

THREE PIONEER VOICES

By Tim Pfau

Today's offering is a sampling of poems from three Pioneer poets.

Elizabeth Markham, a Portland socialite, often read commissioned poems at public historical celebrations. Today they provide us glimpses of the public's mood and, perhaps, of the myths that followed.

Here, she celebrates Oregon's 50th anniversary.

ROAD TO OREGON

We left our friends in foreign lands—
Our native country dear;
In sorrow, took the parting hand
And shed the falling tear.

For Oregon, three cheers they gave,
From us to disengage—
Fearing that we might find our graves
Amidst the sand and sage;

Or met by cruel savage bands,
And slaughtered on the way—
Their spectred visions, hand in hand,
Would round our pathway play.

To the Pacific's temperate clime
Our journey soon began—
Traversing through the desert sands
Towards the setting sun.

Ella Higginson's best-selling poetry and fiction included *From the Land of the Snow Pearls*, and *Mariella of Out-west*. Suffragette zeal and immense talent led her to be Washington's first poet laureate. She created wholes from closely observed details, a model that transcends archaic form, as in this from the early 1900's.

MARCH

Hey, alder, hang thy tassels out
This blue and golden morn;
And willow, show thy silver plush,
Wild grape, thy scarlet thorn.

And velvet moss about the trees,
Lift every russet cup;
The dew is coming down this way
With pearls to fill them up.

And birds, why tarry so a-South?
Spent is the bitter rain!
With messages of love and cheer
Come North, come North again.

Ada Hastings Hedges spent years in the wilds of eastern Oregon while her physician husband worked for the railroad. Missing urban comforts and companionship, she poured her loneliness into the landscape. *Desert Poems* was the beautiful result. This is the first in a sequence of four seasonal sonnets composing the book's signature piece, "The Desert."

It will be spring upon the bare grey hills:
Across the sunny slopes will soon be seen,
Close in the wake of winter's lingering chills,
A trailing mist of thin ephemeral green.
Through this transparency the hills will be
Unmoved and grim, in scorn of compromise
With spring's brief carnival, inscrutably
Disdaining all her garments of disguise.
In frosty dawns the desert larks will pour
Their reckless flood of song upon this wide
Indifference; while under skies too clear
Old junipers, more weathered than before,
Grow wistful as they stand unglorified,
That May is but a shadow passing here.