

Sams Valley **By Dennis Powers**

Eleven miles north of Medford at Highway 234 and Antioch Road lies the unincorporated community of Sams Valley. The first settlers in the area who owned large ranches were Enoch Pelton and Jose Sizemore, who arrived in the early 1850s. The James Pankey family from Tennessee also settled there, had numerous children, and were part of the large landholding families. The Fitzgerald family began growing fruits and vegetables in the late 1870s on a 320-acre parcel.

The community was first named "Moonville," when Andrew Moon settled there in the late 1850s and established a general store; the wooden structure also housed Arad Stanley's drugstore, also the local doctor in the area. A tin shop and blacksmith shop were part of the hamlet. The boundaries of Sams Valley were generally considered to be now Ramsey Road to the west and Table Rock Road or Meadows Road to the east.

Sams Valley was named in honor of Chief Sam of the Rogue River tribe. He signed the peace treaty in the mid-1850s that ended the hostilities between the settlers and Indians, lived on the Table Rock reservation, and subsequently was removed with the tribe in 1856 to southeastern Oregon. Located five miles from Gold Hill on Highway 234, the rich valley produced grains, livestock, dairy products, vegetables, and other products that were wagoned to Gold Hill and outlying areas.

Sams Valley was as an important provider of food for the many miners and settlers that had flooded into the Rogue River area. Established in 1861 in a log building on Sams Valley Road, its first school was Sams Creek School; the next one was Pankey School that started in 1877. When the railroad chose Gold Hill, Central Point, and then Medford for its stations and right-of-ways in 1884, these towns surpassed Sams Valley in prominence. Nearby Gold Hill became the trading center for the vicinity, and even a few prominent families left for that town. The Ray brother's construction of Gold Ray Dam in 1903 with its ensuing supply of hydroelectric power furthered solidified Gold Hill's then prominence.

The important agricultural base continued, however, as most families stayed in an endeavor that they knew and enjoyed. A noted horseman, marksman, and farmer, C.C. McClendon designed and built his farm house--which still exists--in 1856. Tresham Lane was named for Bill Tresham and his three sons who owned a 160-acre ranch and threshing equipment; they traveled throughout the Valley during the season to work the farms with their threshers.

Another important settler was "Grandpa" Hinrich Holst and his wife, who left Minnesota in the 1890s and settled in Sams Valley. A farmer who also became the local banker, he loaned money--and like Thomas Chavner of Gold Hill--would foreclose when debts could not be repaid, although he did give a grace period or two. Grandpa Holst celebrated his 80th birthday in 1932 and invited nearly everyone that he knew to his annual birthday party; over 235 family, relatives, and friends attended this one. Grandpa was really

celebrating, however, his 79th birthday at the time. He felt that when he was born, he was already a year old, so each year he celebrated one year early.

Located in Pankey Cemetery on Ramsey Road is the tall monument to “H. Holst.” He regularly walked to the cemetery in the 1930s from his home and made a plot plan of all of the graves. The pioneering Pankeys donated the land for the cemetery, which dates back to 1863.

Although the precise boundaries of Sams Valley can depend on the resident, it is still dominated by large farms, ranches, orchards, acreage, and now includes vineyards. The number of working farms has extensively decreased, as commuting to nearby Central Point and Medford replaced farming as the area’s main livelihood. Its peaceful nature, however, and the generations of families who live there still stand out.

Sources: “Rural and Suburban Lands Element: Sams Valley Rural Service Center,” at [Sams Valley History](#); Paul Fattig, “Speaking up for Sams Valley, *Mail Tribune*, September 19, 1999, at [Additional Background](#); Dennis Powers, “Images of America: Gold Hill,” Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, South Carolina, 2010, pgs. 79-84.