Since 1970

Exploring the 1870 U.S. Census for the “Oswego Precinct” By Steve Dietz

Today Lake Oswego has a population of just over 37,000. Beginning in 1850, census counts were taken for residents of the Oswego area, but those living there were included among others from a large area which stretched from Linn City to Portland in what was then noted on the records as “Washington County.” One hundred fifty-six people are reported in that census, but the number living in what would become Oswego was much less. According to Ann Fulton in Iron, Wood & Water, Postmaster Wesley C. Hull reported 25 residents in Oswego in 1853. A look at the 1850 census for families shown on an 1852 General Land Office survey map indicates that the number for Oswego and the immediate area was higher, perhaps more on the order of 75. A number of these are millwrights, carpenters, laborers, and wagonmakers shown as living at and adjacent to the residence of Albert Durham, whose occupation is listed as “Milling.”

The 1860 census includes the “Linn City Precinct” and lists Oswego families along with those for communities to the north and south. Here again the total population of 235 for the precinct is more than the number of Oswegans which may have totaled around 70 to 80 if families such as the Bryants, Browns and others further east of the lake are added to the count.

The 1870 U.S. Census was the first to enumerate a separate “Oswego Precinct” in what was, by then, recorded as Clackamas County. The 1870 census provides an example of how information contained in these counts can be used to explore the historic demographics of an area and shed light on the role individuals and families played in the development of their communities.

The count of July 28-30 lists a total of 144 residents in 35 dwellings and includes families that are beyond the town limits of Oswego, ranging out to the Hazelia farms on the west, south near the former location of Linn City, and Tryon Creek to the north. Of the 144 Oswegans, 82 are male and 62 female. Eighty-one (81) are teenagers and younger children of adults, and most of them are “at home.” A closer examination of the ages in ten year increments shows 8 individuals less than 1 year old, 44 from 1 to 10 years old, 36 from 11 to 20, 29 from 21 to 30, 13 from 31 to 40, 11 from 41 to 50, 9 from 51 to 60, and 2 from 61 to 70. The youngest is 1 month old; the oldest 70 years. The median age is 17, the average age 21.

How might we account for the steady drop off in numbers as people age, particularly after 30 years and when 1 month to 30 years accounts for 76 percent of the population? Enough research might show that coming west to settle the land and seek available jobs was a younger person’s game. Many of those who are adults and listed in the 1870 census had migrated west at an earlier date and were obviously younger when they did. They had not been here long enough to age much (Oswego was still in its infancy at 20 years), and once settled, they started what would often become large families which helps to explain why over half of those listed in the census are aged 20 years or less.

Married couples with children have family sizes that range from 3 to 11 including the parents, with an average of almost 6 members per family. The largest family was that of Franklin Ford, a Hazelia area farmer, with his wife and 9 children ranging in age from 5 months to 18 years.

A variety of occupations are listed for the men including laborers (14), farmers (10), hucksters (9)(historically any person engaged or employed in the business of buying and selling farm products or small merchandise who sells such products at retail to consumers), carpenters (2), a grocer, a blacksmith, a clerk in a sawmill, a teamster, and a cook in a hotel. All of the 27 adult women over 19 years of age except one are wives “keeping house.” The exception is Mary Prosser, a widow at 50, who is also “keeping house.”
Two children in the census are listed as servants: Anna Clark, 11, for George Walling and Florence Spence, 13, for Lumen Calkins. Anna Clark appears to be the daughter of the hotel cook, Titus Clark. He, his wife Mollie, and their children Jennie, Solomon, Harry, Lincoln, and Anna are listed as “B” (black) or “I” (Indian) and account for the seven “colored females” and “colored males” in the 1870 census. Mollie is the only Clark shown as “I” and was born ca. 1830 in Oregon. They are originally from New York, and the rest of the family were from Oregon. He is listed in the 1860 census as a “bootblack” residing in Portland with no other family members. In the 1880 Oswego census Mollie is listed as “Mary”, widowed, and living with her children Solomon, Jane, Harry, and Andronicus. The family does not show up in any later censuses for Oswego.

Families of farmers (9), hucksters (4), and laborers (9) include 101 men, women and children or ca. 70 percent of those in the Oswego Precinct. Owners of real estate with monetary values as well as the monetary values of personal estates are noted in the census. The wealthiest person at the time was George W. Walling, listed as a huckster, with real estate Holdings valued at $10,000 (about $250,000 in today’s dollars) and a personal estate set at $1,000. Walling held 451 acres in 1862 just north of his father’s (Gabriel Walling) separate land claim of almost 560 acres. Following Walling is A. R. Shipley, a farmer at $6,000 and $1,600, A. A. Cleveland, a huckster at $5,000 and $250, Jesse Bullock, a huckster at $5,000 and $500, H. W. Shipley, a farmer at $4,000 and $2,000, and John W. Kane, a teamster at $4,000 and $600. Thirteen others who hold real estate have land values ranging from $250 to $1000.

Hucksters and farmers actually account for most of the relatively wealthy people in the census. Besides Kane the teamster, the only other person to have real estate holdings worth more than $1,000 is Henry Gans, the grocer, at $1,500 and $1,000. At the time of the census the average real estate wealth of 22 holders was about $2,100, and the average personal wealth of 30 individuals was about $608. None of the laborers own real estate, and their personal worth ranges from $100 to $300.

Oregon is, by far, the birthplace of the majority (60) of those in the census. Most of these are children of the adults listed. Presumably their parents were immigrants to the Northwest and Oregon with some who may have been attracted to Oswego for the jobs at its iron production facilities. Twenty-five individuals are from Ohio or Iowa, 7 of these are male adult laborers, and may, in part, represent an early Ohio-Oswego iron worker connection which saw many Ohioans move to Oswego over the years to work at the town’s furnaces. At the time of the 1870 census, the Oregon Iron Company was not operating its furnace, and would not again until 1874. It seems likely that those working at the iron company facilities, be they from Ohio or elsewhere, would seek work at other jobs in the area as laborers or move to other locations searching for employment.

New York was the birthplace of 7 people, after that a variety of other eastern states are represented with 1 to 3 persons each. A number of other countries are included as well for “foreign born” people. Ireland is represented by 7 individuals followed by England (3), Scotland (1), Canada (1), and Germany (1).

A number of those listed in the 1870 census played important roles in the settlement and future of Oswego.
Jesse Bullock held a 618-acre tract just south of Oswego and would donate land in 1881 for what would eventually become the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery on Stafford Road.

A. R. Shipley’s farm at what is now Stafford and Rosemont Roads would become the center of activity for the farming community of Hazelia. Nearby farms would include those of the Rangers, Fords, Armstrongs, Davidson, and Laverys, families included in the 1870 census.

George W. Walling would, with his brother Albert, plat the town of Willamette approximately one mile south of Oswego. He and his father Gabriel held two large early land claims on the west bank of the Willamette.

Mary Prosser, her husband Henry owned land on the north side of Sucker Lake that would contain iron ores which, from the “Prosser Mines”, would be used in Oswego’s iron-making industry as it tried to become the “Pittsburgh of the West.”

George Prosser, son of Mary Prosser, would become a general merchandiser with a store in Oswego as well as a postmaster, director of the town’s school district, and local representative to the State Assembly.

Henry Gans was an early merchant with a store in South Town which would later be purchased by Joseph Bickner.

Henry Shipley, Lucien M. Davidson and Elisha Kellogg were carpenters and helped to construct buildings in Oswego including the residence of John Trullinger who re-plated Oswego in 1867 and owned the Oswego Milling Company. Davidson, whose family developed the farm “Mountain View” south of Oswego, would keep daily journals of his activities from 1876 to 1911. These would later be transcribed and provide invaluable insights into the daily life of Oswegans.

At least 29 of those listed in the 1870 census are buried in the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery on Stafford Road and include members of the Armstrong, Bullock, Calkins, Davidson, Ford, Gans, Libbey, Prosser, Ranger, Shipley, and Walling families. The 1870 census is an interesting mix of early pioneers and those who would, early on and in later years, be directly involved in the settlement and development of Oswego and the lands around it. As evidenced by the families mentioned above, many played a significant part in the history of Oswego and other nearby communities, as would a number of their children for years to come. This and other U. S. censuses wait to be explored and mined for information that will help us to better understand the history of Oswego and the people who lived there.

OHC Art Show and Sale
November 23 and 24, 2013
Corner of 10th & “A” Ave., Lake Oswego
Saturday, November 23, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, November 24, 10:00 to 3:00 p.m
Santa will be here both days for your children and grandchildren to visit. Bring your camera-times TBA

Oswego Heritage House 6th Annual Holiday Art Show and Sale will be held at the historic Oswego Heritage House, featuring original paintings and prints in all mediums from many prize-winning painters in our area, note cards, a variety of holiday gifts that include paintings, glass, puppets, jewelry, and much more. More information www.oswegoheritage.org click events
Oral History as taken by Ed and Phyllis Miska
May 9, 2013
Margot Bullier Dewart
Margot was born in Portland, Oregon on August 18, 1923 at the Adventist Hospital. She lived in Portland until the age of 10 (1933) when the family moved to 1226 North Shore Road, Oswego, Oregon. She said the home wasn’t finished, but it was livable. She continued to live there with her parents until she finished her education. While Margot lived at the family home in Oswego, they kept horses. She would ride their horses to the Hunt Club, then located approximately where Wizer’s Grocery is currently located between 1st & 2nd Street, south of A Street, then she would ride up A Street and back home. At that time, A Street was only paved to 1st street, and it had gravel beyond that point. She also rode horses in the Tryon Creek area.

Margot spent a very short period going to Lincoln High School and finished her high school education at West Linn High School, graduating in 1940. Later, she spent 4 years at the University of Oregon, graduating in 1944.

While Margot was living at the family home in Lake Oswego, she learned to water ski, probably in the late 1940’s, and continued to water ski most of her life, even as recently as 2011. On one such adventure, she skied under the bridge at the west end of Lakewood Bay when her father was driving. The boat’s wake ricocheted off the bridge abutments making the skiing difficult. Margot said her dad tended not to follow the safety rules very carefully, so the Lake Corporation made him the Safety Officer. He had to follow the rules after that.

After school, she went to work in Portland as a Medical technician doing various kinds of laboratory work. At this time in her career, she made reagents for testing at hospitals in Oregon and Washington. This laboratory experience gave her the opportunity to accept a job in Prairie City, Oregon to set up and operate a laboratory in the hospital for two years. The work included laboratory work plus operating an x-ray machine without her having any prior experience or instruction. She commented that some of the time she would look at the operator’s manual while positioning the patient for the x-ray.

After two years, Margot decided to return to Portland, Oregon. She obtained a job with a group of doctors who operated their own laboratory on 10th and Washington Street, and she worked there until about 1973, about 20 or more years. After returning to Portland, in 1943, Margot married "the love of her life," Samuel C. Drennan - They lived in SW Portland near 35th and Holgate. During this same period she had two sons.

In 1965, Margot’s father insisted that she look at the cabana on Lake Oswego built by Richard Sundeleaf. She saw it, loved it and has been there since. This cabana (#4) is one of the two remaining originals built by Richard Sundeleaf and has a spectacular view of Lakewood Bay (early on, called “Duck Pond”). Her cabana is essentially the same as when originally built and has only a very small addition on the back and west side not even noticeable inside the main living area. The other original cabana is #10. Margot remembers that the cabanas were all originally painted different colors.

In 1974, Margot (age 51) decided that a laboratory technician’s salary wouldn’t properly finance her retirement, so she decided to become a Real Estate Agent. She took the Oregon State test and got her first job with Pounder Realtors selling real estate. She was the first female real estate agent in Lake Oswego.

On one scheduled property listing tours, she stayed in the office. A customer arrived looking to buy a house. She was the only one in the office, so she showed him three or four homes. Later, his wife decided she liked the one which was new on the market, so they bought it. While Margot was filling out the paper work with their offer, she was, apparently, scowling because of the complexity of the document she was preparing, and the buyers thought she was unhappy with their offer. Before she got the paper work together, they increased the offer to the full asking price. Thus, she satisfied the customer and the listing agent; the customer was happy to get the home, and the listing agent was happy to get the full asking price. During that year, she became the top sales person of the company and was encouraged to have her office moved to a frontal position. She declined, however, saying the office behind the storeroom was a successful sales location for her. She knew Paul Murphy, a prominent realtor, who had his office at one time in the Heritage House. Margot worked at real-estate sales until she was 65 years old.

Margot remembers February 10, 1996 for two major reasons: first, her second marriage occurred on that date, and second, her prized cabana was flooded by the only flood recorded in recent years in Lake Oswego. That was caused by a large amount of water being released from a dam upstream from the canal inlet and the...
failure of the Lake Corporation to open up gates on the dam to let the water flow out fast enough. It seemed that no one had expected this amount of run off. She said the water was knee-deep in the cabana, requiring significant clean-up and replacement of appliances. Her replacement carpet was laid in May, 1996 and still looks like new. High quality carpets such as hers, are no longer available. Margot said that after the flood the Lake Oswego Corporation hired someone to be the Lake Manager, keeping lake water quality, cleanliness, and water level up to a standard that would prevent deterioration of the lake.

Now in 2013, Margot is about 90 years old and still enjoys having people visit her at her home. She even hosts church study-sessions planned by members of her church, Lake Grove Presbyterian Church. She said the exciting times in her life were participating with a singing group and enjoying parties, whether it is a business group, pot luck, or just a group visit. In addition to her great and generous hospitality, Margot is a great cook. She enjoys cooking her favorite soups, and she said she would sometimes buy a 10-lb. salmon from Wizers with its head and tail intact and cook and serve it on a large platter to her guests.

Margot was in the kitchen recently, she got down on the floor to pick something up, but then couldn’t get herself up. So, she called 9,1,1 and had some young men come over and help her. She said they were great, but seemed a little amused about the situation. However, it was nice that they got there in two to three minutes.

Margot has lived a full active life. Her two sons now each have two children. Her older son had two daughters: one is a professor in San Francisco, California, and the other is a full-time parent of two children in the eastern part of the US. Margot’s younger son, Leon Drennan, who lives near his mother in Portland, has two boys. The youngest one is still in college, looking into the medical field.

Margot commented that, the other day, she was sitting on the davenport, when a feeling of overwhelming peace came over her. She believes, as we do, that God touched her to give her that peace. She said she believes in always being truthful and upbeat, no matter the situation.

Margot’s father’s family came from Scotland in 1832 and his father was a barber. His mother was an accomplished carpenter but lacked cooking skills, so cooking was left to his Father. Margot was a lady of grace, charm, wisdom, decorum, unshakeable faith, consummate generosity and a rare nobility of character - she passed away May 28, 2013.
This year’s Collector Car and Boat Show was the result of the dedicated efforts of many individuals. In addition to our generous sponsors named below, we would like to extend a special note of thanks to our more than 70 sponsors and volunteers.

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