

TABLE ROCK

\$2.50

# SENTINEL

NOVEMBER  
DECEMBER 1991

MEDFORD  
NEON  
**BLAZING  
THE WAY**

THE  
**RAGGEDYS  
GO WEST**

**COUNTY  
BYWAYS**  
NAMING SOUTHERN  
OREGON STREETS

The  
Magazine  
of the  
Southern  
Oregon  
Historical  
Society





# Twenty-seven Years Ago



The rising Rogue River wrecked Dodge Bridge and submerged hundreds of acres of prime southern Oregon bottomland. SOHS #9669

Flood waters dampened holiday spirits as torrential rains drenched western Oregon and northern California during Christmas week of 1964. In the Rogue Valley, December rainfall totaling more than eleven inches—roughly half the average annual amount—coupled with snow runoff from the Cascades, swelled local streams and rivers, raising them ten to fifteen feet above flood levels. A record 1.9 inches of rain pounded the city of Medford on Monday, December 21. The next day the *Mail Tribune* carried the grim headline: “Rogue Runs Wild; Homes Evacuated.”

During the next several days, the raging Rogue River knocked out or rendered impassable most bridges, swept away a natural gas line servicing almost 6,000 valley residents, and damaged or destroyed more than 400 homes in its path. Communities such as Rogue River, Union Creek, and Murphy found themselves without power, telephone, or water service for days. In one remote area along Big Butte Creek, local residents constructed a precarious footbridge, jamming it against log debris. Desperate for groceries, one elderly woman reportedly made several trips across the hazardous structure.

By the weekend, rainfall had tapered off, and local streams and rivers finally began dropping below flood levels. A *Mail Tribune* reporter assessing damage in remote areas summed up the mood of the entire valley when he reported, “The city of Butte Falls was dripping wet and settled in gloom Saturday.” The Small Business Administration in Washington, D.C., declared flooded regions of western Oregon to be disaster areas. Damage to roads and bridges alone in Jackson and Josephine counties was estimated to exceed \$3 million.



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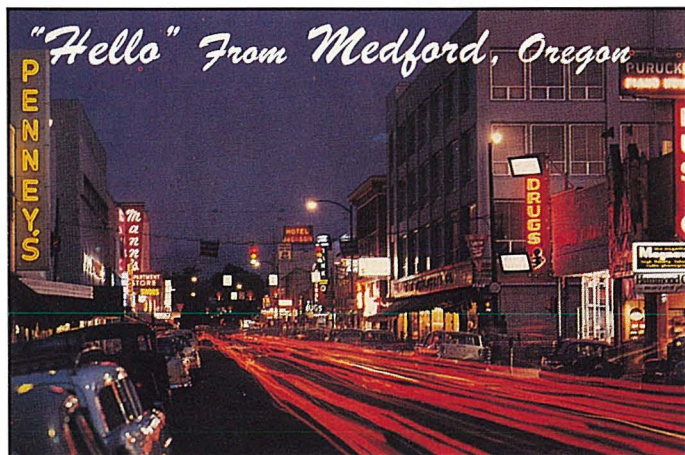
Samuel J. Wegner, *Executive Director*

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A provoking product since its introduction in America in 1923, neon enjoyed the heights of popularity in southern Oregon during the 1940s and '50s. A number of landmark signs created by the Medford Neon Company and other neon builders survived the depths of urban disfavor during later decades, and await renewed appreciation for their place in twentieth-century art and culture.

### 14 The Raggedys Go West *by Patricia Hall*

Johnny Gruelle, author, illustrator, and creator of Raggedy Ann, received national acclaim for his kindly characters, magical stories, and luminous illustrations. Southern Oregonians take Gruelle to heart; while vacationing in Ashland in the early 1920s, he developed the character of the lovable Camel with the Wrinkled Knees, published in a Raggedy Ann and Andy adventure in 1924.

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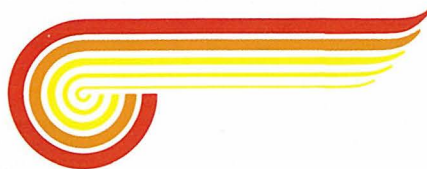
28 County Byways

That's Fairly Interesting (inside back cover)

**Front cover:** The bright lights of Ashland's 1937 Varsity Theater were outlawed in the late 1960s, a victim of sign regulation. Last year, the city of Ashland relented, allowing the Varsity's neon to be restored and relit. Photo by Natalie Brown

**Back cover:** Raggedy Ann and Andy think "lovely, kind, beautiful thoughts" following their adventures in *Raggedy Ann and Andy and the Camel with the Wrinkled Knees*. Courtesy Patricia Hall and Macmillan, Inc.





# BLAZING THE WAY

## Neon Comes to Southern Oregon

By George Kramer

**N**eon signs, as they're supposed to, usually provoke a reaction. When the new technology first appeared in America in 1923, its blazing colored lights literally stopped traffic. A Los Angeles auto dealer, Earl C. Anthony, had imported two small signs from Claude Neon of France with the word "Packard" spelled out in a flowing orange script and had placed them on his showroom.<sup>1</sup> As people gawked at the new signs the first night they were lit, police had to be called to keep the cars from backing up the street. Within a decade of its introduction, neon had become a kind of beacon, a suggestion of the "modern" or a better future in a country ravaged by the economic woes of the Great Depression. Neon, and the other bright lights of the big cities, were glorified in motion pictures and song as the harbingers of happier days.

The connotation of neon as an energetic force continued throughout the Second World War and well into the early 1960s. But the election of Lyndon Baines Johnson, and more importantly the activities of Ladybird and the "America the Beautiful" campaign, changed the way signs were perceived. They became crass and ugly representatives of commercial excesses. Neon, along with billboards and other "garish" advertising devices, became the target of civic improvement and beautification drives nationwide. Commercial signs were now seen as a threat to a quality urban environment, a menacing influence



on the way our cities looked and functioned.

In response to the new anti-sign viewpoint, cities passed laws that strictly regulated signs. In many areas older neon signs were declared illegal and taken down. Often new neon signs were banned as well to remove their bright colors and blinking lights from the streetscape. In other cities neon simply fell out of favor aesthetically or economically as newer, less expensive, and more modern plastic materials came into vogue. In the 1970s subtle sand-blasted redwood signs replaced neon as the preferred advertising medium as understated marketing came into acceptance. By the early 1980s, with the exception of an occasional beer company sign in a tavern window, neon was virtually a dead technol-

**In 1952, the Medford Neon Company constructed the Craterian's marquee (above), which is still in use today. The Jacksonville Tavern neon sign (opposite), serviced by Johnny's Neon in the late 1950s, is considered a valued historic element in that National Historic Landmark City. Craterian photo courtesy E. J. Ellis, tavern photo by Matt Strieby**





REDMEN'S HALL  
1884

3rd & VILLAGE  
TAVERN



TAVERN

WATCH THE STICK HERE

Public RESTROOM CLOSET

Permitted on These Premises

OPEN

CHEESE SANDWICHES \$2.99  
NACHOS \$3.99  
HOT DOGS \$2.99

ALL SANDWICHES SERVED WITH  
SHRIMP, PEPPER, PEPPER, CHIPS

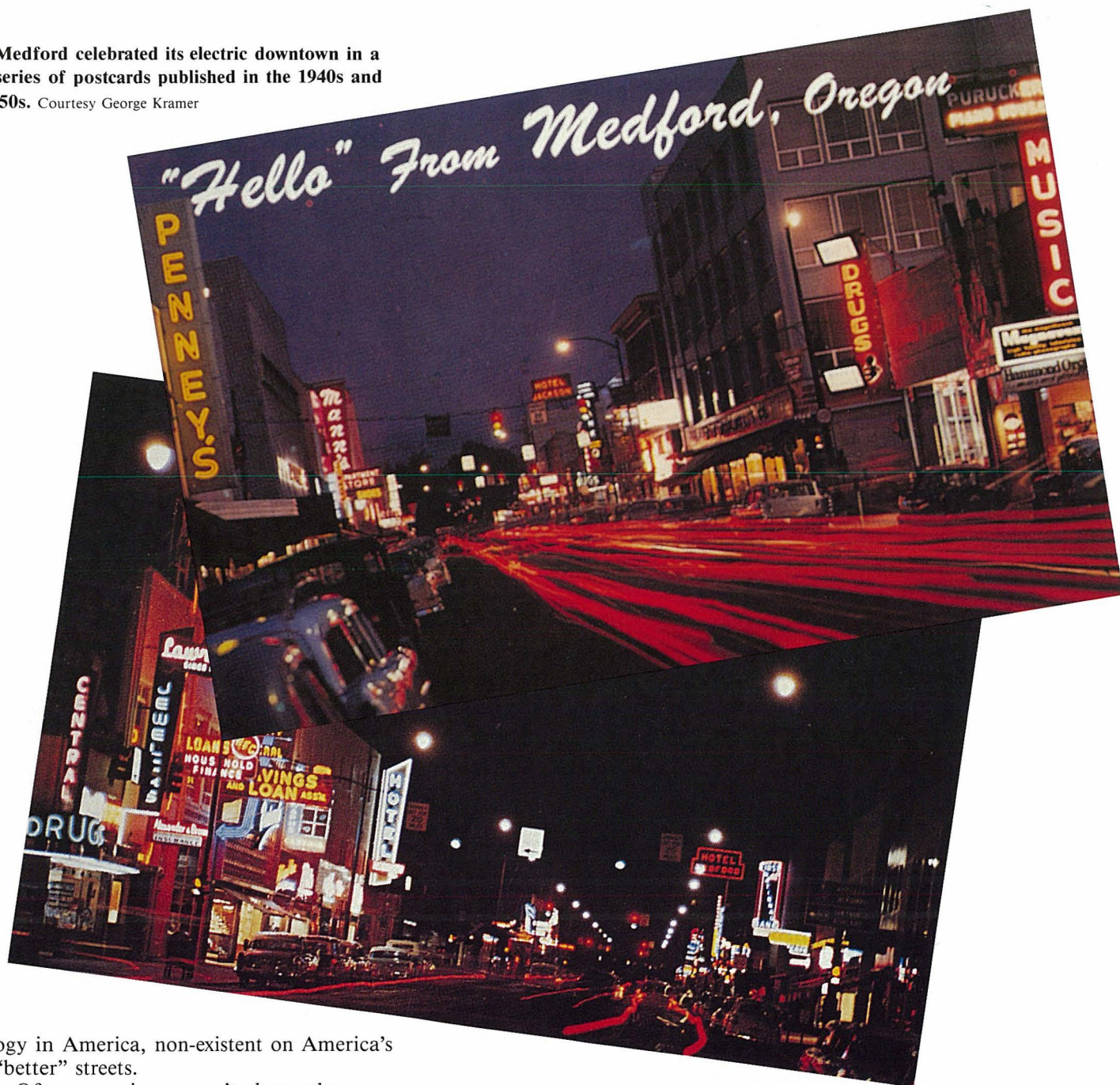
BEER  
BLAZZ \$3.99  
CASH \$3.99  
MILLER \$3.99  
MAYHEW \$3.99

NACLES CHARD

Time To Place Your Party Orders



Medford celebrated its electric downtown in a series of postcards published in the 1940s and '50s. Courtesy George Kramer



ogy in America, non-existent on America's "better" streets.

Of course, signs weren't always the enemy. In the early 1900s here in the Rogue Valley, as elsewhere, electrified signs were viewed with a mixture of wonder and excitement by people still just a little bit in awe of the newness of electric power. Typical of the comments a new electric sign could spark are these, referring to the installation of a new rooftop sign for the *Medford Mail Tribune* building in 1911;

Like Liberty it brightens the sky in the vicinity . . . its blazing white lights are visible miles away . . . letters two feet in length and 156 tungsten lights make it night bright . . . putting the old style incandescents to shame.<sup>2</sup>

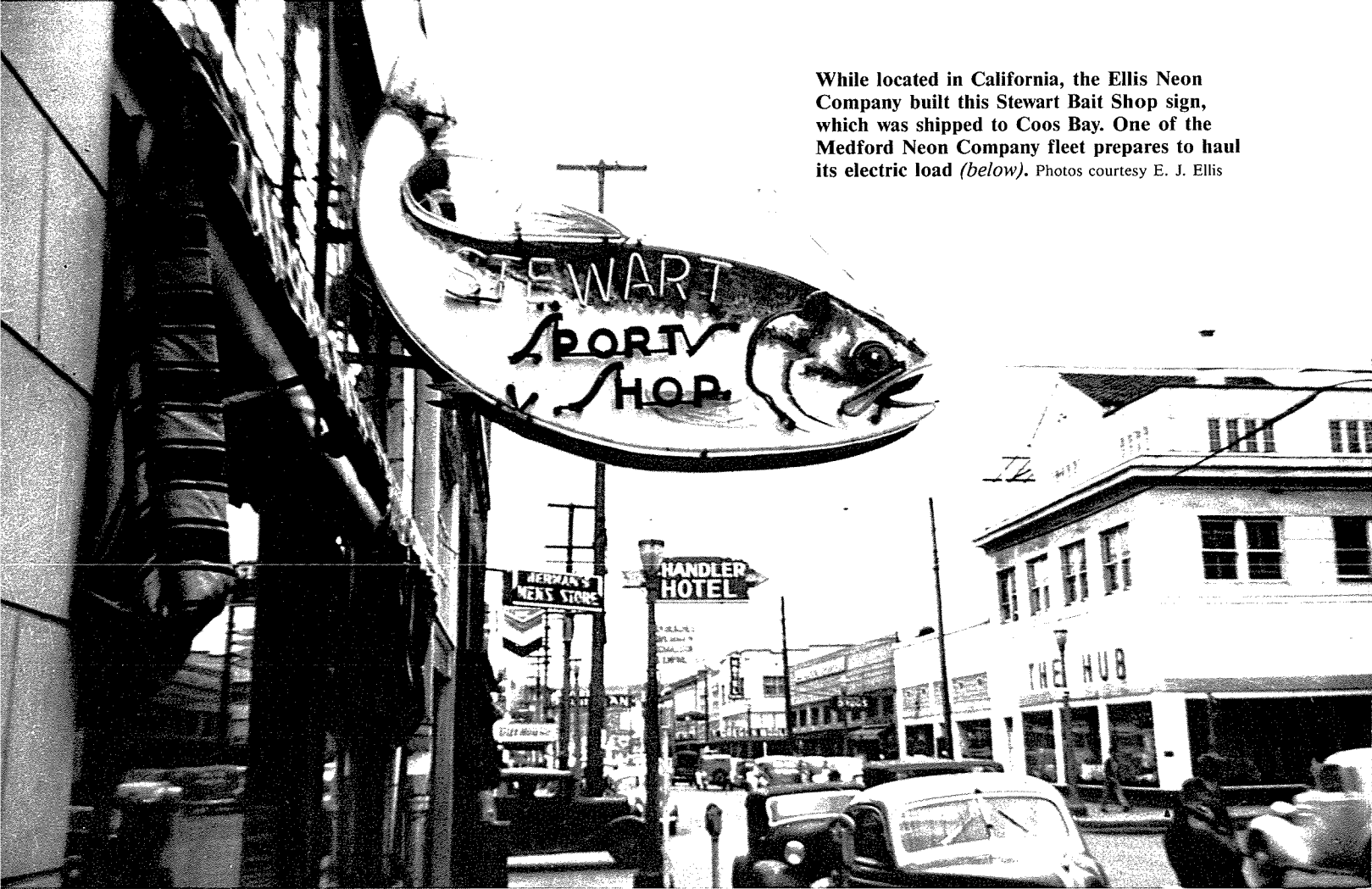
In 1916 the California-Oregon Power Company ran an advertisement extolling local merchants to "Advertise with Electric

Signs" pointing out that "Electric signs and show windows are most attractive at night, because then the people on the streets are less hurried and are in a receptive mood. . . . What they see makes a deep impression and lingers in their memory."<sup>3</sup>

But locals recognized the fleeting and changing nature of the new electric sign technologies and were quick to upgrade to something newer or more eye-catching. Just sixteen years after installing its first electric sign, the *Mail Tribune* installed an even larger, more impressive one, commenting that "the big electric sign will flash forth, adding its brilliant bit to the metropolitan aspect of Medford."<sup>4</sup>

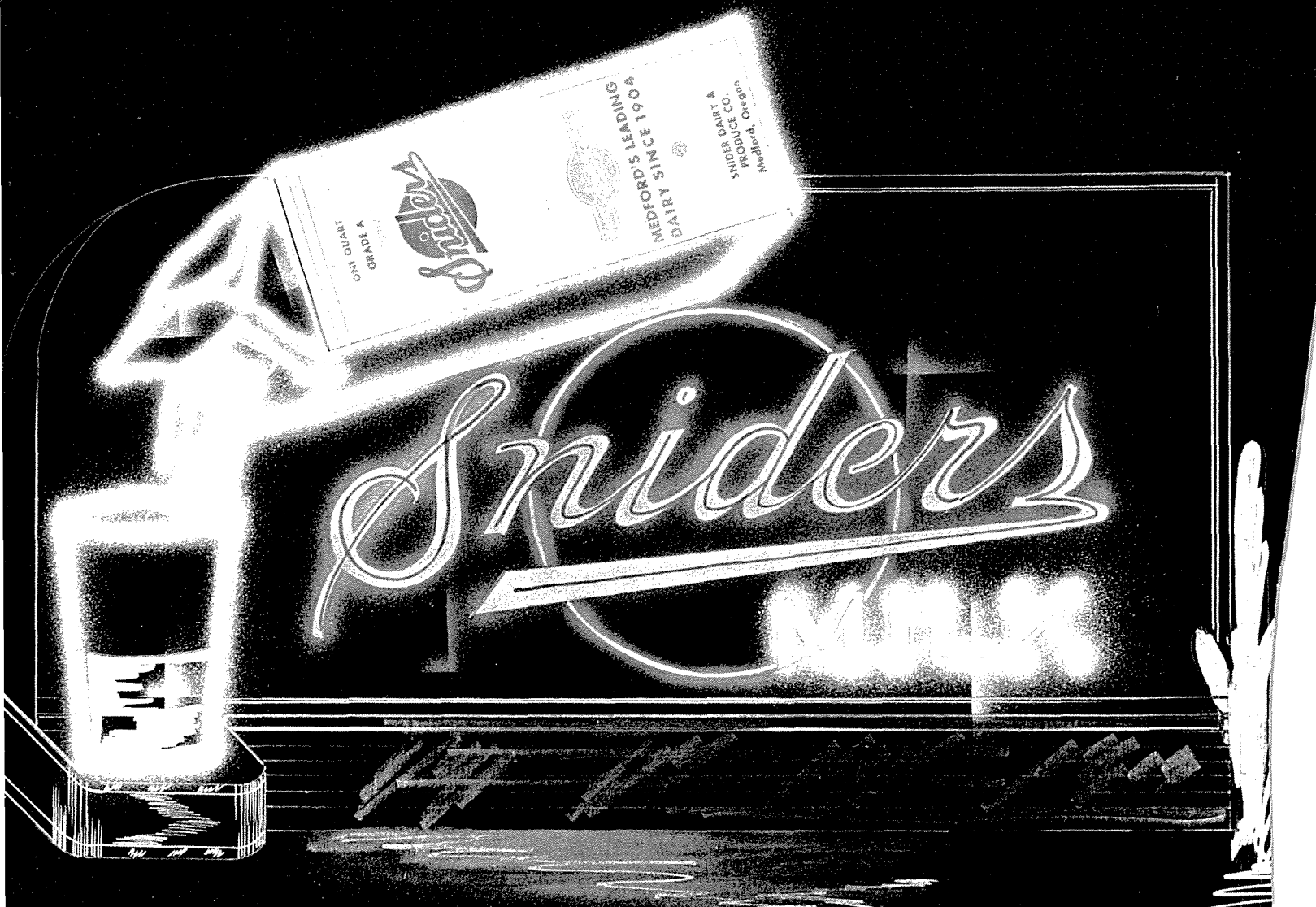
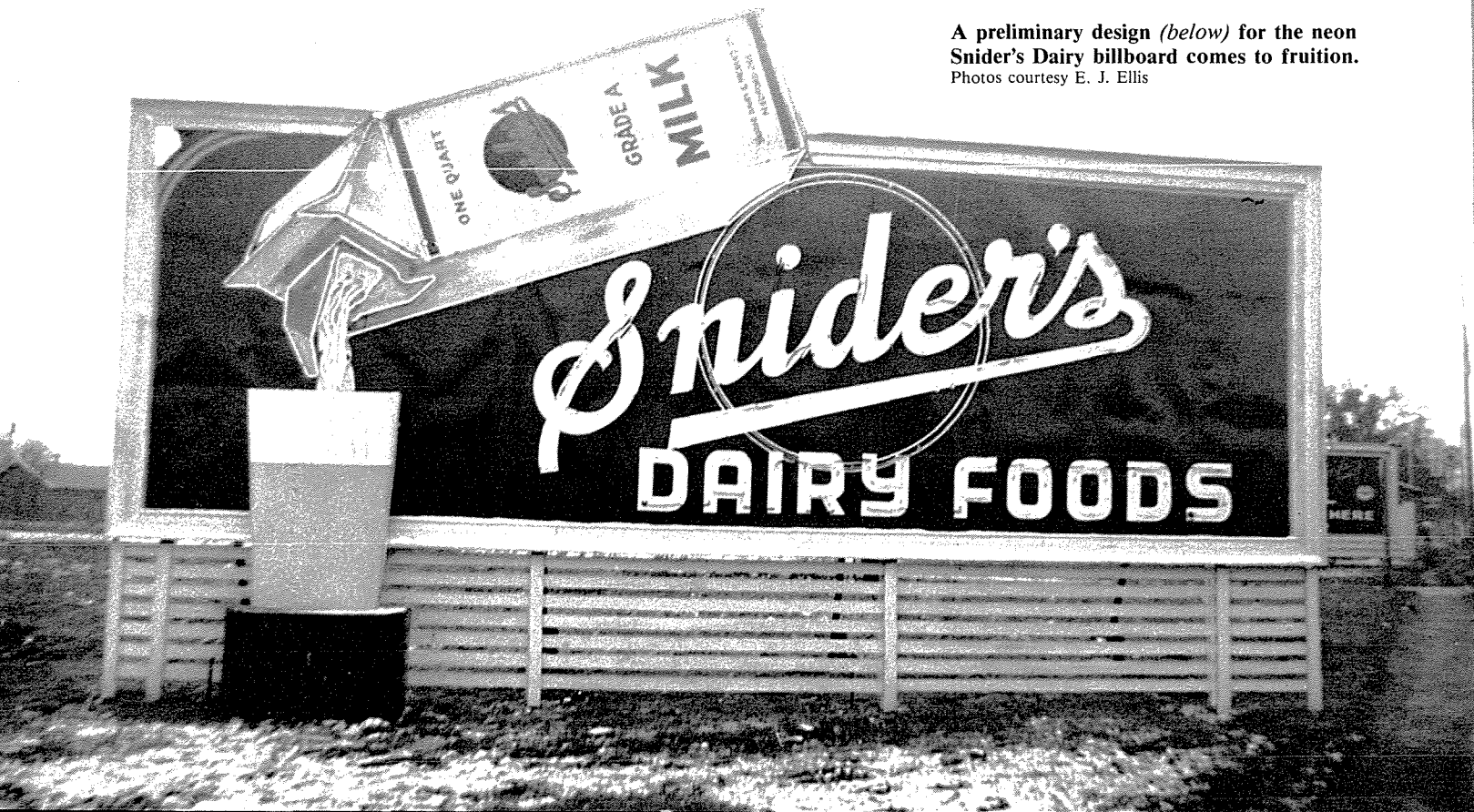


While located in California, the Ellis Neon Company built this Stewart Bait Shop sign, which was shipped to Coos Bay. One of the Medford Neon Company fleet prepares to haul its electric load (below). Photos courtesy E. J. Ellis





A preliminary design (*below*) for the neon Snider's Dairy billboard comes to fruition.  
Photos courtesy E. J. Ellis







# SHIRLEEN COURT TRAILERS

But these early signs, impressive as they must have been, were still little more than exposed light bulbs that spelled out a name or slogan. Neon signs, with their varied colors and graceful shapes, probably first appeared in Medford in the early 1930s. With its versatility, neon quickly took electric sign design to unprecedented levels of creativity.

At first, the neon signs in the Rogue Valley were likely made in larger cities and then shipped into the valley for installation by local electricians. For example, the large "HOTEL" sign that dominated Medford's skyline from its place atop the Hotel Medford was probably made by one of the large California sign manufacturers such as the Federal Sign Company.

The earliest Medford company that actually made neon signs itself is apparently the Neon-Ad Company, owned and operated by William "Bill" Catlett. Catlett, whose background was in sign painting and lettering, had established a sign company in Medford by the late 1920s, doing business as the "Oregon Paint Shop" at 506 North Riverside. His Neon-Ad Company of the late 1930s was billed as the "successor to Eugene Neon," a company

that at one time had opened a branch to serve the Medford market.<sup>5</sup> Although many Catlett signs likely remain, the only one still in use that has been identified is the small façade sign at Blind George's News Stand in Grants Pass.

The neon sign industry in Medford really got going just after the start of World War II. In early 1942 the city of Los Angeles passed a blackout law hoping to make that city less susceptible to nighttime bombing raids. That law also boosted the development of neon advertising in Medford because the decree required that all unnecessary electric lighting was to be shut off for the duration of the war. "You had to have blackout curtains on your windows, you couldn't turn on your lights, [and] you couldn't turn on your neon signs. So overnight we were out of business,"<sup>6</sup> said Ethelyn J. Ellis, who with her husband Ralph, owned the Ellis Neon Company in Los Angeles. No longer able to build signs in southern California, the Ellises closed their company and moved north, away from the blackout, to Medford.

Both the Ellises were skilled in the various aspects of sign design, technology and

**Lester Beckley rendered this design for the Shirleen Trailer Court sign, which stands inoperable near the intersection of Jackson and Riverside. Courtesy E. J. Ellis**





Medford Neon Company's Elks Temple sign was a downtown Medford landmark for nearly fifty years. Medford Neon installs a local Richfield sign (below). Photos courtesy E. J. Ellis



installation. Having entered the business in 1931 just a short time after neon was introduced, they were literally among the industry's pioneers. A photo album in Mrs. Ellis's possession entitled "Firsts" documents the company's involvement with a number of important signs in the Los Angeles area, including the original script "Thrifty Drug Store" and "Von's Markets" signs. Both companies are now large chains with stores throughout the western United States.

In early 1942, when the Ellises first arrived in southern Oregon, they went to work for Catlett's Neon-Ad Company. Mrs. Ellis recalls that one of their earliest jobs was to repair the "Hotel Medford" sign because Catlett was too elderly to get onto the roof and fix it himself. At first, with materials difficult to obtain because of the war, most local sign work was limited to repair.

By early 1943 the Ellises had left Neon-Ad and set up their own firm, the Medford Neon Company, and they quickly became the premier neon sign company in the southern Oregon area. The office and shop were built right next door to the Ellis family home. "We hunted around and we found this place, because I told Mr. Ellis I don't want any more business locations, because you have to have a home away



from there, so let's figure out some way we can have it all together."

In the small market of Medford, Mr. Ellis was in charge of the marketing end of the business and Mrs. Ellis designed the patterns for the "cans," the sheet metal boxes which hold the electric wiring of a sign. She also did the artwork and design, laying out the tubing pattern in full size as a guide for bending the glass. In the early

**A Medford Neon business advertisement. In the late 1940s, Medford Neon built the script "Omars" entryway sign. The diamond freestanding sign in front reportedly was built by Johnny's Sign Shop. Ad courtesy E. J. Ellis, photo by Natalie Brown**





years Mrs. Ellis even bent and charged the neon tubes herself.<sup>8</sup> Later this job would be given over to others, including one of the Ellises' daughters.

The first sign the new company built in Medford was for the Medford Elks Club, at Fifth and Central. The sign was in use for almost fifty years and was replaced by an internally illuminated copy only within the last few months.

Soon, with business booming in the valley because of Camp White and the increase in population it brought, Medford Neon hired more employees. One was Lester Beckley, a sign designer who had previously worked for the Ellis Neon Company in Los Angeles. Beckley is likely the first specialized sign designer ever to work in the Medford area. He designed many signs for Medford Neon, but the one that was likely his crowning achievement had an unfortunately short life. The Snider Dairy sign, a large, freestanding billboard that was built on Court Street in the mid-1950s, was quite an elaborate design. Using sequentially lighted neon, the sign created the appearance of milk "pouring" from the carton into the glass. But the Snider Dairy stood for just a few years before it was removed.

During the time the Ellises ran Medford Neon, they hired and trained a number of people who later went on to form their own local sign businesses. These included John Eads, a popular local magician who after his discharge from the armed forces returned to Medford and went to work for Medford Neon. "He started doing patterns, Mrs. Ellis was teaching him how to do layout and all . . . [and] he thought he was learning too slow. So he quit and went up north and hired a company to teach him glassblowing. And then he came back and opened Johnny's Neon."<sup>9</sup> Johnny's would be a major sign manufacturer in the Rogue Valley until 1960, when the business was purchased by Electrical Products Corporation.<sup>10</sup> Other local sign manufacturers who got their start with Medford Neon include Clair Stumbo (later of Sta-Brite and Allied Neon) and Emmett Carpenter of what is now Signs ETC. In 1956 the Ellises sold Medford Neon to a company that has since evolved into Medford-based Blaze Signs of America, still a leader in the sign industry of the Pacific Northwest.

Throughout the booming economic times of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Medford Neon was responsible for literally

hundreds of signs from Grants Pass to Redding, and from Klamath Falls to the coast. Some of the more unusual are now gone, including the "neon fire" that Mrs. Ellis remembers building for the fireplace of the Tally Ho Club in Phoenix or the "neonized" coffee mill that was designed for a cafe on the coast.<sup>11</sup> But many of the company's signs remain.

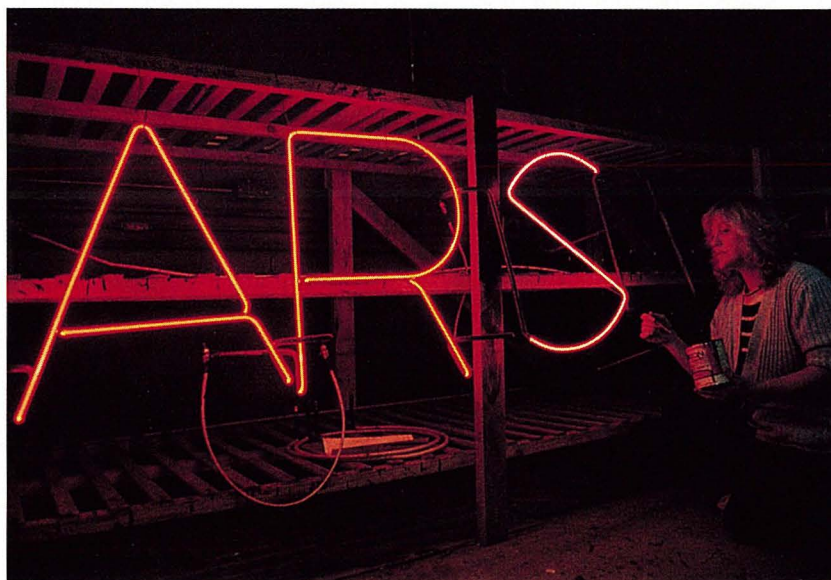
Over the last few years some communities have relaxed their control over neon, ceasing to view it as crass and overtly commercial and recognizing it for what it is—a twentieth-century art form that has grown up with urban America. Because that's what well-done neon can be, adding life and vitality, and most of all color, to our cities' streets at night. Perhaps neon, whose very existence in America spans only a single lifetime, which had been first admired and then abhorred, which was first displayed in delight and then condemned as tasteless, has now finally been rediscovered and can be appreciated anew.



**The Varsity Theater's newly restored neon (opposite) arcs across Ashland's downtown. Lona Burgess, employee at Blaze Signs of America, puts finishing touches on the rebuilt Varsity marquee. Photos by Natalie Brown**

#### ENDNOTES

1. Claude Neon, Inc. was the originator of the neon tube process, and through a franchise arrangement,



was instrumental in the rapid growth of the neon industry worldwide.

2. *Medford Mail Tribune*, "Look for the Sign of Mail Tribune," June 1, 1911, 4:2. This sign was made by the Southern Oregon Electric Company.

3. *Medford Mail Tribune*, advertisement, November 4, 1916, 4:2-5.

4. *Medford Mail Tribune*, "Mail Tribune's Electric Sign Ready Tonight," August 22, 1927, 8:1.

5. Some remaining signs may be of Eugene Neon







make, including "The Spot," on South Riverside near Main Street in Medford.

6. Mrs. E. J. Ellis, oral history interview with the author, March 25, 1991. Now ninety-six-years old and living in Medford, Mrs. Ellis is a virtual treasure-house of the history of the neon sign industry. Much of the information in this article stems from her wonderful memories and photo collection.

7. Ibid.

8. In brief, neon signs are based on gases (neon or argon) sealed inside glass tubing and connected to a high-voltage electrical current. When charged with current, the gases emit a glow, red for neon and blue-green for argon. Other colors are produced by additives to the gases or coatings on the tubing.

9. Clair Stumbo, oral interview with the author, April 11, 1991. Stumbo was hired just before John

Eads came to work for Medford Neon and remained active in the sign industry until his retirement.

10. John Eads remained with Electrical Products, which was in turn purchased by Federal Sign of Los Angeles. In 1978 the Northern California and Oregon interests of Federal Sign were purchased by Blaze Signs of America.

11. In this design, an actual antique coffee mill was rimmed with neon and used as a rooftop sign.

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*After sundown, Ashland historic preservation consultant George Kramer prowls city streets, gazing signward in search of the ultimate neon experience.*

## from the Collections

by Janette Meek

"YOUR NEW GROCETERIA . . . Oregon's Most Modern Food Market Opens Tomorrow!" read the headline on the full-page advertisement in the January 24, 1947, issue of the *Medford Mail Tribune*. The sixteen-year-old Groceteria, located at Sixth and Grape, had been closed for six months for enlargement, remodeling and redecorating. The new store featured the traditional food departments as well as new services in keeping with the slogan of "keeping woman out of the kitchen." New offerings included a self-service delicatessen and frozen-food section with three brands of local ice cream.

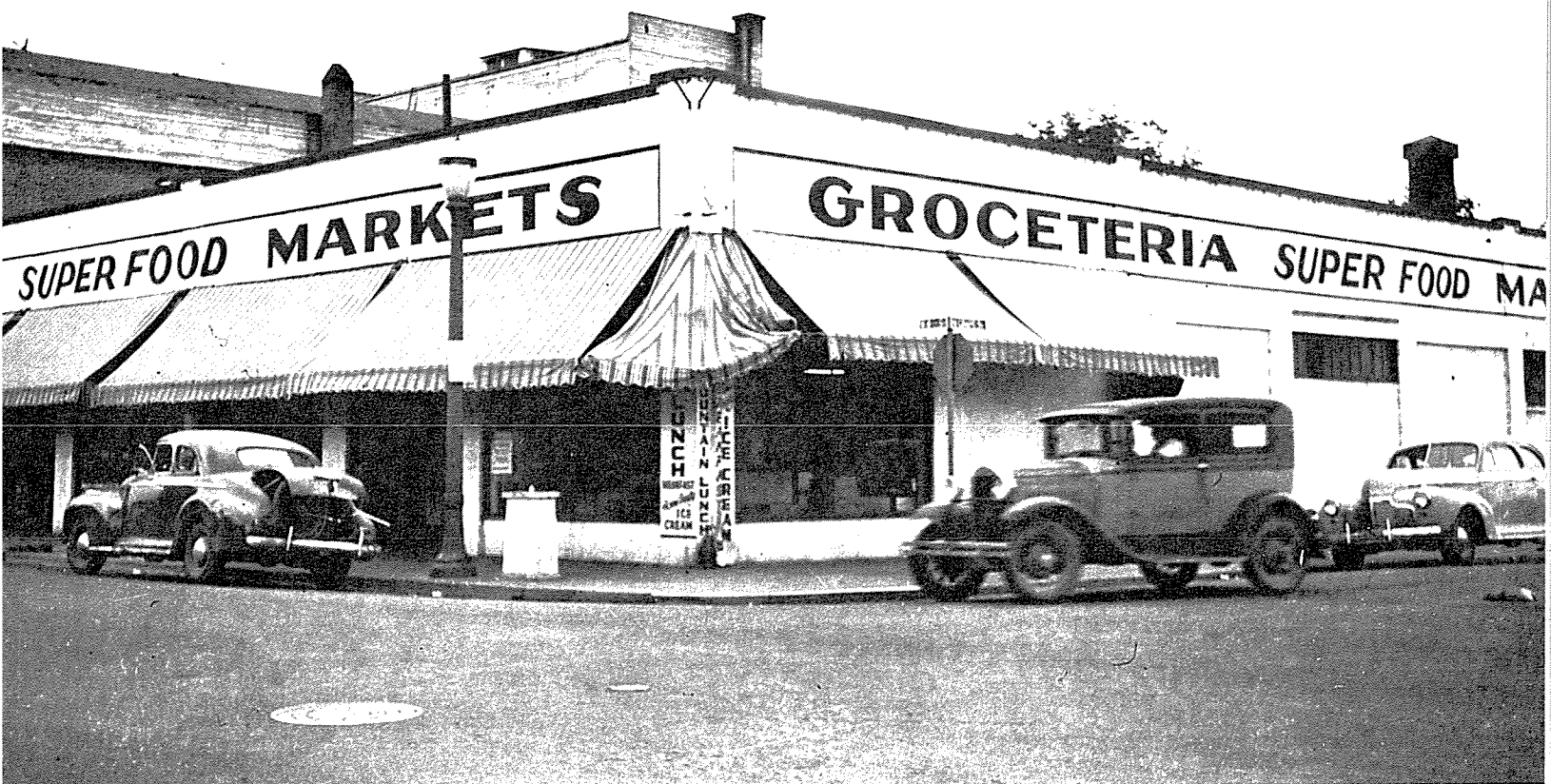
An article on the next page tells about the redesign of the store entrance. The store sign and the marquee which sheltered the entrance were outlined with colorful neon lights. The Medford Neon Company advertised on the same page: "See our Latest Medford Job, the New Groceteria Super Food Market's Neon Front, a 100% Medford Product."

Ralph Ellis owned the Medford Neon Company. In June 1991, Mrs. Ethelyn Ellis donated to the Southern Oregon Historical Society the graceful flower basket that the Medford Neon Company sent for the grand opening of the "new" Groceteria. The Ellis family added to the twisted handle a glass rod containing gas that provides a blue neon illumination. The silver splint-and-wicker basket stands 32.5 inches high. Flowers were arranged in the ten-inch diameter base weighted with the ballast.

The Society houses numerous objects which, owing to limited exhibit space, are not often seen by visitors. We hope that featuring an item in each issue of the *Table Rock Sentinel* will provide an enjoyable and educational glimpse of the scope of its collections.







Medford's memorable Groceteria, located at the corner of Sixth and Grape streets, went from an early painted façade to an electric look in 1947. Photos courtesy E. J. Ellis





# RAGGEDY ANN AND ANDY

and the  
*Camel with the Wrinkled Knees*



BY JOHNNY GRUELLE



# The Raggedys Go West

by Patricia Hall

**O**N A SUNNY afternoon, a little girl rushes into her father's art studio, a floppy rag doll in tow. Breathlessly, she tells him of finding her tattered charge in Grandmother's trunk. Daddy is more than delighted to take a break from his drawing board to meet this newest member of his daughter's nursery. Tomorrow's cartoon can wait.

Together they sit while he draws a smile on the doll's faded face and attaches two round black buttons for eyes. Both agree that dolly looks much better with a face; all she lacks now is a name. The man thinks a minute for inspiration and then remembers two of his favorite poems by a family friend, the poet James Whitcomb Riley. He silently recalls the opening stanzas of "The Raggedy Man" and "Little Orphant Annie." Foreshortening the titles, he hugs his daughter, and asks: "What would you think if we called your little doll Raggedy Ann? . . ."

So goes the most popular (but by no means the most accurate) birth legend of the seventy-six-year-old



Raggedy Ann and how she came to be at the hands of a prolific and talented cartoonist, Johnny Gruelle.

Millions of children still play with Raggedy Ann dolls. And many adults still retain vivid childhood memories of having grown up with Raggedy Ann. With her shoe-button eyes, shy smile, and charming slue-

footed stance, Raggedy Ann has become an internationally recognized symbol of American childhood. Just last year Raggedy Ann—whose youthful looks certainly belie her age—celebrated her 75th birthday.

Raggedy Ann—with her inscrutable smile and magical literary persona—invites tale-telling and legend-making. The lippy rag doll somehow inspires a belief in magic, and encourages a return to childhood, even for the most mature adults. As with many creations that endure decade after decade to be embraced by each new generation, Raggedy Ann's longevity can be credited to the whimsy and originality of her creator. Behind the story of Raggedy Ann is the story of a remarkable American storyteller and artist who began his career in the Midwest around the turn of the century: Johnny Gruelle.



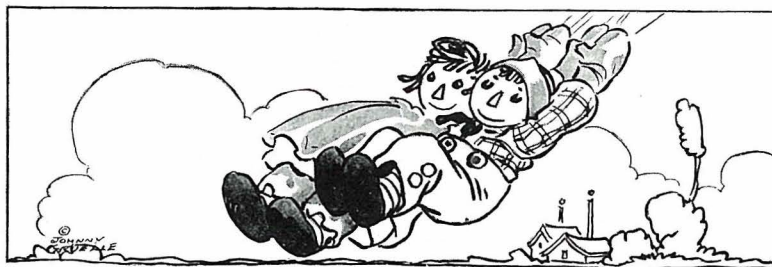
Gruelle was a man of many talents and interests. Throughout his life he pursued myriad professions and avocations: artist, journalist, writer, cartoonist, illustrator, humanist, nature-lover, spiritualist, and sojourner. Tempered only by a good head for business, Gruelle's fanciful outlook and belief in magic formed the wellspring of his literary and artistic creations.

Gruelle also was possessed all his life by wanderlust. This is probably what overtook him during the mid-1920s when, at the peak of his career, but badly in need of rest and recreation, he packed his young family into a specially outfitted bus and headed out from his East Coast home on a westward trip that ultimately brought him to Ashland. Here, he and his family stayed for nearly a year and a half. Amid the breathtaking Jackson County scenery and balmy climate, surrounded by many new friends, Gruelle worked and played and rested. Finding the mental and spiritual refreshment he had sought, Gruelle was able to unwind, focus inward, and create some of his best work.

**J**OHN BARTON GRUELLE was born in 1880 in Arcola, Illinois. His father, Richard Buckner Gruelle—known as R. B.—was a self-taught landscape painter, later to become a member of the Hoosier Group of Indiana-based Impressionist artists. R. B. was also a musician and writer. He and his wife Alice saw to it that their children were exposed to the arts and literature and gave them ample opportunities for artistic expression. The family attended local musical events and hosted poetry readings in their parlor. The Gruelle children were encouraged to sing and play musical instruments and R. B. allowed his children to experiment freely with the paints and brushes in his home studio. This kind of family appreciation of late nineteenth-century regional culture and aesthetics would profoundly influence Johnny, and his younger siblings, Justin and Prudence.

During the 1880s, when Johnny was still a toddler, the family moved from Arcola to Indianapolis. It was a time of great industrial growth and cultural flowering in the Hoosier capitol; an ideal time for a young artist like R. B. Gruelle to settle there and try to make a living.

In Indianapolis the Gruelles soon became friendly with other inspired Midwest artists and writers. R. B.'s landscapes were eventually exhibited alongside those of T. C. Steele, J. Ottis Adams, Otto



## GRUELLE WAS A MAN OF MANY TALENTS AND INTERESTS: ARTIST, JOURNALIST, WRITER, ILLUSTRATOR, HUMANIST, SPIRITUALIST, AND SOJOURNER.

Stark, and William Forsyth who, along with R. B., would later become known collectively as the Hoosier Group.

A frequent visitor to the Gruelle home was the Indiana poet, James Whitcomb Riley. Riley led occasional literary discussions in the Gruelles' front parlor and eventually commissioned R. B. to illustrate one of his volumes of poetry. Young Johnny loved hearing about Riley's robust, colorful life and would later honor the poet's memory in his own book, *Orphant Annie Story Book* (1921).

No doubt, a childhood spent among writers and artists instilled in Johnny the significance of the well-told tale. Sitting at Riley's feet while the poet spun hearty yarns of genteel-but-vagabond adventures, and living with a father who not only painted regional scenes but also was a colorful, wordy writer and yarn-spinner—all of this exposed young Johnny to the language and the dialect, the demeanor and the power of expert storytelling.

If Johnny's artistic and literary muses tempted him at an early age, apparently, so too did the seductive spirits of adventure. According to Gruelle family members, Johnny was a quiet but restless youth. Johnny himself often told a tale about his thirteenth summer—in 1894—when he and a friend hopped a freight train from Indianapolis's Brightwood Yards and hoboed their way to Cleveland, Ohio. Hungry and broke, the two boys headed for a saloon, where Johnny hired on as a piano player. There—the story goes—the young Gruelle charmed a portly policeman named McGinty by drawing his likeness with soap on a back-bar mirror. McGinty thought the boy showed such talent that he offered

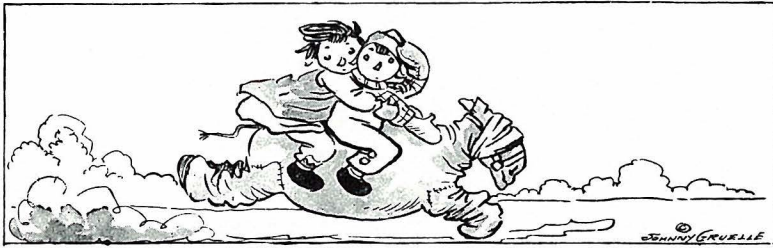






**Johnny Gruelle in the 1930s. Gruelle received a patent for Raggedy Ann on September 7, 1915.**  
Courtesy Patricia Hall/ Jayne Comerford, U.S. Patent Office





WITH A WINK OF HIS EYE OR A  
FLASH OF HIS PEN, HE  
DELIGHTED IN TRANSPORTING  
ALL AGES TO LANDS OF MAGIC  
AND MAKE-BELIEVE.

to help him get a job as a newspaper cartoonist in Cleveland. Johnny declined, however, homesickness spurring the two wandering boys back to Indianapolis.

Though he had turned down Officer McGinty's help with a newspaper job, years later Gruelle would move to Cleveland and rekindle a friendship with the policeman. And, much later, Gruelle would honor the kindly officer in a manuscript called *Raggedy Ann and Andy and the Nice Fat Policeman*, first published as newspaper serials; later published posthumously in 1942, with illustrations by Gruelle's son, Worth.

Gruelle eventually did choose newspaper work. As a very young man he worked jobs as a chalk-plate artist at several Indianapolis newspapers, scratching crude cartoons on a black slate from which negatives were made that would reproduce as black-on-white images. In 1903 Gruelle was hired as assistant illustrator for the newly founded *Indianapolis Star*. There, Gruelle produced small stock-market cartoons, humorous headline cartoons, and one-frame sports comics.

The *Star's* managing editor quickly recognized Gruelle's talent for capturing, in pen and ink, the nuances and whimsy of everyday life. Within months, Gruelle's political cartoons were appearing on the *Star's* front page.

Gruelle's talent as a cartoonist eventually led him to other newspapers in other cities. His big break occurred in 1910. While working for the *Cleveland Press* and the Newspaper Enterprise Association, Gruelle entered a comic-drawing contest sponsored by the *New York Herald*. His two submissions won first and second place in a blind competition of 1500 entries. His first-place

entry, the full-page "Mr. Twee Deedle," won Gruelle \$2,000 and what turned out to be an eight-year contract with the *New York Herald* to produce weekly installments of the cartoon.

By this time, writing and illustrating his own original fairy tales had become a passion for Gruelle. He even executed many of his "Mr. Twee Deedle" comic pages as illustrated fairy story episodes. Upon winning the *New York Herald* contest, Gruelle had stressed: "I wanted to get away from the slap-dash style of comics. I have always loved fairy tales and have wanted to illustrate something like this for a long time."

By the time he won the *New York Herald* contest, Gruelle, his wife Myrtle, and





young daughter Marcella, had relocated to the Norwalk, Connecticut, area. Here they built a home for themselves in the Silvermine artists' colony not far from Gruelle's father and mother, who had helped pioneer the settlement.

Once settled in the East, close to many outlets for his free-lance work, Gruelle's literary and artistic output soon became well-known, as he quickly mastered the techniques of turning out vast quantities of artwork and stories in short periods of time. "My father was incredibly gifted and prolific," recalls Gruelle's son, Worth (himself an artist, and illustrator of several of his father's Raggedy Ann books). "He'd visualize something, then without even laying it out, put pen to paper."



In Gruelle's first serious "fairy story with a moral" format, character Mr. Twee Deedle (left) appears to children to teach them ethical and spiritual lessons. Gruelle's love of fairy tales is evident in his illustrations featured in a 1914 volume of *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Courtesy Patricia Hall

Gruelle often finished his newspaper cartoons early in the day, spending his afternoons completing illustrated fairy stories for ladies' magazines and children's periodicals, as well as satirical "bird's-eye-view" cartoons for humor weeklies like *Judge*.

Most of all, Gruelle loved to tell a good story. Whether he was preparing a manuscript for publication, illustrating a comic page, telling fairy tales to a group of children, or recounting his own life story, he was a skilled yarn-spinner. He quickly became a master at inspiring in the reader or listener that all-important mindset for enjoying a make-believe story: the suspension of disbelief.

Using the tried-and-true techniques of the traditional storyteller, Gruelle not only created and perpetuated new, whimsical tales for children, but also created many of the still-prevailing tales about his own life. He also initiated many legends about the genesis of his well-known rag dolls, weaving fanciful details into factual accounts. With a wink of his eye or a flick of his pen, Gruelle delighted in transporting all ages to lands of magic and make-believe.

His whimsical characters and plots seemed to come from another place, another era. Gruelle possessed a lifelong love of traditional folk tales, and was familiar with their motifs and themes. This affinity, coupled with his deeply spiritual connection to nature, magic, and all living things, enabled Gruelle to create stories about fairies and gnomes, witches and princesses, many of which rivaled those found in the Grimms and Anderson fairy story collections.

During 1914-1917, Gruelle illustrated a comprehensive edition of Grimms' fairy tales (see illustration) and illustrated and retold single fairy tales such as Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, and Little Red Riding Hood, for a storybook series. All of these early commissions immersed Gruelle in the traditional folk tales whose format and structure would influence his own yet-to-come books.

Gruelle would soon write and illustrate his own book of original fairy tales, which was published in 1917 by the Chicago-based P. F. Volland Company, a publisher of gift and inspirational books. Entitled *My Very Own Fairy Stories*, it consists of short, well-crafted four- and five-page illustrated stories of fairy magic, good-hearted people, and witches' spells.

With his growing reputation and what seemed to be a prevailing pre-World War I national nostalgia for "old-timey" diver-





**Published in 1918, *Raggedy Ann Stories* was an instant success.** Courtesy Patricia Hall and Macmillan, Inc.

sions in the face of modernization, Gruelle was in an excellent position to become successful with his beautifully written and illustrated stories.

He set many of these tales in a nursery full of dolls, giving each a whimsical name and personality all its own. One of the dolls that sprang from Gruelle's imagination—one who would eventually star in her own books of tales—was Raggedy Ann. In her rise to fame, Raggedy Ann inspired myriad legends of her own genesis.

The most popular legend (recounted at the beginning of this article) asserts that Gruelle's inspiration for this doll had been found by Gruelle's daughter, Marcella, in Grandmother Gruelle's attic. But, a word here about the legends, especially those that celebrate Raggedy Ann's beginnings. These accounts—most of them apocryphal—have been repeated again and again as factual. In most cases, the few verifiable facts have become laced with romantic imagery and embroidered with made-up details. In fact, many who have chronicled Raggedy Ann's genesis seem to prefer not the straight factually based history, but rather the gentle, nostalgic tales about how she came to be. Perhaps this is so because Raggedy Ann seems inextricably connected to a magical childhood world that adults secretly long for.

A more credible (but much less romantic) account of Raggedy Ann's genesis was offered at one point by Gruelle's wife, Myrtle, who recalled:

... we were young marrieds on a visit to Johnny's folks in Indianapolis. There was something he wanted from the attic. While he

was rummaging around for it, he found an old rag doll his mother had made for his sister. He said then the doll would make a good story. I guess he kept it in his mind until we had Marcella. He remembered it when he saw her play dolls. You know how little girls are. He wrote the stories around some of the things she did. He used to get ideas from watching her.

Being a businessman as well as a writer-illustrator, Gruelle may well have anticipated the potential for a commercial rag doll character based on the one that emerged, somehow or other, from his mother's attic. Or perhaps he simply wanted to participate in a trend popular among many of his artistic colleagues, who were enthusiastically copyrighting and patenting their own animation devices and comic-strip characters, hoping to enjoy their share of royalties.

Whatever the inspiration, whatever the motivation, in May 1915 Gruelle applied to the U.S. Patent Office for a design classified simply as "Doll." However, by the time his patent was granted, Gruelle's thirteen-year-old daughter, Marcella, had fallen gravely ill from complications resulting from an infected vaccination. Several months later she died. Understandably, her death devastated Gruelle. The details of Marcella's passing eventually became woven into legends about what role she had played in Gruelle's yet-to-be-published first Raggedy Ann book.

Another account claims that Gruelle's Raggedy Ann tales had first appeared as early as 1908 as illustrated poems in Johnny's bound artist book, which he would lend on occasion to friends and colleagues to read to their children. Later, following Marcella's death, Gruelle supposedly changed the tales to prose.

In 1918 Gruelle submitted a manuscript featuring Raggedy Ann to the P.F. Volland Company, the company which had already published Gruelle's *My Very Own Fairy Stories* and for whom Gruelle had provided several sets of commissioned illustrations for other books.

In the fall of 1918, the first editions of Gruelle's *Raggedy Ann Stories* rolled off the presses. Longtime Gruelle associate Howard Cox later recalled the book's success: "It no sooner reached the retail counters, than reorders began to pour in and for the rest of the year every printer in Chicago with an idle press was printing *Raggedy Ann Stories*."

Around the time that Gruelle had patented his Raggedy Ann doll, he had also applied for a trademark for the name "Raggedy Ann." With high hopes for a

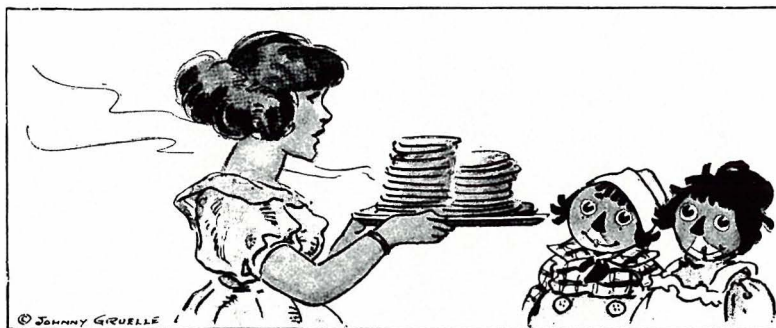


marketable item, female members of the Gruelle family had gone to work in a Norwalk, Connecticut, loft. Under Johnny's careful direction, they cut and fabricated and finished dozens of handmade Raggedy Ann dolls to sell.

Some say that these original dolls possessed real candy hearts. While many collectors today doubt that story (no Raggedy Ann doll can be found today that actually contains one), Worth Gruelle, who would have been four or five at the time, distinctly remembers the candy hearts being lovingly sewn into the chest of each doll.

"It was my job to go downstairs to the candy store to buy the hearts," Worth recalls. "If the old man storekeeper was there, he'd let me pick through the hearts to find only the ones that said 'I Love You.' If his wife was there, it was a different story. She'd make me buy a whole pound, but I didn't care. I'd go back upstairs, pick out the 'I Love Yous' and like a typical kid, I'd gobble up the rest."

Various journalistic accounts have claimed that some of these family-made dolls were later used as store display items to accompany *Raggedy Ann Stories* when it was first sold in 1918. Supposedly, customers began clamoring to buy the dolls, too, and in such quantities that it would have been difficult for the Gruelle family to supply them. This may have been so, demand eventually outweighing the production abilities of the family. Far more likely, however, was that the Volland Company and Gruelle already had a merchandising scheme in mind. What can be documented is that, around the time *Raggedy Ann Stories* was published, Gruelle authorized Volland to begin manufacturing and selling a mass-produced Raggedy Ann doll under the Volland label.



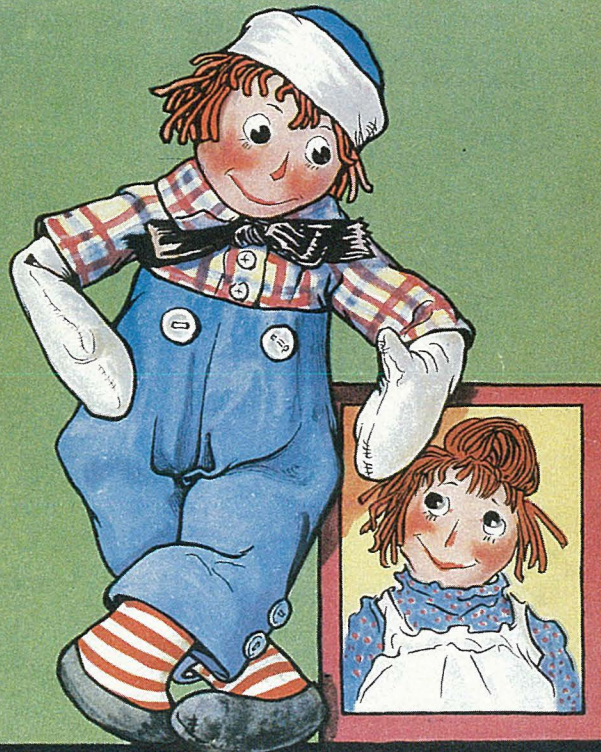
**UNDER JOHNNY'S CAREFUL  
DIRECTION, FEMALE MEMBERS  
OF THE GRUELLE FAMILY  
CUT AND FABRICATED DOZENS  
OF HANDMADE RAGGEDY ANN  
DOLLS TO SELL.**

**According to some accounts, a small  
rag doll appeared on Gruelle's shelf  
following the death of his  
daughter.** Courtesy Patricia Hall  
and Macmillan, Inc.





# RAGGEDY ANDY STORIES



JOHNNY GRUELLE

In 1919—a year after publishing *Raggedy Ann Stories*—Volland published Gruelle's *Friendly Fairies*, another volume of short, original fairy stories. The next year, Gruelle created Raggedy Ann's brother, Raggedy Andy, who made a literary debut in his own volume, *Raggedy Andy Stories*. Raggedy Andy soon joined Raggedy Ann as a commercially available Volland-made doll.

During the early 1920s, Gruelle was approached by the Indianapolis-based Bobbs-Merrill Company about doing a children's book that would honor one of the company's premiere poets, the late James Whitcomb Riley. Gruelle was delighted to so honor his longtime family friend, and the result was the *Orphant Annie Story Book* (1921). Gruelle also produced a second book for Bobbs-Merrill, entitled *Johnny Mouse and the Wishing Stick* (1922), based on a series of magazine stories Gruelle had written for *Woman's World*. Each of these books in its own way showcases Gruelle's storytelling abilities. And Gruelle would forever cherish his

*Raggedy Andy Stories* (1920) and *The Magical Land of Noom* (1922) followed the success of *Raggedy Ann*. Courtesy Patricia Hall and Macmillan, Inc.



brief, but close association with the "Hoosier House."

In 1922, Gruelle wrote and illustrated his most ambitious and lengthy book for children, *The Magical Land of Noom*. Supposedly dictated in only several days, this 40,000-word tale charts the adventures of Janey, Johnny, and their grandparents, as they fly in a homemade apple-crate flying machine to the other side of the moon (hence the destination, "Noom"). There, they enjoy magical adventures, and meet strange animals, magicians, and a real princess.

By the early 1920s, it was apparent that Gruelle's Raggedy Ann and Andy were best sellers, both as dolls and in books. Gruelle's creation of the two rag dolls, essentially, made his career as a well-known children's author and illustrator. But, in addition to generating Raggedy material, Gruelle continued with his many newspaper and magazine commissions, which kept him up working late many a night.

So, by the time letters began arriving from a family friend in Oregon, Gruelle was ready for a vacation. Emma Oeder, whom the Gruelles had known for years, wrote of Jackson County's crisp air and breathtaking mountain scenery, and extended an invitation to the Gruelles to come visit.



In the spring of 1923, in a bus fully outfitted with mahogany bunks and shelves with brass fixtures, its sides festooned with cartoons, Gruelle, his wife and two sons, Worth and Dickie, set out for the West Coast.

It was to be a working vacation. Johnny drove the bus by day and worked on his drawings and stories at night, sending in his commissions and picking up his checks at general delivery stations along the way. But there was plenty of time for family fun and adventures, including a stopover in Indianapolis for the Indy 500, a visit to a working ranch, and a picnic at the foot of Pike's Peak.

In August, the bus finally rolled into Ashland. Hot and dusty, the Gruelles were ready to relax and stay awhile. For a time, the family stayed with Emma Oeder and her daughter, Lynda, at their house at 108 Granite Street. Later, they moved up the street to a house at 114 Granite where Johnny settled into a routine, writing and illustrating. But, as he had while traveling, Gruelle left plenty of time for enjoying the beauty of southern Oregon. Many weekends were spent picnicking with neighbors, fishing on the Rogue River, or on family expeditions to the Oeders' cabin at Lake of the Woods, where they enjoyed cookouts, hiking, and overnights. Gruelle also enjoyed socializing with the other



**IN SOUTHERN OREGON, THE  
GRUELLES SPENT WEEKENDS  
PICNICKING WITH NEIGHBORS,  
FISHING ON THE ROGUE RIVER,  
OR ON FAMILY EXPEDITIONS TO  
LAKE OF THE WOODS.**

**Johnny, Myrtle, Worth and Dickie Gruelle  
enjoy a cookout en route to Ashland.**

*Courtesy Patricia Hall/Baldwin Collection*





For each guest who attended Gruelle's 1923 New Year's Eve dinner party in Ashland, Gruelle rendered an original, watercolor place card (below). The character of the Camel with the Wrinkled Knees (right) was based on a family stuffed toy from which the leg skewers had been removed. Courtesy Patricia Hall/Lynda Britt and Macmillan, Inc.



writers and artists who had homes in Ashland. Among these were famed Chicago newspaper columnist Bert Moses and novelist Zane Grey.

Gruelle had quickly become known as a celebrity around town, and the affable creator of the Raggedys was asked often to sign his books (which were on display at the Elhart Stationery Store on Main Street) or render in some form images of his famous Raggedy characters.

The most memorable Gruelle renderings were mural-sized painting of the Raggedys affixed to the walls of a local Ashland ice cream parlor called The Raggedy Ann Sweet Shoppe, owned at one time by Emma Oeder. The Sweet Shoppe was named after the Gruelles' arrival, and was located in the Enders block in Ashland. Unfortunately, when the Oeders moved from Ashland, the whimsical murals were stored in an attic and succumbed to the ravages of time and moisture.

On New Year's Eve, 1923, the Gruelles hosted a party for their many new friends at the Ashland Civic Club House, near the Masonic Hall. Those whose parents attended still remember tales of Gruelle entertaining the group with lively tunes, expertly played on the black keys of the piano.

Gruelle might have stayed in Ashland for a long time. However, during the fall of 1924, he was stricken both with appendicitis and kidney stones. Following a narrow brush with death in the local hospital, Johnny managed to recover just enough to travel. The family decided it would be best



to return to the East, so they sold their beloved bus, bade their friends goodbye, and took the train home to Connecticut. They arrived just in time to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Though their trip West was now behind them, the Gruelles would stay in touch with many of their friends in Ashland. It had been an uplifting, spiritually rejuvenating trip for Gruelle, complete with adventures; rather like one of the fanciful accounts he so loved writing about in his Raggedy books. Gruelle would never forget the magical time he spent in Jackson County. And, to this day, the townsfolk haven't forgotten him.

By the late 1920s, the Gruelles were migrating regularly from their home in Connecticut to the warmth of south Florida. Having grown increasingly fond of

**Local Raggedy Ann fans share their treasures, which are currently on exhibit at the Southern Oregon Historical Society. Photo by Natalie Brown**







the climate and relaxed lifestyle, they relocated permanently to Miami Beach in 1932. It was here, in a gracious home on the waterway, that Gruelle, with assistance from Worth, worked on his later Raggedy Ann and Andy books, among them, one of his most beautiful entitled *Raggedy Ann and the Golden Meadow* (1935).

During these Florida years, Gruelle also continued producing his satirical "bird's-eye-view" cartoons for local newspapers and national humor magazines; cartoons he filled with funny little geezers and sun-bonneted ladies, cavorting in front of storefronts that bore the names of many friends and acquaintances, some of them prominent business people.

By this time Gruelle had honed his ability to spontaneously recite tales in impromptu settings. He had begun developing this ability in the early 1920s during his cross-country trip to Ashland, entertaining his family and other travelers staying in the tourist camps with his original fairy stories, and colorful, embellished yarns about his own childhood.

In Florida, Gruelle received many formal invitations to appear in public, at bookstores and as a luncheon speaker. He also was invited by teachers to appear at schools. For these performances, Johnny would pull out his giant pad of paper, and gather his group around him. Though always nervous ahead of time, he would soon forget his shyness, falling quickly into animated storytelling, reciting and illustrating old and new adventures of Raggedy Ann and Andy and their magical companions.

The Gruelles loved their life in Miami, where they worked hard promoting Raggedy Ann and Andy. Surrounded at various times by their sons and for a time, Johnny's mother (an ace fisherwoman, known affectionately by everyone as "Grandma Gruelle"), the couple also relaxed and enjoyed their family. They also hosted parties for their many good friends, and with an income that was, by Depression standards, comfortable, Gruelle was able to indulge his lifelong penchant for old, resplendent cars.

Unfortunately, Gruelle's Florida years were to be his last. Despite his good life, he faced numerous health problems and financial setbacks during the 1930s. Internal problems at his publisher, the P.F. Volland Company; a federal lawsuit over another doll manufacturer's patent and trademark infringement; and the more general effects of the Great Depression on

publishing and consumerism all seemed to conspire to keep Raggedy Ann from being the financial provider she should have been for Gruelle and his family. The attendant stress on the mild-mannered artist/writer exacerbated a diagnosed heart condition, and on January 9, 1938, Gruelle died suddenly from a massive heart attack. He was only fifty-seven.

Gruelle's family was stunned and deeply grieved by his passing. Gruelle's adult friends and colleagues mourned the loss of an incredibly talented, divinely inspired, deeply humane man. The millions of children around the world whose imaginations

**Kristin Schwichtenberg clutches a collection of contemporary and antique Raggedy dolls.** Photo by Natalie Brown



he had enchanted could not believe that their favorite Uncle Johnny was gone.

Johnny Gruelle's untimely death did not stop Raggedy Ann and Andy from continuing as America's favorite rag doll duo. Johnny's wife Myrtle, and sons Worth and Dick, carried on the artistic, literary, and business legacy that Gruelle had begun. That legacy continues to the present day. To many around the world, Raggedy Ann and Andy are a reflection of Americana at its best.

So, now, as generations of children and adults look ahead to Raggedy Ann becoming an octogenarian, they can also honor the source: a man with an inspired imagination, whose talents and interests seemed boundless. And, southern Oregonians can take special pride in the fact that for a brief but enchanted period of time, this whimsical, peripatetic man—Johnny



Gruelle—found a special kind of relaxation, rejuvenation, and inspiration in Ashland.



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*Patricia Hall is a folklorist living in Nashville, Tennessee, who has researched and written about Johnny Gruelle and the Raggedys for the past two decades. She recently completed a book-length illustrated biography of Gruelle, entitled Through the Eyes of a Child: Johnny Gruelle, Creator of Raggedy Ann, to be published in the fall of 1992 by Pelican Publishing Company.*

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## JOHNNY GRUELLE, STORYTELLER

Though he died prematurely, Johnny Gruelle left behind an enormous artistic and literary legacy. Of all his writings, Gruelle was proudest of his original fairy stories, which to a great extent were inspired by traditional European folk tales. Like other tellers in the tradition of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, Gruelle was attentive to folk and fairy tale style, and understood the importance of folk tale motifs—those plot details that recur frequently enough in folk tales that folklorists have gone to the trouble of categorizing them.

Gruelle used certain folk tale motifs with some regularity. Among these are "Helpful Animals" (on whom he bestowed names like the Camel with the Wrinkled Knees); "Dwarves or Fairies" (whom he named Ned Gnome, Queen of the Flower Fairies, Mr. Twee Deedle, and others); and "Magical Objects" (like wishing pebbles, left-handed safety pins, magic swords, lucky pennies, wishing sticks, golden rings, to name only a few).

One of Gruelle's favorite motifs was one folklorists have dubbed the "Inexhaustible Food" motif. To the delight of his little readers, Gruelle used it in hundreds of his stories, in countless mouth-watering descriptions of bottomless soda water fountains or ice cream puddles, magically replenishing pancakes, and wild hot weenie trees.

Although his stories are folk tale-like in many ways, Gruelle—like any skilled storyteller—nevertheless gave to his prose his own style, sidestepping the severe moral tone and omitting the cruelties often found in many folk tales.

In keeping with the tone of other early twentieth-century children's literature, Gruelle's stories are filled with lessons for children about sharing, compassion, and honesty. At the back of his later books appears an imprint entitled "The Gruelle Ideal," which embodies

the essence of his tales and life philosophy. Patterned by Gruelle's heirs after the much earlier P.F. Volland Company Ideal, it reads: "Books for children should contain nothing to cause fright, suggest fear, glorify mischief, excuse malice, or condone cruelty."

But what set Gruelle's stories apart from many others of the time was the way in which these moral and ethical "lessons" were conveyed: usually, as unpunitive reminders spoken by the two Raggedies; as humorous parables presented by the gentle forest critters of the *Deep Deep Woods*; or in childlike "confessions" made by contrite witches.

Gruelle family members hasten to point out that while many of them share in the family artistic legacy, Johnny Gruelle was the one in the family with the true "gift" for tale-telling. Stories about fairies, stories about magic, and even stories about himself came naturally to Gruelle and formed an important part of his life and outlook.

Gruelle also told his stories through his illustrations, which are colorful glimpses into lands of magic: forest glades, with dancing wood sprites and carpets of colorful flowers; bulging little bungalows with crooked chimneys; and, of course, scenes in which the kindly rag dolls, Raggedy Ann and Andy, lope through adventure after adventures.

Gruelle's early artistic style is romantic, almost dreamlike, and his use of color borrows heavily from the gold-and-violet palette of his father and other early-twentieth-century American Impressionists. His later illustrations are bright and fluid. Facial expressions and body movements, be they of little fairies, dolls, or mortals, are crisply captured with pen and brush. Animation historian Donald Crafton typifies Gruelle's illustrations as possessing "... a clean, curvilinear style that looks ahead to the Disney graphics of the 1930s."



# County Byways

by Sue Waldron

Whether they follow the orderly scheme favored by ancient Greek cities or sensuously wander along the hills and valleys of the landscape, Jackson County roads and their names tell stories of people and events in this area. Among the Main and Front streets, First, Second and Third avenues and A, B, C streets are the names of many of the county's early settlers. Prosaic School House and Church streets and the better-known Crater Lake Avenue and Siskiyou boulevards each add richness and detail to southern Oregon's history.

There is little recorded history of the names local Native Americans may have given trails in the valley. More than likely the pathways were known for where they led: "the way to the river," "to where the

acorns grow large," or "to our winter camp."

Early travelers through the valley followed the same practice. The trail south was "the road to California," the trail west was "the way to the coast." The scarcity of early roads allowed for little confusion.

But the discovery of gold and the organization of Jackson County in 1852 brought more people and more roads. On March 7, 1853, the County Board of Commissioners met and designated the part of the "Oregon road" passing through Jackson County as a public highway. Thus the county established jurisdiction over "... existing roads and trails and set the stage for new and improved roads."<sup>1</sup> The commission was a strong regulating force in

**Hanley Hill looms ahead of northbound travelers along Hanley Road.** Photo by Matt Stieby



the county as it accepted or rejected road petitions, viewed and later surveyed early roads. General directional road names became confusing. The immediate solution to the confusion, though somewhat lacking in imagination, was to name the roads for the person owning the land bordering the road. Ross Lane is an example of such a road name.

Beginning north of Jacksonville on Old Military Road, Ross Lane runs south and east through the foothills, passes just south of the old Westside Elementary School, crosses Hanley Road and ends in about the center of Rossanley Drive. About half a mile east on Rossanley, Ross Lane North runs south to end at East Main or Highway 238. The section of Ross Lane from Hanley Road to Rossanley Drive follows the western half of the north boundary of the donation land claim filed by John England Ross in October 1853. The northern half of Ross Lane North follows the eastern boundary of Ross's claim.

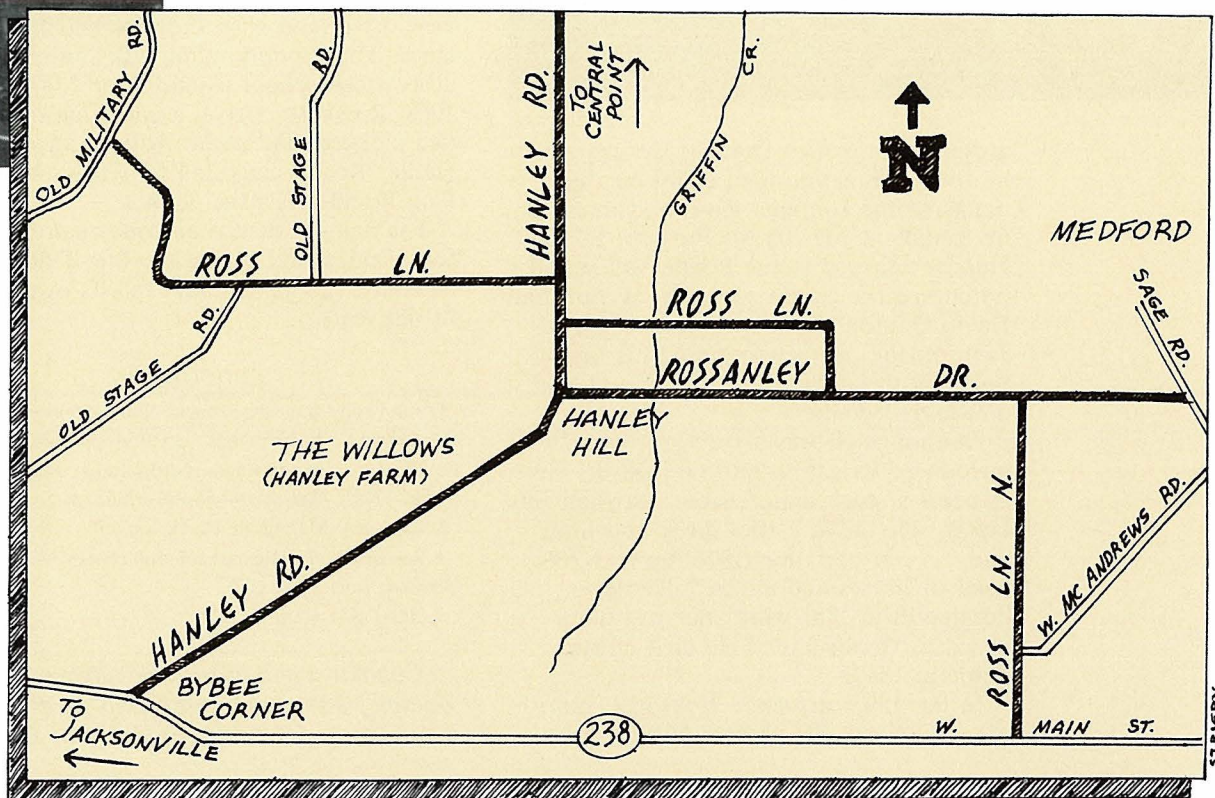
John Ross left Illinois in 1847 to come to California. He became a gold miner following the Sutter's Fort gold discovery and worked in much of northern California during the next several years, never finding the rich pocket of gold every miner knew existed. Ross came to southern Oregon in 1852, but not to look for gold. He brought a herd of cattle and . . . "went into the butchering business" feeding hungry

miners.<sup>2</sup> In January 1853 he married Elizabeth Hopwood. Elizabeth had ten children between 1853 and 1872.

Ross was an Indian fighter and between flare-ups in the ongoing Rogue Valley Indian wars, he farmed his property. In 1855 he represented Jackson County at the Territorial Council and in 1866 was elected to the state Legislature. When the Oregon and California Railroad Company formed, he was one of its directors. Ross was involved with Native Americans one more time when he was appointed brigadier general of the Oregon Militia during the Modoc Indian War of 1872. Elected to the state Senate in 1878, Ross was appointed chairman of the military committee. John Ross died in February 1890 at the age of seventy-two.

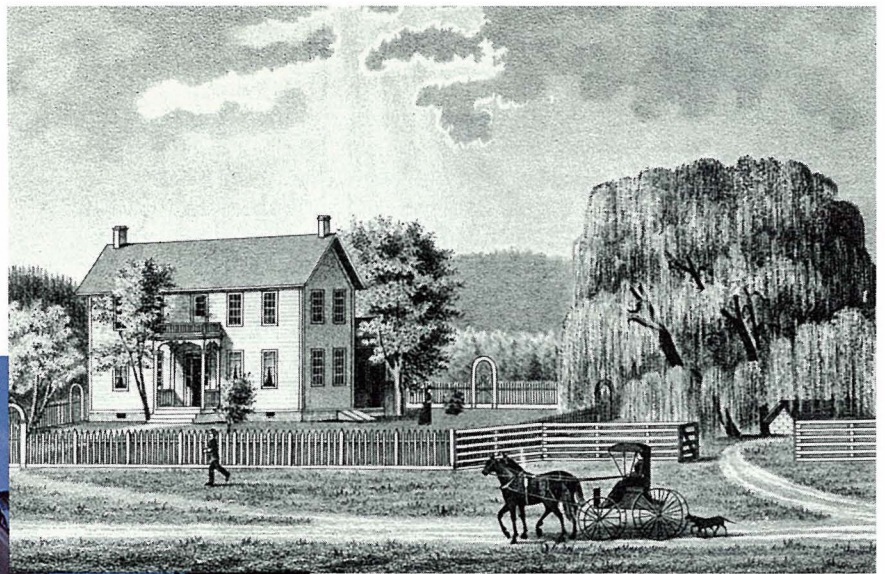
The Hanley Road that crosses Ross Lane is another example of a road named for an early settler. The road now known as Hanley Road had been laid out in March 1854 as a portion of a road from Jacksonville to Thompson's Ferry on the Rogue River.<sup>3</sup> Today, Hanley Road begins at Highway 238 and ends at the west end of West Pine Street in Central Point. Running along the eastern banks of Jackson Creek, the road straightens to pass the Hanley family farm and follows the eastern boundary line of the Hanley property.

Michael Hanley worked in the butcher shop John Ross operated in 1852. After





The elegant Hanley home was pictured in a late-nineteenth-century lithograph (right). A century later (below), The Willows is owned and operated by the Southern Oregon Historical Society. SOHS #6922, photo by Natalie Brown



awhile he moved to Douglas County where he filed a donation land claim on the banks of the Umpqua River and married his neighbor, Martha M. Burnett. In 1857 Hanley returned to the Rogue Valley and purchased the claims of A. W. Welton and David Clinton about two miles north of Jacksonville. Hanley increased his land holdings throughout the county and east of Klamath Falls.

"Although he was a fruit grower and introduced irrigation into Oregon he was at heart a stock man," wrote historian Ray Lewis.<sup>4</sup> He raised cattle, sheep and hogs and "... at one time (1876) he had 200 head of horses and mules."<sup>5</sup> Hanley became ill in 1881 with what was diagnosed as "brain fever." He died at his home in 1889.

In the 139 years since Jackson County was organized, the process of naming

roads has been refined. An individual still fills out a petition, and submits it to the county Department of Planning and Development. An initial fee of \$150 sets the wheels in motion. The petition moves through the Public Works Department and the county Administrator's office before reaching the board of commissioners for final consideration.

In the mid-1960s a petition was filed to connect Sage Road and Hanley Road. As work on the road progressed, Herb Wing, the principal of Westside Elementary School, noticed that no name had been suggested for the new road. He asked his students to propose a name. The top four student suggestions, as judged by school officials, residents along the road and county officials, were Rossanley and Westview drives and New Frontier and Lizard lanes. The winning name was announced at a special school assembly on March 19, 1968. Rossanley Drive, a combination of two pioneer road names (Ross Lane and Hanley Road) suggested by sixth-grader Pam Ritchie, was the winner.

The naming of a road today can be complicated and expensive. But if done carefully, the name could tell its own story in 100 years.



#### ENDNOTES

1. John and Marguerite Black, "Early Jackson County Roads and River Crossings," 1979, unpublished, p. 4.
2. Ray Lewis, "John England Ross Indian Fighter, Part Three," *Table Rock Sentinel*, July 1982, p. 5.
3. John and Marguerite Black, op. cit.
4. Ray Lewis, "The Remarkable Bill Hanley," *Table Rock Sentinel*, June 1984, p. 4.
5. Ray Lewis, *ibid*.

*Columnist and historic researcher Sue Waldon finds stories and memories along the highways and byways of Jackson County.*



# Life

in the

# Past Lane

by Brad Linder

Growing up in one of the vast 1950s housing tracts of suburban Denver gave me a somewhat limited viewpoint for appreciating history. As a kid, historic preservation" was not a phrase I used often, nor was there much evidence of its practice in the neighborhood. New and modern was the order of the day, with an occasional historic remnant left tucked



Charlie Lewis and Pat Hopker.

between identical split-levels. Historic preservation was something they did in New England—sending in teams of archaeologists and trained conservators to rescue a Colonial-era house where George Washington had slept. A look around the neighborhood forced me to confront the reality that the old, run-down motel with the dangling neon sign was my Williamsburg, my Sturbridge Village.

Southern Oregon has its share of truly historic resources in the form of splendid commercial struc-



The former Sacred Heart Rectory precariously heads down the street toward a new future in the Oakdale Historic District. Photos by Natalie Brown

tures and imposing residential districts. It also has its share of old, run-down motels with dangling neon signs. Both types have a place in history and both may be worthy of respectful rehabilitation. Over the next few issues of the *Sentinel*, this column will focus on various historic preservation/rehabilitation projects in the area, highlighting concepts, problems and solutions. Perhaps we can all gain new perspectives on this political and economic issue by looking at successful examples, examining some of the thinking behind the projects, and delving into some of the creative answers that builders and homeowners have found useful.

A good example of a historic rehabilitation project in west Medford is being put together by Pat Hopker and Charlie Lewis, who have purchased the former Sacred Heart Catholic Church Rectory, moved the 3,000-square-foot structure a block south onto a vacant lot in the Oakdale Historic District, dropped it on a new foundation, and completely re-wired, insulated and installed new mechanical systems in it. They credit the Medford Historic Commission with saving the structure

from the wrecking ball while they put together the details for the move and rehabilitation. Both express a kind of "tough love" for projects like this—mixing in the cold, hard economic facts with a love for saving fine old structures. The home will retain many of the unique features of the rectory while accommodating a large family in a unique urban setting. Lewis and Hopker began marketing the house soon after it was set on a foundation and hope to have the project completed and sold by spring.

If anyone is interested in featuring his or her project in this column, please contact me at the History Center in Medford to further explore the possibility. The hope is to follow both a commercial and residential project through the entire process—somewhat of a "This Old House" approach. I intend to take full advantage of local experts and to distance myself from the emotional controversy that historic preservation sometimes seems to evoke; I don't intend to lie down in front of any bulldozers or encourage readers to do the same (unless of course it is my house or place of business that is being threatened).



# Then & Now

by Natalie Brown

Memorable even among miles of exotic riverfront properties, the Obstinate J Ranch harkens back to nearly 100 years of homesteading tradition on the upper Rogue River.

Built by Jasper Savannah Clay Tucker and his wife Mary Elizabeth in the late nineteenth century, the unusual hexagon-shaped house is constructed of concrete and river rock laboriously collected while the land was cleared for farming. The Tuckers eked out a living from the beautiful but back-breaking ranch for perhaps a decade. The property then passed through the hands of numerous optimistic owners charmed by the location but unprepared to pay the piper. As one former resident commented, "It was an expensive place. Unless you knew how to work it, you didn't keep it long."

In 1923, native Ashlander Spratt Wells and his wife Kate purchased the Rogue River Ranch, as it was then known. Hardworking and knowledgeable from years of ranching in eastern Oregon, Spratt and Kate and their children set about making a living off the land. The family raised hay and cattle and provided overnight pasturing for herds heading to and from summer range near Union Creek.

Like many ranch wives living far from town, Kate tended a productive garden and preserved countless quarts of fruits and vegetables. Daughter Ann Briggs remembers, "If we didn't have 100 jars of tomatoes we'd be in trouble."

The Wells family weathered the '27 flood, which left the raging



The unusual hexagon-shaped house's exterior looks much the same today (below) as it did when the Tucker family occupied the ranch around the turn of the century (above). Photo courtesy Pat Brooks



Rogue River only inches from the back doorstep. During the Depression, they sold cream in Trail, plus eggs and corn-fed turkeys. But weary of laboring over several hundred acres, managing miles of irrigation ditch, and tending animals, Spratt reluctantly put the place up for sale in 1938.

Several owners later, Vera Martin and her husband bought and named the ranch Sierra Manor. Intending to run a dairy operation, they built three barns and two additional houses on the property before deaths in the family put an end to their plans.

In 1958, sisters Pat Brooks and Bunny Pearson and their families arrived with visions of a vacation resort/ranch business. Frustrated by the initial acquisition process and brand and name registration

hurdles, Bunny and Pat's father Cole Parker wryly suggested calling the place the Obstinate J Ranch. The descriptive name stuck.

In addition to growing hay and raising cattle and horses, the sisters fixed up three quiet guest houses and installed a tennis court and swimming pool. Soon, summers were filled with families who returned year after year to the quiet beauty of the river and ranch life.

Today, Pat's son Fraser, daughter-in-law Debi, and daughter Martha tirelessly manage the ranch, which is under the same ownership after three decades.

And drivers along Crater Lake Highway still slow down as they pass the place, captivated by the seemingly tranquility of the upper river landmark.



# ODDS AND ENDS OF HISTORY

## That's fairly interesting...

Compiled by Samuel J. Wegner

History is as much the bits and pieces as it is the great events of the past that shaped the present. Some historical events are noteworthy for being the first, the last, the biggest, the best, or the worst. Others go relatively unnoticed as the strange, the funny, the quirky, or even just the fairly interesting. So here you have a sampling of the great and the obscure, the strange and the typical—the odds and ends of history.

January 25–26, 1854: A convention is held in Jacksonville to promote the creation of Jackson Territory to include portions of what is now southern Oregon and northern California. But Joseph Lane, Oregon's territorial delegate to Congress, writes, "A new territory can not be made as proposed. The delegation from California does not think of entertaining the idea of clipping their state."<sup>1</sup>

In 1877, Ed Schiefflin, who grew up north of Jacksonville, strikes silver in Arizona Territory, leading to the rapid development of a mining town called Tombstone.<sup>3</sup>



Train near Ashland. SOHS #10503

In the 1880s William Wood, construction engineer for the Southern Pacific Railroad and designer of the famous loop in Tehachapi Pass, California, is put in charge of building the railroad over the Siskiyou Mountains. He stops work on the first route and on Buck Rock Tunnel and goes instead with a new route and a new tunnel—the now-famous Tunnel 13. The first train passes through Tunnel 13 on October 10, 1887.<sup>4</sup>

"Full justification of President Cleveland's unprecedented course in devoting his annual communication to congress exclusively to a consideration of the surplus and the best means of distributing it, and preventing similar accumulations in the future, is to be found in the message itself. The message is able and statesmanlike; humorous in style; perspicuous in statement; clear in its reasoning; and irrefutable in its conclusions."<sup>5</sup>

—*Chicago Tribune*



Elizabethans in Ashland. Photo by Natalie Brown

"Ashland became Shakespearean-minded in 1935 when the first Festival was held. The venture was a decided success. Uncertain of the patronage that Shakespearean plays would receive, a carnival, fireworks and boxing bouts were added to the program the first year, the theory being that the added attractions would pay for the anticipated deficit of the Shakespearean productions. The prize fights went into the red; however, the shortage incurred was more than made up by the profits of the plays."<sup>6</sup>

—*Oregon Oddities*

### ENDNOTES

1. Corning, Howard McKinley, ed. *Dictionary of Oregon History: Compiled from the Research Files of the Former Oregon Writers' Project with Much Added Material* (Portland: Binford & Mort Publishing, 1989), p. 127.
2. McArthur, Lewis L. *Oregon Geographic Names*, 5th edition (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1982), p. 189.
3. Engeman, Richard. *The Jacksonville Story* (Medford: Southern Oregon Historical Society, 1990), p. 24.
4. O'Harra, Marjorie. *Southern Oregon: Short Trips into History* (Medford: Southern Oregon Historical Society, 1985), p. 125.
5. The Democratic Times, Jacksonville, Oregon. Vol. XVII (1), January 6, 1888, p. 2.
6. "Gala Days," *Oregon Oddities* (Portland: Federal Writers' Project), p. 2.



Crater Lake. SOHS #13528

August 4, 1869: A group of visitors from Jacksonville first uses the name "Crater Lake" for what first had been called "Deep Blue Lake" when discovered on June 12, 1853.<sup>2</sup>





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