

**John Newman Durham  
&  
Mary Ann Melvina Ford**

compiled by Gail Nerby



The John Newman Durham family traveled to Oregon in 1846 with the Ben Simpson wagon train.

**1820:** John Newman Durham, son of William Green Durham and Judith Ann Harden, was born March 27, 1820 in Madison County, KY (near the Rockcastle County line); a year later the place was in Rockcastle County.

**1826:** Mary Ann Melvina Ford, daughter of Martin Ford & Martha (Patsy) Keaton, was born May 7, 1826 in Woodford County, Kentucky.

**1838:** John Durham obtained two land grants in Rockcastle County, Kentucky when he was 18 years old...a total of 206 acres. He didn't keep this land long.

Mary Ann Ford went to Missouri with her siblings (most were older) after her parents died. They were in Clay & Platte Counties by 1838.

John left home when he was 19-20 years old and ended up in Clay/Platte County, Missouri by 1840. He appears to have traveled alone...all his family and others associated with his family either stayed in Kentucky or moved to Indiana.

**1840:** John Newman Durham and Mary Ann Melvina Ford were married July 16, 1840 in Barry, Clay County Missouri.

**1840 U.S. Census:** They were listed in Platte County, Missouri.

John & Mary Ann had been married for over three years when their first known child (Billy) was born. As they were young and healthy and it's unlikely they practiced birth control, it's possible that one or two children were born before Billy and didn't live long.

There is also a family story that John first went to Oregon, without his family, with an earlier wagon train...then returned to them in Missouri. This may or may not be true...there is no evidence either way. This could also explain why their first known child was born over three years after they were married.

**William (Billy) was born October 19, 1843**  
**Elizabeth Frances was born April 22, 1845**  
**Both in Missouri.**

**1846:** John and Mary Ann Durham and their children traveled to Oregon in 1846 with the Ben Simpson wagon train. They probably started out with others who left Platte County together...and ended up on Ben Simpson's train...see stories by others. Billy died enroute to Oregon.

After arriving in Oregon in October of 1846, the Durhams wintered "on the Cook place, two miles from Lafayette" in Yamhill County.

Lafayette (founded in 1847) is located in the Willamette Valley 35 miles southwest of Portland and 25 miles north of Salem.

Amos Cook (1816-1895) was a member of the "Peoria Party" that started out in 1839. After the party split at Bent's Fort, he traveled with the Shortess party and arrived at Fort Vancouver in May 1840 and settled in Yamhill County.

John Newman Durham and his family settled for a while near the Cooks and McBrides in Yamhill County.

**Martha Lucy was born June 21, 1847**  
**William Martin was born November 30, 1848**  
**Both in Yamhill County.**

1849 - Oregon Country is declared a United States Territory bringing change in the form of the army, postal service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, harbor improvements and road construction.

John Durham and family were listed on the 1849 Territorial Census in Yamhill County. It looks like two other couples were living with them.

**1849 Census, Page 3:**

McBRIDE, James 2 m 21+, 2 m -21, 8 f

COOK, Amos 3 m 21+, 1 m -21, 2 f

DURHAM, John 3 m 21+, 2 m -21, 4 f

MCBRIDE, Thomas

**1850 U.S. Census:** not listed

1850 - The Donation Land law was passed in September 1850 and provided that each US citizen, white or half breed settler, could receive 320 acres in his own name, and if married 320 acres in his wife's name.

**1851:** The Durhams filed on their donation land claim on Salt Creek in Polk County in 1851 (near the Yamhill County line).

**1854:** John Newman Durham was Captain of Co. G. 5th Regiment of Militia of Oregon Territory. His Commission was dated September 14, 1854, and was signed by Acting Governor George Curry of Oregon Territory.

I'm not sure how long they stayed on Salt Creek, but they sold the place to Chris Zumwalt and bought a place in Spring Valley near Zena (still in Polk County).

**Cordelia Helen was born January 22, 1851**

**John Henry was born September 5, 1853**

**Charles Victor was born April 22, 1855**

**Mary Atelia was born April 18, 1857**

**All in Polk County.**

Then, according to their son John Henry, they sold the Spring Valley Place and bought the Pressley claim just northeast of Salem (Marion County).

As Mary Atelia was born in April of 1857 in Polk County, and Northeast Salem is in Marion County...and, according to John Henry, the family moved to Jackson County in 1857...either they lived Northeast of Salem for only a few months...or John Henry Durham's memory was off a little. (John Henry would have been four years old in 1857.)

Whatever the case, by the summer of 1859, the family was living in Jackson County.

**Irene Ethel was born June 14, 1859 in Jackson County.**

**1860 U.S. Census:** The Durhams are listed living near Dardanelles in Jackson County.

**Minnie Belle was born July 21, 1861 in Jackson County**

According to John Henry they bought and sold several places in or near Jackson County. He mentioned three locations (1) a location next to what later became Medford (2) Applegate Country and (3) Table Rock. Again his memory was a little off regarding the dates.

According to a letter from Veva Morgan & Ethel Ross Oliver in 1976, "I know that the family lived in Jacksonville for a time when Grandmother (Irene Ethel) was a young girl. John Newman Durham had a contract to supply the S. P. R. R. with ties for building the track. Chinese coolie labor did the actual work."

They were back in the Willamette Valley by spring of 1864 (John Henry was 10 years old.) They bought a place near Scio in Linn County.

**Frank Pleasant Tom was born May 17, 1864 in Linn County.**

**1866:** John N. and Mary Ann Durham bought a section of land in Polk County.

Then, according to John Henry, "Father took a contract to furnish wood, so he bought the standing timber on a half section of land where Chemawa Indian School is now located." This was near Salem (Marion County).

**1870 U.S. Census:** The Durhams were living in North Salem (Marion County).

**1880 U.S. Census:** John Newman and Mary Ann Durham were now living near Walla Walla, Washington. Only two of their children were still at home.

Although John was listed as being a farmer on every census...the family didn't stay in one place long enough for serious farming.

Although we don't know for certain, we can speculate (based on what little we do know) that John's main interest was clearing the trees off the land he owned and selling the logs...possibly buying uncleared land cheap and later selling it for a profit to those who wanted to farm or build.

We can also speculate that John made money by buying and selling other things besides land and trees.

According to John Henry: "My father was a natural trader; he didn't need any guardian to protect his interests in a horse trade. Judge O. C. Pratt, one of Oregon's first judges, was no slouch at trade either. My father sold a band of long horn Spanish cattle to Judge Pratt. They were as lean as greyhounds and as wild as coyotes. Judge Pratt sold these cattle to a California stockman as a herd of 'Durham' cows. When the buyer came to get them and found they were wild Spanish cattle he tried to repudiate the deal, alleging misrepresentation, as Judge Pratt had described them as 'Durham' cattle. Judge Pratt said 'I bought them off J. N. Durham and they are commonly referred to as the Durham herd of cattle.'"

**1889 or before:** John and Mary Ann Durham were back in Polk County, Oregon...on the farm of their daughter Martha Lucy and her husband Rev. G. W. Richardson near Bethel.

According to John Henry: "My father and mother died on that place. Father was sick and they told him Mother was dead. He said 'I'll die in a day or so, then you can bury us in one grave and have one funeral.' He died 36 hours after Mother did and his wishes were carried out."

**1889:** Mary Ann Melvina (Ford) Durham died June 24, 1889. John Newman Durham died June 26, 1889. John was 69 years old and Mary Ann was 63 years old when they died. They were buried in the same grave at Bethel Cemetery. <http://ncbible.org/nwh/Bethel.txt> Although we don't know what illness caused the deaths of John and Mary Ann Durham. We do know that there was a worldwide influenza epidemic (pandemic) in 1889.