

Gater Tale

The Elmores of Applegate

BY LISA BALDWIN

With roots in the lower and middle Applegate, the Elmore family has long been foundational in our community. Their history here goes back to the 1880s when the Robinsons, including Winfield Scott Robinson, acquired land on both sides of the Applegate River in Wilderville and Jerome Prairie. Scott Robinson's family home was on the south side of the Applegate, near the mouth of Bull Creek, off what is now known as Fish Hatchery Road. Bessie Robinson was born at home in Wilderville in 1889.

In 1900, Charles Herbert (C.H.) Elmore of Neligh, Nebraska, moved his family (wife Pauline and five children—Joseph, Charles Herbert II, Grace, Elizabeth, and Dorothy) to Jackson County, and in 1903 bought 160 acres on Steamboat Road, now called Thompson Creek Road. Later in 1903, he bought an adjoining 40-acre parcel. C.H. died in February 1908, and in September 1908 his youngest child, daughter Jennie, was born. C. Herbert II was named administrator of his father's 200-acre estate.

In 1910, C. Herbert II married Bessie Berteena Robinson at Bessie's childhood home in Wilderville. How these two met is something of a family mystery since the Elmore dairy in Applegate and the Robinson dairy in Wilderville were about 40 miles apart. Granddaughter Barbara Elmore Niedermeyer recalls stories of the day-long trip to see each other and stories of meeting halfway between; it was a long-distance courtship and a marriage that lasted their lifetimes. They had two children, Charles Herbert Elmore III (C.H. III), in 1911, and Bessie Berteena Elmore, in 1915.

In the early 1920s, Pauline and her five youngest children moved to Douglas County, near Yoncalla. Over the next several years, C. Herbert II bought the shares of the family ranch that belonged to his mother and siblings, and by acquisition of other parcels that bordered the ranch, the Elmore estate totaled 295 acres in 1937. In 1938, C.H. III married Beryl Brockway, and they moved to the Applegate ranch in 1939. In 1941, they bought a five-acre strip of land that expanded the family's holdings to an even 300 acres. In 1957 they bought another 320 acres, an adjacent farm known as the Kubli Place, bringing the Elmore property to 620 acres.

The two generations continued to work the dairy and raise pigs and sheep as the next generation began to arrive. Between 1939 and 1958, C.H. III and Beryl had seven children: Charles Herbert IV, Truman, Russell, Michael, Alicia, Joseph, and Barbara. All grew up on the Thompson Creek ranch and all graduated from Applegate School. For 57 years—from 1945, when C.H. IV started school, until 2002 when the last Elmore descendant living in the area graduated—an Elmore attended Applegate School. In 1988-89, there were nine Elmore grandchildren in attendance. It is no surprise that C.H. III and Beryl were very involved with the school and the children's activities. Beryl started the Applegate PTA. C.H. III started the 4-H club. Beryl also set up a community canning kitchen in the school's basement, and the pears, peaches, and tomatoes they canned were used for school lunches.



Charles Herbert Elmore II and Bessie Berteena Robinson Elmore wedding day, April 1910, at the Robinson home in Wilderville. Photo courtesy of Barbara Elmore Niedermeyer.



Charles Herbert Elmore III and Beryl Brockway Elmore at home in Applegate, around 1965. Photo courtesy of Barbara Elmore Niedermeyer.

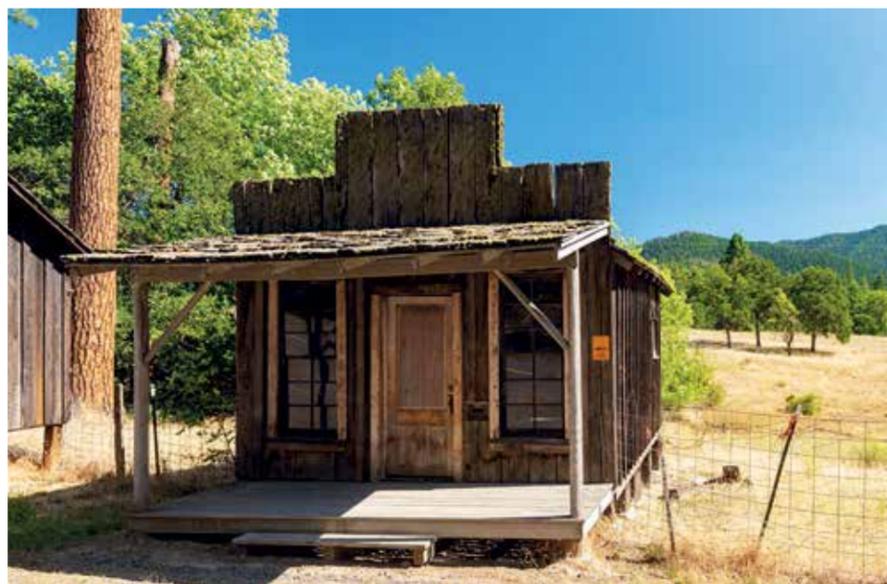
The Elmores are a true root-stock family, proud of their heritage and full of good humor. Barbara Elmore Niedermeyer told a story about her father and some fellow Applegate Grangers, who all grew beards to commemorate Oregon's Centennial in 1959. C.H. III liked his so much he kept it. Beryl asked him how long he would stay bearded, and he said "until he got an elk in hunting season." But he never did shave, and Barbara never saw him without a beard. Many years later, looking through some old family photos, Barbara didn't recognize her clean-shaven father. There was a good deal of teasing over that one!

In 2003, the Elmore Ranch was recognized by the Oregon Historical Society as an Oregon Century Ranch, an honor reserved for farms and ranches that have been continually worked and occupied by the same family for 100 years or more.

In Grandma Bessie's later years, Barbara would visit her, and, though Bessie sometimes didn't recognize her granddaughter, she would always ask, "Did you have to travel all day to get here?" perhaps remembering the long journeys she took to see her future husband—from Wilderville to Applegate—and meeting halfway between.

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ASK THE GATER



Buncom Post Office, built in 1910. Photo: Oregon Secretary of State Archives.

What is the history of Buncom?

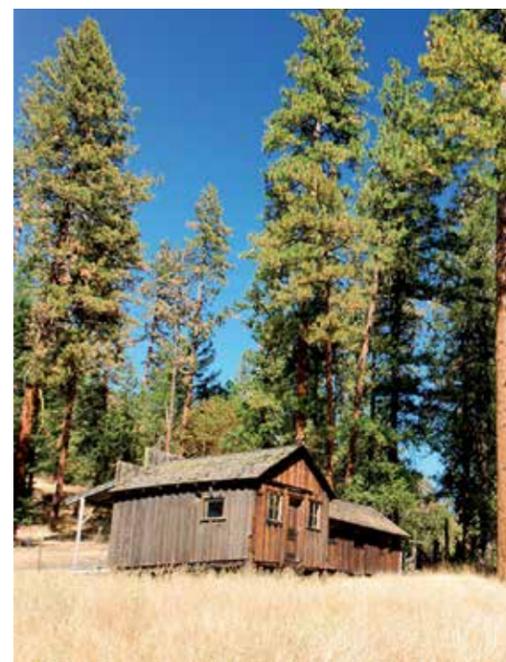
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Applegater reader Doranne Long wrote us a note wanting to know "a little more about the history of Buncom." Good question, Doranne, as it's probably a safe bet that most folks know little about the last remaining ghost town in southern Oregon. Only the name may be familiar because a weather spotter reports for local TV forecasters from Buncom (etymology unknown, though perhaps slang for "not worth much"). Here's what we know.

In 1851, Chinese miners found gold on Sterling Creek. It didn't take long for the news to spread and for thousands of miners to find their way to the Little Applegate Valley. As was often the case, the Chinese miners were overwhelmed and pushed out by the rush of miners from California and other parts of Oregon. Most accounts of the origins of Buncom cite the gold strike made in 1854 by two white miners, James Sterling (for whom the creek is named) and Aaron Davis. Their mining claim was more than four miles from Buncom, though. A boom town sprang up there too—Sterlingville, a town with 1,200 residents at its peak—but when the gold petered out, so did Sterlingville. There is nothing left of it but the cemetery.

Buncom thrived for about 60 years, growing from a mining camp to a full-fledged town well-positioned at the crossroads of Little Applegate and Sterling Creek roads. When the gold rush ended, Buncom served as the supply hub for farmers and ranchers in the Little Applegate Valley. The stagecoach route ran right through Buncom, and there was a US Post Office there for 20 years, from 1896-1916. It was a full day's wagon ride from Buncom into Jacksonville, which made Buncom an important community center, providing services and goods to the people living in the Little Applegate.

It was the arrival and popularity of automobiles in the Rogue Valley that led to the demise of Buncom. Once a trip



Back of the post office and bunkhouse (general store) buildings in Buncom. Photo: Oregon Secretary of State Archives.

to Jacksonville was shortened by more modern transportation, Buncom quickly died out. The post office closed. Stage travel was a thing of the past. By 1918, Buncom was abandoned. Soon after, most of the town's buildings were destroyed by a wildfire. The three buildings that survived the fire—the bunkhouse, the cookhouse, and the post office built in 1910—are still standing, having been preserved and maintained by the Buncom Historical Society.

For those who are interested in learning more, check out a book, *Buncom: Crossroads Station*, by local authors Connie Fowler and J.B. Roberts. It was published in 1995 by the Buncom Historical Society. The book, now in its second printing, is available from the Society for \$18, including shipping (the book itself is \$15.95). To order, call 541-899-7656 or write to the Buncom Historical Society, 3232 Little Applegate Road, Jacksonville, OR 97530.

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