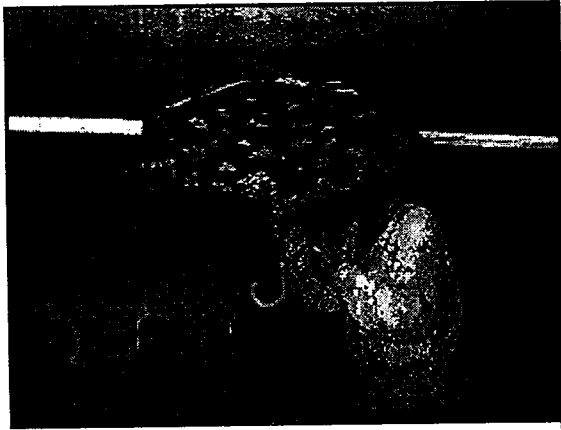


# The West Side

Newsletter and Journal of the Yamhill County Historical Society

March 1998



B. White photo

Weatherman John Day risks bad luck to display his "cloudy day umbrella"

## TAKE THE TIME TO DO SOME LOOKING UP !

Such was the advice offered by weather columnist John Day to the Yamhill County Historical Society at its February 10th general meeting and potluck dinner in McMinnville. Before beginning the program proper he distributed copies of the informative Whealdon/Day chart depicting annual rainfall recorded for the McMinnville area since 1946 along with a brief interpretation and a bit of its history.

Moving on to the main portion of the program, Day presented several points in support of his theory that looking up at constantly changing cloud patterns offers relief from everyday boredom. To assist the novice in sorting out some of the technical details he described a few of the basic formations and identified them with the descriptive Latin names assigned by atmosphericist Luke Howard circa 1800 (cumulus, stratus, nimbus, etc). The balance of the program was then devoted to an outstanding presentation of colorful slides depicting interesting and unusual cloud formations as observed throughout the world.

It is not at all unfair to state that those attending came away with a new awareness of what is taking place above our heads.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

With the news of the beating the coast is taking from high water and surf, I find I'm very happy with our weather.

I was pleased to see the Piecemakers quilting group at work Saturday upstairs in the log museum. They are so enjoyable to watch and visit with. If you are at the museum on a Saturday, check and see if they are working (I don't think they call it work!)

We are making the log museum available for non-profit groups to use as a meeting place. One of the requirements is that a YCHS member be present. The Women for Agriculture of Yamhill County met there in January. The Sunshine Club and Obsidians will be there in March.

You will notice a new cameraman in action at our general meetings. We wish to thank Dan Linscheid for taking over that job. We will now be able to add tapes of the guest speakers to our growing video library. Eventually we will have a VCR at the museum for viewing these tapes.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read of the six preservation and conservation projects which were sent to the Oregon Heritage Commission for their recent Historic Resources Needs Assessment. Thanks to John White, Wayne Moore and Kathleen Mitchell for helping us make the February 13th deadline [*Shirley Venhaus should also be included. -ed.*]. This new grant project is in the preliminary process of assessing the needs of smaller organizations such as ours. If the Legislature approves funding, it will be two years before this program will be ready to produce results.

Some great big thanks are in order for plumbing equipment wholesaler Familian Northwest and Larry Bopp, manager of their Beaverton warehouse. It was through Larry's generosity that we now have the new commode in the church lavatory. More thanks are due Richard Windle of McMinnville for donating his time to

install the fixture. The entire project cost us around \$5.00 for a short piece of pipe. However, the best part is the facility is once again functional. Thank you gentlemen.

If any Society members would like to learn some of the inside workings of the museum, drop in on a Saturday between 1:00 and 4:00 PM and you can receive a hands-on experience. Your teachers will be Olive and Elma. They are glad to share their knowledge and would appreciate your help.

Have a happy St. Patrick's Day.

.....Shirley

## STATE PRESERVATION GRANTS

The State Historic Preservation Office in Salem recently solicited "wish list" grant proposals from local organizations throughout Oregon. These will all be combined into a single budget request to be presented to the 1999 Legislature. Should the funding then become available, the grants for the local proposals will be considered on a priority and viability basis.

The time frame for submission was extremely short, but Shirley Venhaus, Kathleen Mitchell and John White worked up six project proposals for the YCHS. Included were the Relocation of the ESD covered wagon, An extensive oral history project, Environmentally safe quilt, clothing and linen storage and displays, Transcription of historic diaries, journals, letters, etc on to compact disks and Providing proper drainage around the church building as well as replacing its roof.

There is very little assurance funding will ever become available from this source, but by submitting these proposals now, a place in line for YCHS has been reserved should something materialize.

*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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Olive Johnson  
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**Newsletter**

John White  
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**Publicity**

Elaine Rohse  
472-6827

**MUSEUM HOURS**

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



B. White photo

Betty Baltzell displays her  
ever present smile.

**KEEPER OF THE RECORDS**

Our Secretary Betty Baltzell, who has always enjoyed Oregon history, is a fairly recent member of the Yamhill County Historical Society, but she wasted no time in becoming actively involved. She is a native Oregonian and has lived in Yamhill County since 1952.

Betty was a teacher in Enterprise High School for two years and taught in the Dayton Elementary School for sixteen years. She also did playground work in Portland during the summers and presently teaches a survival swimming course to third graders. She also worked for the Red Cross during World War II. Her husband Charles passed away in 1994, but she has two sons and two grandsons of whom she is quite proud.

Now into her second year as Secretary, Betty provides us with accurate and well-kept records of both the regular and board meetings.

.....Maxine Williams

**CENTURY FARM APPLICATIONS**

Until May 1st the Oregon Historical Society will be accepting applications for official "Century Farm" status. To be eligible, a farm must have been actively and continuously operated since at least 1898 by the same family. Successful applicants receive a certificate signed by the Governor and are permitted to erect a highway sign to mark their historic property. Since the program was begun forty years ago, 898 farms have been so recognized. For a complete information packet, contact the Oregon Historical Society Field Services Coordinator Rick Read at (503) 306-5215

**NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN SALEM....**

A new exhibit of photographs and drawings showing bridges, tunnels and construction techniques of the Historic Columbia River Highway (1913-22) is now on display in the lobby gallery of the Oregon State Archives Building, 800 Summer Street NE. The hours are 8:00 AM to 4:45 PM Monday through Friday. No admission charge.

**NEW SUMMER MUSEUM HOURS**

In order to better serve the public as well as make the best use of our available volunteers, the Board of Directors passed a resolution at its February 10th meeting to change the Summer (June 1 to August 31) open days and hours to:

Fridays and Sundays - 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Saturdays - 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Winter days and hours will remain unchanged.

**QUILT IN PROGRESS**

Those who have not as yet had occasion to do so, should visit the second floor of the Miller Log Museum. The Piecemakers Quilt Guild is now set up and working on an outstanding example of their craft. Again they will be donating the finished product for the benefit of the Society and tickets for the drawing will soon be available..

**MARCH GENERAL MEETING & POTLUCK DINNER**

The venue will be 6:30 PM Tuesday, March 10th in the Amity Methodist Church at 201 Nursery Street. Mr. Arlie Holt of Dallas will present an after dinner program entitled "Further Confessions of a Trunk Junkie". Many will remember an earlier program by Mr. Holt describing his encounter with an old trunk containing letters and papers related to the well-known Oregon pioneer Levi Scott. We are now informed he has uncovered more of this remarkable material and will be sharing his find with us. Mark your calendars, plan on bringing a guest and don't forget table service.

**NEW MEMBERS**

Financial Secretary Lila Jackson was laid up this past month with bypass surgery, so her report did not reach us by press time. *(We are very happy to relate she is doing well and becoming quite impatient to get back to her many activities.)*

Also, apologies to Fran Savage of Newberg as we neglected to include her as a new member last month when listing her husband Ed.

**SPRING IS ALMOST HERE**

In spring, some people's fancy turns to gardening. Anyone so inclined is invited to assist our chief horticulturist Ruth Crawford tend the museum grounds. Remember, we have the inmates to do the heavy work, so only the fun stuff remains. If interested call Ruth at 434-9843

**NEED A RIDE?**

As announced last month, Joanne Watts has been appointed Telephone Coordinator. Members needing a ride to meetings may call Joanne at 835-5893

**CORRECTION**

Last month we referred to the "Buhl" family in reporting the January 13th program. It should have been "Buell". Our apologies for the error.

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

## LEVI T. DAVIS - THE MAN AND HIS MACHINE

by John White

*Throughout the country today at least one combine is found on virtually every farm engaged in grain production. The first of these harvesters appeared in California during the late 1850's and was followed shortly thereafter by a greatly improved machine developed and patented by Yamhill County resident Levi Davis. While Davis' horse-drawn harvester was primitive and cumbersome compared to the powerful self-propelled models now in use, it was most certainly a forerunner of the modern machines in several important respects.*



Levi T. Davis

Levi Davis was born to Samuel and Mary (Brock) Davis March 26 1838 in Andrew County Missouri. The entire family, which in addition to Levi included three older boys and three younger girls, journeyed overland to Oregon in 1846 with nine yoke of oxen and three wagons. After scouting the Tualatin Valley for a possible homestead site, Samuel Davis went northward across the Columbia River to settle near the extensive Cowlitz Farm operated by the Puget Sound Agricultural Company<sup>(1)</sup>. Possibility of a local Indian uprising caused the Davis family to relocate in 1848. This time the elder Davis took a 640 acre claim in Yamhill County just southwest of present day McMinnville<sup>(2)</sup>. With the help of four teenage sons (Levi, Albatross, William and John), Samuel Davis was able to turn his claim into a prosperous operation that at one time encompassed nearly a thousand acres.<sup>(3)</sup>

Growing up on his father's farm Levi displayed an early interest in mechanics by tinkering (not always successfully) with hayrakes, binders and other machinery in efforts to improve their efficiency or durability. He also found time on his busy farmwork schedule to complete an education at McMinnville College in 1859.

For the harvest of grains the time-honored procedure up to this point had been one of cutting the stalks fairly close to the ground and then bundling these into sheaves or shocks for drying and carriage to a large stationary threshing machine that would strip off straw along with removing hulls from the grain kernel. By the mid nineteenth century agricultural technology had advanced to produce the "header", a device that cut grain stalks much closer to the grain head thereby removing the necessity of drying as well as the reducing overall bulk to be hauled to and processed by a thresher. With less chaff to contend with, smaller and more efficient threshers, sometimes called "separators", began appearing on the scene. What remained now was for someone to develop a single machine that would "combine" headers and threshers into a single harvesting unit. Levi Davis had been studying just such a possibility and assisted by his brothers accepted the challenge. The barn and other outbuildings on the Davis farm soon took on the appearance of blacksmith and machine shops as the project progressed.

The first prototype apparatus was ready for the harvest of 1862. This original model performed fairly well in actual operation except that if stopped for any reason, the separator unit would jam and could not be restarted without a full clean out. Also power was provided by a standard six horse hitch which was barely sufficient at times. Increasing to eight or ten horses solved the power problem but severely taxed the skill of the driver. Addi-

tionally, with these longer hitches turns were quite difficult and often required a stop which would result in the aforementioned separator jamming.

Over next few years Levi Davis tinkered with improving the efficiency of his thresher mechanism, but the important innovation was the ten horse "pull-push" arrangement he devised. Out front was a four horse hitch under the command of one driver and at each side of the machine were three more horses working against a push bar controlled by another driver at the rear. On his final model a third man was added to the crew to fill and sew grain sacks while moving over the field. By the late 1860's Levi Davis, with the help of his brothers John and William, were consistently harvesting 1200 to 1500 bushels per day with their machine.

On November 16 1869 Levi Davis of McMinnville Oregon was granted U.S. Patent Number 96896 on his "Combined Harvester & Thresher". An arrangement had been made made with Portland Iron Works to undertake production and marketing the combine with much of the Davis family capital invested in the venture. However, disaster later struck in the form of a fire that totally destroyed the Portland Iron Works buildings along with four ready for market Davis machines and a large quantity of related parts and accessories. This loss was devastating because being without insurance to cover the damage the Davis brothers were unable raise sufficient funds to continue the venture. Thus, retaining only one combine for use on the McMinnville farm, the patent rights and another completed machine were reluctantly sold in 1883 to D.M. McCreary of California. With only a very slight modification, later models were effectively marketed in California well past the turn of the century.

Over the next several years Levi and his brothers continued their successful family farming operation on the original Samuel Davis DLC and became valued members of the community. Levi served as school clerk and supervisor for many years as well as being a staunch supporter of the Baptist Church. In 1873 he had married Margaret Hunsaker, niece of the Rev. A. J. Hunsaker of McMinnville, and the couple had four children. After Margaret died in 1892 he married his second wife, Clara Skinner, in 1895. Levi Davis passed away in 1921 and was laid to rest in the family plot at the South Yamhill Baptist Cemetery not far from his lifelong home on his father's Donation Land Claim.

(1) *The Puget Sound Agricultural Company was a subsidiary of Hudson's Bay Company with headquarters at Fort Nisqually organized (in violation of the HBCo's Crown Charter) to provide farm produce for trade in Alaska, California and the Sandwich Islands. Their Cowlitz Farm was located not far from present day Toledo Washington.*

(2) *The original Samuel Davis DLC stretches along both sides of Peavine Road between Old Sheridan Road and Youngberg Hill Road.*

(3) *Davis Street in McMinnville is so named in his honor.*

Since 1960

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

**Tuesday, March 10th, 5:00 PM**

Board of Directors - First Methodist Church - 201 Nursery Street - Amity

**Tuesday March 10th, 6:30 PM**

Potluck Dinner - First Methodist Church - 201 Nursery Street - Amity

*Bring Your Own Table Service      Guests Always Welcome*

*(See page 2 for Program Details)*