

# HERITAGE

## Restoration Pioneer in Oregon

by Bonnie Miller

You can't read Oregon history without reading about our spiritual ancestors. Many of the most prominent figures in the state's early years were also members of the Restoration Movement, or "Campbellites" as they were derogatorily labeled. Several of our Christian brothers played important roles in the development of the state including James McBride, L.L. Rowland, George L. Woods, and the flamboyant William Lysander Adams.

Born in Painesville, Ohio on Feb. 5, 1821, Billy Adams received his formal education at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. It was there that he met his wife-to-be, Frances Olivia Goodell, a native of Harmony, Maine. They became engaged in the fall of 1842 but postponed their wedding until Billy had completed a year of study under Alexander Campbell at Bethany College in Virginia. While at Bethany, Billy became Campbell's close friend and protégé and even lived in the Campbell home. However, due to severe eyestrain from overstudy, he left Bethany a month before he was to graduate. Upon leaving Bethany, Campbell appointed him his book agent for Illinois and Indiana. Although ill with measles and other complications that summer, Billy managed to sell enough books to profit \$17. Combining that with \$15 Frances had saved from her teaching job, they were wed on August 25, 1844.

In the fall of 1845 Billy began teaching school in Henderson County, Illinois. He was offered five years' employment to take charge of Illinois University in Jacksonville, in the winter of 1846. He declined the offer having already caught "the Oregon fever" which was sweeping Ohio, Illinois, Missouri and other states. Having paid off all his college debts, he was ready to depart. However, just three days

before they were to leave, on March 8, 1847, his father Sebastian, died. Billy postponed his trip for a year in hopes of persuading his mother and siblings to accompany him, but they chose to remain in Ohio until 1852.

His friends thought he was a reckless visionary and even Alexander Campbell tried to discourage him from making the journey. Campbell wrote to him, "Is there not land enough, and are there not people



William Lysander Adams studied with Alexander Campbell at Bethany College in Virginia before moving to Oregon Territory in 1847 where he became one of the leaders of the Restoration Movement.

enough in Illinois for your talent and enterprise without burying yourself and family in the Oregon wilderness among the savages?" Adams replied, "No. Illinois is not big enough or good enough for me. My soul hungers for something that Illinois cannot give. In Oregon I expect to find what I desire."

On their last day with the Christians in Illinois with whom they worshipped, the congregation sang:

*My Christian friends in bonds of love,  
Whose hearts the sweetest union prove;*

*But pilgrims in a foreign land,  
We oft must take the parting hand.*

The church gathered around Adams and his family shaking hands, embracing and sobbing.

Having sold one of his 8 yoke of oxen to fellow Restorationist William Bristow, Billy and Frances left Galesburg in March 1848 with their two children, Inez (born in 1845) and 2-month-old Helen. On April 10 they crossed the Missouri River, then waited 2 weeks for his books and clothing to dry out which had become water-soaked as the river had run over the top of the wagon bed.

They always stopped to rest and observe Sundays in spite of the dangers and hardships encountered on such a trip. Crossing the Cascade Range was the last major obstacle. The cattle and teams were weak and reduced almost to skeletons while the faces of the immigrants were peeled and scaled by the alkali of the sage plains. By the time they reached Barlow's Toll gate, which had been opened two years earlier to provide the last overland link in the Oregon Trail, many of the members of the train decided to go down the Columbia River on rafts instead. Adams announced that he would go on by way of the Barlow Toll Road even though rain had left the road almost impassable. The gate keeper's journal records that Adams paid "one quilt" as his fee to use the road, a practice common among those who had no cash to pay the \$5 per wagon toll. The route was lined with dead horses and cattle lost by those who had come before. He and Frances had to carry the children and their goods up the steepest hills and go back and drive the empty wagons for the cattle were too weak to pull the laden wagons.

Ten days after passing Barlow's gate they reached Philip Foster's, the first house they had seen in six months. Mr. Foster provided a peck of potatoes and offered Billy every accommodation for

the winter if he would stay and teach school there. Adams did not like the country there however, and decided to continue on. Upon reaching Oregon City he borrowed \$2 to pay his ferrriage over the Willamette River and had 10¢ left, which slipped through a hole in his pocket that winter.

Traveling 35 miles farther west he came to Yamhill County in October 1848 and settled on Panther Creek adjacent to Dr. James McBride's homestead. The McBrides, fellow Restorationists, welcomed Billy and his family into their home until they could roll up a cabin of their own. Adams recalled, "They boiled peas for breakfast, dinner and supper, and browned them for coffee" which they drank without sugar or milk.

That winter Adams and the women in the neighborhood, along with the few men who had not gone to the gold fields of California, built a lean-to as an addition to James Fulton's log cabin to serve as a school house. Over the door a sign, written with charcoal, announced the existence of "Yamhill University." He taught 15-20 children that winter with a blackboard, crude benches and a few books. McBride offered one of the three rooms of his log cabin for a schoolhouse and Adams continued his teaching there.

Adams took great pride in the outcome of his students and boasted that he had taught John R. McBride, who was afterward a member of Congress from Oregon (and Adams' brother-in-law) and was appointed by Lincoln as chief justice of Idaho; Judge Thomas A. McBride, who became a justice of the Supreme Court of Oregon; George L. Woods, later

Oregon's third governor and subsequently appointed governor of Utah; and L.L. Rowland, afterward State Superintendent of Public Instruction. It should also be noted that they were all members of the Restoration Movement and active in establishing the church in Oregon.

It was certain that Yamhill County was the stronghold of the Churches of Christ in Oregon and most of the Pacific Northwest during these early pio-



William and Frances Adams and their growing family settled near Panther Creek in Oregon's Yamhill County. This photo was taken in the mid-1850s.

neer days. Diaries of several denominational missionaries in Oregon all note the early activities of the "Campbellites" in the area and a quick count will establish that there were more "Christians only" in Oregon Territory than all the Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodist Episcopalians combined.

Adams wasted no time in putting his oratorical skills to work. In August of 1850 he preached the first sermon at the official organization of the church of Christ in Pleasant Hill (near Eugene) where his old friends the Bristows had begun a church. He was known for his eloquence as a minister and divided his

time between farming and preaching in Yamhill and vicinity.

He was remembered by his children and friends as a minister as well as a politician, writer and doctor. Although never employed as a preacher, Billy frequently "ascended the sacred rostrum and expounded the Gospel." Historian Elwood Evans claimed that he heard many men and women say, "I would rather hear Adams talk than visit a theater." Evans also observed that "there are two subjects he never allows to be assailed in his hearing without speaking in their defense — Abe Lincoln and the New Testament."

Billy's daughter, Inez Parker, recalled going to church regularly and her father's custom of translating Bible passages into Chinook jargon before assembled bands of Klickitat Indians who passed through their farm on food-gathering expeditions.

Adam's pungent pen and eloquent oratory would leave their mark on the emerging Oregon Territory throughout the 1850s. As an editor, politician and gospel preacher, he was unsurpassed.

One of his sons, Gaines Melancthon, moved to Pateros, Washington in 1889 where he taught school, practiced medicine, farmed and planted a congregation of the Church of Christ. Two of Gaines' sons, Cecil and Francis, became preachers in the Church of Christ and two of Gaines' grandsons became elders in Churches of Christ in central Washington.

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