

# Pleasant Hill, Oregon – The Community

Pleasant Hill began with Elijah Bristow.

He was born in Virginia in April of 1788, emigrating in early manhood to Kentucky and then to Illinois. He was restless, looking for something. He went west to California in 1845 but the California lifestyle wasn't for him. He traveled overland to Oregon in the spring of 1846, at the age of 58. There he made up a traveling party of Eugene F. Skinner, Captain Felix Scott, and William Dodson and they started up the Willamette Valley in search of a good location for settlement.

They came up the west side of the valley and stopped seeing evidence of white settlers after passing the Luckiamute River (about 10 miles north of present Albany, a quarter mile downstream from the Santiam River mouth).

The party kept going south.

According to an account by Susannah Gabbert Bristow, his wife, as transcribed by H.M. Gabbert in July of 1989 from a document held by Judge John Gabbert of Riverside, CA: "On arriving at a point between the Coast and Middle Forks of the Willamette river, on a low rolling ridge, sparsely covered with oak, fir and pine timber, ever since known as Pleasant Hill, Mr. Bristow's eye was attracted towards the panorama of mountain and vale stretching out before him that reminded him of a like scene in far-off Virginia, where he was born. He halted and raised his hat, allowing the cooling breeze, fresh from the near rolling Pacific to play at will through his thin gray locks, he exclaimed: 'This is my claim! Here I will live, and when I die, here shall I be buried!'" as the founding statement of Pleasant Hill.

He sent for his family and built the first house in what became Lane County. The family took six months to make it across the plains.

Elijah's fourth son (and one of eventually 15 children), William Wilshire Bristow, who had been born in Cumberland County, Kentucky on July 18, 1826, was the very first teacher in Pleasant Hill's history, as Elijah's second building project was a cabin to be both the church and school in 1847, the oldest school in Lane County.

With the help of James Hendricks, he erected a small log house on the southwest corner of what is now the Pleasant Hill Cemetery, near where the entrance road is now. It was used as both a school and a church for the first four years and was supported by subscription. In April of 1853 a meeting was held and the following "school-directors" (school board members) were elected: Edward Mullholland, Gilmore Callison, and James Mitchell, with John Gilfrey elected as clerk. At that same meeting, the directors voted to erect a new school building on 40 acres of land donated by Elijah Bristow from the NW corner of his claim.

The building was erected the following year in 1854 by Robert Callison. District Number 1 originally included Pleasant Hill and what would later be the districts of Edenvale, Enterprise, and parts of Coast Fork and Cloverdale.

The first Union High School in Lane County was built on land either donated by H.C. Wheeler, or "purchased from Joseph Pestal, 1/4 mile east of the PH cemetery on the south side of the highway," according the Verna Manning Mauney, an early teacher in the elementary school, married to Berry Mauney, who graduated from PHHS in 1927. The school was east of the current (2010) Elementary school about where the newer Junior High gym is today, The older gym south of that one was built in 1953 to replace one that burned down in 1951.

In 1908 a group of people from the five districts, Pleasant Hill, Enterprise, Coast Fork, Edenvale, and Trent, met and elected a school board member from each district. Those elected were Will Wheeler,

Chairman; R.J. Hemphill, Clerk, Bert Beaver, W.C. Reeve, E.P. Lattin, and Fred Cook.

Although only the first five districts were official, many students came from non-high school districts: Zion, Lowell, Jasper, Goshen and Cloverdale. They had to pay tuition which changed from year to year. Some years it was as small as \$1 per student.

Details of other buildings in the Pleasant Hill community, including a cheese factory, can be found on the Pleasant Hill CD-ROM in selections from the "Lane County Historian" from June of 1959.

In 1908, Pleasant Hill started its first high school classes. There were other high schools in the area: Eugene had started its first public high school in 1899 with four teachers (there had been a private religious high school, St. Johns, started in 1870, taught by Rev. McManus) and Cottage Grove built their first high school in 1891 with one teacher. Springfield later started their high school in 1909 with four teachers, the year after Pleasant Hill High School began as a separate room with Mrs. Clara S. Corum as the first teacher.

In 1910 four seminal events happened in Pleasant Hill: the railroad came to town, a bridge over the Coast Fork was completed, the high school was built, and the first class graduated. The principal/teacher was "Prof." Earl Kilpatrick. He was also the baseball coach and the Pleasant Hill team beat the other high schools in Lane County and also defeated the University of Oregon's "second team," what we would call a JV team today. As part of the first graduation festivities over three days, a rematch was held with the U of O. The program for the graduation had a scorecard so people could keep track of each inning. I don't know the results of that game.

Why was Earl Kilpatrick only the principal from 1909–1910? Verna Mauney relates what she heard: "It is believed he was killed in some auto accident before completing the first school year . . ." But records of the Oregon State Teachers Association list Earl Kilpatrick (from Eugene) as a member in 1913, 1915, 1917, 1922. But there is also an Earl Kilpatrick listed as the principal of Salem High School in 1909. From 1926-1932 "E. E. Kilpatrick", also known as "Prof.," was principal at Pleasant Hill High. The OSTA records say their Earl Kilpatrick was associated with the University of Oregon between 1913 and 1922.

The Eugene *Register-Guard* on March 3, 1946, writes of how E.E. Kilpatrick, called "Proff" by students, was visiting from Merrill, Oregon, where he had moved with his wife later. He came back every year for the county basketball tournaments, since he had coached a number of PHHS champion teams. His son, Vernon, was listed on that date as having been in the Service. In January of 2010, "Vernon Kilpatrick" was listed in the obituaries as having died on Dec. 29, 2009 and as being the son of "Eber and Iva Kilpatrick." Was "E.E." Earl or Eber? Did Earl move on to the U of O or was he killed in an accident. Pictures of E.E. Kilpatrick in 1932 show a man who looks similar to Earl. A mystery!

The first graduating class consisted of two students, Hattie van Vliet and Dougal Rankin. But there was a third member of the Class of 1910, Bill Moore. He wanted to enroll in the U of O but did not meet their foreign language requirement (two years). He had the choice of graduating and not going to the U of O or completing the second of two years of the foreign language and then graduating. He took a delayed diploma, graduating in 1911.

Dougal Rankin shows up in two pictures of adult baseball teams in the area in a *Register-Guard* publication but nothing else is known. However, Hattie van Vliet became a teacher: 1914 Crow District 35, 1915-1916 Big Prairie/Hazeldell/ Oakridge Dist. 76, 1916 Portage Dist. 53, 1919-20 Elmira Grade School, Dist. 139. I wasn't able to find more about her career after that point. I could speculate that she got married and women teachers weren't supposed to be married but then there are the Coopers.

In the early years of PHHS, husband and wife team of Frank and Elsie Cooper were the teachers of

the new school after Kilpatrick in 1910. Elsie would finally retire in 1946 after teaching at PHHS for 31 years.

In 1914, the first gymnasium was built, mostly by the shop students under the direction of Mr. Cooper. During the 1912-1919 years, Mr. Cooper had a manual training or shop class that built that first gym. A carpenter was hired and the boys received credit by aiding in the building of the gym. Some of those students were Bernice Manning, Jed Wheeler, and Cecil Wheeler. But it became a community project with parents joining in. E.P. Lattin, one of the school board members, had a sawmill in the woods just west of the 1962 (present) high school. Men from the area felled the trees and bucked the logs which were then dragged to the mill by horses and the wood used in building the gym.

Jed Wheeler used his father's team and lumber wagon. The ladies of the community would gather at noon with baskets of food for the men and boys. At the time, this gym was considered one of the best in the county. There were eight or ten gas lamps that hung from the rafters to provide lights for the ball games. When they were hit by a ball, they would swing to and fro. About 1927 showers were added to the rear of the building. That reminds me of our current grandstand that was built by donations of money and labor by parents, students and teachers. I was out here swinging a hammer in the 1970s.

By 1926, two more districts were added to the original five: Cloverdale and Dexter. Two more, Zion and Jasper, were added much later in 1961. 1926 also saw the first annual, mimeographed, edited by Berry Mauney. In honor of the now seven districts forming the union high school, the name "Hepta" — "seven" in Greek — was chosen for the annual and is still the same in 2010. Coincidentally, seven seniors graduated that year, but 1927 saw 16 receive diplomas. The last member of that class of 1926, Russell Harrison, died in August of 2009 in Albany at the age of 100.

In 1930, the school got electricity and a telephone was installed in the principal's office. And a school bus was purchased. There went those stories of parents walking through snow uphill both ways. 30 seniors graduated.

In 1937, a new gymnasium was built behind the high school, the one that still stands. The old 1914 gym was being used for home economics and science rooms when it burned down in 1950–1951. It happened at night and nobody was hurt, although during that school year two teachers were killed in an automobile accident on the Coast Fork Bridge and a student died of polio, three years before the first immunizations of the Salk Polio Vaccine. In 1951, 23 seniors graduated, including Paul Smith, teacher Steve Smith's father.

1953 saw a new high school of eight classrooms and a shop (on the site of the old 1914 gym). This later would become the junior high when the new high school, the building we currently use, was built in 1961. Students moved in during January 1962 after Winter Break. 28 students were in the class of '53. 67 graduated from the new high school in 1962.

The Baby Boom had arrived in 1964 and nationally, the peak years were the mid 1970s. Senior classes at PHHS remained around 100 students for the next 35 years.

Additions to the physical plant of the high school building since that 1962 opening time have included science rooms 15, and 17, math room 16, enlarging the library, the General Purpose room, the music building, forestry building, art room, rooms 21–23, and the weight room.

This year, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders joined us in the same building, bringing us full circle to where we started in 1908, all in one place, all working together.

What has remained constant has been the quality of students and parents and the teachers who have provided continuity. And we've had some long-time teachers, some of whom were working on their third generation of students.

Many remember Miss Dora Ellen Cash, from 1945-1965, not for being a nice teacher but years later they remember her as someone who taught them lessons they still remember. It takes a bit of maturity to realize "nice" doesn't necessarily go with "good teacher" although it can help. Chris Luehring taught for 28 years at PHHS and is still on campus from time to time, continuing to help out and tutor. Dan Skipper retired in 2009 after 30 years but comes back to substitute, as does Bill Neal, retiring in 2003 after 34 years at the high school. Ralph Perkins started teaching at PHHS in 1963 and finally stopped 38 years later. Richard Adams started teaching science in the fall of 1970 and is still here, 40 years later and looking forward to next year.

So why do so many teachers in Pleasant Hill's history teach for two, three, or four decades? In many jobs and professions, people are ready to get out as soon as possible. Why do we stay? For one thing, we are the people who were very lucky to find a job we really enjoyed. But why at Pleasant Hill? Other school districts pay more, much more. Other schools may have newer facilities. But what the other schools can't match are the students and the parents.

Year after year and now in our second century, the parents of the Pleasant Hill School District have sent us fine young people to educate. And we can do that, especially when they come to us already blessed at home with notions of hard work and readiness to learn. And we can see our teaching having results.

The patrons of the school district long ago in 1847 said that education was important and they were willing to pay taxes to make that happen. They wanted their community to survive and prosper and that only happens when each succeeding generation is able to carry on the old tasks and be ready for the new challenges as they come along.

And each year, each decade, each century, the Pleasant Hill story has remained constant: a joint effort on the part of parents, teachers, and students to make learning happen, make success happen, and make a community a place people want to be a part of because good things continue to be achieved.

We offer you, the class of 2010, the first class of our second century, the Centennial Class.