

Laying Claim to Cottage Grove: Early Settlers

The earliest white settlers to build homes in the Cottage Grove area began arriving in 1847 with Richard Robinson building on land in what is now the Walker area and James Chapin building a home in what is now Latham. New settlers continued to move into the area creating the foundation for our town. Four settlers, Cochran, Shields, Small, and McFarland, staked claims on the land that became the city of Cottage Grove.

Cochran

John and Letticia Cochran's Donation Land Claim (DLC) makes up the northeast **quadrant** of town. John and Letticia were both from Illinois. According to family records the Cochran's moved to the area in 1847. Their DLC, #1153, was 643 acres and was settled in 1852. John and Letticia traveled to Oregon with livestock and the hopes of selling meat to miners in the gold fields. John regularly traveled to Northern California to sell meat. John died shortly after returning from one of these trips in July of 1859. Letticia later married Samuel Dillard who had a DLC near Saginaw.

Shields

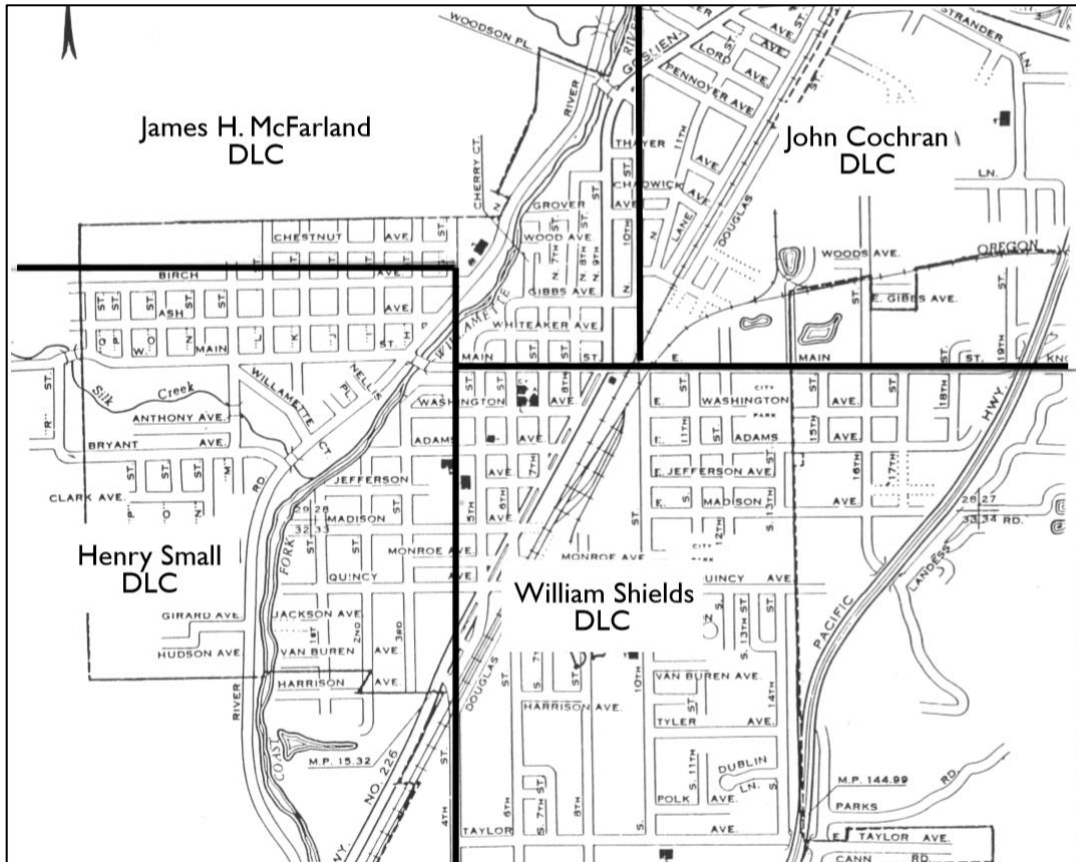
William and Judith Shields's DLC covers the south east portion of town. William was from Tennessee and Judith was from Kentucky. They settled in Oregon in Aug 1851. One source stated that John Cochran wanted neighbors so badly that when the Shields showed up in the area John convinced them to stay, offering his claim and moving to a section of land just to the north. Though the Cochran's did end up with much better river access on their new claim. The Shields settled their DLC, #340, in Sept 1852. Their claim was 319.85 acres. William and Judith would go on to acquire over 900 acres of land in the area. The family donated the land for Shields Cemetery.

Donation Land Act of 1850

Congress passed the Oregon Donation Land Law in 1850, giving 320 acres to all white or half Indian male citizens (with white fathers) and an additional 320 acres to their wives. Citizens arriving after Dec 1, 1850 were eligible for a maximum of 320 acres. This law required the 320 additional acres for married couples be placed in the wife's name making it one of the first times women in the United States could hold legal rights to land.

The law expired in 1855 but resulted in 7,437 claims for 2.5 million acres of land. The U.S. population in the Oregon territory increased from 11,873 in 1850 to about 60,000 by 1860.

This act was designed to eliminate France and Britain's claim to the area as well as remove local Indians from good farm land. An openly identified goal of the act was to remove tribes from the land to *"leave the whole of the most desirable portion open to white settlers."* **Reservations** in Oregon originally opened between 1850 and 1860, during which time the population of the Kalapuya went from around 9,000 in 1841 to less than 700 in 1855.



Small

Henry and Nancy Small's DLC makes up the south west quadrant of town. Henry was born in Tennessee, no birth location was found for Nancy. They arrived in Oregon in October of 1850. They would spend a couple years in the Brownsville area before moving to this area in 1852, Their claim, #483, was settled in April of 1853 and consisted of 642.42 acres. In 1852 the Smalls donated land for the first schoolhouse in the area, later known as Latham School.

Jeremiah Yarnell and O.P. Adams bought the Smalls claim in 1859. They divided the land into smaller lots, which they sold. These new homes form the initial layout of Cottage Grove. It was also on the Small's land that the first Main Street in Cottage Grove would spring up. Running through their claim was an **ancient** trail used by Indians then fur trappers then early Applegate Trail travelers, then as a stagecoach route, early highway, Main Street and now South River Road.

McFarland

James and Mary McFarland's DLC includes the north west portion of town. James was born in North Carolina and Mary, aka Polly, was born in Kentucky. They arrived in Oregon in Oct of 1853 and settled their claim, #345. Their original claim included 639.33 acres.

James and his brother John had originally traveled to the area in 1850 to learn about the area. They clearly liked what they saw as they soon brought their families west. According to Golden Was the Past, the McFarland's choose tracts of land on higher ground because they had dealt with frequent floods when they lived on the Missouri River.

These brief introductions serve as a reminder that the town we call home began from the hopes and dreams of settlers coming west and laying claim to unfamiliar land far from home. Do you live on land that was once a DLC?

A Names Journey

The name Cottage Grove came from a post office opened in 1854 just east of Creswell. Over the years it moved a few times, roughly following what is now Hwy 99 heading south until it reached this area in 1867. The 1870 census lists the Cottage Grove post office as located in the Coast Fork Township. In 1887 the community **incorporated** as a city under the name Cottage Grove.



Early Commercial District, picture is labeled 1870. Located on the original DLC of Henry Small, this is the intersection of Main and River Rd. Today you would see the Masonic hall in the center, Riverview Terrace to the left, and the Applegate trail interpretive center/Centennial bridge on the far right.

Discussion Points

1. Use the map to locate places you know in town and identify the original Donation Land Claim owner. For example, on whose land claim is Bohemia Park located?
2. The Donation Land Act of 1850 had good and bad consequences. Discuss the positive and negative aspects and results for our community.

Vocabulary

Quadrant: Roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of a given area in which the four sections meet at a center point.

Reservation: An area of land set aside by the federal government for North American Indians or Australian Aborigines, generally land was poor in quality where Indians were forcefully moved

Ancient: very old, from a time before known history

Incorporated: Legally recognized as a town by the State