

Reuben Alonzo Gesner

Pioneer of 1845

compiled by Stephenie Flora
oregonpioneers.com

Reuben Alonzo Gesner

b. 17 May 1814 Schenectady, NY

d. 26 Mar 1888 Salem, Marion Co, OR

m. 1841 Charleston, IL

Mary E. Bailey

b. 05 Sep 1821 KY

d. 04 May 1903 Salem, Marion Co, OR

“At his home on Piety Hill, Saturday; March 24, 1888, at 6 p.m., R. A. Gesner, aged about 72 years. The deceased was born in New York in 1815, and came to Oregon in 1845, settling in 1846 on the farm he now owns southeast of Salem. He was well known throughout this section of the valley. He leaves a wife and eight children, amongst them Alonzo Gesner, of Macleay; B. B. Gesner, of Turner; Dr. Van Gesner, of Prineville. The funeral will take place from the house on Summer street at 11 a.m. tomorrow (Monday). Friends of the family are invited. “ [Oregon Statesman, March , 1888]

“HAS PASSED AWAY--Mrs. Mary Gesner, A Pioneer of 1845, Died Yesterday Morning
Another one of the few remaining pioneers of the earliest days of Oregon history has passed away. Mrs. Marry Gesner died at her home, 461 Summer street, yesterday morning, at 1:30 o'clock, as the result of injuries received last August. She was visiting a friend in the country, and fell from the steps, breaking her hip. Since that time she has been an invalid, and suffered a great deal, and her friends realized it was only a matter of time until the end.

Deceased was born in Kentucky, September 5, 1821. She afterward lived in Indiana and Illinois, where she was married, in 1842 to R. a. Gesner, who preceded her fifteen years ago, to the great beyond. In company with her husband, in 1845, she crossed the plains, and, coming direct to Oregon settled on the Gesner donation land claim, six miles east of Salem, and she has since lived there and at her home in this city. Eight children are left, Alonzo Gesner, Benzert Gesner, Mrs. T. C. Davidson, Mrs. Sara Gerowe and Mrs. H. Rundlett, of Salem; Dr. V. Gesner, of Prineville; Mrs. J. L. Munkers, of Ashland, and Mrs. Rebeka Haskett, of Chehalis, Washington.

The funeral services will be conducted at the house by Rev. John Parsons, at 2 o'clock p.m. Wednesday, and interment will be in Rural Cemetery. [Daily Oregon Statesman 5 May 1903 1:2]

Ruben Alonzo Gesner and Mary Bailey had the following children:

i. ALONZO GESNER

b. 02 Mar 1842 Cole Co, IL

d. 06 May 1912 Salem, Marion Co, OR

m. 14 Oct 1875 Salem, Marion Co, OR
Rhoda W. Neal

b.

d.

daughter of George William Neal and Millie Stephenson.

GESNER, HON. ALONZO, of Salem, is Joint Senator from Marion and Clackamas Counties, elected in 1894. He has been a frequent member of county conventions, of the state convention of 1880, and of the club league meetings in 1892, 1895 and 1896.

[Republican League Register]

“A. GESNER DIES at HIS HOME. Former Senator from Marion and Linn -- Held Other Offices. Resided in Vicinity Sixty-six years Widely Known as a Surveyor.

Alonso Gesner, former joint senator from Marion and Linn counties, Salem city councilman and city and county surveyor, and honored pioneer, died at his home, 195 South Cottage street, at 10 o'clock yesterday at the age of 70 years.

Mr. Gesner has resided in this vicinity since he was 4 years of age, the last thirty-five years of his life having been spent at his home in this city, and the previous years of the period on the old Gesner farm six miles southeast of Salem, excepting periods when he was absent fulfilling the duties of various offices. His death was due to the weaknesses of old age.

Two Terms as Senator.

Mr. Gesner served Marion and Linn counties in the state legislature as joint senator two terms during the 90's. As a member of the Salem city council he served four terms. He was a surveyor of ability, and aside from holding the position of city surveyor and county surveyor, he held many contracts for surveying work for the government. He was first elected county surveyor in 1872 and was re-elected for the term of 1876-78. Mr. Gesner was appointed Indian agent for Warm Springs reservation by President Arthur in 1892 and served in that position until the opening of the Cleveland administration nineteen months later. Served in Militia. The pioneer was a member of the state militia for nine years. For nearly three years of that time he was captain of Company I, Second regiment, Oregon National Guard, the headquarters of which was at McCoy. Mr. Gesner came across the plains to Oregon with his parents in 1846. Upon reaching The Dalles after coming to Oregon the family discovered that there was no road over the Cascade Mountains, and were compelled to come down the Columbia on rafts and in canoes and guided by friendly Indians. At that time the donation act was resulting in a very heavy immigration from the east to Oregon. The Gesner family came directly to Marion county and settled upon the section of land six miles southeast of Salem, which is still in the possession of the family.

Endured Hardships.

In his boyhood in this county Mr. Gesner and his people endured all the hardships of the frontier pioneers. All wearing apparel was manufactured at home, buckskins being converted into clothing and cowhide into shoes by the men, while the women made their dresses from wagon cloths or other similar materials. In those days there was little money in circulation in this country. As a substitute, wheat was accepted as legal tender, valued

at \$1 per bushel. Because of the large immigration of 1852 what was held at that time at \$5 a bushel.

Educated at Willamette.

Mr. Gesner obtained his advanced education at Willamette university. After leaving that institution he followed teaching for a year. Preferring the farm to the schoolroom he began cutting cordwood and made money enough in one season to purchase thirty acres of land near the Gesner homestead. It was in 1872 that Mr. Gesner began work as a surveyor, and in that work formed a partnership with a Mr. Wilkins of Lane county. His election to the office of county surveyor followed a short time afterward.

Once Owned Statesman.

In 1882 after having served the county and the government as a surveyor, Mr. Gesner with General Odell purchased the Oregon Statesman. Mr. Gesner, however, retained his interest in the newspaper for only about eight months, selling his share to accept the appointment as Indian agent for the Warm Springs agency by President Arthur. When Cleveland was elected president Mr. Gesner returned to his farm, where he remained until 1889, when he was elected city surveyor.

In 1875 Mr. Gesner was married to Miss Rhoda E. Neal, who survives him. He is also survived by three children-LeRoy Gesner, a musician of Spokane; Mrs. Stella Hodges of Boise, Idaho, and Miss Rhoda Gesner of Salem. All were at his bedside when he died. Funeral Friday. In politics the pioneer was a Republican. He was a Mason and also a member of the Ancient Order of United Workmen. Full arrangements for the funeral have not yet been made, but the service will be conducted Friday at the Rigdon undertaking chapel and will be under the auspices of the Masonic order. [Daily Oregon Statesman 7 Mar 1912 1:6 & 4:5]

ii. MARY ELIZABETH GESNER

b. 1843

d. 1859

iii. HARRIET M. GESNER

b. 10 Jul 1846

d. 17 Mar 1926 Portland, Multnomah Co, OR

m.

Samuel Rundlett

b. 1844

d. Jul 1881/82

DEATH OF SECOND OLDEST NATIVE

Mrs. Harriett Rundlett, Born
in Marion County Passes
in Portland 1926

Mrs. Harriett Rundlett was said to be the second oldest living native of Oregon before her passing on Wednesday. She died in Portland Nov. 17th, aged 80 years. She was the widow of the late Samuel Rundlett, who died in Salem in 1882.

Mrs. Rundlett was a daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Gesner, pioneers of 1845. She was born the next year after their arrival here. She was the mother of Mrs. C. V. Johnson, Mrs. Paul Zoloski and Mrs. Robert Delk of Portland, and Sam G. Rundlett of Salem; sister of Dr. Van Gesner of Arlington, Ben Gesner and Mrs. Tom Davidson of Salem, Mrs. Sarah Gerowe of Portland and Mrs. J. M. Munkers of Brownsville.

There was a family reunion and a celebration of the birthday of Mrs. Rundlett on July 9th last. It was at the home of Mrs. C. V. Johnson in Portland. Mrs. Johnson was Maud Rundlett in her girlhood days in Salem.

The Gesner family was prominent among the early pioneers of Salem and Marion county. The funeral services will be at 1:30 this afternoon at the Rigdon mortuary with interment in IOOF cemetery.

iv. JOHN W. GESNER

b. 04 Mar 1848

d.

v. BENJAMIN B. GESNER

b. 19 May 1850

d. 24 Nov 1926 Salem, Marion Co, OR

"B. B. GESNER, a worthy and respected representative of agricultural interests in Marion county, owns and cultivates a farm of two hundred and sixteen and one-half acres, all of which is under cultivation.

Aside from agricultural connections he also has a strong hold upon the regard of his fellowmen owing to a kindly spirit and generous disposition. He was born in Marion county, Oregon, March 19, 1850, a son of Reuben A. and Mary (Alaway) Gesner. The father was born in New York and the mother in Kentucky. They were married in 1844 in Illinois and crossed the plains the following year, taking up a donation claim of six hundred and forty acres near Salem where our subject now lives. This was the father's home until a few years before his death, which he spent in Salem, where he lived retired. At various times he acquired property in other parts of Oregon and at the time of his demise was a large landholder. He passed away at the age of seventy-four years and his wife died at the age of eighty-two. To them twelve children were born, eight of whom are living, namely: Alonzo, who is residing in Salem; Harriett, who is the widow of Samuel Rundlett and a resident of Polk county; B. B., of this review; Vanison, a physician of east Oregon; Ramelia, who is married to James Munkers, of Linn county. Oregon; Sarah, who is the widow of George Jerowe and is a resident of Portland, where she conducts a sanatorium; Amnei, the wife of Thomas Davidson, of Salem; and Rebecca, who is married to George Haskell, of Benton county.

B. B. Gesner received his education in the grammar schools of Salem, after which he returned to the home farm, where he assisted his father for one year before he started out to earn his own livelihood by accepting employment which he held for a year, with a surveying party. Afterward he engaged in agricultural pursuits for five years but in 1882 entered the United States mail service. For four years he carried mail from Salem to Silverton and for one year from Turner to Mehama. During the following four years he was engaged in teaming and at the end of that time returned to the old homestead and purchased twenty-two and a half acres of his brother's share of the farm, thus making him the owner of two hundred and sixteen and a half acres, which he has since cultivated. The land is all in a high state of improvement, being equipped with the accessories of a modern farm. The place presents an attractive appearance because of its neatness and cultivation and annually yields profitable harvests, due to the practical methods which Mr. Gesner employs in its development.

On the 9th of March, 1874, Mr. Gesner was married to Mrs. Frances E. Buster, whose birth occurred in Marion county in 1857, her parents being Samuel and Jane Olinger, who came here from Kentucky in 1852 and in 1843 respectively. To Mr. and Mrs. Gesner eleven children have been born: Frank X., of Lincoln county; Ulysses S., who is residing at home with his father; Jessie, the wife of George Napske, of Florida; Bessie, the widow of Samuel Updegraff; Dolph, at home; Clifford, a resident of Marion county; Archie, Ralph, Iola and Virgil, all at home; and Harry., who died in infancy.

B. B. Gesner is a republican and has been a faithful and active advocate of the policies of that party since age conferred upon him the right of franchise. He is a member of the school board and has served as road supervisor, offices which he has undertaken for the good of the community rather than for personal aggrandizement. Although not a member of church or lodges, he always gives his support to those social and moral interests which he believes promote public welfare and has by so doing won the confidence and esteem of all." [Centennial History of Oregon Vol 4 by Gaston p. 311-12]

"Ben B. Gesner, late resident of route six, Salem, November 24. Survived by the following children: Frank Gesner of Rose Lodge, U.S. Gesner of Washington, Mrs. Iola Hunt of Sublimity, Virgil Dolph, Clifford and Ralph Gesner, Mrs. Bessie Updegraph and Mrs. Jessie Boedigheimer, all of Salem. Funeral Services will be held from the W.T. Rigdon company chapel Wednesday, November 25, at 2 p.m. Interment Macleay cemetery." [Oregon Statesman 25 Nov 1926, 5:1]

BURNED.—Bessie, three-year-old daughter of B. B. Gesner, of Silverton, who drives the Salem and Silverton stage, was badly burned on Monday. The little girl was playing with some matches, when her dress caught fire and was nearly burned off of her. At last accounts the little sufferer was getting along as well as could be expected.

vi. VANISON GESNER

b. Jul 1852

d.

vii. ROMELIA GESNER

b. 1854

d.

viii. SARAH GESNER

b. 1856

d.

ix. AMNEY V. GESNER

b. 12 May 1859

d.

x. REBECCA GESNER

b. 1865

d.

xi. Unknown GESNER

b.

d.

xii. Unknown GESNER

b.

d.

REUBEN A. GESNER—1845

(Source: Amney Gesner Davidson, Salem, Oregon, 1926.)

Reuben Alonzo Gesner was one of the intrepid pioneers of 1845, coming to Oregon with his wife and two small children. He was born at Schenectady, New York, and married Mary E. Bailey, in Illinois. His father died and his mother married again and moved to Tennessee, where she also died, and the family were left in the hands of a half-sister, who mothered them. The family found themselves in Illinois, where they grew to maturity.

Reuben A. and his wife, Mary Bailey, were married at Charleston, Illinois. The immigration of 1845 was especially large, owing to the news of what was called the "Donation Land Act" granting to each married couple 320 acres of land apiece, making 640 acres in all.

Of those who braved the pioneer trail that year were the Herrons, Halls, Gesners and others. This train had very little trouble until they reached Fort Hall, and at Hot Springs they were met by Elijah White, who told them of a shorter route that would save them 200 miles and would take them right into the heart of the Willamette Valley, and that this pass over the mountains was much better than by way of The Dalles. This looked like a good proposition, and when Stephen H. L. Meek offered to guide them by the old fur trappers' road they decided to take the chance. In after years this route was known as Meek's Cut-Off. This was an unfortunate choice, for they became lost and wandered around in the desolate Malheur mountains and the desert country for several weeks. Many of the party died of mountain fever. They crossed and recrossed the Deschutes and John Day rivers. Many of their oxen died from lack of food and water. Finally they found themselves back on the road that led to The Dalles and Mr. Gesner drove his stock over what was afterward the Barlow road, while Mrs. Gesner, with her children and what few household effects they had left, were taken down the Columbia river on flat boats.

While this party was wandering about the Malheur mountains one day, Dan Herron, while looking for his cattle, found a small nugget that some of the party thought was gold. No gold had yet been discovered in California or Oregon and with these ill-fated pioneers, the question of finding a way out of this desert country and to a place where they could find food and water was far more important than gold at this time. This nugget was kept as a souvenir, and after gold had been discovered elsewhere, there was quite an excitement about the gold that had been picked up on Meek's Cut-Off and many parties were lured to prospect through this part of the country. A mine called the "Blue Bucket" was located about where Mr. Herron found this first gold in Eastern Oregon.

After the Gesner family arrived in Marion county they took up a fine donation land claim, six miles east of Salem, where they set about making a home in what was then the wilds of Oregon. This family did not find life very easy at first in the new country. The women even had to resort to making their dresses from the wagon sheets from their covered wagons. Shoes were home-made of cowhide. The men wore buck-

skin clothing and all articles of wearing apparel were made in the home. Wheat was ordinarily sold at \$1 per bushel but because of the large immigration of that year and so much grain needed for seeding and to feed the pioneers, the price rose to \$5 per bushel. There was little money in the country and almost every necessity became legal tender, or was used in exchange instead of cash.

Mr. Gesner was quite a musician and could play several musical instruments proficiently. Several of his children inherited this talent and were good musicians.

To help in the education of the twelve children that in time came to their home, in after years, he built a residence in the town of Salem, where his children could live and attend Willamette University or Willamette Institute, as it was then called. Of these children there were:

Alonzo, who married Rhoda Neal; Mary Elizabeth, unmarried, died aged sixteen; Harriet, married Samuel Rundlet; John, unmarried; Benjamin, married Fannie Buster; Dr. Vanison of Arlington, Oregon, married Anna Fields; Romelia, married James Munkers; Sarah M., married Rev. George E. Gerow; Amney V., married T. C. Davidson; Rebecca married Horton Haskell. (Names of two of the children not known by the writer.)

Mr. Gesner was a republican as to politics and chose farming as his profession. His sons and daughters found places for themselves in the new country and became some of the best citizens. The son Alonzo, who crossed the plains with his father at the age of three years, attended Willamette University, where he grew to young manhood and followed the teaching profession for many years. He was surveyor for Marion county in 1872 and served for several terms in this capacity. Later he was employed by the government in surveying its lands.

Mr. Alonzo Gesner, one of the sons, entered into partnership with General W. H. Odell and for many years was one of the owners of the Salem Statesman. He sold his interests in this newspaper after President Arthur appointed him Indian agent for the Warm Spring Indian Reservation. He was city surveyor for Salem many years and Captain of Company I, 2nd Regmt., O. N. G., for three years. He married Rhoda A. Neal, a daughter of one of the pioneers of 1844. The children of Alonzo, Jr., and wife Rhoda were Stella P., LeRoy L. and Rhoda M.

Mr. Gesner was a republican and a member of A. F. and A. M. and A.O.U.W. lodges.

Calapooia Linn County Oregon May 22 A D 1852

72 10 15
Dear Brother & sister with deep feelings of gratitude I now pen a few lines in answer to yours of March the seventh. It came to hand on the 18th of this month. I am glad to hear you are well for I was fearful that you with many of my connections were dead. but through a kind Providence we are yet numbered among the living-though many of our relations have departed and are no more with us, which ought to admonish us to be (also?) ready. We are separated by the distance of thousands of miles yet that tie of brotherhood ought to bind us, as strongly as ever. I stand here almost alone. I have but one relation here (Rubin Gesner) he lives about fifty miles from me. We all enjoy good health. Amid the hurried business of a public as well as a private life I write and if you find any mistakes you will please correct them for you know I am self taught. I now will give you some account of my affairs beginning with my boyhood. I was (which you knew) a very, a very bad boy, and done many things that I ought not to have done and was Prodigal of the advice of that kind Mother (who was ever mindful of her children) at her last dying moments still I thought of these things until the summer of 1848 in Platte County Missouri, I made a profession of religion. I joined the Cumberland Presbyterian church, in which I have lived ever since and have tried to preach the Gospel of Christ at times for a number of years.

After I was licensed to preach I married a girl by the name of Martha Ann Mansfield the daughter of a widow after the death of my mother-in-law I sold out my possession in Missouri which enabled me to make but a poor outfit for Oregon. I left Missouri for Oregon in May 1847 and arrived in Oregon on the twensixth of September after a March of about five Months in which we suffered considerably. I arrived in Oregon striped of every thing except my teams. Provision very high & labor I had a large familie to support. Some of my wifes connection came with me. The first year I stoped at Rubin Gesners as it was dangerous to push out in the frontier on account of the Indians. It was the time of the Cayuse war. The next year, I moved up the Willamette vally, about fifty miles, and settled on a claim near the foot of the Cascade mountains on the East side of the Willamette River. I have been twice to California, to dig Gold. I have inclosed about sevnty acres. I own 640 acres of land which is worth six or seven thousand dollars which cost me not a dime. I have a first rate Mill site on it. I intend to build a house this summer, which will cost two thousand dollars. My estate is supposed to be worth about twelve or fifteen thousand dollars all of which has cost me but trifeling. I state this so you may see how easy a man can live in Oregon Every boddy is rich or well to live that has been in the country long enough to get a start. No one complains of () Oregon all are satisfied I would not exchange Oregon for any country I ever saw As you wish me to give you a description of Oregon I will say Oregon is divided into valleys & Mountains. The principle valleys are Clackamas Willamette Umpquau & Rogue river. With many other smaller valleys all of which lie between the Cascade mountains and the coast of the Pacific. East of the Cascade range of Mountains the vallys are larg, so that thes are cald plains In these plaines there are but few settlemint The mountains are high and generally covered with timber. The land is rich but cannot be cultiveted. The soil in the valleys is tolerably rich. In some places it's very rich and fertile. The Willamette valley is the largest yet known. The other valleys are not much known. There are men exploreing all the time, so within a few years Oregon will be pretty well known. The principle navigable stream are the Columbia & the Willamette Rivers, in which a number of steam boats are running all the while. Oregon is the finest growing country in the world, a kind of blue grass Stock of all kind live with out fencing Summer and winter and are fat all the time. It cost more to keep a hen than it does a horse or cow The valleys are well adapted

to growing small grain of all kinds Culinary roots grow to the greatest perfection in Oregon, than in any country I ever saw. I waid one Turnip that waid forty lbs. I saw one potatoe that seven lbs. and the same hill produced three pechs Corn does not grow well. I have known twenty-fiv bushels to grow on one acre, but this is not com. Oregon is a healthy country beyond dispute.

Almost every thing is dissimiler from the States Seasons, trees, friuts of all kind and her berrys all unlike. In winter, Oregon in latitude North 46 deg. as compared with New England in latitude North 43 deg. enjoys the mild atmosphere of a Ten degrees of more indulgent skies. without its burning suns and sultry nights of summer of all its tress, very few if any will compare exactly with any variety in the States I have mad out the following probably imperfeet catalogue, which may interest my friends Timber in Oregon--- Spruce abundant. Fir do, Hemlock most pleanty near the Columbia. Oregon dogwood like the dogwood in the states. Yew tree. Soft maplw, vine maple, Black Oak resewbling Black Jack of the states. White Oak, unlike White Oak of the states, good for wagons Laurel grows a tree some times three feet in diameter, has no grain. Wild Cherry, fruit small, r-----(?) and butter Sweet Elder, grows to the size of three feet in diameter. Alder, grows larg trees some of which will make three of four saw logs, is manufactured into furniture, wood soft and tender. White Ash unfit for timber. Black Ash, yellow Pine Several varieties of the Magnolis, of which the Balm of Gilead is most abundant, It abounds in all parts of Oregon, and is the principle timber on the Umatills (commonly cald Utilla) the wood is of a yellowish cast and is soft. Oregon hickory, a large under growth of no value. Hazel, grows largeenough for broomsticks. for which the Indans

must have been another page, we do not have any more of this letter.

This appears to be from Luther White. Not sure of relationship to Reuben Gesner.

Gesner

Wayne LeRoy Gesner, age seven months, died January 16 at the home on route seven. Survived by parents, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford N. Gesner, and the following brothers and sisters: Richard Donald, Robert, May Etta and LaJune. Funeral services Saturday at 3 o'clock from the Rigdon mortuary, Rev. R. L. Payne officiating. Interment City View cemetery.