

# McConnel Family

Contributed by Sharon McConnel April 20, 2012.

Benjamin "Ben" Casner and Elizabeth P. (Hall) McConnel



Benjamin "Ben" Casner McConnel was born on January 18, 1846 in Guernsey County, Ohio to William and Nancy (Graham) McConnel. He was their fourth child. His namesake was given to him after his mother's sister, Margaret (Graham) Casner's husband who was Benjamin Casner. In 1893, Benjamin inherited from his aunt's estate a sum of \$300 because of that namesake of Benjamin Casner (Courtesy of a Graham Family researcher, Carol Bryant). At the age of two, Benjamin's family migrated to the Southeastern section of Iowa to Birmingham in Van Buren County. His family didn't traveled alone because his mother's father, his grandfather, Joseph Graham, and second wife, Letitia, along with their teenage sons, Joseph, Jr. and Simon, moved with them. It was probable that the Casners came with them as well, nonetheless, by 1850 census, they were all accounted for, and then ten years later the McConnels were found further west to Wayne County, Iowa.

On June 19, 1867, Benjamin married Miss Elizabeth Hall of Sheridan, Lucas County, Iowa (Extracted from the family Bible). Miss Hall was the daughter of Nathan and Permelia (Matthews) Hall. She was their third child. Her eldest sister, Sarah (Hall) Dey and husband, John Dey, acted as witnesses to their ceremony. A little over nineteen months later, Benjamin and Elizabeth had their first child, William Nathan McConnel on February 1, 1869 in Lucas County, Iowa.

The Dixie or "Lower Boise" Homestead

In April 1869, Benjamin, Elizabeth, and their almost three months old, William, along with Benjamin's brother, John Wesley traveled to the newly formed territory of Idaho. In the biography of Benjamin's son, Walter had written his family traveled to Idaho:

*... Benjamin C. McConnel, located on one hundred and sixty acres of raw land in Canyon county, on which he raised cattle and cut wild hay, for there was no alfalfa grown here in thos day. His brothers, John and Dave McConnel, were associated with him in this work and they had between five and six hundred head of cattle. Benjamin C. and John McConnel came to Idaho in 1869, traveling by rail to Green River, Wyoming, and by stage the remainder of the way. Dave McConnel reached Idaho in the early '60s and settled at Emmett, on the old Merve Gill place of one hundred sixty acres, which he afterward sold and then farmed with his brother Benjamin following the latter's arrival in Idaho (History of Idaho: The Gem of the Mountains (1920), p.749).*

In 1870, Benjamin, Elizabeth, young "Will" and brothers, David K. and John W. were enumerated in the same household with David as the head of household. David's occupation was a farmer while Benjamin, a "stock-raising," and John simply "works on farm." Elizabeth was into "keeping house" and watching over her toddler, "Will." Nevertheless, the

agriculture census showed a greater picture about their farm and stock raising life in Idaho. The household produced that year 2500 pounds of butter, which undoubtedly made by Elizabeth. Boise City being roughly 20 miles upstream from their homestead was probable closest location, and most likely the marketplace to sell their commodity. It was also possible these men went on occasional excursion to Sliver City some 40+/- miles. An Idahoan historian, Mildretta Hamilton Adams explained the process of how butter was made by the local ranch families in Owyhee County. It was made " from cream cooled in a clear, cold spring, 'salted it down' in crocks, and hauled it quantities to the mining camps. [In the] year of 1867, butter sold [for] \$1.35 per lb." (Historic Sliver City: The Story of the Owyhees). Also, reported in that same agriculture census, the McConnel Brothers had owned four horses, 44 heads of milk cows, 80 heads of "other cattle," and 11 heads of swine. Eventually, the McConnel Brothers went different directions in life. "Benjamin C. McConnel, after about ten years in this state, removed to the mouth of the Boise river and the brothers each then went into business independently" (History of Idaho: The Gem of the Mountains (1920), p.749). The homestead was located six miles downstream from Caldwell and two miles upstream from the present-day Notus. The location was a part of the "Lower Boise" P.O., originally established in 1869 by James Tucker. Benjamin received his homestead patent of the "old Judson place" in March 1876, where he continued to improve his farm and engaged in stock-raising.

Over the next ten years, Benjamin and Elizabeth had four more children, Charles E. (born July 21, 1871), Harlan Benjamin (born November 1, 1873), Walter Hall (born October 10, 1876), and Arthur Guy (born January 13, 1879), all of Ada County, Idaho.

Life on the unruly territory of Idaho had its grand tales to be told by every early pioneers, but one story was told by Harry McConnel about some of the frightening times that occurred in the early days, he wrote:

*My grandmother told me when I was about seven years old a story I remember well. During Indian scares or reported Indian troubles in the vicinity, all the men would be assembled, for possible combat, to go to the area where trouble was reported. This would leave the women and children alone and, therefore, they would be in danger and unprotected. During such times she would take the children, some blankets, and cold roast beef, which she tried to keep on hand, down into the brush along the river. There they would stay until the men returned. She would gather up prepared food to take as, obviously, they could not have a fire.*

Another story was preserved from the timeline as above story, told by the McConnel Family about Benjamin's brother, John Wesley, and his whirled-wind romance with a local neighbor girl, Hester Ann Bowman. This story was re-told by John's granddaughter, Lorena Estlow Hyde:

*One day, in the spring of 1875 a party of neighbors living in the vicinity of Caldwell were gathering wild geese eggs on the Dixie slough about three miles west of Caldwell. Among the party was Capt. Bowman, a Confederate officer, and John W. McConnel, a fiery Republican, whose elder brother fought for the Union, and who was in love with Hester, the fifteen year old daughter of Capt. Bowman.*

*Realizing that her father's consent could never be obtained, the young couple decided to take advantage of the opportunity to elope which the day's sport afforded. With the knowledge of the girl's mother and an uncle plans were made very carefully. Two fast saddle horses were in readiness, the side saddle of one being camouflaged with a pack. When the time for the departure arrived, the girl slipped into her riding skirt, the pack removed quickly from the side saddle, and they were off. Capt. Bowman and his sons ran for their guns, which Mrs. Bowman and the uncle had taken the precaution to hide, and by the time pursuit was organized the young couple had too long a start to make capture possible.*

*There were no bridges crossing the Boise at the time, but the ferry which was near the present highway bridge was operated by Mr. Fouch, a minister, who married the couple as they crossed the river on the ferry boat. . . . Mr. and Mrs. McConnel went immediately to the Shaffer Creek Ranch (east of Horseshoe Bend, Boise County) owned by the McConnel brothers, where they established their home. Their romance, however, was of short duration, for the following November the girl-bride died of what was then termed quick consumption.*

John and his "girl-bride", Hester were married on May 2, 1875 (Ada County Marriages Records, vol. 1, p. 135). Unfortunately his "girl-bride" died a few months later. John left Idaho and apparently went to Iowa to visit his parents, and then met Miss Sarah Levine Lawson. They were married on September 12, 1877 in Wapello County, Iowa. John and his wife began their family in Iowa, later came back to Idaho, and then moved to Colorado where a Lawson family member lived. John lived until 1917, and the follow year later, his wife and one of his daughter, Fannie Elizabeth, both died of influenza follow him in death.

Back in Idaho during the 1880 census, Benjamin and David were enumerated as neighbors in the Ada County, "Lower Boise Valley" and John was in "Dixie Valley" with his family. In the same year's agriculture schedule showed Benjamin with 7 horses, 3 milk cows, and 210 "other" stock with 120 calves under the listing as "meat cattle." Presumably the 210 "other" were considered beef stock.

"McConnel Island" at the Mouth of the Boise River

By the fall of 1882, Benjamin sold his original homestead and moved near the mouth of the Boise River, south of old Fort Boise. He received his "sale-cash entry" homestead of 166 acres in the approximately one mile upstream from the old fort and ferry. The following spring he added an adjacent 166 acres to his original holdings, giving him a total of 332 acres. His brother David bought properties in the same area of 500 acres. Two years afterward a younger brother of Benjamin and David, George, joined them. About 1886, another brother, Charles, joined them adding his property in adjacent tract to theirs. When Idaho became a state in July 1890, the four brothers had over 700 acres of land, including the 80-acre tract of "desert entry" of Mary Ellen McConnel, wife of George W. McConnel. The total McConnel holdings, including properties purchased from adjacent homesteaders was over 1400 acres during this time period.



**The McConnel Brothers**

**Standing (Left to Right):** photos.htmlGeorge W., Charles S., Sam, Elmer A.

**Seated, (Left to Right):** photos.htmlDavid K., Benjamin C., Francis K. (Frank)

During this period, Benjamin and Elizabeth added three more children to their family. They were Roy Curtis (born June 10, 1881), James Elmer (born October 11, 1883), and Elizabeth "Bessie" G. (born August 26, 1886).

High Valley

In 1891, Benjamin and Elizabeth moved to High Valley, in what was then considered the southwest part of Boise County. It is possible this family had used this area during summer stock migration range. It was here, the McConnel had their last child, Mabel "Mae" P. (born July 14, 1891). The oldest son, William "Will" had spent at least part of the winter in High Valley by himself. A grandson named Bill McConnel told the following story that his uncle told him:

One winter Will was in High Valley by himself and broke his leg, just above the ankle. He crawled to the house and set his own leg and went to bed. The next morning he was hurting so bad that he could not get out of bed and was becoming concerned about freezing to death. There was another fellow living in the edge of the timber at the foot of the hill on the west side. (The old Bechtal place) When he did not see any smoke coming from Will's chimney, he 'shoed over to see what the problem was and found Will and essentially saved his live.



Since Will was married in August 1896, this incident must of occurred before then. By the 1900 census, Benjamin, Elizabeth and most of the other family members moved back into High Valley. While Will, his wife, Zeulo, and son, Arthur, were living in Boise.

#### The Later Years

In October 1906, Benjamin and Elizabeth moved to Boise, to a tract on Overland and Lata, next door to his brother David. In the 1910 census, it was Benjamin, Elizabeth, and his two daughters, Elizabeth G. and May P., along with their grandson Arthur W. McConnel, living in South Boise, Idaho. About 1915, they moved their final moved to Twin Falls, Idaho.

By the 1920 census, Benjamin and Elizabeth was living with their unmarried son, Charles E. in Twin Falls, Idaho. Benjamin died on December 18, 1927, and then five years later on March 22, 1932, his wife, Elizabeth joined him. They are buried in the Twin Falls Cemetery.

*Family Stories & Photographs Courtesy of Sharon McConnel*

IDGenWeb Project's Idahoan Legacy Roots | All Rights Reserved © 2012, 2017