

SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE *Today*

TRAVELER'S REST SINCE THE 1880S

Wolf Creek Inn

SIMPLE PIONEER PLEASURE

Klamath Basin's Wild Plums

A PIONEER'S HOME MAKES ITS LAST STAND

The Wood House

SEPTEMBER 1999

Vol. 1, No. 9

Meet the Board

Fifteen dedicated Southern Oregon Historical Society volunteers meet once each month to review the fiscal status of the Society, approve or decline staff-recommended acquisitions (donated items), review and approve policies, and assist with fund-raising efforts. These fifteen make up the Society's Board of Trustees.

Trustees determine the Society's mission and purpose, employ the executive director, ensure effective organizational planning, oversee effective management of resources, enhance the Society's public image, and determine and monitor the Society's programs and services.

Besides attending a monthly board meeting, each trustee also serves as a member of at least one standing committee such as Bylaws, Development, Finance, Nominating, and Strategic Long

Range Planning, or the Ashland, Hanley or History Store select committees. Board officers make up the Executive Committee, which meets the week before each board meeting. Each trustee is also assigned as a liaison between the Society and one other member of the Jackson County History Museums Association.

At the June 23, 1999, meeting of the Board of Trustees, newly elected trustees Judi Drais and Jim Fety joined the thirteen other trustees and elected the

following board officers for fiscal year 1999/2000: Al Alsing, Ashland, president; Marjorie Overland, Medford, first vice president; Ann Moore, Medford, second vice president; Nancy Hamlin, Medford, secretary; and Alice Mullaly, Central Point, treasurer.

Board meetings are held in the History Center at 5:30 p.m. the last Wednesday of each month (except for December). All meetings are open to the public. In the coming year the Board will meet at least

once in Jacksonville in the Children's Museum and once in Ashland at the Ashland Branch.

Trustees attend a retreat each year (usually January) to review and update the Society's strategic long range plan and begin work on the budget process. In July, a one-day Board orientation is held for current and newly elected trustees at the end of which a Board/Foundation/staff potluck picnic is held at Hanley Farm. ☞



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SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE

Today

SOHS MS#760 (DETAIL)



Profiles in Preservation:
Medford's First Post Office

Our Own
Voices:
Meet the
Board



SOHS #9370

The Pioneers:
The Wood House

SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE TODAY

Editorial Guidelines

Feature articles average 3,500 (pre-edited) words. Other materials range from 400 to 700 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, unscreened 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.

The Southern Oregon Historical Society secures rights to full and final editing of all manuscripts, layout design, and one-time North American serial rights. Authors will be notified of acceptance of manuscripts within ninety days of material receipt. In most cases, payment is upon publication. *Southern Oregon Heritage Today* takes great care with all submitted material, but is not responsible for damage or loss. Only photocopies of irreplaceable original historical documents should be submitted. Facts, views, and opinions expressed in signed submissions are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints or opinions of *Southern Oregon Heritage Today* or the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

FEATURE

Historic Harvest 8
Smoky Secrets of the Klamath Wild Plum
by Donn L. Todt and Nan Hannon

DEPARTMENTS

Our Own Voices 2
Meet the Board

Sunday Driving 4
Wolf Creek Inn: A History of Welcome
by Connie Fowler

From the Archives 5
Baptismal Certificates: Colorful Records
Research by Carole Samuelson and Mary Ames Sheret; translation by Folker Weiss

SOHS News and Notes 6
Exhibits and program updates and calendar

Profiles in Preservation 14
Medford's Other Federal Building
by Margaret Watson

Members' and Donors' Corner 15

The Pioneers 16
Lonesome Legacy: The Wood House
by Barbara Hegne

ON THE COVER

The clean and graceful lines of the ca.-1880s Wolf Creek Inn still beguile weary travelers just as they did in this 1953 postcard view.



PHOTO BY DONN L. TODT

Feature: Wild Plums

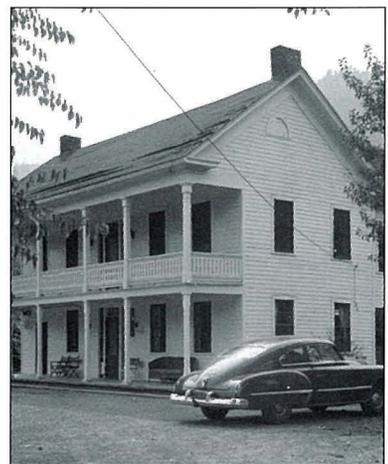
From the
Archives:
Baptismal
Certificates



SOHS MS#342 (DETAIL)



Sunday Driving:
Wolf Creek Inn



SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY #16404 (DETAIL)

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SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Wolf Creek Inn: a History of Welcome

by Connie Fowler

If you need a break from the pressures of life, a trip to Wolf Creek just might be the ticket, and you won't even need a ticket for this ride back in time. The sleepy little community, just an hour north of Medford off Interstate 5 along the old Oregon-California stage route, pulls you back to a slower pace, much as the teamsters of old reined in the big stagecoaches that passed through.

The town's stately landmark, the Wolf Creek Inn, welcomes visitors as it has for more than a century. An original "bed and breakfast," the inn—once called the Wolf Creek Tavern—spawned wonderful stories. Many eventually became legends, most of which, according to historian Larry L. McLane, proved to be "pure fantasy and speculation."¹

The stories attracted business for Wolf Creek founder Henry Smith, an entrepreneur, builder, promoter, and organizer with extensive property holdings in the area. He built an initial log structure in 1854. Travelers could stay the night for six bits—twenty-five cents each for a dinner, bed, and breakfast, and the establishment came to be known as the Six Bit House.

Henry built a second Six Bit House, known as the Wolf Creek House, after the first one burned. Later, in 1883, in a

different location, he built a third hotel, the Wolf Creek Tavern, somewhat upscale from the other two "flop houses." (In some accounts you will see the name Ben Holladay as builder of the hotel. This is part of the "pure fantasy and speculation," according to McLane.)²

Smith's first-class hotel with sixteen guest rooms, kitchen and dining room, accommodated miners, business people, and others traveling along the north-south stage route. Interestingly, Smith, a teetotaler, served no alcohol at the tavern. The English term simply meant a hotel that served food.

Although usually referred to as a stage stop, the inn never was a regular, registered stop under service to the Overland Stage line, which had been established in 1860.

With the advent of the railroad, fewer stages stopped by, but the inn thrived. In 1925, owner John Dougal added a wing of eight more rooms with all-new furniture and baths. Author Jack London finished "Valley of the Moon" one summer at the inn, and movie personalities including Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Clark Gable and others enjoyed the accommodations and famous fried chicken dinners.

The old inn suffered a decline in later years and in the early seventies was home to a band of hippies.

Many of the original furnishings were stolen or ruined. In 1975, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division acquired the building and began a monumental restoration project. The four-year, \$1 million project was completed in 1979. Following a string of inconsistent management, the inn is now open on a regular basis under the direction of innkeeper Daryl

State-owned and extensively renovated, the Wolf Creek Inn still invites travelers to stop.

Hames and chef Dean Kasner. This year marks the 116th year of continuous service to the public.³

Research revealed that Henry Smith's hotel had been lavishly furnished, so Hames set out to duplicate as close as possible the decor of the 1800s, replacing the restored inn's drab look with furnishings on loan from the Oregon Historical Society. Both the original and the 1925 wings look as an inn would have appeared in each period. Inside plumbing, heat, and a modern kitchen are the only amenities. Eight elegantly appointed rooms are available to the public and the fare includes the Dougals' famous fried chicken dinner as well as fresh seafood and more.

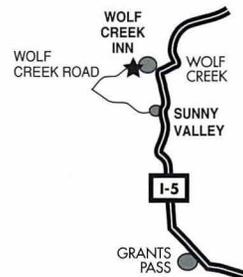
In his book, Larry McLane says: "The story of the Wolf Creek Tavern has been fabricated even though the true story of its beginning is just as interesting as the fictional version."⁴

But isn't history what you believe and remember it to be? And does it really matter to those who come to rest and refresh? Henry Smith would no doubt give a nod of approval to the enterprising people who now operate the old tavern? inn? hotel? stage stop?, which stands as a reminder of the region's history since the 1880s. ♣

Connie Fowler is a freelance writer who ranches in the Little Applegate Valley.

ENDNOTES

1. Larry L. McLane, *First There Was Two Good*, Sexton Enterprise Publication, 1995, p. 339.
2. *Ibid.* p. 339.
3. News Release, Wolf Creek Inn, Darrell Hames, 4 Feb. 1999.
4. McLane, p. 339.



The inn's main building dates to 1883. The guest wing at left was added in 1925.

Baptismal Certificates: Colorful Records

Research by Carol Samuelson and Mary Ames Sheret
Translation by Folker Weiss

Remembrance. ("Erinnerung")

*Still innocent are you, dear child and pure,
Your days are still passing without sorrow,
O please remain this innocent and pure,
Until you fall into the sleep of death.
Then a joyous awakening will await you,
Because Christ will save you forever.*



SOHS MSH#342

Above and at bottom right, baptismal certificates for Jacob Grob, who was born June 10, 1854, in Obstalden, Switzerland. His baptism eight days later was witnessed by Fridolin Durst and Margaretha Grob, nee Menzi. Jacob became Jacksonville resident Peter Britt's stepson in 1861, when Britt married childhood sweetheart and newly widowed Amalia Grob.

Carol Samuelson is library manager/photo archivist for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Mary Ames Sheret is curator of collections and exhibits for the Society.

Folker Weiss is an Ashland resident.

Baptism is one of the celebrated rituals featured in "Masters of Ceremony: Traditional Artists and Life's Passages," on exhibit in the History Center through October 24. Not only do baptismal certificates have a decorative appeal, they can be useful in compiling family histories. 🏠

At right, baptismal certificate for Lisette, daughter of Felix and Anna Scharrer, born July 3, 1840, in Liberty Township, Fairfield County, Ohio. Waves of German-speaking people moved to central Ohio in the nineteenth century, including Lisette's parents from Switzerland. Lisette became Mrs. Lucinda Fridegar in 1861 and moved with her husband to Medford in 1904.

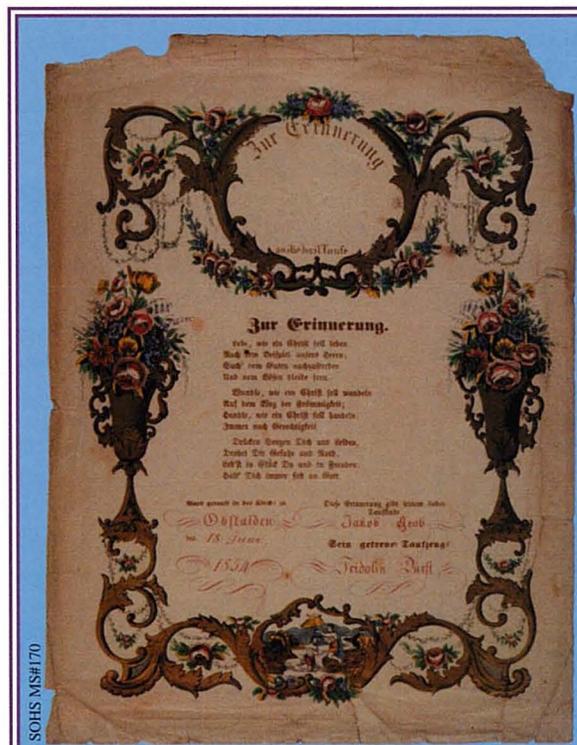


SOHS ACC#61.137.11

In Remembrance of the holy Baptism. (in circle at top)

In Remembrance. ("Zur Erinnerung")

*Live as a Christian should live
After the example of our Lord;
Try and strive for the Good
And reject the Bad.
Progress in life as a Christian would
On the way to godliness;
Act as a Christian would act:
Always live in righteousness.
If sorrow and suffering oppress you,
If danger and trouble threaten,
If you live in happiness and joy;
Always hold firmly on to God.*



SOHS MSH/70



News & Notes

of the Southern Oregon Historical Society

September 1999

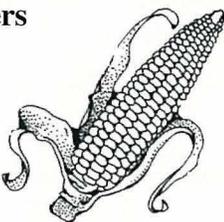
Program Schedule

SEPTEMBER CRAFT OF THE MONTH

Corn Cob Critters

All Month
Children's Museum
Families; free

Create your own corn cob critter magnet.



CONVERSATIONS WITH...

Saturday, September 11
Ashland Branch, 1:00 p.m., free

This month's guest is Lawson Inada, professor of English at Southern Oregon University and trustee of the Southern Oregon Historical Society. Inada, an author of several volumes of poetry, will present a review of the literary arts in the Rogue Valley.

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

JACKSONVILLE HOME TOUR

September 11 & 12
noon - 5:00 p.m.

The Society will open the Catholic Rectory at 4th and "C" streets, Jacksonville. The opening, hosted by members of the Gold Diggers' Guild, is part of the Jacksonville Boosters' Home Tour.

GENEALOGY WEEK SEPTEMBER 13-18

Call Rogue Valley Genealogical Society at 770-5848 for more information

GENEALOGY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Saturday, September 18
9:15 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

An educational seminar sponsored by ARVGS and presented by Gerald S. and Connie Lenzen, CRGS, at the Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater. Register Now! Seating limited! RVGS member registration fee: \$20; non-member, \$25 (includes continental breakfast and cater lunch). Registration forms available at the History Center, 106 N. Central or RVGS, 133 S. Central, Medford.

THE BICYCLE: OLDEST UNEVOLVED MACHINE

Saturday, September 18
Ashland Branch, 1:00 p.m., free

Bicycling became a popular mode of transportation in the 1890s. Though a near perfect tool, the bicycle has evolved from those early days. Jim Berkman, owner of BIKx, a shop which creates custom rebuilt bicycles, will present a program describing the motivation for the technological changes of the 20th century.

BIRTHING TRADITIONS

Saturday, September 18
History Center, Medford
2:00 p.m., free

Come to the History Center for a short video and discussion about the history of childbirth and birth customs from around the world. Veege Ruediger, a student of midwifery, will present birth as a historically empowering and safe event for women and families. Explore various ancient traditions for laboring women and compare them to today's practices.

IN A PICKLE

Wednesday, September 22
3:30-4:30 p.m.

Beekman House
3-6 years
\$3.00 members/\$4.00 non-members

Youth will discover how early settlers preserved their summertime vegetables so they could be enjoyed all winter long. Participants will roll up their sleeves and turn cucumbers into pickles to be taken home.



OREGON ARCHAEOLOGY WEEK (SEPTEMBER 19-25)

Thursday, September 23, 7:00 p.m., free
Southern Oregon History Center

Program: "Ancient Mysteries: Archaeological Fact and Interpretation"

Dr. Nicholas Thorpe, lecturer and archaeologist, King Alfred's College of Higher Education, Winchester, United Kingdom, will discuss sites, such as Stonehenge, which hold different (and sometimes contradictory) meanings for many contemporary groups.

Preregister by September 20 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

HANLEY FARM OPEN HOUSE

1053 Hanley Road
Saturday, September 25
10 a.m.-4 p.m., free

In cooperation with the OSU Extension Service and Experiment Station, the Society will open Hanley Farm from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. for tours of the house and grounds. Ongoing activities and demonstrations at the Extension Service will take place during the same hours.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

September 29, 5:30 pm

EDUCATORS' PREVIEW NIGHT

Wednesday, September 29
History Center, free
4:00-5:30 p.m.

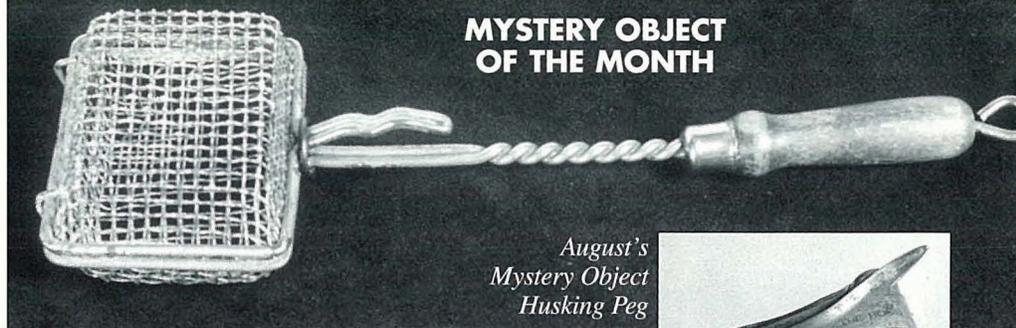
Preschool through 6th grade educators are invited to discover the many resources (on-site programs, outreach to schools, discovery boxes, and more) which the Society has available to supplement teaching curricula. Join us for an informative opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. Light refreshments will be served. Please RSVP by Monday, September 27. Call 773-6536 for more information.

Exhibition Schedule

AT THE HISTORY CENTER:

Community Collects:

Members of the Southern Oregon Antiques and Collectibles Club have always been dedicated to preserving history. The SOACC continuing exhibit, "Collecting During the 20th Century," will be displayed through October. One item featured is an Italian Art Glass clown showing the craftsmanship of Italian glass blowers.



MYSTERY OBJECT OF THE MONTH

August's
Mystery Object
Husking Peg



This object was used from the 1920s-1940s. It has a hinged, wire mesh basket attached to a wire support and a wood handle. 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

August's Mystery Object was a husking peg which was worn on the hand and used to strip away the outer husks of corn. Congratulations to June's Mystery Object Winner, Beverly Hanson of Medford, who identified the shoe last.

IN JACKSONVILLE:

The exhibit *A Time to Mourn: Death and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition* continues through 1999 at the Jacksonville Museum.

Through September 6, join demonstrators in the *Miner, Baker, Furniture Maker* exhibit at the Jacksonville Museum.

History Store in Jacksonville closes for the season September 12. Watch for holiday reopening.

Jacksonville Museum & Children's Museum: New hours beginning September 7. See below.

Beekman House closes September 7; watch for special holiday weekends.

ASHLAND BRANCH

Wednesdays-Saturdays
Noon - 4:00 p.m., free

The exhibit *Public Places and Private Lives* opens September 4 and runs through June 17, 2000. Have you ever wondered whose name is on the statue of Lincoln in Lithia Park or why Alice Peil has her own walkway or even why your

street is named what it is? *Public Places and Private Lives* focuses on the people behind these and other Ashland landmarks such as Will Dodge Way, Butler Bandshell, Hunter Park and Darex Ice Skating Rink. Programs relating to this exhibit will occur throughout the year.

Continuing Exhibits:

Wheel Crazy: the Bicycle Boom of the 1890s, through mid-October.

How Things Have Changed, featuring technological changes in bicycle components since the 1930s, through October.



COMING IN OCTOBER!!

"How to Do Oral History"

Saturday, October 2, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

History Center, Medford

\$10 members/\$15 non-members

Society oral historian Marjorie Edens presents a workshop in collecting oral histories. To preregister and prepay for this program by September 29, call 773-6536.

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
Wed - Sat, 10:00am to 5:00pm
Sunday, noon to 5:00pm

THIRD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIOS

3rd and California, Jacksonville
Fri & Sat, 11:30am to 4:00pm

U.S. HOTEL

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

HANLEY FARM

1053 Hanley Road (between Central Point & Jacksonville) 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

Historic Harvest

Wild Plums

by Donn L. Todt and Nan Hannon

Wild plums ripen just as the season shifts. The dry heat and clear skies of late summer give way to cool mornings and autumnal skies sifted with cirrus clouds. Smoke hazes the air and sunsets reflect the orange-red shades of ripening plums. As the late summer and early autumn sun bakes the soil, the plum foliage turns the glowing ember color of its ripe fruit.

Across America, for generations, the harvest of wild plums has taken place in such settings, with Native American women filling baskets with plums, or pioneer children plucking ripe fruit and plunking it into tin pails. One of the most vivid descriptions of picking wild plums is found in Laura Ingalls Wilder's memoir *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, from her series of *Little House* books.

"Now plums were ripening in the wild-plum thickets along Plum Creek. Plum trees were low trees. They grew close together, with many scraggly branches all strung with thin-skinned, juicy plums. Around them the air was sweet and sleepy, and wings hummed. ...When [Laura and Mary] came to a plum thicket

they set down their big pails. They filled their little pails with plums and emptied them into the big pails till they were full. Then they carried the big pails back to the roof of the dugout. On the clean grass Ma spread clean cloths, and Laura and Mary laid the plums on the cloths, to dry in the sun. Next winter they would have dried plums to eat."¹

Although this richly described landscape is in Minnesota, the explorers, trappers, gold miners and pioneers

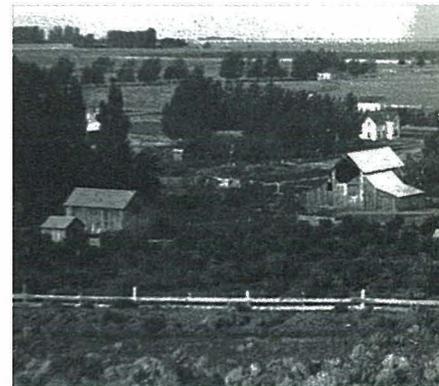


PHOTO BY DONN L. TODT

Klamath plums grow most abundantly in six counties along the Oregon-California border. This patch of wild plums below Fandango Pass overlooks Alkalki Lake in California's Surprise Valley. Pioneers traveling the Applegate Trail over Fandango Pass had access to wild plums.

entering the Far West encountered and enjoyed a related species of wild plum. Sometimes the fruit helped travelers survive their journey through unfamiliar territory, as on the Applegate Trail. During a food shortage, wild plums helped to provision John Work's Hudson's Bay Company California Expedition of 1832-33 as it passed Goose Lake.²

Once settled in their new homes, early homesteaders in Southern Oregon and Northern California took eager advantage of the variation in diet offered by wild plums. Early Klamath Basin ranch families gathered the plums and stewed them to add variety to their monotonous diet. Children helped by squirming through the openings in plum thickets, picking otherwise unobtainable fruit. As commercial fruit became more available, the necessity for picking wild fruit lessened, but the distinctive flavor of wild plums remained a favorite with rural families. Many of these families still continue the tradition of serving stewed or preserved wild plums.

Of course Native American families picked Klamath plums for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Euroamericans. Native peoples ate fresh plums and also dried plums for storage. Sometimes women pounded the dried fruits into a powder and sweetened it with manzanita berry flour.³ Even after their reservation assignment, Klamath Indians continued to engage in the traditional harvest of plums. The Ashland *Tidings* of September 14, 1876, noted that Klamath Indians were busy gathering plums near Bonanza.

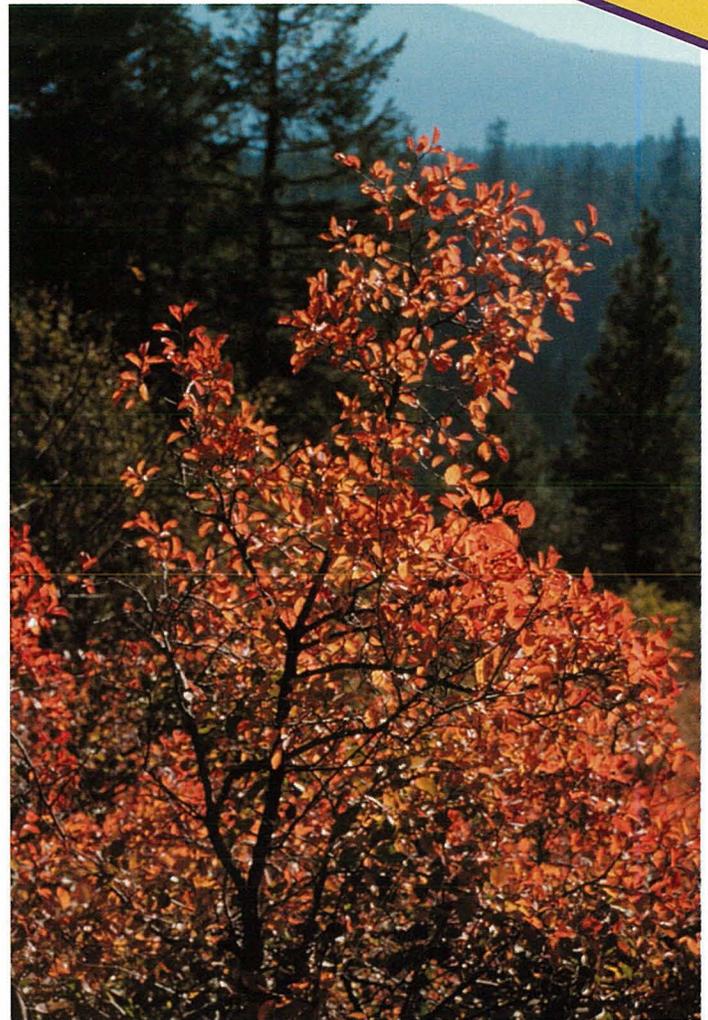


Settlers in the Lakeview area found a place for wild plums in the cultivated landscape, as reflected in this view of New Pine Creek dating before the 1930s.



The wild plums of the Far West are sometimes called Pacific plums or Sierra plums. But in the Southern Oregon-Northern California region, they are usually called Klamath plums, after the vast watershed east of the Cascades that drains into the Klamath Basin. The Latin name is *Prunus subcordata*. *Prunus* places it in the same genus with cherries and other plums. *Subcordata* describes a tendency for the base of the leaf to be heart-shaped.

Although plum thickets are found from the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains north to the Umpqua Valley and from the Coast Range east to the border of the Great Basin desert, the plants become most abundant along the Oregon-California border, within Klamath, Lake, Modoc and eastern Siskiyou counties. While the shrubs do grow in the Rogue Valley and elsewhere west of the Cascades, few people notice them. In part this is a result of a consistently poor show of ripe fruit. Wild plums in the interior valleys seem particularly susceptible to a variety of fruit diseases. Sometimes hundreds of small plums die



Glowing with autumn color, a Klamath plum grows wild along the upper Klamath River.

and fall from individual shrubs within a few days in late spring or early summer. A more noticeable problem, a disease known as "plum pockets," leaves fruit hanging on the shrubs as straw-colored, seedless "mummies." The drier climates east of the Cascades seem to favor the more successful ripening of plums.

Thus, areas east of the Cascades have been the locations for the few orchards where people have attempted to domesticate the wild plum. As early as 1856, settlers in the Oregon-California borderlands began selecting wild plum shrubs from the mountains and transplanting them to valley orchards, where they worked on developing high-quality fruit through cultivation and breeding. These plums, exhibited at the California State Fair in 1888, impressed visitors, who noted especially that Klamath plums made "delicious preserves." In fact, the wild plum commanded a higher market price than traditional domesticates such as gage or blue plums.⁴

In the 1940s, researchers at the Oregon Agriculture Experiment Station selected wild plum varieties for potential cultivation from thickets in Lake and Klamath counties. They grew and studied these varieties as part of their mission to develop commercial crops adapted to regional conditions.⁵ In part this search for locally adapted crops was a response to the failure of homesteads on the east side of the Cascades, particularly in Lake and Klamath counties. This region was one of the last to be homesteaded in the West, with dryland farm homesteads established as late as the early 1900s. However, most traditional Euroamerican food crops failed to thrive in the climate, which

SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY #11019 (DETAIL)

PHOTO BY DONN L. TODD



SOHS #16056

By 1908, settlement along the Klamath River at Klamath Falls and agricultural activity on the fertile bottomlands had pushed the wild plum to the rimrock and canyon country at the wild fringes of the Klamath Basin.

was alternately hot and dry and cold and dry. The newly established Extension Service was actively searching for species that might be grown profitably in the drier areas of the Far West. What better source than a species that was native to the region and for which farmers and ranchers had a high regard?

The cultivation of a native fruit in the Far West was a strong departure from the usual practice of introducing fruits, vegetables and grains traditionally cultivated in Europe and eastern North America. In fact, of species indigenous to North America north of Mexico, few have become important commercial crops. Most of the fruits, vegetables and grains that we purchase at the grocery store had their origins in one of the major agricultural regions of the world: South America, Mexico, Southeast Asia,

China, Western Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The possibility of using the native western species of plum in hybridizing new varieties had occurred to Luther Burbank, the well-known California horticulturist. His records show that two varieties he introduced were in part derived from the Pacific plum. Burbank gave a glowing account of these hybridization results: "Some of the most beautiful and highest flavored fruits which I have ever seen have been produced. These vary in color from almost pure white to light yellow, transparent flesh color, pink, light crimson, scarlet, dark crimson and purple; in form round, egg shaped or elongated-oval; trees both upright and weeping, enormously productive, and in one or two cases the fruit, by hundreds

of experts, has been pronounced the best plum in flavor of any in existence. Most of these selections are extremely productive." Unfortunately, the Pacific plum hybrids produced by Burbank have been lost.⁶

The Extension Service went a step further than Burbank by experimenting with many varieties of native-growing selections. Both local plum gatherers and botanists observed a great variation in the flavor of geographically distinct groups of plums. The great California botanist William Lynn Jepson noted: "In the coast ranges and central Sierras I have never seen *Prunus subcordata* with an edible or near-edible fruit. But in Modoc and Siskiyou counties the shrubs bear abundantly a bright red, roundish plum, which is used freely for preserving and highly praised for the manufactured product. These plums are certainly very beautiful. They are of a fine crimson color and I saw shrubs in the Warner mountains loaded with them. At the same time I saw shrubs of a sub-race ripening two weeks later a reddish fruit, much more bitter and little used by the settlers."⁷

In this century, a number of orchard plantings were established in Southern Oregon and Northern California, including a large orchard planted near Lakeview in the 1930s by E.A. Rugg, a Lakeview jeweler, and his wife. A few of these old orchard plantings survive, but the only orchard remaining in commercial production today is Stringer's Orchard, located along Highway 395 between Lakeview and Alturas. The orchard is an heirloom, a testament to the possibility of growing locally adapted native fruit, even in the high desert along the Oregon-California border.

The family-run business stands in a dramatic western setting. Row by row the land slopes up and east toward the steep escarpment of the Warner Range. To the west, waterfowl glide into the silvery basin of Goose Lake. Deer browse the margins of the orchard, and coveys of quail start up from the tall grass along the fence line. The clean scent of sage pervades the clear air.

Roy and Joanne Stringer purchased the orchard in 1975 from Jack and Virginia Perkins Hinton. The land had been in the Perkins family for almost a century. In the early 1940s, the Hintons took cuttings



PHOTO BY DONN L. TODD

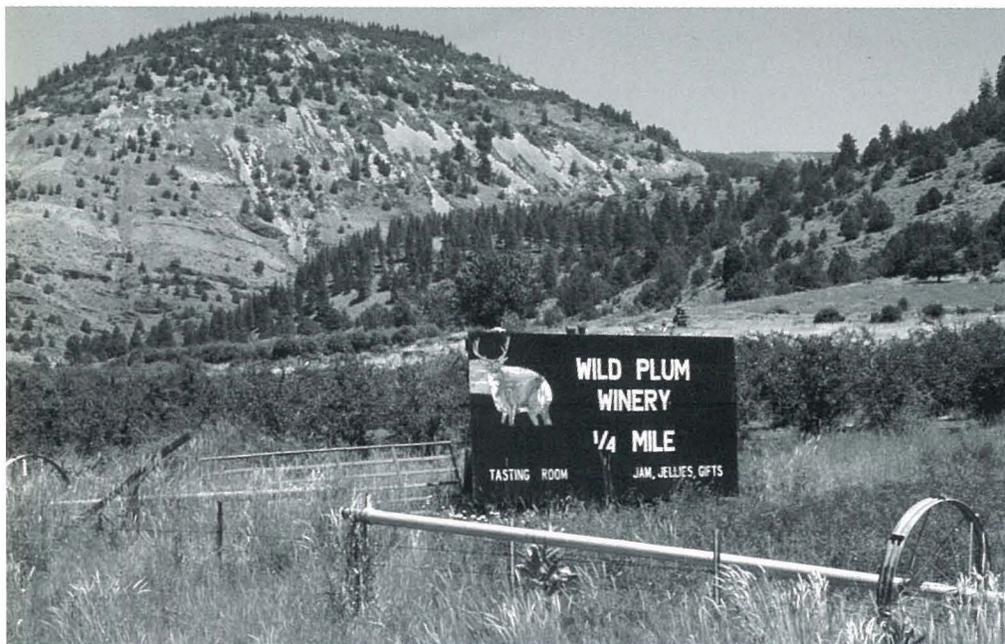


PHOTO BY DONN L. TODD

The world's only wild plum winery is located at the base of the sagebrush-covered Warner mountains south of Lakeview.



In Stringer's Orchard, branches heavy with plums frame the nearby Warner mountains in September.



The exotic wild plum occupies a small commercial niche, providing the basis for wine and preserves at Stringer's Orchard south of Lakeview. For many years, Harry and David bought the orchard's crop for jam.



from the wild plum thickets that grew abundantly on the ranch land, and grafted them to tree stock.⁸ Today the Stringers grow ten selections of the Klamath plum, with different flowering and fruiting times. Some of the trees are fifty-year-old selections planted by the Hintons; most are more recent plantings. The diversity provides a good hedge against the perils of weather and disease.

At one time, Harry and David, the Bear Creek Corporation subsidiary in Medford, purchased the Stringers' entire crop each year to make their wild plum jam. In the best years, Harry and David purchased more than forty tons of wild plums, at a premium price of 65 cents a pound. They made and sold Klamath plum jam under their own label, as "Wild 'n Rare Wild Plum Preserves."

In 1983, under new ownership, Harry and David discontinued its preserved fruit processing operation and canceled its order for wild plums.⁹ The Stringer family needed to find something to do with their tons of plums. Roy and his son John had some experience making homemade wines, and had been pleased with the results of their winemaking experiments with wild plums. They decided to build a wild plum winery in the old barn on the orchard property.¹⁰ In 1985, they bottled more than seven thousand gallons of wild plum wine from the 1984 harvest; in 1986, more than 11,000 gallons. The 1986 bottling won a bronze medal at the Los Angeles County Fair.¹¹ Dry and sweet Stringer wines have been highly praised by food critics. Food writer Linda Eckhardt called Stringer's

wild plum wine one of the top ten foods in the United States.¹²

The Klamath plum helped nourish Native American families; furnished sustenance for immigrants; provided sauce and jam for pioneer settlers, farmers and ranchers; and has now become one of the few native Western fruits to enter the market economy. Each fall, as the wild plums ripen in orchards or in remote ravines, the harvest resonates with history. 🍷

Ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt and anthropologist Nan Hannon of Ashland harvest Klamath plums each fall for their wild plum jam.

(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)

Preserving those Precious Wild Plums

Mrs. Rugg's Wild Plum Jam

After removing the pits, grind the wild plums with a coarse knife. To each 4 cups of plums add 5 cups of sugar. Mix well before putting on to cook, and stir often while cooking. After the fruit reaches a full rolling boil, cook about three minutes. Place in jars and seal. Use only firm plums.

Long-time residents of Southern Oregon and Northern California stay pretty closed-mouthed about the locations of their favorite Klamath plum thickets. But if you can find a wild plum patch to pick in early September, here are two recipes for making jam with your harvest. In the 1930s, Mrs. E.A. Rugg developed a jam recipe for fruit from the orchard that she and her husband owned near Lakeview. Her method yields a tart jam with good consistency. We've also developed a recipe for a sweeter, thicker jam that preserves the rich color of the fruit.

For a Sweeter Wild Plum Jam

Wash and drain fruit. To 10 cups of chopped, pitted fruit add 1/4 cup lemon juice. Mix thoroughly with 12 cups of sugar and cook over moderate heat, stirring frequently, until sugar dissolves. Bring to a rolling boil for one minute. Stir in six ounces of liquid fruit pectin and continue to stir while boiling the mixture for three or four minutes or until jam reaches the sheeting stage. Pour into hot, clean jars and seal.

ENDNOTES

1. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 61-63.
2. Pat Barry, "Clippings for a South Goose Lake Valley Scrapbook," *Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society*, No. 9, 1987, p. 15.
3. Frederick V. Coville, "Notes on the Plants Used by the Klamath Indians of Oregon," *Contributions from the U.S. National Herbarium*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897, p. 99.
4. A. N. Roberts and L. A. Hammers, *The Native Pacific Plum in Oregon*, Agricultural Extension Station, Oregon State College, 1949, pp. 8-10.
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6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
7. Edward J. Wickson, *The California Fruits and How To Grow Them*, Pacific Rural Press, 1889, pp. 36-37.
8. Interview with Joanne Stringer, 7 June 1999.
9. Alberta McMaster, "Stringer's Orchard and Wild Plum Winery—A Modern Enterprise," *The Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society*, No. 9, 1987, pp. 150-151.
10. Interview with John Stringer, 5 September 1998.
11. Alberta McMaster, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
12. For information about Stringer's Wild Plum Orchard and Winery, call (530) 946-4112.

The Smoky Mystery of Wild Plum Jam

by Nan Hannon

Donn and I have come home from Alturas with an abundance of wild plums that will become jam, gathered near places called Fandango Pass, Swan Lake and Surprise Valley. Splitting and seeding the plums with paring knives, we sit on the deck looking out over the Cascades. Across those mountains, nearly due east of Ashland, I first tasted wild plum jam.

Many times a year in the 1950s we went from Medford to Klamath Falls to visit our father's family. Our green Packard threaded the curves of the Greensprings, the Rogue Valley dipping in and out of view as we gained altitude, finally vanishing as the forest thickened and absorbed us. The land flattened and we passed through an endless stand of pine, a stretch we often slept through on the corded back seat of the

Packard. The sage scent of the Klamath Basin awakened us. We popped up, hoping to see pelicans as we crossed the Klamath River northeast of Keno. Sometimes we saw antelope. Silent and alert, they looked back at us, then turned and disappeared, taking with them some secret we wanted to know.

In Klamath Falls, the brick buildings with their rough facades did not look like home. Instead of the smooth, maternal curves of the JC Penney store in Medford, where our mother bought us anklets and saddle shoes, the Woolworth building rose up old and masculine. The differences made us quiet, until we caught the first sight of our Aunt Bernardine waving down at us from the casement window of the apartment on the

second floor of the Keystone Building, which our great uncle, E.J. Murray, built in the 1920s to house his newspaper, the *Klamath Herald*.

The apartment subdued us again, with its salutary smell of furniture polish and the soft, insistent ticking of the mantel clock in its painted glass case.

Our father told us that when he was seven, the carefully wrapped clock had rested in the suitcase under his feet for

Wild plums ripen in late August and early September. They are about the size of large Bing cherries.



PHOTO BY DONN L. TOIT

the entire train journey moving his family from upstate New York to the Klamath Basin. We understood that time was the family's one treasure, measured out steadily by the slightly dented pendulum.

Wild plum jam came from inside the grain-painted door of the pantry where our Aunt Bernardine stored the strange and dangerous foods adults liked. Horseradish from Tulelake, where our Uncle Francis and Aunt Isabel farmed. The brandy our great-uncle Ed used for the sauce on Christmas fruitcake. Squat jars of marmalade in which curls of orange peel floated in eerie suspension next to tall jars of ghostly wax beans. The hot mustard that Bernardine made with vinegar, egg yolks and sugar. Coconut, currants, coffee, bitter chocolate, nutmeg, green tea. To my sister Kate and me, who favored mashed potatoes, rice pudding and milk darkened with Nestle's Quick, these foods were a mistake.

The wild plum jam particularly perplexed us. The first sweet taste gave way to strong, alarming, smoky flavors. It tasted nothing like the safely sweet grape jelly our mother made in the canning well of our stove at home. When Auntie Ber broke out the wild plum jam in honor of our visit, we preferred chewing on bits of the disc of white paraffin that sealed the jam jar. We claimed the little puck of wax dislodged by the prod of a kitchen knife. The paraffin had the comforting smell of our crayons, and a white, neutral taste. Soft and malleable, it conformed to our teeth. We refused bread and jam. The jam tasted poisonous; the bread was not the kind our mother bought at Fluhrer's Bakery in Medford. We crawled under the long oak trestle table, chewed wax, and half-listened to adult stories.

In 1910, at the age of sixteen, Bernardine pinned up her hair and went to teach school for the children of ranchers in the Swan Lake Valley, northeast of Klamath Falls. There she found a wild plum thicket growing in the rocks along the base of the Modoc Scarp. Our family picked that patch for decades after. My aunts and grandmother, my mother and my cousins, made wild plum jam to serve with rabbit and venison, with geese brought down over the lakes and marshes, with beef raised at Fort Klamath. Wild plum jam became a treasured gift received by cousins, sick of ranch life, who had moved away from the Klamath Basin. They were grateful for

the flavor of home, sweet and astringent.

Year after year, Bernardine kept making her jam, somehow changing from the soft-haired sixteen-year-old to our tart, seventy-year-old aunt. Was it possible she was the same person? And what about Uncle Ed? The stories the adults told of Uncle Ed pulling a revolver on the deputy sheriff in a dispute over ownership of the *Herald's* press did not match the frail and gentle old man who walked down the street to Sacred Heart Church to hear Mass every morning, who gave us nickels and religious medals as coins of equal value. Did he still keep a loaded Colt in one of the drawers of the marble-topped dresser where he kept his rosary?

Under the table, refusing wild plum jam, we began to consider how it was for Bernardine to go at sixteen to teach at Swan Lake. To board with strangers. To go through snow to a cold clapboard building to kindle fire in the stove before the pupils came. To fold her hands like a lady among the rough men on the stage skidding down Topsy Grade to the next school she taught. We began to consider Uncle Ed, an orphaned Irish immigrant, heading west where a resolute man might make his fortune. We thought of our father, young like us, guarding the suitcase of time on the hopeful journey from a green farm to the alkali land his family would abandon. What did he think when he stepped off the train, into the scent of the sagebrush? Did his first breath tell him this was not home?

Here it first occurred to us that one place is different than another. Here we first recognized that the people and objects so familiar to us had their pasts, stories we could repeat but not completely understand. Here we learned that history always contains a mysterious center which can never be truly entered. Forty years later, we make wild plum jam with the knives, the bowls, the spoons, the potholders, the aprons handed down to me by people whose lives have a mystery that I cannot explain, as wild plum jam has a taste that I can never quite name. 🍯



SOHS #16056

Downtown Klamath Falls in the 1920s: the city had a distinctive feel, tinged with the scent of sage.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Bernadine Hannon at Swan Lake Valley, 1910.

The Keystone building, at 117 North Eighth Street in Klamath Falls, was built to house E.J. Murray's newspaper, the Klamath Herald.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Medford's Other Federal Building

by Margaret Watson

The Federal Building," I said. "You know, the old Federal Building, down on West Sixth and Holly."

Ah, history! The opportunities for humility are endless. If you have lived around here for a while, you know to call it the old post office.

A post office is an important structure in Oregon history. Many towns dot the map merely because they had a post office. Early in its history, a soapbox purportedly served as Medford's first mailbox. J.S. Howard, the "father of Medford" served as "postmaster, mayor, express agent, store keeper and general poh-bah of the crossroads."¹ Medford began to make efforts to "meet the requirements of the regulations regarding sidewalks, street lights, street signs and house numbers" to get a federally



PHOTO BY DANA HEDRICK-EARP

Following an extensive restoration completed in 1996, the U.S. Court House reveals some of the exterior details designed into the building in 1914.

recognized post office in 1909.² Local support was intense. A reporter for the *Medford Daily Tribune* wrote in 1910:

The land about is as studded with natural resources as the jeweled collar of a great lady of leisure is sprinkled with gems. ... Will the growth of Medford continue? Yes, if the spirit of

progress rules the future. ... And progress means a united effort for the up-building of the city and the development of resources—not the wasting of energy in factional fights, or in discord—but a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether.

As a result of local efforts, Congress allocated money for the construction of a post office and courthouse. In March 1911, Bert and May Anderson and W.C. and Flossie Green donated their properties as a site for the structure. By 1914, Oscar Wenderoth, supervising architect of the U.S. Treasury Department, had designed an imposing three-story brick structure for Medford. J.T. Dugan of Seattle was the official contractor for the building, which cost \$110,000.

The post office originally had three grand entrances facing West Sixth Street. Granite stairs cascaded down to street level. Ornamental cast-iron light fixtures highlighted the entryways. The first floor was laid with marble, and the wainscoting, trim and some desks were constructed of Oregon pine. A federal courtroom anchored the second floor, flanked by government offices.

By 1939, the vision of Medford's growth had been sustained. The old post office had outgrown its space and a north wing expanded the operations. Louis A. Simon, supervising architect, and W.G. Noll, superintendent, designed the addition to match features of the original structure. However, windows replaced two of the front entrances, and the granite steps became a porch with steps descending to the east and west of the central entrance. The modernized interior had a new floor, and steps ascended to the second floor directly in front of a window. Much of the original Oregon pine trim was removed. By 1965, even these efforts could not keep pace with Medford's growth. A new post office was constructed on Eighth Street, and the old post office became obsolete.

In the early 1990s, a new vision for the



SOHS #14647

Medford's first post office cost only \$110,000 to build in 1915, and was the city's mail center until 1965.

building culminated in a restoration, which returned much of the main floor entrance and lobby to their original grandeur. The entire structure was seismically upgraded, sporting new mechanical and electrical components. Communications and energy conservation measures, unheard of in 1916, made work in the twenty-first century possible. Expanded office areas and public meeting rooms gave the old building new life.

The 1910 Medford reporter who envisioned the land about as a jeweled collar was not too far off. What has increased, probably beyond his wildest dreams, is the population. Some bemoan the growth, but perhaps the newest and greatest natural resource in the valley is its people, newcomers and oldtimers, who can on occasion "pull altogether" and carry some of the best of the past into the future—like the old federal building—oops—the old post office.

The building now houses offices for the U.S. Magistrate and other federal agencies. It was rededicated November 7, 1996, as the James Redden United States Court House in honor of the federal judge and former Oregon treasurer, attorney general and legislator. ☞

Margaret Watson is the curator of Hanley Farm for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

ENDNOTES

1. *Medford Daily Tribune*, July 1908.
2. *Medford Mail Tribune*, 3 February 1984.



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Lonesome Legacy: the Wood House

by Barbara Hegne



DSOHS #15404

Marvin and Susan Wood raised three children in their sturdy nineteenth-century Eagle Point home, shown here with Susan and son Walter in the front yard circa 1898.

The oldest house in the Upper Rogue area sits on the edge of busy Highway 62, one mile north of Eagle Point. Travelers may wonder who lived in this deserted and lonely dwelling, and old-timers ponder the fate of the old house that has stood proud and strong for more than 129 years.

The house is called the “Wood House” after Marvin Sylvester Wood, who built it in 1870. The lumber for the house came from the Deskins Mill above Prospect because Marvin believed the timber along the upper Rogue River to be stronger. In 1876, Marvin married Susan Griffith, and soon the home fires burned bright and the sound of children echoed in the rooms upstairs. Marvin and Susan had three children, Mayme, Ora and Walter.



SOHS #15404 (DETAIL)

It is Walter whom many people remember as the master of the house. He was a character. He wasn't mean or ornery or even homely, but he didn't believe in getting too close to a razor, so he grew a beard that covered most of his face and hung down well below his chin. People began calling him “Old Whiskers” and “The Hermit.” Walter raised whiteface cattle, along with horses, goats, chickens, and turkeys.

In 1949, state engineers decided the route for Highway 62 would have to pass right through the Wood House. When the state condemned the home, Walter went into a rage. No amount of money would make it right to destroy the house his father had built. After much debate, the state agreed to move the house to the other side of the proposed highway, facing the opposite direction. In later years, Walter would sit on the old wrap-around porch and watch the cars go by, or shuffle along the edge of the highway to Eagle Point for a sit-and-spit gab session



SOHS #9370 (DETAIL)

Walter, above, battled state highway builders to preserve the home his mother Susan, right, and father Marvin had shared since 1876.

with the local boys. “Old Whiskers” died in 1974 and the house and property eventually sold to a man in California.

Over the years, the Wood House has captured many hearts. It is one of the most often-painted and photographed structures in Jackson County. It has been featured in magazines and newspapers, and its lonesome portrait graces many walls.

Today the house is no longer sound, the aged wood is loose and splitting, and the braces are ready to fall. The boards creak, and in winter the howling wind whips through the open windows. Take your pictures without delay because soon, very soon, the house may come tumbling down.⁴ 🏠

Barbara Hegne is curator of the Eagle Point Museum, a descendant of the Wood family, and author of twenty-five books and booklets on local history.

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