

Letitia Carson, Her Story (Chapter Outlines & Summaries)

This is the story about a remarkable woman and an Oregon heroine, Letitia Carson. It is also a story about her family and her relationship with David Carson and their acquaintances during the last eight years of his life; her subsequent life and homestead in Douglas County; and the events in Missouri, along the Oregon Trail, in pioneer Soap Creek Valley, and blind justice that shaped her decisions and achievements.

1) Kentucky

- Indian Slavery Law, 1775**
- African Country Origins, 1775**
- Ohio River steamboats, 1811**
- Cotton, Hemp, and Tobacco, 1820**
- Patrols, 1820**
- Markings, 1820**
- Kentucky Slaveholdings and Markets, 1825**
- Living Arrangements and Conditions, 1825**
- Church, 1830**
- General Health of Slaves, 1830**
- Nonimportation Act 1833**
- Saturday Nights and Christmas Holidays, 1835**

We really don't know anything about Letitia Carson when she was a child, while growing up, or as a young adult. We do know that she was a slave of African descent born in Kentucky, probably in 1814 or 1818 or sometime in between. Here informed speculation must be based on detailed research. What was the life of a slave child like in Kentucky in the early 1800s? How and why were slaves typically transported from Kentucky to Missouri? How common were pregnancies among young slave women? Bottom line speculation: How did Letitia end up pregnant in Missouri in 1845, and under what conditions?

Very possibly Carson was involved in the hemp or tobacco farming industries, whether as a field hand or house servant or both. She was likely a Baptist or Methodist and attended Sunday services in her owner's church or with an all-black congregation; possibly some of each. Other possibilities regarding her childhood and youth also exist. A significant amount of the information in this chapter is based on the doctoral research and correspondence with noted Kentucky historian, Marion Lewis.

2) Ireland

- American Revolution, 1775**
- French Revolution, 1788**
- The Rights of Man, 1791**
- Weather and Potatoes, 1795**
- Battle of Antrim, 1798**
- Flax, Sheep, and Linen, 1815**
- The "Seven Carsons" Emigrate to America, 1818**
- Smith Carson North Carolina US Citizenship, 1825**
- David Carson "Jr." born in North Carolina, 1830**

David Carson and his siblings were born and raised in Antrim, in northern Ireland. County Antrim was colonized by Scottish and English Protestants following the Nine Year's War in 1593 to 1603, when it

came under British rule. Land ownership became increasingly divided over the decades through inheritance laws and by the late 1700s most rural families supported themselves by raising potatoes, spinning flax into linen, and owning a few sheep. International shipping, largely based on linen products, was a major industry along the northern ports. The combination of widespread rural poverty, dissatisfaction with British rule, and news of successful rebellions in the United States and France helped fuel the Battle of Antrim in 1798, which resulted in political loss and hangings. David was born in 1800, and in following years many Irish emigrated to England and the United States to find profitable work. In 1818, David and six brothers and sisters -- the "Seven Carsons" -- emigrated to the Virginia and North Carolina Adirondacks. By 1825, one of the brothers had attained US citizenship, and in 1830, David Carson "Jr." was born in North Carolina. The elder David Carson is believed to be the father, but there is no certainty to that belief, and no evidence of him being married at any time during his life.

3) Missouri

Code Noir, 1775

The Platte Purchase, 1836

The Mormon War, 1837

The Panic of 1838

David Carson, Platte County Patrol, 1839

Platte County Slaveholdings and Markets, 1840

Platte City, 1841

Carson vs. White, 1844

The Great Flood of 1844

The Oregon Question, 1844

Platte City Politics, 1845

US Citizenship and Letitia, 1845

A surprising amount is known about the actions of David Carson – and many of his and Letitia’s future Oregon neighbors – in Platte County, Missouri from 1838 through 1845. The historical backdrop is the 1836 Platte Purchase and subsequent removal of local Indian Tribes and families, the international bank and market Panic of 1837, and the 1838 Missouri Mormon War and Mormon Extermination Order. Carson enters the picture in 1839 as an early member the Platte County “patrol.” He also purchased land during this time, and was involved in several local legal filings, all of which – including the 1840 census – produce a fairly accurate accounting of his actions during the late 1830s.

In April 1843, David Carson purchased the services of Eliza Ann, a young slave girl, 12 to 15 years of age, for a calendar year. In January 1844, she ran away from Carson and returned to her owners, John and Susannah White (a mother and son business partnership), showing signs of serious physical and sexual abuse. The Whites then took Carson to court -- based on contract violations -- and attempted to void the original agreement. Questions: Was Letitia also associated with the White family in some manner? Was she related to Eliza Ann in some way?

The historical background to Carsons's subsequent life is the Great (Oregon Trail) Migration of 1843 and the Great (Missouri) Flood of 1844. On October 19, 1844, David obtained his US Citizenship. Sometime around then, too, Letitia had become pregnant with his child. No prior children are listed for either one, although David Carson, Jr. remains a strong possibility. Letitia was 25 to 30 years of age at the time, there is good indication that she had been formally purchased or leased by Carson; it also seems possible she may have already given birth to a number of children by that point in her life, probably from her teens until her mid- to late-20s, and over a 10- or 15-year period.

4) Oregon Trail

"Once Free, Always Free"

Tetherow Wagon Train Politics, Fiddle Music & Marriages

Kaw, Delaware, Pawnee, and Pottawattamie Territories & Lifestyles

Mountain Men, US Dragoons, Buffalo & Prairie Storms

Independence Road (May)

Martha is Born (June)

Fort Laramie Powwow & Independence Rock (July)

Fort Boise & The Meek Cut-off (August)

Elijah White, Marcus Whitman & Wascopam Mission

The Barlow Cut-off (September)

The Walk-up Indian Trail, Oregon City Arrival & (October)

HBC, Fort Vancouver, Letitia & Martha?

California Trail and Soap Creek Valley Claim

The first historical reference to Letitia Carson is as a member of David Carson's party on April 29, 1845, in a census of Simon Tetherow's wagon train preparing to cross the Oregon Trail. The census listed the Carson party as consisting of three armed men, a fourth adult (Letitia), and supplies consisting of 100 pounds of meal, 600 pounds of flour, 600 pound of bacon, 10 pounds of powder, and 20 pounds of lead. The train, one of five to cross the Oregon Trail that year with a combined total of more than 2500 people, left Savannah, Missouri on May 2. David had taken an active part in the organization of the party and was elected to the Executive Council, but on May 20 he was fined 50-cents for sleeping while on guard duty.

In 1824, Missouri courts had established the precedent of "once free, always free," ruling that slaves taken voluntarily by masters into free states gained their freedom according to those states' laws and could not be returned to slavery if the master brought the person to Missouri. Letitia may have already been free in Missouri, but when she and David crossed the Missouri River in a wagon headed for the "Independence Road" to Oregon, the couple must have believed she was free for certain. In coming weeks the travelers experienced a severe storm and encountered local Indians, traveling buffalo hunters, US dragoons, and other wagon trains. On June 2, Letitia gave birth to baby Martha, the only emigrant black child known to have been born along the Oregon Trail.

The wagon trains heading to Oregon were essentially a days-long and miles-long traveling rural community of 2500 people, wagons, horses, sheep, and cattle, complete with preachers, teachers, fiddlers and dancing instructors, wagonmasters, cattlemen, guides, doctors, cooks, children, and midwives. Several families experienced an historic powwow at Fort Laramie and celebrated the 4th of July at Independence Rock. After leaving Fort Boise, a sizable number of the migration, including the Tetherows, followed Stephen Meek in the ill-fated "Meek Cutoff" through the central Oregon desert. As Col. Stephen Kearny, namesake of the subsequent Oregon Trail fort in present-day Nebraska, returned with his troops to the United States in early July, he took a systematic census of more than 2100 travelers, in more than 450 wagons, and with nearly 7,000 cattle -- and that had splintered into 20 different trains by early July.

Although the Carsons were both believed to be illiterate and left no direct record of their crossing of the Oregon Trail, their progress can be documented on an almost daily basis through the military reports, journals, and correspondence of other fellow travelers. They finally reached the Wascopam Mission, at present-day The Dalles, in mid-September. Beginning on October 1st, we have a very good accounting of "Uncle Davey" leading 150 cattle with five drivers and a young woman along the Indian

"Walk-Up Trail" across the northern flanks of Mt. Hood to Oregon City and the Willamette Valley. There is no mention of Letitia and Martha, but it is quite likely they were taken by canoe from Wascopam to Fort Vancouver by Hudson Bay Company servants, and then perhaps united with David along the Willamette, at Linnton or Willamette Falls. Their wagon may have been reassembled there for the trip to the Tuality Plains, after having been transported down the Columbia River, if it had not already been previously disabled, sold, or traded.

Oregon Trail Wagon Trains Polled by Kearny's US Dragoons, July 3 – 14, 1845

Front 10 Trains	Origin	Wagons	Cattle	Horses	Men	Women*	Children*
1 Thompson	Savannah	10 (20)	300 (9)	10 (17)	20 (15)	15 (.75)	20 (1.33)
2 McNary	St. Joseph	20 (8)	220 (14)	18 (10)	20 (15)	20 (1.00)	60 (3.00)
3 Hall	Independence	16 (15)	226 (13)	14 (14)	38 (7)	9 (.24)	33 (3.77)
4 Waymire	St. Joseph	11 (17)	160 (17)	8 (19)	15 (17)	7 (.47)	25 (3.57)
5 Riggs	St. Joseph	25 (6)	450 (5)	17 (11)	38 (7)	25 (.66)	45 (1.80)
6 English	Independence	20 (8)	170 (16)	21 (6)	23 (14)	30 (1.30)	40 (1.33)
7 Lloyd	Savannah	17 (13)	258 (11)	19 (9)	36 (10)	18 (.50)	25 (1.38)
8 Tyrell	St. Joseph	10 (20)	100 (20)	7 (20)	11 (20)	7 (.64)	27 (3.86)
9 Stewart	Independence	16 (15)	148 (18)	20 (7)	25 (13)	9 (.37)	25 (3.57)
10 Tetherow	Savannah	24 (7)	524 (3)	33 (3)	52 (4)	33 (.63)	67 (2.03)
Sub-Total: Front 10		169	2,556	167	278	173	374
Average: Front 10		17 (13)	256 (12)	17 (11)	28 (12)	17 (.61)	37 (2.18)
Back 10 Trains	Origin	Wagons	Cattle	Horses	Men	Women*	Children*
11 ???	???	17 (13)	215 (15)	17 (11)	27 (12)	15 (.56)	31 (2.07)
12 McDonald	Independence	19 (11)	250 (12)	23 (5)	44 (6)	8 (.18)	18 (2.25)
13 Welch	Independence	43 (2)	495 (4)	42 (2)	80 (2)	43 (.54)	129 (3.00)
14 Palmer	Independence	39 (4)	444 (6)	25 (4)	13 (19)	30 (2.31)	53 (1.77)
15 Brown	Independence	49 (1)	1150 (1)	45 (1)	130 (1)	90 (.69)	120 (1.33)
16 Locke	Independence	20 (10)	285 (10)	20 (7)	38 (7)	14 (.37)	29 (2.07)
17 Barlow	Independence	18 (12)	430 (7)	10 (17)	30 (11)	18 (.60)	25 (1.39)
18 Holliday	St. Joseph	43 (2)	600 (2)	15 (13)	60 (3)	40 (.67)	123 (3.08)
19 Chambers	Independence	11 (17)	126 (19)	14 (14)	15 (17)	7 (.47)	12 (1.71)
20 Hackleman	St. Joseph	28 (5)	430 (7)	11 (16)	51 (5)	35 (.69)	44 (1.26)
Sub-Total: Back 10		287	4,425	222	478	300	534
Average: Back 10		29 (5)	443 (7)	22 (6)	48 (6)	30 (.63)	53 (1.78)
Total: 20 Trains		456	6,981	389	756	473	908
Total Ave.: 20 Trains		21 (8)	332 (9)	19 (9)	36 (8)	23 (.64)	45 (1.95)

Old Road California Barlow Road Meek Cut-off Rear Guard
Men 756 + Women 473 + Children 908 = Total 2,137

Trains The first column shows the name of the Captain of each train and the order in which it was encountered by Kearny, as he traveled east, from July 3 to July 14.

Wagons, Cattle, Horses (& Mules), and Men Total number of each in a train (ranked 1 to 20).

Women* The number in parenthesis is the relative percentage of women to men in a train.

Children* The number in parenthesis is the average number of children per woman in a train.

Total: The totals for each column listing the lead 20 trains encountered by Kearny.

Average: These are the average numbers (and relative ranking, by size) for each column.

5) Soap Creek Valley

Provisional Land Claims, 1845

Births & Marriages, 1846

The California Gold Rush, 1848

Territorial Law, 1849

Adam Carson is Born, 1849

Donation Land Claims, 1850

David “Jr.” & Andrew Carson Arrive, 1851

Death of David Carson, 1852

David Carson is believed to have been the first person to make a Provisional Land Claim (a square-mile, or 640 acres) in later-Benton County, and the Carsons are believed to be the County’s first historical family, having arrived in December 1845 or shortly thereafter. They built a cabin near a large spring at the Soap Creek crossing of the “old HBC California Trail.” This segment later became known as part of the Applegate Trail and was used particularly heavily during the California Gold Rush of 1848 to 1850 by goldminers, stock ranchers, and new arrivals over the Oregon Trail, from both northern and southern routes. In 1851 the road became straightened and bypassed the Carson claim as County Road #1.

Soap Creek Valley and adjacent lands -- including Kings Valley, Berry Creek, and Calloway Creek, soon filled with additional land claims, with most neighbors being former Missouri residents and fellow 1845 "Old Oregonians." Marriages and landownership patterns remained remarkably stable for many years for this particular group of pioneer settlers. Sometime in 1848 or 1849 it seems likely that David Carson – along with most other able-bodied men and older boys in western Oregon – traveled to the California goldmines to try his luck. There is no indication he struck gold, but for several years after his return the family prospered in their new home, adding son Adam in 1849 and building a house, improving their spring, raising cattle, planting crops, and installing fences.

Oregon became a Territory in 1849, and the resulting Donation Land Claim law reduced the Carson's landownership to only 320 acres, because it was illegal for black people to own land under the new law and illegal for David and Letitia to marry. In 1851 David's nephew, Andrew Jackson Carson, and his companion, David Carson -- quite possibly the David's bastard son from North Carolina -- crossed the Oregon Trail and moved in with the Carsons. The younger David soon claimed 160 acres of the original 640-acre claim, immediately south and adjacent to the Carson family's ranch. By the summer of 1852, the elder David Carson had somehow become too ill to serve as a juror on a local murder trial. In September, he died without a will.

The 1845 roster of Oregon Trail emigrants included many members who would become landowners and neighbors of the Carsons in the following years, including many who actively participated in the assessment, sale, and purchase of the family’s possessions following David’s death, and later, in the subsequent lawsuits.

Table 1 provides a listing of such individuals, their age at the time of crossing, the principal route they took to get to Oregon, and the legal description of the land they settled after their arrival. The “Tsp.” (Township) and “Rng.” (Range) columns describe the 36-square mile “townships” in which they lived as Oregonians, showing the families claiming land in the same Tsp. 10 S. (South), Rng. 5 W. (West) as the Carsons, and in the adjacent Tsp. 9 S., Rng. 5 W.; Tsp. 10 S., Rng. 4 W.; and Tsp. 11 S., Rng. 5 W. – all within a few miles of the Carson family home. The “Estate \$” column indicates those fellow travelers who participated in the David Carson estate sale seven years later, in January 1853, and

represents the amount of money they paid at public auction to purchase a portion of the family's possessions.

Name	Age	Birthplace	1845 Route	TSP.	RNG.	Estate \$
Forrest, Cordelia C.	15	Illinois	T'Vault-Meek	9 S.	4 W.	
Fulton, William	36	Illinois	Unknown	9 S.	4 W.	\$18.00
Hawkins, Maryanne	10	Iowa	English-Meek	9 S.	5 W.	
Carson, David	45	Ireland	Tetherow-Carson	10 S.	5 W.	
White, Nancy	51	Kentucky	English-Meek	N/A	N/A	
Carson, Letitia	27	Kentucky	Tetherow-Columbia	10 S.	5 W.	\$104.87
Hughart, Joseph T.	41	Kentucky	Tetherow-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	\$64.05
King, Nahum	62	Massachusetts	T'Vault-Meek	11 S.	6 W.	
Hughart, Eliza J.	17	Missouri	Tetherow-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	
Hughart, Martha A.	12	Missouri	Tetherow-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	
Read, Thomas M.	33	New Hampshire	English	10 S.	4 W.	\$267.50
Staats, Stephen	24	New York	T'Vault-Carson	9 S.	4 W.	
Staats, Isaac	31	New York	T'Vault	10 S.	5 W.	
Fuller, Arnold	43	New York	T'Vault-Meek	11 S.	5 W.	
Hawkins, Nancy	30	Ohio	English-Meek	10 S.	4 W.	
Stump, David	26	Ohio	T'Vault	9 S.	5 W.	
Fuller, Henry	16	Ohio	T'Vault-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	
Fuller, Price	19	Ohio	T'Vault-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	
King, Abigail	16	Ohio	T'Vault-Meek	11 S.	5 W.	
Carson, Martha	0	Oregon Trail	Tetherow-Columbia	10 S.	5 W.	
Williams, James E.	42	Tennessee	English-Meek	9 S.	5 W.	\$41.00
Williams, Malissa A.	11	Tennessee	English-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	
Williams, Orlena M.	18	Tennessee	English-Meek	9 S.	5 W.	
Wheeler, James	25	Tennessee	Hackleman	9 S.	5 W.	\$42.75
Forrest, Moses B.	18	Tennessee	T'Vault-Meek	9 S.	4 W.	
Smith, Alexander	22	Virginia	T'Vault-Meek	N/A	N/A	
Smith, Greenberry	25	Virginia	T'Vault-Meek	10 S.	5 W.	\$254.65

6) Carson Estate

Jack's cradle

Greenberry Smith, Executor, 1852

Appraisals of Property, 1852

David Carson, Jr., 1853

Andrew Jackson Carson, 1853

Carson Estate Sales, 1853

Tampico Post Office, 1853

Sales of Property & Character of Purchasers, 1853

Platte County Probate, 1853-1857

Oregon Land Surveys & Sales, 1855-1857

Final Determinations & Distributions, 1859

In late September 1852, David Carson died after a short illness and without leaving a will. At that time Oregon was still a Territory of the United States and did not have a Constitution to guide its legal affairs: however, there was significant regional experience dealing with the estates of the deceased, beginning with Ewing Young's death in 1841. In some fashion, neighboring landowner Greenberry Smith was appointed Executor of the Carson Estate and, at that point declared that, as slaves, Letitia and the children were themselves property and therefore not entitled as heirs to the family's possessions. This was in Oregon, though, so they weren't individually appraised or put up for distribution or sale as would have happened had David died in Missouri.

Purchases and Purchasers at Carson Estate Auction, January 4, 1853

Purchaser	Estate Purchase Items & Prices	Total
Read, Thomas	8 steers (\$212), 1 heifer (\$45), 6 chairs (\$5), 1 coat (\$3), 1 trunk (\$1.25), 1 pitcher (\$0.50), 1 dish knives & forks (\$0.75)	\$267.50
Smith, Greenberry	1 velvet vest (\$1.12), 1 coat (\$3), 1 yoke of oxen (\$96), 1 steer (\$63), 1 yearling steer (\$30), 1 cow (\$42), 1 heifer calf (\$15), 1 sow & 3 pigs (\$4.50)	\$254.65
Davis, David D.	1 yoke white oxen (\$92), 1 red cow (\$57), 20 hogs (\$46), 1 clock (\$5), 1 churn (\$0.25), 1 milk strainer (\$0.25), 1 bucket (\$1), 1 lot of carpenter's tools (\$4), 2 furkins (\$1), and "1/2 [acre?] in a patch of potatoes" (\$17).	\$223.50
Horne, J. M.	2 cows (\$111), 2 heifers (\$94)	\$205.00
Last, Michael	2 cows (\$106), 1 heifer (\$45)	\$151.00
Taylor, Stephen	2 cows (\$120)	\$120.00
Carson, Letitia	1 bed & bedding (\$10), 1 tub (\$1), 2 cows & 1 calf (\$89.50), 1 large iron pot (\$1.25), 1 skillet & lid (\$2), and 6 plates (\$1.12)	\$104.87
Smith, J.	3 heifer calves (\$86)	\$86.00
Collins, Smith	1 cow & heifer calf (\$80), 1 iron pan (\$0.60)	\$80.60
Hughart, Joseph	1 horse (\$62), 1 spade (\$1.55), 1 iron pan (\$0.50)	\$64.05
Redford, Edward	1 heifer (\$50)	\$50.00
Wheeler, James	1 plow (\$23.50), 1 gun (\$12), 1 bible (\$1.50), 1 cask (\$1), 1 log chain (\$4.75), and 1 pitcher (\$1)	\$42.75
Chamberlain, H.	2 yearling steers (\$41)	\$41.00
Williams, J[ames]	Wagon (\$41)	\$41.00
Hodges, Alexander	Red bull (\$30.75)	\$30.75
Fulton, William	Harrow (\$18)	\$18.00
Carson, Jr., David	1 trunk (\$1.50), 1 "lots" shirts and drawers (\$1.50), 1 copper kettle (\$1.25), 1 iron pot and lid (\$2.50), 2 large dishes (\$1.25), 4 small pans (\$1.50), 4 plates (\$0.60), 5 cups & saucers (\$1), and 1 bucket (\$0.50)	\$11.60
Carson, Andrew J.	Watch (\$7)	\$7.00
Hodges, J. Monroe	1 hat (\$3), 1 summer vest (\$0.25), and 1 iron pot & lid (\$2.50)	\$5.75
Writsman, Alfred	2 log chains (\$4.87)	\$4.87
McDonald, Frank	2 books (\$0.50) , 1 vest (\$0.75), 1 thermometer (\$1.80)	\$3.05
Modie, Jacob	1 furkin (\$.75), 6 tumblers (\$1.40), and 1 tin pan (\$0.40)	\$2.55
Tappan, William H.	Shovel (\$2)	\$2.00
Roberts, George W.	2 pitchers & 1 bowl (\$0.85)	\$0.85

Smith soon appraised the land, improvements, and possessions of David Carson, and sold everything transportable at a public auction on January 4, 1853. There was no mention of Letitia or of David's children, Martha and Adam, in the list of Carson heirs from Virginia, North Carolina, Missouri, and Oregon. Everything except the land was sold, including ½ acres of potatoes, David's underwear, the family's bible, bedding, dishes, and tableware, jars, farm tools and equipment, two yokes of oxen, a wagon, a velvet vest, a watch, a clock, a gun, a thermometer, 35 cattle, 26 hogs and a 14-year-old horse. Sometime around March 1, Smith entered her property and herded off the remainder of Carsons' oxen, swine, cattle – and Letitia's milk cow – and sold them to himself and other neighboring landowners.

There is a complete handwritten listing of the Carsons' possessions and appraised values, as well as a list of individuals who purchased them and how much they paid, to the penny, for each. Comparisons with Carson's 1840 and 1850 census records provide a good measure of the Carsons' – and other Oregon Trail pioneers' -- lifestyle and achievements in Oregon. Because Letitia and David were probably illiterate, it is interesting to speculate on which books they owned, and why. Because the few books were bought cheap at auction by a neighbor, and not by Letitia or David's other relatives, who were also present and made purchases, it seems unlikely a family bible was among them.

The sale garnered \$1538.80, of which \$104.87 was spent by Letitia for her own bed and bedding, a skillet and an iron pot, six plates, two cows and a calf. To have her neighbors looking over these personal items as she was forced to publicly bid on them must have been a humiliating experience for Letitia and her children. It appears that sometime by mid-March she and the children left with a family headed south and relocated in Douglas County with the Elliff family in Upper Cow Creek Valley. Shortly thereafter Smith removed the livestock from her former home.

7) Carson vs. Smith

Uncle Tom's Cabin is Published, 1852

Judge & Attorneys, 1854

Jurors & Neighbors, 1854

First Trial: Back Wages, 1854

Second Trial: Theft of Cattle, 1856

Oregon Constitutional Convention, 1857

Oregon Constitution, 1857

Oregon Statehood, 1859

Civil War, 1860

In 1852, Reuben and Polly Holmes, who were first brought to Oregon as slaves, went to court to win their freedom and that of their children. In 1853, Chief Justice George H. Williams ruled against their previous owner, Nathaniel Ford, and declared the Holmes' children to be free and not subject to his ownership. Williams stated, "in as much as these colored children are in Oregon, where slavery does not legally exist, they are free." This law was still in effect until 1854, when, "in a general legislative housekeeping act," it was repealed (quite possibly without any specific intent to do so).

In July 1854, Letitia Carson filed her first legal action in Benton County against her long-time neighbor and Executor of David Carson's estate, Greenberry Smith. Her lawyer was Andrew J. Thayer and Smith was represented by John Kelsay. Smith had been a fellow Missouri resident and pioneer of 1845 and settled his land claim in close proximity to Carson's, shortly after their arrival. Smith had taken the Meek Cut-off and was delayed, while the Carsons had followed the established trapper and Indian trails along the Columbia River and were among the very first to arrive in the Willamette Valley

that year. Letitia based her legal claim on uncompensated work she had performed for Carson during their time in Oregon and Thayer issued several summons and subpoenas to long-time neighbors and fellow 1845 Oregon Trail pioneers, as witnesses. A jury decision of local white male peers, with several members of similar pioneer backgrounds, decided in Letitia's favor in October 1854 -- but for only a fraction of the amount she requested. Judgment, again by George H. Williams, Oregon Territory Chief Justice, was rendered in May 1855.

In May 1856 Letitia filed her second suit against Greenberry Smith, again through Andrew J. Thayer, this time alleging Smith had illegally taken a milk cow and cattle that rightfully belonged to her and sold them for his own benefit. Her court hearing was attended by several local and regional politicians of note, including Judge Williams, who again ruled in her behalf (and this time for an amount that was very close to what she and Thayer had requested) in October 1856.

The US Supreme Court Dred Scott Decision in March 1857 had a sobering effect on Oregon politics and legal affairs. The Court ruled, among other things, that Congress and territorial legislatures had no authority to prohibit slavery in federal territories: that only sovereign states could decide the issue of slavery. This ruling added much fuel to Oregon's efforts to become a State -- which was generally divided between the Lane Democrats, who favored slavery, the "Salem clique" Democrats who were willing to make both slavery and residency by free blacks illegal, and the Republicans, who were dead-set against slavery of any kind in Oregon and divided regarding black residency. In Washington DC the concern was that Oregon did not have enough citizens to become a State, and there was even more concern that Oregon might tip the nation's pre-Civil War balance of free states and slave states to an unfavorable advantage of one side or the other.

Shortly before the scheduled start of the Oregon constitutional convention on August 17, 1857, Judge Williams, a Democrat, decided to speak out publicly against the prospect of slavery in Oregon -- the only Democrat in Oregon to do so at that time. Williams wrote a long letter, published in its entirety in the *Oregon Statesman*, responding to what he perceived to be a growing number of Democrats favoring slavery in Oregon. Williams used his "Free State Letter" to strongly argue that slavery was not adaptable to Oregon's economy and climate. He further tried to establish his credibility with his intended readers by declaring his hatred for abolitionism or black equality, while affirming his belief that slavery should be left alone where it already existed. In fact, he considered southern slaveholders to be "as high minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as [could] be found in the world . . ." and maintained that abolitionists were unfairly persecuting them. He went on to argue that slavery would harm the existing labor force, writing, "Negroes are naturally lazy . . . [They] are an ignorant and degraded class of beings, and therefore they will vitiate to some extent those white men who are compelled to work or associate with them."

Williams also argued that the cost of bringing slaves to Oregon and maintaining them would be prohibitively expensive. Only a handful of Oregon's farmers could afford the cost of buying, transporting, and providing for slaves. Moreover, the territory's crops and economy generally were not suited for slavery or a plantation system such as with tobacco and cotton in the South and tobacco and hemp in Missouri. Williams further contended that while white wage laborers could be hired and paid to work only for the period they were needed -- such as planting and harvesting seasons -- slaves would have to be supported by their master the entire year. This led to the question "What could a negro fitted by nature for the blazing sun of Africa, do in an Oregon winter?" Williams also claimed that southern slaveholders would sell only their most troublesome slaves. Would these slaves, once in Oregon, escape to the free state of California or to the free territory of Washington? Or worse yet,

would they flee to the refuge of hostile Indians, perhaps forming an alliance to attack isolated and poorly protected white settlements in Oregon?

The Oregon Constitutional Convention began deliberations on August 17, 1857, and all Oregon newspapers covered its actions and debates in great detail. The August 29, 1857 *Weekly Oregonian*, for example, covered the ensuing debate on the statewide slavery issue with the headline: “The Nigger Question.” The Constitutional Convention was completed on September 18, 1857 and voted in by Oregon voters (“white and half-breed male adults”) on November 9.

The new Oregon Constitution – the only State to have adopted such a document before actually attaining statehood – contained a third exclusion clause, prohibiting new in-migration of African Americans, as well as making it illegal for them to own real estate or enter into business contracts. They were also denied the right to sue in court. This clause, Article 1 Section 35, was subject to popular vote, as were the adoption of a ban on slavery and adoption of the entire constitution. The exclusion clause received more popular votes than the approval of the constitution or the ban on slavery. About this time Letitia and her children seemingly went into hiding in rural Douglas County and weren’t listed in the 1860 census. Although enabling legislation was never passed and the clause was apparently voided by passage of the Federal 14th and 15th Amendments after the Civil War, the ban remained a part of Oregon’s constitution until it was finally repealed – after several major efforts – 70 years later, in 1927. In 1951, more than 100 years after the Carsons arrived in Soap Creek Valley, it finally became legal for whites to marry blacks (or Indians, Chinese, or Hawaiians) in Oregon.

The timeliness and magnitude of Letitia's two successful lawsuits against a politically and financially powerful white landowner cannot be overstated -- likewise, the immediate and successful attempt to erase these achievements from Oregon history at a critical time during a national debate, deserves much more attention.

8) Cow Creek Valley

Upper Cow Creek Donation Land Claims, 1853

Auntie Tish, Midwife & Housekeeper, 1853

Starveout Creek Goldmining, 1854

Rogue River Indian War, 1855

Battle of Hungry Hill, 1855

Hardy Elliff Home and Fort, 1855

The New Wagon Road, 1858

Upper Cow Creek Valley, 1860

After the sale of their land and possessions, Letitia and the children left their home of seven years and moved to the upper Cow Creek Valley in Douglas County. It is thought that she may have traveled south with the Nidey family, pioneers of 1852 who wintered in Santiam City (present-day Jefferson) and traveled south to Cow Creek Valley in late March and early April 1853. George Abdill was the first (and only) person to specifically write about her time in Douglas County; and he did so more than 40 years ago, in the *Umpqua Trapper*:

“From the evidence at hand, it would appear that David Carson was both Letitia’s owner, master and husband, and the father of her mulatto daughter and son. The trail then fades in the antiquity of time until “Aunt Tish” Carson and her children appear in Douglas County. For many years she reportedly made her home with the Hardy Elliff

family near Galesville (present vicinity of Azalea) in the upper Cow Creek Valley, where she worked for the Elliff family and also served as the community midwife.”

In 1853 the Umpqua Valley was hit with a plague of locusts, making it difficult and expensive to provide feed for livestock, and thereby obtain cheap meat, milk, and transportation. The problem was exacerbated by the heavy traffic on the California Trail that year caused by the gold mining boom in southern Oregon and northern California; the military units contending with the late summer events of the Table Rocks Indian War; and the influx of Oregon Trail pioneers traveling northward in the fall.

A story from that time is that Letitia was staying with the Nidey family women and girls when the men were away from camp for several days. At some point the girls were playing outside their tent when they were accosted by a group of Indian men on horseback, acting in a hostile manner. Letitia is said to have emerged from the tent, a “large coal-black woman with a deep voice,” brandishing a carving knife or a cleaver and frightened the men away, thereby saving the girls. The Indians were said to be shocked by the appearance of a [relatively] big, loud, threatening woman with black skin and a weapon and reacted as if seeing a ghost or evil spirit. This is a story that has survived for more than 170 years, with minor variations, and likely has a basis in fact.

During the August and September 1853 Rogue River Indian War, Hardy Elliff had served as a Captain in the Oregon Militia and commanded forces under Gen. Joseph Lane at Table Rocks. On November 15, 1853, 18-year-old Nidey niece, Melvina Baker, married 28-year-old Hardy Elliff. On December 16, they filed a 320-acre Donation Land Claim along the California Trail (Territorial Road), including the Nidey’s campsite and Elliff’s cabin. According to granddaughter, Bess Clough, in 1961, their first child was born nine months later:

“Her first child, Alice, was born in the fall of 1854 in the Elliff cabin with the help of Mrs. Fanny Levens, a mid-wife, and Letitia “Aunt Tish” Carson, a Negress who lived with the Elliffs.”

In early October 1855, racial warfare between Indians and whites in southern Oregon abruptly resumed, resulting in the murder and mutilation of several families (both Indian and white), widespread looting of cattle, and the burning of most of the barns, haystacks, and outbuildings in Cow Creek Valley. The open warfare culminated in the deadly “Battle of Hungry Hill” on October 31 and November 1, less than 20 miles from the Elliff home.

The winter of 1855-1856 was particularly harsh, with deep snows and heavy freezes. Gov. Curry had called for a militia to fight the Indians, resulting in two battalions of mounted volunteers. The Elliff home became “Fort Elliff” to local families who stayed there during the initial hostilities, but according to Bess Clough, Hardy took Melvina, baby Alice, “Aunt Tish Carson and small son Jack, freed Negro slaves” (no mention of Martha), to “the Galesville Stockade where they spent nine months fortified up from the Indians.”

During this time Capt. Laban Buoy and Co. B, Lane County, were stationed at “Camp Elliff” for the winter. Their assigned duty was to keep the Territorial Road open to military and commercial traffic from Galesville to Canyonville. By springtime warfare had all but ended and most of the remaining Indians in southwest Oregon were sent north to reservations along the Oregon Coast and in Yamhill County. The “ethnic cleansing” of southwest Oregon was complete, having been accomplished in five years. This is the political and social environment Letitia and her children first experienced during those years of long, cold winters.

On March 6, 1857, the US Supreme Court ruled in Dred Scott vs. Sandford that African Americans, whether free or enslaved, could not become American citizens or bring suit in a federal court. On November 9, 1857, Oregon adopted its State Constitution by popular vote, making it illegal for black people to become permanent residents of Oregon, to own property or engage in business here, or file a suit in a court of law. Also, slavery was illegal. The Oregon State Constitution is the only one in US history written before acquiring statehood, or that included racial exclusionary laws among its statutes.

On February 14, 1859, Oregon became a State and formally adopted its 1857 Constitution. Letitia and her children – possibly by design -- are not found in Mrs. Harry Hiday's 1974 transcription of the 1860 Douglas County US Census records, although they most likely continued living in Douglas County during that time. The following year, on April 12, 1861, Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter in South Carolina and the Civil War had officially begun.

9) Letitia Creek

The Homestead Act of 1862

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863

Homestead Claim #108, 1863

South Myrtle Creek Community, 1863

Mary Alice is Born, 1864

US Homestead Patent #39, 1868

Martha Gets Married, 1868

Letitia & Lisette, 1869

Grandkids, Nieces & Nephews

Jack Gets into Trouble, 1877

Jack is Given the Land, 1884

The Lavadours Move to Umatilla, 1887

Letitia is Buried in Stephens Cemetery, 1888

On June 17, 1863 Letitia Carson made a Homestead claim of 154 acres along South Myrtle Creek, about 10 miles due north of the Lavadour Ranch, separated only by Old Baldy (present-day Bland Mountain) and a narrow portion of Days Creek Valley. "Lavadour Gap" provided a convenient crossing point. The area was covered with foot and pack trails and connected by wagon roads, thanks in large part to the Indians who had lived there until the early 1850s and the Metis farmers, miners and trappers and Oregon Trail pioneers who had followed. The Carson and Lavadour properties were just an hour or two apart by horseback and could be readily walked or jogged on foot in three or four hours.

On January 19, 1868 Narcisse Lavadour ("a half [Breed] Indian Man of Douglas County") married Martha Carson ("a half [Breed] Negro Woman of Douglas County") in the South Umpqua home of Peter GrosLouis. Witnesses included Julius Cardwell and Basil Courville, but Martha's brother Jack and mother Letitia were not officially represented. Did they even attend the wedding? Was one or both missing for reasons of health, family dispute, or being away on business? Or was illiteracy or religion a factor, and neither wanted to sign anything? Or was it a big, happy occasion, fondly remembered by all members of both families who attended?

On June 19, 1868, six months later, Letitia obtained clear title to her property. A year after that, on September 19, Martha and Narcisse had their first child together, baby Agnes. Was Letitia the midwife? Or did the Lavadour women step in on that account, now that Martha was a member of their family? The 1869 County Tax Roll showed Letitia with 39 cows, 4 pigs, and a horse. The new family had plenty to eat.

In the 1870 Myrtle Creek Census, “Tisha” Carson and her son “Jackson” maintain Dwelling # 40: he as a 19-year-old Mulatto farmer with no assets, born in “Eutah Ter,” and she as a 52-year-old Black Housekeeper, with \$1,000 worth of real estate and another \$625 in taxable personal property.

In 1871 Martha and Narcisse’s second child and first boy, Ira, was born. On June 8, 1873 sister Ada was born. Bert was born in 1875, followed by Ida on June 6, 1877. By that time Letitia had seven grandchildren, ages just born to 13, by way of her daughter, Martha. The children’s four grandparents had deep roots in three different continents: a former African American slave, a Walla Walla Indian, a French Canadian, and an Irish immigrant – and they were able to spend their childhoods with three of them. It is difficult to imagine the wonderful family stories they must have listened to from their parents and grandparents. In 1879 Martha and Narcisse had another baby, Fred, and in 1882 daughter Millie was born.

By the time Letitia’s Homestead was certified in 1868, she had “built a house thereon of hewn logs about 18 x 22 feet 1 ½ stories high two doors and two windows a comfortable house to live in.” Additional improvements were described as “built a barn granary smoke house and has planted about 100 fruit trees.” That had been more than 10 years earlier, though. Maybe the house and barn had been enlarged or improved since then; if the fruit trees had survived the 1869 wildfires, they would all be 10 years older and bearing fruit; the cattle herd was likely larger or more commercially viable than the 39 cows of 10 years earlier, too. More work for teenagers and older children. Letitia was in her 60’s now.

On the 1880 Canyonville District Census, Joseph was listed as 84 years old and “1/4 Indian” and Lisette as 75, “full-blooded Indian, born Wash. Terr.” That is probably not an accurate age for Lisette, though, as she would have had to be in her 50’s when Joseph, Jr. (“24, 5/8ths Indian”) and Scott (“22, 5/8ths Indian”) were born. It is more likely that the 1817 date on her tombstone is accurate, although the tombstone birthdate for Joseph might be less accurate than the 1880 census data, which indicates a 1796 birthdate – on the other hand, some family members believe that Joseph may have actually been older than 101 when he died.

Narcisse, Martha and their children were also listed on the 1880 Canyonville District Census, but with Martha being listed as “white” and their children – including Mary Alice, who was ¾ white and ¼ black – as “5/16ths Indian.” This is very curious as it was common knowledge that Martha was ½ black and that all of her children were ¼ black.

On January 11, 1883 Joseph Jr. married his sister-in-law Martha’s daughter, Mary Alice Bigham. Now Letitia’s daughter and all of her grandchildren were named Lavadour; and now Lisette had both Martha and Martha’s daughter as daughter-in-laws.

On July 31, 1884 Letitia signed her property over to her 35-year-old bachelor son -- whom she refers to as “Andrew” -- probably due to her age and possibly her health; perhaps timed to help him out of a jam or for some tax reason. There is no mention of livestock. In the same document Letitia leaves “\$5 after my death to my daughter Martha Jane.” This seems to be the first instance in which Martha is referred to with a middle name, and Jack as “Andrew.”

On May 1, 1885 Elmer Leonard Lavadour was born to Joseph Jr. and Mary Alice. This was Martha’s first grandchild and would be the only great-grandchild that Letitia would ever meet. Letitia Carson died in 1889 and is buried in Bryant [or Stephens] Pioneer Cemetery, next to her son, who died as lifelong bachelor in 1919. The cemetery is small, mostly including the pioneer Cardwell family, and

sits on a hill above South Myrtle Creek; a few miles downstream from its Letitia Creek tributary, named for the owner of the Homestead through which it flows. A dark brown, nearly black, "soil type" found along the creek also bears her name, though somehow misspelled as "Lettia soil." The locals have always called it "Tish Creek," though most of them today have only recently learned of "Aunt Tish," for whom it is named.

10) Umatilla Allotments

The Murder of Elijah Hedding, 1844

The Whitman Massacre, 1847

The Murder & Mutilation of Peopeomoxmox, 1852

Lavadours Claim Allotments on Umatilla Reservation, 1886

Jack Sells Family Farm, 1891

Miners Strike Gold on Carson Property, 1892

Martha is Buried in Umatilla County, 1911

Jack is Buried in Stephens Cemetery, 1922

1885 was a turning point in the lives of the Carson and Lavadour families – that was the year the Slater Act was negotiated in Washington DC by an Oregon Senator from Corvallis, James A. Slater. The 1885 Slater Act was specific to the Umatilla Reservation – the remnants of Lisette's and her older children's ancestral homelands – and provided for individual claims of land for Walla Walla, Cayuse, and Umatilla tribal members of 160 free acres per family, or 80 acres per single adult. This was a precursor to the 1887 Dawes Act, which essentially expanded the Slater experiment to most other reservations in the US. The main requirement for an allotment, other than being a Tribal member, was that you had to live on the land for 25 years in order to receive clear title.

All of Lisette's sons -- Narcisse, Xavier, Scott, and Joseph, Jr. – and their families moved from Douglas County to file allotment claims on the Umatilla Reservation. It appears as if they all moved east about the same time, with the summer of 1886 being a likely time of transition. On the other hand, all of the daughters – Angelique, Emelie, and Isabelle – and their families, the McGinnesses, Rondeaus and Frenches, chose to remain in Douglas County instead.

For a number of generations, many descendants and relatives of Lisette Lavadour have believed her to be a daughter of Peopeomoxmox, the renowned Walla Walla leader that was brutally murdered and his body mutilated for "souvenirs" by Oregon Territory militia members on December 7, 1855. No documentation is currently known to support this relationship, but it seems entirely possible given that it has been widely repeated by a number of family members and local historians and has never been disproved.

Lisette's birth name was Tawasaqklie, which means "one who gets her work done early" in the Walla Walla Sahaptin language. Tawasaqklie's English name became Lisette Wallawalla and she is thought to have been born about 1817. Her granddaughter and Lavadour family historian, Martha Lavadour Kirk, does not mention any direct family relationship to Peopeomoxmox, but was quoted as saying Tawasaqklie's sisters' names were: "Mrs. Eats-No-Meat, Mrs. Young Chief, Mrs. Matches, Mrs. Susie Liberty, Mrs. Yum-Sum-kin, and I'm not sure about Annie Hair – Poker Jim was Annie Hair's father – Annie was related somehow."

Isaac Stevens, while traveling east to the United States on business in 1843, met with Peopeomoxmox and described him as having a "dignified manner" and owning "over 2,000 horses, besides many cattle." The Oregon Indians of the Columbia Plateau – the Walla Walla, Umatilla, Palus, Cayuse, Nez
Zybach Letitia Carson Summary Outline 20230417

Perce, Yakama and Klikitat – measured their wealth in horses; Peopeomoxmox was a very wealthy man and said to be atypically generous to others less fortunate.

By the time of Stevens' visit, Lisette was married to French Canadian fur trapper Joseph Lavadour and they had four children: Angelique, born April 15, 1839; Narcisse – who married Martha Carson and became a stepfather to Mary Alice Bigham in 1868 – born January 1, 1840; Emelie (“Nellie”), born 1841; and "Uncle X" Xavier, born April 14, 1842. Joseph was originally from Quebec and had traveled west as an employee of the North West Company and of the Hudson's Bay Co. (HBC).

The Lavadours would have been comfortable and successful in either environment – whether the horse- and root-centric culture of the Walla Walla or the hunting, trapping and farming culture of the Metis. Both cultures routinely traveled long distances, lived off the land, and traded extensively; and often among one another. Lisette would have likely been very skilled in managing livestock, horse-trading and horseback riding. Also, undoubtedly, in skinning, tanning and butchering, root harvesting, cooking, braiding rope, leatherwork and weaving. Joseph was undoubtedly adept at traveling by horseback or by canoe, and was an expert hunter, trapper, trader, and fisherman. Between the two of them they were fluent in Sahaptin, French, English, and Chinuk wawa -- the relative values of currencies in use by each of those cultures -- and were likely familiar and conversant in other native languages as well. For the 1830s and 1840s, the Lavadours were as capable of surviving comfortably as about any family in the Oregon Country during those years.

Again, assuming that Lisette was truly the daughter of Peopeomoxmox – and we have little evidence to believe otherwise -- then her younger brother (or half-brother) would have been his son, Toyanhu, who was 16 years old in 1843. The teen-ager had been sent by his father to the Methodist Mission in the Willamette Valley “to learn English,” where his name was changed to “Elijah Hedding.” The 1845 murder of Elijah Hedding in California by a white American named Grove Crook has been given as one of the galvanizing factors leading to the 1847 Whitman Massacre (also called the Walla Walla Massacre), and to the subsequent Cayuse Indian War; which in turn were said to directly contribute to a galvanizing effort in Washington DC to create Oregon Territory in 1849, the Oregon Land Act in 1850 and, ultimately, Oregon statehood in 1859.