

**THE HOPKINS FAMILY
A Pictorial History
1983**

by John Stephen Hopkins

**Dedicated to Grandpa,
Elmer H. Hopkins**

Forward

Inspired by “Grandpa Hopkins” (Elmer Henry Hopkins), who told fascinating stories and anecdotes about his family’s past, we began work in 1970 researching records to establish a true account of the HOPKINS FAMILY HISTORY. We encouraged Grandpa to set down on paper all that he could remember. He started writing “chapters” in the mid-1960, recollecting stories his mother had told him, and information he had gleaned from relatives back in Kentucky during his visit there in 1909. Finally, in 1968, he finished writing the story of his parents’ trek to Oregon. It was titled “CUMBERLAND GAP TO THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY BY COVERED WAGON”. They arrived there in 1876 and homesteaded “up the river” from Milton, Oregon. I began the investigation of the “facts”, with considerable help from my mother, Ermine C. Hopkins. We found vital records very scanty, but finally succeeded in locating direct line ancestors on U.S. Census Schedules. Library searches turned up some other records, but it was my correspondence with Henry M. Hopkins of Detroit, Michigan, in the early 1970’s that provided the crucial clues, which enabled us to put together missing parts of the “family puzzle”. Henry was born in 1889, and grew up in Kentucky, thus was able to hear the family stories first hand, and knew many of the children of his grandfather, “Grand-Daddy Stephen”.

After tracing the family to Harlan and Bell counties in Kentucky, we discovered that they originally lived in Claiborne and Hancock counties, in East Tennessee. I am a career Army officer, and my duties took me to Germany in 1971, but my brother, Richard D. Hopkins, took up the search. He and my mother continued the search for several years, and a major portion of the genealogical material in this history is the result of their labors.

In addition to my mother, brother and cousin Henry, I would like to acknowledge the help and support of Mrs. Dan (Jean) Shaw of Pilot Rock, Oregon, who worked in the Umatilla County Courthouse and contributed many of the vital records contained in this booklet. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Mrs. Elmer (Emma) Hopkins of Loyall, Kentucky. And finally, I would like to dedicate this booklet to the family’s senior historian, my grandfather, Elmer H. Hopkins of Fairfield, California. This family history is the culmination of our mutual efforts, and without their hard work, it would not have been possible.

This booklet is intended only for the private use of the Hopkins family, and is not intended for republication. It is printed on the finest archival quality paper available, and should last for generations with moderate care. I sincerely hope that our efforts will prove to be of enduring interest to you and your family for generations to come.

John S. Hopkins
14 December 1983

EXCERPTS
From Cumberland Gap to the Walla Walla Valley
by Elmer H. Hopkins.

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My folks added every dollar they could to the Oregon nest egg to outfit them for the long migration to the Promised Land in the west. Both of them were young and healthy. A new or nearly new wagon would be needed, and their old Kentucky mules would be traded in for larger and younger Missouri mules. New heavy canvas and hickory bows would guarantee warmth and dryness.

Folks who had been over the Oregon Trail suggested that they travel as light as possible, taking three or four lightweight boxes about three feet long and twelve inches deep that could be nestled for storage if necessary. These boxes could be used on the outside for table and benches. When crossing rivers, they could be inverted so bedding and provisions would be raised a foot above the bed of the wagon and not get water-soaked. Nobody over sixty or under three, no horse or mule over eleven or twelve, and no old cows could make the journey. They had to take along extra horseshoes, an extra wagon coupling pole and brake blocks, an assortment of bolts, nails and tools, and also a lantern, kerosene, turpentine, axle grease, and extra clothing and shoes. Mother listed everything for the trip.

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Dad called her ‘Ma’ with us children, and otherwise ‘Malinda’ or sometimes ‘Milly’.

Mother heard him calling her both names once as loud as he could yell. The wagon train had made night camp on a rather small, fast flowing river, and as soon as she saw this stream, Mother could see a pan full of trout. So telling Dad to ‘‘watch Everman and put on the pan’’, she took the fishing pole, some bait, and taking little Meda, away she went. After fishing with fair luck for a half hour or so, at a distance between a quarter and a half-mile from camp, she heard her name called faintly. Turning toward the circle of covered wagons, she noticed Dad waving his gun and motioning to her in a wild way. Then she couldn’t see much of the white wagons because a large band of Indians practically surrounded the camp. The Indians were a disheveled mixture of red humanity, begging for food and anything else that was loose. Evidently they were migrating to a new camp ground farther north or west, and trying to avoid being put on a reservation by Cavalry units.

The black-eyed children were nearly all naked, and many of the male grownups could have used more body covering also. My Dad and the other men carried their guns, and giving stern command, forced all of the Indians away from the wagon. They were probably outnumbered three to one. Some of the train women had guns, too, and showed fire in their eyes. The six or seven dogs in the train were taking on all Indian dogs that came near. In fact, they were so hostile toward the smelly red visitors that a ‘‘Sic ‘em’’ would have given them an opportunity to tear into any intruder. Several of the men had butchered a dry cow and some younger stock. The half-starved red folks practically cleaned up the entrails and other discarded parts of the carcass.

The butchering took place several yards from the wagons.

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On the leg of the journey from Pueblo to South Platte, an incident happened to Dad that caused Mother to smile whenever she thought of it the rest of her life. The wagons camped one evening on a level spot in a rather mountainous area. Dad noted that the hill they were on ascended three or four hundred yards, apparently dropping off beyond into a narrow gully before the next hill. Loading the big muzzle-loader with heavy buckshot in one barrel and smaller shot in the other, and putting on the firing caps, he took off. He told Mother to put on the largest frying pan because they would have antelope or mountain grouse, or perhaps both for supper. Mother and the children watched him cautiously slow down as he disappeared over the crest of the hill. In a minute or so they heard a loud report from his gun.

From the summit, Dad surveyed the lay of the land down below, noting a small stream with low undergrowth on each side. The opposite hill rose rather steeply. A movement caused him to focus straight across the canyon where a large animal settled on the ground. For a few seconds Dad was spellbound, then he realized he was looking into the blazing eyes of a huge mountain lion. Even at a hundred feet away, the open red mouth filled with large teeth seemed to exhale fire and fight. Dad admitted his finger might have been shaking a little when he pulled the trigger of buckshot. The big cat let out a snarly spit and screeched as it struck back toward its belly. Then it came leaping straight for Dad.

Returning to the scene with other men a little later, they discovered that the big cat had headed downstream, leaving bloodstains on rocks and bushes. Hunters told Dad later that the animal was running for the closest cover. But in those two or three decisive seconds, how could a fellow take time to figure that out?

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I am not sure of the number of covered wagons in our folks' train, but guess between forty-five and fifty. Let us observe them at ten o'clock on a very warm morning, perhaps forty-six wagons strung out, keeping as close together as the prairie dust permitted. In number nine down the line, Dad was walking and driving the mules from the right or driver's side. Number ten was the George Michael wagon. Nan was walking and driving their team. George had bad lungs and could not walk very well. Cousin Arch was driving number eleven. He and his young partner were both walking in order to lighten their load. I think the number twelve wagon belonged to the Nail family, but am not sure.

Arriving at a fairly level section about 12:10, the Captain called back loudly to the line, "Noon" then pulled a short distance off the road. Three wagons followed the Captain, pulling up opposite on his right. The fifth wagon drove about thirty feet behind the Captain's. Then, the three following him pulled up on his right. Next my folks stopped thirty feet behind the second line, and the Michaels, Cousin Arch, and the Nails lined up on Dad's right. This orderly process grouped the wagons so they would not get strung out for a half-mile down a hill. Dad securely blocked the wheels, unhitched and unharnessed the mules, leaving only a halter on them, with perhaps a seven or eight foot of rope attached. The mules were turned loose to find any available grass. Usually youths on horseback acted as guards to keep the stock from roaming far from the noon camp. One hour was usually allowed for the noon stop, so about twenty minutes before starting time, the teams were driven in close and the owners began their harnessing. When the noon hour was up, the Captain started up the head wagon slowly, then gradually the original line reformed.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon, a designated rider, or perhaps two, rode on ahead of the train a few miles to select a good camping place. The Captain relied on "WARE'S EMIGRANT GUIDE OF THE OREGON TRAIL", which was usually accurate concerning watering places, rivers, and grass conditions. Camp was made as early as five o'clock, or sometimes much later, depending upon the availability of ample water. The night encampment was on the pattern of the letter O.

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My folks' train finally made its way into the Grand Ronde Valley. One camp was made at some springs in the Blue Mountains, and the next day they came to the Umatilla River. Shortly after that the train parted in two directions. About half the wagons continued on down the river, then over the hill toward the Columbia River. The remaining wagons chose Walla Walla, Palouse Country, Yakima, and Puget Sound as their destination.

One day years later, while on our way to Pendleton on the old road that followed the Wild Horse, Dad showed me where his half of the old wagon train made its last camp. I would say it was about two miles below where Adams is located now.

The next day they drove the wagon over the hill and down Dry Creek, seeking a place to settle down. They crossed over another hill and descended on a new road to the valley where Milton nestled. That road was close to the present-day highway. The old Oregon Trail skirted above Milton and hit the valley close to Freewater. This old Trail road is nearly doomed to oblivion. I know of only one place that one can go to see the wheel marks of the thousands of wagons that passed by.

This book is in our archives and has been presented to the Milton-Freewater Area Historical Society, Milton-Freewater, OR by L. E. Hopkins, September 1986. He stated that copies are available for \$25 from L.E. Hopkins, 16840 SW Monterey Lane, Tigard, OR 97224.

It is the best work on family history I have seen – and is available to anyone to see visiting the Frazier Farmstead Museum.

*Thank you,
Frazier Farmstead Museum*