

# The West Side

Newsletter and Journal of the Yamhill County Historical Society

March 2001

## Patricia Harding introduces us to Walter Russell

Our February program was presented by Pat Harding, society member and life-long resident of Yamhill County. She lives on the family Century Farm near Masonville, and is a granddaughter of Walter Russell. He was born in South Dakota, one of eleven children. Rosemary Vertregt, Pat's cousin, assembled two tables of family pictures to assist in the presentation. Walter moved to Gopher Valley in 1899, went to eastern Oregon to work for a while, and returned to what is now the family farm near Bellevue. Pat described her grandfather as a feisty little man who was determined that there be progress in Yamhill County. Over the years, in serving on various boards, county and state government positions, he accumulated many years worth of service to our citizens. Pat also talked about her grandmother, Mary Duerst Russell, one of seven children. They had migrated from Switzerland in 1859. The Russells had two children.. Ruby, mother of Rosemary, and Raymond, who died when Pat was two. Walter Russell served in the Oregon State House. The Russells celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Walter passed away in 1966, Mary in 1974. What an interesting voyage into the past we embarked on with Pat and Rosemary's help. Thank you, ladies!

## Genealogical Society Relocates

Ralph Turner reported at our February meeting that due to space problems at the McMinnville Public Library, the Genealogical Society is looking for a new home for their research library. The Sheridan Library is considering allowing these documents to be stored in their facility. The group would prefer a McMinnville location, but will take whatever they can get. (Editor's Note: the February 21 edition of the Sheridan Sun reported that these documents have now been relocated in the Sheridan Public Library.)

## From President Shirley

I will miss you at the meeting in March. I will be on a mission. On March 6th I will be driving a 1989 Toyota Pickup to 29 Palms, CA. It is very tall with big tires, a stick shift and a super stereo. Tara, my granddaughter in the Marine Corps, is to be there for three months and can use her truck. Then my daughter Shea will pick me up and take me to Las Vegas for the Prudential convention. Following the convention Shea will once again pick me up and we will go to Pahrump, Nevada, where she lives. Pahrump has its own history of Unidentified Flying Objects and glowing waters. I will return late on the 23rd. I hope all goes well with you. Did you know a gentleman from McMinnville has written a book on the subject of UFO's and his own experiences? It is being prepared for printing now. Maybe he will donate a copy to our library. Anyway, I wish you a "Happy March" and will look forward to seeing you in April. Shirley

## Board Highlights:

The February Board meeting was attended by ten members and officers. Betty Brown circulated copies of the financial report: despite no heat in the Church for three weeks the bill was quite high, with the next one to likely be even higher. Lila reported seventeen membership renewals, one new member couple and several memorial donations. Correspondence Secretary Marjorie Owens sent a Get Well card to Shirley Kuykendall and a Thank You note to Eleanor Mitchell for her donation of a book. Volunteer Chair Maxine Williams reported having two recruits on a Saturday. She reminded the Board that 7 books received from the Willamina Historical Society have not been paid for. These are volume one of what will eventually be a four volume set. Betty was directed to pay for these books.

In other business; the application for the educational grant mentioned in last month's newsletter has been submitted, and another Tourism grant proposal is ready for submittal. Shirley is also thinking about submitting another Prudential grant. Betty White represented the Society at the Dorothy Miller memorial service. The Log Building doors have been fixed at no charge (thanks Morgan!). The Church front door project is still pending. Quilt Day was a wonderful success, with 51 people in attendance, and three of our quilts registered. The Barn has been partially cleaned up, and a new shop vacuum is now installed. Our current property and liability Insurance policy expires in March. It will be rewritten due to numerous changes being required: General Liability of \$600,000 (\$255/yr.) and aggregate property insurance of \$250,000 (\$913/yr.). A box of memorabilia donated by Ruth Banke (via Morris Majors, years ago) has been turned over to Marjorie Owens and Eileen Lewis for sorting and possible filing in the Ruth Stoller Reference Library.

Under New Business, the Board discussed the disposition of the hedge in front of the Church—Shirley will talk with the Work Release crew to see if something can be done with this eyesore. It needs to be either drastically cut back or removed completely. Shirley McDaniel will conduct the March meeting in Shirley's absence. Shirley has received a second bid (from Lonnie Rose) of \$12,650 to paint the Church; the earlier bid (from Baxter) was for \$7200. No decision was made on this matter. Eileen reported needing another file cabinet for marriage certificate storage and its purchase was approved. Some discussion ensued regarding placement of a low-end computer in the Log Building to 1.) allow data input of records and 2.) allow the public a new research tool.

Submitted by Barbara Knutson, Secretary pro tem.

*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*

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**MUSEUM HOURS**

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

By Appointment

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**ANNUAL DUES**

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97128

**March General Meeting and Potluck**

Our March meeting will be held at the Amity Grade School on Rice Lane in Amity on Tuesday, March 13th at 6:30 p.m.. Our program for the meeting will be Maynard Drawson of Salem, telling us about the life and times of Peter Duncan McIntosh, cheese maker. Please invite a guest and join us for great food and fellowship. Shirley McDaniel will be hosting this meeting in our Presidents absence. Please bring potluck fare and your own tableware.

**Desperately Seeking Computer Donation!**

Thanks to the diligent efforts of John White, Don Crawford and other volunteers, we have quite a few records and databases in digital format. We would also like to create new databases for marriages and death certificates. These files could be made available to the general public at the Museum as well as on our website. We are looking for a low-end computer and color monitor to place in the Log Building for public use as well as data entry. If you have one or know someone who will donate or sell us one for cheap, please contact Dan Linscheid or Shirley Venhaus.

**Oregon Trails, Oregon Tales**

The program will be presented on Sunday, March 25 at 1:30 p.m. at the Carnegie Room of the McMinnville Library, 225 N. Adams, McMinnville. Admission is free.

The Friends of the McMinnville Library will sponsor a presentation by Tom Nash, a professor of English at Southern Oregon and author of three books, including "The Well-Traveled Casket", a collection of Oregon folklore and history. Nash is past president of the Oregon Folklore Society and Board Member for the Oregon Council of Teachers of English. Tom has received study grants from Princeton, Yale and U.C. Berkeley. He lives in Ashland with his son Paul, a promising musician, and two elderly cats.

From Astoria to Vale, regional folklore reveals much about Oregon history, offering a chronicle of cooperation, strife, tradition and ethnic pride. This program combines storytelling and song to provide a kaleidoscopic view of Oregon's diverse cultural legacy. Included are interesting and often humorous stories from many tradition: Nez Perce, Basque, Hispanic, Chinese, English, African-American and more.

This program is made possible by funding from the Oregon Council for the Humanities. OCS is dedicated to providing opportunities for life-long learning in communities around the state. For more information call Pat Birchmore at 503-435-2223.

**Absolom J. Hembree**

Absolom J. Hembree was born in White County, Tenn., on December 22, 1813, the son of James and Nancy Hembree. On January 22, 1835 he married Nancy Dodson, born June 22, 1813, daughter of McMinn Dodson, a former governor of Tennessee. She was born in Warren County, Tenn. Following their marriage they removed to Missouri and crossed the plains in 1843 to Oregon where they secured a Donation Land Claim two miles east of the present Carlton. He turned his attention to farming and merchandising and became a prominent factor in the pioneer life of the county. On his claim he erected a log house, the only one of that character in the vicinity - others were of rough logs. "Uncle Ab" as he was known to his neighbors, was elected to the Oregon Legislature in 1846, the first year it convened. When the Indian War of 1855-56 began, Hembree assisted in organizing the Oregon Mounted Volunteers and was elected Captain of Company "E". While this war was generally fought in both Oregon and Washington, the center seemed to be in the Yakima Valley. An Army garrison was established at Fort Simcoe, 38 miles southwest of Yakima.

On April 10, 1856, while observing the approach of what they believed at the time to be rider less horses, the troops were ambushed by Indians, and Captain Hembree was mortally wounded. He shot several of the attackers before expiring. One of his men stopped to carry him away, but was waved off by A.J. Later his men recovered his body, which had been mutilated and scalped. All of his belongings including clothing had been taken. He was said to have been carrying several hundred dollars in gold, which was never recovered.

His body was returned to Oregon and interred in a small family plot on his own claim. Eventually his wife was buried beside him. He was nearly three months past his 42nd birthday. She lived until January, 1886.

For several days following the news of his slaughter, the townsfolk of Lafayette maintained a constant watch, not wanting to be surprised by attacking Indians. His bravery and courage were honored with placement of a monument at Toppenish, Washington, on June 20, 1902, placed by the Washington State Historical Society. This monument is located at the place of his death on Satus Creek, near Toppenish. One of the surviving war volunteers pointed out the location at the time of the dedication ceremony.

The Yamhill County 1860 Census shows Nancy, aged 46, with her five children aged from 5 to 15 years, living with her in the Lafayette Precinct. Thanks to Bill Kombol of Black Diamond, Washington for suggesting this piece. Bill wrote an exhaustive book entitled "Hembree—Snow—Morris - A Family History", which he published in April of 1999. He also donated a copy to our Library. The Hembree family history makes for fascinating reading.

One of the great events leading to United States occupation of the great northwest happened to be a cattle drive. It all started when President Andrew Jackson needed more information on British activities. His Secretary of State chose William Slacum to scout out the strength and motives of the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Vancouver. Slacum traveled across country to the Gulf of Mexico and from there by sea to the Sandwich Islands. There he chartered the brig "Loriot" and on January 2, 1837 tied up at the Vancouver docks; his eyes and pencil busy.

Dr. McLoughlin visited openly with Slacum and showed him around the place. McLoughlin was aware that Slacum was an agent of the United States and probably "led him on" as the report sent back to the President grossly overestimated the productivity and strength of the Fort.

McLoughlin also saw a way to solve one of his serious problems with the settlers South of the Columbia River. Ewing Young had arrived in the area with a large herd of horses. Reports were that he had stolen them from the California area. Therefore, Hudson Bay was determined to not trade or deal with Young. This caused both men trouble and neither wished to back down. The worst problem concerned Ewing Young who was making whiskey. McLoughlin wouldn't buy Young's wheat so Ewing decided to turn the wheat of their Chehalem Valley farm, into a commodity whose marketing would not require help from the Hudson's Bay Company. He would turn his wheat into alcohol. He brewed his "hell's fire" in a big pickling kettle and unless he was stopped, there was no telling what kind of trouble he might cause. McLoughlin asked Slacum to act as his emissary to carry a tacit apology to Young and to get him to abandon the still. Jason Lee from the Methodist mission joined Slacum on this visit to Young. He agreed to shut down the still. However, he still wasn't happy with Dr. McLoughlin and told of many grievances he and the other settlers had with Hudson Bay Co.

True, McLoughlin was kind and would loan tools and seed, horses and cows to everyone who needed them but he would not sell the animals and asked that all new born animals be returned to the fort. It was the opinion of the settlers that he was trying to keep the entire Willamette Valley in economic subservience. They had no place else to sell their crops or furs except the company store. Settlers could not even repair a broken tool without taking it to the company forge.

As Slacum and Young talked about these problems they had an inspiration. The settlers needed their own cattle so why not go to California and buy them and herd them North to the Valley. This would break the strangle hold Hudson Bay Company had on the settlers and improve their ability to develop a prosperous herd of cattle.

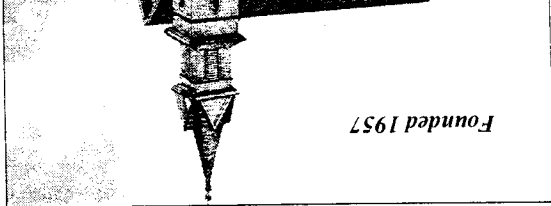
Slacum suggested that they ask the settlers to put what money they could into a pot to purchase cattle and asked for volunteers to go to California to bring the herd home. Slacum would take the group down on the "Loriot" and Young would buy the cattle. Young was anxious to go as he also wanted to clear his name with the Mexican Governor of California.

Young and Slacum were able to collect the required cash and volunteers. Young himself started the pot with a \$1000.00 contribution. Strangely enough, Dr. McLoughlin put over \$500 in the pot and another \$300 in the name of two of his trappers. The Methodists were able to invest \$624 and Jason Lee gave another \$100 as a personal investment. So they boarded the "Loriot" and headed for California. It took 3 weeks of waiting before they could cross the Columbia Bar. Finally, arriving in California, Philip Edwards, the diarist of the group, said in his journal, "What a repulsive passage. Tempestuous and cold! Sick and melancholy! Perhaps no period of my life had been less calculated to give happiness. But peace! God is merciful and I am safe!"

Arriving in San Francisco the drovers were put ashore and Slacum sailed on home to report. The Oregonians then found jobs to support themselves while Young began the process of wheedling government permission to buy the cattle. After three months of being sent around in circles he was finally given permission to buy 800 head of cattle at three dollars per head. The rancher in the area, knowing of the sale, cut out their leanest, meanest beasts and corralled them to wait for the Americans. Young, moving as fast as he could, bought 40 more horses and added five more footloose Americans to his crew. Then began the job of putting the rebellious cattle together into a trail herd. Their first obstacle was the San Joaquin River. According to David Lavender, author of "Land of Giants," "one expedient after another failed. First the men dragged calves across behind their saddle horses. Only a few mother cows followed. Next the crew built a pen at the water's edge, jammed it tight full of bawling beasts, and by brute pressure tried to squeeze the herd into the river. Instead the animals broke down the fence and stampeded. The cursing men rounded them up and tried again.. and again... and again. On one occasion they succeeded in getting the herd into the water, but in mid-river a panic seized the animals and they broke back, seventeen of them drowning during the frantic melee."

The men finally built a small raft and took the cows over one at a time. Then at a snail's pace, in hot August dust, the foot sore herd dragged out of the Sacramento Valley into the Siskiyou Mountains. It was a hard trip. Each evening the men had to go back and pick up the day's strays one by one. The exhausted riding horses gave out, so at times the weary men had to night-herd the cattle on foot. After a near mutiny and a run in with the Rogue River Indians, Young finally led them to the green Willamette Valley. Here the cattle found more grass and the herders an easier time. Lavender reported that, "The effect on morale was tremendous. Until this moment the thirty-odd settlers had possessed almost nothing they could call their own. These stringy, fence-breaking cattle, however, were something on which a man could stamp his brand and say, 'This is mine!' As such, Young's epic drive had a significance far transcending its size or its monetary value; for it was the Northwest's first gleam of independence, the first crack in the Bay Company's benign but hitherto invulnerable monopoly."





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*YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

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*March 2001 Calendar of Events*

**Tuesday, March 13 , 5:00 PM**

Board of Directors - Amity Grade School, Amity

**Tuesday March 13, 6:30 PM**

General Meeting & Potluck Dinner- Amity Grade School on Rice Lane, Amity

Bring your Own Table Service - Guests Always Welcome  
*(See page 2 for details)*