

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

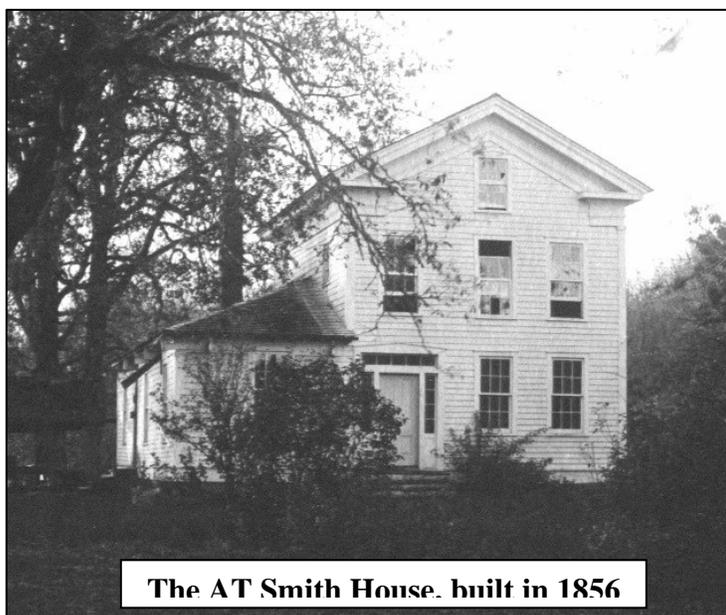
A.T. Smith Pt II - There to Here

By Jon Stagnitti

*(Continued from
the Winter newsletter)*

Eleven miles... a little more than once around Hagg Lake. That is how far the Smiths, Clarks and Littlejohns traveled on March 23, 1840, the day they departed Quincy, Illinois bound for the Willamette Valley. Eleven days passed before they completed the 207-mile journey to Independence, Missouri, the launching point for their trip to the Oregon Country. The ensuing three weeks would be spent looking for mules and packing; except for the Sabbath, which was spent in meeting.

The plan was to meet a party of the American Fur Brigade in Westport, Missouri who would guide them on to Fort Hall, near what is today Pocatello, Idaho. Although little was documented of this part of the journey, one can imagine that the dynamics of a group of would-be missionaries led by a small band of mountain men through the wild west must have been interesting, to say the least. In fact, there was a bit of excitement before they even set off. Harvey Clark made arrangements with one trapper, Moses "Black" Harris, to lead the party, and then bartered with another, Robert Newell, for a lesser fee. Harris, with at least a little alcohol in him, expressed his displeasure by firing a shot at Newell. No blood was



The AT Smith House. built in 1856

shed and off they went on April 29; Newell with a party of five, and the three couples with their three wagons, horses, mules, and seventeen cows. Others joined the party, some of whom were also to settle in the Willamette Valley.

On August 14 the party arrived at Dr. Whitman's Waiilatpu Mission on the Walla Walla River. Along the way they camped near Indians, they subsisted

on game such as buffalo and antelope and, overall, seemed to suffer but a few small hardships. A. T. Smith did his best to provide assistance at the Mission, though the relationship between the Whitmans and the independent missionary families was anything but picture perfect. Recall from Part I (in the Winter newsletter) that Smith, Harvey Clark and others embraced a more liberal view of religion. This did not sit well with the Missionary Board, who governed the existing missions, and feared these 'upstarts' would undermine their more traditional message. The Board discouraged their own members from providing assistance to Smith and his party. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were in the precarious position of wanting to provide them with supplies, but the American Missionary Board prohibited them from doing so.

A. T. and Abigail Smith were conceivably content to leave Waiilatpu in November when they traveled to Lapwai, the mission of Henry and Eliza Spaulding among the Nez Perce near Lewiston, Idaho. The Smiths and Spauldings accomplished a great deal at Lapwai in their eight months together. A. T. worked at the saw mill, he completed work on a grist mill, built a cradle for harvesting wheat, made a loom and some quilt frames for Eliza, butchered animals and fixed a cheese hoop, while Abigail taught school.

What the Smiths and Spauldings failed to achieve though, was to bring religion to the Indians. The Nez Perce had asked for “white man’s religion” believing it would bring them the same prosperity the Christians held. Interest was quickly lost when they realized the radical lifestyle changes required. The Nez Perce Indians were not ready to trade their mobility for the homebound lives of farmers, nor were the men ready to divest themselves of all but one of their numerous wives. A. T. and Abigail Smith settled their affairs with the Spauldings in August and, with some regret at the parting, returned to Waiilatpu. In payment for their services the Smiths received \$140 and the promise of a heifer and a bull at Waiilatpu. But they were disallowed this last payment as the Missionary Board continued to see the new group as potentially harmful to their own cause.

On September 1, 1841, the Littlejohns, Clarks, Smiths and Asahel Munger left the Whitman Mission for the Willamette Valley. From Walla Walla, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Littlejohn traveled by boat, the others on horseback. They arrived at West Tuality Plains in late September, planning on later returning to Walla Walla for their belongings. They then suffered what was perhaps the biggest setback of their entire trip from Connecticut. While they were traveling, a fire at Fort Walla Walla had destroyed most of the supplies stored there by

Griffin, Clark, Littlejohn and Smith. The loss for Smith included seventeen head of cattle, held at the fort in Walla Walla for which he was to use as collateral for credit in Vancouver...no doubt a great disappointment at the time. But A. T. Smith had already proven he was a man born not merely to accept the circumstances dealt him, but to create his own. After all the difficulties and setbacks, within days of arriving he had selected a home site and begun preparations for building a shelter. That site, at the confluence of the Tualatin River and Gales Creek, under a large fir tree, was near the Kootpahl Indian village. Unfortunately their troubles didn’t end there. Of their small party, Munger took his own life that December and Philo Littlejohn, suffering from severe hypochondria, returned with his wife to the east coast some years later.

As I sit at my desk, with gray-blue skies and an easy wind delivering a soft rain upon the double-paned vinyl windows, I wonder what life was like for A. T. and Abigail Smith back in that autumn of 1841. Today is the last day of March and glimpses of warmer, drier days have already appeared. Maybe I will make a fire in the fireplace; just for ambiance of course, given that the house is already a constant sixty-eight degrees. The garden is well tilled and some of the mail-ordered seeds are already in the ground. Perhaps a peek at Smith’s diary will offer up some glimpse of how Forest Grove’s first pioneers passed their time. Smith writes:

- Oct. 26th – halled logs for the house in the rain
- Oct. 27th – did the same in the rain
- Oct. 28th – did the same in the same
- Oct. 29th – did the same not in the rain
- Oct. 30th – did the same in the rain

Special thanks to George Williams for providing much of the information for this article.

Meet Claude Romig – HLB’s Newest Member

After a decade-long adventure working as a professional musician and traveling around our hemisphere, I enrolled at UCLA to pursue a degree in Chemical Engineering. After graduation I worked for a couple of years with a consulting firm specializing in alternative fuel development projects. When my wife (whom I met working on a cruise ship) became pregnant we decided to move to a more family-friendly city such as Portland, Oregon. I soon found work as a Process Engineer

and Environmental Compliance Administrator at a local factory.

Over the next year and a half the family moved gradually westward and eventually settled down in Old Town Forest Grove. We love the small town atmosphere and the wonderful historic architecture. Living in one of these historic houses is proving to be quite an adventure: there is always some kind of project in the offing. Maintaining the historical nature of these old structures is so

important, though, not just to me, but also to the community as a whole. It's going to be a pleasure working with the Historic Landmarks Board.

Skylights - Yes or No?

By George Cushing

Should you install modern features on the exterior of your historic home?

With the exception of a few extravagant mansions, older homes did not have skylights; they were found only in commercial buildings. The question of skylights often arises for historic landmark groups, and although not original to the home, they are not expressly forbidden, either. However, the location and type need to be chosen with care in order to minimize the aesthetic impact upon the home.

Provided no supporting members are affected, building code allows most homeowners to add a skylight in a roof without a building permit. Towns often require external changes to historic homes to be approved by a local board so as to discourage inappropriate modifications. As mentioned above, skylights are not expressly forbidden - with a little guidance from professionals or our own Historic Landmarks Board, a skylight may be placed in the roof of a house while having minimal effect on its historic nature. This can be achieved by using a lower profile unit, color matching, placing it low on the roofline and/or out of sight from the street.

A good example is the Macrum House, commonly known as "The Castle". A large white-framed skylight had previously been placed high on the roofline and was not only quite visible but also out of character. In the restoration the current owners replaced this with new skylights installed low on the roofline and in a color that blends in so that they almost completely disappear. The present owners addressed the issues with the state's preservation office and gained approval for more tasteful modifications. Another recent situation involved the addition of a skylight with no advice sought, resulting in far less aesthetic success.

As historic homeowners, we need to be aware of the impact our decisions have upon the community, and to take advantage of the resources provided. There's usually a way to accommodate most any changes, and with a little thought they can be done in a manner that helps preserve the Forest Grove's unique feel.

Local Updates

The Historic Landmarks Board is proud to present the annual Eric Stewart History Award to the Committee to Preserve the Alvin T. Smith Property for their outstanding commitment over the last year in their efforts to save the A. T. Smith House. The Forest Grove City Council will present the award at the April 26 council meeting. Congratulations to the committee and thanks for all the hard work!

Upcoming Friends Events

June 5th (Sat) 10-3 – "Gardens With a Past"
10th Annual Spring Garden Tour.
Central School, 17th Avenue and Main Street
\$10 for the public and \$5 for FHFG members.
Proceeds will benefit the A. T. Smith house heritage garden.
May 6 (Thur) 7 p.m. - FHFG Annual Meeting.
Update on the A. T. Smith House Project
United Church of Christ, 2032 College Way
Fellowship Room

National Preservation Week is May 3-9!

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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