

THE DR. J. W. MESERVE FAMILY AT DELENA, OREGON

By J. J. LAUGHLIN

Dr. John Willis Meserve, a descendant of 17th century New England ancestors, was born in Jackson, N.H., Oct. 9, 1827. Working his way west he was engaged in cabinet work and carpentry in the E. St. Louis area, where he met and married Sarah Atkins. After the War he attended the Eclectic Medical Institute at Cincinnati, Ohio, and graduated with a degree in both surgery and medicine.

The family lived for a few years in Malcolm, Iowa, where the Doctor had an extensive practice. He often called upon his wife for assistance. In 1872 we find the family of ten children living in a "sod" house on the Nebraska prairie near Cortland, where two more children were born. Dissatisfied here for lack of wood and water, Mr. Meserve was persuaded by his brother-in-law, Alexander Atkins, to move to Oregon. The two of them arrived at Astoria, via San Francisco on New Year's day, 1881.

Finding a place to his liking just west of the present Delena School, with a heavy growth of good timber and Beaver Creek cutting across one corner, Dr. Meserve established this as his homestead. Alexander Atkins had already taken up his claim a few miles to the south. His first house was a large cedar stump, which he covered with shakes, but it was adequate until he could locate or build something better for the rest of the family who moved west from Nebraska in 1883-1884.

There being no roads into the place at that time, Dr. Meserve hired Chinese labor to build the Meserve road to connect his place with the Atkins and Townsend roads leading into Rainier. Later the road was extended to Hudson and Clatskanie.

With plenty of help after his sons arrived, they built a sawmill and put a dam across Beaver Creek. Their lumber was in demand and was hauled by wagon to Rainier or Clatskanie. Some of the timber was sold to Benson, who logged it out with oxen and it was here that one of the boys, William N. Meserve found employment greasing the skid-roads for the logs. This is the W. N. Meserve who was Columbia County Surveyor in 1898 and later owned the store at Grays River,

Wash.

Dr. Meserve continued his practice as a country Doctor, making most of his calls by horse back as the roads were bad and the mud deep. With the help of his sons and a sawmill to finish the lumber, he completed their large six bedroom home with a total of 14 rooms, by 1890. Several of the rooms had hardwood floors. The house however, burned down in a forest fire about 1910.

Dr. Meserve was now able to return to his "first love," cabinet making. In the workshop over the woodshed, he was able to make all the bookcases, tables, bedroom sets, etc. out of curly and "birds eye" maple. Beautiful furniture from wood most difficult to handle even with modern tools.

Every member of this family was active and had their part in the life of the community. The first two girls, married in Nebraska, Lucy Little and Ellender Wonderly, lived near by in Beaver Valley. The mother of this family of twelve children, Sara Atkins Meserve, maintained a large garden and orchard and kept the cellar filled with canned food.

The Meserve brothers built a small building for the first Post Office in this country area west of Rainier. Lincoln Meserve was the first Postmaster and he named the place Delena. The building was just west of the school house, which the Meserves helped to establish and a daughter Fannie Meserve (Laughlin) was one of the teachers.

The community activities were also helped by having a meeting hall that was built by the Meserves. A place for dances, school programs, and other public meetings. As Dr. Meserve was strictly opposed to drinking and smoking, he kept a firm hand on the upbringing of his family, who were naturally all quite talented.

In 1887 the Meserve Family Band was organized under the leadership and direction of the oldest son Charles Meserve, who arranged the music and helped the members in playing their instruments. This band of the 12 living Meserve children, was outfitted in beautiful uniforms, Navy blue wool, gold braid and buttons. Their felt hats had a gold "M" on the front and a white ostrich feather or plume on top. The Band was in great demand on boat excursions and at the 4th of July and other celebrations. One 4th of July they were paid \$100 and all expenses to march in a parade at Portland. Fannie Meserve, having an excellent lip and talent for the cornet, played first cornet. Prof. G. Morris, Mariatta's husband, acted as Drum Major using the big baton.

By 1900 the Meserve Band was only a memory, death, marriage and ill health had taken its toll. Charles Meserve went to work at St. Helens for the newspaper "The Mist", and later bought the Oregon City "Enterprise", and after the death of his wife moved to Grants Pass where he published the Rogue River Fruit Grower.

Dr. J. W. Meserve, a member of the I.O.O.F. and Masonic Lodges

and active in the Grange, died Nov. 6, 1903. His wife died at Yamhill, Oregon, May 5, 1906. This couple and their family of twelve children have all contributed to the founding of our West, and have set examples that all of us could follow with pride. Their children:

Charles, Joseph B., Lucy M. (Little), Marietta (Morris), Ellender (Wonderly), John Lincoln, William N., Eunice (Douglass), Harry E., Thomas, Fannie J. (Laughlin), and Almer Meserve.