

YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Date: Tuesday December 11, 1984 7:00 p.m.
Location: Community Christian Church, 2831 N. Newby, McMinnville, Oregon
Potluck: Bring your own service
Election of officers and a short program.

Museum News

We were closed on the Saturday after Thanksgiving as I had Thanksgiving on that day with my family who had to stretch the holiday to have all of the family together. We have received a petticoat from Mrs. Mischler that was worn by her grandmother. It was made of many long inserts of crochet. It must have been quite a job to make, wash, iron, etc..

We will begin day meetings in January for a few months as the weather is so bad and it gets dark so early. Thanks to Mr. White for repairs on the eaves at the museum building. We have many books of Schools of Old Yamhill that are available for \$10.00 per copy. They make excellent Christmas gifts. We are out of maps and have ordered more and they should be here shortly. If you would like an appointment at the museum, please don't hesitate to call. 472-7935.

History notes (submitted by Ruth Stoller)

(We continue the interview with W.H. Hembree, grandson of Joel J. Hembree, done on April 25, 1938 by the Federal Writers' Project under the Works Progress Administration)

At the tender age of eight years, I worked right along with the rest of the men of the family. Being the youngest, my job was to keep the shavings all raked up into piles, and to bundle the shingles as fast as my father and brothers made them. That was no easy job for a youngster so small, for they contrived to fashion a surprisingly large number of shingles each day and the piles of shavings grew prodigiously large as the day wore on. No sooner would I arrange and tie one bundle of shingles that it seemed another was ready to tie. We used to work well on into the evening. That's when the piles of shavings were put to use. I would set fire to the shaving piles, one after another as each burned out, and we worked by the light of these pungent fires. It was not at all unusual for us to work 14 or 16 hours from the time we started in the morning until we gave up and called it a day. I was always a pretty tired youngster when I had tied off the last bundle and was mighty glad when my father would say, "Alright boys, let's put out the fire."

I worked along with the family, riving shingles until I was 12 or 13 years old when I began to work out for others. Boys in those days seemed to mature earlier than they do now. As soon as a lad had a sign of fuzz on his cheek he was considered a man and was expected to fill any place that a man could. I was no exception. At 15 I was riding the range, and at 17 had been pretty much all over the great plains of central and eastern Oregon.

As I said before, We worked every day but Sunday, and except for chores, Sunday really was a day of rest, and a very welcome one. The day was really a quiet and holy day in those times. My family was not what one would consider over much pious or religious, for those times, but it seemed that every family embraced some sort of faith. God did not seem so far away as he does today. He seemed mighty close to us. We seemed to see evidence of His works all around us and were mightily awed by His power. I noticed that folks in general don't have that sort of religious consciousness in them of late years.

Our home was typical of a pioneer Oregon family. Mother made homespun. I can see her at the spinning wheel, treading out the yarn that was to go into the things that we would be wearing a few months later. Today, women of the age she was then, use the same toe my mother used on the treadle, to step on the accelerator as they drive to a department store for machine-made cloth and ready-made garments. Our work clothes shirts and pants, were usually made of home-turned buckskin. This stuff wore like iron, and though it was not very beautiful to look at, was extremely serviceable. When a man--and I mean by that, any male person over 16 or thereabouts--was able to accumulate the required number of dollars, one of his most important investments would be in a Sunday-go-to-meeting outfit made by eastern tailors, and consisting of swallow-tail coat, a fancy, light-colored vest, and a striped pair of pants. We would top this elegant attire with a high, beaver hat. He was then ready for--and considered properly dressed to be acceptable in--the most dignified and formal gathering, or social function.

After a good deal of wandering about, mostly within Oregon's boundaries, I came to Portland and got a job on Portland's "Paid" fire department. The fire department personnel at that time comprised both paid and volunteer firemen. I stayed with the department for about three years, making an excellent record as fireman, and then went to sea as a sailor. I liked the seafaring life very much and my travels took me to many foreign ports where I saw a great deal to interest a young man of my active and curious disposition. But I hadn't quite forgotten the thrill and excitement that went with fighting fires, so I returned to Portland, and because I had left a good service record behind me when I quit the department previously, I was immediately placed on the roster and became once more a fireman. Another few years as a fireman, when the sea beckoned, and I returned to walk the caulked planks of a ship's deck. A couple of years at sea and I again found myself yearning for the prancing fire-horse and clanging gong. Back to the fire department, where I served during Mayor Simon's administration, quitting finally and never again returning. I then worked on river boats in various capacities, where I earned the courtesy title of Captain. I have no papers, however.

(to be concluded)