

The West Side

Newsletter and Journal of the Yamhill County Historical Society

May 2001

Board Highlights:

The meeting was called to order by President Shirley Venhaus, with Francis Dummer, Dan Linscheid, Marjorie Owens, Shirley McDaniel, Betty Brown, Ed Roghair, Maxine Williams, Eileen Lewis and Barbara in attendance. Treasures Betty disclosed monthly income of \$386.40, and expenses of \$4,372.98. There was a discussion about the Putnum Funds: a CD will come due at the end of June, which will allow us to repay the Franklin fund, which was reduced in paying for our new roof. We will be looking into contacting Kristie Brill with Edward D. Jones and Associates for some financial planning for our funds.

Lila Jackson, our Membership/Financial Secretary, was absent, but sent in a report of 3 new and 6 renewal members. Marjorie Owens, Corresponding Secretary answered three correspondences, and also met with Barbara Corff of San Francisco, who had some old files given to her mother when she worked in the old Courthouse.

Volunteer Chair Maxine Williams is still looking for able-bodied volunteers. Summer hours begin in June, so Friday sign-ups are especially needed. Eileen volunteered to help Maxine with scheduling and getting more volunteers.

Business Items: the new doors in the Museum need entry sensors to be installed. The teaching grant for schools (proposed earlier this year) is still in-process. The sign on our Barn will be repainted soon by "Painting by JJ", at a cost of between \$50 and \$75. We will probably need a new wooden board for that sign also. Eileen will call Tom Genco to see about having the hedge at the front of the Church Museum removed by Work Release personnel. The trees at the southeast corner of the Church also need attention. New file drawers are now in place. The Bindery items are in a file upstairs in the Log Building.

Under New Business, our Harvest Festival will be held on October 13th next. A motion was passed authorizing purchase of a couple of canvas signs to attach to a vehicle and/or covered wagon in parades around the county and display during the Festival. Our Summer Picnic will be held on August 4th in Amity. Eileen Lewis will help with arrangements. Shirley Venhaus has submitted two applications for grants for funding projects for the Museum. One is from the Oregon Heritage Commission and the other from the State Preservation Office. If one or both of these are approved, we may get some financial help with painting the Church Museum and one or more other maintenance projects needing financing.

The Oregon Heritage Conference will be held on May 4th and 5th in Bend. It was moved and approved to pay expenses for Shirley Venhaus and Eileen Lewis to attend this event. Compliments and thanks were given to Marjorie for the recent arrangements she has made in the Log Cabin, and to Eileen, Julie, Elma and Olive, all tireless volunteers at the Museum. CD-ROMs containing all of our scans of old photos will be available for \$10 each. This CD in most cases contains the full sized digital scan of all the photos online at <http://www.co.yamhill.or.us>, plus more that have not made it online yet.

Board Highlights continued...

This means they will make better printouts, but you may need a more powerful computer to view them. We will also likely be preparing some YCHS calendars containing selected old photos, which will be offered for a nominal fee to members and the public.

Friday, April 13 will be the dedication of the cottonwood tree at Willamette Mission Park. George and Maxine Williams and Shirley Venhaus plan to attend this dedication of a new Heritage Tree. We need a few repairs at the Church Museum as well as a little better monitoring of the humidity.

From our President

Dear Members: Mission accomplished. The truck was delivered to my granddaughter Tara at Twenty-nine Palms, a four day convention with Prudential in Las Vegas was very successful and the week with my daughter Shea, was filled with lots of fun things to do. Both granddaughters were able to come down and we spent a day in Las Vegas. In reading Elaine Rohse's description of their activities in Las Vegas I concur with all she said about things to do. We did the Roller Coaster and the Big Shot and enjoyed lots of sightseeing.

My compliments to everyone who has been working at the Museum. The new doors in the front of the church look great. There are new exhibits and arrangements of articles in the Log Museum and the Church. The inventory of books in the back of the Church has begun. We are looking for duplicate copies and books that do not relate to Yamhill County. We still need volunteers to work in all of these areas. Maxine Williams has asked to resign from her volunteer coordinator position. We desperately need someone to take over this job. Maxine has offered to work with anyone who would like to help. The flower gardens at the Museum have been getting attention. Dates for the Summer Picnic and Harvest Festival have been selected. Thanks to everyone for your continued help and support. Sincerely, Shirley.

Gopher Valley Wildflowers

Sandy LeTourneux gave attendees of our March meeting a colorful slide-show and informative presentation of the nearly 60 wildflowers she has photographed and studied, most of which were found on the tree farm she and her husband Jim own and operate in Gopher Valley. Some of the plants, roots and bark have been used for medicinal purposes and other household uses for many years, including the times of the local Indians. The LeTourneux's came to this area in 1976 to start their woodland tree farm.

Some of the plants and flowers Sandy discussed are poisonous, and some will cause a rash to exposed skin upon contact. The beautiful colors and variety of sizes and shapes of the flowers Sandy continues to catalog and study were quite astounding. Many of these have more than one name, and Sandy knew most of them. This was a great presentation and we are indebted to her for her efforts.

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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Joanne Watts
835-5893

MUSEUM HOURS

Sept 1 to May 31:
Sat-Sun 1 to 4 PM
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 Secretary
2430 North Baker
McMinnville OR
97128

Brother Ben

Dear Brother Ben, I take my pen,
To tell you how and where and when I found the nest of our old speckled hen. She never could lay in a sensible way like other hens in the barn, on the hay. But here and there and everywhere. One the woodshed stair and the stable floor. And once on the ground, her egg I found. The other day I ran away with Mother's leave, in the barn to play. The sunshine bright on the seedy floor and the little white doves were a pretty sight as they strode in and out of the open door with their little pink feet and feathers so neat. Cooing and cooing, more and more. Well, I went out to look about the platform wide, where side by side I could see the pig pens in their pride and beyond them both on a narrow shelf I saw the speckled hen hide herself behind a pile of hoes and rakes and broken boards and pieces of stakes. Ah, hah, old hen, I've found you now but to reach your nest I don't know how. Unless I climb, or creep, or crawl along the edge of the pig pen wall. As I stood in a thoughtful mood the speckled hen cackled as loud as she could and flew away, as much as to say, 'for once my treasures are out of your way'. I didn't wait a moment then. I couldn't be conquered by that old hen. So, along the edge of the slippery ledge I carefully crept, while the greater pig slept. I dare not look to see, if they were thinking of eating me. Then all at once; oh, what a dunce, I dropped my basket into the pen. The one you gave me, brother Ben. It had two eggs in it, by the way, that I had found in the manger, under the hay. The pigs got up and ran about with a noise between a grunt and a shout. When I saw them rooting and rooting, of course I slipped and lost my footing. I tripped and jumped and finally fell, right down among the pigs, pell mell. For once in my life I was afraid, for the door that led out into the shed was fastened with an iron hook and father was down in the field by the brook, hoeing and hoeing his rows of corn. And here was his Polly so scared and forlorn. I called him and called him as loud as I could. I knew he would hear me. He must and he should. "Oh father, oh father", Get out you old pig. "Oh father, oh father", their mouths were so big. I waited a moment, then called him again. "oh father, oh father, I'm in the pig pen". Then father did hear me and threw down his hoe, and ran as fast as a father could go. The pigs had pushed me close to the wall and munched my basket, eggs and all. One had rubbed his muddy nose all over my apron clean and white. They sniffed at me and stepped on my toes, but hadn't taken the smallest bite. Then father opened the door at last, and, oh, in his arm he held me fast. *An Old Time poem.... submitted by Virginia McLeod.....*

Retired Educators Meet at Museum

A large delegation of Yamhill County Unit 37 of the Oregon Retired Educators Association (OREA) met at the Museum on March 20. Several members brought guests. The retired educators enjoyed their brown bag lunches in the Log Cabin, while those who are members of both the Historical Society and OREA provided coffee, punch, and brownies.

Twila Burnes, Shirley McDaniel, Marjorie Owens and Charlotte Filer told about the organization and work of the Society and the Museum and of volunteer opportunities. Ed Roghair opened the Barn and answered questions about it and its contents.

After lunch the visitors toured the Log Cabin and the Church Museum in addition to the Barn. Many of them had not been to the Museum before, so much was learned about both the Museum and the Society.

May General Meeting and Potluck

Our April meeting will be held in the Trinity Lutheran Church, 311 S.E. Schley, Sheridan, on May 8th at 6:30 p.m. Our program will feature Lee Lau of Stayton, telling about the Scroggins family of Sheridan and Sheridan's first bank.

Please invite a guest and join us for great food and fellowship. Please bring potluck fare and your own tableware.

Rev. L. Van Slyke

Bethia Robinson Washburn, who lives in Connecticut, has written a booklet for the family of Rev. Van Slyke, who is buried in the Masonic Cemetery in Lafayette. He died of Typhoid fever during the hot summer of 1870, and, having no family in the area, Dr. Goucher had his body placed near the Doctor's own plot.

Apparently not much was known of the Mr. Van Slyke's background. He got the Gold Fever like so many others in the area, but decided to turn to religion for his calling. He preached a circuit in the area for the Methodist Church. In his final sickness he was apparently tended to by "Doc" Goucher, but the heat and the disease finally took its toll.

For decades after his passing folks remembered this tall, thin, religious man, and spoke highly of him. As more time passed, the name was no longer remembered... there was no family nearby to pass on his story. Then in the 1970's and '80's, the white marble gravestone marking his sleep came to the attention of some people who had a special interest in him, and research began, letters were written and answered.

Over the past couple of decades, vandals have wreaked havoc with many of the headstones in this and many other cemeteries in our state, the good Rev. Van Slyke's included. But caring family members back east will later this year repair and relocate this original stone in the Center Cemetery, Portland, CT, and it will have a new inscription telling folks where it came from originally. A rededication of the refurbished headstone by family members will take place at that time. Thank you, Bethia, for your work..

In the spring of 1844, Joseph Watt left his parents and seven sisters in Ohio to make the trek across the Plains and Rocky Mountains. This young man of 27 was looking for opportunities that did not seem available in Ohio. His goal was to check out this Oregon Country. Stories from the West sounded too good to be true and he had to see for himself.

Getting there was not an easy trip. Joseph had signed on, as many young men did, to help with the stock, make roads and provide protection. The trip had been relatively easy as far as Fort Boise, but then, as supplies ran out and stock died, Joseph found himself without a job, money, supplies or his horse. So, at the Grande Ronde Valley, near present day La Grande, he took off ahead of the Wagon Train hoping to arrive in The Dalles in time to hire on a boat down the Columbia River. With a light pack and worn-out shoes this ambitious young man traveled through the snow of the Blue Mountains and sand of the Columbia River country. He arrived at The Dalles with supplies and money gone and feet bleeding.

Joseph went looking for a boat down river. There were no large boats as he had envisioned, only log rafts loaded beyond capacity by the emigrants. He asked dozens of families if he could join them, but, since each raft was heavily loaded, they couldn't afford to take on one more person.

Finally, he managed to get one emigrant to talk to him. It wasn't a particularly encouraging conversation. The emigrant said "Work? Why, you're worse off than my worn-out oxen back there. No, you'd just be in the way! I've got troubles enough already."

"Let him come, Paw," the women said, "His mother would thank us for it. And his voice is so good, we would enjoy his singing."

Down the river he went, singing and telling yarns for his supper. It was a tough trip, especially the portage around the Cascades, but he made it to the valley and was among the first to arrive in Oregon City that year. What a spectacle! (according to James Robertson in his article "A Pioneer Captain of Industry") His buckskin pants reached to his knees and were patched with antelope skin. He had a red blanket for an overcoat and a woolen hat so worn it hung about his neck rather than on the top of his head.

Soon Joseph had all the work he could handle. A carpenter by trade, he found many construction jobs in this new country. The best was an offer of \$3.00 per foot to build 700 feet of Cornice for the Catholic Church on French Prairie, now in the town of St Paul. This was his "stake" and by buying and trading clocks and wheat, he had the capital to start work on his dreams. By the Spring of 1847 he had a good feel for the country and enough saved to return for his family. So back to Ohio he went with dreams for the future! Joseph would buy a band of sheep, over four hundred, and bring them to the valley. He would buy American Merinos, the best of breed at that time, producing excellent soft wool. And he would bring a carding machine and spinning wheel to make cloth from the wool. He could envision a profitable wool industry in the Willamette Valley.

One year later, in the spring of 1848, Joseph had put together two well-equipped wagons with ten yoke of oxen. He also had purchased 435 sheep, a carding machine, equipped the family for the trip and was headed back to Oregon. Joseph, his mother, father and eight sisters were to herd their sheep across the western horizon. This made many old "seasoned" emigrants shake their heads. A brother, Ahio Watt, stayed in Ohio for another year to finish up some business and followed the family

The next day they were back with many presents and advice on good water and grass. It was this way all through the Indian Country. Not one sheep was lost to the Indians. In fact, their help with guiding Joseph to good grass and water probably saved the whole herd. He did lose 25 sheep in crossing the snake but arrived in Oregon City with almost 400.

Joseph, his parents and sisters with their sheep, had made it to the end of the trail. They arrived almost 2 months before emigrants began arriving in their lumbering wagons. September was a beautiful season in the Willamette Valley and the Watt family settled on land near the present city of Amity.

When they arrived in Yamhill County, people were awed by the large flock of Merino sheep. They were amazed at the softness of the wool and asked to buy some, but Joseph wasn't ready to sell any of the flock. He considered them foundation stock and was thinking about raising thousands of this special breed.

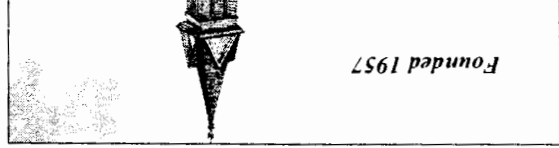
That first winter was hard for the pioneers. The Watts lost 100 sheep during one cold spell. Everybody commented that it was too bad they hadn't sold the sheep when they had a chance. Resourceful as ever, the Watt family sheared the dead sheep, carded and spun the wool and knitted socks to sell. The soft Merino wool made the best socks worn in the Oregon Country; selling for \$3.50 a pair! Several hundred pair of socks were sold so the Watt family had a good year.

The old man (R Lancefield we believe) who gave Joseph a ride back in '44 at The Dalles was now the Watt's neighbor. Joseph gave him several pair of socks and told him of his plans; a Woolen Mill! It took some time for Joseph to see his plans become reality. Everyone was interested in "gold" and had little time for wool. Joseph was reported to say "About six or seven years after the gold mining excitement wore off people began to sober down to the home business, a few began to think about the prosperity of the country." He felt that something had to happen to stop so much outlay for merchandise from other countries and to start producing for their own needs. Of course Joseph was anxious to see wool become one of these products.

Finally, the mill, under Joseph's supervision, was built in Salem in 1856. Being the first mill on the Pacific Coast, it was called the Willamette Woolen Mill. It's machinery was run by water power brought in by a ditch from the Santiam River. The mill was soon to process four hundred thousand pounds of wool annually and paid \$100,000 per annum for the wages of the workers. But this was not automatic. The first year was discouraging. Joseph was not a miller but he was a good salesman. He offered to buy the output of the mill for the first three years and sell it himself. So up and down the trail to California he went, selling wool products. In only three months he had such orders that the mill was in the black. Joseph then sold his Contract back to the mill for a "large consideration." Robert Ormond Case, in his book, "The Empire Builders," tells us: "The opening ceremonies (of the Mill) were culminated by a grand ball attended by the leading citizens of the valley, including the Governor and other State Officials. Joe Watt's mother and sisters walked proudly behind the Governor and his Lady in the Grand March."

In addition to the mill, Joseph was a farmer, stock grower and owner of 3,640 acres of land just North of Amity. In 1868 he shipped the first load of wheat around Cape Horn from Oregon to Europe. This was the beginning of world trade that would end Oregon's industrial isolation.

In 1860 Joseph Watt married Miss L. A. Lyons, daughter of Hen. Lemuel Lyons. They had five children: John I., Maria L., Arlington B., Earl B., and Mary C. By 1887 he and his family resided in Amity, Oregon. This Empire Builder and his family have gone down in history as the originators of Oregon's Wool industry.



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YAMHILL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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May 2001 Calendar of Events

Tuesday, May 8, 5:00 PM

Board of Directors - Trinity Lutheran Church, Sheridan

Tuesday May 8, 6:30 PM

General Meeting & Potluck Dinner- Trinity Lutheran Church, Sheridan
(Take Sheridan Road exit off Hwy 18, the Church
is 2 blocks east of Bridge Street)

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