

History of Susana Olive De-Ruiter By Mikenzie Schwalger

In the early 1800's, Henrietta pear- De-camp/de-Ruiter came from the Netherlands. It was a long sea journey and they came into New York Harbor on a ship called the Bachelor. Henry and Henrietta had six children and soon moved to the west to Iowa, where Henry, my great grandfather, was a banker and my great grandmother was a school teacher. My Great great grandfather worked hard and the knowledge of land in Oregon pulled him to sell his land and give up his bank position and buy a large wagon to go west to Oregon on the spring wagon train.

They took dishes; furniture, food and water, a cow, and chickens, a pig and they had oxen and to pull the wagon. Susana was about 10 years old and was excited to go on a journey. Little did she know her comforts of a home would be gone for a long time. She carried her doll and Grandmother Ruiter made them matching dresses. She had a trunk of clothes and shoes as the journey began. It was still cold and rained a lot. She remembers signing her name along with the family on Independence rock, which is still there today.

The days turned into weeks and at different places along the way the wagon master told the people to lighten the load. Her mother's China Closet was set along the side of the trail and then the large grandfather clock she brought across the ocean.

Susana's mother had a baby on the way and it got sick and died and they made camp and buried little John.

Each night the wagon train made a circle of wagons and families would build a large camp fire and sing and play music. There was always the fear of Indians and sometimes they would come into camp and want to trade their goods for food.

Susana soon got a suntan, even though she wore her bonnet. Her feet hurt as they had to walk along the trail. They got their water from rivers and her mother cooked over a camp fire. Food got short and they ate three chickens. Then one day father told them the cow was to be used as food. Susana never in later years ate beef as it reminded her of the cow they had to eat.

They crossed the Missouri River and continued on westward to the Rocky Mountains. It was summer and the mosquitoes were everywhere. They found buffalo chips to build camp fires with on their trek west over the Rocky Mountains. The wagon master again said to lighten your loads and each wagon left behind their worldly goods. – Trunks of clothes, dishes, books. How Susana loved books, but her parents said all the books but the bible would be left behind. – Pots, pans, dresses lay abandoned as the wagon train crawled over the mountains.

Soon they came to the Blue Mountain of Oregon and the Columbia River. Some followed the Oregon Trail down and stayed at Fort Dalles and then the Whitman's Fort. Then onward to the land they had spent so many months crossing the plains.

It was fall and my great grandfather built a sod house for the family. The next spring they plowed the ground and planted crops. The farm is still in the family today just off side Albany, Oregon.

Susana grew up and married a son of the next farm over, Peter Freerksh. Peter and Susana had 6 children – 3 who were triplets – one of whom was my great grandmother. Susana lived to 96 years and died in 1960 in Oregon.