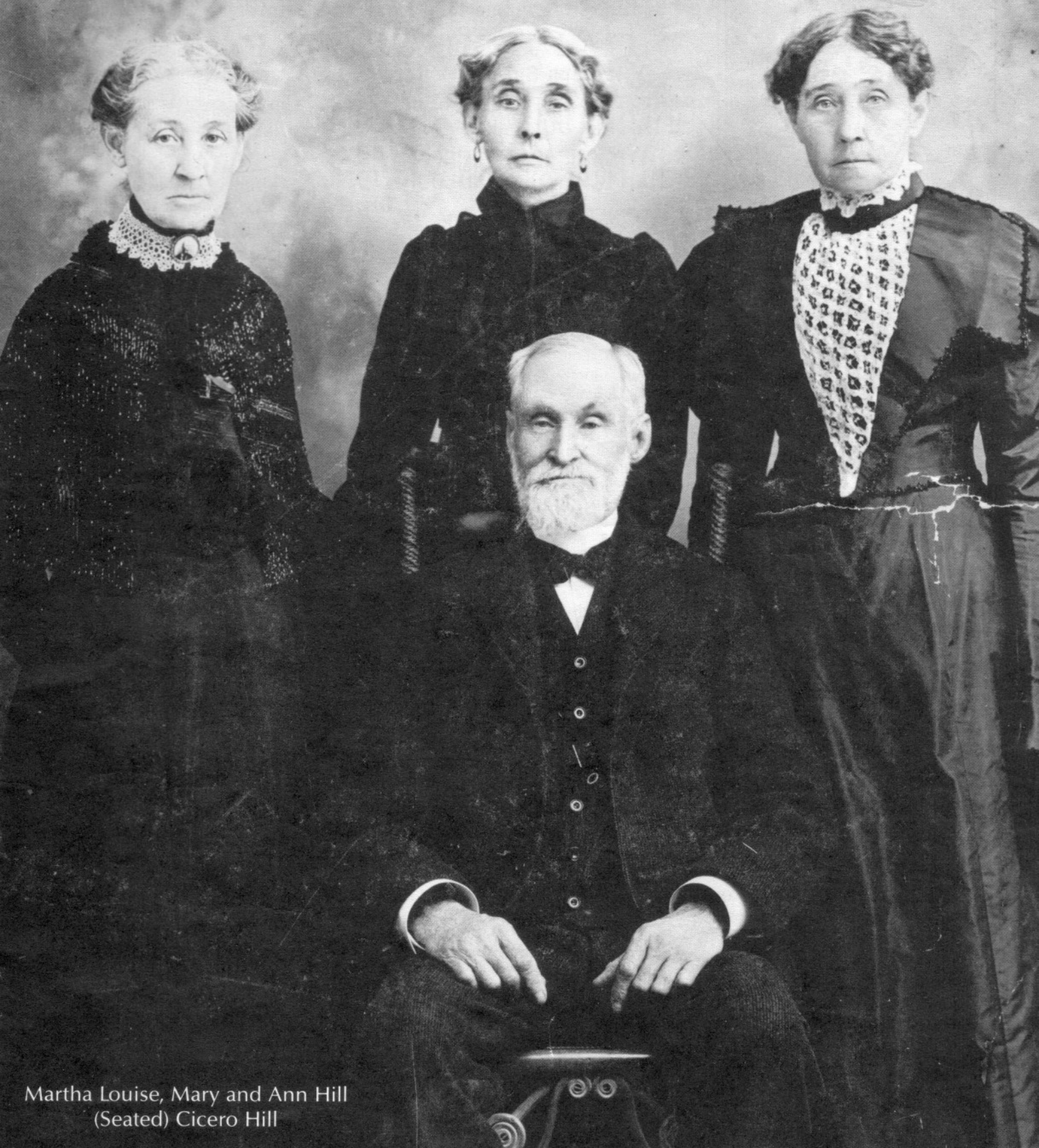
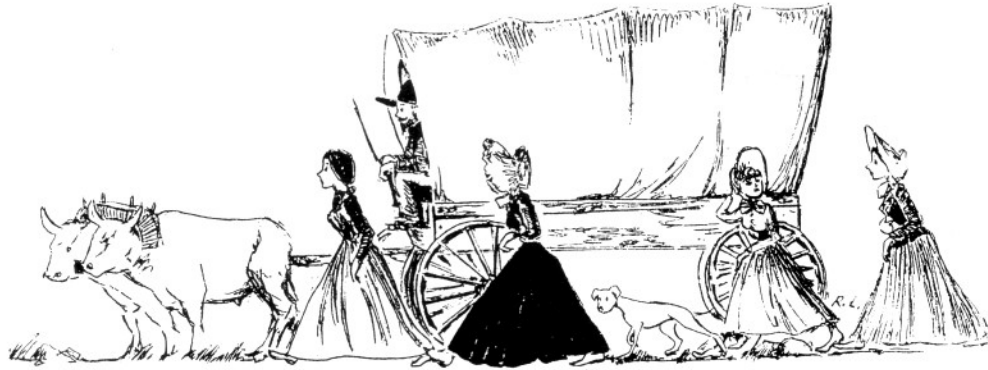

THE TABLE ROCK SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Martha Louise, Mary and Ann Hill
(Seated) Cicero Hill

Part 2



THE HILL FAMILY OF ASHLAND

by Nan Hannon

In the August issue of the newsletter Ms Hannon presented the Hill family of Tennessee and pictured their farewells as they set out to make a new home in the wilderness. Arriving in southern Oregon, they were enchanted with the primitive beauty of the area but were soon forced to flee to the fort to seek protection from the hostile Indians who were preparing for war. The story continues:

Ann Hill Russell comments in her memoirs that her parents saw both sides of pioneer life: Betsy Hill focused on the very real hardships and deprivations; Isaac saw the opportunities.

But in the first months in the Bear Creek Valley, Betsy came to share Isaac's viewpoint. The spring of 1853 passed into summer, and Betsy was impressed with the climate and the beauty of her new home, and with the kindness of their neighbors.

The Hills had a great deal of contact with their neighbors, for their three marriageable daughters drew crowds of bachelors from Yreka, Jacksonville and the Valley. On Sunday mornings the Hills woke to find their fences lined with lonely men eager for a glimpse of the girls, who were made even more attractive by the fact that a married man was entitled to more free land than a single man, under the terms of the Donation Land Act of 1850.

Hospitable Isaac always invited the men in for breakfast and conversation. Betsy and the girls sometimes spent the

whole day cooking for the visitors. The girls were overwhelmed with marriage proposals from men they scarcely knew. To avoid the embarrassment of these unwelcome advances, the sisters made a pact to travel as a threesome, and discourage suitors.

The most frequent visitors to the little cabin were the Mountain House boys, who were all courteous and well-liked by the Hill women. Soon the girls were doing their laundry and sewing; in return the Mountain House boys brought them gifts from their pack trips. Especially welcome were Jim Russell's gift of some tiny potatoes from Portland, and a cat brought from California by John Gibbs. The cat was possibly the first domestic cat in southern Oregon.

In addition to helping out the Mountain House boys with their domestic chores, the Hill girls had considerable work of their own. Their brothers Cicero and La Grande had hastened to the gold fields as soon as the family was settled. They were staying with their Aunt Kelly in Yreka and seeking gold in the streams where their father had been lucky.

The three girls had to do their brothers' work in addition to their own. They herded and milked Isaac's cattle and helped their father make cheese. Betsy found herself busy as nurse to the community.

That summer of 1853, the Hill sisters were out riding one day when they were surprised and pleased to see two women riding horseback along Ashland Creek. One of them had a small girl in front of her on the saddle. Up to that time, the Hill women had been the only white women in the south end of the Bear Creek Valley.

With their formal Southern manners it did not occur to the sisters to ride up to the women and introduce themselves. Instead, they reported the newcomers to their father, who made inquiries and discovered that the women were Martha Helman and Sophia Emery. The little girl was Mrs. Helman's daughter, Almeda. Abel Helman, who had built a small cabin and sawmill on Ashland Creek with his partner Eber Emery, had returned to the "States" for their families, and his first look at his little daughter Almeda who had been born a few months after her father left on his first venture to the west.

Isaac, who loved to sing, was happy to add to his report that Mrs. Helman had a reputation as a fine musician.

The Hill girls were eager to visit their Aunt Kelly in Yreka, and had been invited by some packers to ride with them down to Yreka for the Fourth of July. Aunt Kelly wrote to Isaac and Betsy advising against the journey. Yreka was too wild on the Fourth, she told them. The girls should come down the next week.

But it might as well have been the Fourth of July when the girls arrived. The excited miners welcomed the girls with a band, and kept them up dancing until dawn. One of the men was a jeweler, working in the soft, pure gold from the Yreka mines. With Aunt Kelly's permission he gave each of the girls a pair of earrings. The girls treasured them all their lives.

The Hill girls' happy times were brief that summer. When they returned home across the Siskiyou, they noticed that the Indians were acting strangely. Isaac and the other settlers were worried.

August is hot and close in the Valley.

A hundred and thirty years before I&M legislation, Valley residents reported in their journals that the summer skies were hazy and that smoke obscured the hills. The circle of hills and mountains bounding the Bear Creek Valley trapped the air as it does today. The Indians burned out brush in late summer and early fall to make hunting easier. But in August of 1853, the settlers noticed that there were also signal fires on the hills.

Around August first, an Indian came to the Hill cabin, and tried to seize Isaac's knife and gun. Mary sprang ahead of him, drew the gun on him and shouted, "Kla-ta-wa," which meant "Get out!" John Gibbs and Patrick Dunn, who had been following the Indian, arrived while Mary was holding the gun on the intruder. They frightened the Indian away.

Days later, John Gibbs and Isaac made a scouting trip around the Valley, which led them to conclude that trouble with the Indians was imminent. The Hill women were singing as they worked in their cook shed, making pies from the berries of the wild Oregon grape, when Isaac hurried in to tell them to get ready to go down to the Dunn place, and safety. Hasse wrote that the women "left the pies in the ovens, clothes in tubs and on lines and ran to the road. The wagon, with a guard of armed men from the Mountain House, took us past an Indian Rancherie, and there we were met by more armed men coming to attack the Indians on what is now called Neil Creek. All the men except the driver turned back and we heard shooting ... Fathers, brothers, friends were in the fight."

The company of twelve white men took prisoner most of the Indian men, and all of the women and children. Patrick Dunn and a settler named Andy Carter were both wounded. Several Indians were killed. The prisoners were brought to the Dunn cabin, where the anxious women waited for news. In her book, "Undaunted Pioneers," Mary wrote: "It was a hard night for all. We had no beds, just rolled up in blankets on the floor, and we could hear the squaws and their children and the men on guard walking back and forth." Martha and another man took turns applying pressure to Andy Carter's wounded wrist, which bled badly.

In the morning Dr. Cleveland from Jacksonville arrived to sew Carter's severed artery and remove a bullet from Dunn's shoulder. Mary wrote that "It was a painful operation for each of them after waiting for twenty-four hours and not having anything to deaden the pain." As she helped to nurse Patrick Dunn, Mary came to know and admire her future husband, whom she found gentle, brave and uncomplaining.

Dunn's house was full with the Hills, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Grubb and their five children. Isaac and another man went out to kill a beef to feed the crowd. While they were gone, several Indians came to the Dunn cabin to bargain with the settlers. The chief of the Indians was called Sambo by the whites, and he promised that the Indians would give up their arms and not trouble the settlers if the women and children were released. John Gibbs agreed and the Indians left.

Isaac was furious on his return, and predicted that the Indians would return and attack. John Gibbs disagreed with him, saying that if he had a hundred lives he would trust all of them in Sambo's hands.

Most of the settlers held Isaac Hill's view however, and construction began immediately on a fort at Wagner Creek, around Jacob Wagner's house. A crew of about twenty men, supervised by George Tyler from Yreka constructed a wall of logs ten feet high around the Wagner cabin.

Joining those who had been at the Dunn cabin were the Helmans, Emerys, Rockfellers, McCalls, and Culvers, among others. Mrs. Helman was pregnant at this time with her son John, who would be born in January, and would be the first white child born in Ashland.

Living conditions were crowded and uncomfortable. Hasse's memoirs recall the crying of the babies and the constant concern Mrs. Wagner had for seeing that everyone was fed.

*Headstone of Isham Keith
in the Hill-Dunn cemetery.
Photograph by Doug Smith*

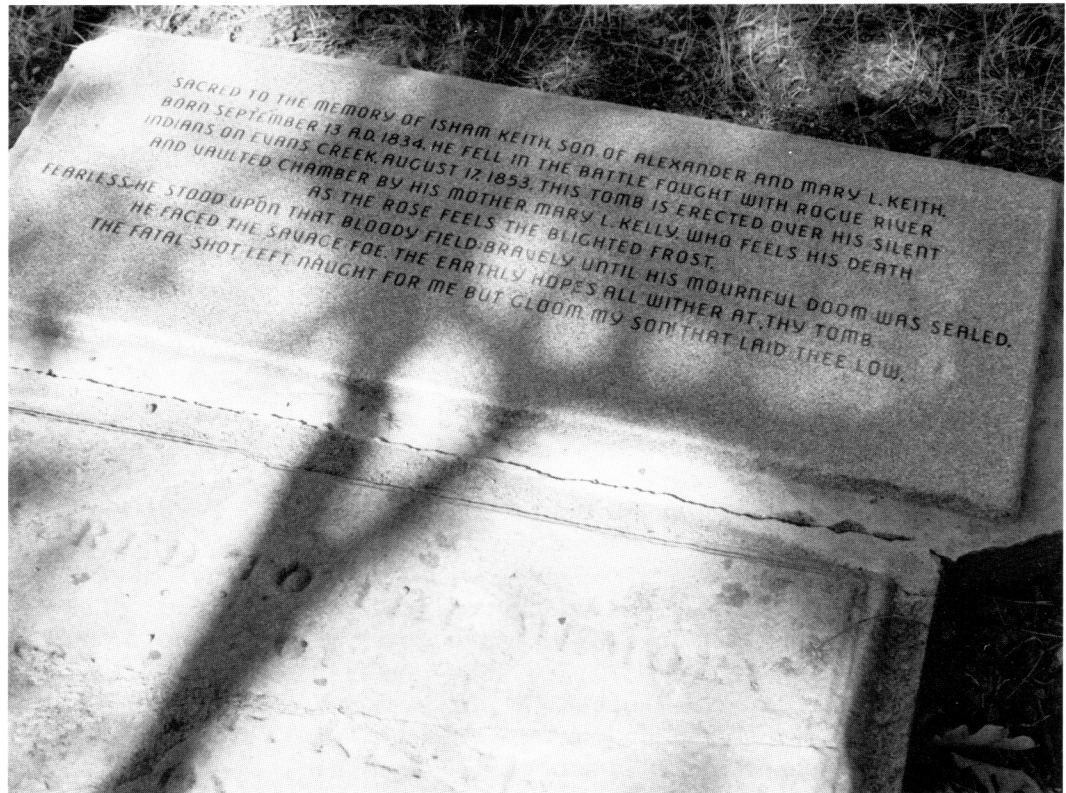
Among the twenty men who had come up from Yreka to build Fort Wagner was Isham Keith, Aunt Kelly's son and the girls' cousin. When the fort was built, the company of men went farther down the Valley to join men under the command of Lieutenant Elliott. Aunt Kelly had given Isham permission only to stay with the Hills and help protect them, but Isham joined Elliott's group.

On August 17, the party was ambushed by Indians as they were eating. The men ran for their horses, and one was shot. Isham helped him mount his animal and then, following Lieutenant Elliott's orders, pursued the Indians.

Seventeen-year-old Isham knew that he was considered the best tracker and marksman in Yreka; perhaps he felt he needed to use those skills in defense of the settlers. Though others in the party tried to dissuade him from following the Indians, he replied, "I'm here to obey orders."

Isham was shot as he went after the Indians. He told the men who ran to him, "I'm a dead man," and turning over, laid his head in his arms and died.

Isham's body could not be safely transported by the other men. They decided to bury him where he fell. While some of them stood guard, others scratched out a shallow grave with their hunting knives, and Isham was wrapped in





Mary Hill

a blanket and buried on the mountainside. Isaac, La Grande and Cicero, who had come over from Yreka, retrieved the body four days later. Betsy washed and dressed the remains, and Isham was buried again, on the hillside across from the Hill cabin.

That section of land was to become a resting place for many other victims of the Indian War. The next to be buried there was John Gibbs, killed by the Indian called Sambo with a gun snatched from his own hand. In all, Betsy Hill prepared for burial the bodies of seventeen men who died in conflicts with the Indians. She recorded their names in her diary, and over the next months tried to notify the families of the dead, some of whom had just arrived in the Valley before they died. She undoubtedly remembered her own days of waiting for news of the recovery of her son John's body, and wished to ease the sufferings of other mothers back in "the States."

Less than a month after Isham's death,

on September 10, 1853, a treaty would be signed between the Indians and General Joseph Lane. Conflicts with the Indians would continue, but Isham's death was the worst consequence of war that the Hill sisters would experience. In the spring

of 1856, the Indians who had survived attacks by the white settlers were removed from the Valley, and settled on a reservation at Siletz. Pioneers who came to the Rogue Valley even as early as the late 1950s had no contact with the Indians, no opportunity to learn from them, and little cause to think that for thousands of years the land had been theirs.

Despite the Indian Wars, the Valley was being settled quickly. In 1856 Isaac and other settlers in the area around present Emigrant Lake organized a school board and built a school close to the Hill house, which was also used for religious services. As the Bear Creek Valley became more civilized, the Hill sisters began thinking of establishing homes of their own.

*1850s



Patrick Dunn

Mary was the first to wed. She and Patrick Dunn were the first couple to be married in Jackson County, which then included the present Jackson, Josephine, Klamath and Lake Counties. In "Undaunted Pioneers" she describes her wedding in detail: "Mother had a cook down from Mountain House for three days preparing for the feast. Father killed a beef. The fruits and flour were from South America, packed over from Crescent City. Mr. Burns of Yreka baked a large fruit cake for the occasion, and Aunt Kelly carried it in a bucket in her lap as she rode over the Siskiyou on horseback. There was a big dinner for everybody."

Mary and Patrick Dunn went to live in Patrick's log cabin. In 1860 the Dunns built a large, two-story house on Neil Creek which remained in family ownership for over a hundred years, and which is still standing. The Dunn house is included as a point of interest in Marjorie O'Harra's new book, *SOUTHERN OREGON*:

Short Trips into History, recently published by SOHS.

The Dunns had six children. Their first baby, a son named Frank, died in infancy and was buried in the Hill cemetery. Patrick Dunn served in the first Oregon Territorial Legislature, and later as

Jackson County Assessor, County Clerk and County Commissioner. A memorial resolution passed by the Southern Oregon Pioneer Association upon Patrick's death records that he and his wife never spoke a cross word to each other. A letter written to Mary from Patrick when he was about to return from the Territorial Legislative session in 1855 certainly seems tender: "There are nearly three hundred miles between us which with the blessing and help of God will not remain long."

Hasse was next to wed. She and James Russell married in 1854, and moved to the Mountain House. There the young bride of sixteen had an experience which proved her independence and her strong



Ashland Marble Works on the Plaza

sense of justice. In her memoirs she wrote of it:

The sheriff of Siskiyou County, California, dropped in one morning and arrested our colored cook on a charge of horse-stealing. It seems that the [black man] traded a good horse for a mining prospect, which "prospect," it developed, had been "salted." Upon learning that he had been defrauded, the [man] took the horse and came over the Siskiyou to the Mountain House where he was given work. When the sheriff heard the story, he said he couldn't blame the [man] but his duty compelled him to take his prisoner back to Siskiyou County. He was prevailed upon to wait until after breakfast was cooked, so he deputized a farm hand to sit in the kitchen and guard the culprit. The cook sent the guard into the dining room with a big dish of hot cakes and seized the opportunity to slip out of the door. I saw him from a nearby building where I was gathering up the washing and beckoned him to come to me. He did so and I told him to lie down on the floor and keep quiet until I told him it was safe ... I covered him up with a great heap of sheets.

In a few minutes, every man in the house was out looking for the Negro. When I was asked if I had seen him, I evaded the question by suggesting that "he would probably make for the woods" and the next

minute every man of them was running for the woods.

Hasse told the fugitive that the law was against him, and that he should abandon the horse and flee. He did. When the sheriff came back Isaac Hill, who happened by, told him "it was just as well that the man got away as he could hardly be blamed for recovering his property from the man who had cheated him." The sheriff returned to Siskiyou County without a prisoner.

La Grande married Bethenia Owens, a fourteen-year-old girl from Roseburg. Young Bethenia was old for her years; she had helped raise her younger brothers and sisters, and with the hard chores of a pioneer farm. Her years with La Grande were not happy. The couple had a son, and La Grande had difficulty supporting his family. The love of adventure which had suited La Grande for pioneering did not serve him well as the country grew more settled. La Grande preferred hunting to working in the businesses in which Bethenia's family tried to set him up.

For a time the couple lived with Betsy and Isaac, and with Aunt Kelly.

Aunt Kelly was very fond of Bethenia's baby. She offered to take him and raise him as her own, telling Bethenia that La Grande would never amount to anything, and that as Aunt Kelly's heir, the child would have no worries in life. Bethenia, of course, did not surrender her infant.

When Bethenia was eighteen, she divorced La Grande, despite the pleas of her family not to disgrace them with the scandal of divorce. Bethenia worked hard at any job she could find, saved her money, and set up a millinery shop in Roseburg. She put her son through medical school, and then decided to go to medical school herself. Bethenia Owens became the first fully-qualified woman doctor to practice in Oregon. Her unsuccessful marriage to La Grande forced her to become self-reliant and resourceful, and perhaps gave her the courage to complete her medical studies despite the discouragement of male students and instructors.

La Grande Hill died in 1886, and is buried in Ashland.

Martha was the last sister to marry. Her husband, A.V. Gillette, was a Yreka cabinetmaker. The couple had eight children, and moved to Ashland in 1857, where Gillette served as town recorder.

On July 15, 1864, Isaac Hill died at the age of 58. Family records indicate that he died of cholera, the disease he had told the girls on the prairie that you either recovered from quickly or died. The day before his death Isaac had worked hard in the fields.

The family suspected that the doctor summoned to treat Isaac was indifferent to the case because Isaac was a Southerner, and the doctor an Abolitionist. Hasse wrote several times that her father was a victim of the Civil War.

Isaac, who had finally found a permanent home after years of looking for a perfect spot, was laid to rest on his own land, in the small cemetery he had given for burial of victims of the Indian Wars. In his eleven years in Ashland, he found prosperity and adversity. He was honored as a pioneer, and respected as a justice of the peace.

In a letter written to his mother on



*Grave of Ann Hill Russell.
Photograph by Doug Smith.*

February 7, 1864, five months before his death, Isaac reported; "Last year was the best fruit year I ever saw, apples are still plentiful. I have 175 apple trees, the most of them bearing. I had peach trees which will bear this year...We are just sowing our wheat...The elders are budding and the peach buds are swelling... I have a fine stock of horses, ten in number, and most of them very fine. I have not sold any under \$200. I have 3 brood-mares, one stallion and the others, three years and younger. I fattened 24 hogs and baconed them. It sold for 15¢ lb. I have a good stock of hogs left and all the cattle I want... I raised a good crop of tobacco (sic) last year. It is worth \$1 per pound here...I am about out of debt and have plenty of everything so have no reason to complain."

His description of a fertile valley with orchards and pastures show the drastic changes in the Valley wrought by Isaac and Betsy and other pioneers. Hasse, who had despaired of ever seeing another red apple upon her arrival in the Valley, now lived in what was becoming a famous fruit-producing area.

Hasse and James Russell lived in Yreka

for several years, although James had business ventures in several towns. His most important and sustaining work was as a marble carver. In 1865, he and Hasse set up a marble works on Ashland Creek, which was the first marble works in Oregon south of Portland.

Almon Gillette set up a cabinet shop nearby, and the sisters were close again, and raised their children together. The Russells had eleven children, including twin daughters whom Hasse had named Mary and Martha after her sisters.

It's uncertain what year Hasse first took up a mallet and chisel. She had been drawing floral designs for James to carve and one day when he was unable to work out a carving to his satisfaction, she asked him to let her try. James was astonished by her natural proficiency at carving, and soon she shared the work with him, while her older children watched her younger ones.

In her memoirs, she writes that soon she was able to see forms in the rough blocks of marble. As James became increasingly disabled from old mining injuries, Hasse's work helped support the family. She was not to put down her mallet and chisel until her 90th year. She became somewhat famous for carving the white marble bowknots which marked the graves of members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In newspaper articles across the country, she was celebrated as the oldest woman marble carver in America.

Hasse and the San Francisco branch of the Vermont Marble Company carried on a lively correspondence over the years. In 1924, the Company wrote her:

You are certainly a good testimonial for marble. We hope that we will all thrive on it as vigorously as you have. We have been somewhat suspicious that the Fountain of Perpetual Youth was located somewhere in the neighborhood of Ashland, and we are surprised and delighted to know that as a matter of fact the Fountain is really a quarry located in Vermont

and the product is going abroad over the earth in allopathic doses.

In addition to raising their families, the Hill sisters were involved in religious and civic activities. Martha was particularly active in the Presbyterian Church. The Ashland church still has a Martha Gillette League named in her honor, and for many years after Martha's death, the League continued to meet in her home on the corner of Church and High Streets.

The Hill sisters outlived their husbands, and were honored in their later years as Ashland pioneers. Martha died in 1920, Hasse in 1930, and Mary in 1933.

The Hill sisters temperance activities remain famous in Ashland folklore. When a saloon opened in Ashland, Hasse organized Martha and other Ashland women to stage what was Oregon's first "sit-in." The women took their rockers and knitting and rocked and knitted in shifts in front of the saloon door. No man dared pass the severe gaze of these righteous ladies, and on the third day, the publican came out and said, "All right, ladies, you win. I'm moving to Medford."

This was but one battle in the long war against alcohol. The railroad brought into Ashland many visitors who wanted to buy a drink and saloons opened to accommodate them. Hasse, Martha and other women organized protests and tried to see that laws were passed and enforced regulating the sale of alcohol.

Public battles such as this were anguishing to the reticent Hill sisters. Hasse recorded in her memoirs that she could hardly stand to be watched as she did her marble carving in the family's outdoor shop. It required all of her strength of character to stage sit-ins, appear in court and at city meetings, and speak at temperance gatherings. She feared the opposition of powerful men, and town gossip, but she spoke out for what she believed in.

Photograph by Doug Smith.

Nan Hannon



THE TABLE ROCK SENTINEL