

KEITHLEY CREEK PIONEERS

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Dear Relatives, Friends, or to those whom it may concern:

I was very much surprised to get a letter of inquiry, pertaining to my father's family and ancestors. My father died nearly forty-eight years ago, and not many dates or records have been kept of historical events of the family, but I will try to tell you some of the things I have heard him tell of his life, and some of the incidents that happened along the way. It will give you a glimpse backward over a hundred years or more, the time in which he lived

I have heard him say that his grandfather lived in the southwestern part of Germany: Coblenz, Germany. He came west to the waterfront in the Netherlands, and set sail for the good old U.S.A. He settled in Penn's Woodland, which was later called Pennsylvania, and where the people were later known as the Pennsylvania Dutch.

I have heard him speak of his father, Daniel Keithley, and an Uncle Nathan. These two boys pushed farther into frontier life. Uncle Nathan settled in Southeastern Missouri; while Grandfather Daniel settled Central Eastern Missouri, St. Charles County. They called themselves the "Danites" and the "Nathanites".

The mother of the second family visited Pa, John and Maggie, when I was five years old, some seventy years ago.

My Grandfather, Daniel Keithley was united in marriage to Elizabeth Hoste. To this union were born eight children, six boys and two girls; namely: Eli, Frank, William, Robert, Levi, John, Maggie, and Kate. These people were all large of stature. The men were all six feet tall, weighing from two to two hundred and fifty pounds. The girls were also large: Aunt Kate was a giantess, six feet tall. Other measurements being:

Weight: 722 pounds
Chest: 7 feet around
Waist: 6 feet around
Arm: 2 feet around

Her sister Maggie weighed two hundred forty pounds. Aunt Kate died at the age of thirty years due to fat melting around her heart. It was known at that time as a disease called "Fatty Degeneration of the Heart."

The mother of this family died at St. Charles County, Missouri, when John was a small lad. Grandfather remarried to a girl named Rebecca Ghost. When Grandfather brought his new bride home, the older boys when to meet them on calves and colts. I imagine this was a real greeting!

When the older boys had grown to manhood, the Civil War was calling young men to the battlefield, but these boys were in sympathy with

the slaves and thought it not right to hold the Negroes in bondage, and did not wish to fight with the South. It was heartrending to my father and his brother to see families torn asunder and sold over the auction block, as we sell our cattle, pigs and sheep to the highest bidder.

Grandfather had a family of slaves on his plantation, but they were given privileges. The Negro boys and girls and the white boys and girls played together in their yard; the boys all working together in the cotton, corn, and tobacco. The Negro "mammy" took care of Grandfather's family until he remarried.

Levi and his brother Robert, along with two other boys, decided to go west and leaving the freeing of the slaves to the north. They got a light wagon which they called a "buckboard", a team and a harness. They packed their clothes in trunks, and put their bedding and provisions in the wagon with a tarpaulin over it to keep out the dust and keep off the storms. Then they bid farewell to friends and loved ones.

The boys left eastern Missouri and started for Oregon over the rugged trail, which was indeed a rugged trail, as there was not real road over the rolling desert, quick sands, steep and rugged mountains. Neither were there bridges over the turbulent rivers and their tributaries.

One boy in this group had poor health, so he was given the task of driving the team. They had to

They had not gone far from Kelton, Utah, when the Indians drove their herd of horses away. The owner

chain the box of the wagon to the running gears, so it would not float off while swimming the rivers.

The other three boys in this group walked beside the wagon from Missouri to Kelton, Utah. They cut themselves some hickory canes before they left Missouri, and they said they had no trouble keeping up with the team all day.

In order to have bread to eat for their meals, they rolled down the top of the flour sack, made a nest in the center of the flour, put in rising ingredients, salt, shortening or lard, and mixed in the right amount of water. Then mixed this into a dough, wrapped in around their walking canes in strips, and baked it over the camp fire.

When they got to Kelton, Utah, they met a man who had some horses that he wanted someone to break to ride. By helping the man with his horses, the boys had the privilege of riding the horses the rest of the journey. This, of course, made the boys very happy. The man who allowed the boys to ride the horses said to Levi Keithley, "May I see what you have in your shirt pocket?" He said, "Yes, Sir", and handed him the small Bible. The man said, "That is just fine. I thought it might be a deck of cards." So, by this incident, he won the respect and confidence of the man who was to be their traveling companion on the Oregon trip.

of the horses said, "Will anyone follow the trail and bring the horses back?" Levi and Robert Keithley, and

some of the other boys in the party volunteered to go.

They followed the trail, brought the horses back, but missed one horse and colt. The man again asked if anyone would go after them.

The boys all said they would go, but it was much harder this time, as they had to go near the camp, dismount, and untie them from the bushes, as well as making sure their horses that they had ridden were on a safe spot from the Indians. They were very much nearer the Indian camp than on the previous trip.

By this time, the Indians were becoming quite furious, and leveled their bows and arrows at the men, and uttered ugly cries of "Ugh! Ugh!"; but not an arrow was whizzed at the men as the pale faced men went between the Indians and the men who were untying the horses. They had their guns in readiness, if needed, but the Indians were afraid. It was just too bad for the man who might have lost a hat or a bandanna, as no one would go back for such small items.

From this point, they went across Idaho to The Dalles, Oregon. Here the two Keithley brothers, Robert and Levi, got enough equipment together, which consisted of two wagons apiece and six head of horses, with harness for each. By being loaded to and from, they were

While freighting through Idaho, Robert and Levi met two men from Salubria, Idaho. They were Mr. William Allison and Mr. Lem Rhinearson, who wanted them to come to Middle Valley and file on land for homesteads. They went back

ready to start freighting from The Dalles, Oregon to Kelton, Utah. They followed this line of work for eight years for a meager living. It was very heavy and tiresome work.

One night while camped at Meachem, Oregon, they were awakened by whispering over their heads. There were six Indian men bent over their bed whispering "Fire water! Fire water!" Levi reached for his gun and told them to get out, they had no "fire water". The Indians gave them no more trouble, but they learned later that a man had been bringing the Indians whiskey.

These brothers did not work on Sunday, but put their horses on green pasture to rest and feed, while they climbed one of the eastern slopes of the Blue Mountains, and looked toward the rising sun and their homeland, and wept bitter tears. They were very lonesome and homesick boys. It took three months to get a letter from home. Their sister Kate wrote them from home that President Lincoln had been shot. No one dared say a word against Lincoln in this group. All were very quiet.

The terrain was the same on the rugged mountains that overshadowed the Great Salt Lake. I have heard my father say that he had killed many deer for food on all of those mountains.

and looked the land over, and found some very fertile land that could be watered from the creek flowing from the mountain that now bears the name Keithley Mountain, and the creek was later called Keithley Creek. Their brother John joined them in

1876 in Middle Valley.

Robert Keithley found a companion in Middle Valley, Miss Bertha Reed. They were united in marriage and to this union was born one son, Henry. When he was about two years old, his father fell at the door with an attack of Apoplexy, a form of heart disease, from which he never recovered. He died in 1879. His grave was one of the first in Middle Valley. This grave is an isolated one on what is now known as the Hiddleson Place on Highway 95, where it crosses Keithley. The exact location is in a field to the right of the highway, and is marked and protected.

Henry was riding a wild, bucking horse when he was about sixteen or eighteen years of age. Later he developed a high fever and other symptoms and soon died. So ends the posterity of Robert Keithley.

After Robert's death, Levi and John filed on homesteads at the foot of the Keithley Mountain. Their homesteads joined, and their houses were one half mile apart.

During the summer months of 1878 and 1879 the Indians gave them much concern. After dark, they carried their beds to the center of the meadowland where a profile could be seen against the skyline and also had their guns and dogs for protection. At day break their beds were rolled and carried to the willows on the creek so the Indians would not know where

Robert Jackson, with his pick, and Alexander Towell with his ax, were clearing the road through the trees and underbrush in the Reed's

they slept.

They said the first winter they spent in Idaho, they thought they had struck a paradise as it was a light winter and they went to plowing the sixth of January. The second winter, however, was a blizzard from beginning to end. The snow was deep and ropes had to be stretched from the house to the barn so they would not lose their way.

The two brothers plodded on in this way until 1881, when a caravan of home seekers came from Mercer County, Missouri, to the Middle Valley, Idaho. These two brothers were always ready to visit and welcome new people to their vicinity.

However, it was just a little more awesome this time as there were two pretty girls on this immigrant train. One had pretty brown eyes and brown hair. Her name was Sara Serepta Evens. This one John adored and took to be his wedded wife.

The other girl, with the black hair and pretty blue eyes was Effie Jane Towell. This girl and Levi Keithley were united in the Holy Bonds of matrimony April 20. 1884. In 1885, May 23, this girl became my mother.

Roads had to be built into the mountains to the new sawmill for lumber and stove wood for the settlers use. The Burke brothers, Walter, Dick, and Jerry owned the mill. They were jolly Irish boys and sang many Irish song, for the entertainment of their friends.

Grove when they were attacked by a grizzly bear. Jackson ran behind the bear and struck with his pick. The bear whirled, slapped the pick from

his hands. Towell struck from behind with his ax and the bear whirled on him and slapped his ax away. While Jackson was getting his pick, the bear reared on Towell and he felt the bears hot breath on his face. He struck the bear in the mouth with his fist and was bitten through the thumb. By this time, Jackson was back with his pick. The bear whirled on Jackson but took the shirt off Towell and left his nail prints down his chest and stomach as he turned. They fought for some time in this way. The bear finally gave out and went into the underbrush. The men went to the valley for help. They notified John and Levi Keithley and several others. Settlers and neighbors went back with them to the place where the skirmish had taken place.

There was a small clearing here, and Levi called out "All boys climb trees. We may have to fight; we do not want a boy in danger". The boys ran for the trees.

Levi always carried two extra cartridges between his fingers on his left hand for quick loading and shooting, as his gun was only a single shot. He went to the brush, and ran the bear out. He fire the first shot which killed the bear. He said the bear sprang high into the air and when it struck the ground it let out

The farmers all planted a few acres of cane. Uncle John Keithley bought a cane mill to extract juice from the cane stalks. Uncle Dan Keithley, (Uncle Griff's brother) made a vat and boiled the juice down into a heavy syrup. It made wonderful sorghum which also made tasty

such a loud and terrifying groan they were all filled with fright and started shooting. My guess is the bear's hide was not good for a fireplace rug.

My father did not think he was excited but when the excitement began to wear away, he noticed he still had the two cartridges between his fingers. He had never reloaded!

When they called the boys to come, that the bear was dead, one boy, "Rass Wiggins", said he was sitting flat on the ground with his arms and legs around the tree trunk. It is surely strange what fear and excitement can do to the human family.

Their time was given to raising a good breed of horses for work and power on the farm. Their time was also given to farming, the raising of beef and dairy cattle, hogs and sheep.

The first hay was cut with a scythe! The grain was cradled and flayed. However, it was not long until larger machinery came into use, which made the work lighter and much faster.

They put out orchards of apples, prunes, pears, peaches, crab apples, and apricots. Also the small fruits of berries, currants and rhubarb.

My father kept bees. He extracted the honey from the comb, and we had all the honey we could use and honey for sale.

ginger bread, cookies, and taffy candy. All had a barrel of sorghum behind their pantry doors.

One of the things we loved to do was call in the neighbors and youngsters on a cold winter evening and have a taffy pull for entertainment. We all enjoyed the

pulling of taffy.

My father's stepmother visited us in Idaho seventy one years ago. To me she was a kind and loving grandmother.

Some seventy years ago my father, his brother John, and his sister Maggie, decided it was time to get some school houses built for school, and churches to meet in to worship the God of Heaven. The school houses were used for both school and church worship.

Children have grown into adults and it has been said' "The home is the place for training, the school is the place for instruction, and parents who expect the school to make up for the neglects in the home are apt to be sadly disappointed. It is the morality and religion which bud in the home, blossom in school, and bear fruit in life."

The valley was divided into two districts. District number four was at the foot of Keithley Mountain. This was Mount Pleasant School. The other district, on the east side of the Weiser river was number seventeen, the Salem School. We had much rivalry between the two schools in spelling and ciphering matches.

In the last few years, these two districts and all outlying districts have consolidated into one school, the first eight grades and high school. A large gym for basketball and school programs for the entertainment of It made chills sweep up and down his spine,

His heart did tremble and his knees did shake,
At the sight of the old rattle snake.

parents and friends, also pupil, school board, and teachers. Buses bring children to and from school.

Before the irrigation project was finished on the valley land, a hot wave struck the crops and gardens and dried them up. The east side was called "Poverty Flat". The wheat on district number four, Mount Pleasant, dried until the kernels looked like little wooden pegs for mending shoes. So it was called "Shoe peg" and is still called "Shoe Peg" more than it is Mount Pleasant.

There are not many land marks left in the valley. The barn my father built still stands. The frame work was made of well seasoned, small, peeled logs. The rafters were of long fir poles. The sheeting was lumber one by fours, the walls on by twelves, and bastioned cracks! The roof covering was hand made shakes of fir. Not long after the barn was finished my father was putting down straw bedding in the barn. A hen had made a nest under the manger. He thought he would lift her off and take the eggs to the house while the horses were still drinking at the creek. He said no, I will just use my four tined fork to lift her off.

To his bewilderment and surprise
It was a snake with beady eyes,

That twisted and tumbled off the straw
fork twine

The hen flew up at the break of day
To the loft of the barn on new mown hay,

That she might hide her nest away
from owls and chattering magpies gay.

We have watched the little Indian villages grow from nothingness of the wilds into a flourishing valley with modern houses with trees and flowers around. Church buildings and also a large gym for basketball and school programs.

The older settlers of the valley have most all crossed the great Divide and the younger generation have had a part in following the foot prints left on the sands of time and trying to keep the home fires burning; to keep the lights in the watch tower gleaming, that our children and grandchildren may follow the guiding light into the land of rest where there is no night.

We hope the Star Spangled Banner, our "emblem" of freedom and good will, may keep on floating over the homes, the churches, and the schools while time lasts.

Now that places of fame and honor
Have been filled by trusty ones,

May Midvale keep on filling them
With her daughters and her sons.

Idaho, the gem of the mountain will
always be home to me.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter 12, verses 12, 13, and 14.



12. And further by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.
14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, where it be good, or whether it be evil.