

THE FEYRERS OF MOLALLA

"Charm of Past Exists at Feyrer Farm".....by Judy Sanders-Chapman



The Feyrer Farmhouse

The Feyrer farmhouse, built in 1889, is of the rural Gothic cottage style. An unusual feature is two front doors leading into two separate sitting rooms. Katharine's flowers and herbs graced the perimeters of the house.

People on the porch in this 1902 picture are unidentified.

Photos and information for this story were provided by Hanna Schink, Katherine O'Black and Katharine Zeek.

Bibliography:

Author Unknown, Dickey Prairie School, *Molalla Bulletin*, V I. #9, 10/25/1972

Clackamas County Deed and Survey Records

Sanders-Chapman, Judy, Interview with Dorothy Feyrer-Magill, 1992

"Charm of Past Exists at Feyrer Farm"

By Judy Sanders-Chapman

Perhaps the oldest, intact historic farm complex in Clackamas County, is located on Dickey Prairie Road near the community of Molalla, Oregon. At the 1889 Feyrer farmstead, one can find vestiges of the past that visually impart former farm functions and household usefulness. Antique apple trees, vintage hand-crafted furniture, rusted hand-forged farm hardware, faded, tattered wallpaper, and a cluster of weathered barns and sheds are part of the legacy left behind. The original farmhouse remains a tribute to the tenacious German family who worked the land and created a homey, self-sufficient lifestyle.

Gottlieb Feyrer was born into the Evangelic faith on June 19, 1844, near Balingen, Thieringen, in what is now Germany. His parents were farmers and young Gottlieb spent his first fourteen years helping on the farm and attending school. Six more years were devoted to farm work before he was drafted into military service. Almost five years of duty included action in the War of 1866 against Prussia. In 1867, Gottlieb received a war memorial medal and, two years later, was discharged. Because his native state was forced into the German empire as a result of the war, he decided to come to America when he was twenty-six years of age.

Unmarried and traveling alone, Gottlieb was described as strong and healthy with light blond hair and blue eyes. It was March, 1870, and war was soon to break out between France and Germany. Gottlieb was grateful to be on his way to New York, thereby avoiding the ravages of another war. He went to Pittsburg where he had friends and worked for ten years in the iron works and occasionally on farms. He headed west in 1880, seeking work in Denver and San Francisco but returned to Pittsburg in 1882 to marry his sweetheart, Katharine Vogt.

Rosine Katharine Vogt was born on October 24, 1862, in the community of Schlattstall at Kirchheim in what is now Germany. Her parents were Joseph Vogt, a miller and cabinetmaker of the Catholic faith, and Anna Maria Steudle of the Evangelic faith. When Katharine was 17,



*Rosine Katharine & Gottlieb Feyrer
with Anna, Fritz & Louise*

ca. 1886

she worked for two years in Kirchheim and then in Glarus, Switzerland for three years. In 1881, she applied for a visa to America. She and Gottlieb Feyrer were married in Pittsburg in 1882, and soon departed for Oregon.

Once in the Willamette Valley, the Feyrers bought a large tract of "wild" land in Needy. A small cleared section was farmed with oxen and enlarged each year. Four children



The Feyrer Family in 1915

Back row from the left: Gottlobe (Ed), Louise, Gottlieb, Katharine, Anna and Jakob Heinrich (Jack)
 Front row: unidentified, Franz Joseph (Joe), Edgar Wilhelm (Will), Dorothea (Dorothy), and Karl Herman (Carl)
 Girl in front row is unidentified.

were born to the Feyrers at Needy; Karl Friedrich (Fritz) in 1883; Anna Marie in 1884; Louise Magdalena in 1885 and Karl Joseph in 1887, who, unfortunately died only two months later. In 1888, Gottlieb Feyrer purchased 222 acres of prime Molalla River bottom land at Dickey Prairie.

The Feyrers resided in a cabin built by a previous landowner while the present house, a vernacular farmhouse, was being completed. The builder of the cabin is currently unknown, but it appears not to have been William Bunton, the original Donation Land claimant, since his home was located up the road a short distance. Bunton had settled his claim adjacent to the John Baty and John Dickey homesteads on June 15, 1847. He sold the subject portion of his claim to James Wills in 1856, who in turn sold to Jacob Robius in 1866. Robius sold out to John and Elizabeth McCoy in 1870. The McCoy's held title only one year before a sale to George Hungate in 1871. John Noblitt purchased the property in 1884 and he sold to the Feyrers in 1888.

One child was born to Gottlieb and Katharine while they resided in the cabin and started their farm. A daughter, Klara, arrived on January 14, 1889 but lived only four days. She rests in the old Baty family cemetery on the hill behind the Feyrer farm.

The Farmhouse

The present Feyrer farmhouse, constructed in 1889, was built in a traditional manner and thus deviates somewhat from contemporary styles of the Victorian period. Architecturally, it follows the decorum of the previously popular rural Gothic cottage style. The antiquity of this building type is further evidenced by the appearance of two front doors leading to two separate sitting rooms.

Local builder Philip "Barney" Leichtweis probably had access to a carpenter's pattern book when he constructed the house for the Feyrer family. At least three other Victorian period houses by Leichtweis remain in the Dickey Prairie area. He also built homes in Oregon City,



This early 1970s, aerial picture shows the Feyrer farm complex off Dickey Prairie Road. In the lower left hand corner is the Grandmother's house and immediately north, the main house. To the right is the large garden space and, next to it, you can see the pyramidal roof of the smokehouse. Other buildings, remaining today, are the barns, a blacksmith shop, a two-story machine shed and a cooler shed. Today the farm is owned by David and Judy Chapman, who reside in the main house with their two children, Liese, age 9 and Billy, age six. They purchased the home and twenty acres in 1991 and operate a wholesale nursery business there.

Highland and Portland. Leichtweis, a fellow Dickey Prairie settler of Germanic descent, had immigrated to America with his family in 1854, when he was six years old. He came to Clackamas County in 1886, and married Martha Callahan in 1892.

True to Gothic tradition, the Feyrer farmhouse originally exhibited vertical wood plank walls which were allowed to age and weather. White window and door trim, decoratively sawn porch brackets and chamfered posts accentuated the country farmhouse charm. Two corbelled brick chimneys service three interior wood heating stoves

- one in the front parlor, one in the family sitting room, and the indispensable kitchen wood-cooking stove. Upstairs, dormitory style bedrooms and a main bedroom adjacent to the parlor were left unheated, demonstrating a resilience common among German people. Warm wool comforters and quilts sufficed while windows were left open to the weather and the health-giving properties of the cool night air.

The cellar of the house was used to store root crops, apples, pears and squashes. A milk room connected to the kitchen by a breezeway and was used to cool milk

directly from the cow and to serve as a buttery, that is, a place to store foods not suited for the cellar. The original cellar, a dug-earth room beneath the parlor that was accessible from the front porch, was substantially updated in 1941 when a full basement was excavated beneath the house. A laundry room, a second bathroom with shower and a wood-burning furnace was also installed.

The Feyrer family grew as the final decade of the nineteenth century wore on. Gottlob Edward was the first child born in the new house in 1890. Next came Karl Herman in 1893, Jakob Heinrich in 1894, Edgar Wilhelm in 1896 and Franz Joseph in 1899. The youngest, a girl, Dorothea Katharine arrived soon after the dawn of a new century on August 30, 1902. The last to pass on, she died on May 27, 1992, not long after her final visit to the old family farmhouse.

The Farm

Gottlieb Feyrer worked the farm growing grain, raising sheep and cattle, and tending horses, goats, chickens and pigs. A large livestock barn was one of the first outbuildings erected on the farm. Possibly, Leichtweis was instrumental in raising the barn, since it is known he built his own barn on Dickey Prairie. The Feyrer barn is a traditional "side-opening" style with interior center drive-through on a raised wood floor. Built with a nod to the past, the barn features a low-pitched roof, flanking lean-tos, an upper hayloft, interior grain bins, cow stanchions, horse stalls, and a motorized hammermill installed in the 1930s. The frame is constructed on hand-hewn timbers with mortise and tenon joints. The barn is clad with vertical, unpainted mill-sawn boards cut from trees on the nearby hillside.

Much of the hardware for the barn, fence gates, and other outbuildings was hand-forged in the Feyrer's blacksmith shop. Though a date of 1907 is visible on the forge, the shop as well as the smokehouse and pig barn, were probably built before this date - most likely in the 1890s. Each of these buildings exhibit vertical, rough-sawn board-and-batten siding, left plain to the weather.

A blacksmith shop was necessary on a country farm not only for fabricating hardware but for shoeing horses and repairing equipment. Ed and Jack Feyrer performed blacksmith duties in their fully stocked shop. Rows of drawers and bins held bolts, nails and other supplies while duties could be performed on a massive countertop composed of two two-inch thick, two by fourteen foot long slabs of fir laid end to end. The coal-fired brick-lined forge remains on one end of the shop but the bellows, anvil, cooling vats and stacks of raw steel and iron are gone. Large iron wheels on the ceiling that were driven by a

generator to run a lathe and whetstone grinder can still be seen.

The Feyrers operated an efficient farm that mainly sustained their own needs. This meant raising enough staple foods to feed nine children as well as continually upgrading farm production techniques and making physical improvements. Numerous buildings required for specific farm purposes went up on the property. Many no longer stand or have been moved away, such as a chicken brooder house, small farm sheds, the original cabin, a fruit and vegetable dryhouse, a large two-story equipment barn, a water tower and small outbuildings devoted to motorized vehicle maintenance. Across the road, towards the Molalla River, once stood a two-car garage and gas pumps, post and rail fencing, a family picnic and swim area and an expansive apple orchard.

Several Twentieth-century buildings do remain. In addition to the blacksmith shop, they include a small granary near the farmhouse. This structure was outfitted with a long butchering table and walk-in refrigerator/freezer in the 1940s. A large chicken house was built in 1922. A two-story machine shed, principally used to store wood, went up in 1943. A lean-to on the north side of the building was added by Ed Feyrer in the early 1970s, when he was past 80 years of age. He was the last Feyrer family member to live in the house and work the farm.

The smokehouse, today used as a simple garden shed, was once an important feature of the self-sufficient farm. The Feyrer smokehouse is a traditional small square-plan structure with a pyramidal roof. A smoky, slow-burning fire was tended directly on the ground beneath hanging slabs of bacon, ham and sausage rings. After the hogs were killed, scalded, scraped and butchered, they were smoked not only to preserve the meat but to improve the flavor. Today, blackened beams with hanging wires can still be seen in the upper reaches of the smokehouse.

Many methods of food preservation were practiced on the Feyrer farm, including root-cellar storage, smoking, drying, canning and putting up foods in crocks. Large vegetable gardens, fruit trees, berries and grapes supplied food for the family table. Katharine's flowers and herbs graced the perimeters of the house. Louise and her brothers added numerous native shrubs, bulbs, holly trees and what are now towering fir, cedar, hemlock, walnut and filbert trees. Water from the nearby creek was piped to the productive gardens during the summer months. Today ducks visit the pond regularly while geese pass overhead. Deer help themselves to the landscape, and coyotes howl on the hillside in the early morning hours.

"Grandmother's House"

The Feyrers modernized their farmhouse with exterior horizontal board siding, painted white, which updated the Gothic appearance, probably at the same time they raised a small Victorian cottage on the property for Katharine's parents. The Vogts traveled to America in the late 1890s. They resided in Tigardville (Tigard) until the cottage at Dickey Prairie was completed around 1906.

The cottage looks to be a simple pattern book style, very small and accommodating, with daily household needs attended to by the unpretentious layout and functional arrangement. It was constructed by local builder, Willard Robbins. Robbins is most noted for having built the historic Methodist Church in downtown Molalla and dozens of other fine homes and barns in the surrounding area. He was also a merchant, farmer and, at one time, a schoolteacher.

The cottage, or "Grandmother's house" as the family affectionately called it, consists of four rooms with attached storage-wood shed, and a dug-earth cellar beneath the house. Since the house was not plumbed or wired until the 1980s, an outhouse was a necessary outdoor dependency. A commodious chicken house remains nearby, still in useable condition. The large, open country kitchen featured a dry sink in one corner, freestanding cupboards and table, and a spacious walk-in pantry. Glistening jars of home preserves and kitchen food staples and equipment lined the pantry shelves. The sitting room featured lace curtains at the windows and a perennial-lined garden walk greeted visitors at the front door.

Later Years

Improvements to the main farmhouse came about as the children grew and older family members passed away. A two-bedroom addition, added to the back of the house, featured a large bathroom with deep clawfoot bathtub and built-in drawers and shelves. A water tower fed by a hydraulic ram pump near the springhouse brought indoor plumbing and all its conveniences. Some of the original 1930's electrical wiring can still be seen in the house, though the parlor was only recently wired for outlets.

The parlor, called the front room by the family, was reserved for special occasions and Christmas celebrations and was not used for daily activities by the family. Traditionally, furniture would have been placed against the walls around the room, then moved for use. When needed, Katharine could lower a quilting frame from the parlor ceiling to put the finishing hand-sewn touches to a quilt or comforter. She and her daughters would have spun wool, knitted and crocheted in the sitting room, next

to the woodstove, with light provided by oil lamps and candle tapers. Rag rugs beneath their feet and country-style furniture created a warm family scene.

The sizeable country kitchen received a facelift in the early 1930s when local cabinetmaker, William Adams, installed built-in cabinets and cupboards, which necessitated the removal of a handy walk-in pantry complete with a large flour bin, baking supplies, and cooking utensils. A workable kitchen was a top priority not only to prepare food for the family but, also to create hearty home fare for the farm work crews. These chores fell to Louise, second eldest daughter, who from the 1920s until her death in 1957, acted in the capacity of homemaker to her bachelor brothers while they worked the farm.

The matriarch, Rosine Katharine, had passed away on July 6, 1924, leaving Gottlieb to carry on the farm, with some of his children, until his death ten years later on February 10, 1934. In what must have been an agonizing situation, eldest son Fritz, passed away at a young age due to complications of appendicitis in 1904.

Second child, daughter Anna, married Emil Montandon in 1906 and she passed away in 1969. Anna, and her husband, a carpenter, lived briefly after their marriage in Needy, Oregon, and then moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1908, then back to the country near Hazelgreen, Oregon, in 1920.

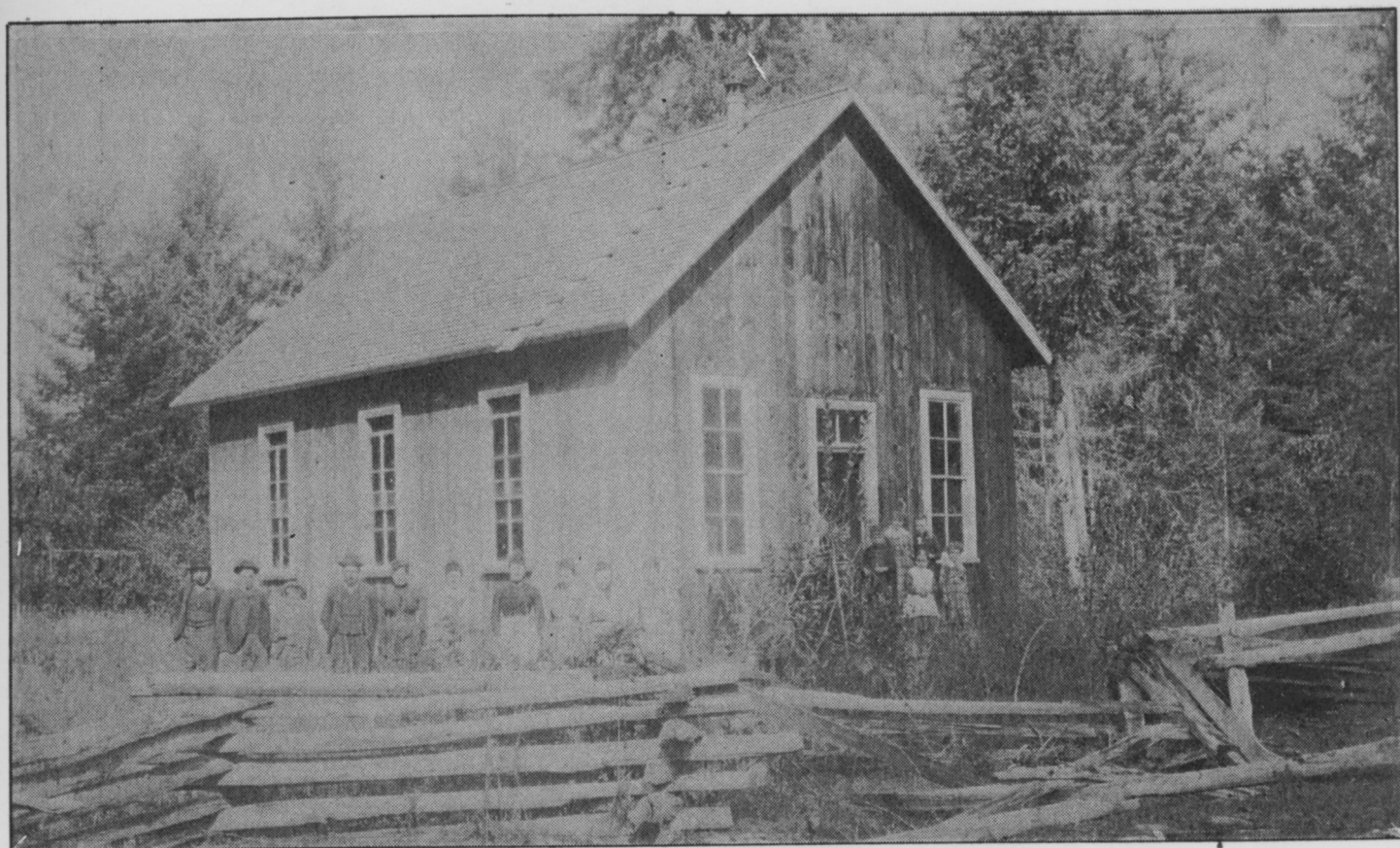
Louise married Gustaf Johnson in 1917, but his early death due to an accident, left Louise with three young children. She then moved back to the family homestead to raise her daughters and run the household upon Katharine's death.

Son, Edward, never married and it was he who carried on the traditions of the family farm until his death on April 11, 1978. Ed played many roles in his active lifetime from farmer, engineer, builder, father to his young nieces, family photographer and caretaker of all the inner workings of a beautiful and productive farm operation. Brother Jakob (Jack) worked by his side, until his death in 1963 at the old homeplace. He too never married.

Karl (Carl) married Hanna Kylo in 1921. He built a stately, small, brick Tudor style home up Dickey Prairie Road and started his own farming enterprise. He died in 1948. Hannah currently resides in Woodburn, Oregon.

Wilhelm (Will) briefly tried marriage, but, like his bachelor brothers, preferred the single lifestyle. He too built a home, in the 1940s on an old homestead, which is today maintained by a niece and her husband as a beautiful farm on Wright Road.

Franz Joseph (Joe) married Laura Hill in 1930 and soon



after departed for Alberta, Canada, where he lived until his death in 1988.

Youngest daughter, Dorothy, married Otto Magill in 1929. They lived in a 1920s bungalow and farmed a large tract of land on Dickey Prairie Road that is currently overseen by their daughter and her husband. In later years, Dorothy resided in Mulino until her death.

To live on the Feyrer farm today is to be immersed in

history. One only has to take a step out the back doorway to absorb the sensations of the historic landscape, and perhaps pluck a heirloom pear from the old tree. The smell of preserves cooking on the woodstove, the whirl of the spinning wheel and the clank of the threshing machine are gone, but their memory lives on in the minds of family descendants, many of who still live in the area.

* * *