

## **Where Portland Stands**

### **James Catching Camped Here in 1847**

#### **Pioneer, Now a Resident of Coos County, Tells the Story of Early Days**

MARSHFIELD, Or., Sept. 26(Special.) It is impressive to hear of men still living who more than half a century ago wrapped their blankets around them and lay down to sleep in the silence of the wilderness where now stirs the life of the great city of Portland. It is still more marvelous to take them by the hand and hear them speak and tell of those times when naught but forests fringed the banks of the Willamette. That messenger from the long past comes like a voice from the grave. We read in history accounts of the daring deeds of those early times with some emotion, but when we meet face to face the actor himself who took a part in the drama the scene is real. Those human documents are rare. Each day sees them passing farther and farther away, and soon they are gone from us like the ship that sinks at sea. We may well listen to their voice while yet we may. They are men of few words, but each word speaks volumes.

Their eyes grow dimmer and dimmer and they strain to catch the spoken word, but the memory of those early times does not fade. Those scenes of their youth have become a part of their being, and will be the last to leave them with the parting breath. Those men were pioneers. It is a proud scroll that bears their names. They were heroes and walked in the humble paths of life. They met the savage foe in the trackless forest with unconcern. The dangers of those times were little less when Lewis and Clark threaded the wilderness but a few years before. To these living witnesses belongs the post of honor at the Fair next year. To one of those pioneers, after a long silence of 55 years, it is pleasing at least to know that a grateful Republic has at last rewarded his services in those Indian wars with a paltry pension of \$8 a month. May he live long to enjoy the Nation's bounty. This man is James Catching. He comes of the old Catching stock of Marion County, Tennessee, where he was born April 4, 1827. He came West when a boy of 20, but hear him tell the story in his own words.:

"It was in the summer of 1847 that Ephraim and I came West. Ephraim was four years younger than me. There were three of us brothers. William had come out to Oregon two years before and settled on a ranch a mile east of where Forest Grove now is. Our father had died and we boys got the Western fever. Our mother afterward joined us here in Oregon. I am the only one left. William died at Forest Grove a few years ago, and Ephraim died here in Coos County. "We stopped a while at The Dalles coming out and then came on to Oregon City. As luck would have it, our brother met us there. He didn't know we were coming. Oregon City wasn't then much of a place, Governor Abernathy was there running a sawmill. We accompanied William to his ranch.

"I made camp right where Portland now stands. Ephraim and I were out looking around and passed the night in our blankets right where Portland is today. I haven't seen Portland since coming to Coos County, more than 30 years ago. It was no town at all

then. The only one there at that time was a man named Lownsdale, who had rigged up a plant to make tanbark.

"It was that same Summer that the Indians murdered Dr. Whitman near Walla Walla and the Cayuse Indian War broke out. We all enlisted. There were about 600 of us, commanded by General Gilliam. We were making camp one night when General Gilliam was killed accidentally. He was unloading a wagon from behind and was drawing a gun toward him, when it went off and shot him dead. Colonel Walters then took command. "We went on after the Indians and made them give up those who had murdered Dr. Whitman. I think there were four of them. They hung them at Oregon City. I was detailed for duty at The Dalles at the time. But they were some of the head men of the tribe.

"I get a pension for service in that war. Hermann got it for me. Hermann is a friend of mine. Do you know him? I got \$137 back pay, and \$8 a month. This was last year, 55 years after the war closed. That was a long time to wait, wasn't it?"

There was no note of reproach in his voice, but it was one of pride. It was only when his steps began to falter that he asked for a pension. Mr. Catching at the time he said this was standing in the yard at his dairy farm south of Catching Slough, 12 miles from Marshfield. He had a crosscut saw in his hand and had paused in the act of sawing wood. It was apparent that he was of feeble age.

"Won't you come in the house?" he asked. "I am not very well; I have had the rheumatism for the past two years. I got the rheumatism the year I went to the Salmon River mines in Idaho. That must have been in the '60s. I forgot just what date it was.

"Come into the garden first. I want to show you some thornless blackberries. Aren't they fine? This is the only patch around here like them that I know of. They will keep bearing for quite a while yet.

"No, I never struck anything on the trip to Salmon River. But before that I had been in California. After the close of the Cayuse War in 1848 they started to build Portland. Just then we heard about Marshall's discovery of gold in California. There was a company of us formed in Portland and went down overland to the diggings. I was down there several years, but never made any great discoveries.

"I came back and settled on Cow Creek, in Douglas County. I was one of the first white men that ever set foot in Coos County. That was before the Marple party settled here in 1853. Ephraim and I came with Marple the year before to reconnoiter. We came as far as Myrtle Point on horseback. There we hired the Indians to take us down to the mouth of the Coquille in a canoe. Marple wanted the Indians to take him out to examine the bar. But the tide was running out and they refused and said, "No come back."

"But what do you want to know all this for? Going to publish it? You won't remember half of it. Come into the house and see my wife. She can tell you more than I can."

Mrs. Catching was found seated at her work in the kitchen. She was strong and hearty, and age had hardly yet begun to tell upon her step, although the 4th of last May she celebrated her golden wedding. There was not much of a celebration. They were all down with the measles at the time, and so the event was put off. She is 13 years the junior of her husband, born May 30, 1840, and was married May 4, 1854, and her first son was born March 20, 1855, although she says she was going on 15 when she married. It was nothing in those days for girls to marry young," said Mrs. Catching. "I know girls that married when they were only 11 years old. I was going on 15. "I was only 12 years old when we left Missouri. Of course I remember the trip. Why shouldn't I? There was nothing then this side of Fort Laramie. When we came through Salem there was just one man there keeping a store. My father came on down and settled on Cow Creek in Douglas County. My father's name was Joseph Russell.

"You'll have to excuse me now. We have to milk. Help yourself to one of those roses."

Growing beside the house on a tall bush were magnificent tea roses. But every dairy farm in the Coos Bay Country is famous for its flowers. Fuchsias here grow outdoors as tall as your head, with hundreds of beautiful bloom in comparison with the puny potted plant of the Eastern home.

Mr. and Mrs. Catching moved to Coos County to make it their home in 1871. They have had four children born to them John, Mary, Sarah and Arthur. John, the eldest, lives on the adjoining place. James Catching is a gaunt and bent old man, but that there is beauty in the Catching blood is seen in his granddaughter. Miss Effie Catching is but 13 years old, but she has developed with all the charm of womanhood. Her cheeks are as rosy as the flowers that bloom round her home. She is the belle of all that country.

Catching Slough was named after Mr. Catching and his brother Ephraim. They were among the first to settle on that arm of the sea. And right here it is pertinent to enter a protest against the misnomer of these inlets. To call them sloughs gives one the impression that what he needs to bring with him is a bolt of mosquito-netting and a cargo of quinine.

A slough implies stagnant water, as back water from a river. It breeds pests, typhoid and death. There is no stagnant water here. There are no mosquitoes on the bay, and only at rare intervals up in the mountains. Typhoid fever is unknown.

These sloughs are inlets or bayous, and they should be called such. The Government has been a party to this deception by marking "slough" on all its maps. These inlets are, where the waters of the bay and rivers meet. The tide going back and forth dredged out a channel. At this season of the year there is but a small rivulet without a name running down from Mr. Catching's dairy farm, but when it reaches the inlet below Sumner it becomes quite a body of water.

And so it is with Coos River. There you will find a stream 100 yards wide and 10 feet deep, and a mile or two further up it is so shallow that you can step across it. You have

gone above the Influence of the tide. The tides insure plenty of water in these inlets for navigation all the dry Summer through.

There are half a dozen or more of these inlets and rivers, branches of Coos Bay. They form admirable sites for manufactories and give a water-front of many miles. This will be an important factor in the building up of the city on the bay.

But will James Catching live to see this city? His race is almost run. His mind is still clear, but his body is wasting away. He has gone through nearly 60 years of the history of this Western Coast, even before the days of '49. His part has been a modest one. He has trod over the great natural wealth of this country, and his portion has been small. He has seen others grow rich in a day, but fortune was not for him. But he did his duty as he saw it. He won the best of all: He built for himself and family a happy home, and he has no regrets. [The Oregonian, Sept. 27, 1904, pg 5]