

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

Lafayette Cartee (1823-1891)

From: “Pennsylvania Biographies”ⁱ

Lafayette Cartee, son of John L. and Seclendia Cartee (Cartier), was born in December, 1823, in Tioga County, N. Y.. In 1825, he was brought by his father’s family to Coudersport, and here he lived until 1843. He was almost self-taught, having very limited opportunities of attending school, even after the opening of the academy in 1840. In 1844 he traveled west, and late in the same year became principal of the high school at Newport, Ky., a position he filled for two years. In 1846 he entered St John’s College, Cincinnati, as professor of mathematics and civil engineering, but failing health compelled him to resign in 1848, and in November of the same year he took passage on board a sailing vessel, bound for San Francisco, a sea-voyage being recommended by his physicians.

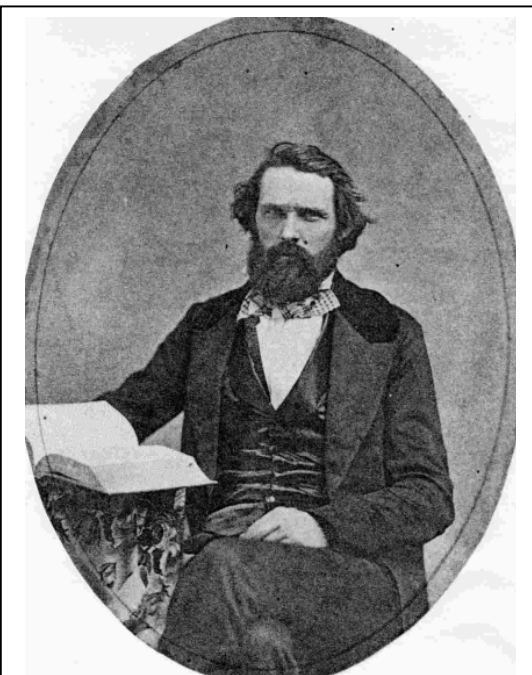


Figure 1. Lafayette Cartee. (Photo Courtesy of The Idaho State Historical Society, 984.111.1)

Reaching San Francisco in June of the following year, he found himself much improved in health. In California he spent a few months, and then went to Oregon, locating in Oregon City, where he remained some years. He was a member of the first territorial legislature, was speaker of the house the second term, and during the following few years he was engaged in surveying and engineering.

In the fall of 1855 he returned to Potter County, Penn., and was married during the ensuing winter to Miss Mary Bell, of Ceres, McKean County, who died at The Dalles, Ore., in December, 1862.

By Jerry Olson:

When Cartee arrived in Oregon City, he established an engineering and surveying business, and certainly, some of his projects were the notification surveys required of settlers

attempting to secure rights under the new Donation Land Claim Act. There is a record of Cartee performing at least one of these surveys in 1851 near downtown Portland.

An educated professional had an advantage in the local society, where Oregon City was the seat of government in Oregon. By 1853, Cartee was in the Territorial Legislature, and by 1854, he was Speaker of the House. As a Democrat, he was also in the currently correct political party. On February 12, 1853, he signed Claim Contract 5 with the Oregon Surveyor General, John Preston, a Whig, for the survey of 28 land claims near Oregon City. On April 25, 1853, he added Claim Contract 9, also with Preston. These surveys were not as political as the township surveys, because the settlers may have had a say in recruiting their Deputy Surveyor. March of 1854 brought Contract 42 of five original townships ranging from Camas, Washington south to Estacada, Oregon, this time authorized by the new Democrat Oregon Surveyor General, Charles K. Gardner. He also received Contract 59 from Gardner for five townships adjacent to the ones in Contract 42. That survey began in September of 1855 after he returned from getting married in Pennsylvania.

One of the young men he trained was Ezra Timothy Taft Fisher, the son of a claimant whose land claim he surveyed. Fisher worked quickly from chainman to compassman to a U. S. Deputy Surveyor on his own. Fisher would have a distinguished surveying career, partly in the role of Linn and then Clackamas County Surveyor. Also, on the first contract, Cartee hired David Preston Thompson, who would also rise up the ranks quickly to compassman and then U. S. Deputy Surveyor, and ultimately to Territorial Governor of Idaho and Minister to Turkey. One always wonders how much of the work the Deputy Surveyor turned over to these competent assistants.

From 1856 to 1859, Cartee was absent from GLO surveys under the term of John Zeiber as Oregon Surveyor General. When contracts were offered on the East side of the Cascades, he returned with Cont. 86 for 10 townships near Hood River, Cont. 88 for 2 townships south of Hermiston, Cont. 94 in 1860 for 2 townships, Cont. 96 for 5 townships south of Hood River, and Cont. 98 of 7 townships near Maupin, all awarded between November, 1859 and July of 1861 by Democrat Surveyor General William Chapman.

The Surveyor General gave Cartee a contract in 1860 for surveys in the Deschutes River valley (Num. 98). This contract was completed and then extended by the Surveyor General to survey an additional 300 miles of line. After the work was finished, Surveyor General Chapman was replaced by Republican B. J. Pengra, leaving Cartee without payment of \$3033.50 unless specifically appropriated by an Act of Congress. It is unknown whether he received the money.



Figure 2. Back Row Darius F. Baker, Governor David Ballard, _ Bishop, Front Row, Lafayette Cartee, Unkn, James Reynolds. (Photo Courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society, Cartee Album, 74-128.5/a,b.)



Figure 3. Lafayette Cartee. (Photo Courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society, 74.50.3)

The rapids at Cascade Locks posed a significant obstacle to the passage of passengers and freight on the Columbia River. The Bradford Road (railroad) was constructed on the north shore from present North Bonneville to Stevenson. In 1862, the Oregon Railway and Navigation Co. began construction of a railroad on the south shore to also bypass the rapids. The terrain was very difficult with rock cliffs and large boulders prevalent. In 1862, Cartee was hired to act as engineer and superintendent for the construction of this road.

It was about this time that Cartee's wife died in The Dalles, which was where most of his work had been centered at the time. He finished what was in progress and removed himself to Idaho in 1863. Many years later he sent his fourteen year old son Ross to bring Mary's body to be interred in Pioneer Cemetery in Boise.

He built Idaho's first sawmill at Rock Bar, and in 1866 was appointed Idaho Territory's first Surveyor General by Democrat President Andrew Johnson, serving through many Republican Regimes until approximately 1880. During his term as Surveyor General, his old employee on his GLO Contracts, David P. Thompson, was appointed Territorial Governor of Idaho, serving only 2 years, 1875-1876.

From: "Idaho State Historical Society, Reference Series"ⁱⁱ

Cartee married Mary Bell at Ceres, Pennsylvania, in 1855, and they had four children: Carrie (later Mrs. Fremont Wood), Ella, Ross and Mary. After his wife's death in 1862 at The Dalles, Cartee came to Idaho. He erected the first sawmill at Rocky Point Bar in 1863, and attempted to bring in the first quartz mill, but the freight train was reportedly attacked by Indians, and the mill was

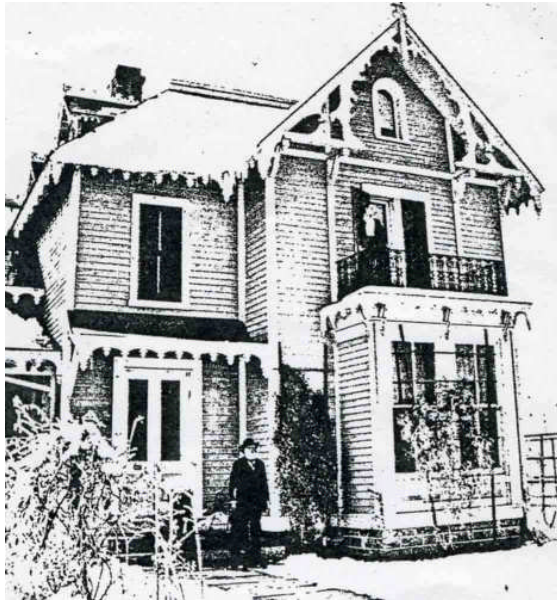


Figure 4. Lafayette Cartee standing in front of his home at 405 Grove Street in Boise, ID.
(Photo courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Society.)

abandoned. He brought his family to Boise, building the city's first greenhouse in 1871. For the next twenty years he imported trees, flowers, and shrubs from the Eastern United States and from China, India, and Japan. Bringing tender trees and plants to early Boise was a major and risky undertaking, as they could be shipped by rail only as far as Kelton, Utah, then had to be hauled by freight wagon. Cartee planted most of his twenty-four acres between Grove Street and the river, and grew enough fruit and vegetables to produce 30,000 cans a year in his cannery. His nursery and orchard were important sources of plants and trees for many Boise Valley growers between 1870 and 1890.

Lafayette Cartee, who possessed the seemingly contradictory titles of "General" and "father of the nursery business in Idaho," died in Boise on September 2, 1891

ⁱ **"History of the counties of McKean, Elk, Cameron and Potter, Pennsylvania"**: with biographical selections, including their early settlement and development, a description of the historic and interesting localities, sketches of their cities, towns and villages, portraits of prominent men, biographies of representative citizens, outline history of Pennsylvania, statistics. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1890, page 1145.

ⁱⁱ **"Idaho Historical Society, Reference Series: Publications"**: – 450 N. 4th Street, Boise ID 83702