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*Jack Fosmark is a Salem, Oregon, historian with family roots in the Aurora Colony. His sketch, "Fosmark on Fosmark," at the bottom of this page, summarizes some of those connections. Jack can be reached at [jack.fosmark@comcast.net](mailto:jack.fosmark@comcast.net).*

## **Willapa**

By Jack. M. Fosmark

Researchers just beginning to examine museum records dealing with settlements established by the Keilites will find repeated reference to a locality called Willapa. Going in search of the place, however, may lead them into a state of frustration.

"Willapa," as used in colony-days language, refers to long-extinct Fort Willapa. That landmark log structure, erected in 1857 by 15- settler-families alarmed by reports of Indian massacres, was torn down in the first decade of the 20th century.

We expect the shortened version will continue to be used by aspiring future historians and researchers. Be forewarned, however, that the abbreviated version can cause confusion to a neophyte who ventures forth into Pacific County, Washington, asking for directions to "Willapa."

Visitors are advised to first locate the town of Menlo, six miles off Highway 101 via Highway 6, then backtrack about one mile while searching the roadside for a turnout having a state historical sign. The sign describes Willie Keil's death in Bethel and the subsequent 1855 transportation of his whiskey-soaked remains by mule-drawn wagon across the Oregon Trail to his final resting place atop the hill behind the sign. Also in the turnout is a stone marker, erected in 1928 by the Willapa Chapter of the DAR, commemorating Fort Willapa and its builders. The site of the fort is but a stone's throw downhill from Willie's grave.

A party of nine scouts sent out in 1853 from the mother colony, Bethel, by founder-leader William Keil, selected the Willapa River valley as the site of a new colony in the West. Although Keil rejected it upon his 1855 arrival, several of the scouts decided to remain on land claims they had staked and settled upon.

An immediate concern of the scouts upon their arrival was the construction of shelters. Winter was nearly upon them and one of their number, Emma (Wagner) Giesy (1836-1916), wife of their leader Christian "Christ" Giesy, was heavy with child. On Oct. 19, 1853, at Ft. Steilacoom, she delivered a son, Andrew Jackson Giesy, destined to become a Portland physician.

The much-feared Indian attacks never materialized, but Fort Willapa did prove useful as the first post office and school in the valley. Karl Ruge stayed with the Sebastian Giesy family and taught school in the fort.

In about 1865 the Giesy family erected a new house of lumber adjacent to the fort. From then on,

the latter was used as a wash house and storage place. Giesy School had earlier been discontinued after a new school was built on land donated by the Giesys. The log fort was finally dismantled in about 1910.

The once-stately "new" Sebastian Giesy house, popular stopping place for transients going up and down the valley for a century, degenerated after the passing of your writer's cousin Huldamay (Giesy) Buell (1900-1974) and her husband Ed (1903-1982).

When we visited the site again in 1988, the spacious two-story level house stood vacant, its windows and entrances covered with 4-by-8 sheets of plywood. Dry grass and weeds stood high around it and the detached carriage house and barns. Only one of the original three stately maples still grew in front; a rotted stump of one remained but no vestige of the third landmark tree was visible.

The abandoned dwelling faced the highway, some 50 feet lower in elevation and 200 feet distant. The two-story attached ell was sided in gaudy barn-red vinyl as was the main house itself. A rose grew invisibly inside a wall of the ell and emerged through its roof in a cluster of ambitious growth to offer one of the few signs of greenery on the farm.

The house and ell had disappeared entirely when we next returned sometime in the early 1990s. Cousin Huldamay was prominent in the Pacific County Historical Society. Some of her papers were published in that society's quarterly *The Sou'Wester*. The covers of several issues contain the line drawings of Aurora Colony historian-artist Clark Moor Will. Huldamay's mother, Martha (Zimmerman) Giesy, was a sister to your writer's grandmother, the late Kate Ritter of Needy. Kate and Martha were two of the six children of Aurora Colony tannery founder David Zimmerman II (1837-1906) of Needy.

The fenced Giesy Cemetery is encircled by eight towering western red cedars and one pear tree. Stepping quietly alone into that shaded copse on a breezy spring day is an unforgettable experience. "Helloo Willie," one is tempted to call out to his vanished spirit and the shadows. Willie isn't the only Keilite buried there. Earlier surveys bespeak of some 40 graves, including those of Huldamay and Ed Buell, the last owners to reside in the lumber house and operate the farm. Only 27 graves reportedly still have markers.

We recommend visitors stop in at the museum in South Bend. There one may examine and purchase back issues of *The Sou'Wester* quarterly containing articles on the peoples of Bethel, Willapa and Aurora. A colony-days lantern donated by Huldamay may still be in one of the cabinets. Open to public perusal on this writer's 1988 visit was an original ledger, Assessment Roll of Pacific County, Washington Territory, for the Year 1879. It contains detailed descriptions of donation land claims of Willapa pioneers.

The museum in Raymond is also well worth visiting to view old maps showing those early claims.

## **Fort Willapa**

By Jack M. Fosmark

The builders of Fort Willapa were proud of their workmanship. One settler remarked that they were so well pleased they sometimes wished the Indians would come and "try them a tussle" (the *Sou'Wester*, Summer 1967, Vol. II, No. 2). Older Keilites, seceders from George Rapp's society, were practiced builders, for they earlier may have helped Rapp construct three cities: Harmony, Pa.; New Harmony, Ind., and Economy, Pa. Later, with "Count" Leon's breakaway group, they built Phillipsburg, Pa. Then, with Keil, they established Bethel, Ninevah and Elim in Shelby County, Mo.

## **The Omnipresent Giesys**

Eight sons of Andreas Giesy staked land claims in the Willapa Valley: Christian, Andrew, Rudolph, John, Sebastian, Frederick, Martin and Henry. Martin and some of his sibs arrived with

Keil's 1855 train.

Martin pulled up stakes in '56 and moved to Aurora where he became the colony physician-pharmacist of long duration and admirable repute.

Most scouts, including John Stauffer, Sr., also staked claims. Stauffer stayed 13 years before moving his large family to Aurora in 1868. There he established what we volunteers today know as the 1869 Stauffer-Will farmstead.

### **The Isthmus Passage**

We can only imagine the grueling 1855 trip seven of the Giesy clan endured coming from Bethel to Willapa via the Isthmus of Panama. That group consisted of family patriarchs Andreas and Barbara (Giesy) Giesy, ages 63 and 60, respectively; their son and daughter-in-law John, 34 and Barbara Ann (White) Giesy, 22, and their three children: Elizabeth 3; Henry, 1; and newborn Fritz. Their route of travel was from Bethel to New York harbor, where they took a steamship (such as the North Star) to Aspinwall (now Colon), Panama.

The passage in fair weather could be completed in seven days, but rounding treacherous Cape Hateras during a storm could extend the trip to two weeks duration and leave the saltiest of sailors wobbly in the knees.

From Aspinwall, the Giesy seven crossed the Isthmus by rail in relative comfort. They went by steamship (such as the Constitution) to San Francisco, then took a coastal steamer to Astoria. Crossing the most dangerous bar in the world and steaming up the first 10 miles of the mighty Columbia was but a warm-up for the most trying leg of their journey still ahead.

In Astoria, two options were available. The first was to board a small steamer, re-cross the treacherous bar and sail up the Pacific coast to Willapa Bay. No one is at hand to tell your writer if they made landfall at Steilacoom, or if Bruceport even existed in 1855. The second option was to cross the strong-flowing Columbia by canoe to Chinook Point then go north by horse-drawn dray over the worst sort of pioneer road.

If Christian Giesy or another scout didn't meet them with horses at the mouth of the Willapa River, there remained but a primitive and muddy five-mile trail with no means of traversing it except by foot. We only know that all seven eventually reached the newly-settled land claims of Keil's scouts and were warmly welcomed.

### **Giesy Cemetery**

We won't bore readers with the saga of Willie Keil, last-born of the 10 children of William and Louisa (Ritter) Keil. We do need to mention that Willie was first of the relocated Keilites to be interred in what is now known as Giesy Cemetery. This small hilltop burial ground is located a mile shy of Menlo, WA, on one of two adjacent claims purchased in about 1853 by Christian Giesy from "two Americans." In closing the deal, Giesy probably used Bethel Colony funds entrusted to him as captain of the scouts.

John Giesy, one of Christ's 10 younger brothers, took one of the two claims; Menlo now occupies that site. Ludwig "Louis" Schwader took the other tract, on which Fort Willapa and Giesy Cemetery materialized. He had arrived with Peter Klein's six-wagon train of 1855, slightly ahead of Keil's group.

Schwader moved to Portland in early 1856 and later that year settled with Keil's followers in Aurora.

Another younger brother of Christ, Sebastian "Bosh" Giesy, took over the Schwader place. Bosh-the-benevolent and his heirs subsequently maintained ownership longer than a century.

## **Known Burials In The Giesy Cemetery**

Barstow, Charles, 1823-03/11/1914, age 91.

Barstow, Sophie (Beck), 1842-1877, age 35.

Beck, Charles, ?-1930, age 86 no marker.

Buell, Huldamay (Giesy), 05/06/1900-10/17/1974, age 74 daughter of John H. & Marthe (Zimmerman) Giesy.

Buell, Edward D., 1903-1982, husb. of Huldamay (Giesy).

Crawford, Dean C., 1952-04/04/1954, age 2, no marker.

Crawford, Emma (Geisy), 1872-08/27/1941, age 69 daughter of John Geisy.

Crawford, Frank Gillman, 12/15/1859-12/16/1922, age 63

Crawford, Glenna D., 1900-1959, age 59, no marker.

Crawford, Harold H., 1901-1948, age 47.

Crawford, Henry C., 05/04/1945-05/05/1950, age 5.

Giesy, Andreas 'Andrew,' 11/17/1791-10/16/1860, age 68, family patriarch, native of Basel, Switzerland.

Giesy, Christian "Christ," 09/20/1813-07/07/1857, age 45, drowned in Willapa Bay, son of Andreas.

Giesy, Elizabeth, 12/02/1856-02/28/1879, age 23, dau. of Sebastian.

Giesy, George, ?-1881, son of Sebastian, no marker.

Giesy, Henry H., 08/26/1869-12/28/1953, age 84, son of John.

Giesy, Henry, 10/12/1838-10/22/1874, age 36, son of Andreas.

Giesy, Jacob "Jake," 03/06/1831-12/20/1899, son of Andreas.

Giesy, John, 06/08/1843-03/02/ 1901, age 59.

Giesy, John A., 12/05/1901-06/30/1916, age 14 son of John H. & Martha (Zimmerman) Giesy.

Giesy, John Henry, 09/23/1857-05/21/1906, age 48, son of Henry (1838-1874) and husb. of Martha Zimmerman.

Giesy, Martha J. (Zimmerman), 11/25/1868-05/22/1923, age 53, wife of John Henry.

Giesy, Martin, 05/03/1872-02/17/1873, age 1, son of John (1843-1901).

Giesy, Mary (Kraus), 1832-11/16/1874, age 42, wife of Sebastian.

Giesy, Rudolph "Rudie," 01/21/1828--03/24/1895, age 67, son of Andreas.

Giesy, Solome, 05/20/1859-04/25/1886, dau. of Sebastian.

Giesy, Sebastian "Bosh," 01/26/1823-04/16/1910, age 87 son of Andreas.

Johnson, Mabel G., 1904-1932, age 28.

Keil, William "Willie," 01/12/1836-05/19/1855, age 19, son of William & Louisa (Ritter) Keil.

Nedrow, Christian, ?-?, age?, no marker

Stauffer, John Sr., 11/14/1810-06/21/1886, age 75, killed by falling tree.

### **Fosmark on Fosmark**

I am a Bethel and Aurora Colony descendant of the Wolfer and Zimmerman families. I have been collecting family history for a quarter century. In the process of doing so, I have also researched allied family lines and as a consequence, on my mother's side, have recovered a significant amount of the genealogy of numerous founding families of Bethel and Aurora and gained some understanding of the history of those communal societies. I have also researched George Rapp's Harmony Society of Pennsylvania, of which my Wolfer ancestors were 1804 charter members prior to joining up with Keil in Bethel in 1845.

On the other hand, my father Johan Andrew "Andy" Fosmark was pure Norwegian. His ancestors hailed from a small village named Fossmark, on the east shore of Sorfjorden about 30 miles northeast of Bergen, Norway. Father ran a watchmakers shop opposite the Aurora Hotel from about 1910 to 1918. He also had a jewelry shop in Canby from 1922 until it failed in the depths of the Great Depression, about 1932, whereupon we relocated to a portion of his parents' farm near Yoder (about eight miles south of Canby).

My maternal great-grandparents were David & Elizabeth (Wolfer) Zimmerman, who were married in Bethel. Elizabeth's father, Rudolph Wolfer, was born into the Harmony Society of Pennsylvania in which he became a printer. Rudolph's parents, Frederick & Maria (Vester) Wolfer, had followed George Rapp to Pennsylvania in 1804, leaving behind their farm in Markgroningen, Kingdom of Wurttemberg, Germany.

The Wolfer clan helped establish three cities for the Rappites and two or more with the Keillites. Rudolph's wife was Catherine Vogt, whose family also became followers of Keil. David and Elizabeth, with their first child, Kate (my grandmother), came to Aurora with the 1863 wagon train. Rudolph and practically his entire family also accompanied the train. Several of Rudolph's nine surviving children were married adults with offspring and drove their own wagons in the train.

Keil sent the Zimmerman and Wolfer families out to settle on parts of the 596.62 acre James Shirley donation land claim which Keil had just purchased for his expanding colony. It was located in the north Needy district, across the line in Clackamas County. Although separated from Aurora by only a few miles, the Wolfer and Zimmerman families of Needy are seldom mentioned in written accounts of colony history.

David was the Aurora Colony Tannery founder-operator in Needy, where he also established the family graveyard known as Zimmerman Cemetery. His father, David Zimmerman, Sr., was the tanner of Bethel, Missouri. Alt Mann or "Old Dave," as he was known, came to Aurora late in life (1867) as a widower. He is buried in Aurora Community Cemetery, as are two of his unmarried daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, and a son Christian. Incidentally, the grand old house of Christian & Catherine (Will) Zimmerman still stands, a prominent landmark of old Aurora, located a short distance from the museum.

My grandmother was Margaret Catherine "Kate" Zimmerman, eldest child of the aforementioned David and Elizabeth. Kate was the wife of Jacob DeWitt "Jake" Ritter, a prominent hop and grain farmer of Needy and an Oregon pioneer of 1855. Kate was born into the Bethel Colony in 1861 and came to Oregon with the 1863 wagon train in the arms of her mother who walked most of the

way. Kate spent the rest of her life in Needy and is buried beside her husband and her parents in Zimmerman Cemetery.

Although not followers of Keil, the Ritter family accompanied Keil's 1855 wagon train out of Bethel as far as Walla Walla, where they were promptly burned out of the cabin by hostile Indians. After a two-winter sojourn in The Dalles, they settled on a farm in the Needy district where Jake met and married my grandmother Kate. Jake's parents, John and Lydia (Nygh) Ritter, retired in Aurora and are buried there in the community cemetery. I have recently celebrated my 70th birthday, and have resided in Salem since 1994.