

Emigrant Springs

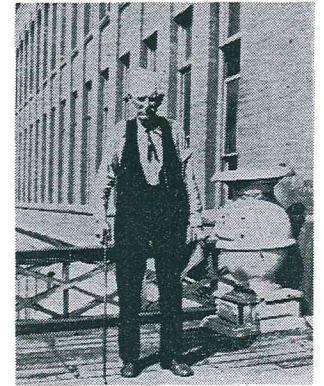
An Oregon Trail Campsite

by Dorys Crow Grover

History, legend, and myth surround many of the stories about the West and the experiences of the pioneers who traveled to Oregon. One historical story which many people may not know is about Oliver Purl Bowman (1862-1939), who was the builder and owner of the Bowman Hotel in Pendleton, Oregon. Bowman once owned Emigrant Springs in the Blue Mountains, the campsite of the pioneers who came West in 1843 and later. Emigrant Springs, along the Old Oregon Trail, was acquired by Bowman and his wife, Laura Evalina (Eva) Stickler Bowman (1868-1930), in the early 1900s. They were married in 1891.

O. P. Bowman came, as a six-weeks-old infant, with his parents Lydia and John Bowman by wagon train leaving Winterset, Iowa, and arriving at Emigrant Springs, where they camped overnight, in the fall of 1862. Henry Bowman, a brother of John, had already settled on Birch Creek in 1859, in the vicinity of the former Ganger ranch near Pilot Rock. There were five sons and one

daughter in the John Bowman family: Purl, Bertha Bowman Turner, Frank, George, and two sons who died as infants. All are deceased.



John Bowman (1837-1932)

Evalina Stickler Bowman was the daughter of Samantha and Emanuel Stickler of Osceola, Iowa, and came across the Plains in the summer of 1884, at the age of sixteen. She and her older sister Harriet (Hattie) walked most of the way, as did Harriet's future husband, Joe Ingram, who was also a member of the wagon train. Two other daughters were Cora and Annetta, and a son Edgar. The family also camped at the Springs in the fall of 1884. All of these

pioneers are deceased, but many of their descendants reside in Umatilla County. Ted Stickler, 93, son of Fred Stickler, who was a brother of Emanuel, lives with his wife Mabel at Mission, Oregon. The one surviving daughter of Eva and Purl Bowman is Leona Bowman Moser (1898-) who lives in Pendleton.



Harriet Stickler Ingram, Joe Ingram and Eva Stickler Bowman, 1890

Historically, Emigrant Springs became a state park, but not until a furious court battle settled the matter. O.P. Bowman had purchased the property as part of a 4,000 acre tract and used the property for grazing his sheep and cattle in the early 1900s. The Bowman family went by wagon and horseback, driving the livestock, to Emigrant Springs every summer from the home ranch on Tutuilla Creek south of Pendleton, known as the Cheney Place. The family camped at the Springs, where they had a one-room cabin with a tent pitched in back for living quarters. In her

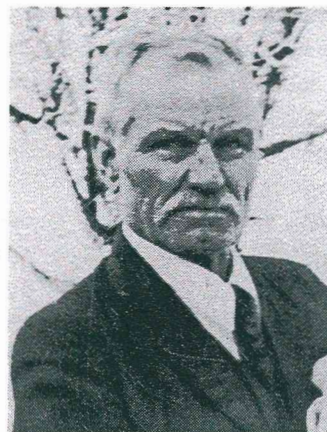
diary Leona Bowman Moser tells of picking huckleberries, for the area was then covered with dense underbrush. It was necessary to clear a path from the cabin to the spring, a distance of about twenty-five yards. Here Bowman sank a fifty-gallon barrel and built a log corral around it to keep out the livestock. He also built watering troughs to provide water for his livestock.

Travelers going east will pass Emigrant Springs, which is thirty miles from Pendleton, on what today is part of the Old Oregon Trail. Those who stop at the Emigrant Springs State Park will find, near a fresh-water fountain in the park, an Oregon State Highway marker which informs:

"In the first week of January, 1812, a party of trappers and traders members of the Astor Overland Expedition, crossed the Blue Mountains in this area. Traveling afoot in bitter cold, often waist deep in snow, they were the first white men in this area. The route they traveled to and from St. Louis and Astoria developed into the Emigrant Route to the Oregon country later known as the Oregon Trail. Wagon trains, Oregon bound, started their journey with the "Greening" of the grass on the prairies, and crossed the "Blues" after completing some 2,200 miles of their journey from late August to early October, then as now this was the first forested area on the route. Although Meacham Meadows was the favored stopping place, some Emigrants used the springs located west of the park area, and for which the park is named."

Emigrant Springs State Park is dedicated to the memory of the intrepid pioneers who came with the first wagon train in 1823. A small granite marker has been placed on the dedication site by the Old Oregon Trail Association.

On July 3, 1923, some 30,000 people came by wagon, buggy, car, and on horseback to hear President Warren G. Harding. It was a glorious day for Eastern Oregonians, but not so glorious for the last private owner of the land which eventually became Emigrant Springs State Park. It is probable the the owner, Oliver Purl (O. P.) Bowman came



O. P. Bowman

to hear the dedicatory speech. He was reported to have been saddened by the prospect of losing his old livestock watering place and the beautiful yellow pine forests surrounding the 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."

But it was the clear-running mountain springs that made the area attractive as a public park. The land which comprises the park was originally a part of some 320 acres adjoining a larger tract of land Bowman had purchased in the early 1920s.

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, obtained the property. The first action to secure the park land was a complaint filed August 2, 1924, asking the defendants to appear and defend their rights. Judge I. M. Schanep was acting judge of Umatilla County at the time, and the summons declared the property for public park purposes as:

All that part of the property of O. P. Bowman in the NW 1/2 of the NE 1/2 of Sec. 29, T. 1N, R35 E.W.M. lying east of The Old Oregon Trail.

The total acreage of the original land described was 14.1 acres with defendants to receive a sum of \$700, pasture land then being valued at \$6 per acre. The defendants refused to accept the sum and declined to negotiate upon "any reasonable or fair basis of compen-



Earth moving for Highway 30 adjacent to Emigrant Springs, 1923 style.

sation 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. He did build a summer home on adjoining land called the Darr Place and there he also operated a sawmill. The family call it "the old cement house."

But the Emigrant Springs area had wonderful water rights, and the severance of this portion from the whole body of land made the complete property valueless according to Bowman. Due to the great amount of traffic upon the Old Oregon Trail, the county officials felt there was "a public need and demand for a park where the public using and traveling upon said highway might have accommodations

for camping and other needful recreation."

The trial opened October 9, 1924, and a twelve-man jury, "all good and lawful men," returned the verdict October 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 plaintiff was to construct a line fence and permanently and substantially maintain the fence in good repair free from any cost or charge to the defendants. The plaintiff was to provide water in a water trough for livestock at the described location of spring water.

In 1925 the County deeded the property to the State of Oregon. The State built a lodge of hewn logs fitted together with an axe, for use as a lounge and rest station by the public. There were then no overnight camping grounds. The

lodge later burned and was never replaced.

Today there is a large community building on the grounds, several covered outdoor kitchens fitted with electrical outlets, and a large overnight camping area with firewood provided. There are picnic tables and play areas throughout the park plus hot and cold running water facilities. The community building was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and is available for use to large civic and community groups for a nominal fee.

The park area, which was on a campsite of the emigrants traveling west by covered wagon, remains today a campsite for travelers. It is interesting to note that 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. Dr. Marcus Whitman, who established a mission; at Waiilatpu near Walla Walla, in one of his letters, stated the route he traveled in 1836 descended the Blue Mountains following one of its streams to the proposed site of his mission.

When the Oregon legislature appropriated funds for building Highway 30 (now I-84), it seems coincident that a son of Harriett Stickler Ingram, Rolland (now deceased), was an engineer on the project. On a happier note for the Bowmans, some of their 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.)

News Notes from Weston in 1870s

A fire occurred in July, 1875, destroying 17 buildings with a loss of about \$15,000. The town was soon rebuilt and in 1879 had a telephone system and a "street sprinkler". The *East Oregonian* commented:

"We have learned that Weston has a street sprinkler. A Chinaman with two square coal-oil cans with holes in the bottoms, tramping back and forth through the whole day keeps the Main street nicely wet down. Far ahead of Pendleton in this respect."

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