

It takes more than a good resume to get a government contract.

Lewis Van Vleet (1827-1910)

From: "Clarke County Washington Territory", 1885: by B. F. Alley and J. P. Munro-Fraser, 1885¹

Hon. Lewis Van Vleet—The subject of this short memoir, a view of whose residence in Clarke county, Washington Territory, will be found in this volume, was born in Seneca County, New York, October 21, 1827, but removed with his parents to Ridgeway, Lenawee County, Michigan, when he was only seven years of age. Here he received the

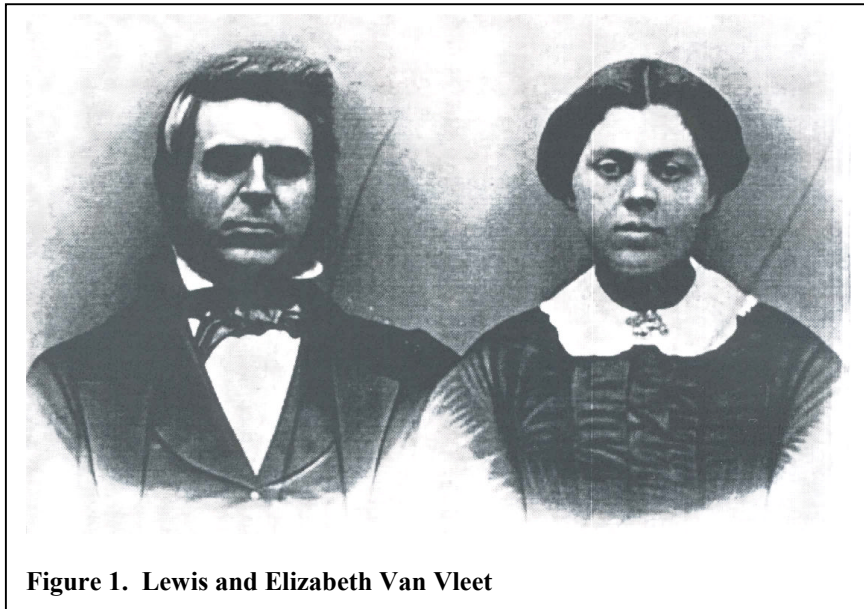


Figure 1. Lewis and Elizabeth Van Vleet

groundwork of that education which in after life has stood him in such good stead, and resided until 1848 in which year he returned to the State of New York and commenced working at the cooper's trade and still farther pushing his learning with the money thereby acquired, earnestly believing that "Knowledge is Power." After passing with credit through the Oswego

Academy, which is situated within the city wherein he labored at his calling, Mr. Van Vleet turned his thoughts towards emigrating to the great Northwest. These musings came to full fruition and in the month of August, 1852, we find him passing through Ohio to Hannibal, Missouri, at which place he spent the winter of 1852-3. On the fourteenth day of the following April he commenced the long and hazardous journey across the plains, arriving at Oregon City, August 6, 1853, and there made his home until his removal to Vancouver, August 6, 1855. In October of that year he took up his land claim at Fern Prairie and continuously resided thereon until September, 1868. In 1871 he transferred his abode to Kalama where he remained until 1878; thence he proceeded to Portland where he has still a dwelling, and in 1882 came back to his farm. In 1856 Mr.

Van Vleet was elected to the Council of the Territorial Assembly for three years, being sent to the lower house in 1859-60. In 1856 he was appointed United States Deputy Surveyor and is the present incumbent, having held the office for nearly thirty years, a longer term in that position than any other official of that class on the Pacific Coast. He was also employed for four years and a half in the Land Department of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, his particular duties being the appraising and valuation of their land grants. In 1871 he was elected from Cowlitz county to the lower house of the Territorial Legislature, in all of which multifarious affairs he has shown marked ability and acumen, proving that the confidence placed in him has not been unmerited. This gentleman is married to Elizabeth A. Coffey, a native of Missouri, and has a family consisting of three daughters and two sons, viz: Luty, Edith, Stella, Lewis and Felix.

From: Joseph Gaston, "Portland, Oregon, Its History and Builders."ⁱⁱ

In the far-away state of New York, on October 21, 1826, was born a baby boy who was destined to promote the civilization and development of Oregon. He was the seventh of thirteen children, all of whom lived to manhood or womanhood. His parents were well-to-do, industrious people and with true philosophy enjoyed life as the years passed. His birthplace was the same substantial Dutch farmhouse in which his father, Peter P. Van Vleet was born February 23, 1799. He was a descendant of a Hollander who settled in New York early in the seventeenth century, and he lived to be over eighty years of age. The mother, Lois Swarhouse Van Vleet, was born February 5, 1802, and died July 2, 1879, four months after the death of her husband.

The farm on which Lewis Van Vleet was born was located between Seneca and Cayuga lakes and had belonged to his grandfather, Peter Van Vleet. One day, when he was six years of age, he was playing with his little brother Edgar, aged four, down by the spring some distance from the house. The younger lad slipped into the water and Lewis Van Vleet, with all the force of his sturdy young arms, tried to save his brother. Fortunately the root of a tree projected somewhat over the spring and, holding on to this, Lewis Van Vleet, with excellent judgment and after several heroic efforts, pulled his brother from the water. It was about that time that the father of the boys made a trip to Michigan, then a territory, to ascertain the prospects of making a home in that undeveloped section. The following year the entire family, traveling by canal and with team and wagon, removed to Michigan, the trip being full of interesting incidents which were distinctly remembered by Lewis Van Vleet during his long life. Hardships were many and conveniences at first few, but the family managed to enjoy life and good health in their new home. The manner of living was far different from that of the present day, for mother and daughters then spun and wove wool for garments and for household use and also raised and prepared flax for use in their own family. A tailor made semi-annual visits to supply the family with clothing and the shoemaker came once a year. Candles were made at home and the cooking was done on the huge fireplace and in the big brick oven. At Christmas, stockings were hung to receive an apple and doughnut. Wild turkeys and other game were hunted in the near-by forests.

It was in Michigan that Lewis Van Vleet began his education and acquired a most beautiful style of penmanship, writing in those days with goose quill pens. The curriculum consisted of reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic. The boy mastered his lessons but also managed to take part in the mischief and the fun of the school, which are ever a part of a boy's life. He early displayed good business judgment and made his start in business with a small white pig. Later, when he wished to attend a school three miles from his home, he bargained with his father to give him his entire drove of pigs - eight or ten - for the privilege of going to that school. He earned his first money by riding a horse hitched to the plow with which his neighbors were cultivating their crops. Working from "sun to sun," he received a shilling each day. He early cultivated the habit not only of earning but of saving money and, always making it his rule to spend less than his income, he ever had ready means at his command. When he was seventeen his father purchased a cow with a propensity for kicking, so that nobody could milk her, until Lewis, promised a "long tailed" coat as a reward by his mother, succeeded in the attempt and thus acquired his first "dress suit," while his next older brothers, twins, still wore their "roundabouts."

As was the custom in those days, Lewis Van Vleet remained at home, working for his father until twenty-one years-of age, when his father gave him five dollars and he started for New York. He learned the cooper's trade in Oswego and, carefully saving his earnings, was enabled to pursue a course of study in the Oswego Academy, having already realized the value of an education. By the time his school days were over he had formed the plan of emigrating to the Pacific northwest and in August, 1852, went to Hannibal, Missouri, where he spent the winter. On the 14th of April, 1853, he started for Oregon, reaching Oregon City in August, and on the 6th of August, 1855, he removed to Clarke County, Washington, where he secured a homestead claim on which he lived until September, 1868. In 1871 he removed to Kalama, where he remained for seven years and then came to Portland, where he resided to the time of his death, although he retained his Clarke County property. It is believed that this homestead is the only one in that county now owned intact by the original patentee or his descendants.

In Oregon City, on the 3d of February, 1856, the Rev. Harvey K. Hines performed the wedding ceremony that united the destinies of Mr. Van Vleet and Elisabeth A. Coffey. Seven children were born to them, those now living being Dr. Louisa V. Wright, of Camas, Washington ; Edith, Stella and Lewis, all of Portland; and Felix, of Camas. Two daughters, Lois and Harriet, died in early childhood and Mrs. Van Vleet passed away in Portland, April 12, 1905. Mr. Van Vleet had been a resident of the northwest but a brief period when he enlisted for service in the Yakima Indian war of 1855-6, under Captain William Strong, and participated in the usual experiences of warfare against the red men. He was greatly interested in public matters and from 1856 until 1859 represented Clarke County in the territorial senate. In 1860 he was a representative from Clarke County in the lower house and from Cowlitz County in 1871. He displayed much ability in his public service and left his impress upon the legislation enacted during his connection with the general assembly. Appointed United States deputy surveyor in

1856, he thus served for nearly two score years—a record unequalled on the Pacific coast. For

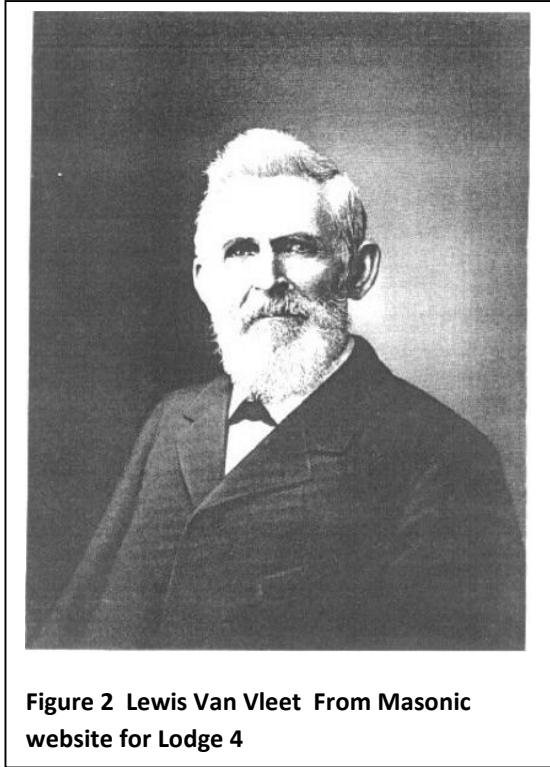


Figure 2 Lewis Van Vleet From Masonic website for Lodge 4

four and a half years he was connected with the land department of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, his particular duty being to appraise the land grants of that corporation. The Oregon Pioneer Association numbered him among its honored members for many years and he was a prominent Mason, identified with the fraternity for nearly sixty-three years. He joined the order in Albion, Michigan, in December, 1847, and afterward became a member of Multnomah Lodge, No. 1, at Oregon City, the first Masonic lodge instituted west of the Rocky mountains. He became a charter member of Washington Lodge at Vancouver in 1857 and aided in organizing the Masonic Grand Lodge in Washington, of which he was made senior grand warden in 1862. In 1871 he assisted in instituting Kalama Lodge, No. 17, at Kalama, Washington, and was one of the organizers in 1890, of La Camas Lodge, No 75, in

Clarke county. In 1893 he joined the Masonic Veteran Association of Oakland, California, and in March, 1901, joined Albina Lodge, No. 101, A. F. & A. M., of Portland, of which he was a member at the time of his death.

In appearance Mr. Van Vleet was a distinguished looking man, nearly six feet tall, well proportioned and notably erect. His eyes were blue and in early manhood his hair was black but after his fortieth year it was snow white, contrasting strongly with his ruddy cheeks. He believed that each person should have a sound mind in a sound body and that good health might be enjoyed, was judicious in the care of his physical nature and lived "the simple life." He was philosophical in his acceptance of hardships and few persons seemed to obtain so much genuine pleasure from life. He was a splendid example of an ideal husband, father and citizen and his was indeed a well rounded character, his strong, manly qualities and extreme gentleness producing perfect symmetry. His kind and loving disposition made him many friends and his love for them, many of whom he had known for years, was tenacious. He was a public-spirited citizen and managed affairs both great and small with thoroughness and judgment. While frugal and industrious, he was also generous and, while a self-educated man, he was ever well informed and kept pace with the progress of affairs. Even animals recognized his kindly spirit and those upon his farm would come at his call. In early days he raised many cattle and would often sell quite a drove to one buyer. What a surprise to the purchaser to have Mr. Van Vleet go to the bars of the great "woods pasture" at unusual hours and by giving a call which the cattle well knew, have his entire band answer the summons! This occurred again and again. How Mr.

Van Vleet loved the old farm upon which he spent many happy years! It was there, in the old log house in the orchard, that he and his wife "set up housekeeping" after their marriage. Unlike many, they used their leisure time in study and self-improvement. Among their choice early possessions was a large family bible, an unabridged dictionary and a copy of Shakespeare. These books, with astronomy, algebra, history and literature, were carefully studied and thoroughly enjoyed, and as success came to them they had equal pleasure in improving the several homes which they planned and built. True hospitality was always found under their roof and many beautiful memories remain of family and friends seated around the comfortable fireplace. An open fire! That was one of the comforts of life that Mr. Van Vleet always insisted in having in his home wherever he lived. Mr. and Mrs. Van Vleet traveled life's journey in the most harmonious companionship for nearly fifty years, enjoying the pleasures and bearing the sorrows of life together. Their children remember the tender care and kind protection with which they were continually surrounded and their triumphs and successes were increased many fold by the appreciation and enthusiasm with which their efforts were received by their parents. In moments of discouragement and doubt they turned instinctively toward the father and mother from whom they never failed to receive comfort and help. These worthy pioneers have completed their earthly pilgrimage but the influence of their lives will continue until time shall be no more. Lewis Van Vleet passed away April 5, 1910, after fifty-seven years devoted to the development of this great western country. The funeral services were held in the Methodist church in Camas, of which he had been for many years a member, and the last sad rites were performed by Washington Lodge, No. 4, of which he was the last surviving charter member. Leaving the church, the solemn procession wended its way to the quiet country cemetery on the old Van Vleet homestead, which had been donated by Mr. Van Vleet many years before. There he was laid to rest by the side of his wife.

It is fitting that tribute be paid to Mrs. Elisabeth Angeline Van Vleet that her children and friends may ever keep before them her high ideals. She was born in Missouri. May 8, 1836, and came to Oregon with her father, Joel Coffey, one sister and two brothers, in 1852. Her life history recalls incidents relating to pioneer days over which the twilight of uncertainty has not yet thrown its shadow and the night of forgetfulness has not descended forever. Those who knew her remember and appreciate the threads of gold which were woven into the web of her life. Her genial smile, her sympathy with all phases of human experience and her comprehension of all human moods can never be forgotten by those who knew her. Placed in positions of trust, she filled them with conspicuous ability. Hers was a life of unselfish service. Modesty was a leading trait in a character finely matured and altogether admirable. She conducted herself in her home duties with the same unassuming and dignified demeanor that marked all her acts. She shirked no duty, sought no notoriety and had a splendid sense of her responsibilities to her associates, her family and her God. She hated wrong, never compromised with error and had no illusions that swerved her from the straight path of conscious rectitude. The usual number of sorrows that are the common lot came to her but she bore them silently and patiently. She possessed, moreover, amiable humor and bright wit and was gifted with a singularly genial disposition.

She was much admired, much loved and much respected and was untiring in her efforts for her friends. She proved herself a worthy pioneer, devoted in her home, faithful in her service to her children and revealing in her nature also a large interest for others. She died at her home in Portland, April 12, 1905, and her remains were interred in the family burying grounds at La Camas. A fitting tribute to her memory was penned by her son, Lewis Van Vleet.

"You can see Mother's grave from the Old Homestead, The flowers are still fresh and fair,

When in shade the rest of the landscape is wrapt, The sunbeams are kissing them there.

She has gone to the rest she has earned so well; We are left here to live our lives through:

The least we can do to repay her dear love Is to live as she'd have us to do.

Then her work, where she left it, will not be undone. But will grow with the passing of years ;

And when we are called to her dear arms again, There'll be smiles, then, instead of our tears."

A HISTORIC HOUSE.

This house, built during 1861-2, is the successor of "the log house in the orchard" and was built, on his farm, by Lewis Van Vleet. It is the oldest house in that part of Clarke County, yet it is in a state of perfect preservation - a monument to the sturdy builders. The farm on which is located this historic house is believed to be the only farm in the county now owned, intact, by the original patentee or his descendants.

The length of time required in building this home is noteworthy, as all the work of planning the lumber, making the shingles, cutting the trimming for the gables was done by hand, Mr. Van Vleet hiring men by the month in the preparation of building. For long distances and over rough roads, the materials were gathered, in the building of this substantial farm house. A trip to Portland or elsewhere was in those days no small undertaking. In starting for lumber or other materials an axe, an ox chain—used to pull logs out of the road—and a shotgun, a protection against wild animals which were numerous - these three useful tools were always taken with the pioneer and were always of use on the trip.

Before beginning the erection of the dwelling, a large, substantial barn was completed. A barn supported by huge square beams and pillars and strongly mortised together - a style of barn most unusual in this new country but often found in the well developed east. In this commodious barn, the planing of lumber and other work of preparation for house building was accomplished.



Figure 3. Lewis Van Vleet Farm at Fern Prairie, north of Camas.

The windows and doors used in this house were made in Boston, Massachusetts, and were sent by ship around Cape Horn to Portland. The shutters, or window blinds, were the first product of the first sash and door factory in Portland. The fine large fireplaces were unexcelled. They were built by a mason in the employ

of the United States government at the garrison in Vancouver. The house was completed, and the family moved into it in August, 1862. People from all parts of this new country came to inspect and admire this historic house.

From: The Morning Oregonian, Saturday, April 16, 1910, Page 16

Birth: Oct. 21, 1826

Death: Apr. 15, 1910

L. VAN VLEET DIES

Pioneer of Two States Crossed Plains in 1853

OLD HOMESTEAD INTACT

Early Public Life Included Service in Legislature in Two Branches

From Two Counties—Prominent in Masonry.

Lewis Van Vleet, a well-known pioneer, who came to Oregon in 1853, died at his residence, 344 Graham Avenue, at 9:45 o'clock yesterday morning.

Mr. Van Vleet was of Dutch ancestry, the first of his name coming from Holland to America about the middle of the seventeenth century and settling in New York. He was born in

Seneca County, that state, October 21, 1826, and removed with his parents to Ridgeway, Lenawee County, Michigan, in 1834. Here he secured a knowledge of the three R's and lived until 1848, when he returned to his native state and acquired a knowledge of the cooper's trade in the town of Oswego.

Being frugal in his tastes and of a studious habit, he at length had the means to go through Oswego Academy with credit to himself. By this time he received the idea of emigrating to the Pacific Northwest and in August, 1852, he went to Hannibal, Mo., where he spent that Winter.

Plains Crossed in 1853

On April 14, 1853, he started to cross the plains to Oregon, and reached Oregon City in August. On August 6, 1855, he removed to Clark County, Washington Territory and took up a homestead, upon which he made his home until September, 1868. He removed to Kalama in 1871 and lived there seven years. Then he came to this city and built a beautiful home, and has been a resident here most of the time since, although he retained his Clark County property, which he owned at the time of his death. It is believed that his homestead is the only one in that county now owned intact by the original patentee or his descendants.

Mr. Van Vleet was married to Miss Elizabeth A. Coffey, a pioneer of 1852, in Oregon City on February 2, 1856, by Rev. Harvey K. Hines. Seven children were born. Those surviving are as follows: Dr. Louisa V. Wright, Camas, Wash.; Misses Edith and Stella Van Vleet and Lewis Van Vleet, Jr., Portland; Felix Van Vleet, Camas. Two children, Lois and Harriet, died in early childhood. Mrs. Van Vleet died in this city on April 12, 1905.

Mr. Van Vleet was greatly interested in public matters, and in 1856 represented Clark County in the upper house of the Territorial Legislature for three years. He was a representative in the lower house from that county in 1860, and represented Cowlitz county in the lower house in 1871. In his public life he evinced much ability. In 1856 he was appointed United States deputy surveyor and held that position nearly two-score years--holding the record on the Pacific Coast for length of service. He was also employed four and a half years in the land department of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, his particular duty being to appraise the land grants of that corporation. He was an honored member of the Oregon Pioneer Association for many years.

War Veteran and Mason

Mr. Van Vleet was an Indian War Veteran, having served in the company of Captain William Strong in the Yakima War of 1855-56. He was identified with the Masonic fraternity nearly 63 year, having received the first degree in Albion, Mich., in December, 1847. After crossing the plains in 1853 he became a member of Multnomah Lodge No. 1, at Oregon City, the first Masonic lodge constituted west of the Rocky Mountains. He was a charter member of

Washington Lodge, Vancouver, in 1857, and aided in organizing the Masonic grand lodge in Washington. In 1862 he was the Senior Grand Warden. In 1871, with others, he assisted in constituting Kalama Lodge No. 17, at Kalama, Wash., and in 1890, with other brethren, he aided in constituting LaCamas Lodge No. 57, in Clark County, Wash. In 1893 he joined the Masonic Veteran Association, of Oakland, Cal., and in March 1901, he joined Albina Lodge No 101, of this city, of which he was a member at the time of his death.

The Morning Oregonian, Saturday, April 16, 1910 Page 11

FUNERAL NOTICES

VAN VLEET---In this city, April 15, at his late residence, 344 Graham Ave., Lewis Van Vleet, aged 83 years 5 months and 25 days. The funeral services will be held at Oak Grove Farm, Wash. Sunday, April 17.

The Morning Oregonian, Saturday, April 16, 1910, Page 16

ⁱ Alley, B. F. and Munro-Fraser, J. P.: "**History of Clarke County, Washington Territory**": compiled from the most authentic sources; also biographical sketches of its pioneers and prominent citizens." Portland, OR.: Washington Publishing Co., 1885.

ⁱⁱ Gaston, Joseph, "**Portland, Oregon, Its History and Builders**", In Connection with the Antecedent Explorations, Discoveries, and Movements of the Pioneers that Selected the Site for the Great City of the Pacific. Illustrated: Chicago – Portland, The S; J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911