

Mount Talbert – Who is it named for?

By Mark Hurlburt

Driving on I-205 northbound, when you get to the off-ramp to Happy Valley and Sunnyside Road, you will see a butte on the right side covered in trees overlooking the highway. This small “mountain” is officially called Mount Talbert. A mystery surrounds this place as there is no official origin for the name. So, who is Mount Talbert named for?

There is no known record of the hill receiving its name from a proclamation or from a document naming it in honor of a distinguished person. It is likely then that the name emerged from common usage in the community. Prior to officially being known by its present name, the butte was known by some in the community as Mount Latourette. This name comes from the prominent Oregon City family who once owned property on Mount Talbert.¹ Could this be true for the Talbert name as well? A man named Francis Talbert owned a Donation Land Claim of over 300 acres just to the north of the butte. Talbert’s property was located where 129th Avenue is today between 122nd and King Road in Happy Valley. John Talbert, his son, lived on land to the southwest of the butte. Daniel Talbert, another of Francis’ sons, owned a homestead on the western slope of Mount Talbert itself.²



Amanda Talbert

Courtesy: Clackamas County Historical Society

Who was this family? Francis was born in 1804 in Virginia. His future wife, Amanda Newbill, was born about 1811 in the same state.³ Francis had seven children from his first marriage while Amanda had four girls from her marriage to Jonathan Craghead.⁴ Both became widowed and they married in 1847. Their first child, John Alexander Talbert was born in Missouri on September 17, 1848. They also had twin boys but both died in infancy. Amanda was a slave owner in Missouri and freed her slaves when the family left for Oregon in 1852.⁵ The family settled on a donation land claim, arriving one year after the Deardorffs first settled in Happy Valley. Francis built a house and he and Amanda lived there for 21 years before moving to Clackamas. When they died, Francis in 1881 and Amanda in 1900, their deaths were lamented by the community as they were both well beloved.⁶

John Talbert, their sole surviving child together, became a prominent figure in the community serving in several public positions. He was a Deputy Sheriff of Clackamas County from 1879 to 1882 and a County Deputy Assessor for two years.⁷ In 1901, he was elected as the representative for Clackamas in the state legislature.⁸ He also spent most of his life in the fish business establishing federal and state hatcheries on the White Salmon, North Umpqua and McKenzie Rivers.⁹ In 1870, John married Emma Davis and had three children.¹⁰ John died in 1929 and being a prominent citizen was highly regarded. Daniel Talbert, a son of Francis and John's half-brother, was the family member who owned a homestead claim on the western slope of Mount Talbert. He was born in Kentucky in 1833, fought in the Indian wars in Idaho, worked as the Clackamas School District Director for a time and died in 1915.¹¹



John (at left) and Daniel Talbert

Courtesy: Clackamas County Historical Society

Did the name for the butte come from the family who lived on and around there? The naming of Mount Scott, a hill near Mount Talbert, seems to contradict this reasoning. A man named Jacob Scott had a donation land claim in Sunnyside in the vicinity of Mount Scott, which might lead some to believe the hill was named after him. However, the hill was named after *Oregonian* editor Harvey Scott in 1889 who owned hundreds of acres on the butte.¹² There is a notable difference between the two though. While Jacob Scott only lived in the vicinity of Mount Scott, Daniel Talbert actually owned property on Mount Talbert itself, which supports the hill was named for him or for his family.

The Talbert family had a long, prominent presence in the community and were beloved by their neighbors. The Talberts lived just to the north and western sides of the hill, with Daniel Talbert, in particular, owning a homestead on its western slope. If the name emerged from common usage in the community, this would seem to support Mount Talbert being named after this local, prominent family.

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.

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