

By Lola Moore

HIS TRAGIC DEATH -- "A storm that has been dealing destruction to the entire Pacific coast for the past two weeks, abated Tuesday after having caused thousands of dollars worth of damage to ranchers, townspeople and highways in northern California and southern Oregon.

Beginning last Thursday, a heavy sea-born wind and rain kept up a deluge of rain for over sixty hours without abating. Cellars and basements were flooded everywhere, and streams were swollen until the flooded lowlands had tied up traffic for over three days. Smith river raised to such extent that its banks would not hold the flood waters, and bridges were carried away, and great sections of the Redwood highway was washed out.

The temporary bridge at the Convict Camp was carried away, and in two places between there and Patrick's Creek Station, sections of the highway were washed out to the extent that it is said traffic can not be resumed until May. It is now necessary for traffic from here to Grants Pass to use the old road for fifty miles.

Mails from down state are again getting back to normal, the first mail coming through Monday night since the previous Friday, due to heavy slides on the highway and high water from the Klamath river at Requa.

Smith river overflowed its banks on the bottom lands Saturday night, putting six feet of water over the road at Tryon's corner, and washing away 15 head of cattle from Wm. D. Tryon, and 5 head of cattle from the Clarence Woodruff ranch.

The flood marooned dancers who were in Crescent City for the Fireman's Ball on Saturday night, compelling many of them to remain here dressed in their masque costumes until Monday."

Such was the February 24, 1927 Crescent City American newspaper account of the terrible weather conditions the week George Washington lost his life. The same newspaper edition gives an account of his death:

"A Coroner's jury was called to the vicinity of Patrick's creek on Wednesday to investigate the death of George H. Washington, who had been caught in a landslide, about four miles east of that place, and crushed to death.

Mr. Washington was an old resident of that section, having lived in a cabin near the Siskiyou Forks for the past 33 years, coming there from Oregon, a native of Iowa and a veteran of the Civil War.

The body was partly covered by the slide and so fastened in the avalanche it required three hours to extract it, the right leg being pinned between stones, and broken, and his face badly cut and bruised by rocks.

Coroner S.A. Miller and L.R. Black, R. Tyrell, D.E. Raymond, H. Raymond, G.H. Benish, J.R. Breen acted as jurors, O. Hayes and G.W. Ridgeway witnesses.

No one saw the accident and Mr. Tyrell, superintendent of the road, said that Mr. Washington occasionally came over to the road and it is thought that he had been there when the hillside caved and caught him, carrying him to his death. His only relative here is a daughter, Mrs. G.W. Ridgeway, of Smith River.

Due to the impossibility of removing the body to a cemetery, on account of the condition of the roads, the body was laid to rest at his claim on Wednesday."

FONDLY REMEMBERED BY HIS GRANDSON (JACK RIDGEWAY) -- Although the newspaper and death certificate both list his birthplace as Iowa, George Henry Washington was born on April 4, 1848 in the state of Ohio according to the old family record handed down to Jack from his parents, and he only lacked a couple of months of being 79 years old at the time of his death.

At a very tender young age George joined the other millions of soldiers who fought in the American Civil War (1861-1865). He was only 17 years old when that dark chapter of our history ended.

"The American war of the 1860's was not a civil war in the usual sense of the word," says the Americana Encyclopedia. "The contestants were not fighting for control of the government, but over the attempt of one of the parties to become a separate nation."

"The Civil War had a number of distinctive features. It was in many respects the biggest war that the world had ever known. It was also the first of the modern total wars. The telegraph came into its own as a military instrument, and railroads proved of such unprecedented importance as to justify calling this the first railroad war. The timely delivery of troops by chugging iron horses decided the outcome of more than one battle." The Merrimac and Monitor "engaged in history's first duel between ironclad warships.

Other Civil War "firsts" were the electrically exploded torpedo and the sinking of a vessel by a submarine." Rifled artillery and small arms yielded from muzzle-loaded to breech-loaders as the war progressed, leading to drastic changes in tactics. The invention of metallic cartridges paved the way for the introduction of repeating rifles on a large scale in the latter part of the conflict. The camera also played a far more conspicuous role in the Civil War than in any prior conflict."

This war was also "the last of the old-fashioned wars, in which massed armies marched as if on dress parade through walls of canister and grape to close in near combat with enemies wielding bayonets, clubbed muskets, and even sticks and rocks. It was the last war in which were observed on a large scale such niceties as the succoring of wounded foes caught between the lines, the calling of informal truces for trade and friendly chats, and the cheering of acts of bravery on the part of enemy combatants.

The Civil War was also the "singiest war" in American history. Music publishers flooded homes and camps with hundreds of songs, and civilians and soldiers on both sides found in sentimental melodies welcome diversion from loneliness and hardship." A few of the favorites are still familiar to most of us. Like: The Girl I Left Behind Me -- Dixie -- Battle Hymn of the Republic -- Home Sweet Home & Pop Goes the Weasel.

There is little doubt that this period of intense changing conditions left a lasting impression on the young Mr. Washington, and helped shape much of his character. His grandson describes him as an extremely gentle man who would often take in strangers who were in need, feed them, share his worldly goods with them, and be their loyal friend. On the other hand, if they betrayed his trust and did him wrong, he would abruptly send them packing and never have another thing to do with them.

He married when he was a very young man (date unknown), had a daughter named Ellen, and was divorced when she was a tot. Ellen married George William Ridgeway and to their union was born Edna, Birdie, Goldie (she was born in their family cabin at Washington Flat in 1907), and Johnnie or "Jack" as he was always called.

George Washington lived in Oregon before moving to Del Norte, earning a living by fishing. He was on friendly terms with the Indians of that area and often went fishing with them at Yaquina Bay. Somewhere along the way, he had learned the Chinook language, which he spoke fluently and used as a sort of base or root language to enable him to communicate with his various Indian friends.

From 1894 until his death in 1927 George lived in a cabin on his mining claim near the Siskiyou Fork of Smith river. His lifestyle was simple but adequate, as he really didn't need very much to get by. Besides the necessary staples he purchased with his veteran's pension, he raised a garden every year, kept a few bee hives for honey, fished with a home made willow pole in the nearby river, and hunted just enough to meet his needs for meat. His one and only rifle was a Marlin Ballard 45-70. The site of his claim (Washington Flat) and nearby Washington Peak were both named after him.

George once broke the back of a mountain lion with his walking stick when it attacked his dog. He was walking home at dusk from a nice visit with an old prospector friend of his that lived at Trout Haven when the cat pounced on the dog and George, armed only with a stick, commenced yelling and whacking the cat, managing to poke out both of its eyes and break its back. His friend heard him yelling in the midst of all the ruckus and came running with his rifle and finished off the cat. However, it was too late to save the dog -- a hard thing for George to bear.

George's grandson, Jack, would spend two weeks of summer vacation with him each year. It was a seven-and-a-half mile hike from the old Patrick Creek Lodge, past the hatchery, then along the river to the Flat. But, it was well worth the effort. Jack thought it was the most wonderful place in the world and remembers those summers as the best times of his life...close to nature...and close to his beloved grandfather.

Jack says there is a cement headstone about three feet tall at his grandfather's grave site with his military regiment number on it. The Bar-O boys keep it tidy and have planted pretty roses there. A young Indian is supposed to also be buried at the east end of Washington Flat, but he did not know any other details.

WASHINGTON FLAT NOW BAR-O-RANCH -- The following background information about Bar-O-Ranch is taken from the History of the Soroptimist Club of Crescent City, Inc. covering the club year 1956-57 (Roberta Westbrook, President and Fran Short, Service Chairman) -- and the club year 1957-58 with Jean Souder, President and Marge Brown, Service Chairman.

(Page 11, C. 2.) "BAR-O-RANCH - Originally known as Bar-None-Camp at Washington Flats on the Smith River, had been a dude ranch. This became our work project for the next two years. Through a member who was a school councilor, Marge Speicher, we became interested in this camp. She also became our committee chairman. John Ostrum, Supervisor in education, came and told us of his dream to start a rehabilitation camp in Del Norte County. He had worked in such a camp at Santa Barbara, Los Pretos. His mother, a Soroptimist in Twin Falls, Idaho had suggested to him to try and obtain our support. She would buy the ranch for him, to use for such a purpose. We became very interested in this plan, and after much discussion, voted to help as much as we could. During the next two years we were very involved in this project. A complete history of this work as written for the Region will be found in the next club year. Many donations were given to the ranch."

(Page 12, 13, & 14) "Bar-O-Ranch Project won the Helena Gamble Service Award from the Region for the Biennium of 1956-58. Here follows a copy of that report of project completion. (This camp still operating) Bar-O-Ranch is a rehabilitation

# Del Norte's George Washington

## Namesake of flat and peak was an early settler

**G**eorge Washington wasn't the father of our county, but he was an early settler in Del Norte for whom both Washington Flat and Washington Peak were named.

George Henry Washington was born on April 4, 1848, in Ohio. At a very young age he enlisted in the Army and fought in the Civil War. He was only 17 years old when the war ended in 1865.

After the war, he settled in Oregon, where he earned a living as a fisherman.

He was on very friendly terms with the Indians in the area and often went fishing with them at Yaquina Bay. Somewhere along the way he had learned the Chinook language and spoke it fluently. Using this language as a base he was able to communicate with his various Indian friends.

George was young when he married. He had a daughter named Ellen. When Ellen was just a tot, George and his wife divorced.

In 1884, George acquired a mining claim near the Siskiyou fork of the Smith River. He built a cabin on the claim and moved in.

He received a veteran's pension, which paid for the necessary staples. His needs were simple.

He raised a garden each year and kept a few beehives for honey. He fished with a homemade willow pole in the nearby river, and hunted just enough to supply his needs for meat. His one and only rifle was a Marlin Ballard 45-70.

Washington Flat, the site of his claim, and nearby Washington Peak were both named after him.

George's daughter Ellen married George W. Ridgeway. They lived in Smith River. They had four children:



Photo courtesy Del Norte Historical Society

### George Washington wields an ax.

Edna, Birdie, Goldie, and Johnnie (or Jack as he was always called).

Jack would spend two weeks of his summer vacation with George each year. Jack remembered it as the best time of his life.

It was a seven and a half mile hike from the old Patrick Creek Lodge, past the fish hatchery and then along the river to the flat. But the trek was worth it to Jack. He was close to nature and close to his beloved grandfather.

His grandson Jack described George as a very gentle and trusting man. He would often take in strangers who were in need, feed them and share what he had with

them, and be their loyal friend. However, if they betrayed his trust and did him wrong he would run them off and have nothing further to do with them.

In February 1927 a powerful storm hit the entire Pacific Coast. It pounded the area for two weeks and caused thousands of dollars worth of damage to ranchers, townspeople, and highways in Northern California and Southern Oregon.

At one point heavy rain fell in torrents non-stop for 60 hours. Cellars and basements flooded everywhere. Streams were swollen to the point where flooded lowlands tied up traffic for three days.

The Smith River overflowed its banks. Bridges were washed away and great sections of the newly constructed Redwood Highway to Grants Pass were washed out. The highway wouldn't be rebuilt until May of that year. Traffic to Grants Pass had to detour over the old toll highway.

When the rain stopped and the damage could be assessed, a partially covered body was discovered where a section of the Redwood Highway had washed out.

It took three hours to uncover the body. The right leg was badly broken and pinned between several large boulders. The face was also badly cut and bruised.

It was George Washington. He had apparently been trying to get to the Patrick Creek Lodge when a landslide caught him and carried him to his death.

Because of the road conditions the body couldn't be brought to Crescent City or Smith River for burial, so he was buried on his claim at Washington Flat, the place where he had lived for 33 years and loved so.

A three foot high concrete headstone was erected to mark his grave. It had his name and military regiment number on it.

Today, George Washington's grave is maintained by the Bar-O Boys Ranch. But that's another story.

*Footprints is a weekly feature focusing on local history. It appears every Friday in The Daily Triplicate. Dave Gray is a volunteer with the Del Norte County Historical Society.*



### Footprints

By Dave Gray

FROM CRESCENT CITY COURIER, VOLUME IV, NUMBER 27, PAGE TWO, JULY 3, 1915:

PATRICK CREEK NOTES

July 2, 1915 - George Washington, of Smith River, is doing considerable development work on his property. He is possessor of some very valuable mining grounds. He is at present entertaining his two granddaughters, Misses Birdie and Edna Ridgeway of Crescent City. They are very nice young ladies. We fear through their coming here we may lose some of our young men in this neck of the woods.