

# **A Family with a History of Public Service.**

Written by Jason Yazzolino

The date is May 17, 1843, and a group of emigrants are assembled near Independence Missouri. Little do they know that they are the beginning of the westward expansion that resulted in the opening of the wagon road all the way to the Columbia River.

Their wagon train consisted of 120 wagons and 5,000 head of cattle. Harvey W. Scott, the late editor of the Oregonian said, "It numbered about 900 settlers among whom were many strong characters." On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1843, they started their trek west with multiple people who would ultimately help shape what we know as the "Oregon Territory."

Prior to 1843, there were only two documented emigrations of settlers to the Oregon Territory. The most authentic records show that there were only 111 people in the emigration of 1841, and, on May 16<sup>th</sup> of 1842, a wagon train of only sixteen wagons left Independence, MO with 109 settlers, and of those only fifty-five were over eighteen years old.

At that time, the borders of the Oregon Territory were not as defined as they are today, and the territory was governed by a treaty between the United States and Great Britain. The treaty stated that the Oregon Country was jointly occupied by the United States and Great Britain and was British soil as to the subjects of that country and American soil for those who had been born of American descent or possessed citizenship. This treaty lasted nearly twenty-six years from October 1818 to May 1844.

One of the first to settle in the Oregon Territory was fur trapper Ewing Young who arrived in the Oregon territory in 1834. Mr. Young was an entrepreneur who established fifty square miles of land for himself. Mr. Young was famous for being the founder of the Santa Fe Trail. He also established trade routes in the Mexican Territories now known as New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and California.

Ewing Young's land became the place where the earliest American Pioneers finished their journeys. Young was responsible for creating many of the businesses in Oregon to include building the first sawmill, which was at the confluence of Chehalem Creek and the Willamette River. Mr. Young built the first grist mill that bordered the land known today as Ewing Young Park in Newberg, Oregon. He also operated a general store for the arriving settlers.

After Mr. Young passed away on February 9, 1841, many settlers recognized the need for a government. There were no laws in place for probate and Mr. Young did not leave a will establishing who would take ownership of his properties.

After Mr. Young's funeral on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1841, a group of settlers met at Champoeg, a settlement on the French Prairie of the Willamette River valley, in present day Marion County. The meeting was organized by newly-arrived settlers as well as missionaries and a Catholic priest from Canada.



**PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT MONUMENT, CHAMPOEG STATE HERITAGE AREA**

Missionary Jason Lee advocated for a settler-run, local government in the region to address issues of probate, estate administration, and how to reward hunters who killed animals that preyed on livestock.

Joseph Meek (Washington County's first Sheriff) was part of the first meetings and is known for his leadership to help get the votes to create the provisional government until such time as the United States decided to exercise jurisdiction over the territory.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1843, a meeting was again held in Champoeg to vote on the creation of the committee that would establish the Provisional Government. The meeting was attended by fifty-two Canadians and fifty Americans.

That day, settlers started what would be called the provisional government of Oregon. Elections were made to include electing Joseph Meek to Sheriff of the Territory.

Reports say during the meeting Joseph Meek shouted, "Who's for a divide?" and drew a line in the sand with the heel of his boot. He then announced, "All for the report of the committee and organization, follow me." Two Canadians, following a private conversation with Meek, sided with the Americans making the vote fifty-two to fifty in favor. Meek then hollered, "Three cheers for our side!"

This fledgling government was in place from May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1843, and lasted till March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1849. After 1849, the government was called the Oregon Territorial Legislature as Oregon was now officially a territory of the United States.



**WASHINGTON COUNTY'S FIRST JAIL**

Some of the names you may or may not recognize in the wagon train of 1843 are Dr. Marcus Whitman, who was later killed in the Whitman Massacre; Jeremiah Rowland, who later became a Judge in McMinnville; and James Marshall, who ultimately discovered gold at Sutter's mill—resulting in a mad scramble to California in 1849.

Another name the reader should be aware of is A. J. Hembree. Current Washington County Sheriff Caprice Massey is a descendant of Hembree, which is her maiden name. In his move to Oregon, Mr. Hembree was accompanied by his wife, Nancy Hembree (Dodson). The Hembree family left Missouri with their four children: William, Ann, Nancy, and older brother Joel. Unfortunately,

Hembree's infant son died along the trail. They arrived in Oregon City on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1843, where they stayed until the spring of 1844.

Mrs. Hembree was specifically mentioned in an excerpt from W. D. Fenton's writings in *THE WINNING OF THE OREGON TERRITORY*, when General Fremont, a U.S. Army General, described what he saw as his unit overtook the Hembree's emigrant train of 1843 at Bear River, Near Fort Bridger. He stated in his writings that he found two brave, patriotic American women who were moving towards Oregon with their husbands and little children.

As Fremont's company of soldiers approached the wagon train, the alarm was erroneously given that Indians were coming. Some of the men with the wagon train did not have bullets for their guns. While the men corralled the cattle as they prepared to defend the wagon train, Mrs. Cyrene B. Carey, and Mrs. Nancy Hembree molded bullets for the men to use for battle.

It was reported that a member of the wagon train came to the Carey wagon wanting to borrow a gun, whereupon her husband, Miles Carey, told him he could have his wife's. Mrs. Carey replied, "No, you cannot have my gun, for I am going to fight for my little one and will need my gun." Just then the American flag and the soldiers came into plain view, and the settlers realized they were not being attacked.

In 1844, Mr. Hembree and his family moved from Oregon city to the newly organized Yamhill District and settled on a piece of land they claimed near the present community of Carlton. Mr. Hembree's claim was one of the first in what became Yamhill County.

Mr. Hembree was to be known as "Uncle Abb" to his neighbors. He constructed a hewed log house, the only one of that character in that vicinity, others were of rough logs. Ten children were born into the family. They raised livestock and Mr. Hembree operated a store near Lafayette.

In 1844, Mr. Hembree attended the Champoeg meeting where he ran against Joseph Meek for Sheriff. Joseph Meek received 267 votes for Sheriff to 214 votes cast for A. J. Hembree. Later in 1845, as four districts were established, A. J. Hembree became the first Sheriff of the Yamhill District and served till 1846.

During a Champoeg meeting in 1846, A. J. Hembree was elected to the Provisional Legislature of Oregon, to represent the Yamhill District, which he held from 1846 to 1849. Once the Oregon Territorial Legislature was established, he was again elected for office in 1849, 1851, and 1854.

In 1855, the Yakima War between the United States Government and the Native Americans broke out in the eastern part of the Washington Territory. It was during this campaign that Mr. Hembree was a Captain in charge of a company of troops as he helped organize the "Oregon Mounted Volunteers."

Captain A. J. Hembree took a small group of men to carry out reconnaissance on the Satus Creek (in Washington State) near where their detachment was at. During the reconnaissance, his group was ambushed on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1856, and Hembree was killed.

The following, documented in THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON MONUMENT TO CAPTAIN HEMBREE written by William P. Bonney, cited a description of the skirmish in Lieutenant Stillwell's words, who was one of the members of the scouting party:

Just before we got to the top of the hill we went over a little ridge and down a small flat at the head of and between two canyons, one a mere hollow and the other a good-sized canyon. The Indians were at the big ridge to the right of us, probably fifty or sixty of them. About forty more of them came around and got between us and the camp to cut us off from our main body of troops. There were a large number, probably one hundred Indians in the large or main canyon ahead. When we got over the flat, Hembree ordered 'Right, charge up the hill.'

About half the way up the hill the Indians fired on us. We were about fifty yards from the foot of the hill when they fired. None of us were hit. They mostly overshot. After they fired the second time, they rose yelling and waving their blankets and stampeded our horses, and the Indians in our rear, between us and camp, closed in at our back and attacked us.

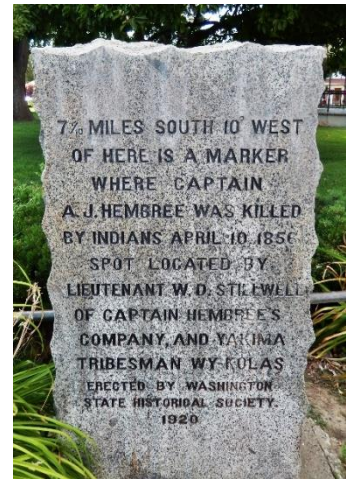
There were ten of us all together. This put us between the Indians on the ridge and the bunch of about forty in the rear. About this time Hembree said, 'Retreat, boys, they are too many for us.' Then we retreated along the flat between the two canyons which now seemed to be filled with Indians. In moving Hembree was on our extreme right near the deeper canyon. There were over one hundred Indians there in the big canyon. I was on the extreme left when we retreated and fell in just ahead of the forty Indians on our left. Four or five of the boys close to me, and just as we got on the level spot between the two canyons, and just at the top of the hill before starting down, Hembree was shot from his mule. He was shot in the right side just above the hip bone, the shot coming out on the left side at the second rib; the ball going clear through. He called to the boys not to leave him.

My animal was weak, and I was holding it in to keep it from over-jumping itself when it came to the steep part going down the hill. An Indian came up to me on this steep hill and kept gaining on me until his horse's nose was against my right knee. I knew that as soon as I struck level ground, he'd put his gun against me and shoot, and it would be all over. I threw my horse onto its haunches and swung her around to the left, and as I came around the Indian fell off his horse before he could get his gun up to his face.

I looked around and then saw Hembree lying with his head downhill. He was braced up with his right hand and was using his revolver with his left. This was the first time I saw him after he was shot, he, having gone over the point of a small sharp ridge out of sight, just before he was shot. Just then an Indian ran up to him and fired, shooting him through the heart. Hembree fell over and moved one foot and then one hand afterwards and then lay still. I could not keep my horse still, but every time she whirled around, I fired, having a good pair of Colt Dragoon Revolvers and with them held back the forty mounted Indians until the balance of our party came up.” Lieutenant Stillwell said the fight continued all day and several Indians were killed.

Captain Hembree’s body was recovered and taken to Oregon where he was buried on the family farm. Another written account says that Captain A. J. Hembree was given a Masonic burial at the Hembree Cemetery in Yamhill County. On June 20, 1920, the Washington State Historical Society placed a monument at the site of his death.

One hundred sixty-seven years after A. J. Hembree’s heroic sacrifice for his country, you will still find his descendant, Sheriff Caprice Massey, keeping to the family tradition of public service.



CAPTAIN A. J. HEMBREE'S MONUMENT

Sheriff Massey served in the United States Navy from 1990 to 1999 as an Aviation Ordnanceman. During her time in the service, she was the first woman to run the brig on the USS Theodore Roosevelt. Years later, Sheriff Massey again made history with being the first female Sheriff sworn in for Washington County.

Sheriff Massey’s father, Louis Hembree, served in the U.S. Air Force and he was stationed in the air base here locally in Portland, Oregon. Sheriff Massey and her family understand the meaning of service to our God, Country, and Community.

As you look back on the history of our nation and the state of Oregon, you will find many stories repeating the same theme of good people stepping up to sacrifice for a greater cause. These are stories of grit and determination, of adversities and, ultimately, of triumph. The “characters” in these stories exemplify some of our most dearly-held values: courage, commitment, charity, and faith. Those values have been passed down and are lived out among the people I get to work with every day at the Washington County Sheriff’s Office—to include our new Sheriff. I personally want to give my thanks to each family that has sacrificed for our country and community as well to the families that continue to serve generation after generation.