

## Rogue Valley Genealogical Society

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The Rogue Digger is a publication of the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society ([www.rvgsociety.org](http://www.rvgsociety.org)), which is a non-profit organization governed by a thirteen-member board consisting of elected officers, past president, and appointed directors of the Standing Committees, all with voting rights. A subscription to The Rogue Digger is included with membership. Annual dues are \$30 for an individual; additional members in the same household are \$15 each. Membership includes library checkout privileges. Our library website is [www.rvgslibrary.org](http://www.rvgslibrary.org).

Editor's Note:

Anne Billeter's next installment of the story of Sarah Ann (Cox) will appear in a future issue.

## 2012 RVGS WRITING CONTEST WINNERS



Left to right: Steve Kious, Lynn Ransford, and Peter Lester

The 2012 RVGS Writing Contest winners were announced and invited to speak at the November 20th general meeting, which was open to the public.

The winners shared their historical and genealogical research journeys—journeys that resulted in three very different but equally high-quality submissions. So strong were all three, that Judges Cleve Twitchell, Anne Billeter and Cara Davis-Jacobson chose to award three 1st prizes! Each winner received a \$30 Gift Certificate redeemable for any service at the library or society. RVGS thanks all who participated! Start thinking now about your research and your family tree so that you'll have a submission ready for the 2013 Writing Contest!

All three submissions will be published in *The Rogue Digger*, and this issue contains the first of the three winners.

## MYSTERIES IN OUR BACKYARD:

### “WHAT BECAME OF DR. JOHN MCCULLY (OF MCCULLY HOUSE AND ODD FELLOWS HALL) WHEN HE LEFT JACKSONVILLE IN 1861 TO AVOID PAYING HIS CREDITORS?”

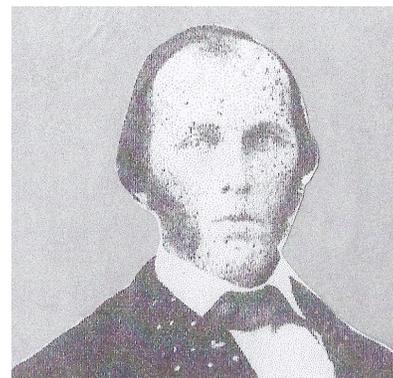


**JOHN WILMER MCCULLY**

**B. 1821 D. 1889**

**JANE MASON MCCULLY**

**B. 1824 D. 1899**



**RESEARCHED BY LYNN RANSFORD**

“Poor ol’ Mrs. McCully” was left alone to raise three children when her husband, Dr. John McCully, stepped on the stagecoach and left his family in Jacksonville in 1861. (Some say it was 1862.) She sold bread, cakes and pies for \$1 a piece to the hungry gold miners in town. She used part of her house to open the first private school in Jacksonville. She rented out rooms. Admirably, she managed to support herself and the children. As far as we know, she never heard from her husband again. We never knew what became of him. “It’s a mystery,” I always told tour groups visiting the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery.

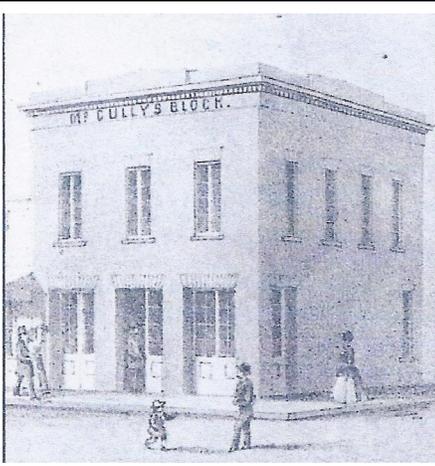
Sure enough: “What became of Dr. John McCully...when he left Jacksonville in 1861 to avoid paying his creditors?” was indeed a mystery. It appeared on a list of unsolved “Mysteries in our Backyard” that the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society, Southern Oregon Historic Society and Jackson County Heritage Association invited interested participants and students in an SOU, OLLI class to try to solve. As a student enrolled in the “Mysteries in Our Backyard” class, I couldn’t resist the invitation.



*Jane McCully Gravesite*

For years, as a guide for cemetery tours of the Jacksonville Cemetery, first through Southern Oregon Historical Society and then as a volunteer for Friends of the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery, I have told groups of schoolchildren about “poor ol’ Mrs. McCully.” When we approached the McCully family block, I pointed out the beautiful marker that her children had placed to honor her memory. The three McCully children graduated from Willamette College. James became a forest ranger in Klamath Falls; Mollie and Issie, like their mother, became schoolteachers and remained in Jacksonville all their lives. Mrs. McCully and her children are buried there, but not their father. “No one knows what happened to him after he left town,” was what cemetery docents learned from brief written sketches prepared for us by the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

We knew something about the McCullys’ early history. Jane Mason McCully was born in Scotland. When she was 6 years old, she and her family came to the United States. Jane grew up in Iowa, became a schoolteacher and, at age 24, she married the young doctor, who was originally from New Brunswick, Canada. The newly-weds, Dr. and Mrs. John Wilmer McCully, along with friends, family, and neighbors traveled the Oregon Trail, and were among the earliest “white” settlers to arrive in Southern Oregon by wagon



*McCully Hall, Jacksonville, OR*

train in 1851. When the McCullys' baby was born in Jacksonville, in 1852, he was known as the first pioneer baby to be born in the area. They named him James Cluggage McCully, after the founder of Table Rock City, which later was called Jacksonville.

Dr. John McCully was the first doctor in town, but his practice evidently was not very successful. It seems he only practiced medicine to a limited extent, perhaps because his many other ventures took so much of his time. He may have owned a bakery and been involved in a dairy. He was one of two Justices of the Peace, and a representative to Oregon's last territorial legislature. He served in the Oregon State Legislature in 1859 and was Jacksonville postmaster from at least June 30, 1860 to June 30, 1861. Dr. McCully was also involved in numerous real estate ventures: the Eldorado Saloon, an 8-acre parcel he hoped to sub-divide, a theater, a convention center, and a meeting hall. \* He is given credit for building the I.O.O.F. Hall, and his own 2-story family home, both of which remain in Jacksonville today. "His building efforts greatly overextended his finances..."\* He was seriously in debt when he got on the stagecoach that day in 1861 and left Jacksonville, never to be heard from again. It was assumed that Dr. McCully left town "to avoid paying his creditors," as the Mysteries in our Backyard title question states.

In 1861, there were liens placed against his properties that totaled over \$7500. \* (That amount, in today's dollars, might be closer to \$200,000!) Though it is speculated that these business debts were what drove him away, it is likely that other factors played a role.

As part of my SOU "Mysteries in our Backyard" class, we were taken to the Jackson County Genealogy Library to begin our research. There, Anne Billeter, the librarian, was able to show me *original* deeds, signed by Jane McCully, indicating that she was able to turn over property to settle her husband's debts! If Jane McCully was able to sell off most of his properties (saving the family home) to settle his debts, why couldn't Dr. McCully have done the same? Was he ashamed of his business failings? Did he regret not being able to succeed like other prominent men in town? Was it embarrassing for a Justice of the Peace to have liens served against him? Were there marital tensions? Some of the mystery surrounding Dr. McCully's disappearance remains. However, where he went is no longer entirely unknown.

Again, as part of my SOU class, we visited the Southern Oregon Historical Society research library and the reference library at the Medford Branch of the Jackson County Library System. There I began reading all I could find about the McCullys. I also consulted with Dirk Siedlecki, President of Friends of the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery, Joan Hess and Carolyn Kingsnorth, both tour guides and Friends of the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery who had visited Joseph, Oregon, and found McCully family records and family grave sites in the cemetery there. They led me to Condor Tales, a website with surprisingly thorough information on "The History and Genealogy Pages of the Descendants of Sam McCully." From those pages, I was able to find out much about what happened to the McCully family.

For the first five years after he left Jacksonville from 1862 – 1867, records are sketchy. John McCully was reported to have been in various gold camps in Idaho and Montana, "possibly doctoring, possibly mining."\* There are records of him briefly attending a medical school in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1866, he was in Montana and his correspondence from there suggests he may also have been in Idaho.



*McCully House, Jacksonville, OR*

From 1867–1868, John McCully was working for the People’s Transportation Company back in Oregon on the Willamette River. He evidently worked as a purser for this steamboat company owned by his two older, very successful brothers.

In 1880, the federal census lists John McCully as a “gardener,” living with his oldest brother in Yamhill County, Oregon.\* His brothers (and nephews) had substantial farming and cattle enterprises in the area. Dr. McCully may have been working on the farm in some capacity.

Dr. McCully’s last years were spent in Joseph, Wallowa County, Oregon. His nephews and other family members resided there and were among the prominent founding fathers. Dr. John Wilmer McCully died 28 years after he left Jacksonville. He died in 1889 at the age of 68. He is buried in the Masonic cemetery at Hurricane Creek, near Joseph, Oregon. Sanford Wilbur reports in his *Condor Tales* that Dr. McCully’s procession was one of the largest in Wallowa County, “with 40 teams and 36 walking Masons attending the casket.”\* It is difficult to understand why so many people would have attended his funeral. Perhaps they never knew that he deserted his wife and three children. The Masons may have attended his service to honor one of their own and, perhaps more likely, to demonstrate their respect for Dr. McCully’s esteemed brothers and nephew.

Dr. John McCully and Jane Mason McCully never divorced. There is no record of them ever communicating with one another after 1862. However, it is hard to imagine that the family deserted in Jacksonville didn’t ever locate their father. Both of Dr. McCully’s brothers were involved in Oregon state politics, had extensive businesses in Yamhill, Wallowa, Linn, and Douglas Counties, all in Oregon. The older, very successful brother and his son, on whose property the doctor lived in his later years, were members of the Oregon Pioneers Association in Portland and Salem. Ben Beekman, of Jacksonville, was also an active member of the Pioneers Association and remained a very good friend of the McCully family all his life. He certainly would have come across the brothers and known the whereabouts of the doctor.

In solving one mystery, other mysteries arose. Did Jane and the children vow to never mention their father’s name again (even though they surely must have found out later what became of him)? How was Jane, in 1862, able to sign the deeds, turning over property to the county, to settle the doctor’s debts? Perhaps more research needs to be done to determine the laws in the new state of Oregon, regarding women’s property rights, or perhaps the town of 1000 citizens circumvented any existing laws. We do know the brick McCully Building (the IOOF Hall) was sold in a Sheriff’s auction in 1862, to pay off some of the doctor’s debts. So, less than a year after Dr. McCully’s disappearance, city officials must have deemed him permanently gone and/or unreachable in order to take action on his property. Jane did manage to save the family home, where she and her daughter, Issie, remained all of their lives. The McCully House still stands today and is still open as a lovely bed and breakfast inn in Jacksonville. Jane McCully supported herself and the children and was very well respected in the community. Jane died in Jacksonville in 1899, ten years following her husband’s death. She was 75 years old and is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Jacksonville. In addition to all her community contributions, among them being the first schoolteacher in Jacksonville, Jane also wrote poetry. One of her verses became the anthem of the Native Daughters of Oregon, who bestowed honors on her at her funeral.

Perhaps, from now on, during my cemetery tours, I should refrain from saying, “Here lies ‘Poor ol’ Mrs. Cully.” Perhaps instead I should say, “Here lies courageous, resourceful, talented Mrs. McCully who did what needed to be done in a time that did not favor women.”

\*CONDOR TALES, The History and Genealogy Pages, The Descendants of Samuel McCully, by Sanford R. “Sandy” Wilbur

## RESOURCES

I received invaluable help from OLLI instructors, Alice Mullaly and Nancy Vaughn, from Stephanie Butler, former Education and Program Coordinator for SOHS and now an Education and Program Coordinator for the Division of Continuing Education at SOU, Anne Billeter, genealogist and librarian, Jackson County Genealogy Library, from Pat Harper, manager of Southern Oregon Historical society research library, Julie Dregson, reference librarian, Medford Branch of the Jackson County Library System, Dirk Siedlecki, President of Friends of the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery, Joan Hess and Carolyn Kingsnorth, both tour guides and Friends of Historic Jacksonville Cemetery, who visited Joseph, OR, and found McCully "Family Records" and McCully family grave sites in the cemetery there.

They all helped me find numerous sources for information and written materials that provided insight into "Whatever happened to Dr. McCully?"

- ◆ Kay Atwood, An Honorable History, Medford Branch of Jackson County Library, Ref. and Circ., 610.092
- ◆ "Fletcher Linn Memories," Southern Oregon Historical Society Library, Reference
- ◆ History of Southern Oregon, Medford Branch of Jackson County Library, Ref. and Circ., 979.5
- ◆ Margaret LaPlante, ON TO OREGON: The Story of Seventy Pioneer Families Who Settled in the Rogue Valley, Copyright 2009, ISBN: 978-14449981273
- ◆ Sanford R. Wilbur, CONDOR TALES, "The History and Genealogy Pages of the Descendants of Samuel McCully, <http://www.condortales/samuelmccully2.html>