

The West Side

Newsletter and Journal of the Yamhill County Historical Society

May 2000

Williams Canyon & Gerrish Valley

At our April meeting, George Williams and his wife put on a wonderful program, telling about the pioneers who settled in some of the northernmost valleys of our county. John Gerrish was born in 1799, and traveled to Oregon in 1844. He was an ordained minister who preached on a circuit, sometimes being away from his family for months on end. His circuits covered from Dallas to Astoria, to St. Helens, all of Yamhill County, and even into Clark County, Washington. His diaries still exist, in which he described his sermons, as well as the numerous trials and tribulations he experienced over the years until his death in 1865. There were hard feelings between Catholics and Protestants during these early years, and one woman told him "You're not satisfied going to Hell alone, but must drag a number of other people along with you!". He was attacked by a vicious dog and threatened by a lady wielding a butcher knife. The last sermon in his diaries is # 1302, but he preached once or twice more before he passed away.

Joseph Williams came to New York from England as a young man, as much to escape an overbearing father as to make a fresh start in our new nation. He came to the Gaston area in 1872 and settled in the upper end of the canyon bearing his name in 1877 with his wife and children. The hop industry became very important to our economy in the late 1800's, and between 1905 and 1915, Oregon lead the nation in hop production.

Space here does not permit more than a small portion of the fascinating history we learned about at this meeting. The old pictures, the diaries and the historic information related was of interest to all in attendance. We thank George and his wife for all their work in putting this together for us.

Meeting Location Notice:

Our next meeting will be at the McMinnville Christian Church, not the County Public Works Auditorium as announced at our last meeting.

A Plea for Help:

A Westfir lady is seeking photos, articles, information and recollections of the Flora Logging Company, which operated extensively in Yamhill and Tillamook counties during the 1930's. Her uncle was Joseph Flora, owner of the company. She can be reached at: Nikki (Flora) Hampton, 46443 Westfir Rd. #12, Westfir, Oregon 97492 or by phone at 541-782-4539. Her email address is NikkiEH@webtv.net Thank you... Ed.

Presidents Message

Dear Members; I am impressed with the quality of the programs that Barbara Knutson continues to arrange for our monthly meetings. The speakers who present the programs about the pioneer families and events that affected Yamhill County and its settlement are enjoyable and appreciated. Many times it is a descendant of one of these families who makes the presentation. I know I speak for our membership and guests when I say, "Thank You, Thank You, Thank You, Barbara!!" Also, a thank you to the volunteers who meet every Saturday and Sunday at the Museum to work on projects and show visitors our facilities and help those researching their families, places and events. The "Hats Off to Volunteers" Tea being held May 11th will be a great chance to let these people know how much we appreciate all the things they do to help preserve and make our collections of items and information available to the public. Be sure and mark this event on your calendar. Happy Easter. Love, Shirley

School Grant Possible

On Friday, March 31st, a meeting was held at the Log Museum. Those present were Twila Byrnes, Lois Brooks, Ed Roghair and Shirley McDaniel. This group is responsible for the school tours held at the Museum. Also present was Lorna Monson, Curriculum Coordinator with the Yamhill-Carlton School system and Shirley Venhaus. It is the desire of the group to make our services more known and available to the Yamhill County Schools system. A grant was brought to our attention that could be applied for, via the schools, which would allow us to provide teachers manuals, worksheets, a listing of our library resources and forms to help establish better communications between the schools and the society.

It is too late for this years grant deadline, but could be considered for next year. The ideal tour is around 30 students divided into three groups within our buildings, with time for each group to see all three facilities. This would also help prevent a situation that occurred when 95 students, teachers and assistants arrived late for the tour, tired and hungry, having already spent time in Portland. Increasing the number of students touring the Museum will require more volunteers. This is an excellent program, we just need to make the school system more aware of the Society, and allow them to make use of this educational tool. We would appreciate your help and suggestions with this program. Contact any of the above members. Thanks.

OFFICERS - 2000

- President**
Shirley Venhaus
472-7328
- VP/Program**
Barbara Knutson
843-2069
- Secretary (Joint)**
Shirley McDaniel
662-3528
Eileen Crawley
835-3673
- Treasurer**
Betty Brown
472-7100
- Financial Secretary**
Lila Jackson
472-8510
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Marjorie Owens
843-3081
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Eileen Lewis
835-7531

Ed Roghair
472-6909

Robert Kuykendall
662-3354

Dan Linscheid
843-2625
- Volunteer Coordinator**
Maxine Williams
472-4547
- Librarian**
Olive Merry Johnson
472-6070
- Newsletter**
Dan Linscheid
843-2625
- Car Pool Coordinator**
Joanne Watts
835-5893

MUSEUM HOURS

Sept 1 to May 31:
Sat-Sun 1 to 4 P M
or
By Appointment

605 Market Street
Lafayette Oregon
Phone: 864-2308

ANNUAL DUES

\$10.00 Individual
\$17.00 Family
\$125.00 Life

Mail to:
Financial Secty
2430 North Baker
McMinnville OR
97128

Heritage Tree Dedication:

The statewide Heritage Tree Dedication ceremony was held on April 5th at the LaPine State Park South of Bend, OR.

This years designees—the big Ponderosa Pine at the State Park and the Baker/Russell Black Walnut on Cleo and Pat Hardings' farm on Oldsville Road southwesterly of McMinnville were announced at the LaPine ceremony.

A local heritage tree ceremony for the Baker/Russell Black Walnut will be held on Oldsville Road (just north of the Pine Tree Patio) on Friday, June 2nd at 11:00 a.m. The public is welcome. Please come and help us honor our Heritage trees. Maynard Dawson, noted author and big tree hunter, will make the dedication. Following this, there will be a reception sponsored by the Historical Society at the home of Shirley Venhaus, 8200 N. Hwy. 99 W., McMinnville. It is the third home on the right after you cross the bridge over the Yamhill, wooden fence and a hard right into the driveway. Everyone is invited.

Correction:

One of our sharp-eyed readers informed the editor that in the March issue, Morey Parmeter was really Maurice Parmenter of First Federal, better known as Maury to his friends.

May Meeting & Potluck

Our next meeting will be held at the McMinnville Christian Church on May 9th at 6:30 p.m. Following the potluck dinner our guest speaker will be Joe Dancer, retired McMinnville City Manager and noted local historian. His presentation on Historical McMinnville promises to be fantastic, so please plan on attending, and try to invite a guest along.

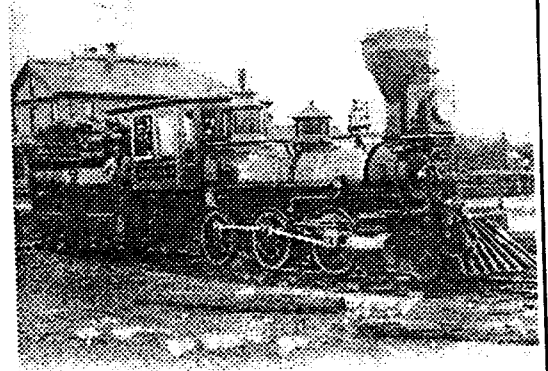
Summary of Board Meeting Minutes

At the April 11th meeting, Treasurer Betty Brown reported an income of \$1494, expenses of \$1459. Maxine Williams reported that volunteers for May are covered. Some organizing in the Church Museum will soon be taking place, such as placing all the telephones in one location. Security system in the Log Building is still not active, but soon will be. We will sponsor a \$15 award for Div. 508, Class I at the Co. Fair again this year. The Board is acting as the general chair of the Harvest Festival until someone volunteers. We are missing a bonnet at the Museum, which Twila uses for her school demos. We will be placing more labeling on items at the Museum to aid in self-guided tours. - Co-Secretary Shirley McDaniel

School Tour

Fifty-seven Yamhill 4th graders visited the Museum on Tuesday, April 11th, and were shown through by Lois, Ed and Twila. Teacher Ken Watson was in charge and several other adults accompanied the students. Many agreed there was too much to see in the allotted time and they would come again and bring their family. Twila Byrnes

More on our Narrow Gauge Railroad



Last months issue did not allow room for a photograph of a typical engine, so it's being inserted here. Taken about 1888, engine No. 5, the "Oregonian" is shown stopped at White-son. Called "narrow-gauge" and "slim-gauge", the 36" wide rails carried goods and passengers farther west and south than the standard gauge railroad on the West Side, which stopped at St. Joseph. The first engine was built in Pennsylvania and weighed just over 10 tons. The track-age between Sheridan and Dayton was described as "poorly constructed and not ballasted" by Leslie M. Scott, historian.

Donation:

Several items were donated to the Museum by the late John White: a roll-top desk, two filing cabinets, a wide map drawer and a chair. Thanks to Betty White, Elma Shuck and Olive Johnson for their efforts in getting these to the Museum.

Picnic:

Our annual picnic will be held on August 19th at noon in the Amity City Park. Please join us!

The Union Block—A History

Ardis Hendricks has donated a copy of her recent publication on the history of the Union Block in McMinnville. Between 1890 and 1941, the McMinnville Building and Improvement Co. was active in construction of this 3 story building in Historic McMinnville. Thanks, Ardis!

Mary Hess, lovingly called "Old Lady Hess" by her many friends in the Newberg, Oregon area, may well represent the independence and tenacity that Oregon Trail women developed.

Mary Kaiser was born into a strong German family on February 22, 1817. She married Joseph W. Hess in October of 1836 and in May of 1843 they, their five children - age 10 months to 6 years old - and Mary's parents, Thomas and Mary Girley Kaizer, were waiting in Westport, Kansas to start their great trek West. Over seven months later, on Christmas Eve of 1843, the Hess Family settled in lower Chehalem Valley. Joseph threw up a tent along a muddy creek that would soon bare their name and the family set about making a home. With five young, "scallywags", a wet winter, a small tent and few provisions, life must have been desolate. However, Doris Jones Huffman reports they did all right. "Joseph, with a flintlock rifle hoisted over his shoulder, corn ground in Mary's coffee grinder for corn pone, and a little moonshine to whet their southern whistles the whole of Chehalem Valley lay before them."

For the next twenty-five years the Hess family grew and prospered. They had 8 more children which was to keep Mary busy. Joseph was one of those people that found financial success easily. By 1869 he was considered the richest man in the area, having 2000 acres of land and was worth over \$50,000! No small sum in those days. It no doubt helped when he made a summer "excursion" to California as one of the "49ers. That trip netted him over \$3,000 in gold.

Important contributions to the economy of the area were the two grist mills the Hesses built. The first was a small one on Chehalem Creek and later a larger one costing \$11,000 was built on Hess creek. The later, run by son John, and was successful.

Mary was more than able to take care of herself and her family. She was a "crack shot" and there are stories about how she was able to drive off a pack of wolves with her shooting ability. The family likes to tell how she fooled the Indians once. James T. "Jim Tom" Hess told this story. "One day after father had started to Oregon City for provisions, mother saw Indians sneaking around in the brush, and was afraid they would try to get into the cabin that night, knowing she and her several small children were left alone."

"That evening she made a dummy by stuffing some of father's clothes, spread a quilt on the floor in front of the fire-place, laid the dummy on the quilt, put an old hat over the head as though it were a man asleep, and placed a gun beside it."

"Sure enough that night an Indian came to the door and wanted in. Mother told the Indian that he couldn't come in because her man was sick. He said, 'Man not here, man gone away.' She said, 'He is here. He is lying there in front of the fire asleep.' The Indian insisted that he had seen father go away, and that he was coming in."

"As he reached his hand through the hole to open the door, Mother grabbed the chopping axe and told him that if he touched the peg she would cut his hand off. He snatched his hand back and peeked through the hole. By the light of the fire he could see a man lying on a quilt on the floor with a hat over his face and a gun beside him, so he hurriedly left and did not bother around the cabin any more."

Such were the times of our first pioneers. But greater

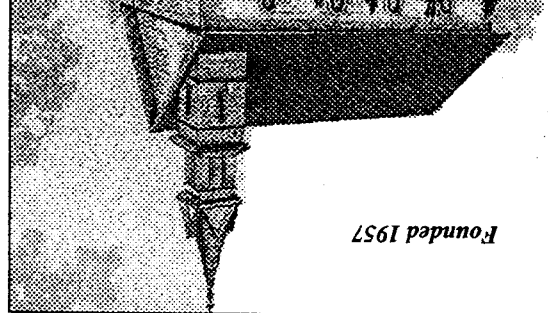
problems were to visit Mary in the form of "moonshine." The federal government was after Joseph for building a distillery. His habit of keeping hard liquor around was getting him into trouble. Joseph was able to control his own drinking but his sons were not able to exhibit that same discipline. Known as the "wild Indians" of Chehalem valley, they took what they wanted, made life difficult for the neighbors and generally made pest of themselves. It was not long before a conflict broke out between the Hess boys and their neighbors, the Morris family. Finally, Clayborn Morris shot Tillman "Cull" Hess in self-defense. Cull recovered but soon after, Clayborn was shot and killed from ambush. The Hess boys and their father were prime suspects and were all arrested and put in jail. Famous lawyer David Logan from Lafayette, Oregon managed to get them free of any charges but advised them to leave the area. They didn't have much choice because his fees took most of Joseph's assets. Logan collected \$2000 in gold and 320 acres of land.

All of the family, except John who was not part of the "wild Indians" and was successfully running the grist mill, moved to northern California. But again, Joseph was into building a distillery and in trouble with the law. Mary had enough of his "tomfoolery" and left him. She moved back to the old homestead in Newberg to be near her son John. The last 30 years of her life were spent in Newberg, supporting and contributing to the community. She died in 1902 and is buried in the Friends Cemetery.



Mary Louisa's contributions to the Hess fortunes were significant. She was able to cut a tree and trim a log for the cabin as quick as any man. She understood farming and had a good business head. The breaking up of the family was very hard on her but she maintained her friends, her independence and reputation in the Newberg area thus being known as "Old lady Hess."

by Jim Lockett



Founded 1957

YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 484
Lafayette Oregon 97127

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Organization
U.S. Postage
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YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March 2000 Calendar of Events

Tuesday May 9th, 5:00 PM

Board of Directors - McMinnville Christian Church

Tuesday May 9th, 6:30 PM

General Meeting & Potluck Dinner - McMinnville Christian Church
Bring your Own Table Service - Guests Always Welcome

(See page 2 for details)

Note: the four characters in brackets to the right of your name and address label are the year (1st two digits) and month (last two digits) our records show you last paid your dues. If those numbers show its been more than a year, this will be among your last newsletters. A 90 day grace period has been granted by the Board; thereafter, sorry, but no more newsletters. For those who paid in January of 1999 (or earlier) this will be their final newsletter.