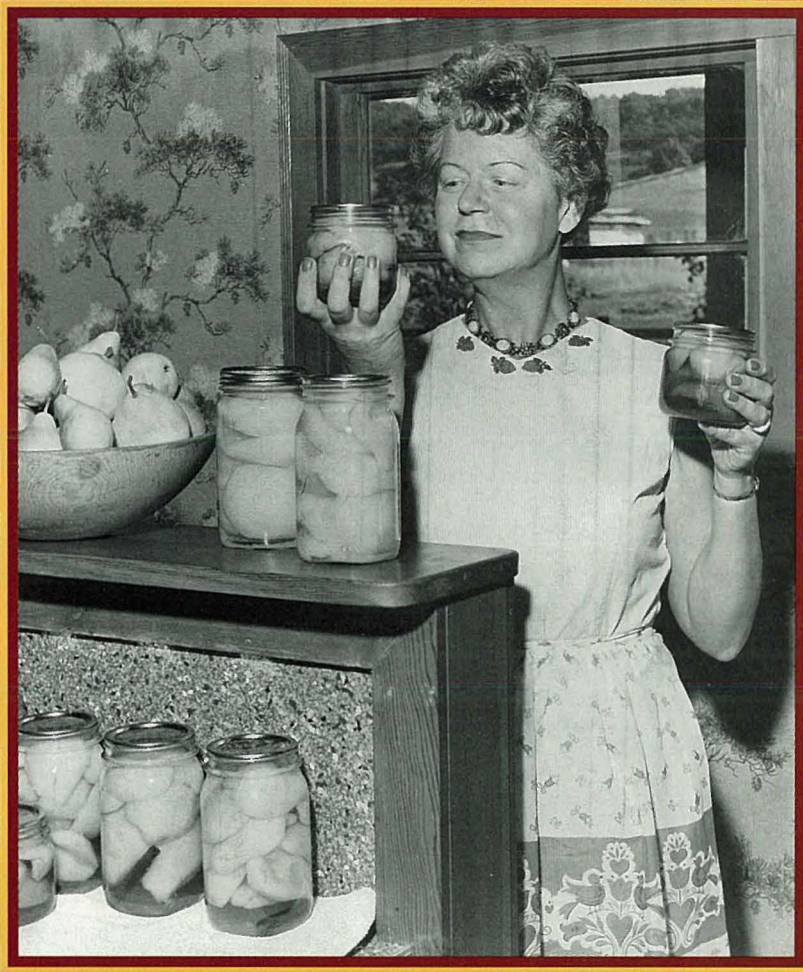


SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE *Today*



ALWAYS USE A SILVER KNIFE

Preserving Food in the Early 1900s

I AM COMING HOME IN THE FALL

**An 1854 Letter from the Oregon
Territory**

COOL DESTINATION FOR A HOT SUMMER DAY

Toketee Falls

AUGUST 1999

Vol. 1, No. 8

The Magazine of the Southern Oregon Historical Society





*Southern Oregon
Historical Society*

History at Work in Jackson County

by Marjorie Edens



What does the oldest commercial log structure in Jackson County have in common with Camp White? Or a covered bridge with a brick jailhouse? Or a caboose with a gold mine's stamp mill? Or the Applegate Trail with the Trail Creek Tavern? Or Medford Corporation's locomotive with a schoolhouse?

All of these objects—and the history of Southern Oregon—are cared for by members of the Jackson County History Museums Association.

The association consists of thirteen historical organizations providing valuable public services to all areas of Jackson County. The association enhances the quality of life in the county, promotes economic development, makes learning and cultural opportunities accessible, helps make good use of Jackson County's material resources, and provides the public with historical records.

Does it surprise you that Jackson County currently has thirteen historical organizations collecting local history? It really shouldn't. Jackson County is very large. As a matter of fact, it's over twice as large as the entire state of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island has more than fifty historical organizations collecting and caring for its history. Granted, Rhode Island as a state has been in existence longer than Jackson County. But our history is quite diverse, and it used to include the entire southern corner of the Oregon Territory. That's one reason why the oldest historical organization in the association is named the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Member organizations include the Applegate Valley Historical Society, Big Butte Historical Society, Buncom Historical Society, Camp White Historical Association, Eagle Point Historical Society and Museum, Gold Hill Historical Society and Museum, Lake Creek Historical Society, Rogue Valley Genealogical Society, Southern Oregon Chapter/National Railway Historical Society, Southern Oregon



*Applegate Valley
Historical Society*



Big Butte Historical Society



Buncom Historical Society



*Camp White
Historical Association*



*Eagle Point Historical
Society and Museum*



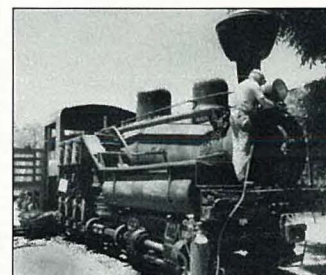
*Gold Hill Historical Society
and Museum*



*Lake Creek
Historical Society*



*Rogue Valley
Genealogical Society*



*Southern Oregon
Chapter/National Railway
Historical Society*



Talent Historical Society



*Upper Rogue
Historical Society*



The Woodville Museum

Historical Society, Talent Historical Society, Upper Rogue Historical Society, and the Woodville Museum.

Possible future members include the Phoenix Historical Society and the McKee Bridge Historical Society.

For more information, please call 773-6536, and ask for Marjorie Edens. ☎

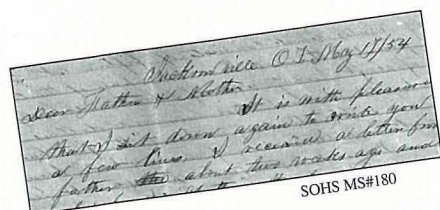
Marjorie Edens is field services coordinator for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

PHOTOS FROM SOHS PHOTO DEPARTMENT

SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE *Today*

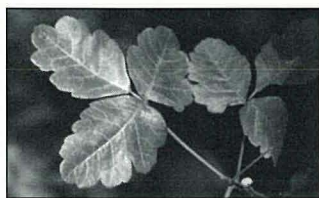


Our Own Voices:
Jackson County History
Museums Association



SOHS MS#180

From the Archives:
An 1854 Letter from the
Oregon Territory



Rooted in History:
Poison Oak

SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE TODAY

Editorial Guidelines

Feature articles average 3,000 to 4,000 (pre-edited) words. Other materials range from 500 to 1,000 words.

Electronic submissions are accepted on 3-1/4-inch disks and should be accompanied by a hard-copy printout. Cite all sources and construct endnotes and cutlines using the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The author is responsible for verification of cited facts. A selection of professional, unretouched photographs and/or line art should accompany submission—black-and-white or color. The Southern Oregon Historical Society reserves the right to use Society images in place of submitted material. All material should be labeled with author's name, mailing address, and telephone number. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope stamped with sufficient postage. Authors should provide a brief autobiographical note at the end of manuscripts.

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FEATURE

Preserving Food in the Early 1900s . . . 8

Always Use a Silver Knife

by Sherry Wachter

DEPARTMENTS

Our Own Voices 2

Jackson County History Museums Association

by Marjorie Edens

Sunday Driving 4

Toketee Falls: Essence of the Northwest

by Donn L. Todt and Nan Hannon

From the Archives 5

"I Am Coming Home in the Fall"

An 1854 Letter from the Oregon Territory

Written by James Tice

by Jacque Sundstrand

SOHS News and Notes 6

Exhibits and program updates and calendar

Rooted in History 14

Poison Oak, the "Poysoned Weed"

by Nan Hannon and Donn L. Todt

Members' and Donors' Corner 15

The Pioneers 16

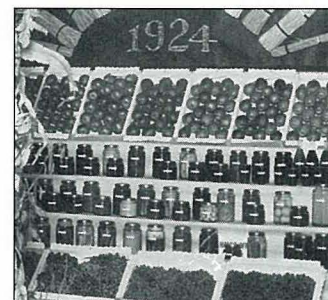
Birdseye Farm: All in the Family

by Connie Fowler

ON THE COVER

Canning helped many households put produce on the table year-round, and gave food preservers such as this woman a sense of accomplishment.

Southern Oregon Historical Society



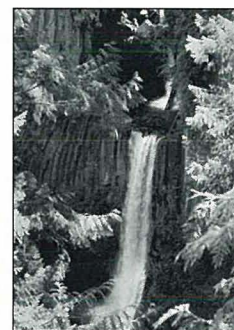
SOHS #12932 (DETAIL)

Feature: Preserving Food
in the Early 1900s.

The
Pioneers:
Birdseye
Farm



SOHS #278



Sunday
Driving:
Toketee
Falls



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Magazine Staff

Cynthia Wicklund, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT/COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
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ART DIRECTION by Daerly Lewis

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SOUTHERN
OREGON
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Toketee Falls:

ESSENCE OF THE NORTHWEST

by Donn L. Todt and Nan Hannon

When blazing hot summer days make Crater Lake National Park or Diamond Lake attractive destinations, a trip to either of these attractions may be happily prolonged by a drive through the Toketee Falls country. Here visitors can enjoy the mountain coolness of the Cascade Range, named for its many waterfalls.

The North Umpqua Valley's Toketee region reflects the elements of the essential Northwest: salmon, western red cedar and trailers of mist rising through the trees at daybreak. Water vitalizes this landscape, gives it voice and shapes the rock. It also intertwines the lives of the plants and animals that live in the North Umpqua River watershed.

Douglas fir, hemlock, vine maple, rhododendron, salal, and ferns share habitats with bears, river otters, ospreys, and blacktail deer, while the river is home to runs of spring and fall chinook salmon

means pretty or graceful, and Lemolo, the name of a lake near the headwaters of the North Umpqua, means wild and untamed.

The falls that grace the steep slopes dropping toward the river are, like those of the Columbia River, a characteristic feature of this portion of the Cascade Range. The river has incised itself deeply into the high, mountainous backbone of the Cascades, creating a gorge where tributary streams plunge down cliffs toward the river below. The process and results are much like those in the Columbia Gorge. On the North Umpqua though, there are no interstate highways, no railroads and no large population centers.

The North Umpqua was one of Zane Gray's favorite rivers, but not wishing to popularize it, he wrote little of it. A long stretch of the river is set aside especially for fly-fishing and the historic Steamboat Inn has a long tradition of catering to visiting fishermen.

On the North Umpqua, as in much of the Northwest, there is a tension between development and the natural environment. As on the Columbia, that tension involves power production. In the 1920s, a young hydraulic engineer named John Boyle explored the North Umpqua back country. He astutely realized that water plummeting down some of the steep slopes could be harnessed to produce electricity. He proposed a project that involved using small holding lakes to divert water into canals and then into penstocks, which would channel the water to generators. The project was approved, completed in 1956 and still produces hydroelectric power today. Unlike many projects, this one didn't destroy large sections of river in order to produce electricity. In fact, much of the development detracts little from the natural environment.

To approach the Toketee area, proceed from Medford toward Crater Lake on Highway 62 to Union Creek, then Highway 230 to its intersection with Highway 138 at Diamond Lake, situated

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UMPQUA NATIONAL FOREST



Toketee Falls is one of a series of waterfalls that feeds the lush landscape of the upper Umpqua country.

at the base of Mount Thielsen. Highway 138 continues north past Diamond Lake, staying high in the Cascades for several miles before turning west and dropping into the upper watershed of the North Umpqua River. Lemolo Lake will be to the right of the highway about a mile from the turn.

Although Whitehorse Falls may be reached by vehicle, the Toketee vicinity offers many opportunities to slow down and enjoy the landscape on foot. Most of the spectacular falls, including Toketee, Watson, Clearwater, Lemolo and Warm Springs, require short walks via trails. Besides the trails to the falls, a foot-trail follows much of the south side of the river. An Umpqua National Forest map is indispensable for spotting the turnoffs to the various falls, for planning hikes and for finding good excuses to stay high and cool in the Cascades. ■

Ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt serves as horticulturist for the city of Ashland. Nan Hannon is a writer and anthropologist.



Kalmiopsis rhododendron is found only in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness—and along the North Umpqua River.

and winter steelhead. Some of the surprises include *Kalmiopsis*, a small rhododendron relative found along the North Umpqua and nowhere else except in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Whitetail deer are another surprise: they are usually associated with the more eastern parts of North America.

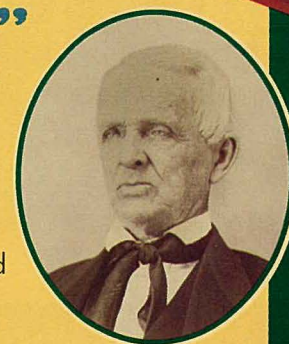
Native Americans lived, hunted, fished and gathered plant foods in the area for thousands of years, enmeshing their lives with the plants and animals of the North Umpqua and with the river itself. Some of their names remain attached to the landscape. In Chinook jargon, Toketee

"I Am Coming Home in the Fall"

From Manuscript No. 180:

An 1854 Letter from the Oregon Territory Written by John R. Tice

by Jacque Sundstrand



John R. Tice, in
his later years

[Editor's Note: For authenticity, all spellings and punctuation remain as they were written.]

It is rare to find a letter returning to its place of origin, and so exciting when it is dated May 17, 1854, from Jacksonville, Oregon Territory. Such a letter gives a first-hand view of the early events that contributed to the area's settlement. This letter written by John R. Tice, twenty-one, to his parents in Covington, Indiana, lets them know "that mails in this country are very irregular" and that he is still packing freight since leaving mining.

"We are packing from a place called Crescent City on the Coast some thing about one hundred miles west of here. it takes us about two weeks to make a trip, but it is a very mountainous road and nothing but a narrow trail most of the way."


Tice fills in his parents about his business affairs by discussing some of the Rogue Valley's news. Besides their fifteen mules, he and his partner have one-half of a combined crop of about seventy acres of wheat and barley, about \$200 in outstanding debts, and \$500 in cash.

"Miners are doing better here than ever before. ... Wheat all over the valley looks well. ... There are some three Grist Mills in progress and two will be ready to run by harvest and a great many are speculating on the price of wheat, some put it as low as three dollars and some as high as six do. but I think wheat will be worth five Dollars per Bu to flour, flour is worth in Crescent City from 6 to 9 cts just owing to the market and it cant be packed here less than six cts per Pd. which will bring it from 12 to 15 cts and I think wheat is worth 5 dollars to flour at that price for flour."

Tice misses his family but wants to return proudly with money from his efforts out West.

"Just as soon as we can dispose of our wheat I am going to start home whether Andy does or not. I would

have come this spring but he was in favor of stayiang till fall and our business was so arranged that we could not separte without sacrificing our property and I concluded to stay till fall. I dont want you to think hard of me for not coming this spring for I think and thought then I was doing for the best, but I am not going to put off later than the first of October sure for I want to come home as bad as you want me."

In 1856, Tice began farming near Jacksonville and married Margaret Wright, with whom he had twelve children. Despite his desire, he did not visit Covington until 1880. He died October 26, 1889. 

Jacque Sundstrand is library/archives coordinator for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Jacksonville, O.T. May 17/54
Dear Father & Mother,

It is with pleasure that I sit down again to write you a few lines. I received a letter from you from Mother the last mail of February 12th which I was very glad to receive. The mails in this country are very irregular, like very new Country it has its inconveniences, we arrived from the Coast about one week ago, and expect to start back soon, we are still packing. Business has been very good. This Spring and the rainy season is over and freight is going down but we can make good wages this summer, we are packing from a place called Crescent City ~~about~~ ^{on} the Coast some thing about one hundred Miles from here it takes us about two weeks to make a trip, but it is

News & Notes *of the Southern Oregon Historical Society*

August 1999

Program Schedule

AUGUST CRAFT OF THE MONTH

Handkerchief Dolls

Children's Museum

Families; free

Commonly made from mama's handkerchief while quietly sitting in church, handkerchief dolls will delight boys and girls of all ages.

APPLEGATE TRAIL JOURNEY

through August 8

Rogue Valley Mall, first level

Families; free

Explore the adventure of the Applegate Trail as you travel a 18'x18' map highlighting various stops along the trail in Oregon. Interactive stations add another dimension to help participants discover some of the hardships and fun pioneers experienced as they traveled the trail.

CHILI COOKOFF...

Saturday, October 2

Hosted by the Society at the 1999 Harvest Fair at the Expo.

Join the fun and the competition.

Limited to 20 teams.

Call Susan Cox-Smith or write for your entry form now!

Yes, you've tempted my taste buds. I've got a five-alarm recipe just waiting to win. Please send me a copy of the rules, prizes and an entry form.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Mail to: Chili Cookoff, Southern Oregon Historical Society, 106 N. Central Avenue, Medford, OR 97501 (541) 773-6536

CONVERSATIONS WITH...

Saturday, August 7, free

Ashland Branch

1:00 p.m.

Claudia Everett's introduction to Ashland was the 1959 Ashland Hills fire. After graduating from Southern Oregon College, Claudia began working for her professor, Angus Bowmer, at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Claudia will share her memories of growing up in Ashland during the "sixties" and her career with the Festival.

OREGON'S SPA ERAS

Saturday, August 14, free

Talent Elementary School

307 W. Wagner Avenue

7:00 p.m.

The geography of Oregon abounds with natural hot springs—131 of them in fact! "Hope Springs Eternal: Water Cures During Oregon's Spa Eras," is a slide presentation by Shannon Applegate which identifies both turn-of-the-century and present-day natural spas. The presentation, co-sponsored with the Talent Historical Society, will also show the significance of the hot spring culture to ideas about health and relaxation across the 20th century. Call 773-6536 to preregister.

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Saturday, August 21

Ashland Railroad Park,

Oak Street near 8th

10:00 a.m. to noon

Families; free

Get a taste of old-fashioned fun at the Ashland Railroad Park! We'll be pulling out our marbles and jacks as we prepare for a day full of games played in



BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

August 26, 5:30 pm

times gone by. Pucker up for an old-time watermelon seed spitting contest and lots of other summer fun!



JACKSONVILLE'S JEWISH HERITAGE

Sunday, August 29, free

Jacksonville Cemetery

1:00 p.m.

Join Judith Stevens, manager of the Jewish section of the cemetery, and Jan Wright, Society Curator of Education, as they explore Jewish cemetery and burial practices and Jacksonville's Jewish heritage. Preregister for this program by August 28 by calling 773-6536.

For more information about the Southern Oregon Historical Society, contact us at:

106 North Central Avenue · Medford, Oregon 97501 ■ Phone 541 · 773 · 6536 ■ Fax 541 · 776 · 7994 ■ Email info@sohs.org ■ Website www.sohs.org

Exhibition Schedule

AT THE HISTORY CENTER:

The "Masters of Ceremony" exhibit, celebrating life's passages and featuring traditions of cultural groups in Oregon, including Wasco, Iu-Mien, Palestinian, Mexican, Cayuse, Hmong, and Wallulapum-Palouse, continues on the mezzanine. "Masters of Ceremony" was produced by the Oregon Historical Society XZBTS TO GO program and sponsored by Portland General Electric, Jeld-Wen Foundation, Jackson Foundation, and Lamb Foundation.

Community Collects:

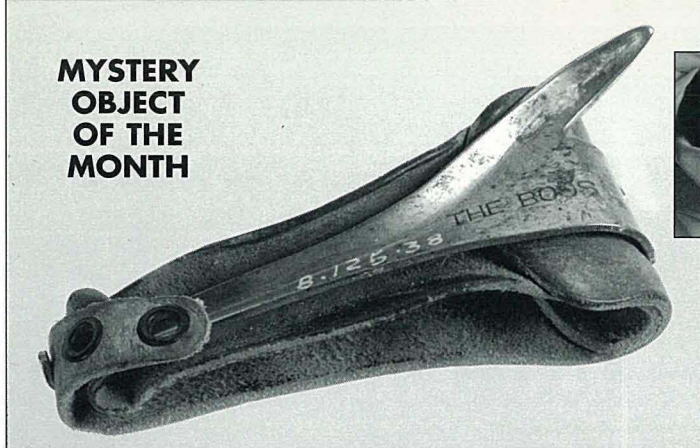
The Southern Oregon Antiques and Collectibles Club (SOACC) and the Society share common values of preserving items of the past for future generations. August 4 through September, the Society's Community Collects exhibit becomes a "Time Capsule" featuring items from SOACC members' collections.

IN JACKSONVILLE:

A Time to Mourn: Death and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition is on display in the Jacksonville Museum through 1999. Dioramas, photographs, voices, and text explore Jewish burial rituals, traditional family mourning practices, and the history of the Jewish community.

Join demonstrators in the *Miner, Baker, Furniture Maker* exhibit at the Jacksonville Museum as they re-create everyday activities from 19th century life. Marvel at the "modern" kitchen gadgets that Victorian era housewives worked with—from apple peelers to hand-cranked washer-wringers. See how wheat became flour at early Rogue Valley gristmills, or learn how milliners created stylish hats for fashion-minded ladies. Demonstrations are offered daily from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. throughout the summer. Specific topics will vary from day to day. Applegate Spinners will be demonstrating August 30 from 12:30-3:00 p.m. in the exhibit.

MYSTERY OBJECT OF THE MONTH



July's
Mystery Object
Box Hammer

Called "The Boss," this 4-1/2" long object is small enough to fit in the palm of your hand and has a metal hook attached to an adjustable leather strap. Send your answer on a 3-1/2 x 5 card with your name, address and phone number to: News & Notes Mystery Object, SOHS, 106 N. Central Ave., Medford, OR 97501

July's mystery object was a box hammer, used for nailing fruit boxes. Congratulations to May's Mystery Object winner, Ms. Vivian W. Rice of Yreka, CA, who identified the Salt and Pepper Shakers.

Tom Smith will be demonstrating Native American flint knapping techniques at the Jacksonville Museum on most Thursdays from 1-5 p.m. in August.



SOHS #1204 (DETAIL)

ASHLAND BRANCH *How Things Have Changed*

Even before the advent of the mountain bike in 1980, bicycles had gone through many changes since popularization in the 1890s. This exhibit examines technological changes in the bicycling components since the 1930s. Local cycling businesses have loaned the new and the old so we can see technology's advance for ourselves. On display to mid-October.

Wheel Crazy: the Bicycle Boom of the 1890s, explores the local and national craze for the "new" sport of cycling. Learn through photographs, artifacts, and interpretive panels how bicycles captured the fancy of ten million Americans. The exhibit, which is on display to mid-October, will also feature information on present-day cycling in Southern Oregon.

JACKSONVILLE HISTORY STORE & THIRD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIO

Third & California streets

Handwoven Tartan Exhibit, and Handspinning and weaving demonstrations on Fridays and Saturdays presented by the Weaving Guilds of Southern Oregon. A potter will demonstrate the throwing of Hannah reproduction ceramic pots on Saturdays and Sundays. Studio open Fridays and Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Local artist Ann Conlee-Brower demonstrates pine needle basket making on Thursday, August 19 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Jacksonville History Store.

Southern Oregon Historical Society sites

Phone: (541) 773-6536 unless listed otherwise

HISTORY CENTER

106 N. Central, Medford
Mon - Fri, 9:00am to 5:00pm
Sat, 1:00 to 5:00pm

RESEARCH LIBRARY

106 N. Central, Medford
Tues - Sat, 1:00 to 5:00pm

JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM & CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

5th and C, Jacksonville
Daily, 10:00am to 5:00pm

JACKSONVILLE HISTORY STORE & THIRD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIOS

3rd and California, Jacksonville
Wed - Sun, 10:00am to 5:00pm

U.S. HOTEL

3rd and California, Jacksonville
Upstairs room available for rent.

BEEKMAN HOUSE

Laurelwood & California, Jacksonville
Daily, 1:00 - 5:00pm

HANLEY FARM

Open by appointment.
(541) 773-2675.

HISTORY STORE

Rogue Valley Mall, Medford
Daily, Mall hours
(541) 774-9129

ASHLAND BRANCH

208 Oak, Ashland
Wed - Sat, 12:00 to 4:00pm
(541) 488-4938

Always Use a Silver Knife: Preserving Food in the Early 1900s

by Sherry Wachter

I remember the steam, mostly, and the stickiness that coated everything from my stinging fingers to my aching feet to the concrete walls to the very air we breathed. Heat radiated from the turkey roaster, pressed into service to blanch the skins from the peaches and tomatoes, and from the white enameled stove with an electrical short under the range top. We learned early that bare feet on a damp, sticky cement floor and wet fingers on a stove produced not a burn, but a painful electrical jolt. But this was the canning kitchen, used only once a year, so the short in the stove was tolerated.

My sisters and I dreaded canning season: the endless wooden boxes of fruit to be washed, blanched, halved, and slipped delicately into jars; the pickup loads of corn to be husked (carefully, for fear of worms), silked, sliced from the cob, then worked into the jars still holding together in brittle slabs; and worst of all, the carrots. We hated the carrots not only because they had to be scrubbed, sliced, cooked, then put in the jars and pressure cooked, but because they eventually had to be eaten.

I don't remember hearing the word "botulism." The various vegetables and fruits just had to be processed in certain ways or they would go "bad." "Bad" covered everything that resulted from an improperly sterilized or nicked jar, a twice-used lid, a defective ring, or insufficient pressure-cooker time. Food gone "bad" could be anything from moldy to deadly. I learned early on that canning instructions, like mushroom identification,

are not open to personal interpretation. When canning, one follows the rules handed down by Presto and the oldest living canner, even if they don't seem to make much sense.

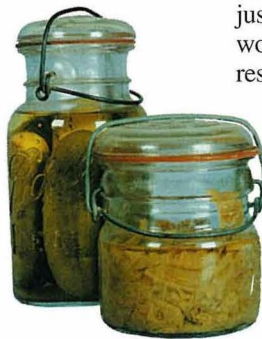
In our case, the oldest living canner was Mom, and sometimes Grandma. Some of their rules were written down. Our pressure cooker had come with a set of canning instructions for various foods. My mother followed some of those rules slavishly. Things like cooking time, temperatures, and jar sterilization were ordained by the kitchens at Presto. Other things, though, were oral traditions. Things like "always check a jar for nicks in the rim," "you can re-use rings but never lids," and "the canning companies always suggest too much sugar," were parts of the canning ritual that, as far as I knew, had come out of past experience and spreading waistlines. My sisters and I served a sort of unwilling apprenticeship because our mother made us. Mostly, though, we canned so we would have something besides potatoes to eat come January.

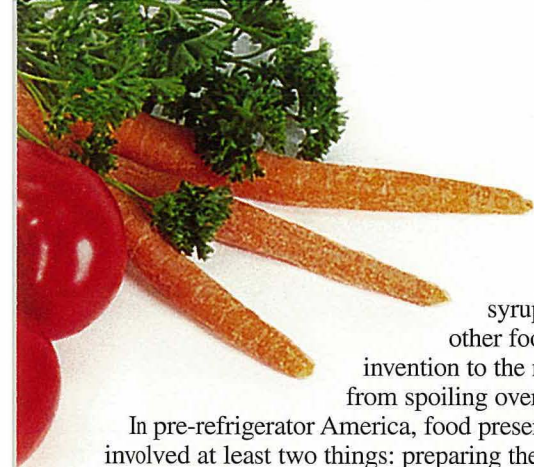
And in that, too, we were unwitting participants in a long tradition. Preserving food to provide a healthier and more varied diet during lean seasons has been a major occupation, particularly for women, for thousands of years. In meeting the challenge, our ancestors not only solved much of the problem, but ended up creating new dishes that in some cases are more popular than the foods they were created to preserve. Cheeses, fruit and vegetable preserves, jams, and jellies, jerky, corned beef, mincemeat, beer, wine, pickles,

We often forget that many common foods are the end products of attempts to preserve food value. Some examples include, clockwise from top right, strawberry jam, beef jerky, raisins, Scotch whiskey (grain), sauerkraut (cabbage), pickles (cucumbers), butter coloring, and apple butter.



PHOTOS OF SOHS COLLECTIONS BY DANA HEDRICK-EARP



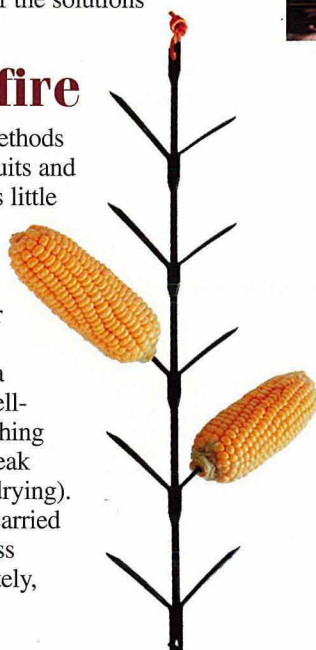


syrup, and countless other foods owe their invention to the need to keep food from spoiling over a period of time.

In pre-refrigerator America, food preservation generally involved at least two things: preparing the food with some preserving agent like sugar, salt, or vinegar, and then storing it in ways that would preserve food value even longer—by drying, canning, or chilling it. By the turn of the century women knew that food decayed because of bacteria, and that preservation depended upon first killing the bacteria, and then creating a stable environment unfriendly to its regeneration.¹ Take a look at some of the solutions devised over the years:

Hang it by the fire

Arguably one of the oldest methods of preserving meat, fish, fruits and vegetables,² drying requires little more than a sharp knife (most nineteenth and early twentieth-century sources insist on silver, since other metals tended to discolor fruits and vegetables),³ a consistent heat source (the sun, a wood stove, a commercial food dryer, or even a well-tended open fire will do), and something with which to pound the food (to break down the fibers and allow for even drying). Much of the food that the pioneers carried west with them was dried; it took less space, was lighter, and kept indefinitely, as long as it stayed dry.⁴



To dry corn, a food preserver impaled the cobs on this rack and placed it near a fire or under the hot sun.

Set it in the creek

Another popular method of food preservation, chilling could be done by using air, water, earth, ice, stone, or masonry. Travelers chilled fresh meat, dairy products (if available), and other perishables by putting the food into a box and hanging it in a tree where the breeze could cool it, or immersing it in a stream or lake where the water could do the same job.⁵

Once a home was established, running water continued to be a popular cooling method. Springhouses, such as the one at Hanley Farm near Jacksonville, were built directly over running water, and perishable foods were kept there.

There were other popular alternatives: cool houses, like the one at the Beekman House in



The Beekmans counted on the insulating power of thick masonry walls, left, to keep down the temperature in the cool house, where apples, potatoes, cheese and other foods once were stored on these shelves, below.



Jacksonville, were built with thick walls to keep heat out; root cellars, essentially caves dug away from the house; cellars below the house; and, in some cases where large lakes and hard winters produced thick, clean ice layers suitable for long-term storage, ice houses. Some homes had a cool closet, essentially just an open shaft that ran from the cellar to the attic and vented outside at both ends.

The draft through the channel kept perishable foods, stored on slatted shelves set at intervals, somewhat cooler.

In the early 1900s iceboxes, the precursors to the modern refrigerator, began to replace cool closets. Essentially, the ice box functioned exactly like a refrigerator, except that cooling was provided by a large chunk of ice in the top or bottom of the box, rather than freon through tubes.



The Beekman family relied on the cooling power of a block of ice in this ice box, above, to keep foods fresh longer during the hot Rogue Valley summers.

The springhouse at Hanley Farm, left, provided a place where cold spring water could be used to chill foods at a time when ice was unavailable.



PHOTO BY MAGGIE JAMES



Cover it with salt

Salting meat, while a good means of preservation, wasn't as widely used as some other methods simply because of the expense involved. Though salting recipes vary, all by their very nature require a significant amount of salt—some recipes called for nearly half as much salt as meat—and top-quality meat.⁶ Meat that was preserved in this way had to literally be “worth its salt”—in prime condition. In places remote from naturally occurring salt sources—the ocean, rock salt residues from prehistoric seas, and natural salt springs—it was quite expensive. As a result, meat in those areas was generally preserved in other ways. In places where salt was plentiful, however, salting provided an excellent means of meat preservation.

The big cheese

Fermentation is generally associated with beer and wine production today, and certainly it has been used for thousands of years to produce alcoholic beverages from just about anything that could be thrown in a pot. However, fermentation also produced things like cheese and butter. Fermenting had two advantages: it provided a way to preserve food value, and it produced alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer, mead, sake—the list is nearly infinite.



Butter extended the useful life of milk. It took a churn to make the butter, the bowl and paddles to separate the solids from the liquid, and butter molds for making cubes and blocks.



A tub for mashing fruit, glass carboys for fermentation and a barrel for storing and aging, make up a wine-making outfit from the 1920s—in this case for producing fig wine.

Heirloom recipes aren't always safe

So you found Great Aunt Bertha's pickle recipe, and you're thinking you'd like to try it out? Think again. There are several reasons to treasure that recipe as a family heirloom—and keep it as far from the kitchen as possible.

1. There's no guarantee that Aunt Bertha's pickles were safe even when she made them. Consider the tragic—and possibly apocryphal—case of the Southern Oregon family that was nearly wiped out at a family reunion. Somebody brought some pickled asparagus, which apparently just about everyone loved. The asparagus was tainted, and most of the family died as a result.

2. The second reason using that old recipe might not be such a good idea is that we really can't be sure exactly what went into it. Take vinegar, for instance. For a housewife a century ago, vinegar was one of those things she made at home.¹³ As it turned out, vinegar can be, and was, made from just about anything, which meant that there was no way of determining how much vinegar was needed to completely pickle the fruit or vegetable. There's no way of knowing how strong Aunt Bertha's vinegar was. Even if you follow the recipe to the letter, your pickles will probably not turn out like hers did—and might not even be safe.

3. The third reason to leave that recipe in the scrapbook is that vegetables and fruits have come a long way in the last century. As a result of genetic manipulation, grafting, and biological engineering, their acidic makeup may not be what it was in Aunt Bertha's day. A recipe written to work with Aunt Bertha's vegetables may come out very differently for you—and again, might be deadly.



This jar of pickles from the Beekman pantry collection is of questionable age and safety.

Fermentation preserved food value, but it also transformed the food undergoing the process more than other preservation methods. Milk became a bewildering variety of cheeses; fruits became wine; grain became beer, and, when distilled, whiskey; honey became mead; cabbage became sauerkraut.

Sauerkraut, while traditionally a German dish, was so popular nationwide that there's even an Appalachian folk song that sets the recipe to music.⁷

They don't make it like they used to

Fermentation also produced vinegar, a key ingredient in pickling. A food preservation method that was—and is—frequently combined with canning, pickling relies on vinegar to create an acidic environment. While just about everything from strawberries to venison to cucumbers could be, and was, pickled, the recipes that seem to have stood the test of time the best are for pickled cucumbers.⁸ In fact, the term “pickles” has become synonymous with them.



SOHS #5676 (DETAIL)

Preserved foods including fruit jam and wine or ale were a part of the menu at this pioneer campsite in the 1890s.

Which is not to say that the pickles of today taste like pickles used to. My grandfather used to complain that “they just doesn’t taste like my Ma’s. They’re too sour.” Apparently my great-grandmother—like most farm wives in her day—fermented her own vinegar, which she used to make her pickles. And apparently her vinegar, like most home-brewed vinegar in her day, wasn’t as strong as the commercially produced vinegar used in pickles today. Great-grandma’s vinegar was pretty typical. The cookery books from her era advised cooks to use “strong” vinegar in pickling. How to determine when vinegar was “strong” was not addressed. Apparently it was something each cook determined for herself.

Cookbooks from the era specifically advised against using commercially produced vinegar. Some, like nineteenth-century homemaking maven Eliza Leslie, went so far as to claim that “much of the vinegar sold in stores is concocted of pernicious drugs ... what is shamefully called the best white wine vinegar is frequently slow poison.” Oysters cooked in it turned to “rags, and are soon entirely eaten up, or dissolved into a thin whitish liquid, fit for nothing but to throw away.”⁹ Leslie put it down to toxins in the vinegar. Janice Gregg, an extension agent for Oregon State University, offers another explanation: “Homemade vinegar

varied so much that old pickle recipes were often unsafe. The vinegar used to make the pickles often wasn’t as strong as commercial vinegar, and not strong enough to really make the pickles safe to eat. Vinegar is standardized now.”

Check for nicks and use new lids

Since the invention of the canning jar in 1809, canning steadily increased in popularity until its heyday in the 1930s. “Home canning became a necessity in the Depression, especially for rural families,” says Gregg. “You could save seed over the winter, grow your own fruits and vegetables, harvest and can or dry them, and save the seed for the next year. It was a way to feed your family without spending money.”¹⁰

Canned foods weren’t, and aren’t, just dropped in a jar and sealed; they first had to be cooked and specially prepared with some sort of preservative; sugar, salt, spices, and vinegar were some of the most common. Fruits might be turned into preserves;



SOHS #16347 (DETAIL)

This tableau of meticulously canned fruits and vegetables earned second prize for the proud members of the Live Oak Grange at the 1936 Josephine County Fair.

Does this smell funny to you?

Food covered with mold or in an advanced state of decay is easy to spot. But how did our great-grandparents know about some of the less obvious ways food went bad? They devised tests.

Canning using brass and copper kettles was an established practice, in spite of the fact that foods cooked and left standing in the pot reacted with the brass or copper to produce acetate of copper, or canker—also called verdigris. While the obvious solution would seem to be not using a copper kettle (and eventually they did disappear), crafty canners devised simple chemistry experiments to let them know if their canned food was safe to eat. How did they do it? They put a teaspoonful of the preserves into a cup, poured 30 drops of vinegar over it, and stirred it with a clean knitting or darning needle. If canker was present, the needle turned red.

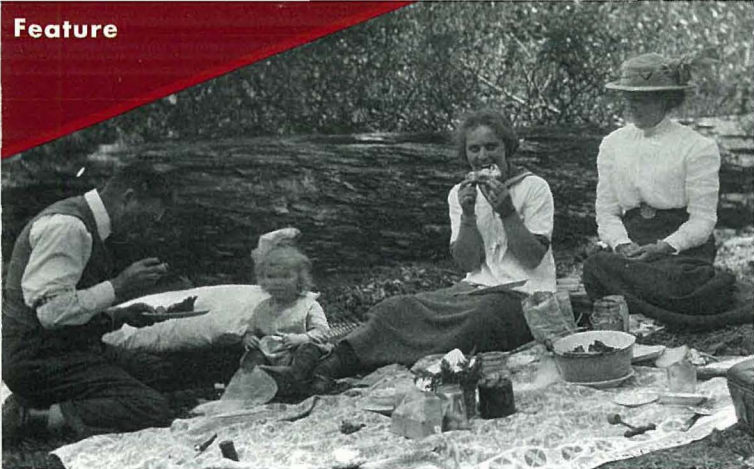
If no red had appeared after six to eight hours, the preserves were declared safe.¹⁴

Meat, another food that can become dangerous without showing obvious signs of decay, was often stored in a granite box down a well, in a springhouse, or in a running stream. Homemakers were advised to set the box in a stream and watch the water flow over the meat. As long as the meat remained firmly on the bottom of the box it was safe. When it started to float it had to be used immediately.

“The outside may be somewhat whitened, but the flavor will be uninjured,” says turn-of-the-century home economist Sidney Morse. He further advises that meat that has perhaps failed the “float” test can be used if one applies “a solution of chloride of soda by means of a soft clean brush or sponge. With this quickly wash over the tainted portions and rinse immediately with fresh water. Afterwards broil or roast the meat so as to expose the tainted portion to a high temperature and char it with the heat.”¹⁵

meat might be salted; vegetables might be pickled. In every case, the canned food was then sealed and subjected to further heat to kill the decay-causing bacteria and seal the jars, preserving a sterile environment.

Louis Pasteur’s discoveries in the 1860s put canning on a new, scientific, footing.¹¹ By the late 1800s and early 1900s, how-to manuals provided not only detailed canning instructions, but scientific explanations for those instructions.¹² However, canning really wasn’t a reliable way of keeping low-acid foods until the refinement of the home pressure cooker in the 1930s and 1940s. Food poisoning could result from improper food preparation—pickling with weak vinegar, for instance—or from a flaw in the actual canning process.



Food preserves in Mason jars are part of this picnic spread near Union Creek in 1914. From left, that's Emil Britt, two members of the Barnum family, and Mollie Britt.

SOHS #15642 (DETAIL)

And flaws in the canning process weren't hard to find, given the makeshift tools canners had available to them at the turn of the century. Canning instructions from the era sometimes sound a bit like a game: "What second use can you find for

household items?" Canners were advised to use everything from knitting needles to old wash boilers to coal oil and string in putting up their preserves. For instance, canners were advised to use a cut-down wash boiler to heat the sealed jars to boiling for a period of time—frequently

determined by guess, according to Gregg—let the jars cool for a few days, heat them again to boiling for another period of time, let the jars cool for a few more days, and repeat the process as many times as the cook felt necessary. The method wasn't foolproof. As Gregg puts it, "It was a kind of Russian roulette; sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. About the only thing you could be sure of was that the vegetables had been well-cooked."



It seemed like a good idea at the time

Canning equipment and processes have changed in some fundamental ways over the last hundred years. While the basics remain the same, there are some significant changes that help make today's canned goods safer than those that your grandmother may have put up.

Standardized canning jars and new jar lids or rubber seals are strongly recommended today. This wasn't always the case. One author warns her audience that they will certainly reach a point in their canning where they have more food than jars. But not to worry. She assures them that they can turn old bottles into canning jars using a string soaked in coal oil and a match—and "thus can be made, without cost, excellent pint tumblers for jelly and preserves."¹⁶ Even conventional jars can become dangerous if there's the slightest nick in the rim, or if the rubber seal has degraded from either age or double use; yet one instruction book advocated re-using seals from vegetable jars on jelly and jam jars.¹⁷

Even today, some canners try to economize by using old mayonnaise, jam, and pickle jars, or anything else they can find

that is clear and doesn't have nicks in its rim. The practice is safe enough, as long as the jar doesn't break and you don't re-use the lid that the jar came with originally, says Gregg. But she warns that jars not tempered for canning can crack under the extreme temperatures necessary to completely kill the bacteria in canned foods. "You run the risk of losing the food you've canned, but otherwise you can preserve food in any jar you can get a seal and ring on."

Brass canning kettles are things of the past. Home economics experts of the late 1800s and early 1900s warned of the dangers inherent in preparing acidic fruits and vegetables in a brass kettle for canning. They could even describe scientifically how the danger arose: "There is danger in brass kettles. A busy housekeeper is often called away from the kitchen and may of necessity remain away a considerable time, while the preserves stand in the kettle. Thus canker, from the brass, or acetate of copper, an active poison, may get into the preserves. Never allow preserves to stand or cool in a brass kettle, but turn them out instantly upon removing from the stove."¹⁸

Some cookbooks even provided tests to help the canner determine if foods cooked and left standing in brass kettles had become toxic (see the sidebar on page 11 for more details).

Fannie Farmer's 1897 edition of *The Boston Cooking School Cookbook* states plainly that "fruit should be cooked in earthenware or graniteware and silver or wooden spoons should be employed for stirring. ... All fruits contain one or more acids, and when exposed to air and brought into contact with an iron or tin surface, a poisonous compound may be formed."¹⁹

Yet copper and brass kettles continued to be the canning kettle of choice. Why? Gregg speculates that they remained popular because they conduct heat so well. "They heat evenly. Even today some of the best cookware is copper-bottomed, or copper-cored. And the alternatives—iron, mainly—discolored and tainted the food."



This large graniteware basin, useful for preparing fruit and produce for canning, is said to have come across the Plains by wagon in the 1880s.

Food preservation techniques have changed, but making strawberry jam still calls for cooking fruit in a kettle on the stove—this one at the Beekman House.

This home economist is preparing pears for the pressure cooker in standardized canning jars, circa 1962.

This early pressure cooker, circa 1920, made higher—thus safer—cooking temperatures possible for home canners. Mason jars have found a place in American pantries since the early 1800s.



SOHS #16345

something with their hands and to avoid additives—you know exactly what's in the jar when you put it up yourself. This year we'll find people doing it for family survival because of the Y2K issue," she concludes. ☐

Sherry Wachter is a writer, illustrator and graphic designer who cans only when she has to.

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Tools still found in canning kitchens include a lid wrench and tongs for lifting jars from their boiling water baths.

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOS
BY DANA HEDRICK-EARP

"The old recipes said 'boil for three to four hours,'" says Gregg. "This was fine for high-acid foods like peaches, tomatoes, and plums, but for low-acid foods like snap beans, corn and carrots even boiling for four hours is not enough. It doesn't kill botulism. To kill that particular germ requires 240 degrees, and boiling water only reaches 212 degrees.

"The pressure cooker changed all that when it came into general use in the 1950s. The companies that produced the first pressure cookers not only provided a foolproof means of heating low-acid

vegetables to 240 degrees, they also provided pamphlets with recipes and canning instructions solidly based on USDA standards.

"For the first time, home canners could be assured that the foods they put up were safe to eat. Canning continued to be an important part of the American lifestyle in the fifties and sixties, and it's still a part of our culture today," Gregg concludes.

The big chiller

Food preservation changed radically with the invention of the freezer.

Freezing preserves food value better than any other method. In fact, because commercially frozen foods are flash-frozen nearly immediately after being picked, in many cases they actually have more nutrients than fresh produce purchased in the store after being shipped fresh, says Gregg. Freezing is also easier than any other preservation method. Most fresh foods need only be washed, blanched (except fruit), put into an airtight container, and placed in the freezer.

Will freezing replace other preservation methods? Probably not, says Gregg. "People can and preserve food for various reasons: because they enjoy producing



This 1930s-era refrigerator also included a freezing compartment—a novel idea at the time.

Poison Oak, the "Poysoned Weed"

by Nan Hannon and Donn L. Todt

Captain John Smith, colonist of Jamestown, Virginia, was the first European to describe a member of the genus *Toxicodendron*. In 1624, he identified a "poysoned weed" that was "much in shape like our English Ivy, but being touched causeth rednesse, itching, and lastly blisters." His "poysoned weed" is now known as poison ivy. Members of this genus grow in most of the continental United States, including Oregon, where they are literally as old as the hills. Leaves of poison sumac are clearly preserved in the John Day fossil beds of Eastern Oregon, dating back 35 million years.¹

David Douglas, the Scottish plant explorer after whom the Douglas fir is named, first encountered poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversiloba*) near Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. He shipped poison oak seeds back to England, suggesting that the shrub would make an admirable ornamental but should be located away from pathways because of the tendency for some people to develop a "slight rash" after contact.² The British still grow poison oak in the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Poison oak doesn't seem to bother most species of animals. Flickers and chickadees feast on the berries, deer bed down amidst the foliage, and cattle, horses and goats browse contentedly on poison oak. But an oil called urushiol, present in the leaves, stems and roots of poison oak, causes an allergic reaction in about 85 percent of the U.S. population. Within this vulnerable group, most people are moderately sensitive to poison oak. But 10 to 20 percent experience extreme reactions, sometimes requiring medical attention.

Intense exposure increases the severity of the reaction. Each year, about a third of the firefighters mobilized to combat forest fires in Oregon, California and Southern Washington must be pulled from the fire lines because of severe poison oak dermatitis. Urushiol-laden smoke, whether from a forest fire or a backyard burn pile, is especially dangerous, as it may affect the throat and lungs.³

Long exposure to poison oak probably gave most Native Americans a degree of



PHOTO BY DANA HEDRICK-EARP

Poison oak usually grows as a low shrub, but takes on vine-like proportions in some habitats. "Leaves of three, let it be."

resistance to its toxic effects. In the Southern Oregon-Northern California region, native people used the plant for a variety of purposes. It served as both warp and weft in baskets. Its juice yielded a black dye. The ash of poison oak was used in tattooing. It was applied medicinally to warts and ringworm. The Karuk Indians living along the lower Klamath River covered soaproot bulbs with poison oak foliage when cooking them in earth ovens. They also dried salmon on poison oak stakes because of a preference for the taste.⁴

A new use for poison oak developed after the Euroamerican settlement of Southern Oregon. Bees take advantage of the early and abundant poison oak flowers and beekeepers put up poison oak honey. This flavorful honey, lacking any trace of toxicity, is available at several markets in the Rogue Valley.

Because poison oak's foliage turns bright red in late summer and autumn, this is a good time to note its locations and to familiarize yourself with its variable forms and habits. It is often a low shrub, but in shady situations becomes

vine-like, growing high into the canopies of neighboring trees. Its foliage is also variable, which is reflected in its Latin species name *diversiloba*. The foliage resembles lobed white oak leaves, but the lobes may vary in form even on the same plant. However, appreciate poison oak carefully. Our native "poysoned weed" has reminded many of the uncautious to pay better attention while walking in the woods of Southern Oregon. 🌿

Like most people, anthropologist Nan Hannon is allergic to poison oak. Ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt is not.



PHOTO BY DONN L. TODT

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All in the Family: Birdseye Farm

by Connie Fowler

In the summer of 1853, Clarissa (Clara) Stein Fleming Birdseye carefully folded her green and white taffeta wedding dress and tucked it into a saddlebag. Her husband then lifted her onto her side-saddled horse for their honeymoon trip to his 360-acre land grant near Woodville (Rogue River), some 300 miles away in Southern Oregon.

She met David Nelson Birdseye, (pronounced Birds-ee), on one of his merchandising trips to Portland. David,

They soon returned to the ranch, however, for Clara found rowdy Jacksonville as potentially dangerous as hostile natives.

Uneasy about a fragile Indian truce, David had a small stockade structure built around the log cabin. Briefly, during the Indian wars, "Fort Birdseye" housed Army personnel.

In 1856, amid another outbreak of hostilities, David completed their hand-hewn, dovetailed log home. With her husband away much of the time, Clara ran the farm and cared for their five children in his absences.²

The youngest son, Victor Wesley, farmed the land after David's death in 1898. He married Effie Cameron, of Hillsboro, and Effie took over the heavier farm chores from the aging Clara while "Wes" pursued other endeavors. The



SOHS #278



SOHS #1788

David and Clara Birdseye built the original farm, which is worked by their descendants to this day.

the oldest son of Effie and Wes, and his wife, "Nita," helped Effie on the farm. Later, they acquired a dairy and ran it as a successful family business. Glenn, the second son, and his mother continued to operate the farm on the river until his mother's death and his marriage.

One hundred forty-three years later, the fifth generation of Birdseys still farm the place. Victor Theodore "Ted" Birdseye II left a teaching career in Klamath Falls to take over the farm, raising cattle, primarily.

The Birdseye house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and remodeled in the 1970s, nearly burned to the ground in 1989. Ted and his wife, Sheri Larson Birdseye, laboriously rebuilt and restored the old home as best they could. Like the Birdseys before them, the family has worked hard to keep the farm. Daughter Kelly and son Victor Theodore III are the sixth generation to live on the Birdseye Farm and will one day inherit the chance to carry on the tradition.⁴ ☛

Connie Fowler is a freelance writer living in the Applegate.

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2. Ibid. p.16.
3. Effie and Nita Birdseye, *Clarissa - A Story of the Birdseye House*. Rogue River: Springs Printery, Inc.
4. Ted Birdseye, personal interview, 25 March 1999.



PHOTO BY DANA HEDRICK-EARP

Pictured above is the rebuilt Birdseye home as it appears today, not much changed from the way it looked in this 1934 photo, at right, when the house was already fifty years old.

born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1827, gave up a teaching career to seek his fortune in the gold fields of the Rogue Valley in 1852. With his Uncle Charles, he ran the Birdseye Mercantile Company in Jacksonville.¹

Upon arriving at their land, Clara and David found that armed conflict between Indians and settlers made the crude log cabin unsafe, so the newlyweds lived in Jacksonville with friends.



SOHS #3976

women, it seems, while not Birdseye by blood, devoted their lives to keeping the farm in the family whether by design or necessity.³

The Birdseye farm vacillated between prosperity and tough times, but with pioneer spirit and ingenuity the family kept the farm alive and intact. To help cover expenses, the family took over a milk-delivery route in Woodville. Victor,



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