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THE CLAYTON/DEER PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Lewis Cass Gemmill
— Early Wild Rose Prairie Settler —
by
Peter Coffin

Lewis Cass Gemmill was born in January 1849 as the second of eight children to the farming family of James E. and Leonora A. Gemmill in Jackson, Jay County, Illinois. In 1875, he moved to the farming town of Corning in the northern part of California’s central valley a little over 90 miles north of Sacramento. By 1880 Mr. Gemmill was established as a well to do farmer. The United States Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, he listed him as owning 1,920 acres of farmland worth at an estimated $17,200, with farm machinery estimated to be worth $1,500 and livestock valued at $200. His farming operation produced an estimated annual income of $525 — about $11,700 in today’s dollars. According to his family he moved from California to Colfax (or possibly Dayton) in 1881 and worked there as a carpenter. He moved to Spokane shortly before the Northern Pacific Railroad was built through there in 1883 and worked in the lumber industry. During his time in Spokane, he filed for a homestead on the eastern edge of Wild Rose Prairie (NE/4 Section 26-Township 28 North-Range...
42 East WM) three miles south-south-east of Deer Park and soon went into the lumber business near Wayside. The serial patent (deed) for his homestead was issued on September 25, 1894. According to the 1900 Federal Census, Lewis Gemmill married Louisa L. (Kaiser) Wilbur, a widow, in 1887. He was working in the lumber industry at the time. By 1900 the Gemmill family was composed of two daughters: Hazel S. (November 1889 — October 29, 1967), and Carrie Leonora (January 23, 1895 — January 24, 1990) and two boys: Ward L. (March 4, 1893 — April 9, 1946), and Bryan W. (October 21, 1896 — August 30, 1971). Two more children were born after 1900, Leonard C. (June 17, 1901 — October 2, 1990) and Elizabeth K. (1908 — July 7, 1935). Carrie Leonora married Joseph House and is perhaps better known as the Deer Park Elementary School fourth grade teacher Leonora House. The 1900 Census indicates that Louisa had six children, two of which were deceased. Lewis Gemmill expanded his land holdings beyond the homestead quarter section and became a lumber mill proprietor. His business plan was to buy state land for $0.25 per acre, log off the land and let the land revert to the state for non-payment of taxes. The 1905 Ogle Spokane County ownership map (Image #3) shows that he owned over 1080 acres in the southeast part of Township 28 North-Rang 42 East WM (S/2 S/2 Section 25, S/2 SW Section 27, NE Section 33 — excepting the SE NE — and the W/2 and N/2 SW of Section 35), in addition to his homestead tract. In the fall of 1883, Lon Carter and
Images, This and Facing Page.

Image 4: Louisa (Kaiser, Wilbur) Gemmill. (Photograph courtesy of Gerald Gemmill.)

Image 5: A corner of the Gemmill saw mill after a flood had washed away the flume carrying water to the water wheel.

Image 6: The Gemmill saw mill. The flume in the middle ground brought water from Dragoon Creek, on the right, to run the mill by waterwheel. Mr. Gemmill could be in the carriage in front of the mill building (see inset).

Image 7: The Gemmill house on the mill site. According to Gerald Gemmill there was no proper foundation under it.

Images #5, #6, and #7 from the Lawrence Zimmerer collection.

From left to right: Bryan Gemmill, Leonora Gemmill, Mrs. L. C. Gemmill, Ward Gemmill, Leonard Gemmill, Hazel Gemmill, L. C. Gemmill, Ward Gemmill, Mrs. Joe Simpson, Mrs. Maxwell (photographer’s wife), and Mr. & Mrs. McIntyre and daughter Phyllis. McIntyre was a partner in the beginnings of the Arcadia Orchard Company.
George Brown built a sawmill (NW/4 Section 35 Township 28 North-Range 42 East WM) just southeast of the intersection of Dragoon Creek and Dalton Road. Lewis Gemmill and James Titus purchased and operated this sawmill. In the late 1880s Gemmill and Titus also operated a factory on Wild Rose Prairie manufacturing horse sleighs. The sawmill was very busy and lumber produced by it was shipped across the United States. Lewis would go on selling trips, and take his daughter Hazel to manage the business. He would buy hardwood lumber in the eastern states and have it shipped west for sale in the Spokane area.

In addition to being a busy businessman, he served a term as a Spokane County Commissioner from 1896 to 1898. Testifying to his success he purchased the first automobile on Wild Rose Prairie, a one-cylinder Cadillac.

During the financial “Panic” of 1908, he sold his homestead to the Arcadia Orchard Company to help pay off his debts. He had refused an offer from the banks holding his notes to trade his homestead land for a tract of land in Spokane west of the Spokane County courthouse, possibly in the Jenkins Addition.

Adding to much of the information in this manuscript, Gerald Gemmill, Lewis’ grandson shared some personal stories about his grandfather. Because Deer Park was voted “dry” before Prohibition many area citizens, such as Mr. Gemmill, would go to Spokane to help pay off his debts. He had refused an offer from the banks holding his notes to trade his homestead land for a tract of land in Spokane west of the Spokane County courthouse, possibly in the Jenkins Addition.

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Options.” When you select that item, an “Interactive Map” will appear. Click on the map, and a new map will appear, showing each County. Select “Stevens County” by clicking on it. A list of the State Library’s newspaper resources for Stevens County will appear, many of which are listed as available on microfilm reels. The sixth item in this list is the Clayton News-Letter, with a notation that the issues on microfilm are dated July 18, 1912 through August 29, 1913. Click on that newspaper, the “Call Number” to see the availability status will be displayed.

While one could travel to the State Library in Olympia to view these microfilms, most public libraries in Washington can borrow the microfilm for you via “Inter-library loan” and provide the means to view the films at your local library. More information may be found at: https://www.sos.wa.gov/library/libraries/interlibrary-loan.php. You’ll need to provide the “Call Number” for the microfilm containing your desired newspaper. For the Clayton News-Letter, it is “NEWSPAPER 6/38.” Be aware that images of many other newspapers may be stored on the microfilm as well, and you will likely have to search through the microfilm reel to find the images of interest to you.

Your library will need a “microfilm reel viewer,” so check with your local librarian to see that one is available. Many of these viewers are able to print copies of microfilm images, or to store the images digitally on a customer-supplied USB “thumb drive.” Your librarian would be able to instruct you in the use of their viewer.

While nearly all the newspaper resources of the State Library are on microfilm, you may find that a few are directly accessible from online archives. An example is found in the Spokane County newspaper listings, item number 26 the Liberty Lake Splish. Click on this publication and then click on “View online archived issues.” All available issues are displayed. Click on the issue of interest to open it.

Of course, many newspaper publishers can help you directly by supplying paper copies or scanned digital images online or at the newspaper’s office. For example, the Tri-County Tribune offers a few online archives at: http://tct.stparchive.com/archives.php. But if you are searching for archive copies from newspapers no longer in operation, the Washington State Library may be your best resource. And if you’re having trouble, don’t hesitate to use the Library’s online help, by clicking on “Ask a Librarian” at the top of the Library Catalog web page. You should receive a friendly reply within a day.

Letters, Email, Bouquets & Brickbats — or —

Bits of Chatter, Trivia, & Notices — all strung together.

... the Weeks of Loon Lake ...

On July 7th, I received this out-of-state inquiry from one Claudia Clark. Claudia wrote, “My great grandfather was Lucius Weeks. His wife was Carrie Mae. According to the United States Census, my great grandparents lived in Loon Lake with their four children, Lucius was a farmer. He moved his family from Minnesota to Loon Lake. I also have or had family in the Spokane/Davenport/Reardan areas, but have lost touch with any in the current generation. My grandfather would have finished his education in Loon Lake. His name was Paul D. F. Weeks (1893-1969). I remember my father, also named Paul D. F. Weeks Jr., speaking fondly of visits to Loon Lake. Any information you may have of my family would be greatly appreciated.”

I sent a note regarding Claudia’s inquiry to the Washington State Grange’s twenty-fourth annual convention, which indicated the membership at Loon Lake had declined to 46 by the end of 1912. As for the Loon Lake group’s fate, data archived during 1913’s Colville Examiner indication that the Loon Lake group had zero members; suggesting the Loon Lake group’s grange had dissolved by the time the records were finalized.

And one final set of clippings, a series of legal notices regarding Lucius B. Weeks, were found in a consecutive number of summer editions of 1917’s Colville Examiner. The notices were a Stevens County Superior Court summons stating that “Lucius B. Weeks, and Carrie M. Weeks, his wife, plaintiffs,” were seeking a judgment of ownership of the Lucius Weeks property — held in Colville during the summer of that year — indicated that the Loon Lake group’s grange had zero members; suggesting the Loon Lake group’s grange had dissolved by the time the records were finalized.

Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society Newsletter — Issue #112 — August — 2017
Minutes of the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society  
—— July 8, 2017

In attendance: Bill Sebright, Pat Parker, Wally Parker, Mark Wagner, Lorraine Nord, Sue Rehms, Ella Jenkins, Mary Jo Reiter, Mike Reiter, Roberta Reiter Pete Coffin, Denny Deahl, Judy Coffin, and Don Ball. Society President Bill Sebright called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He reported that 1) he received a phone call from former Williams Valley resident, Tammy Peterson. She was searching for information about who was in charge of the Williams Valley Cemetery. She was given Betty Parlette’s and Don Ball’s phone numbers, and received the information she needed. 2) After the last DPDS board meeting Greg Schuler talked to Bill. He now lives in the “Don and Marilyn house.” Bill gave him a C/DPHS card with email addresses and directions to our website. Greg is the son of Jake Schuler, and is a member of DPHS’s School Board. He’s interested in the history of his home and would like to keep it historically correct. 3) Joyce Reiter Wolfe (Don and Pete’s older sister) sent a 1916 Deer Park High School yearbook to Mary Jo Reiter. Mike Reiter picked it up from Mary Jo. We now have 1915 and 1916 yearbooks.

Society Treasurer Mark Wagner reported the main checking account ended the month at $6,970.39. There were deposits of $630.00. One check was written to Discount Sign Warehouse for $506.55 for shirts for Brickyard Day. The web hosting account ended the month at $705.86 with a withdrawal of $10.95 and $16.99 for web hosting. I have also submitted our 2016 tax return, it has been accepted by the IRS.

Society Vice President Pete Coffin reported that: 1) I’m working on a manuscript describing the early settlement of eastern Washington and northern Spokane County prior to 1880. 2) I scanned the Koehler pictures and returned them to Heather McGrath. Print editor Wally Parker reported: 1) One hundred and forty copies of the July Mortarboard (#111) have been printed for distribution, and the online version has been submitted for posting. The sixteen-page issue features a piece by this writer titled “Clayton Burns: The Clayton Fires of 1897, 1908, and 1957.” 2) Ten copies of the Collected Newsletters, Volume 31, have been printed. This issue combines Mortarboards #109 through #111. 3) A computer meltdown required some technical intervention and the purchase of a new device. All the data was saved, and Print Publications is up and running. The days lost put a significant squeeze on the construction of July’s Mortarboard, but my Editorial Group came through in making sure issue #111 presents as well as it does. If anyone would care to join in the Editorial Group’s future efforts, just drop me an email. Also note, membership in the society is not a requirement for participation in the Editorial Group. 4) Plans are in the very initial stage for a possible expedition to gather photos and measurements of the remains of the vintage turn of the century motor launch Gwen; its hull, or at least a portion thereof, known to reside just a short distance beneath the surface of Loom Lake. The exact date the craft sank has yet to be documented, though eighty to ninety years is probably somewhere within reason. Stay tuned for more on this. 5) On June 20th of this year, the society purchased a decorative Leno Prestini illustrated gold pan. The price, $76.60, including shipping. I first noticed the item being offered on eBay several weeks prior to purchase, the asking price at that point being $250.00. How long it had previously been posted online is unknown, but within a week of first being noticed the price was lowered to $69.99, at which point Bill Sebright was notified of the pan’s existence, and shortly thereafter, with the consent of several members of the society’s board of directors, the purchase was authorized. After purchase, I sent a note to the seller requesting information on how the pan came into the seller’s hands. The seller’s reply was that they bought the entire estate-sale contents of the basement of an older home on Spokane’s south hill. They didn’t recall the address. The first name of the prior owner is believed to have been Clarence, but they don’t recall the last name. They did say, judging from the
basement’s contents, that the prior owner was a World War II veteran, United States Navy, and that he was “into cameras,” and photographic images related to the Navy. 6) The purchased pan appears to be typical of Prestini artifacts of the type. Made of light metal, the pan is 14⅛ inches wide, and 2¼ inches deep. The flat segment at the center of the pan measures approximately 8⅞ inches across. The fitment for hanging the pan is tack-welded or brazed to the back of the pan as commonly seen on similar Prestini artifacts. The entirety of the pan — front and back — previously a grey color, has been painted gold (possibly with common aerosol spray paint). The image — the depiction of a classic equal-arm balance scale in the process of weighing gold dust — is confined within the flat portion at the bottom of the pan. The paint media used to create the image is assumed to be similar to that Leno used for the rest of his artwork. The inner rim of the gold pan contains Leno’s typical signature, and the date “1961.” 7) The essentially still-life image falls within Leno’s common theme of gold prospecting and prospectors. Though likely of interest more for its historical than artistic value, the object is none less representative of a very limited number of Prestini objects coming to market.

Webmaster Marie Morrill reported that she is in Illinois at a family reunion. All my kids and grandkids will be there, which is a rare occasion. Upload of the July Mortarboard is expected next week.

Mike Reiter reported he was changing a meter at the Don Keyes house at Stevens and C Street in Deer Park, and was told by the resident that Leno Prestini had done the homes brickwork, including the fireplace. Brad Wainwright stated he’d unearthed some Clayton brick on his Merritt Drive property. Some of his property was once in Clayton’s brickyard.

The Brickyard Day committee met Wednesday, July 5, 6 PM at the Estate Marketplace. We are having trouble getting insurance this year.

Next meeting: Saturday, August 12, 2017, at 9 AM at the Clayton Drive-In. Meeting adjourned at 9:51 AM.

The above C/DPHS minutes submitted by Mark Wagner, acting Secretary.

See Yourself in Print.

The Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society’s department of Print Publications is always looking for original writings, classic photos, properly aged documents and the like that may be of interest to our readers. These materials should be rooted within, though not limited to, northern Spokane County, southeastern Stevens County, and southern Pend Oreille County. As for types of materials, family or personal remembrances are always considered. Articles of general historical interest — including pieces on natural history, archeology, geology and such — are likely to prove useful. In other words, we are always searching for things that will increase our readers’ understanding and appreciation of this region’s past. As for historical perspective; to us history begins whenever the past is dusty enough to have become noteworthy — which is always open to interpretation. From there it extends back as deep as we can see, can research, or even speculate upon.

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