

THE McCOY FAMILY

The McCoy family was among the earliest settlers who had a part in the development of the Valley. Some of their descendants still own and occupy a part of the original family holdings.

Thomas McCoy, leading a string of pack animals, brought his possessions from California gold fields in September 1856 and built a log cabin on land he selected. The land was patented in 1864, under the land-grant law of 1820. Title to the tract was the first deed to be recorded in Umatilla County.

Some time after Thomas became settled he was joined by his family, who had remained in Ohio while Tom sought fortune in the West. The search was successful to a degree as Tom set up business in the Walla Walla Valley with \$40,000 or \$50,000 in gold. It is recorded he shipped the gold from California by Wells Fargo Express. With part of it, the family, in 1876, built a two story, seven-gable house on the present Ben Johnson property.

It is a matter of record that the first litigation in Oregon over irrigation water rights, was between Thomas McCoy and Ninevah Ford. The case was tried in Oregon City. The court decree is known as the McCarthy decree and divided the water of the Walla Walla and the Little Walla Walla equally between them.

The McCoy's traded extensively with the Indians, let them camp on their property. There was never trouble between them. E. O. "Dutch" McCoy prospered by shipping wheat by rail and barge to The Dalles, acquired property elsewhere, and moved away. Mark McCoy lives on part of the old place.

Thomas McCoy was one of Umatilla County's Board of Commissioners when Umatilla was the county seat. Ninevah Ford was one of a committee of three appointed to select a site for a new county seat to be between the mouth of Wildhorse Creek and McKay Creek, which later became Pendleton.

Early History of the Milton-Freewater Area

Published by the Valley Herald, Inc.

Milton-Freewater, Oregon

1962