

JOHN VANCE ABBOTT and KETURAH (BALLINGER) ABBOTT

OREGON TRAIL - 1852

John Vance Abbott was born in 1810 in Virginia, and when he left for Iowa, John was a widower leaving behind a little girl in the care of her maternal grandmother to raise. It was there he met his wife to be, Keturah Ballinger who was born in Burlington, Ohio in 1818 to a Judge Ballinger according to her death certificate. They were married on June 13, 1843 De Moines Co., Iowa. It was the following spring that their first daughter, my gg grandmother Catherine Abbott, was born on April 24, 1844. The next year they moved to Oskaloosa, and welcomed their 2nd daughter Amanda.

John owned a mercantile business there but became ill after falling into a river, getting very wet and stranded with no dry clothing for several days. He contacted a cold that never left. It was suggested that coming west would be a good change for his health, that many had been cured of ailments from the clean air and healthy environment in Oregon. So in March 1850, having sold their business to pay for the trip, and saying good-bye to family and friends, the Abbott family journeyed to Council Bluff, Iowa on the first leg of their journey west. Before making the trip, John had hired a negro to be caretaker for his children. When he stepped out to make some farewell calls, the girls seeing a powder horn on the wall, asked the negro what it was. "I'll show you" was his reply and the powder horn was thrown in the open fireplace. Fortunately there was little powder in the horn, but flames were flying everywhere and children screaming. Needless to say, the caretaker was immediately dismissed and replaced by the biggest and best dog their dad could find. "Lion" was the family companion across the plains.

John was 40 when they started their trip, Keturah "Kitty" 32, Catherine 6, and Amanda 5. The Abbotts took the plains route via Nebraska, Wyoming the Rockies and into Utah. Their Prairie Schooner averaged about 11 miles a day and was pulled by 4 oxen, two of which were named Brindle and Buck. The girls often rode on their backs or walked barefoot along the wagon as the trail was bumpy and made Amanda sick.

Reaching the Mormon settlement near Salt Lake City was a blessing to the Abbott family as John was getting worn out, and Keturah was about to give birth to their 3rd child. John, along with several other emigrants, were given permission by Brigham Young to build cabins and clear enough land where they could grow grain to feed their oxen. Little John Vance Jr. was born in 1851 and the family was content for 2 years. Soon though, some Mormon leaders were wanting the men to take on more wives according to their religious beliefs, so the families quietly joined the next wagon train west.

By the time they reached The Dalles, Oregon, John Abbott was dangerously ill, but continued on until they were able to get over Laurel Hill on the Barlow Road. Afterwards, they stayed with friends along the Clackamas River for several months until John could regain some of his strength. Unfortunately,

when they arrived in Oregon City, winter was nearing and John Abbott was in no condition to locate a land claim. He found a cabin to rent on main street, where he was hoping by spring to be rested and feeling better. The cabin belonged to Dr. John McLaughlin, and Catherine and Amanda remember taking the rent money to his home each month.

Unfortunately, John's health did not improve. He did however, find a job as a teller at the local bank. Keturah gave birth to their 4th child, a daughter Trilla in March 1853. John continued to decline, and soon had to give up his job at the bank leaving no income for the family. They sold all they had except a cow for milk and lived off the charity of friends and neighbors. Sadly, John Vance Abbott wasted away, passing in January 1855 of consumption. There is no known record of his burial.

Keturah is left with 4 children and another baby to be born later that year with no income, no job and no support from her husband. Her own health now begins to fail radically. The Oregon City community watched over her and the family of now 5 the best they could, but in May 1857, she suffers a breakdown called "brain fever". Mrs. Abbott is arrested and put in jail. Her situation was taken before the Clackamas County Probate Court where she is found to be insane and unable to care for herself and her children. What few belongings left in the family are now sold at public auction. Keturah is placed in the guardianship of Peter Rinearson and her children in foster care: Catherine placed in the home of Amory and Mary Holbrook, Amanda with the Nathan Mudge family, and John Jr. with W.H. & Ann Faucett. Trilla is taken in by Charles and Martha Kester, and baby Charles is adopted by Nathan & Mary Mack of Hardens.

In 1860 Keturah is no longer living in the Rinearson home, but the 1870 Census shows living in East Portland in an asylum. In 1880 however, she is now living with her daughter Amanda in Wasco County. Keturah continues to live with daughters Catherine and Amanda until her death in 1907 at the age of 89 at the home of Hercules Kelly in Oregon City. She is buried in an unmarked grave in the Hatch plot at Mountain View Cemetery in Oregon City, Oregon.

The children of John and Keturah Abbott, were placed in good homes and raised by kind and respected people.

AMANDA: Amanda was the first to be married in 1859 to William Henry Williams, just short of her 15th birthday. They lived in The Dalles on 8 mile where they were wheat ranchers. They were parents of 14 children. Amanda was a mid-wife to many neighbors. She died in 1933 at the age of 88 and is buried in the IOOF Cemetery in The Dalles, OR.

CATHERINE: Catherine married Hercules LaTourette Kelly in Oregon City on November 9, 1863, an Oregon pioneer of 1859. They lived in Oregon City and had 7 children. Their home was on the site of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Their son, Fielding Scott Kelly, was the only one to have children, and was my grandfather. (Joni Kelly Walker) Catherine died May 20, 1936 at the age of 92 in Oregon City. Both she and Hercules are buried, alongside their daughters May, Elmina and Elizabeth, at the Mountain View Cemetery.

JOHN VANCE JR.: Nothing is really known about John other than he never married. He lived mostly in Montana and Canada and died after 1936.

TRILLA: Trilla married Payson Hatch in 1877 and they had 1 daughter, Winifred. Payson was a house mover and they lived primarily in Portland. A widow for 38 years, Trilla in her later years moved to Riverside CA. and lived in a Neighbors of Woodcraft Home where she died in 1944 at the age of 91 and his buried there. Payson and Winifred (Rohweter) are both buried at the Mountain View Cemetery.

CHARLES: Charles was adopted by Nathan and Mary Mack. He is never mentioned in any family notes so there was no known contact with the family. Except for the 1860 census, the family is no longer found. Mr. Mack died in Salem, OR in 1893, but no mention is made of his wife Mary, or son Charles (Abbott).

NOTE: Nathan's wife Mary's maiden name was Arthur. It turns out that Mary Arthur is a niece of my husband's gg grandmother, Jemima Arthur Walker.

Submitted by: Joni Kelly Walker

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