land Bowman had purchased in the early 1920s.

The fact that Emigrant Springs almost didn't become a state park can be discerned from the historical documents on file in the Umatilla County Recorder's office. In order to obtain the park, Umatilla County had to proceed under the right of eminent domain, and by a condemnation action. The first action to secure the park land was a complaint filed Aug. 2, 1924, asking defendants to appear and defend their rights. Judge I.M. Schannep was acting judge of Umatilla County at the time.

The original tract was 14.1 acres with defendants to receive a sum of \$700; pasture land was valued at \$6 per acre. The defendants refused to accept the sum and declined to negotiate upon “any reasonable or fair basis of compensation with plaintiff,” according to Bowman’s attorney, Colonel James H. Raley. Later Bowman placed a value of \$7,000 on the property. His refusal to negotiate was based upon sentiment rather than the monetary value placed on the property, for he had planned to construct a summer home there for his family.

But the Emigrant Springs area had water rights without which the whole body of land made the complete property valueless, Bowman said.

County officials thought the large amount of traffic on the Oregon Trail created a public need and demand for a park where travelers could have accommodations for camping and other recreation.

A trial opened Oct. 9, 1924, and a 12-man jury returned the verdict Oct. 11, holding that said property of defendants should be appropriated by the County of Umatilla for the use and purposes declared in the complaint at the sum of \$2,500. The county was to construct a line fence and maintain it in good repair free from any cost or charge to the defendants. The county also had to provide water in a trough for livestock at the described location of spring water.

In 1925, the County deeded the property to the State of Oregon. A lodge of hewn logs for use as a lounge and rest station was built. There were then no overnight campgrounds. The lodge later burned and was never replaced.

Today there is a large community building on the grounds, cabins, and camping and play areas. A community building was constructed by Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and is still available for rental for a fee.

In 1844, according to historical records, the route of the Oregon migration was in large part diverted to approximately the present roadway from Emigrant Springs to Pendleton.

When the Oregon Legislature appropriated funds for building Highway 30 (now Interstate 84), it’s a coincidence that a son of Harriet Stickler Bowman Ingram was an engineer on the project.

Some of the Bowman descendants still own their grandparents’ original mountain property near Emigrant Springs.

**Author’s note:** this essay is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Harriet Mildred Bowman Crow and members of the Bowman/Stickler families and their descendants.