

Yakima history

About the first actual settler and mainstay and promoter of the Yakima country was Mr. F.M. Thorpe, now one of the well to do farmers of Kittitas valley.

Mr. Thorpe with his family came across the plains from old Missouri, arrived at what is now Portland, Ore, July 1844 in the summer of '59 he moved from Benton county, Oregon to what is now Klickitat county and located near the present site of Goldendale. W.T. In February, 1861 he pulled up stakes and located on Yakima river opposite the present City.

The first white child born in the Yakima country was Rufus Clifford to the wife of F.M. Thorpe, April 3, 1863.

Yakima county was organized March 17, 1867. December 13, 1883 the county was divided; the northern part formed into Kittitas county containing the famous farming and fruit growing valleys of Kittitas and Wenatchee.

Wenatchee valley is from half a mile to three miles in width and some forty odd miles in length, extending from the northwest to the southeast with the clear snow water of the Wenatchee river winding slowly through it. The valley is but 400 feet above the level of the the sea; high pine clad mountains Delicious peaches and grapes are readily grown by the few settlers in the valley.

In September 1868 Mr. Thorpe and his son-in-law Chas. A. Splawn went to Kittitas valley and built their dwelling houses, the following February they moved their families there where they now reside.

In the years 61, 62 all of 8,000 men passed through the Yakima country going northward to the Cariboo Smellkimeen and Frazier river Gold Mines. The Washington Farmer March 14, 1885.

Thorp, F.M.

Virginia, proud southern state, may have its first families but the Yakima country boasts of its first family, that of F.M.

Thorp who first saw the valley in 1858 and who, three years later became the first permanent settlers.

At that time Mr. and Mrs. Thorp (she had been Margaret Bounds) came to the south Moxed valley and brought with them their nine children and Indian Harmilt with his wife. From that beginning through the 74 years to the present, the Thorps and their descendants have figured largely in the development of Yakima country.

Eldest of the Thorps was Leonard, only 16 when the first family came into Yakima but already a man grown in his strength, his ability to meet wilderness difficulties and his often proved resourcefulness and courage. Others of the pioneer group were Helen, Armilda, Frances, Ella, Olive, Willis, Bayless and Milton. Clifford, another son, died in infancy and there were also Leonard Thorp, twins who died almost at birth (copy) Today, also, there are Thorp twins, the wee daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Thorp, who are direct descendants of the first family and who can carry on the Yakima twin tradition started in that very early day.

Thorps, too, are linked with the Perkins murder, the outrage which aroused the whole countryside. Milton Thorp, off on some pioneer errand, disappeared at about the time Alonzo Perkins and his bride were slain by renegade Indians; it is assumed Milton, too, was killed by the red men although no definite proof of what happened to him has ever been found.

Coming to Yakima in the days when the Thorps first found their way here was in itself a gigantic task. The eleven members of the family went from Central Oregon to Portland by emigrant train, then by steamer to the lower Cascades of the Columbia, by rail to

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the upper Cascades, by steamer to the Dalles and by wagon to Goldendale, their starting point for an unmarked trail to a home somewhere in the wilderness.

Old Fielding M. Thorp, a man whose soul craved the wilderness, and his elder sons took 250 cows and 60 horses to the Yakima country during the winter of 1860/ In the spring they built a cabin, felling cottonwoods and cutting out their own logs and planted a garden. At that time the open lands of the valley were covered with rye grass from four to six feet tall so cultivating any ground was a difficult task, even at a spot so favored as the Thorp homestead at the big spring of the Moxee. Stock and garden thrived and in 1861 the elder Thorp brought his family to the new land which he saw as an empire fit mainly for grazing cattle and but due to retain its vast ranges. By 1868 that wilderness had become so crowded, in Fielding Thorp's eyes, that he moved to Kittitas county where he lived until his death (The town of Thorp takes its name from him)

When the elder Thorp moved to his new place on Tanum creek, Leonard Thorp was preparing to establish his own home in the Yakima country, in which he lived contentedly until his death a few years ago. In 1869 when but 24, he married Philena, daughter of the Alfred Hensons, and the next year the young couple homesteaded in the Selah. Their five children, Martha, Eva, Dale, Herbert, and Margaret were all born there. Now the youngest, as Mrs. Willis Hawkins, makes her home near Union Gap and can look across to the Moxee hills at the foot of which her grandfather built the first home erected by a white man in the whole sweep of the Yakima valley.

Pioneer Life? The everyday existence of Mrs. Leonard Thorp, a bride at 17 years, a mother at 18 and head of a brood of five

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youngsters when she was but 28 in a day when there were no conveniences, no neighborhood stores, no electricity or running water is in itself a saga of cheerful endurance.

Through the year took her husband kept full pace with the rapidly growing Yakima and shifted easily from pioneering in the sagebrush to pioneering in business. He did the latter with such success that for many years he served as vice president of the Yakima National bank and also has to his credit public service through terms as county assessor and county auditor.

Mrs. Hawkins recalls clearly her mother's vivid accounts of life in the early days when weather was a big factor in all plans and enterprises. Back in the "hard" winter of 80-81 the whole valley was covered with deep snow and ice crust. Cattle, held fast and unable to break through to get anything to eat, died where they stood, thousands of them. Some of the heroic pioneer women kept cattle alive by making soup of the frozen and starved to death and feeding it to others which thus enabled them to survive for the tardy coming of spring.

"Mother was cross because she hadn't thought of it," Mrs. Hawkins said. "She used potato peelings to save her cows."

Another winter of which the Thorps will remember, is the account of the year of the flood, the year the railway was being built through the valley. The young Thorps paddled over what is now the town of Selah in a canoe. The ice was jammed high at places in the river and when it gave way, the whole lowland was under water. Mrs. Hawkins still chuckles as she tells how her father warned the section hands who were working not to try camping in the yard; in the morning he was startled to hear yells for help coming from the tops of his haystacks. The section hands had camped against orders and had scrambled higher and higher in

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efforts to escape the rapid rise of the water.

Mrs. Thorp often told of how the first chickens were brought to the valley. The Hensons had two crates of chickens tied on their pack horse when they came to the Yakima valley. Pilfering Indians got one crate and with it the roosters of the flock. It looked as though there would be no spring fryers. But a few days later while making camp near the river the Hensons noticed a movement in some bushes and found an old rooster tied underneath them. "It hardly sounds possible," Mrs. Hawkins admits, "but that's what happened and that's the start of the poultry industry in this valley."

Housekeeping had its hazards when young Mrs. Thorp, pioneer wife of the valley started out. Goods were brought from the Dalles, and shopping was done at long intervals. Flour, of course, was kept in barrels. Once when Mrs. Thorp reached for some flour she heard a horrifying rattle and barely missed being struck by the rattlesnake which had coiled comfortably inside the flour bin. There were times when she was almost afraid to crawl into bed for fear of the snakes, and no wonder, for one season Mr. Thorp killed 142 of them about the home place.

Visiting in pioneer days? There wasn't much of it. The first winter the Thorps were established their home was 75 miles from that of the nearest white settler in the Klickitat country. They were 100 miles from the nearest postoffice at The Dalles.

Those were the days before the rocks of the hillsides overlooking the present Riverside golf course had been blasted away and wild goats and deer quite often hopped about the rocks to peek at the strange, two-legged creatures who had invaded the lowland.

And salmon! Mrs. Hawkins says, "I remember hearing mother

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telling that one could have used them for stepping stones walking across the river. The fish, fighting to get upstream to spawn would be caught at the riffles and be jammed there like sardines. Many died in the shallows and the stench would be awful. Fish were cheap in those days. The Indians would gladly trade a big king salmon for a little salt or a few matches.

Yakima pear trees are still in blossom; Leonard Thorp was the man who started the pear industry as he did so many others, in the valley. He grafted pear switches brought from the coast onto the wild hawthorn. F.M. Thorp started the valley's pork industry. The hogs along the bottomlands waxed fat on fern roots; at times the porkers would dig holes 10 to 12 feet deep in their enthusiasm to get to the succulent roots. At one time F.M. Thorp sold 500 hogs which averaged 200 pounds, prime stock and proof the pioneer knew his pigs. As another thing first, Thorp was the first man to bring full blooded Holsteins into the state which he did in 1884-the real start of Yakima's modern dairying with its now huge payroll.

"Indians always thought it was funny the way the white men worked, Mrs. Hawkins says. 1880 They would say "Boston man hi-as pil-ton or "the white man is a great fool. Instead of sending his squaw out to get wood he goes himself. He is a very great fool indeed.

Living under pioneer conditions was never easy and often called for all the stamina and resourcefulness which a man might possess. Such was the case in the winter of 1884 when the Naches was frozen from the bottom up. Thorp went out to look after some of his cattle, risking his life in the work. He became chilled and frozen but continued until he fell in the drifts and could not rise. When he was rescued from the trail where he had been

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huddled in a temperature of 36 degrees below zero, he was so severely frozen for a long time his recovery was doubtful. He did lose his toes; there was no such thing as an anesthetic available and the only surgeon available balked at amputating the blackened toes though gangrene was developing. So Thorp did it himself and in later years would point to as clean a job of amputation as the most modern surgeon could have done. Such was the pioneer courage and physical bravery of Yakima's first family- no wonder the whole valley rallies to pay tribute to the pioneers in the coming Frontier day celebration. (Yakima about 1936)