

IT'S 1856...MEET THE NEIGHBORS

6. CLARA POTTLE SYLVESTER (Sept 24, 1832 Searsmont, ME - after May 1917 San Diego, CA?)

Clara Pottle was born and raised in Maine, near the sea. She met Edmund Sylvester in 1854, while he was on a return trip to his childhood home of Deer Isle, Maine. Clara married Edmund, and embarked on the long journey west to start a new life with him in the small frontier town he founded, called Olympia. The couple traveled by steamship from New York to the Isthmus of Panama, where they crossed by land to the Pacific Coast, boarded another ship to San Francisco, and finally arrived in Olympia on October 13, 1854. It is likely they landed at Giddings new wharf which extended 300 feet from the end of Main Street.



Washington State Capital Museum

Clara and Edmund lived in temporary quarters until 1856, when the grand Italianate-style Sylvester Home was built. This home, which boasted a third story tower, overlooked a rugged, stump-filled "town square." It would be Olympia's showplace for many years. Clara made sure it was also a place that hosted events and welcomed people. The Sylvesters shared the home with their only child, May.

When asked to fill out a questionnaire later in her life, Clara listed her religion as "liberal." Liberal thinking with regards to women's rights, was something Clara felt strongly about. Even though her husband did not approve, Clara offered her home for the first meeting of the Woman's Club, a group considered quite radical in 1883. Clara also supported a woman's right to vote, and hosted visiting suffragists who arrived in town to advance their cause.

Not long after Edmund's death in 1887, Clara moved to San Diego, California where she remained for the rest of her long life. She wrote letters to friends back in Olympia describing happy memories she had of the town, and how much she longed to return to the Northwest.

In 1889 Clara's daughter May wrote to the newspaper, explaining that the town's name had actually been Smithter for a time. (It is probable that May meant the town of Smithfield became Smithter *after* Levi Smith's death, and before the name Olympia was chosen.)

The Sylvester Home stood for over a century and then in 1961, was destroyed by an arson fire. Clara would have been comforted to know that before the fire, a group of Olympians made a valiant effort to move and renovate the home she had lived in for more than thirty years.

This pioneer mother, wife and activist must have marvelled at the changes she saw from her third story tower window, overlooking Olympia.

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1. GEORGE BUSH (?1790 PA - Apr 5,1863 Bush Prairie, WT)

George Bush was not a young man when he crossed the Oregon Trail with his family in 1844. Yet as one member of the Bush/Simmons wagon train said, *"Not many men of color left a slave state so well to do, and so generally respected."* George was in search of a land free from prejudice where he could raise his boys and farm in peace. Although a successful rancher and farmer back in Missouri, as a "mulatto" George could not vote, his children couldn't attend school, and his marriage to Isabella, a white woman, would soon be declared illegal.

George was raised in Pennsylvania by Quaker parents who made sure their only child was educated. It is likely his mother was Irish and his father came from India or the Caribbean. Although there is little documentation, it appears George's early life was full of travel and adventure. Stories indicate that he likely fought in the War of 1812, wandered through the Far West and Mexico as a Hudson's Bay Company trapper, and traveled the Santa Fe Trail, where he came to know Kit Carson. There is the possibility that George went through the Olympia area as a trapper, as much as *two decades* before the Wilkes Expedition of 1841!

George financed the Oregon Trail trip for his family and, in his trademark generous fashion, was also responsible for partial financing of other families on the trail. After the arduous journey west, George was disheartened to learn that a "Law Against Slaves, Negroes and Mulattoes" had just been passed in the Oregon Country. It threatened blacks with whippings of 39 lashes every two years until they left. The Bush Family saw two choices. They could go south to California where Mexican rule would protect them, or they could go north into disputed territory where American pioneers had not yet settled. George's friend Michael T. Simmons helped convince him to go north, and thus the first party of American settlers began their journey, in late 1845, for the Puget Sound Country.

The tiny community that began to form around Tumwater Falls depended in part on the financial aid of George Bush. His money helped build the first grist mill and sawmill on Puget Sound. George was an unusually skilled and experienced farmer. He turned his land claim into one of the most productive farms in northern Oregon. George was a friend to both the Indians and the American Settlers. This was evidenced during the Indian War, when the Bush Family remained on their farm through most of the turmoil, and were never harassed.

During the California Gold Rush of 1849, which depleted the region of many men, and again in 1852, when there was an early snow and supplies were minimal, the pioneers turned to George Bush for help. He did not disappoint them. As fellow pioneer Ezra Meeker explained, *"the man divided out nearly his whole crop to new settlers who came with or without money... 'pay me in kind next year,' he would say to those in need..."*

The community's deep admiration for this man became clear in 1854. Although blacks were denied land claims at this time, a petition was signed by fifty-five local settlers saying that an exception should be made for their friend George Bush. The legislature agreed, and George lived out his days on his farm at Bush Prairie, beside the Cowlitz Trail. It is heartening to know that shortly before his death, George learned Abraham Lincoln had delivered a powerful blow for freedom in the form of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Bush Prairie, four miles south of Olympia, and the Bush Interpretive Park are named for George and Isabella. George Bush Middle School in Tumwater also honors this unforgettable pioneer, who some have called *"the hardest argonaut of them all."*



Hypothetical Drawing by Samuel Patrick for L. A. Times
Courtesy of Henderson House Museum

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2. ISABELLA JAMES BUSH (1809 TN - Sept 12, 1866 Bush Prairie, WT)

Isabella, or "Ibby" as she was affectionately called, was a white woman from Tennessee who married George Bush, a black man, in Missouri on the Fourth of July, 1830. By the time she was ready to head west with her family, Isabella was in her mid-thirties and had given birth to nine boys. Sadly, only five of the children survived infancy. On the grueling wagon trip to Oregon, the Bush's remaining sons were ages 12, 10, 7, 3 and 1. During the journey, Ibby and her husband helped take care of the orphaned Sager children, until they could be left with the Whitmans at the mission in Walla Walla. Isabella later gave birth to a sixth son in New Market, (Tumwater), on Christmas Day, 1847. His name was Lewis Nisqually Bush.

NO
PICTURE
YET
AVAILABLE

Isabella was an educated woman who home-schooled her boys in Missouri, since the law there excluded the Bush children from all public schools. Later, during the early years on Bush Prairie south of Tumwater, Isabella conducted the region's first school in her home. She became fluent in the Coast Salish language and housed Indian orphans until the tribes could find suitable foster parents. Isabella was also known as a vigorous and highly capable nurse. During the measles epidemic of 1848, and the smallpox epidemic of 1853, she worked tirelessly to care for the Native Americans who were devastated by new diseases brought by the American settlers who had immunity.

At one time there were as many as twelve cabins on the Bush farm, which she and George made available to passing travelers. The Bush Farm was also the happy scene of many pioneer gatherings and parties. Isabella worked the remainder of her relatively short life raising her six boys, building up the family's stock of turkeys and sheep, taking care of the sick, sharing with those less fortunate, and quietly, yet purposefully, fighting prejudice through the love of a wife and mother. Although her husband was never allowed to vote, Isabella would have been proud to know that in 1889, her oldest son William Owen would be elected to Washington's first state legislature.

Bush Prairie, and the Bush Interpretive Park are named for George and Isabella. The Isabella Bush State Records Center, two miles north of the Bush home, also honors this woman.

Unlike some of the famous pioneers, Isabella's face can only be seen in our imagination. However the story of her character gives a powerful image indeed.

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3. DANIEL RICHARDSON BIGELOW (Mar 24, 1824 Belleville, NY - Sept 15, 1905 Olympia)

Daniel Bigelow's ancestors first caught sight of America from the deck of the Mayflower. Daniel first saw Olympia from the deck of the schooner Exact, late in 1851. (This same schooner had just dropped off the founding fathers and mothers of what would become Seattle.)

Daniel was a highly educated New Yorker with a strong moral compass, and a desire to help shape the western frontier. His law studies at Harvard gave him the legal expertise to advance his progressive ideas in the fledgling town of Olympia. Daniel was a strong advocate for women's rights, minority rights, temperance and quality education for all. Throughout his long career, Daniel kept urging citizens to focus on these issues.



Bigelow Family Collection

On the Fourth of July, 1852, Daniel delivered an eloquent speech which inspired citizens to create a separate territory north of the Columbia River. His entire speech was printed in Olympia's first newspaper, The Columbian.

Daniel built a cabin on the Eastside, where he brought his young bride Ann Elizabeth in 1854. In the early days, he rowed a boat across the channel to his office in town. Today, thanks to preservationists and Daniel's descendents, you can still look across the channel and see his historic cabin and the family home right next to it.

Daniel helped clear the land for the first public school on Puget Sound and served as Olympia's first school superintendent. In 1857, he spearheaded the creation of the Puget Sound Institute, which was the territory's first school of higher learning. The institute, which *still stands*, was the forerunner of the University of Puget Sound.

Soon after the formation of Thurston County in 1852, Daniel was elected its treasurer. He served in the first Washington Territorial Legislature in 1854. It was Daniel who presented a petition to lawmakers in 1854, demanding that George Bush, a mulatto, be allowed to keep his land claim on Bush Prairie. In 1871, the year Susan B. Anthony visited Olympia, Daniel tried to convince lawmakers to approve a women's suffrage bill. He was unsuccessful, but became heavily involved in a later effort that gave women the vote from 1883 until statehood in 1889.

Daniel humbly explained his community involvement as follows: "*I was prosecuting attorney, probate judge, territorial auditor, member of the (state) council, postmaster and superintendent of schools, all at once. I suppose they gave one all of the offices because there was nobody else to occupy them.*" A neighbor of Daniel's was asked to support someone other than Bigelow, and the gentleman replied, "*I won't never vote for nobody else for nothin!*" Daniel was still practicing law at the time of his death in 1905.

Today, as Olympians reap the benefits of quality education and equal rights, we should look back to Daniel with our highest gratitude. From the Mayflower to the Exact, Bigelow pioneers, like Daniel, have been courageous leaders in a new land.

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4. ANN ELIZABETH WHITE BIGELOW (Nov 2, 1836 Springfield, IL - Feb 8, 1926 Olympia)

Ann Elizabeth White came on the Oregon Trail from Wisconsin with her family, as a teenager in 1851, and settled in the community called Freedom, nine miles east of Olympia. (Today, the Fort Eaton historical marker on Yelm Highway stands in the approximate area of Freedom.)

At the age of 17, Ann Elizabeth became one of Thurston County's first teachers. The Packwood Family paid her twenty dollars a month to teach the children living in the area of the Nisqually Flats. As she explained, *"I taught the three R's with no frills...Every Monday...I rode to my school on horseback, turned the horse loose and it would run home. On Fridays my brother came for me."*

She married Daniel Bigelow in 1854 and moved into his cabin while the Bigelow House was being built. During the Indian War of 1855-56, Ann Elizabeth would have cause for celebration and sorrow. She welcomed her first child, Tirzah, in September, 1855, but six months later, mourned the death of her father who was killed in an Indian ambush on Chambers Prairie.

Ann Elizabeth raised four sons and four daughters. While caring for this large family, she demonstrated her strong support for equal rights, education and temperance by opening her home for meetings and by graciously hosting visitors. When the Mercer Girls arrived from New England in 1865, Ann Elizabeth was part of the welcoming committee, and took in one of the women until she could find a home. In 1871, the famous suffragist Susan B. Anthony attended a meeting and stayed in the Bigelow Home. Ann Elizabeth was surely a role model when it came to education. She taught before her children were born, and again when they were older. In her thirties, she went back to school to study and to teach at Olympia's Union Academy, setting the example that learning never ends.

Ann Elizabeth was proud of her garden and her orchard, and she had a stable of horses that she loved to ride. She witnessed huge changes in her long life, from the Nisqually trips on horseback in the early days, to Olympia drives in her automobile as a senior citizen. But thankfully the Bigelow tradition of opening their doors to the community did not change.

Bigelow Park, Bigelow Lake, Bigelow Avenue, Bigelow Springs Park, Bigelow Highlands, the Bigelow Neighborhood and the historic Bigelow House all honor Ann Elizabeth and her husband Daniel. Step inside the Bigelow House Museum at 918 Glass Avenue. It will take you back...



Bigelow Family Collection

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5. EDMUND SYLVESTER (Mar 2, 1821 Deer Isle, ME - Sept. 20, 1887 Seattle, WA)

Edmund Sylvester, the founder of Olympia, was the adventurous son of a sea captain, who left Deer Isle, Maine as a young man, sailed around Cape Horn, and ended up in Oregon Country in 1843. Edmund helped build the first two houses in the fledgling town of Portland and staked a land claim in Albina nearby. But this New England native soon missed the salt water air, and set his sights north, to the Puget Sound Country. In January, 1846, just two months after the Bush/Simmons party arrived in Tumwater, Edmund and his partner Levi Smith, hiked onto the peninsula of "Cheetwoot" for the first time. Edmund built a small cabin on Budd Bay for Levi, and then staked out his own claim on Chambers Prairie. Levi named the land surrounding his home "Smithfield." But the pioneer partnership would soon have a tragic end, when Levi suffered an epileptic seizure and drowned in September of 1848. Under their joint agreement, Edmund inherited Levi's claim, which became the City of Olympia.



Washington State Capital Museum

In 1849, Edmund, like many others, had high hopes of striking it rich in the gold mines of California. He completed the overland trip to Sacramento with an ox team and wagon, but ill health soon sent him back north on the brig Orbit, which landed in Smithfield on New Years Day, 1850. The Orbit became the first American pioneer ship on Puget Sound.

Edmund soon renamed the peninsula Olympia, in honor of the spectacular view of the Olympic Mountains. He set about laying out the town, generously donating an entire city block for a park, as well as land for a Masonic Hall, a school, a customs house, a Catholic church and 10 acres for the capitol grounds. In 1856, he built a grand home with a third story tower overlooking the town and harbor. The sweeping view north from Edmund's window provides the perspective for this project.

In 1852 Edmund was elected the first coroner of Thurston County. A year later he helped locate a new route for immigrants over Naches Pass, called "The People's Road." Edmund built the first hotel, the "Olympia House," which was actually an extension of the original Smith cabin, on the west side of Main between 2nd and 3rd. He also put a second story on the Parker and Coulter Store just in time for the first legislature to meet there in 1854. For many years after that, he ran a shop just north of Fourth and Main, next to the spring.

One of Edmund's favorite pastimes was playing checkers at the back of his store. A local historian related the following story, *"Such a devotee was he to his favorite game that should his opponent suggest that there was a customer in the front room he would reply, 'Keep very quiet and perhaps he will go out.'"*

Sylvester married Clara Pottle on a visit back to Deer Isle, Maine in 1854. They had one daughter named May. In 1878 during an interview, Edmund reflected back on the founding of Washington's capital city, *"I never was satisfied anywhere else than at Olympia. The very first time I ever heard this place mentioned I wanted to come here and I have been satisfied ever since. If I had a million of money, I would settle right in Olympia..."*

There is no doubt that the "Father of Olympia" loved his town, believed in its potential, and donated generously to the public good. Sylvester Park stands today as the garden spot of the city center, just as Edmund envisioned it would be back in 1850, when he paced off the densely forested "town square".

Edmund died just two years before Washington became a state. His obituary described him as *"unostentatious, courteous, always lavish with his money, honest and industrious."* Sylvester Park, Sylvester Street and this project, "Sylvester's Window", honor this saltwater-loving, checkers-playing original who *"never was satisfied anywhere else than at Olympia."*

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7. MICHAEL TROUTMAN SIMMONS (Aug. 5, 1814 Bullitt Co. KY - Nov. 15, 1867 Lewis Co. WT)

Michael was a 6'4" Kentucky native, who became known as "*the Daniel Boone of Washington Territory.*" In search of his "Garden of Eden," Michael brought his family west from Missouri, by wagon train. As assistant wagonmaster, this likeable leader earned the honorary title of "Colonel." The Simmons Family arrived in Washougal on the Columbia River near Fort Vancouver in the fall of 1844, and spent the winter there. In the summer, Michael's adventurous spirit, and his dislike for the unjust laws affecting his black friend George Bush, sent him north to scout out the Puget Sound Country, instead of south to the Willamette Valley like most of the settlers. He returned for his family, and on November 6, 1845, after overcoming the difficult Cowlitz Trail, the Simmons/Bush party arrived at what is today Tumwater Falls. Michael staked his claim, calling the first permanent American settlement on Puget Sound "New Market." Today, it is the City of Tumwater.



Washington State Capital Museum

Michael gained a reputation as a fair man and a peacemaker. Although he claimed he couldn't read or write, Michael had "people skills" which helped him deal with the Hudson's Bay Company and the Native Americans during the first and most difficult years at New Market. Michael persuaded the British to let the American settlers trade shingles they had cut, in exchange for badly needed supplies at Fort Nisqually.

Simmons was a self-starter, who tried various jobs and moved in many circles. His first enterprise was a flour mill, and then a sawmill, both powered by the "tumchuck" or pounding water of the falls. Before long he sold his mills to buy shares in the ship "Orbit", and opened a store in Olympia's Customs House. Michael became the first postmaster, and was known to carry the letters around in his hat. He also served as judge for a time. On November 13, 1852, Michael was a delegate to the Monticello Convention which asked the U.S. Government to form the Territory of Washington. He was later appointed by Governor Stevens to be an Indian Agent during the Indian War. Michael was fluent in the native language and acted as one of the interpreters at the Medicine Creek Council. It was actually Michael who finalized the treaties with the Quinault and Quillayute Tribes. Later still, Michael moved his family to the Shelton area where the eternal entrepreneur ran another mill and took up oyster farming. He spent his last days on a farm in Lewis County.

Today, Michael T. Simmons Elementary School honors the Father of Tumwater. If you stand on the footbridge at the lower falls, you will be near the site where Michael's flour mill stood. It is only a few hundred feet from a sprawling interstate freeway now. Yet amazingly, the roar of the falls, the "tumchuck," still overpowers all other sounds, as it did for those who came before. This mighty cascade was a life-giving source for Michael T. Simmons, who dared to head north and claim his Garden of Eden along the banks of the Deschutes.

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8. ELIZABETH KINDRED SIMMONS (Feb 15,1820 IN - Mar 23,1891 Olympia)

Elizabeth Simmons was a fourteen year old bride who was so small she could stand under the outstretched arm of her 6'4" husband. Yet a decade after her wedding, this petite pioneer would make a 2,000 mile journey on the Oregon Trail with four young sons, ages 7, 5, 3 and 1 1/2. To add to the challenge, she was pregnant during the icy trek through the snow-covered Blue Mountains. But for Elizabeth, the most difficult test would come a year later, on the final leg from the Columbia River to present-day Tumwater Falls...



Washington State Capitol Museum

Elizabeth was born in Indiana in 1820, and married Michael Simmons in Iowa on January 20, 1835. Elizabeth described herself as timid, but others said she was gentle and kind. During the Simmons wagon train trip of 1844, Elizabeth had the advantage of traveling with her parents and brothers, as well as her husband and children. Most settlers going West left loved ones behind, with no guarantee they would ever see them again.

Since their wagon train was part of the earliest migration, the trail from Missouri to the Oregon Country was in very poor condition, and the journey took close to eight months. Elizabeth and her family arrived in Washougal in December of 1844, where she set up housekeeping in primitive quarters provided by the Indians. On April 10, 1845, Elizabeth gave birth to one of the first American pioneer children born north and west of the Columbia River, naming him Christopher Columbus Simmons. Years later, Christopher described this event: *"my birth chamber was a sheep pen with a canvas stretched over the roof to keep part of the rain from mother and me."* In her lifetime, Elizabeth gave birth to three girls and nine boys. Several were given famous names such as Ben Franklin, David Crockett, George Washington, and Francis Marion.

In the fall of 1845, Elizabeth and her family chose to go north on the rugged Cowlitz Trail, to Puget Sound. Elizabeth carried her baby "papoose style" like Sacagawea had done, while hiking through the dense forests. After arriving at New Market (Tumwater), Elizabeth set about establishing a farm and raising her family. Since Michael's work often kept him away, she frequently ran the farm. When Michael died in 1867, Elizabeth was forty-seven, and her youngest were only five and seven. She continued to farm, care for her family and contribute to the community for many years. Elizabeth is proof that small stature cannot stop great determination.

Simmons Lake, (now Ken Lake), as well as Simmons Road and Simmons Street remind us of Michael T. Simmons and his wife Elizabeth.

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9. ISAAC INGALLS STEVENS (Mar 25, 1818 Andover, MA - Sept 1, 1862 Chantilly, VA)

1818 was a significant year for the Pacific Northwest. In that year Great Britain and the United States agreed to joint occupancy of the vast Oregon Country, and in Andover, Massachusetts, Isaac Ingalls Stevens was born. Thirty five years later, Isaac would become the first governor of the new Territory of Washington.

From an early age, ambition, boundless energy and a hunger for adventure were the hallmarks of Isaac's life. He graduated from West Point as one of the brightest scholars the academy had ever known. After marrying Margaret Hazard, Isaac was called to duty in the Mexican War. His bunkmate was General Robert E. Lee, and he fought alongside General Franklin Pierce, who would soon become President. During the last battle of the war, Isaac was wounded in the foot. This injury caused him pain for years, especially during his grueling treks through the Northwest.

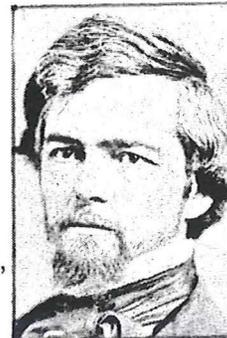
In 1853, President Pierce selected Isaac to perform three jobs which today would be the work of entire departments. Isaac at once was made chief of the Northern Pacific Railroad survey team, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Washington Territory, and finally, the first Governor of Washington Territory, which comprised a massive wilderness from the coast of present-day Washington to Butte, Montana.

On November 25, 1853, five months and nineteen days after leaving St. Paul, Minnesota, Isaac arrived in the pioneer outpost of Olympia, and his welcome went like this...
"Great preparations were made for the governor's reception. He arrived ahead of his party and in an unostentatious way asked for admission to the dining room (of the town's only hotel). He was informed that there was no time to lose on strangers, as they were 'getting ready for a great doin's'. Saying he was hungry, Stevens asked for a snack in the kitchen, which was furnished him. He then went outside where he met a stranger, who complained that the governor was late in arriving. 'Why I am the man you are looking for,' said Stevens."

Isaac set about organizing the first territorial legislature above Olympia's Parker and Coulter Store. He explored the waters of Puget Sound, and made extensive overland trips to meet with Indian tribes in three current-day states. He recommended the best northern route for the railroad, terminating in Seattle. Isaac returned to the East for his family, and trudged through the muddy Cowlitz Trail in December of 1854, sheltering his baby daughter inside his coat.

As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Isaac's leadership was severely tested and questioned. Long before his arrival, the Donation Land Claim Law was in practice, allowing a settler to claim 160 acres of land without first negotiating with the Indians. In this atmosphere of unrest, Isaac was asked to create treaties, in a short span of time, with 30,000 Native Americans who lived vast distances apart, and remove them to reservations. The result was the tragedy of the Indian War. At one point during this time, Isaac placed Olympia under martial law, creating a huge controversy in the territory's capital. Finally, Isaac supported the hanging of Leschi, rather than treating the Nisqually leader as a prisoner of war. This further divided the war-torn region. However, it was also Isaac who addressed a grievous error in the Medicine Creek Treaty, and negotiated the improved Fox Island Treaty. This agreement gave back to the Nisqually People some of the rich delta land they had previously occupied along the river.

When the Civil War broke out, Isaac and his son Hazard enlisted. During the Battle of Chantilly, moments after coming to the aid of Hazard who lay wounded, Isaac was killed. Through out his unusual career, Isaac felt duty-bound to carry out his orders, though the task was often beyond anyone's reach. Stevens County in Washington, Oregon's Fort Stevens, Stevensville in Montana, as well as Olympia's Stevens Field and Governor Stevens Avenue all honor Isaac.



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10. MARGARET HAZARD STEVENS (1816 Newport, RI - Nov 4, 1912 Boston, MA)

Margaret Lyman Hazard, or "Meg" as she liked to be called, was a prominent young member of New England society and a descendent of six Rhode Island governors. She met Isaac Stevens at a Newport social gathering in 1839. On their first date, they went horseback riding, and when Isaac asked if a particular horse would be safe for Margaret, the livery owner replied, "*Miss Margaret Hazard can ride any horse in my stable.*" It became clear, in horseback riding and in the events of a long, adventurous life, that Margaret was up to a challenge.



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In December of 1854, thirteen years after being married in a mansion near the Newport State House, Margaret would find herself with Isaac and their four children, at a remote northwest trail stop called Cowlitz Landing, which would remind some, of a scene from a Tolkien novel. Margaret described Cowlitz Landing as follows:

"We walked ankle deep in mud to a small log house, where we had a good meal. Here we found a number of rough, dirty-looking men, with pantaloons tucked inside their boots, and so much hair upon their heads and faces that they all looked alike. After tea we were shown a room to sleep in, full of beds, which were for the women. I was so worn out with the novel way of traveling, that I laid down on a narrow strip of bed, not undressed, all my family alongside on the same bed. The Governor sat on a stool nearby, and, strange to say, slept sound through the long dismal night. He had been shown his bed up through a hole on top of the shanty. He said one look was sufficient. Men were strewn as thick as possible on the floor in their blankets. The steam generated from their wet clothes, boots, and blankets was stifling. One small hole cut through the roof was the only ventilation."

Margaret next described travel on the Cowlitz Trail:

"As soon as breakfast was over the next morning, we mounted a wagon without springs and proceeded on our journey. There surely were no worse roads in the world than this. The horses went down deep into the mud every step; the wheels sank to the hub, and often had to be pried out. We forded rivers, the water coming above our ankles in the wagon."

Finally, Margaret shared her thoughts on reaching their destination:

"At night we were told, on ascending a hill, 'There is Olympia'. Below us, in the deep mud, were a few low, wooden houses, at the head of Puget Sound. My heart sank, for the first time in my life, at the prospect."

When Margaret arrived in Olympia, she and the children were still recovering from "Panama Fever" which they had contracted while crossing the isthmus in Central America. However her negative feelings and poor health would change dramatically. As time went by, Margaret camped, went for long horseback rides on the prairie, and swam every day in Puget Sound. She enjoyed the company of Fort Steilacoom officers and their wives, and she visited with Father Ricard at his nearby mission, and conversed with him in French.

Margaret and her family lived in Olympia from December, 1854 to August, 1857. During these years, she was frequently separated from Isaac. Their first temporary home was on Main Street behind Isaac's survey office, and later they moved to a house near the capitol building, where Margaret hosted the first Governor's Ball in January, 1857.

In the summer of 1857, Isaac resigned as governor and the family moved to "Washington City" (Washington, D.C.). In 1867, a few years after Isaac's death, Margaret returned to Olympia with her grown children and remained seven years. She spent the last part of her life in Boston, where she read the newspaper every day and lived to be almost one hundred years old.

You can read Margaret's 1855-56 letters on the Olympia Historical Society's website.

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11. WILLIAM FRASER TOLMIE (Feb 3, 1812 Inverness, Scotland - Dec 8, 1886 Victoria, B.C.)

In the Spring of 1833, a twenty-one year old Scotsman named William Tolmie arrived in the Northwest to begin his new job as a surgeon and officer for the Hudson's Bay Company. He had sailed on the ship Ganymede from Scotland, traveling around the Horn, and then stopping in the Hawaiian Islands. William's final destination was Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. He stood on the deck of the Ganymede, dressed in a tartan cloak, and surveyed his new frontier home. It was raining.

Within a month he was transferred to a northern post on Puget Sound called Fort Nisqually. This was the closest British fort to "Cheetwoot", which would one day be called Olympia. William's medical training was soon tested when a hunter was brought to him suffering from a near-fatal ax wound. Tolmie saved the man's life.

Although William was a skilled doctor, and wrote the first medical case report in the Pacific Northwest, his interests were not confined to medicine. In the fall of 1833, he made an attempt to climb part way up Mount Rainier, becoming probably the first European to observe glaciers within the United States. He was also the first to do a detailed study of local Native American vocabularies. In addition, William was a botanist who introduced dahlia seeds to the Pacific Northwest, which he had carried over from Hawaii. He also loved music and played the flute. During his long career, William travelled extensively in Canada, Europe and Russia.

Back in the winter of 1845-46, the struggling citizens of New Market, (Tumwater), were kept alive in good part due to supplies William sent on credit from Fort Nisqually. This was in exchange for cedar shingles the newcomers promised to split and bring to the fort. Although the British were vying for the same land, and conflicts with early American settlers often occurred, the Hudson's Bay Company employees were competitors, not enemies.

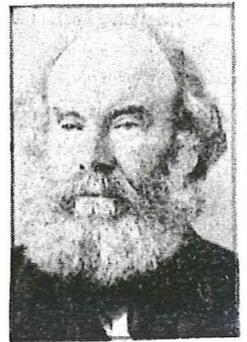
To the Coast Salish People, William was one of the "King George Men." (This was their term for the British, while those from the Eastern U.S. were called "Boston Men.") He was a friend to Leschi, and made an appeal on his behalf after the Indian War. William was respected by the local Native Americans, as well as the traders and trappers who came through the fort.

After helping to establish the fort at Nisqually in 1833, William served at other posts for a number of years. He returned to Fort Nisqually in 1843 and was soon named Chief Trader. In 1850 William married Jane Work, who was French Canadian and Native American. The Tolmies had twelve children. William remained in charge of Fort Nisqually until July of 1859 and then moved to Victoria, British Columbia. There, he operated a large farm called Cloverdale, and was later elected to the British Columbia legislature. He died in 1886.

William's son Simon Fraser, who would one day become Premier of British Columbia, wrote a paper describing his father as *"energetic, well-read, well-traveled, an enthusiastic botanist, thrifty, strict, temperate and, in later years, a strong advocate for free education in Canada."* Simon added, *"I can remember the Saturday afternoon when I received the first (riding) lesson. I fell off three times; and after he caught the horse my father's instructions were very brief, consisting of just two words: 'Climb on.'"*

Although not an American citizen, William's contributions to South Puget Sound will be remembered. This learned Scotsman ran a fort which was the crossroads of many cultures, in the midst of a howling wilderness, and in the face of ever increasing competition for the land.

The 1855 Tolmie House, was relocated, along with Fort Nisqually, to Tacoma's Point Defiance in 1937, and was renovated in 2002. Closer to Olympia we can enjoy the beauty of Tolmie State Park, across the Nisqually Delta from William's old fort. It stands today as a tribute to this pioneer doctor, scholar and respected leader of the region's "King George Men."

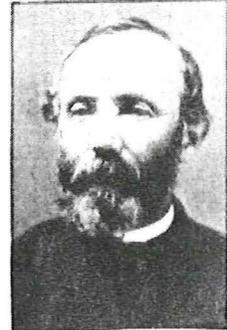


Washington State Historical Society

IT'S 1856...MEET THE NEIGHBORS

12. JOHN M. SWAN (Apr 17, 1823 Greenock, Scotland - Feb 18, 1904 Walla Walla, WA)

When a young shipwright from Scotland named John Swan, and the other passengers of the brig Orbit, anchored in the harbor of Budd Inlet on January 3, 1850, they made history by arriving on the first American merchant ship to bring people and goods into Puget Sound. (Edmund Sylvester, the founder of Olympia was also part of this crew. See earlier sketch.) The voyage had been a harrowing experience from the start, 63 days earlier in San Francisco, due to wild winter storms and the poor condition of the sailing ship. Although they arrived at the Straits of Juan de Fuca in only 8 days, John explained what happened next: *"With the force of the gale, we were being driven outward and northward, as far as the north end of Vancouver Island...(They returned to the straits and were again blown out to sea and fought their way back.)...The wind, getting again on a rampage blew furiously out of the strait, compelling us to remain storm-bound for over two weeks, contemplating the waring ocean and wondering when the storm would subside...(John next described the Orbit:)...Our vessel had been copper sheathed, which had got old and worn, much of it being broken and hanging in sheets from the bottom, acting as drags on the vessel, greatly impeding her progress through the water."* (Finally, John told of the Orbit's arrival at Sylvester's unnamed town:)...*Although the place seemed drear and desolate, timber all around, down to the water's edge, scarcely beach enough for a landing place, no habitation in sight and twenty inches or more of snow on the ground, yet all were pleased that our voyage was ended."*



"So Fair A Dwelling Place"
by Gordon Newell, pg. 49

On January 12th, a small group of men including John, laid out the town on the peninsula known as "Cheetwoot" where Edmund Sylvester had his claim, and officially named the settlement Olympia. John described the process: *"Our surveying was made with the aid of a line, a right angle triangle, and a ten foot pole...One street only was laid off (Main Street- future Capitol Way) and some eight or ten blocks, street 60 feet wide, blocks 250 feet square."*

John spent the first two months boarding at the Catholic Mission in current-day Priest Point Park. During this time, he applied for U.S. citizenship and bought a donation land claim of more than 300 acres from Michael T. Simmons, which was located on the east side of Budd Inlet next to Edmund Sylvester's claim. John put his carpentry skills to work, and on March 23, 1850, he completed a log cabin which became the town's first house after being named Olympia. For the next several years he cleared 30 acres of his land, built homes on the sites, sold them to new immigrants, and named the area Swantown. He also helped construct some of Olympia's commercial structures. In August of 1855, it was John who completed the two-story schoolhouse on the northwest corner of 6th and Franklin, which stood for almost 100 years.

John was very interested in horticulture, and operated one of the first nurseries in the Northwest. Some of the oldest orchards in Olympia got their start from seeds and seedlings that John had shipped around the Horn. In addition, he served as Thurston County Commissioner from 1876 to 1882, and as a federally-appointed assessor. He also worked to improve the plight of the elderly through his membership in the Oddfellows organization. John held the title of first grand master of the Oddfellows in Washington. He built a large home in the southwest part of Olympia and offered to donate this to the Oddfellows to be used as a home for the aged. The Oddfellows instead chose a site in Walla Walla, and asked John to move there and be the first manager of that home. John agreed and lived out the rest of his days in Walla Walla where he became known as the "Father of the I.O.O.F. Home."

Today, Swantown Marina and Boatworks reminds us of this hearty shipwright who weathered the maiden voyage of the Orbit, and built the first home after Olympia got its name.

IT'S 1856...MEET THE NEIGHBORS

13. STEPHEN DULEY RUDDELL (June 16, 1816 Bourbon Co. KY - Sept 10, 1891 Olympia)

The father of Stephen Duley Ruddell, (referred to as Stephen 1), was kidnapped by Shawnee Indians near Lexington, Kentucky in 1780, when he was only 12 years old. He lived as a member of the tribe for the next 15 years, was adopted by a chief, and became close friends with the soon-to-be-famous Indian leader Tecumseh. Stephen 1 went by the Indian name "Sinnanatha" which meant "Big Fish." He was returned to his rightful father in Kentucky after the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. By this time Stephen 1 had an Indian wife, and soon returned to the tribe to take care of his Indian mother until she died. It is probable his first wife died young, and next, Stephen 1 became a Baptist minister, remarried, and preached to the Indians, with considerable success. Years later he was described as follows; *"hardly ever spoke a sentence unless it meant something; spoke good English, showed the Indian habits in his manner and dress."* After the death of his second wife, Stephen 1 married Susan David, and one of their children was Stephen Duley Ruddell, (referred to as Stephen 2).



Lacey Museum

Stephen 2 was born in Kentucky in 1816, and moved as a teenager with his family to Illinois. At 19 he married Keziah Smith and became a farmer. Around 1840, he moved to Missouri where his third son, Stephen Lafayette, (Stephen 3) was born. In 1846 Keziah died and Stephen 2 married a widow named Winnifred with two boys. Winnifred gave him two daughters, one named California, representing their hopes to soon settle in that territory. In 1851 the Ruddell Family prepared for the wagon train voyage that would take them from Missouri to the new state of California. But the departure was delayed due to a leg infection suffered by their eight year old son, Stephen 3. It was necessary to amputate the boy's leg, and although no one thought he would survive, Stephen 3 recovered, made the wagon trip and lived a healthy life in the Northwest for many years. However, the Ruddell's plans changed during the journey, when the wagon train took a wrong road leading them to the Oregon Territory instead of California. Stephen 2's daughter related stories about the trip: *"One morning Indians, or whites painted up as such, stampeded our cattle. Father jumped on his thoroughbred and without waiting to saddle it, rode off after the stock and after several hours brought most of them back to the train...At the Dalles, the Ruddells and others in the train stopped...they built scows and with wagons, stock and families aboard they floated down the mighty river to the...Cowlitz."*

In the spring of 1852, the Ruddell Family travelled north to Chambers Prairie and staked a 320 acre donation land claim near the southern edge of current day Lacey. In November, Stephen 2 was a delegate to the Monticello Convention that asked Congress to create a northern territory separate from Oregon. In the summer of 1853 he built the area's first log cabin schoolhouse. It was located a few hundred yards south of today's Ruddell Cemetery, five acres of which was donated by Stephen 2 for his family and neighbors in 1854. During the Indian War of 1855-56, Stephen 2 completed a blockhouse to protect his family and neighbors. In 1856 his wife Winnifred died, and he was remarried to a widow, Margaret White, who was the mother of Ann Elizabeth White Bigelow. (See 1856 biography.) During these years, Stephen 2 served as the first Territorial Assessor, County Commissioner, and as a member of the legislature. From the late 1860s on, he lived on a farm in the current day Bigelow Neighborhood. His farming practices were described by a neighbor: *"...all root vegetables should be planted in the dark of the moon, while peas, beans, corn, cabbage etc. should be planted in the light of the moon. Corn and beans were not to be planted until the leaves of the oak trees were as large as a squirrel's ear. He always had a good garden."*

Ruddell Road and the Ruddell Pioneer Cemetery in Lacey, honor Stephen Duley Ruddell.