

# Realtors, not folklore, named Happy Valley

By Mark Hurlburt



**From South along 122<sup>nd</sup>, 1988**

*Photo by Bud Unruh*

The origin of the name for the City of Happy Valley, Oregon has been traditionally associated with a folkloric legend of community boys getting happily drunk from apple cider. One version of the story goes, “Boys from the Hollow enjoyed drinking Grandpa Deardorff’s delicious apple cider before attending church services at Sunnyside and often used to arrive there singing loudly and gaily. Sunnyside dwellers were soon referring to them as ‘the happy boys from the hollow,’ and after a while the area became known as Happy Valley.”<sup>1</sup> However, other versions of the name origin contradict this story. In 1948, resident E.A. Knauss spoke on the naming of the community, saying, “Some 50 years ago there was a revival meeting and all the young people were so happy – they named it Happy Valley.”<sup>2</sup> Royal Zinser, a longtime resident who was born in 1896, commented that when he was a kid the locale was called Sleepy Hollow by “some feller who worked down the road and thought it was too dull around here.” Later the residents grew tired of the joke and road signs were erected to read “Happy Hollow.”<sup>3</sup> While these tales may or may not be true, why Happy Valley ultimately received its name might more plausibly belong to realtors.

The City of Happy Valley has had many names in its history including Deardorff Settlement, Deardorff Valley, Happy Hollow, Christilla Valley, and East Mount Scott. It was first referred to as the Deardorff Settlement and the Deardorff Valley, named after the first settler family in the area. The Happy Hollow name emerged from the folkloric story and appears as the name of the school locale on county surveyor maps in 1912 and 1926.<sup>4</sup> East Mount Scott emerged from being the school name for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> In a meeting held at the valley's school in 1902, a new name was chosen for the community. An announcement read, "The pioneer settlement in Clackamas County, southeast of Mount Scott, which has been called 'Deardorff Valley' and 'Happy Hollow,' will be known hereafter as 'Christilla Valley.'"<sup>6</sup> The name was a combination of Christian (Chris) and Matilda (Tilla) Deardorff as a tribute to the first settlers in the valley. The community of farmers had seemingly decided on an official name for their home, but the name "Christilla Valley" would not last for long.

The earliest recorded use of the name "Happy Valley" in referring to the geographic area between Mount Scott, Scouters' Mountain and Sunnyside are found in classified ads selling acreage during the Autumn of 1909.<sup>7</sup> This was only seven years after the school meeting that decided the area would be known "hereafter as Christilla Valley." After that proclamation was made the use of the name Christilla Valley was often paired with the more well-known Deardorff name and the usage of Happy Hollow continued as well. But despite all these different names for the same geographic area, only one has been found to be used by realtors in advertisements for selling acreage. After searching through the classified advertisements in the historical *Oregonian* and Oregon City newspaper archives, the names Deardorff Settlement, Deardorff Valley, Happy Hollow, Christilla Valley and East Mount Scott were not found to be used by realtors.<sup>8</sup> Only the name "Happy Valley" was used in selling land for that area. A simple reason why could be because there was no official name for the area and the farmers living there were just notably happy people. Another explanation could lie in events that plagued the community at the start of the 20th century.

In 1902, wildfires destroyed farmland in many parts of Clackamas County including in the Valley where resident Charles Zinser lost his house, one barn and all his grain and fences. It also took the efforts of 20 men to protect the schoolhouse from being destroyed.<sup>9</sup> In 1904, a severe fire approaching from Gresham posed serious danger to Valley farmhouses and caused much uneasiness among the residents. An *Oregonian* article covering the fires quoted a farmer living in the Valley who stated that "with a fair wind there will be little chance of saving the farmhouses" as the area is "covered with a mass of brush and dry snags and logs, which would feed a fire and carry it forward at a great rate."<sup>10</sup> To make things even more difficult for farmers, a pack of coyotes had invaded the area and were killing poultry and sheep. In the autumn of 1904, a hunt had to be formed of men with guns and hounds in an attempt to kill the predators. One article reported, "A large body of men armed with all sorts of shooting-sticks located the vermin, set upon them, found themselves actually attacked by the reputed cowards, and had such a case of stag fever that they pumped 300 rounds of ammunition into the pack without hurting one."<sup>11</sup> With these dispiriting events occurring in the Valley, realtors might have needed a clever strategy to ease the fears of future land buyers. And, coincidentally, the name "Happy Valley" made its earliest recorded appearance in two real estate ads in 1909.

Could it be true that the name “Happy Valley” evolved from “Happy Hollow” as the legend says? Both names were used up until at least the 1940s and the formal use of the Happy Valley name did not begin until 1954 when patrons of the East Mount Scott School district voted 34-3 to change the name of the school to Happy Valley.<sup>12</sup> Happy Valley would become the official name when the City incorporated in 1965. But an *Oregonian* article from 1932 shows them together as two separate names. The article was a listing of various hiking locations in the Portland Metro area. The listing read, “Happy valley – Go to Lents junction. Take road going past Mount Scott cemetery and on to Happy valley... Happy hollow – Go to Lents junction. Tramp southeasterly over Deardorf valley road to Happy hollow...”<sup>13</sup> If Happy Valley evolved from Happy Hollow, the use of the two names here is rather odd as they are both used to describe the same geographic area. An explanation for this is that these two names originated separately, one from Sunnyside with the cider drinking legend and the other from realtors as a way of inciting optimism. Real estate developers choose names for housing areas that do not share a previous title and that would appeal to potential buyers. If early 20<sup>th</sup> century realtors did not want to use one of the informal names such as Happy Hollow and Christilla Valley, it’s likely they could have combined both to create a new optimistic name to appeal to land buyers.

Happy Valley began as a farming community and would remain that way until after World War II. Why then would a farmer want to purchase land in a place where farms were being destroyed by wildfires and poultry and sheep being stolen by coyotes? Unless they could be convinced by those already living in the area, a farmer would more likely buy land in such a place if it had an optimistic name - like the one that first appeared in real estate ads and, interestingly, was the only title used in identifying that area despite all its other more commonly known names. Today, some people probably move to Happy Valley because of its name, and it is in that optimism the name of the City likely originated from.

*Mark Hurlburt is a lifelong Happy Valley resident and the volunteer librarian in the Wilmer Gardner Research Library at the Museum of the Oregon Territory.*

## References

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- 2 "Unique Farming Community in the Environs of Portland." Sunday Oregonian. 5 September 1948.
- 3 Witter, Janet. "Place Names in Clackamas County." p. 21-22.
- 4 "Name selected in honor of pioneer settlers near Mount Scott." Sunday Oregonian 16 November 1902; "New farmers telephone line." Morning Oregonian 15 June 1908.
- 5 Kanne, H.W. "East Mount Scott." Oregon City Enterprise 9 February 1912.
- 6 "Name selected in honor of pioneer settlers near Mount Scott." Sunday Oregonian 16 November 1902
- 7 Morning Oregonian 25 September 1909, p. 11; Sunday Oregonian 17 October 1909, p. 7
- 8 Oregon Historic Newspapers; The Historical Oregonian (1861-1987)
- 9 "None dead in Clackamas." Morning Oregonian 16 September 1902.
- 10 "Smoke is lifting." Oregonian 16 September 1904.
- 11 "Coyotes Show teeth to farmers." Morning Oregonian 2 November 1904.
- 12 Oregonian 2 July 1954.
- 13 Sunday Oregonian 25 September 1932.