

# The West Side

Newsletter and Journal of the Yamhill County Historical Society

September 1998



B. White photo

Good food and conversation were the order of the day at the picnic.

## GOOD TIME ENJOYED

### BY ALL AT THE ANNUAL YCHS PICNIC

At noon on Saturday August 1st members of the Yamhill County Historical Society convened at the Amity City Park for the annual picnic. This year the weather cooperated by providing a sunny, but not too warm, afternoon and as always the pot luck selection offered a wide variety of tasties.

The highlight of the day was President Shirley's presentation of various gag gifts to several officers and volunteers along with appropriate comments. Among the gifts were jump ropes, paddle ball sets and coloring books with Barbara Knutson receiving a toy cellular phone that turned out to be the hit of the afternoon. Those unable to attend missed a very pleasant outing.

## 1998 HARVEST FESTIVAL CELEBRATION

Saturday October 17th is the date of this year's Harvest Festival and museum open house. One of the old time fiddle bands that played for us last year has agreed to return and we are awaiting confirmation from the other. Quilters, spinners, weavers and persons skilled in several other homemaking arts will be demonstrating their crafts in the log museum plus other activities related to bygone days are planned. Refreshments will be served and it is hoped as many members as possible will attend dressed in some sort of "period" attire.

Remember, aside from being a fun gathering for the Society, this is our opportunity to host the public and make them aware of our activities. Be sure to mark Saturday October 17th on your calendar and plan to attend.



B. White photo

Mary Vincent enjoys her friends at the picnic

## ROSE ARBOR PLANNED AT MUSEUM

Our head groundskeeper, Master Gardener Ruth Crawford, has come up with a tentative plan to build an old fashioned rose arbor at the rear of the Miller Log Building. Construction labor would be provided as an Eagle Scout merit badge project with the Society purchasing the necessary materials. Ross Eells will be

setting it up with the Scouts. For necessary funding the YCHS Board of Directors at its August meeting earmarked our 1998 Oregon State tourist grant of \$305.00 toward the project. It may take a while to complete, but the plan certainly seems like a winner for all concerned

## NOTES AND COMMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thanks to the fine weather and everyone's efforts the annual picnic was a success. Special thanks go to Eileen Lewis and Opal Lahley for their efforts to maintain control of the table and shelter house.

The Board of Directors continues to search for the best investments and use of the Society's endowments. We are looking at the needs for the future and our responsibility to make the most of our resources. Information on our decisions will be made available to the membership. Records for future board members and volunteers will be kept in the Society files in the log museum.

The members of the board have all agreed that we must keep the

membership better informed of the actions of the board. We must try to keep in mind that we represent the entire membership. In doing so, we strive to improve and maintain programs and policies that have proved successful. If anyone would like to attend or address the board, please do so. Our fall meetings are always at 5:00 PM prior to the general meeting.

We Look forward to seeing you at our first meeting following the summer break.

Sincerely,

Shirley



B. White photo

President Shirley Venhaus displays a souvenir obtained during her recent vacation trip.

*The Yamhill County Historical Society is a nonprofit tax exempt educational and public service corporation established to protect, preserve and share the history and heritage of Yamhill County*

**OFFICERS - 1998****President**

Shirley Venhaus  
472-7328

**VP/Program**

Barbara Knutson  
843-2069

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Betty Baltzell  
472-7746

**Treasurer**

Don Crawford  
434-9843

**Financial Secretary**

Lila Jackson  
472-8510

**Corres. Secretary**

Delores Robertson  
538-0767

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John White  
665-5376

Ed Roghair  
472-6909

Robert Kuykendall  
662-3354

Dan Linscheid  
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Maxine Williams  
472-4547

**Librarian**

Olive Merry Johnson  
472-6070

**Newsletter**

John White  
665-5376

**Car Pool Coordinator**

Joanne Watts  
835-5893

**MUSEUM HOURS**

605 Market Street  
Lafayette Oregon  
Phone: 864-2308

June 1 to Aug 31:  
Fri & Sun 1 to 4 PM  
Sat 10AM to 4 PM

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

**ANNUAL DUES**

\$7.50 per person

Mail to:  
Financial Secty  
2430 North Baker  
McMinnville OR

97128

**OUR LADY AT THE TELEPHONE**

Joanne Watts is another of our members who serves in the background. She organized and heads up the telephone committee along with arranging ride sharing to our meetings. Also, her floral decorations for last year's Harvest Festival as well as some of our recent potluck dinners deserve a special note of praise.

A native of Nebraska, Joanne came to Oregon in 1965 with her husband Glen and three children. The Family located themselves on a farm in the McMinnville area and soon became part of the community. In October 1999 Glen and Joanne will mark their 50th wedding anniversary.

In addition to the YCHS Joanne is also active in the Yamhill County Genealogical Society and D.A.R. She enjoys researching her family and is always very willing to help others do the same. An interesting project she has recently undertaken is compiling the histories of Yamhill County Civil War veterans.

Family and friends mean a lot to Joanne and she always finds a free moment to chat with them.



B. White photo  
Joanne displays her smile  
at the August 1 YCHS picnic

**FERRY PHOTO RECEIVED**

At the August 2nd Hewitt/Cooper/Matheny family reunion Don Rivara presented an 18x22 inch framed 1860s photo of the Wheatland Ferry to the YCHS. On hand to receive it on our behalf was librarian Olive Merry Johnson (herself a member of the Hewitt clan).

The Wheatland Ferry was established on a regular basis in 1844 by Daniel Matheny and the present craft is the fourth to be named in his honor.

**NEW MEMBERS**

We welcome the following new members and look forward to seeing them at our activities:

Beki Hayes - McMinnville

Robert Jinings - Hillsboro

Marilyn Ready - Seattle

Matthew Warrix - McMinnville

**1860 CENSUS REPRINT**

Don Crawford has completed electronic digital scanning of the old 1860 census pages. Using this process fuzzy old mimeographed pages are transcribed into a sharp easy to read format. Olive Merry Johnson is now conducting proof reading prior to placing the final product on sale at the museum.

**MEMBER INPUT NEEDED**

Among several other artifacts received for the museum over this past summer is the extensive old bottle collection of the late Art Fryer generously donated by his widow Grace. Some may remember Art for his teaching days at Mac High.

While several of these old bottles are generic and do not relate directly to Yamhill County, it is felt they are part of the heritage. Membership comment is requested as to how this collection might best be displayed. Also, as mentioned in the last issue, the Board would appreciate receiving ideas for updating some of the other exhibits as well.

**SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING AND POTLUCK DINNER**

The place and time are the **Sheridan American Legion Hall at 6:30 PM on Tuesday September 8th**. Presenting the program for the evening will be County Surveyor and YCHS member Dan Linscheid who will discuss the history behind some local road and place names. Start the fall season by bringing potluck fare, table service and a guest to what promises to be an enjoyable evening. *(The Legion Hall is on Bridge Street one block north of Main)*

**SUMMER MUSEUM VISITORS**

Eileen Lewis reports a near record number of individual visitors to the museum this past summer. In addition to those from the local or Portland metropolitan area, there were guests from Germany, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Mississippi, Oklahoma (2 different parties), Arizona and several from California and Washington. Groups were well represented also with the Yamhill County Genealogical Society, Baptist Church, Golden Rule Club, Amity Cub Scouts and an unidentified senior group of 9 persons touring the facilities.

**FINANCIAL PLANNING**

In light of recent larger bequests the Board of Directors will take up at its September meeting establishment of an investment program aimed at providing a degree of future financial security for the organization. Requirements and goals for both the long and short term will also be discussed at this time..

**IN MEMORIAM**

It is with regret we record the passing of two long time members or supporters of the Society:

Margeurite Lewis  
Miles Robertson

*Remember, A Red Dot on Your Address Label Means Your Dues are Due*

## A FAILED BANK ROBBERY AT NEWBERG

by John White

Sometime shortly after midnight on Sunday October 18th 1903 a group of men stopped in front of the Bank of Newberg on First and Washington Streets. Two or three of them forced open the front door while at least two more, armed with rifles, took up lookout positions in the shadows outside the building.



Author's Collection

The Bank of Newberg building as it appeared about 1900

Once inside the robbers made their way across the lobby and past the teller cage to the vault room. Electing to not attempt entry by breaking through the heavy steel door, they attacked the eighteen inch brick and concrete vault wall with sledgehammers. After nearly two hours of smashing and

a bit of cursing, the burglars were able to gain access to the vault room. Their demolition work for the evening was not yet over however as the bank kept its cash in a formidable steel safe within the vault. It had been the very latest in secure design at the time of its purchase ten years earlier.

The robbers placed an explosive charge on the safe, lit the fuse and exited the building. When reentering after the blast they found the concussion had blown open the heavy steel vault room door from the inside making access much easier, but the safe itself remained unopened and relatively unharmed. Once more the robbers set off another charge only to find the strong box again remained solidly intact. In fact, no less than a total of nine attempts to blast open the safe occurred over about a thirty minute period and all produced the same result. Although somewhat battered and bent by its ordeal, the safe had performed its intended purpose admirably.

Perhaps becoming disgusted, or more likely because they had no more explosives, the thwarted safecrackers abandoned their project and departed the scene. They barely had time to disappear into the darkness before the city fire bell began ringing and the entire community came to life.

As the citizens rushed to the business district in search of a fire, they were warned by neighbors of the bank building to take cover as the armed robbery might still be in progress. After several minutes without any sign of the bandits, a group of men including bank cashier, J. C. Colcord, cautiously entered the building. Enduring thick smoke and an acrid explosive odor, they found the interior a shambles of fallen plaster and other debris. Needless to say they were relieved to discover the battered safe unopened. The building was then cordoned off awaiting a full investigation by authorities the following morning.

Probably the first to learn of the attempted robbery were two of three Maxfield siblings (two brothers and their sister) who rented quarters above the bank. Miss Maxfield and one of her brothers were awakened about 12:30 by the sledgehammer noise below, but upon observing an armed lookout from the window, declined to risk going for help. When the nine explosions began slightly after 2:00 a.m., they were terrified the building might collapse around them. Amazingly, the other Maxfield brother slept through the entire episode prompting the Newberg GRAPHIC of October 23rd to suggest "Gabriel will have to give an extra toot for his benefit on the day that's coming."

The noise of the explosions awoke several neighbors who

quickly became aware of the situation and most, like school principal R. W. Kirk, elected to remain spectators out of respect for the armed lookouts outside. A Mrs. McDaniels who lived in a small house directly behind the bank endured the blasts by hiding under a bed with her two daughters. Isaac Vinson was returning home on Washington Street after working late when one of the lookouts shouted "Get out of this or I'll put a hole in you!" following up his command with a shot fired in Vinson's direction. Isaac lost no time in responding as directed. Reverend S. W. Potter had

loaded his pistol and was preparing to go for help when the shot fired at Mr. Vinson whistled down the street. At this point the preacher wisely decided the entire matter was better left in the hands of the Almighty.

Henry Austin and his son Arthur did make an attempt to alert the community. Arthur was dispatched to the electric light plant with instructions to wake the engineer who slept there and have him turn on the street lights (normally turned off at 10 p.m.). The lad was then to head for the city hall and start ringing the fire bell. In the meantime Henry would cautiously crawl to a position near the bank. Their plan was that the noise of the bell would scare off the intruders, and with the street lights on, Henry might be able to identify them. This effort fell apart when Arthur arrived at the light plant to find the engineer gone and then at city hall discovered the robbers, in anticipation of such an occurrence, had removed the fire bell rope. Scrambling to the top of the bell tower Arthur managed to finally sound a belated alarm about the time the empty handed gang crossed the city limits in the direction of Chehalem Mountain.

The next day town marshal Joe Woods along with detectives from the insurance and safe companies conducted an investigation. It was determined that the explosive employed had been nitro-glycerin, but the robbers were not experienced with its use. Only very small amounts of this explosive are required to produce the desired results while larger charges usually send the force in directions not intended. These robbers had used far too much in each of the nine blasts as evidenced by blowing out the locked heavy steel vault room door while inflicting only minimal damage upon the target object inside. As to the identity of the miscreants, Marshal Woods was able to uncover but two clues: One safecracker was heard to call another "Bob" and footprints left by one of the lookouts indicated he had enormous feet.

Once the on-scene investigation was completed, the battered safe was hauled to the blacksmith shop at 108 S Meridian Street where it was opened under the watchful eye of Mr. Colcord and other bank officials. The contents were secure and undamaged.

Although their escape route was later traced through Scholls to the edge of Portland, the inept safecrackers were never apprehended. The Bank of Newberg interior was soon replastered, the vault door repaired and a brand new safe installed. Finally, for the next seventy years the sturdy old safe remained in service as an iron cleaning bench at the blacksmith shop.

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*YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

**YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
*September 1998 Calendar of Events*

**Tuesday September 8th, 5:00 PM**

Board of Directors - American Legion Hall - Sheridan

**Tuesday September 8th, 6:30 PM**

General Meeting & Potluck Dinner- American Legion Hall - Sheridan

Bring your Own Table Service - Guests Always Welcome

*(See page 2 for details)*