

## On the Road with A. L. Todd

by Jerry Rushford

**A**bbott Levi James Todd was born in Davis County, Indiana, on October 12, 1820. At the age of 19 he was baptized into Christ by his cousin, Elijah Goodwin, who was one of the prominent leaders of the Restoration Movement in that state. He married Angeline Tate in 1849, and they moved to the Arkansas frontier in 1850. Not satisfied with the situation in Arkansas, the Todds decided to press on across the plains to Oregon in 1852, even though Angeline was pregnant. In the back of their covered wagon, somewhere near the Umatilla River in northeastern Oregon, she gave birth to a son they named Elijah.

In September 1853 the Todds settled on a donation land claim at the lower end of Lookingglass Valley on Lookingglass Creek. This beautiful farm, situated in the picturesque Umpqua Valley of Douglas County, was located about eight miles southwest of present-day Roseburg. It would be their home for the next 27 years. A. L. Todd did not begin preaching regularly until the fall of 1856, but once he started he became an indefatigable circuit-riding preacher traveling throughout Douglas and surrounding counties for more than a quarter century.

The children of A. L. Todd always knew that their father's "greatest desire in life was to win souls to Christ." They could not remember any occasion when he had failed to fulfill a preaching appointment. "He never missed an appointment that it was possible for him to attend," his daughter wrote with certainty. His son echoed that statement and said that he "could not remember of father ever spending a single Sunday without preaching, if he was well enough to do it." After Todd's death in 1886, his children wrote down their memories of his constant travels to advance the cause of Christ.

Coming home one winter's day in the late 1860s from a preaching tour in Coos County, Todd found the upper Coquille

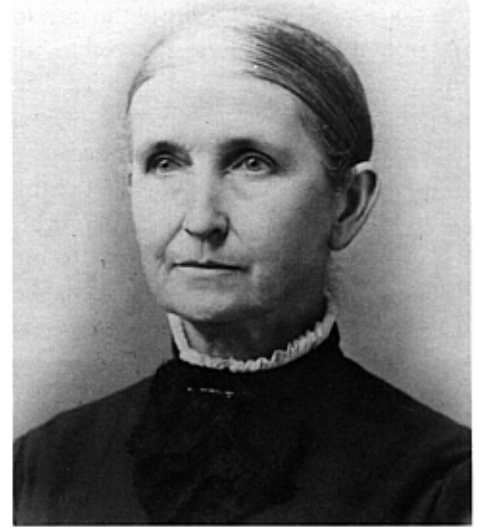


A. L. Todd

River swollen from recent rains. Despite the rapid current, Todd attempted to ford the dangerous river. Before he reached midstream, the current had swept the feet from under his horse and in an instant they were adrift in the icy stream. Todd grabbed the horse by her tail and down the river they went, their heads sometimes above the water and sometimes under. The horse finally swam to shore with her exhausted companion still clutching her tail. They rested for awhile on the river bank, and then pushed on. The thoroughly soaked preacher was suffering severely from the cold, but they rode for 15 miles before they came to the next house.

Todd's oldest daughter remembered another dangerous preaching trip when an accident almost led to a fatality. Writing the story as she must have heard it later from her father, she explained:

*At another time he was going to Camas Swale; on the road between Wilbur and Oakland night had fallen and it was a dark winter night. Taking a cut-off to avoid mud, his horse missed the road and came out on the railroad track; he followed it a little way, when the horse, stepping into a cattle guard, fell and caught father's foot under the horse; all efforts to free himself seemed of no avail and the south bound train from Portland to*



Angeline Todd

*Roseburg, then due, came in sight, he lying on the track in his helpless condition. All he could do to make the horse move did not free him, but as the train thundered down on to them with its gleaming headlight, the engineer blew his whistle and the frightened horse with one supreme effort, freed father's foot and rolled off to one side of the track and father rolled off on the other, barely missing the locomotive as it dashed past him with its train.*

One Sunday morning before church, Todd was in his pasture taking care of his sheep and trying to determine what had been attacking them. Suddenly, his dogs treed a panther. Rushing back to the farmhouse, Todd yelled at the top of his voice for his gun. One of his daughters ran to meet him with the gun and he returned to the tree and shot the panther. He returned to the house, got dressed for church, and then hurried off to fulfill his appointment and preach his sermon.

A. L. Todd traveled far and wide in pursuit of souls for Christ, and often his audiences were very small. On one preaching tour through Coos County he sent word ahead that he would be preaching at Burton Prairie school house. It was a rainy afternoon in the wintertime, and only four persons came out to hear him preach. All four of his hearers were

men, and none of them had thought to bring any matches for the candles. There was not enough time for any of the men to return home, so Todd began preaching in the fading light of a winter evening. The school house was cold, damp and dark, and as he preached the darkness deepened.

"He therefore preached the light of the gospel in the darkness of that winter night, while the rain fell outside," wrote his daughter, "his voice being all that could be distinguished." One of the four hearers obeyed the gospel soon after that experience, and he developed into a song leader and a gospel preacher. Several years later he told Todd's daughter about the sermon in the dark. "That earnest voice coming out of the darkness that night, I could not resist," he admitted, "and if ever any good comes from my work in the preaching of the gospel, it will be on account of that sermon delivered in the dark, in that little old school house at Burton Prairie."

All of Todd's children treasured those occasions when it was their turn to accompany their father on a preaching tour. Levi Todd remembered going to Myrtle Creek when it was six or eight degrees below zero. Forging the rivers with their large bodies of mushy ice was hazardous, and after making it across the Umpqua River at Dillard's Ford they decided to



A. L. Todd's last ministry was with the church he established in Shoestring Valley in Northern Douglas County. This building was erected in the early 1880s. When A. L. Todd died on April 23, 1886, he was buried in the church cemetery. The building burned to the ground in the 1930s. (Photo Courtesy of Douglas County Museum of History)

detour and take a trail which led over the mountains. The difficult journey took the entire day, but the 15-year-old boy remembered the reaction when they arrived. He wrote:

*Arriving at Myrtle Creek late in the evening, we stopped at Brother Ady's house. Sister Ady met us at the gate, and grasping father's hand, said, "Oh, Brother Todd, I knew you would come; they told me I needn't look for you this time, but I told them you would come." We warmed ourselves at the fire and pushed on about three miles further, and stayed all night with a Brother Cornelius. Next morning we went to church.*

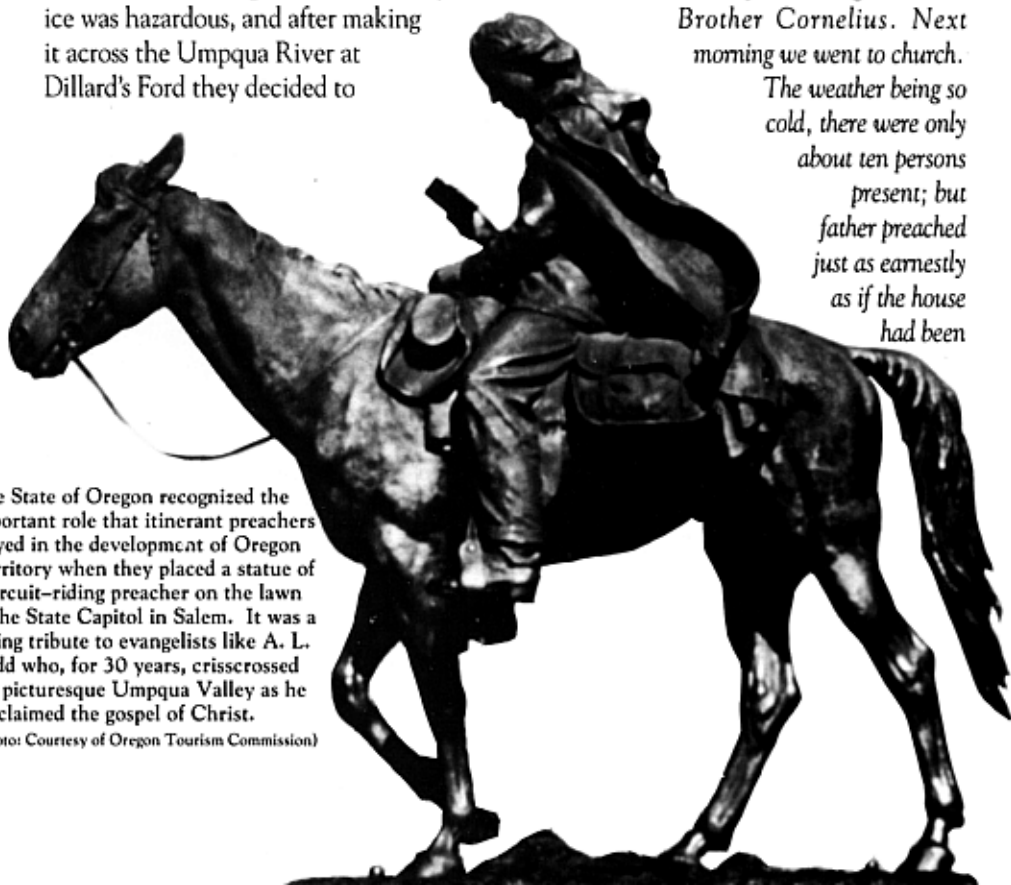
*The weather being so cold, there were only about ten persons present; but father preached just as earnestly as if the house had been*

*crowded After church we went about six miles on the road home, and stopped for the night. The next day we reached home late in the afternoon.*

A. L. Todd continued to ride his circuit in southwestern Oregon for more than 30 years. No weather was too severe, and no appointment was too far, if at the end of the trail there were a few people hungry to hear the gospel of Christ. "Of Hell and its horrors he had little to say," his son remembered, "but of the unbounded love of Jesus Christ for fallen and suffering man, he never tired of telling, never wearied in calling sinners to accept that love and to live under the banner of the Heavenly King."

A. L. Todd always felt uncomfortable when he was offered money for preaching the gospel of Christ. His wife, Angeline Tate Todd, shared his discomfort. On one occasion he closed a protracted meeting at Myrtle Creek by baptizing 15 people at one time, and afterwards a grateful congregation took up a collection. But his wife did not want him to accept the offering. "I felt like it was begging," she confided to her daughter. "I wanted him to preach for the saving of souls, not for money." When the church at Canyonville tried to give him some money, Todd stood up and said: "That is against my wish; I do not wish a collection taken for me."

It was not that Todd was independently



The State of Oregon recognized the important role that itinerant preachers played in the development of Oregon Territory when they placed a statue of a circuit-riding preacher on the lawn of the State Capitol in Salem. It was a fitting tribute to evangelists like A. L. Todd who, for 30 years, crisscrossed the picturesque Umpqua Valley as he proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

(Photo: Courtesy of Oregon Tourism Commission)

## Patty and Eric Atkisson

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Rosa area to find a job in the computer industry for now. He is hoping for a little normalcy after the stress of cancer and the whirlwind of his education. In leaving, Eric tips his hat to his mother: "She is a hard worker, incredibly persistent, and always inspires others. She certainly has more energy than I do."

Meanwhile, Patty is back at her desk organizing the next AWP board meeting and planning space for the thousands of visitors to the Pepperdine Lectures on April 29. She enjoys photos of her two older sons and their families, Frank and Utae in Boise, Idaho, and Bob and Leslie with their three children in Marblehead,

Massachusetts. She usually spends the summers enjoying her grandchildren. Patty also is proud of the photo of Dr. Davenport bestowing the Outstanding Senior Woman/Man to Patty and Eric. She looks at it and smiles about Eric, "He has such a great sense of humor." She adds, "He is committed, dedicated, thoughtful and gets along well with all types of people. He is just a delightful person." The photo sits on her desk to remind her that great accomplishments begin with faith, develop through trials, and end in joy.

But she does not look back. In fact, her advice to her senior class was, "Change is inevitable. Enjoy it!" So, she starts this new chapter in her life with that same faith in God and determination to grow that have seen her through thus far.

County. After carefully adding the totals for 31 years, they concluded that he had traveled more than 68,000 miles on horseback over muddy roads and mountain trails as a messenger for Jesus Christ.

A. L. Todd was a friend of preachers, both young and old. He assisted in commissioning and setting apart at least five young men for the preaching ministry, including Edward A. Chase and Isaac N. Muncy. Older preachers were always honored guests at the Todd farmhouse in Lookingglass Valley. One of his daughters wrote:

*Our home was the resting place for all tired preachers. They came often to rest with him from their work; were always welcome and stayed as long as they cared to stay. Old Brother [Israel] Clark, when he knew his end was near, came and was cared for and died there. Father and Mother watched over him as they would have done for their own parent, and when his spirit took its departure for the other world, they gave his remains a respectable burial.*

Toward the end of his life, Todd began to worry that he had set a bad example by never accepting financial support for his preaching. When he urged young men to preach the gospel, they responded by saying they would not be able to support their families. He decided to invest in some mercury ("quicksilver") mines in order to raise money to help educate and support young men for the ministry. He wrote out his last will and testament and pasted it in the family Bible. It read, "This, my last will and testament shows that it is my desire that all money made in the mines over and above enough to make my family a living shall be used to educate and pay young men for the ministry."

In the judgment of his children, A. L. Todd was a faithful example of a self-sacrificing Christian preacher who devoted his entire life to the cause of Christ. "For of all the sermons that he ever preached in life," his son wrote, "there is none so eloquent to his children and those who knew him best as the one he lived."

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wealthy. His resources were so limited that he often could not afford the candles that were necessary to light his log cabin. He cut blazes in the pine trees on his farm and then regularly collected the balls of pitch which formed at the base of each slashed tree. He burned these pitch deposits at night so that he could have enough light to study his Bible and write the outlines for his sermons.

For many years Todd maintained a full calendar of preaching appointments. His normal routine was to preach the first Sunday of every month at Canyonville (60 miles round-trip); the second Sunday at Calapooia (50 miles round-trip); the third Sunday at Myrtle Creek (44 miles round-trip), and the fourth Sunday for his home congregation at Lookingglass (6 miles round-trip). On the four "fifth Sundays" in every year's calendar, he would preach at Camas Valley. His daughter remembered:

*At each of these appointments away*

*from home he often preached Saturday afternoon and Saturday night, Sunday at eleven and also at one or three in the afternoon, and at night; making from one to four sermons each trip, sometimes more; for he held protracted meetings of about two weeks' duration, at least once each year, at each of these places, and sometimes more.*

How many sermons did A. L. Todd preach during his 31-year ministry in Oregon? His children researched this question and concluded that the number exceeded 4,000 and was probably closer to 5,000. In addition, he officiated at a large number of weddings and preached a great many funerals. As to how many people he immersed into Christ, his children thought that "no one save his Master will ever know." All they knew for sure was that "he baptized nearly everywhere he preached."

To answer the question of how far their father had traveled on horseback to proclaim the gospel, his children calculated the round-trip mileage of all his preaching appointments and then added all of his annual preaching tours to places like the Willamette Valley and Coos