

WILLIAM KEIL

Parties through the Cascades, 1855-1863

KEIL PARTIES THROUGH THE CASCADES 1855-1863

**Aurora Story
by Clark Moor Will
Centennial 1956**

William Keil and his party arrived in Shoalwater Bay, Willapa, Wa. early in October, 1855.

Four parties started west in 1855: two by train and groups by boat via the Isthmus of Panama.

Under the leadership of Captain Peter Kline, a group left Bethel, Missouri, on April 17, 1855. They arrived at the Schaefer and Giesy claims at Shoalwater Bay, near Willapa, Washington Territory, early in the fall of 1855.

Another party, under the leadership of Captain Christoff Wolff, left Bethel April 24, 1863, and arrived in Aurora October 3, 1863. The diary of George J. Wolfer of the 1863 train of 262 people:

“. . .at The Dalles all our wagons, women and children were loaded on a big flat boat — loaded to the water's edge and dangerous — and we ferried down the river to the Cascades, where the same boat ferried our oxen, which we men had driven along the south bank, across to the north bank of the Columbia River.

“The rest of us proceeded down the north bank (Columbia) with our slow moving oxen. We now experienced a series of miserable wet days. The road, a new one, I believe we were the first or among the first to use it, seemed to have no bottom as our wagons sank to the hubs in mud. It was not encouraging.

“We thought we had seen some hills when we passed over the Rockies, said an old aunt of mine and she could only say when coming over the Blue Mountains, ‘Gott vas Bergen!’ (Good God, what mountains). This is now changed to ‘Gott was ein Valdt!’ and ‘Gott was ein Wiege’ (Good God what a forest, and Good God what a road) for this unspeakable road passed between trees we never believed existed.”

It appears that three members of the Keil party were killed at the Cascades, according to reports of people who were present: Fredricka Keil Brown; Jake Keil, her brother; and Henry Hager.

I have found no evidence that Jacob Weiss, George Genger, or Jacob Giesy were at the Cascades on March 26, 1856. Perhaps Skiff and Bloomhardt drew from sources not available to me.

From your acquaintance with the history of the colony can you suggest someone who would be willing to search for relevant information in the Aurora records?

Was Benjamin Brown a member of the colony? Or does this marriage in Skamania County account for her mother, father, and brother lingering at the portage?

Was George Watkins associated with the colony? Why does Bloomquist(??) mention "Watson"? Does he mean Watkins? Did he come to Bloomhardt's attention at Shoalwater Bay as the husband of Mrs. Hager-Chance-Watkins?

Was Chance a member of the colony? Was she a Hager and the sister of Mrs. Waunch of Centralia? Can Henry Hager be placed in the Record?

**RE: MEMBERS OF THE KEIL FAMILY AT THE
CASCADES OF THE COLUMBIA -- 1855-1856**

The following notes are excerpts from eye-witness accounts of the battle at the Cascades settlement on March 26, 1856.

The items relate only to the Keil family (variable spelling: Keil, Kyle, Kiel, Gile and Cyle).

Oregon Pioneer Association, 24th Annual Reunion, 1896. pp. 71-90:

Lawrence W. Coe, letter, April 6, 1856;

Robert Williams, "The Cascade Massacre".

Oregonian, May 9, 1886:

J. H. Elgin letter.

Washington Pioneer Project, W.P.A., 1937: pp. 195-8, Volume I, Told by the Pioneers:

Margaret Iman's reminiscences.

Tacoma Weekly Ledger, September 30, 1892:

Christina Griswold Corum's letter.

**RE: MEMBERS OF THE KEIL FAMILY AT THE
CASCADES OF THE COLUMBIA -- 1855-1856**

Letter from Clark Moor Will to Ruth Strong: 6/30/1975:

“. . . for years I have been watching for factual data that would clear up the rumors of Keil communal colony members being killed by Indians . . . so a few lines give significance. . .”

He goes on to quote: Skiff's *Adventures in Americana*:

p. 207 . . . during the Indian trouble at The Dalles . . . whites were compelled to seek shelter in the blockhouse . . . Jacob Wiese and George Genger, or Ganger, were there.

Bloomhardt, South Bend Journal, Mar. 8, 1895

p. 3 . . . Dr. Keil and his immediate relatives, and several others, among them Jacob Giesy and the Watson (sic) family, went to Oregon and stopped on the Columbia River above Portland. While there an Indian outbreak occurred . . . Mr. Giesy aided Mrs. Watkins and her children to reach Bradford's store . . . among those killed was a daughter of Henry Keil and J. Weiss, a brother-in-law of John Giesy. Watkins was shot and lay all day behind a rock . . . in two short hours his widow and children were left desolate among strangers . . . one of their number, on receiving a ball in his breast, exclaimed: "I was in the battle of Waterloo! To think that I should be shot by a miserable savage!"

H. KIEL

Elgin: “ H. Kiel, a German and a brother of Dr. Kiel . . .”

Williams: “The night previous to the attack . . . an old German, H. Kyle, drinking whiskey today and telling stories. The old German took an active part in the sport and claimed to be one of Blucher’s Waterloo veterans, but none of them got drunk. . .”

MRS. KIEL

Elgin: “. . . Iman concluded to cross the river and took his sick wife, two children, and an old lady, Mrs. Kiel, a sister-in-law of Dr. Kiel of Aurora . . .”

JAKE KYLE

Coe: “. . . three of our carpenters made for the middle blockhouse, overtook the cars at the salmon-house, cut the mules loose, and with the car-drivers all kept on. They were not fired on until they got to the spring on the railroad, but there they ran a gauntlet of bullets and arrows to the fort. Little Jake was killed in the run. . .”

Elgin: “. . . a boy, a son of Mr. Kiel, has been shot. . .”

Corum: “. . . a pitiful sight it was to see a German boy, who was shot down in sight of the fort. He would raise his hands and beckon . . . he died the first night. . .”

MRS. B. W. BROWN (Fredericka Cyle)

Skamania County Marriage Record: “January 3, 1856. Fredricka Cyle married Benjamin Brown.”

Elgin: “Mrs. Brown was a pretty little German girl, a niece of Dr. Keil’s of Aurora. She lived at the mill, had been married only a few weeks before that time. She escaped somehow and almost reached Bradford’s. Her body was found near the store, pierced by an Indian spear. . .”

COE: “B. W. Brown and wife killed at the sawmill.”

GEORGE WATKINS

Oregonian, 4/4/56 . . . “Watkins, formerly of Shoalwater Bay . . . at work on new warehouse on island in sight of Bradford’s store . . . wounded in the attack . . . lay for two days . . . died of exposure. . .”

MRS. WATKINS

Elgin: . . . “gathered her children . . . telling them to run for the store, she followed with her babe in arms . . . Johnny Chance was her son . . . About a mile from Bradford’s at Mill Creek was the sawmill of the company where a half dozen men were at work, also James Watkins, a splendid little boy, who was driving an ox team . . . all these (at the mill) were killed.”

Coe: "I saw Bush shoot an Indian who had drawn a bead on Mrs. Watkins running for the store . . . she watched her wounded husband lying on the island for two days . . . she moaned piteously. . ."

HENRY HAGER

Elgin: "the German boy was lame in his foot and tried to follow Mrs. Watkins to the store . . . Mrs. Watkins' brother was shot down."

Coe: "Henry Hager, shot in Watkins' house, body burned."

(It seems that Mrs. Watkins had been born Hager, married Chance, later married Watkins.)

CENTRALIA, THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS, by Herdon Smith:

p. 62: Mary Hager married George Waunch of Shoalwater. She had crossed the plains with the Keil Party. She said her brother had been left at The Dalles because his foot was injured, and he was killed by Indians.

(This seems to be the same boy who was killed in the Watkins' cabin . . . but if Mrs. Waunch said that her brother was killed, why did she neglect to mention her sister, Mrs. Hager-Chance-Watkins?)

GEORGE E. WATKINS

George E. Watkins crossed the plains in 1852 from Keokuk, Iowa. (See the *Sou'wester X:2 p. 25, 1975*. Pacific County Historical Society, Raymond, Washington.)

He brought his wife, Helen Jeanette Caldwell Watkins, and seven small children to Shoalwater Bay. His wife and one child died in 1853. Watkins built the first sawmill and served in the Washington Territory Legislature. He is described at some length in James Swan's *Three Years Residence in Washington Territory*, as an astute and capable business man. His investments were wiped out by a flood at Shoalwater and he was working at the Cascades at the time of the Indian Attack. He and his young son, James, were both killed.

Apparently he had married Mrs. Chance after the death of his first wife. She was carrying a baby when she ran to the store. Her son, Johnny Chance, was among those who managed to get up stream on the *MARY* and go up river to The Dalles for help.

Strange to say Watkins' children are well recorded in Portland history. Gaston and Lockley both tell of the old and respected family of Parrish and Watkins Insurance Company . . . but there is no mention of the second Mrs. Watkins except in these accounts by the survivors of the attack of 1856.

There is one interesting item in the Pioneer File Index in the Oregon Historical Society Library:

William Greene CHANCE was born in Shellville, Kentucky, January 9, 1848. He came to Oregon in 1852 and "his father was killed in the Indian massacre at the Cascades."d

(I have found no evidence that a man named Chance was at the Cascades . . . so she may have had two sons, Johnny and William??, who called Watkins "father".)

June 30th, 1975

Mr. Carl Ehlen,
Route 1,
Stevenson, Wash. 98648

As you were at my cousin's funeral, I take it you have Aurora Colony background.

We could tell you so much about Hattie -- she was such a help to me in my recording of colony history.

Mary and I spent several days in Stevenson, Washington back about 1932 visiting a relative, Mary's side of the family, so we know a bit of what it's like on the north side of the Columbia.

The data passed on to me being very helpful in rounding out and making of rumors a sensible story, historically valuable.

Carl, please have the lady who is doing research work give me a proper credit if any of my notations are used or published by her. Take time to write me a note.

Sincerely,
CLARK M. WILL

1975
1893Z

CLARK MOOR WILL

EARLY RUMORS WOVEN INTO HISTORY (Dates and names disclosed by researcher)

For years I have been watching for dates, factual data, that would clear up the rather mixed up rumors of KEIL communal colony members being killed by Indians. These rumors, from various sources, came to me in fitful accounts, no dates, and very uncertain as to location -- so the few typed lines coming from Stevenson, Washington, with names, date and data now gives these rumors historic factual significance.

All through the writings of Bek, Arndt, Bockhardt, Nordhoff, one finds different spellings of personal names. Foot notes under some membership listings make some attempt to explain.

Heinrich J. (Jacob) Keil is #168 in my listing of Aurora Colony members with notation: brother to De. Wm. Keil; fought against Napoleon Bonaparte on German side under Blucher.

Heinrich J. Keil's wife is listed #173: Mrs. H. J. Keil, nee Steinbach. Possibly a sister of Old Andy Steinbach.

The typed record doesn't click -- as: Henry Kyle, an older man . . . was a carpenter . . . he was unharmed, but below, the last two lines: H. Kiel, a brother of Dr. Keil, was wounded -- he claimed to be one of Blucher's Waterloo veterans.

I have no record of a Jake Kyle-Keil. As Heinrich's middle name is JACOB, this boy could be a grandson.

. . . my large steel filing cabinet is packed with Colony records, memoirs, obituary records, photos, old music, etc.

EARLY RUMORS WOVEN INTO HISTORY (Dates and names disclosed by researcher)

June 30th, 1975, Salem, 97302

Undated early journal writer's notes misleading.

Cayuse massacre of 1856 erroneously linked with communal organizer, Wm. Keil's 1855 treke. Written records disclose massacre victims were relatives of Aurora Colony founder, Keil.

Bloomhardt fails to mention that Keil herded the larger portion of his 1855 migrating colonies into Portland where most of them wintered but has the correct picture when stating: "A great many of them scattered out in search of work." Some even answered the call for experienced help coming from the Upper Cascades Portage area. "Old Temer" lists some of them. The German writer, Bek, also lists one, as: Joseph Knight, one of the 1853 Scouts, lived at Shoalwater Bay area about a year, came to the Cascades, took part in the Cayuse War and returned to Missouri in 1856."

At this time Colony organizer, Wm. Keil, himself was busy looking for a colony homesite, a New ZION, and served as a doctor in the yet small settlement of Portland. I find no factual record of De. Keil going to the Cascade Portage country other than to meet the 1863 42-wagon train group as recorded in all three diary writings in my possessions.

Carl Ehlen's note of Stevenson, Skamania County, Washington, dated 13th June, 1975, with names and date largely clear "those persistant rumors" of the past years, the letter:

(insert copy of letter)

Historic research into the building of Fort Lugenbeel and its operation during the Indian trouble period should give the date of this massacre.

Priscella Knuth in her *"Picturesque Frontier"* times it with:

"By March 25, 1856, Col. George Wright and his expeditionary force were camped five miles east of The Dalles ready to move into the Walla Walla country, a move delayed by unexpected news that Indians had attacked Cascade Portage, killing about 15 whites and blocking the army supply line. A small body of regulars from Fort Vancouver and some volunteers from Portland answered the call for help and kept the Indians engaged until Col. Wright arrived."

This unrest among the Cayuse-Yakamas was on the upswing when Dr. Wm. Keil, with his 37-wagon train, arrived at The Dalles in Sept. of 1855, as: "This same day after ferrying our group across the Deschutes river, these ferry folks left their possessions and ferry and fled for THE DALLES. There every one seemed preparing for War. The Americans who came with us from Fort Laramie here found work and left us."

Sheet 2: Early Rumors Woven into History -- 6/30/1975.

Footnotes for Sheet 1:

*Page 321 of Dec., 1966, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXVII, Number 4.

**Page 207: Skiff's Adventures in Americana.

“During the height of the Indian trouble at The Dalles in 1856 the Whites were compelled to seek shelter from the Indians in the blockhouse. Some did not take advantage of this protection, however. Jacob Weise* and George Genger, or Ganger, were both recorded in Keil's letters, were both there. Jacob hailed Genger, “Why don't you stay out here, you are a coward!!” Genger replied: “You may call me a coward but I'm going into the blockhouse.” Genger lived to tell about it.

Bloomhardt's story of the massacre at the Portage:
par. 2 and 3 of page 3:

“Dr. Keil and his immediate relatives, and several others, among them Jacob Giesy and the Watson family, went to Oregon and stopped on the Columbia River above Portland. While there, an Indian outbreak occurred. No thought of danger troubled these peaceful homeseekers until a rifle ball came through an open door and wounded one of them who was sitting near Jacob Giesy. Mr. Giesy aided Mrs. Watkins and her children to reach Bradford's store, where those who could, assembled hastily, but many never reached a place of safety. Among those killed was a daughter of Henry Keil, and J. Weiss, a brother-in-law of John Giesy. Watkins was shot and lay all day behind a rock, no one daring to bring him in, lest there should be one defender less for the helpless ones under their care, and when at last he was reached and tendered care for, his life was almost done. In two short hours his widow and children were left desolate among strangers, amid scenes of carnage and misery too terrible for words.

“Bravely, the little band resisted their implacable foes. One of the number, on receiving a ball in his breast, exclaimed: ‘I was in the battle of Waterloo. To think that I should be shot by a miserable savage’.”

. . . those few lines concerning Heinrich Keil add that realistic note which mean much to the researcher. I have known since childhood that one of Dr. Keil's brothers, Heinrich Keil, fought under Blucher against Napoleon at Waterloo, was wounded.

*the date of birth would rather indicate “Uncle” perhaps his father's younger brother.

****Heinrich J. Keil, born Sept. 10, 1792, died at Aurora, Oregon, April 8th, 1876.**

Sheet 3: Early Rumors Woven into History -- 6/30/1975.

Fantastic as it may seem -- in this Aurora Colony was another Old Soldier who fought against Napoleon Bonaparte with the Russians, Old Andy Steinbach, "a great boaster." This from my numbered membership records.

"Ere autumn came the Indians were quelled and all returned to their homes, Willapa, Aurora and a few went back to Bethel."

page 2, par. 4, "Old Timer:"

"Sebastian Giesy, his family and brothers, Rudolph and Jacob, continued to reside at the Old Fort where they dispensed a hospitality generous enough to take in rich and poor, friend and stranger alike until 'Giesy's' became a stopping place for the traveler, a refuge for the friendless and a home for the homeless. page 4, par. 4, "Old Timer"

"Christian Giesy, leader of the nine (1853) Bethel-Willapa Scouts, sleeps under the sod of the beautiful family cemetery just south of where the Old Fort stood." par. 4, page 5, "Old T."

. . . very lamentable is the lack of dates in this six page news letter of Gertrude Lilly Bloomhardt's "Old Timers on the Willapa" in the March 8th 1895 South Bend Journal. This lack of dates kills it as a reliable source of information. It is firmly established by leading writers Bek, Bockhardt, Hendricks, Nordhoff and actual members of the party that Keil and a picked group of some 175 communal minded followers left Bethel, Missouri, for Oregon May 25, 1856.

The Saturday, Sept. 7th 1901 Evening Telegram quotes an ex-Keiliet whose remarks disclose that a very small, impatient group left Bethel thirty-seven days ahead of the large Keil train -- the Peter Klein train of SIX wagons* that made a start about the first of April, 1855** (see page eleven, in second section #125 of the Evening Telegram.)

*two more joined later.

**actually April 17th. CMW.

This impatient group, led by Peter Klein, is referred to by Lilly Bloomhardt in par. 2, page 1, "Old Timers:"

"In 1855 Sebastian Giesy, with his son and several other families belonging to a community colony in Missouri, started early in the season directly for Willapa."

Klein's eight wagon train is also mentioned by Boehringer and "Cap" Miley which, along with the newspaper account, gives us dated verification.

CLARK M. WILL

Sheet 4: Early Rumors Woven into History -- 6/30/1975.

Bek made no serious attempt to run it down. Hinds and Nordhoff flatly discredit those early reports of the van-guard train.

. . . a fort was built:

The early arrival in Willapa of the Peter Klein group who, with the help of the hastily organized militia, built a fort before Keil arrived, which fort is mentioned in his German letters sent back to Bethel.

Par. 1, page 4 of "*Old Timers*" mentions the fort. "John Giesy, the leader of the colonists, summoned them together and with the aid of other neighbors they hastened to build Fort Willapa on the spot where the Giesy residence now stands, Chris Giesy, Stauffer and their families came down from the upper ranches leaving their crops and livestock, which were common property."

Keil's letter finished at Willapa makes mention of "the Fort". "The other day we luckily landed at 'the Fort' a place called Crocketts' Landing," from the German letters in Bek's 1909-1910 Annals.

Bullard, of the Chehalis Survey Group, claims: "fifteen families participated in the building of Fort Willapa." This helps enumerate the Peter Klein party who arrived September 12, 1855 -- they helped build the Fort -- date from Boehringer migration records.

CLARK M. WILL
July 1, 1975
Salem, 97302

1975
1893

“Wrapped up in the Memoirs of Clark M. Will, memoirs pertaining to the Aurora Colony, is the missing link of Oregon History.” --Cornelia Marvin, State Librarian.

. . . listings of published book with data on the Aurora Colony:

American Communities, by Wm. Alfred Hines, Ph.D., Chicago. Chas, Keer & Co. A discredited authority. I have his book. Chapter on Aurora: see pages 287-299.

*Bethel * Aurora*, by R. J. Hendricks, published by Press of the Pioneers, New York, 1933. Robert gives and paints a vivid picture of the brighter, romantic side of Colony life. I have it.

My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music, by Henry Theopolis Finck. Well illustrated; published by Funk & Wagnalis Co., New York and London, 1926. Henry died before this, his last book was off press. I have it and personal letters. My mother nearly married this man.

Adventures in Americana, by Frederick Woodward Skiff, 1935. This book published by the Metropolitan Press, Portland. For the chapter on Aurora see pages 201-223; illustrated with five line drawings by the writer of the chapter on Aurora, Clark Moor Will. I have more than 80 long-hand letters, personal, from Author Skiff - this Colony record is much like as:

Appears in Vol. 1, *Marion County History, 1955*, and appears in:

The Aurora Centennial Celebration Brochure, published in 1956 for that occasion by Clint Mansfield, West Linn, Oregon.

Second Eden, a historical novel covering all angles of Bethel-Aurora Colony life based on my records which were used with my written permission by Cobie deLespinasse, Hubbard, and published by the Christopher Publishing House, Boston, 1951. The jacket cover line drawing shows the interior of the Colony home I was reared in. --CMW.

The Strangest Burial Procession in American History, illustrated cover; “*Willapa Valley has Willie and This*”, by Clark Moor Will of Salem, Oregon: see the Summer Number Vol. 11 of “*The Sou’wester*”, Pacific County, Washington, Historical Society, publication, Raymond, Wash.; Ruth Dixon, Editor; P. O. Box 384, Zip 98577.

The Burial of Willie Keil, with Prelude to the Burial, by Clark Moor Will; illustrated cover; Summer Number Vol. 11 of “*The Sou’wester*”, Pacific County, Washington, Historical Society, publication, Raymond, Wash.; Ruth Dixon, Editor; address as above.

The Aurora Colony Church Bells, by Clark Moor Will, colony historian, a descendant of Oregon Pioneers, well illustrated. See pages 273 of the Sept. 1966 Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXVII, No. 3.

The Harris Anvil, by Clark Moore Will. He tells how an English “FORGE” came to Oregon in 1813, see page 57 of the March 1968 Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. LXIX, No. 1.

The Story of Old Aurora, in picture and prose, 1856-1883. An information handbook to fill the need for a brief record of an historical Oregon experiment in communal living; well illustrated by the author, Clark Moor Will.

Ten pages on Willapa and Aurora by a gifted writer appear in Steward Holbrook's *"Far Corner,"* being a personal view of the Pacific Northwest; published by MaxMillian Co., New York, 1952. His comments on Keil's communal experiments starts on page 60. Some of it is hearsay and not accurate.

Bands Make History, by Clark Moor Will, a 16-day trip into the Puget Sound country by the Aurora Pioneer Band, as told by Will's father; illustrated cover. April-May, 1869. See pages 42-27 in the Autumn 1974 Vol. IX, No. 3, of the *"SOU"WESTER*.

CLARK M. WILL
1692 Liberty St., S.E.
Salem, Oregon 97302

(These are notes from research done by Ruth Strong, Skamania Route, Box 363, Stevenson, WA 98648. She is the lady who wanted the material linking the Kiels of Aurora to those in the 1856 massacre.)

Mrs. Leona Nelson
1211 Randolph Road
Woodburn, OR 97071

Dr. Kiel's party arrived at Shoalwater Bay (Willapa Bay) in November, 1855 . . .

Was the Watkins family part of the Kiel party?

Was the Hager family part of the Kiel party?

Oregonian 4/4/56:

"George Watkins, formerly of Shoalwater Bay, at work on new warehouse on island in sight of Bradford's store, was wounded in the attack. He lay for two days until rescued by troops two days later. He died from exhaustion."

Elgin's letter:

"Henry Hager (Hagar), Mrs. Watkins' brother, tried to follow her to the store, but was killed.

"Johnny Chance was her son . . .

"Johnny Watkins, who was driving an ox team at the mill, was killed there."

It would appear that Mrs. Watkins was born a Hager, married Chance, later married Watkins.