

Henry Hawker Chapman

Pioneer of 1853

compiled by Stephenie Flora
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Henry Hawker Chapman

b. 28 May 1833 New York City, New York

d. 28 Oct 1903 Ashland, Jackson County, Oregon

buried Ashland Cemetery, Ashland, Jackson County, Oregon

s/o Samuel Chapman and Sarah Snead

m. Never married



"HENRY H. CHAPMAN. Settling in Jackson county when the country was in its primitive wildness, Henry H. Chapman experienced all the hardships and perils of the frontiersman, meeting the dangers that beset him with characteristic bravery and fortitude. Casting his lot with the pioneers ere he reached man's estate, he had narrow escapes from the savages that roamed the country at will, and at one time very nearly lost his life in an encounter with a grizzly bear. The chronicling of such events and hair-breadth escapes furnishes sufficient material for a modern work of fiction, the record in his case, however, being too truly realistic. He was a self-made man in the highest sense implied by the term, having begun the battle of life at the foot of the ladder of success, which he steadily climbed, through his own unaided efforts, and in spite of almost seeming insurmountable obstacles. A son of Samuel Chapman, he was born May 28,

1833, on Hudson street, New York City. He was of English ancestry, his paternal grandfather, an extensive stock-grower, having been a life-long resident of England.

Born and bred in England, Samuel Chapman there developed great artistic talent. Emigrating to the United States in 1831, he followed the artist's profession in New York City for a while. Finding that much interest was shown in blooded stock, he embarked in an entirely new undertaking. Going back to England, he purchased some full blooded Durham cattle which he took to Kentucky, disposing of them in Mason county for a fancy price. Encouraged by the results of his venture, he disposed of his New York studio and business and removed with his family to Washington, Ky., where he embarked in the stock and butchering business. Transferring his residence and business interests to Burlington, Iowa, in 1844, he resided there awhile, and then settled in Van Buren county, Iowa, where he remained until his death, at the venerable age of ninety-four years. His wife, whose maiden name was Sarah Smeed, was born in England, and died in Iowa at the age of ninety years. Twelve children were born of their union, namely: Alfred, now eighty years of age, resides in Bonaparte, Iowa; Mrs. Margaret Crawford, of Des Moines, Iowa; Mrs. Sarah Crawford, who died in Bonaparte, Iowa; Mrs. Mary Ann Hilman [sic], of Beloit, Kans.; Samuel, whose death occurred in Talent, Ore.; Daniel, who came across the plains with his brother Henry H. in 1853, and is a resident of Jackson county, Ore.; Henry H., the special subject of this sketch; William, of Bonaparte, Iowa; Mrs. Amy Whitmore, of Bonaparte, Iowa; Mrs. Josephine Young, also of Bonaparte, Iowa; Victoria, widow of the late Michael Mickelson, of Ashland, Ore.; and Mrs. Julia Haverman [sic], who died in Iowa in 1902.

Spending his early life in Kentucky and Iowa, Henry H. Chapman was reared on a farm, assisting his father in the improving of a homestead. There being very few free schools in those days, he had very limited educational advantages, obtaining the greater part of his knowledge of books at the home fireside, studying by the light from a pine knot. In 1853 he and his brother Daniel came with the Walker train to Oregon, paying their way across the plains by driving ox-teams. Leaving Iowa on March 13, they came by way of the southern route, arriving at the Isaac Hill place September 3, 1853. Going that fall to Yreka, Cal., the brothers worked in the placer mines for about six months and in the spring of 1854 returned to Jackson county. Subsequently Mr. Chapman helped to build the first wagon road over the Siskiyou mountains, and finally located a donation claim of one hundred and sixty acres on Emigrant creek, six miles above Ashland, and began the improvement of a farm. In 1855 and the early part of 1856 he took part in the Rogue River Indian war, serving under Captain Fordyce, in an independent company, and later, in 1856, he was one of a large company commanded by Capt. Giles Wells that cleaned the Indians out of the reservation.

In 1855, while in camp at Fog creek, Mr. Chapman induced Erastus and Joseph Wells to accompany him on a bear hunt. Starting early in the morning, the hunters finally arrived at the summit of a mountain lying about ten miles from Ashland, not having seen any game on the way. Fearing the Indians might discover them, they decided to return to camp, and started down the hill separately, Mr. Chapman being in the center, agreeing to fire a gun in case either of them should meet with danger. As Mr. Chapman was passing through the heavy brush he suddenly

heard a rustling sound, caused, as he first supposed, by Indians. Soon, however, he heard the cry of a bear, and on investigating saw two mother bears and four cubs. Loading his double-barreled shot gun with buck shot, and an extra ounce ball, he pulled the trigger, but, as he was forty yards away, the shot scattered, the ball undoubtedly going wide of its mark. One of the old bears fell over, stunned. Firing the other barrel, the second old bear started up and ran away. Hearing the second shot, the wounded, or stunned, bear came to, and started in pursuit of Mr. Chapman, whose only gun was empty. Left defenseless, he ran for a large tree, but before he reached it the bear had torn his coat from behind. Dodging behind a small sapling, the huge bear followed him, making passes at him with her paws. Thinking to get to a larger tree nearby, he turned towards it, but the fierce grizzly reached him, and dealt him a terrific blow on the forehead and not only knocked him down, but bit him in the right thigh, broke his right shoulder, bit him in the right side of his throat, and as he put his right hand to the wound, bit his hand, and then thrust her ugly teeth in the flesh under the left shoulder, piercing his lungs. Hearing his shots, his two comrades rushed to the scene, thinking he had been attacked by the Indians. Coming suddenly upon him and the bear, they were so excited that both dropped their guns, and subsequently lost several minutes hunting through the brush for them. In the meantime the bear had nearly eaten her victim up. Finding their revolvers, both fired at the bear, who was on top, and she started for them. Another shot broke the bear's neck, and she was harmless. Mr. Chapman, being convinced that his jugular vein was severed, told the boys that his time had come, but Erastus Wells took him up in his arms and proceeded on the way home. Realizing after a while that if his jugular vein had been really cut he should by that time have been dead, Mr. Chapman told his companions that if they would brace him up he would walk. When horses could be obtained he was tied on the back of one, and after reaching the home of Capt. Giles Wells, he was confined to his bed for six weeks, being tenderly cared for by members of the Wells family during all that time.

Returning to Iowa by the Panama route in 1860, Mr. Chapman located in Bonaparte as a merchant and grain dealer, and was also extensively engaged in the horse business for several years, and during the Civil war furnished the government with many cavalry horses. Driving a herd of cattle to Colorado in 1879, he disposed of them in Trinidad. From there he took the old route for his former home in Ashland, Ore., where he still owned his original claim, being accompanied by his sister Victoria. On arriving in Oregon he found his ranch in a poor condition, but with characteristic energy he began improving it and carried on general farming for a number of years. Greatly interested in the breeding of stock, Mr. Chapman raised draft horses of a superior grade, and fine cattle and hogs, being quite successful in this branch of agriculture. He subsequently bought land adjoining his farm, and at the time of his death was the owner of four hundred and thirty-seven acres of fine well-improved land, on which he made improvements of a substantial character, having a conveniently arranged house, and two fine barns, one 96x80 feet, and the other 36x36 feet. Renting his farm in September, 1902, Mr. Chapman removed to Ashland, where he had a pleasant home on Oak Street and lived retired from active pursuits, enjoying the reward of his many years of toil until his death, October 28, 1903, at the age of

seventy years. He was always active, and after having been crippled by a horse, and seriously injured in a runaway, so that he had to use crutches all the time, he was often seen working in his garden, and attending to his trees and flowers. During his illness he was tenderly cared for by his sister, Victoria Mickelson. Politically, Mr. Chapman was a Democrat, but not an office seeker, and socially he was a member of the Jackson County Pioneer Association." [Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon p. 691-2]