

Dorris Ranch Living History Program

Pre-Visit Info



To Students and Educators,

Welcome to the Dorris Ranch Living History Program. What you will see during your visit is a reconstruction of the Masterson family Donation Land Claim cabin, a pioneer wagon, a Hudson's Bay fur trapper's encampment and a Kalapuya Plank House. You will experience what life was like for these groups during the years 1820-1855.

History is about people and their experiences in everyday life. During the time you spend at Dorris Ranch you will be journeying back in time to discover firsthand what life was like for the emigrant fresh off the Oregon Trail, the fur trapper making their way through the territory searching for animal pelts and the indigenous populations who made the area around Dorris Ranch their home for thousands of years.

The following facts are a good place to start your journey into the past:

Oregon Trail Pioneers: the Masterson Family

- The Masterson family left Kentucky and arrived in the Oregon Territory in the fall of 1851.
- The Masterson family claimed 320 acres on the land we now call Dorris Ranch in the fall of 1852.
- Most pioneers like the Masterson's started the Oregon Trail in St. Joseph or Independence, Missouri.
- Indian attacks were relatively rare on the Oregon Trail.
- To arrive before winter pioneers timed their departure to late spring.
- The journey from Missouri to the Oregon Territory was approximately 2,000 miles and took 4 to 6 months to complete.

Hudson's Bay Company Trapper

- A trapper was a person who lived on the land, traveling throughout the region trapping animals to sell their furs at company forts.
- Their combined territory reached to the Arctic Ocean in the north and to the Pacific Ocean in the west.
- The Hudson's Bay Company employed 400-500 trappers. They trapped throughout the mountains and valleys of the Oregon Territory, which includes present day Oregon, Washington and Idaho.
- Hudson's Bay Company trappers were well prepared to spend months, if not all year in the wilderness without the comforts of civilization.
- The trappers tied red sashes around their pants to designate them as trustworthy members of the Hudson's Bay Company.
- They often traded their brightly colored coats, beads, and buttons for furs and food.

Kalapuya

- The Dorris Ranch site was inhabited by Native Americans for at least 10,000 years.
- The Kalapuya band that inhabited this area was the Winefelly tribe.
- The Kalapuya were a peaceful, seminomadic tribe that hunted and gathered food, which varied from roots, seeds, nuts and berries, to fish and small game.
- Several families would live together in Plank houses.
- Clothes were made from deer and furs.
- Young boys and girls would go on a "spirit quest" for five days, alone. When they returned they were considered adults.

Dorris Ranch and its connection to the past

Oregon Trail

On Sept. 27, 1850 the United States congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act. The law granted 320 acres to every unmarried white male citizen over the age of eighteen and 640 acres to every married couple arriving in the Oregon territory before Dec. 1, 1850. Those arriving after this date were granted half the amount.

The journey to the Oregon territory was long and hard. Most emigrants would travel over 2000 miles carrying all their earthly possessions in one wagon. But the journey was only the beginning for the emigrant. After securing a land claim they had to build shelter, till and clear land and retain a sustainable food source for their family. The Donation Land Claim Act brought hundreds of thousands of settlers into the new area known as the Oregon Territory. The men, women, and children who made this journey were commonly referred to as pioneers, homesteaders or emigrants.

The Masterson Family and the Dorris Ranch Land

William A. Masterson was born in Kentucky on December 18, 1813. He married Eliza Jane Violet on November 19, 1842 in Kentucky, and they then moved to Missouri, residing there until 1851. In April of that year, with their five young children in tow (James, Daniel, George, Elizabeth, and Robert A.), they crossed the plains with ox teams in the Masterson train, of which William was captain. The train included his brother, Robert Masterson, Walker Young, and Robert Campbell, arriving in Oregon on September 18, 1851. They traveled down the Columbia River from The Dalles (where his brother, Robert settled) to Portland and proceeded up the Willamette Valley and settled their 320-acre Donation Land Claim Number 61, Notification Number 3730, on October 1, 1852. This beautiful property located south of Springfield, on the Willamette River, is now known as Dorris Ranch.

Here the Masterton's built a cabin and added three more children (William, McClelland, and Lucy) to their flock, making them a family of 10, living in a cabin no larger than the one we have built at Dorris Ranch. William busied himself as a brick maker; one brick has been found on the grounds of Dorris Ranch near our current building site. In addition, he was a millwright, a contractor, and a farmer; records indicate that he was also a slave owner in Missouri before his trip to Oregon.

There is not much written information about the family's life at the cabin. We do know that William traveled to other areas of the state, doing work as a millwright. He built the Eagle mills in Ashland, Oregon, and many other mills in Lane County. William and Eliza were charter members of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the first church in Eugene; the original site

was a lot on the southeast corner of Sixth and Pearl, purchased from Eugene and Mary Skinner for \$50 in 1856. William was the first ordained ruling elder of this church.

The facts show that education must have been very important to William and Eliza who, as charter members of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, helped build Columbia College, the first college in Eugene, for which the current College Hill in Eugene is named.

Records indicate that in 1856, William bought 160 acres in what is now southwest Eugene (College Hill). On this property they planted wheat, oats, and flax, and they developed an orchard which included bellflower and lady apple trees, locust trees, walnut, filbert, and peach trees. The soil in that area contained much clay, and fruit and nut trees were more productive than other crops. Their ninth child, Mary, was the first to be born in this house, and two more children were soon added to the family, bringing the total to eleven. This house still stands at 2050 Madison Street.

Kalapuya

The Kalapuya people have existed for thousands of years in and around the area that encompasses Dorris Ranch. The Kalapuya primarily inhabited the Willamette Valley, with spill over into the Umpqua River drainage. Kalapuya were made up of 13 distinct bands speaking different dialects of the same language. The bands consisted of clusters of closely related villages sharing common territory (usually a river basin) and speaking a similar dialect. The band that inhabited the area around Dorris Ranch was known as the Winefelly. The Winefelly most likely spoke the Mary's River (Corvallis) dialect of Kalapuya. The Kalapuya had numerous village sites one being located at the confluence of the Coast Fork and North Fork of the Willamette River.

A thousand years ago the area around Dorris Ranch was much different than it is today. Most of the Willamette Valley was made up of six foot tall bunch grasses which the Kalapuya annually burned to increase plant production and improve animal habitat. Open camas meadows, oak groves and meandering streams flowed through vast wetlands. These varying ecosystems supported a variety of food sources and materials for manufacturing goods. In the tall bunch grasses basket materials were harvested. In the open meadows, camas bulbs were dug and tar weed seeds were collected. In the oak groves the acorns were gathered. The river provided waterfowl, fish, and eels. Small and large game were also taken. In the summer and early fall the Kalapuya lived on mounds located along small streams. On these mounds, temporary huts were built out of bent willow poles covered by grass mats of reed and cattail.

The Winefelly people had a mainly vegetable diet. The most important vegetable plant was that of the camas bulb. Camas bulbs were dug with digging sticks in the spring and pit oven roasted, dried, and pressed into cakes. The cakes could then be traded to neighboring tribes for items like obsidian from the Cascade Mountains, or shell and sea otter pelts from the coast. Other vegetable sources the Winefelly relied on were the filbert, tarweed seeds, and various berries. Meat sources consisted of deer, and elk taken with the aid of bow and arrow and

snare. In the fall migrating water fowl like geese and ducks were taken with the aid of tulle duck decoys, nets and their eggs were gathered. Smaller mammals were trapped with snares and dead fall traps. Fish were caught with spear, dip nets and hand line in the rivers, lakes and eels were taken by hand with the aid of torch light at night. Insects were gathered and eaten, grasshoppers, crickets and a species of caterpillar as well as honey from bees.

In the late fall and early winter the bands would move upland to areas, living in semi-subterranean structures known as plank houses. These houses were made of split cedar planks and usually contained a number of families and cooking fires. During the long winter months the Kalapuya relied mainly on stored food supplies, manufactured and repaired their gear and entertained themselves with stories and games. Storytelling was an important part of the Kalapuya's way of life, for it passes on knowledge and values.

The Kalapuya lived a relatively peaceful existence for thousands of years until the introduction of European diseases in the 1780's. Diseases such as smallpox and malaria devastated the population from 3500 to less than 100 in the 1870's. In the mid 1870's the Kalapuya were forced by the United States government onto the Grande Ronde and Siletz reservations where many still live today. Currently the Kalapuya are building an active tribal life. Locally at east Alton Baker Park in Eugene one can visit the renamed Whilamut Natural Area and view the talking stone exhibit, which reintroduces the Kalapuya words into the environment in a beautiful way.

Hudson's Bay Company Trapper

The business of trapping animals for their furs in and around Dorris Ranch took place from the early 1800's up to the late 1840's. Although a wide variety of fur bearing animals were trapped, beaver was the most sought after animal. Beaver pelts were in high demand in Europe primarily for the fashionable hats. Two types of trapping groups sought after this highly prized commodity-the freeman and the company trapper.

The freeman were self-employed and the company trapper was an employee of a particular company like the Pacific, Astorian, Northwest or Hudson's Bay. The earliest trapping by non-natives in the vicinity of Dorris Ranch was in 1812 by the Pacific Fur Company's Donald McKenzie, for whom the McKenzie River is named. In November of the same year Astorian's William Wallace and JC Halsey made their way to the headwaters of the Willamette River. In 1819 several temporary trading posts established by Thomas McKay were set up at the junction of the McKenzie and Willamette Rives (north of present day Eugene) to trade with the local Indians. In 1812 the British Hudson's Bay Company built Fort Vancouver on the north bank of the Columbia River, near present day Vancouver, Washington and monopolized the fur trade on the pacific slope covering present day British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. This large commerce headquarters stocked supplies for trappers, the Indians and settler trade and for 20 to 30 company posts.

The trapping of furs by the Hudson's Bay Company was done in brigades of 50-200 people including men, women and children of many nationalities including French-Canadians, Metis, Hawaiians, Scots and English. The brigade originated out of Fort Vancouver and headed south picking up horses and traveling down the Willamette Valley and into northern California, trapping along the way. The brigades would leave in late June and trap all year returning the following June. By the late 1830's and 40's the fur trade was in decline and beaver fur hats were being replaced with silk hats. As a result of the heavy trapping the beaver populations were in decline. American settlers began moving into Oregon and the era of profitable company trapping came to an end. Americans pushed the British out, Oregon became a state and some trappers settled into a life of farming.

What Do You Know About Dorris Ranch?

From your reading, answer the following questions.

1. The trappers that worked in the area of present day Dorris Ranch were employed by a large British Company. What was the name of that company?

2. Many types of animal skins were taken in trade. The trappers most wanted what kind of animal skin?

3. In 1850 the United States Congress passed a bill that gave individuals large sums of land. What was this bill called?

4. What was the name of the tribe that lived near present day Dorris Ranch?

5. The Kalapuya hunted and gathered plants and animals, name two.
1. _____ 2. _____

Words to know

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| A. Donation Land Claim | E. Camas |
| B. Emigrant | F. Hudson's Bay |
| C. Oregon Trail | G. Beaver |
| D. Kalapuya | H. Felt Hat |

1. The trappers who did not work for a company were called? _____

2. Mr. Masterson made something that was used to build buildings. We even found one at Dorris Ranch, what was this?

3. When the Kalapuya lived near Dorris Ranch, much of the Willamette Valley region was made up of this kind of geography. _____

4. The main Hudson's Bay Company fort near Dorris Ranch was ? _____

5. Today you can visit Kalapuyan talking stones at this park in Eugene.

6. What was very important to the Masterson parents William and Eliza?

Chinook Jargon

At one time many different types of people lived in and around the area that is now Dorris Ranch. Fur Trappers of many nationalities, Native Americans and Homesteaders all made the Willamette Valley their home in the early to mid-1800. The question then becomes, how did all these people communicate? To solve this problem a language of the fur trade was created. It was called "Chinook Jargon".

Would you like to win a prize when you visit the Dorris Ranch Living History Program? At the beginning of the tour, raise your hand and volunteer that you can count from 1-10 in Chinook Jargon.

Below you will find the words for the numbers one to ten. They are pronounced the way they are spelled, just sound them out. GOOD LUCK!

Go for it and win a prize!

Ikt -one

Taghum (tagum) -six

Mokst- two

Sinamokst – seven

Klone – three

Stotekin – eight

Lakit- four

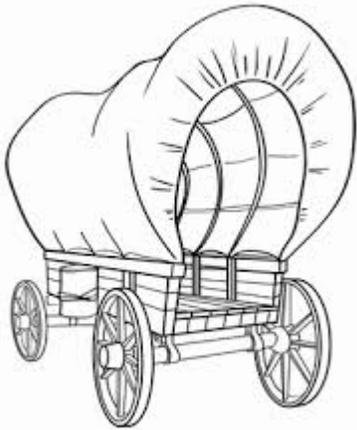
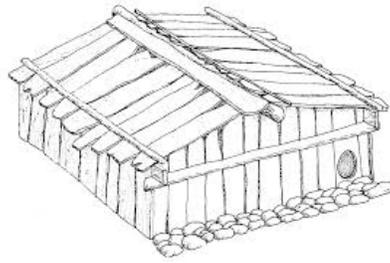
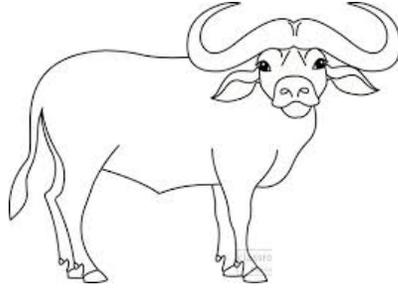
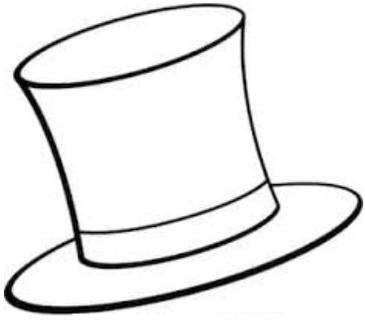
Kwaist – nine

Kwinnum – five

Tahtlum (tatlum)- ten

After Visit Activities

What is it?



Dorris Ranch Word Search

1. Filbert
2. Oxen
3. Trapper
4. Wagon
5. Beaver
6. Hat
7. Trap
8. Deer
9. Camas
10. Pelt
11. Yoke

J	P	U	K	H	A	T	D	W	T
B	E	A	V	E	R	T	J	D	R
F	L	H	D	E	E	R	R	G	A
D	T	O	B	Q	W	D	S	A	P
M	D	L	E	S	A	M	A	C	P
T	I	I	K	U	G	L	D	F	E
F	S	V	O	E	O	X	E	N	R
F	R	Z	Y	W	N	B	A	L	G