

Luelling, Henderson ^[1]

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by Paul B. Thompson, 1991

23 Apr. 1809–28 Dec. 1878

Henderson Luelling, nurseryman and agricultural entrepreneur, was born in [Randolph County](#) ^[2], the son of Mesheck Luelling, a physician and nurseryman of Welsh descent and a member of the Back Creek Monthly [Quaker](#) ^[3] Meeting. His mother's maiden name was Brookshire. Young Luelling studied under his father and developed an interest in the nursery business. In 1825 the family moved to Greensboro, Ind., where, on 30 Dec. 1830, Henderson Luelling married Elizabeth Presnell, a childhood neighbor in North Carolina.

In 1837 Henderson and his brother John began a nursery in Salem, Iowa, which they operated for ten years. During that time Henderson made many trips around the country seeking newer and hardier strains of fruit trees. As settlers moved farther west Luelling began to think of joining them, and on 17 Apr. 1847, with his wife and eight children (the youngest named Oregon Columbia), he left Salem. A friend, William Meek, joined the expedition. Using a wagon pulled by four oxen, the Luellings transported nearly a thousand trees and shrubs to their new home. This strange caravan is said to have astounded bands of marauding Indians as they watched living trees rolling across the prairie. Having lost about half of its nursery stock, the expedition reached Fort Vancouver and Henderson found a suitable site for his unusual cargo near the modern site of Milwaukie, Ore. Among the fruits that he introduced to settlers in the region were grapes, apples, cherries, plums, pears, quinces, and various types of berries. His available stock sold quickly and his business flourished. By 1850 Luelling was sufficiently prosperous that he invited his brother Seth to move west and join in the operation.

In 1854, following the death of his wife, Henderson Luelling moved to California. There the climate and the demand for vines and fruit trees soon made him a rich man. Anxious for even wider markets, by 1859 he decided to move again. He purchased a ship and sailed for Honduras with two of his sons and their families. This proved to be a disastrous venture and they all returned to California. By that time, however, the boom days of the frontier were past and Luelling never enjoyed the success he had known before. As the head of a large family, many of his offspring having also become nurserymen, he remained in California for the rest of his life. He died in San José and was buried in Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland.

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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