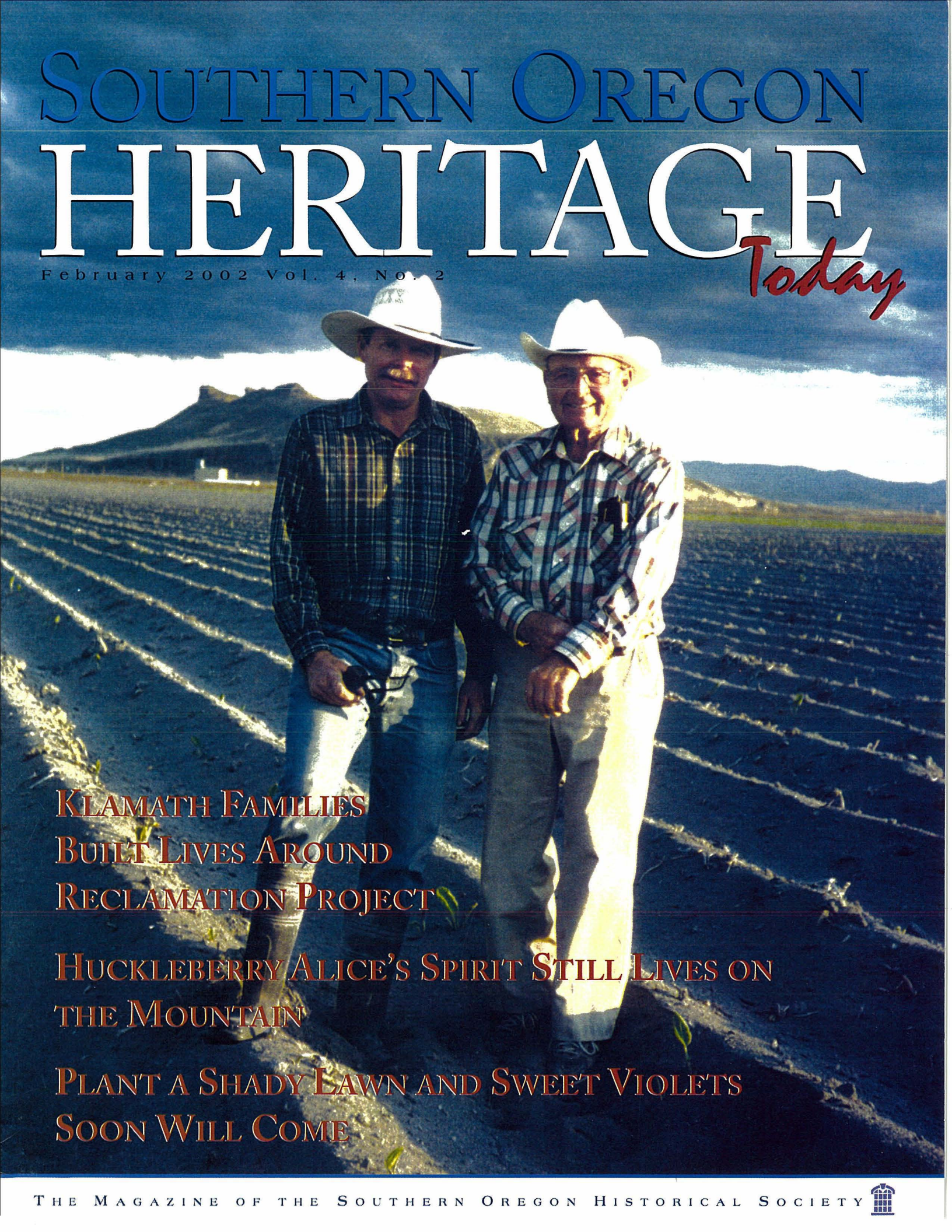


SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE

February 2002 Vol. 4, No. 2

Today

A photograph of two men standing in a field of tilled soil, likely a vineyard or agricultural field. The man on the left is wearing a dark plaid shirt, blue jeans, and a white cowboy hat. The man on the right is wearing a light-colored plaid shirt, light-colored pants, and a white cowboy hat. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with some clouds.

**KLAMATH FAMILIES
BUILT LIVES AROUND
RECLAMATION PROJECT**

**HUCKLEBERRY ALICE'S SPIRIT STILL LIVES ON
THE MOUNTAIN**

**PLANT A SHADY LAWN AND SWEET VIOLETS
SOON WILL COME**



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by Dorann H. Gunderson

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(Continued from page 15)

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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, 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.

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SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE

Today

FEATURE:

Reclamation Pioneers: Family Farming on the Klamath Irrigation Project

by Doug Foster
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COURTESY OF JESS PROSSER

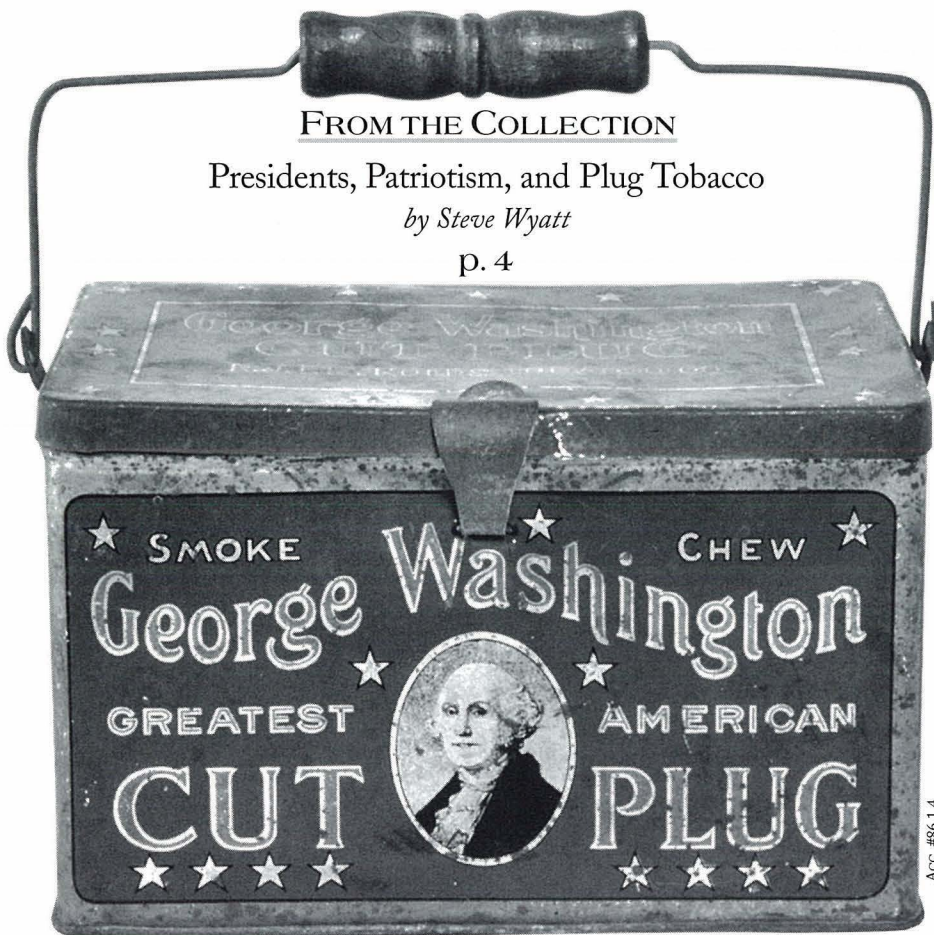
DEPARTMENTS

FROM THE COLLECTION

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and calendar

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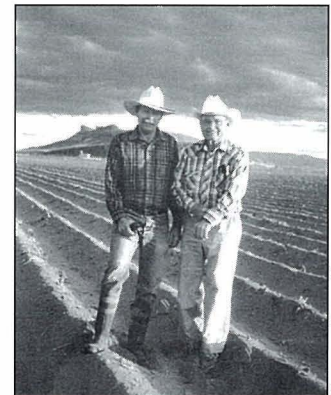


PHOTO BY DOUG FOSTER

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ON THE COVER

In the summer of 2001, Jess Prosser and his son John stand in a dry field across from Jess's original eighty-acre Tule Lake homestead.



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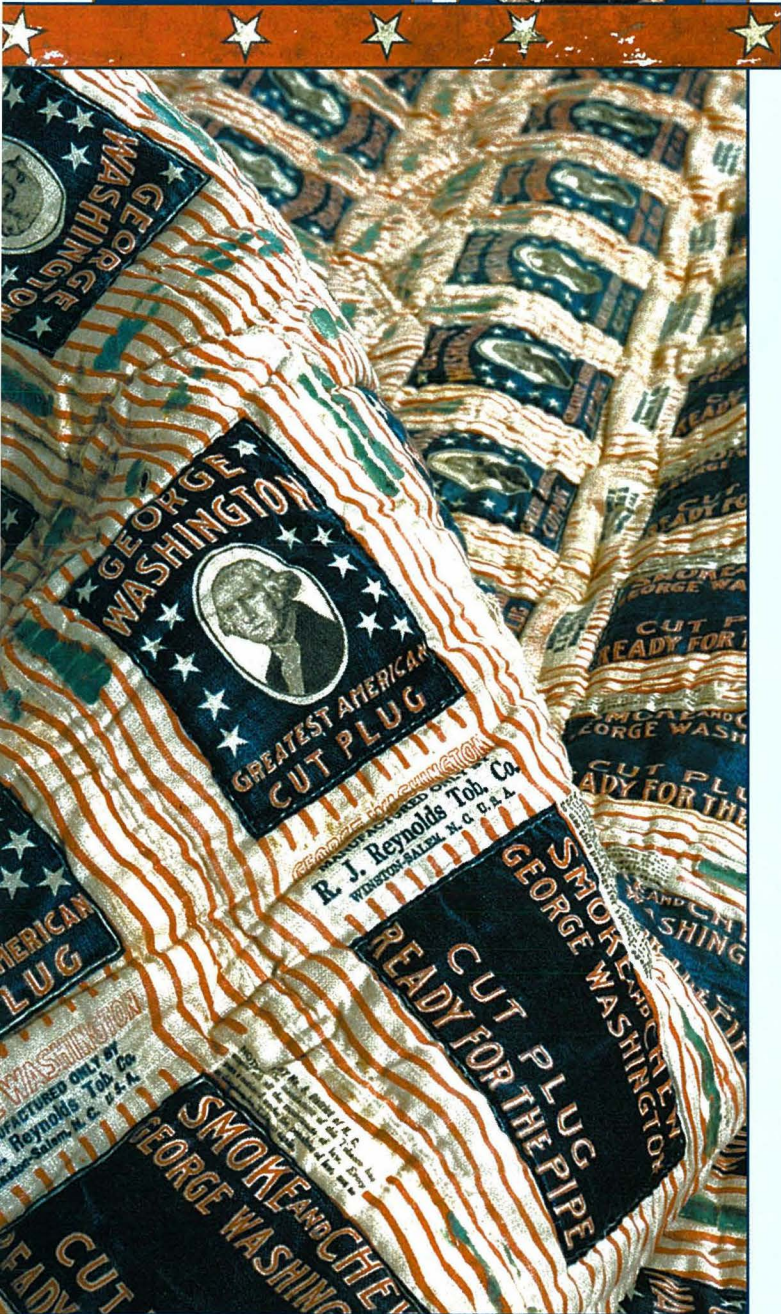
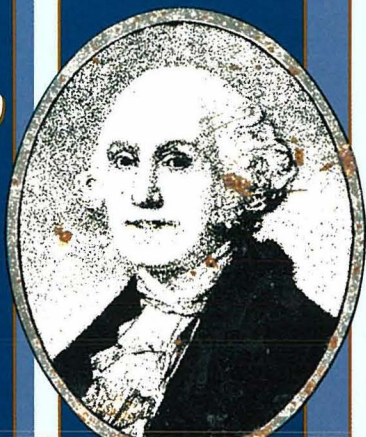
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Presidents, Patriotism, and Plug Tobacco



Acc. #68.102.1

by Steve Wyatt

WHAT'S RED, WHITE, and blue, has 105 images of President George Washington, once contained tobacco, and was smuggled up with? An additional hint: it probably can't be found anywhere except in the collections of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

This one-of-a-kind quilt was crafted by Alice D. Allen of Cove, in Union County. For the quilt top Allen skillfully pieced together empty muslin "George Washington Plug Tobacco" pouches. On July 4, 1932, she presented her handiwork to her brother Fred Corpe, an avid pipe smoker. It was Corpe who collected the 105 pouches needed for this quilt.

This unique piece of functional folk art proves Alice Allen's skill and creativity. It also serves as tangible evidence of changing social norms. When this quilt was made, smoking was widely accepted. Today it seems somewhat out of place, given that the health risks of tobacco use are well known, and smoking is generally considered less than socially acceptable.

From a historical perspective it seems fitting that R.J. Reynolds, the maker of the tobacco that was smoked to create this quilt, chose to name its product after George Washington. Aside from being a tobacco grower, he was commander in chief of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. During the war, tobacco was used as collateral to obtain loans from France. As the conflict dragged on Washington found it increasingly difficult to outfit his troops. Legend has it that in a public appeal for donations he pleaded, "If you can't send them money, send tobacco."

During his two terms as the nation's first president, Washington was immensely popular with the public. Historian Barry Schwartz believes Washington was (and still is) a symbol of the United

States; the public perceived him as a strong, incorruptible leader with a disdain for the monarchy. In the closing weeks of his presidential term, Washington's birthday was widely celebrated. This celebration has since evolved into Presidents' Day.¹

In Washington's lifetime, American tobacco growers simply exported their crop unprocessed. The first tobacco factory was established in this country in 1864. Eleven years later R.J. Reynolds established its first factory in what became Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Reynolds entered the national market after introducing Prince Albert pipe tobacco in 1906.² The George Washington brand may have also been introduced at about this time. In the early 1900s all things colonial (especially furniture and architecture) enjoyed a resurgence in popularity.

Both Prince Albert and George Washington tobaccos were commonly sold in tins. Tobacco tins were sometimes recycled by school children into lunch boxes. The George Washington tobacco tin (see page 3) is believed to have been in use at about the same time as the quilt. It has a wooden grip on its carrying handle and is in good condition. Such tins remain popular with collectors.

Collectors of muslin tobacco pouches on the other hand, are few and far between. Could there possibly be another museum or collector out there with a muslin tobacco pouch quilt? If so, we would like to hear about it. ■

Steve Wyatt is exhibits manager at the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

ENDNOTES

1. Barry Schwartz, *George Washington, the Making of an American Symbol* (New York, the Free Press, 1987), p. 177.
2. Gene Borio, "The History of Tobacco," <<http://www.historian.org>> (28 November 2001).

Huckleberry Alice

by Loren S. Pryor

HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN IS KNOWN AS "IWUMKANI," a place of huckleberries, in the Klamath language, and draws people like a magnet when the sweet, purple berries ripen at the end of summer.

Alice Allen Hamilton, born in Keno in 1882, spent nearly every berry season of her life on the mountain and became affectionately known as "Huckleberry Alice."

In her youth it was a three-day trip by horse and wagon from Keno to Wagon Camp on Union Creek, and then a pack horse operation for the dusty three-mile trip to the top of the mountain. Everything needed for a one-to three-month stay was loaded on the horse: canning jars, wash board, tubs, Dutch ovens, and feather beds.

On one trip, a low-hanging branch tore a hole in a feather bed and each step sent a puff of feathers out the hole. Seeing the puffing feathers, the now wide-eyed horse got more spooked and started bucking. Gear was soon strewn along the trail, and mother and children picked up the pieces while father calmed the panic-stricken horse.

In later life Alice had two tents—one for cooking, one for sleeping. One night a terrible racket in the cook tent brought her out of a sound sleep. She grabbed her rifle and a flashlight and went to check the problem. Her dogs were trying to chase a hungry bear from the cook tent but weren't getting the job done. Alice aimed the rifle and pulled the trigger just as a very excited dog jumped and knocked the gun down. She missed the bear but blasted her right

big toe. The bear headed for the brush; Alice headed for the doctor.

Later the bear raided another camp and Alice, in her late sixties and hobbling on a bandaged foot, shot it. And it wasn't the first. Her dogs loved to chase bears and usually chased them toward Alice, who would then have to "defend" herself. A bear hide drying in her camp was a common sight.

No one used "Allen Camp" even if Alice was late getting to the mountain. Not that they feared her, or retaliation; it was simply that people were considerate. A camp could be empty for days and nothing would be touched. It was called "being neighborly."

Alice joined the nightly entertainment that was a big part of life on Huckleberry Mountain, playing the fiddle, banjo, and guitar. She loved to entertain and this may have been one of her reasons for liking camp life. Picking berries was a sideline; she gave most of them away.

Alice loved the outdoors. Hunting with her sidekick Ethel Patrick during the 1966 elk season, Alice and her friend were told by two men that the elk were scarce and they might as well go home. While setting up camp they heard a noise. Alice saw a bull elk in a grove of trees. She shouldered her trusty rifle, aimed and fired, killing the elk. The two men came to see what the shooting was all about. They saw the elk hanging in the tree, looked at the two older women (Alice was then eighty-four) and, not saying another word, drove off in a huff.

Alice's niece, Vi Garrett of Prospect, recalls that being on the mountain was no reason to leave civilization behind. Garrett says, "We bathed every day and carried our own water to do it!" And she learned never to say "I'm sick" anywhere within hearing range of Alice. Her "cure" for any ailment was goose grease and turpentine rubbed on the chest and Vicks Vaporub in the mouth. Smallpox would have been tolerated more easily.

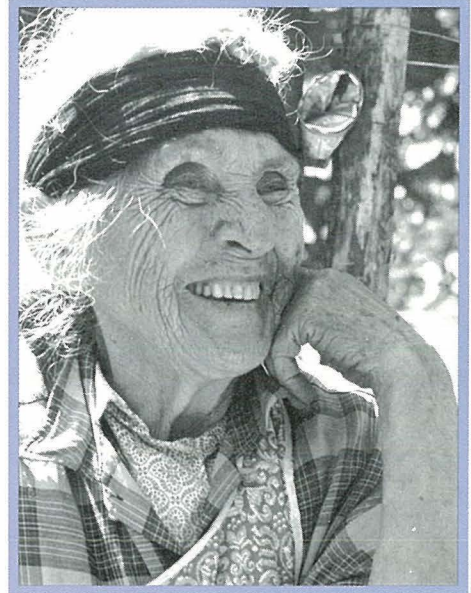


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Alice always had a battery-powered radio to keep up with current events. During World War II the president asked everyone to conserve gasoline. Proud to be an American and patriotic to the core, Alice went one step further ... backwards! She sold her pickup and bought a buggy with a cloth top, and two horses. They also served as pack animals to get her gear to the top of the mountain.

Alice worked many jobs in her life: as a lookout on Hershberger Mountain and Mount Stella, and as a cook at the Klamath County Hospital and on the Klamath Reservation. When she was in her seventies an employer told her she was getting old and should retire. Alice fired back, "I'm not too old, but I quit!" Still going strong, she finally retired ... at eighty years old.

Alice considered the mountain a second home. To her it was a retreat. She would tell friends, "If I live through the winter, I'll see you on berry mountain." Her Indian upbringing and the stories she had heard of hard, cold winters in times past taking her people must have led her to believe that if she lived until the spring, she was good for another year.

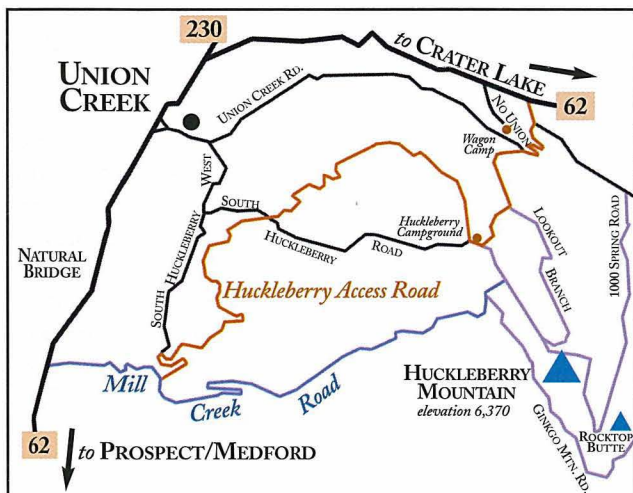
After nearly ninety years of living, Alice claimed, according to Garrett, that for certain she had been on the mountain each year from 1895 to 1971.

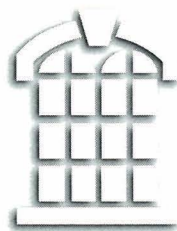
She did not make it through the next winter, dying January 10, 1972. She is buried in Chiloquin, but her friends say her spirit still lives on Iwumkani. 🏠

Loren Pryor is a lifelong resident of the Rogue Valley and a Central Point freelance writer.

ENDNOTE

Information is based on personal interviews with Vi Garrett and Jack Hollenbeck in October 1982.





SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Things To Do in February



PROGRAMS : *(see listings below for complete descriptions)*

	<u>DATE & TIME</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
Craft of the Month	Museum hours	CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	Victorian Valentines; free
Weaving Workshop for Beginners	Sat. & Sun., Feb. 23 & 24, & Sat., Mar. 2; 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.	JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM	Introduction to hand loom weaving Fee: \$70 non-members; \$60 members
Call for Volunteers for 2002		ALL SOCIETY SITES	Various

PROGRAM DETAILS

FOR TIMES AND LOCATIONS, SEE SCHEDULE ABOVE.

FEBRUARY CRAFT OF THE MONTH

Victorian Valentines

Families are invited to celebrate Valentine's Day by creating a traditional Victorian valentine for that special someone using stickers, doilies, and paper hearts. Free. Children's Museum.

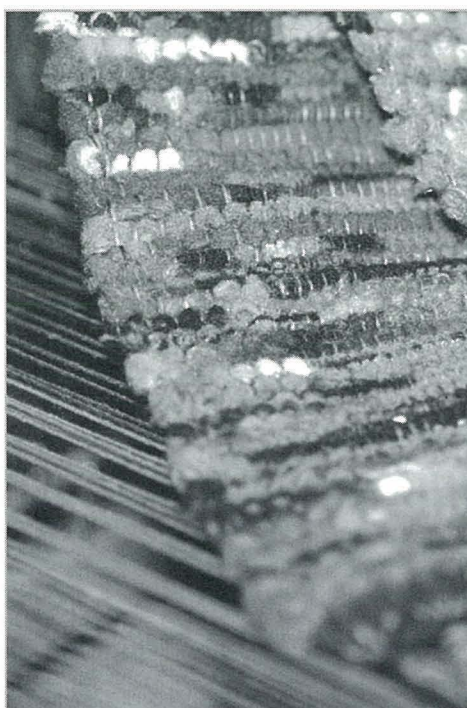
WEAVING WORKSHOP FOR BEGINNERS

Wile away the winter hours learning to weave beautiful fabrics! In cooperation with the Society, the Rogue Valley Handweaver's Guild will offer a 3-day workshop for beginners in the program space behind the Jacksonville Museum. This workshop is an introduction to hand loom weaving, including an overview of terminology, loom types, and the literature of weaving. The twill weave structure will be introduced for the first project; lace weave structure, for the second project.

Weaving threads, a project notebook, and a course syllabus will be provided. Portable looms may be available for a rental fee of \$5.00 per month. A list of supplies needed and instructions about loom rental will be mailed upon receipt of the workshop fee. Space is limited to 6 participants, so be sure to sign up early! **Preregistration and prepayment are required by Friday, February 15.** Call 773-6536.

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In 1915, historian Carter G. Woodson proposed a "Negro History Week" to honor the history and contributions of African-Americans. Nine years later his dream became a reality. Woodson chose the second week of February to pay tribute to the birthdays of two Americans who dramatically affected the lives of Black Americans: Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass (February 14). The week-long observance officially became Black History Month in 1976.



VOLUNTEERS: SIGN UP NOW FOR 2002! YOU'RE HISTORY!

It's that time of year again! The Society is recruiting volunteers for upcoming spring and summer annual programs: Children's Heritage Fair, Beekman Living History, Hanley Farm, and the Jacksonville-Hanley Farm Trolley Tour. If you love history, volunteering is a way to share that love with others in a meaningful and fun activity!

During this year's Children's Heritage Fair, we will provide 2,600+ fourth-grade students in Jackson and Josephine counties with a variety of hands-on ways to experience history. Volunteers help with activities such as tin punching, butter churning, stringing "dentalia" shells and beads, leading cemetery tours, and presenting Oregon Trail and Oregon symbol talks. If you are interested in helping with this program, please call Mary Fyre at 773-6536.

We're also looking for volunteers who enjoy history and meeting new people to participate as 1911 living history characters at Beekman House, to present information about the history of Jacksonville to visitors on the trolley, and to assist with programs at Hanley Farm. Farm volunteers provide house and garden guided tours, assist with a variety of activities, and demonstrate traditional crafts and trades. If you are interested in helping with these programs, please call Dawna Curler at 773-6536.

EXHIBITS : (see listings below for complete descriptions)

	LOCATION	MUSEUM HOURS
Stars and Stripes Through the Centuries Century of Photography: 1856-1956 The History of Southern Oregon from A to Z	HISTORY CENTER	Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
History in the Making: Jackson County Milestones Miner, Baker, Furniture Maker Politics of Culture: Collecting the Native American Experience Hall of Justice	JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM	Wed.- Sat., 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday, noon - 5 p.m.
Ongoing 'hands on history' exhibits	CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	Wed.- Sat., 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday, noon - 5 p.m.

EXHIBIT DETAILS

FOR TIMES AND LOCATIONS, SEE SCHEDULE ABOVE.

STARS AND STRIPES THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Featuring historic U.S. flags, Liberty posters, and more.

CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHY: 1856-1956

Highlights the work of two area photographers, Peter Britt and James Verne Shangle, with cameras from the Society's collection.

THE HISTORY OF SOUTHERN OREGON FROM A TO Z

Do you know your ABC's of Southern Oregon history? Even local oldtimers might learn a thing or two from the History Center windows along Sixth and Central as each letter of the alphabet tells a different story about the people, places, and events that have shaped the region we live in.

"HISTORY IN THE MAKING: JACKSON COUNTY MILESTONES"

The spirit of America is captured in the history of Jackson County. Follow in the footsteps of early residents who experienced the five historic milestones explored in this colorful new exhibit. You'll be inspired by the pioneers who arrived by sea or land; see the gold rush from the perspective of Chinese sojourners; discover the local impact of the railroad and automobile, and more. Artifacts include rare Chinese archaeological material and an early Coleman stove. A 1940s jukebox plays music and oral histories describing automobile travel experiences.

MINER, BAKER, FURNITURE MAKER

Explores the development of the Rogue Valley and the impact the industrial revolution had on the settlement of Oregon.

POLITICS OF CULTURE: *Collecting the Native American Experience*

Cultural history of local tribes and information on contemporary collecting issues.

NEW! Recently researched objects from the Society's Southwest Native American collections are now on display. Highlights include ancient Anasazi and historic Pueblo pottery including a classic piece by legendary San Ildefonso potters Marian and Julian Martinez. Featured textiles include a Hopi/Pueblo "maiden's shawl," two Navajo women's dresses, and a Navajo Germantown blanket.

HALL OF JUSTICE

History of this former Jackson County Courthouse.

CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Everyone enjoys exploring the home and work settings from the 1850s to the 1930s through "hands-on-history."

HISTORIC OPEN HOUSE LISTINGS:

February 4, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

- Enders Building
266-300 E. MAIN, ASHLAND
- State Historic Preservation Office
prd.state.or.us - click on "publication"
PHONE: 503-378-4168
- Southern Oregon Historical Society
PHONE: 541-773-6536

NEW HOURS!

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HISTORY CENTER
106 N. Central, Medford
Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

RESEARCH LIBRARY
106 N. Central, Medford
Tues. - Fri., 1 to 5 p.m.

**JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM &
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM**
5th and C, Jacksonville
Wed. - Sat., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sun., noon to 5 p.m.

HANLEY FARM
1053 Hanley Road
(open by special appointment)

C.C. BEEKMAN HOUSE
California & Laurelwood, Jacksonville
(closed for the season)

C.C. BEEKMAN BANK
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JACKSONVILLE HISTORY STORE
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Fri. - Sat., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
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For membership information, call Susan Smith at 773-6536.

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Reclamation Pioneers:

Family Farming on the Klamath Irrigation Project

by Doug Foster



ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S OLDEST federal reclamation projects cut off water to more than 200,000 acres of irrigated

farmland in the Klamath Basin last spring. Irrigation water was cut off to maintain higher water levels for endangered Lost River and short-nosed suckers in Upper Klamath Lake and for threatened coho salmon in the Klamath River. This crisis won't end with the drought: the Bureau of Reclamation (B.O.R.) has estimated that meeting current requirements set by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect these fish species may not leave water available for Klamath Project irrigators in six out of ten years. According to the New York Times, the "plight of the 1,400 farmers cut off from vital water" has become "a rallying cry" among groups seeking to amend the Endangered Species Act.¹



PHOTO COURTESY OF JESS PROSSER

This article will not attempt to weigh the competing interests involved in the Klamath Basin water crisis; instead, it will focus on the history and lives of one affected group: families who farmed lands reclaimed by the Klamath Project.²

Consider the Palmer family. In 1932, after Tule Lake was partially drained, Harry and Minnie Palmer started homesteading the lake bed, growing crops, raising hogs, and milking twenty cows to sell milk to the cheese factory in Malin. In the winter, Harry Palmer kept a team of horses harnessed in the barn, both to feed their livestock and to pull travelers from knee-deep mud, when the "bottoms dropped out" of the dirt roads in wet weather. They didn't get electric service until 1935. Their kerosene lamps didn't generate enough light to quilt by, so Minnie had to hold her quilting bees in the afternoon. There was no school bus, so their son Marion had to ride his horse to school. Years later, after serving in World War II, Marion won his own "veterans' preference" homestead in the 1949 Tule Lake lottery.³

When the Klamath Project started in 1903, Tule Lake and Lower Klamath Lake were huge, adjacent lakes straddling the Oregon-California border. Lower Klamath and its cloak of dense tule marshes sprawled over more than 80,000 acres; Tule Lake was even bigger. Lower Klamath Lake, a settlement basin for flood waters from the Klamath River, was "dewatered" when a dredged levee blocked the flow of water from river to lake. Tule Lake, fed by Lost River, had no outlet: during wet years the lake would swell in size; during dry years it shrank. Tule Lake was dewatered when project engineers dammed Lost River and diverted its flow through a canal into the Klamath River.

Early-day Homesteading at Tule Lake

As Tule Lake began to recede and expose its lake bed, the B.O.R. (then called the Reclamation Service) leased the land for farming. "Farm units" for homesteading were first available in 1917; after World War I, military veterans were granted a preference for homesteads.

Karl and Marie Gentry read an obscure notice on a back page of a 1922 Portland newspaper about the veterans' preference for Tule Lake homesteads. Since Karl was a World War I veteran, they drove their "turtle-back" Ford south to investigate. Marie still remembers her first impression of the Tule Lake area: "vast emptiness, dust, dryness, no trees and nothing green." They stayed at a Klamath Falls hotel when an ash storm blew in from the dried bed of Lower Klamath Lake, where peat fires had raged for years. "The streets were as dark as night and ash sifted into everything in the hotel. One could write in the ash dust on furniture and even the restaurant food was gritty."

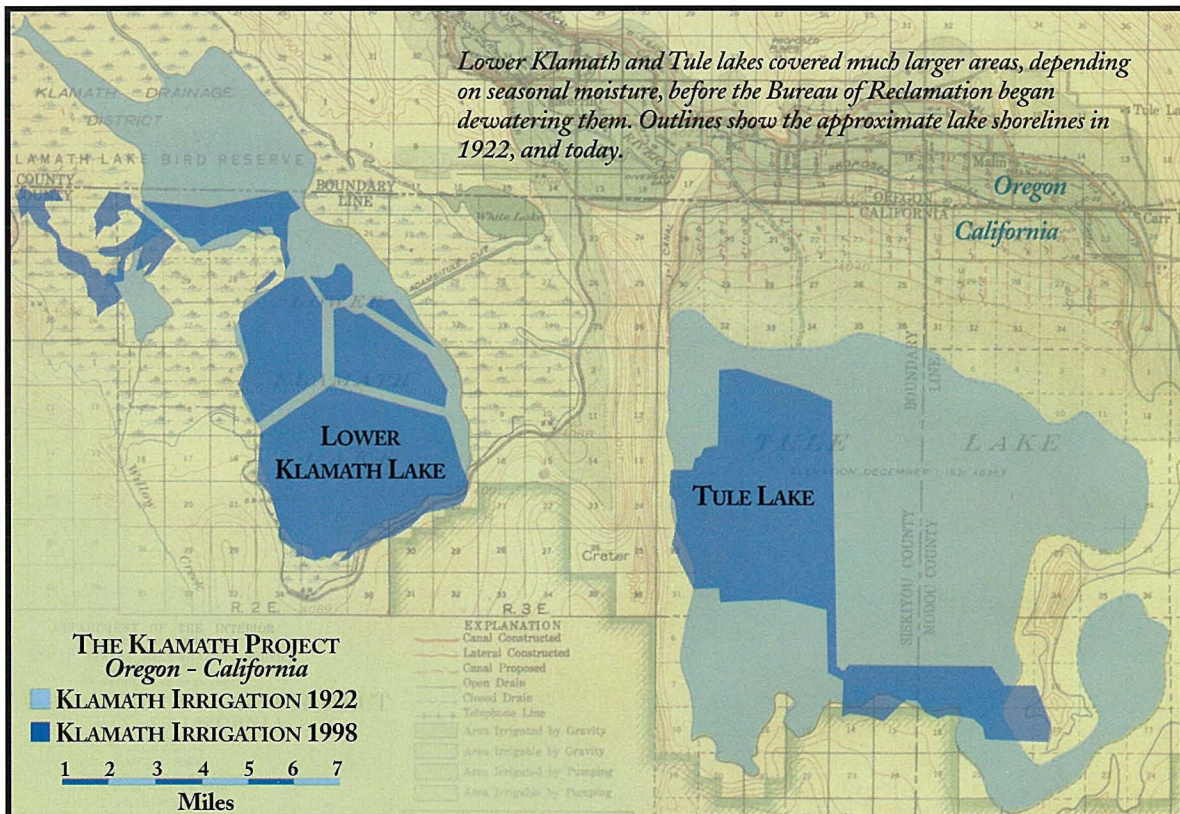
All the businessmen Karl consulted advised against homesteading Tule Lake because of the year-around risk of frost. The chief project engineer, though, said the lake bed soil was "comparable in richness to that of the Nile Valley." So the Gentrys filed for a homestead, and like all other qualified veterans that year, were successful. There were so few applicants, there wasn't a lottery.

Like most homesteaders in 1922, they first lived in a one-room shack with a lean-to kitchen attached. The "bare land blew back and forth until alfalfa and water tied it down a bit." The winters were cold in their poorly insulated house. In the first years there was no indoor plumbing or electricity or telephone service. For house water, they dug a well with a post-hole auger and pumped it by hand; during the summer they scooped water from irrigation canals to wash their clothes because it was better than the "hard"

Left, Jess Prosser pours a bag of dry fertilizer into his fertilizer spreader as his daughter looks on. This photo was taken in 1950, just three years after Jess got his homestead on the dry bed of Tule Lake. Right, WWII veteran Dale Sprout and his wife and children were pictured on the cover of this January 20, 1947, issue of Life magazine because Dale had won a reclamation homestead at Tule Lake in the 1946 lottery. According to this article, the Bureau of Reclamation's lottery for "homesteading veterans was one of the biggest legal lotteries the nation has ever seen."



COURTESY OF TIME PIX, LIFE COVER, JAN. 20, 1947



well water. Looking back, Marie Gentry said success took “backbreaking work, intestinal fortitude, and sheer determination.”

The men helped each other, “lending horses and equipment back and forth as well as trading work”; and the wives started cooking for the bachelor farmers. The B.O.R. made no provisions for schools or roads, so homesteaders donated land and shared the cost and labor of building a one-room schoolhouse. Most of the forty-seven homesteads started that year were between forty and sixty acres, which the government said was sufficient to support a family. The early homesteaders learned through experience it wasn't enough to make a living and persuaded the government to include more land for later homesteaders.⁴

Early-day Farming at Lower Klamath Lake

Because Lower Klamath Lake was a settlement basin, B.O.R. scientists were concerned that excess alkali salts might have been deposited in the lake bed, impairing soil fertility. In 1911, they diked and drained a small tract of marsh on the west side of the lake and started an experiment farm, finding that the crops they planted would not grow to maturity. Believing the lake bed could not be farmed until the alkali was removed and that removal was not economical, the B.O.R. abandoned further reclamation of Lower Klamath.

Private landowners, who had acquired thousands of acres of seasonally flooded marshland around the lake under the Swamp Land Act, sought permission to complete the reclamation of Lower Klamath on their own. With help from the B.O.R., they formed a drainage district and started draining the lake and its surrounding marshes in 1917. They dug irrigation ditches to carry water to their crops, but most who farmed there in the 1920s and 1930s had limited success. Their lands did not have adequate drainage and, in some areas, had alkali problems.⁵

In 1930, when Jack Liskey was nine, his parents moved to the east side of the dry bed of Lower Klamath Lake. Their closest neighbors were four miles away. The lake bed was then a “terrible dust bowl and ash pit.” The irrigation ditch stopped short of the

Frances Johnson stands between her first Tule Lake home, a twenty-by-twenty foot army wall tent, and her “new” home, which still stands on pillars: a surplus tar-papered barracks moved from the abandoned internment camp at Newell. The Johnsons started life on the dry bed of Tule Lake after winning a veterans’ preference homestead in a 1946 lottery.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JESS PROSSER

A family takes a wagonload of locally grown produce to the Klamath Fair on October 21, 1907.

Liskey's land, so Jack's father had to hire a drag-line (an excavating machine that uses a boom and a bucket) to extend the ditch. Their first crop was rye, which is more drought and alkali tolerant. Jack drove a tractor pulling a plow to prepare the soil; then he pulled a wagon hitched in front of a harrow. Jack's dad sat in the wagon and “broadcast” the rye seed by hand from a wooden bucket; and the harrow covered the sown seeds. Rye, they found, grew well on their land.

“It was pioneering.” Their crops often “froze out,” and haying on peat ground used to be “the itchiest thing you ever saw.”

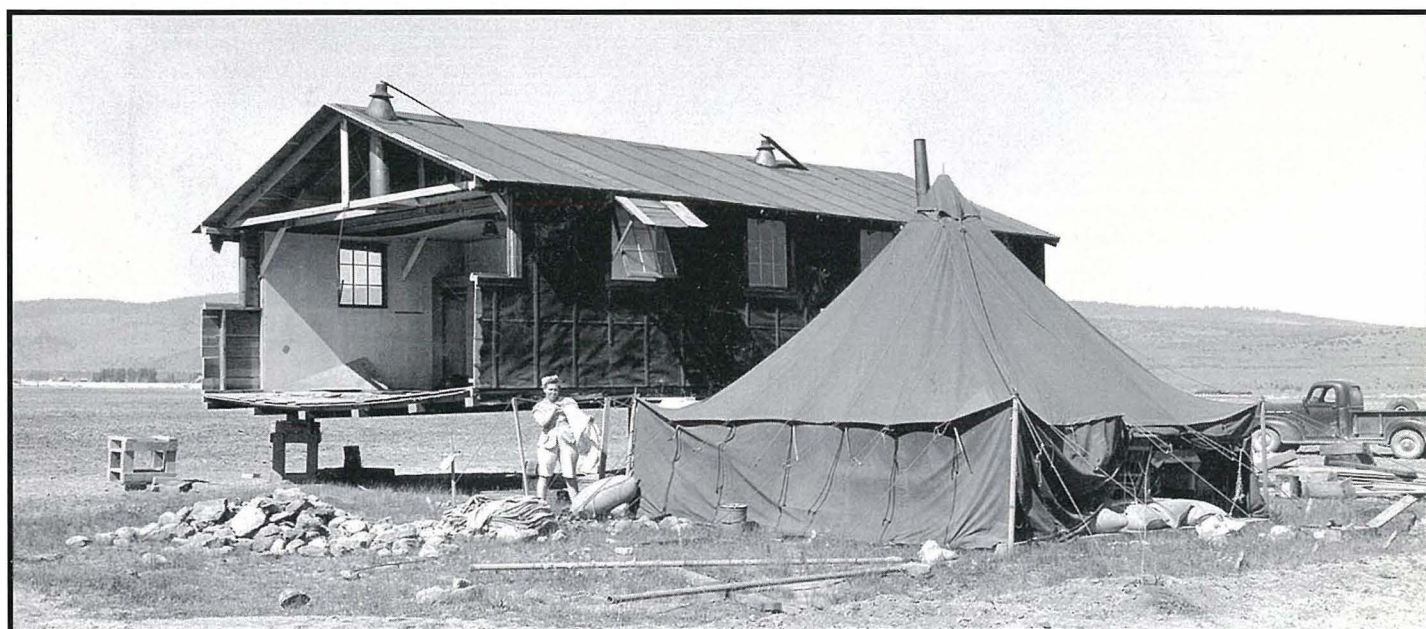


PHOTO COURTESY OF TULELAKE-BUTTE VALLEY FAIR MUSEUM



Teams of horses pull "Fresno plows" to excavate the division two of the main canal for the Klamath Project on February 13, 1907. Hot springs in the bed of the canal send up clouds of smoke in the cold winter air.

In the early days, Stockton "swamp plows" with five-foot "shanks"—the kind designed for plowing drained marshes in the Sacramento Valley—were commonly used on the bed of the Lower Lake, since these big plows could turn under the thick mat of tules. Before drainage ditches were built in the 1940s, flood irrigation left the ground so soft that tractors would get mired in the mud. To work this soft ground, the Liskeys bolted three-foot sections of four-by-four boards onto their crawler tractor's treads—to act like snowshoes.⁶

There were still no roads across the lakebed in the 1930s, so they drove down ditch banks to get to their 320-acre lakebed tract, which lay four miles distant from the home ranch. The Liskey harvest crew lived in a tent there for three years before building a wooden shack. They used a pack horse to haul water from the main ranch, but bathed in an irrigation ditch to save the good water for drinking. Abe Boehm, a cat skinner for the Liskeys, said that at harvest time, "There was dust, dust, dust. There was so much dust you can't hardly believe it. You couldn't see twenty feet, the dirt was blowing so thick."

One person can cut ripe grain with a modern combine; in the 1930s it took a five-to six-man crew: a cat skinner to drive the tractor that pulled the combine; a "header man" to adjust the cutter bar so it wouldn't scrape the ground or cut too high; a "jig man" to adjust empty burlap sacks as they filled with harvested grain; one or two "sack sewers" to sew up the bulging sacks of grain and slide them onto the ground; and a machinist to grease the combine and tractor.⁷

Like many local farm families, the Liskeys have farmed on Lower Klamath land that they leased from the federal government. All federal land on Lower Klamath was set aside as a waterfowl refuge, part of it managed by the B.O.R. and the rest by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Jack's father was the first to grow crops on the 7,000-acre tract of government land in the center of the lakebed in Oregon, which in the old days the B.O.R. would only lease for grazing. Since he had had good luck farming similar soil on Tule Lake, Jack's father obtained a grazing lease in 1934 and then seeded eighty acres of his leased land in oats. The oats grew well, since the center of the lake bed did not have the alkali problems that plagued lands nearer the old shoreline. While the B.O.R. chided him for this lease violation, the agency opened the entire 7,000-acre tract for farming the next year.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has regularly contracted with farmers to grow grain on some of its refuge lands because such high-protein food is critical for waterfowl during the fall

migration. This land is leased "on shares": in return for the right to farm, farmers agree to leave one-quarter of the ripe standing grain for waterfowl. The Liskeys have planted grain on about 600 acres of refuge land for fifty-eight consecutive years.

In the autumn, the Lower Klamath refuge swarms with waterfowl—often well over a million birds—and these birds don't always limit themselves to those parts of the grain fields reserved for them. In 1943, Jack said, "ducks ate up the whole 600 acres of grain." Forewarned, he was ready the next year when "clouds of ducks" moved in at harvest time. Since he couldn't "shoo the birds away," he asked his neighbors for help to save the grain crop. Two of Murel Long's combines arrived from the south; a Tulana Farms tractor pulling two combines arrived from the west, led by a dozer to blade a path across irrigation ditches. Together, they harvested the field in two to three days, leaving one-quarter of the standing grain for waterfowl. "Neighbors help each other out here," Jack said.⁸

"Tulana" was a farming enterprise owned and run by the Henzel brothers, Dick and Ben and—until their deaths in the 1950s—Jack Liskey's uncles, Dave and Dan Liskey. When it was sold in 1976, Tulana Farms was the biggest irrigated farm operation in Klamath County. The Henzel brothers had started farming leased lands on Tule Lake in 1932, Ben driving the tractor all day, Dick driving it all night—and they "made some money, expanded and kept going." They bought their first Lower Lake property near Worden in 1941 when it was "tumbleweeds and dust," since earlier attempts to farm there had failed because of alkali problems. The Henzels, both of whom had degrees in agriculture, donated Lower Lake land for a county experiment station and hired an agronomist. With others' help, the Henzels discovered a solution to the alkali problem: dig deep drainage ditches, leave fields flooded through the winter, then drain off the water to carry off the alkali.⁹

In 1932, when Jack Liskey's father dug the first deep well on his ranch, the water flowed out at 168 degrees; it was so hot they had to cool the water in a 1,500-gallon storage tank before using it for drinking and bathing. Realizing the agricultural potential of geothermal water, they later drilled more wells; one 300-foot-deep well produced 5,000 gallons a minute at 199 degrees. In 1978, they started a geothermally heated greenhouse; one of their greenhouses now covers three-quarters of an acre. They once had a tree nursery; now they grow hot-house tomatoes and bedding plants for retail sale in the spring, then lease the greenhouses for growing wheat grass that is used as a vitamin supplement.

In 1943, Jack Liskey married Virginia Hooper. They both had deep roots in the Klamath Basin. Jack's grandparents started ranching in the basin in 1886; when Jack was born in 1921, his family lived outside Malin in a "wagon house" so they could follow their livestock. When the B.O.R. started leasing the receding shore of Tule Lake, Jack's parents moved into a wall tent there and farmed nearby.

Virginia's grandparents started farming in the basin in 1910. Her father, who fought in France during World War I, won a 1932 veterans' preference homestead at Tule Lake. The family moved into a twelve-by-twelve foot canvas wall tent until her father could build an eight-by-twelve foot cabin on their homestead. Virginia had no brothers or sisters; so, although she was only a third-grader, she walked the three-and-a-half miles to school by herself. The nearest paved road, she said, was two-and-a-half miles away and, in winter, the dirt roads had ruts as deep as she was tall. They rode a horse to town to get groceries in the morning when the roads were still frozen and returned before the roads could thaw. "Those were tough years," Virginia said. "It was pioneering." Their crops often "froze out," and haying on peat ground used to be "the itchiest thing you ever saw."

After getting married, Virginia and Jack found a used twenty-four-by-twenty-four foot house that had been part of a Klamath Falls housing project for loggers. They hauled it to the ranch and set it up on a bare knoll above the lakebed. Jack and Virginia, who raised four children in that house, still live there. Their sons Tracey and Rocky now run the ranch; their grandson Patrick is a ranch-hand; and their daughter Vickie, who studied greenhouse management at college, runs the family greenhouse. Every weekday all members of the Liskey clan who've been working on the farm gather at Jack and Virginia's house for their midday meal. This family tradition started years ago, when Jack's mother still did the cooking.

The Liskeys have survived at farming by being diversified. During the Depression, when cattle prices were "down to nothing," Jack's mother built an incubator and raised 3,000 turkeys. After starting their greenhouse business in the late 1970s, the Liskeys channeled the geothermal water that heated their greenhouses into dozens of shallow ponds, which they rented for rearing tropical fish. The chemistry of the cooled-down, eighty-degree water closely resembles the African streams where these colorful fish thrive naturally; when mature, the tropical fish are sold wholesale to distributors such as Walmart, to stock aquariums.

If they had had project water, the Liskeys would have planted 1,200 acres in grain last year; without the water, they only planted 150 acres. Their only available water is runoff from their greenhouses, which they store in a cooling pond, then sprinkle on their fields using a pivot and wheel line. Because geothermal water is slightly salty, using it for irrigation is not a long-term solution.¹⁰

The Last Group of Tule Lake Homesteaders (1946 to 1949)

When "the boys" came home from World War II, the B.O.R. decided it was time for another Tule Lake homestead lottery. They held the drawing in the Klamath Falls Armory, arranging for the local high school band to provide music and a local radio station to broadcast the results up and down the West Coast. Eighty-six winners were picked from a big pickle jar that held the names of 1,305 applicants. Like all the other winners in lotteries held after World War II, Jess Prosser was a veteran: he had served in a field



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Top, on July 1, 1929, the Barton brothers irrigate rows of potatoes by hand. They dug out the sides of the earthen ditch in the foreground, allowing water to flow along the furrows between their rows of potatoes. They irrigated sixty-five acres of potatoes at Tule Lake that year. Below, Olney Rudd, chairman of the Inter-Veterans' Service Council draws the first name from the big pickle jar in the Bureau of Reclamation's December 18, 1946, homestead lottery. Nelson Reed, chairman of the examining board, just gave the jar a twirl to mix the capsules holding the names of more than 1,300 applicants for the eighty-six Tule Lake homesteads.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Five tractors pull five combines, harvesting a field of Lower Klamath oats in October of 1942. Murel Long drove the first tractor: he, his father, and a partner were sharecropping this 1,000 acres of grain fields. Because of the weather, they had to "get the grain up" fast, so the Cox brothers sent two combines to help. The canvas-covered sides of these combines, called "dog houses," protected the "jig man" and the "sack sewers," who filled burlap sacks with harvested grain, sewed the sacks shut then shoved them down a chute to the ground.

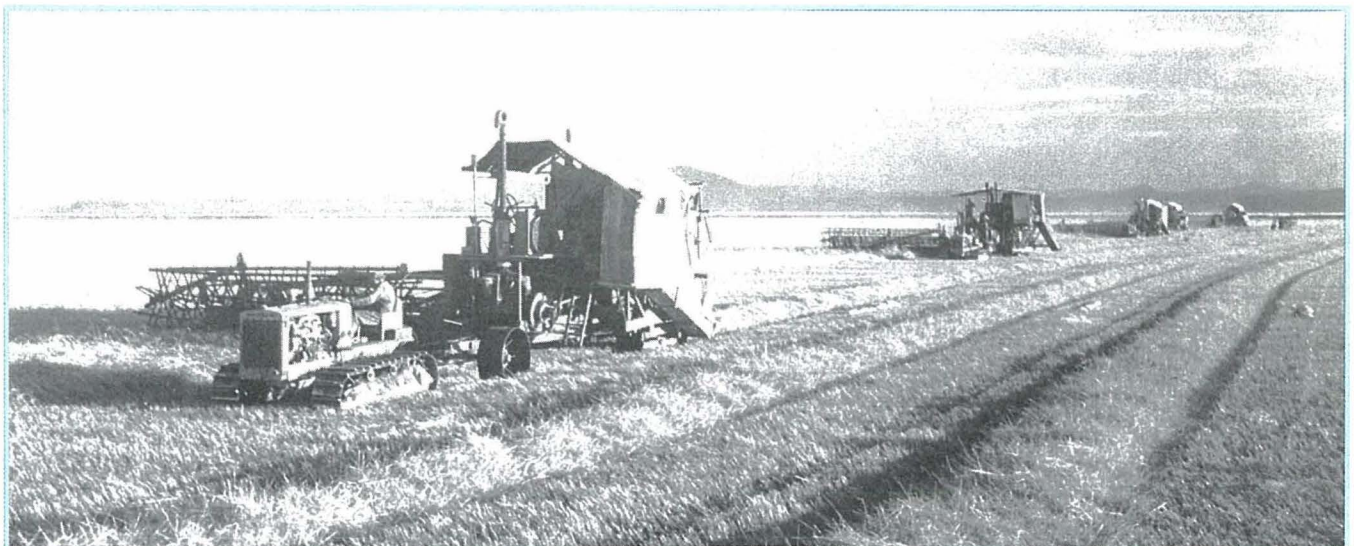


PHOTO COURTESY OF MUREL LONG

artillery unit in the Forty-first Division and was wounded in action on New Guinea.

Jess's new eighty-acre homestead was bare ground: no house, no well, no lawn, no trees, no shrubs. All the homesteaders had to "start from scratch." But "there was lots of cooperation," Jess said. "Neighbors would come over to help. We all worked together."¹¹

When Jerry and Frances Johnson won their homestead in 1946, they set up an old twenty-by-twenty foot army tent and left their "town-worthy" car at the ditch rider's house near the Malin highway, using their tractor to get across the mud and snow to their car. According to Frances, the post-World War II homesteaders created a community by working together and raising their farm kids to have a work ethic. When Jerry built a baseball diamond for kids in a back pasture, no one seemed to mind that the bases were old cow pies.¹²

Some things had not changed: Jess Prosser used a hand auger to dig a shallow well for house water and, since he didn't have a backhoe, he dug his septic field by hand. A friend helped him lay the foundation for the tar-papered, single-walled, military-style barracks that would become his home. The government had offered all homesteaders parts of the barracks from the former internment camp in nearby Newell, where almost 20,000 internees of Japanese ancestry had been confined during the war. Jess cut one barracks so it would fit onto a semi-truck, hauled it to his homestead and placed it on the foundation he'd laid, then "worked it over" to make it livable for his wife and one-year-old daughter.

In 1946, the B.O.R. required that new homesteaders have two years of farming experience, \$2,000 in assets to show they could "get on their feet," own no more than 160 acres of land, and farm their land for five consecutive years. Jess had been raised on a Kansas wheat farm, so he "knew what farming was all about." When he first came to the Klamath Basin in 1936, he worked on a Tule Lake potato farm. He enlisted after Pearl Harbor; but when the war ended, he headed back to Tule Lake to work on a dairy and cattle ranch, getting up at four every morning, every day of the week. He was out feeding cattle in a snowstorm when his wife ran out and said he was a winner in the homestead lottery.¹³

Eleanor Bolesta, also a winner in the 1946 lottery, was the first woman to win a B. O. R. homestead. She was entitled to a veterans' preference because she served as a Navy WAVE for two years; trained as an aviation machinist, she had worked in air traffic at the Seattle Naval Air Station. Asked if she met the B.O.R.'s "head of the family" requirement, Eleanor said that she worked to support her family while her husband was in a Navy Hospital, where he was recuperating from combat wounds received while fighting with the Third Marine Division on Guam.

Eleanor was raised on a small dairy farm on Whidbey Island; her husband Chuck was mechanically minded and learned quickly from more experienced farmers. Shortly after they got their first crop of barley planted, before they had set up a barracks to live in, Eleanor discovered she was pregnant. After harvesting their first barley crop in the fall, they paid off the loan on their tractor and bought a refrigerator, stove, and washing machine.

"It was an exciting time for all of us," Eleanor later wrote. "The

war was finally completely over, and everyone was eager to start a new life. Because of our ages and experiences we all had a good deal in common and we needed and found each other's support and help." The Bolestas helped form a homesteaders club where neighboring farmers could hold potluck get-togethers and community events.

Eleanor still lives on her Tule Lake homestead and relies on the income she gets from renting her land to a neighboring farm family. Winning a homestead in 1946, Eleanor recently said, was like a "miracle," for it gave her security; last year's water cut-off, which left part of her land fallow, was like a "nightmare."¹⁴

People came from all parts of the country to homestead at Tule Lake. Some were from the local area, like the Johnsons from Merrill. Many came from other parts of the West Coast, including the Bolestas from Everett, Washington, and the Palmers from Porterville, California. A few came from a great distance: Beaver City, Nebraska; O'Donnell, Texas; and Arlington, Virginia.¹⁵

Jess Prosser didn't own his own farm equipment his first year homesteading. His neighbor, who first homesteaded in 1938, agreed to farm half of Jess's land in return for three-fourths of the potato crop it produced; and he agreed to loan Jess his tractor and combine in return for Jess's labor. This equipment loan let Jess grow twenty acres of wheat and twenty acres of alfalfa clover.

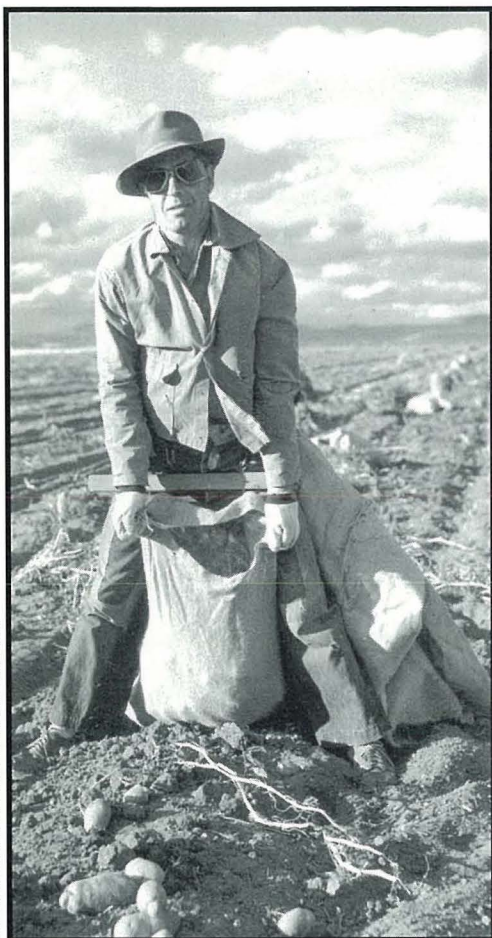
Jess's first purchase was a used crawler tractor to dig irrigation ditches; next he bought a wheeled tractor for cultivating and general farm work. Once equipped with his own machinery, Jess started growing potatoes and "malt" barley, also called "beer barley" because it is used in brewing. Tule Lake has rich soil, Jess said, but only "hardy plants" do well there because of the climate. He has grown malt barley and russet Burbank potatoes every year, since Tule Lake grows "some of the best in the country." In 1956 he bought a "potato bulker," a farm machine that mechanically lifts potatoes from the field, so workers wouldn't have to pick the potatoes by hand and stuff them into gunny sacks.

At first, Jess "flood irrigated." After using a tractor to cut the irrigation ditches, he used a hand shovel to control the flow of water in the ditches: he would dig a small earthen dam to stop the flow, then cut out the side of the earthen ditch to direct the water flow to his crops. He soon switched to siphons for his potato fields: dozens and dozens of curved metal tubes siphoned water from elevated irrigation ditches into his fields, filling deep furrows between rows of potatoes. When frost was a risk, Jess and his sons spent most of the night setting and resetting siphons to get the soil wet, since this created humidity that kept potato leaves from freezing. In 1976, he started sprinkling his potato fields with "solid-set" irrigation pipe—three-inch-wide, forty-foot-long sections of pipe topped with sprinklers—that could be left in the field all growing season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TULE LAKE-BUTTE VALLEY FARM MUSEUM

On December 18, 1946, the day she won a veterans' preference homestead, Eleanor Bolesta posed for a photo on a tractor near Tule Lake: she was the first woman to win a homestead from the Bureau of Reclamation. Eleanor still lives on her homestead.



Above, a worker sacks potatoes at harvest time on Jess Prosser's Tule Lake homestead on October 16, 1947. Below, Dean Minnis operates a horse-drawn double plow on the bed of Tule Lake in 1926. Like other pioneer farmers, he had to rely on horse farming.

This system more easily protects potato leaves from frost and only requires a third as much water as flood irrigation.

Showing the practicality a farmer must have, Jess paid a few hundred dollars for an old schoolhouse in the nearby town of Tulelake, moved it to his farm, put on a metal roof and has used it ever since as his machine shed. Although he has added two bedrooms and a bath, he still lives in the military-style barracks he set up on his original homestead more than fifty years ago. Farming "was a good life," Jess said, "but I never got rich." His two sons now do the farming. When they had project water, they farmed nearly 700 acres, counting leased land.

Cutting off the irrigation water in April, Jess said, was "a big surprise," since he has gotten project water every year for fifty-four years, and the patent to his land says he and his heirs will get project water "forever." And it is a big hardship since his sons invested a lot of money in farm equipment and recently built their own potato cellar. Last fall, his sons spent \$300 per acre to prepare 110 acres of ground to plant potatoes the following spring; they had to fumigate, disc, deep rip, sprinkle and till. Without project water, the Prossers had to rely on what well water they could buy, so they could only plant potatoes on eighteen acres of the ground they had prepared.

Jess's son John said, "we have always been able to get by on one good season every four or five years, when potato prices are good. It's been bad for five years. Last year we had a really great crop, but terrible prices." If the irrigation water is cut off when the price is good, he said, "we can't grow enough potatoes to make up for the bad years."

John is now president of the board of the Newell Potato Co-op, the cooperative

Jess helped start in 1963 to market potatoes for local farmers. Because of the water cut-off, there was a 75% cutback in the acreage of potatoes grown at Tule Lake. If the co-op can't provide potatoes to its established buyers, John said, it could lose these buyers, which would be "a major long-term hardship." They face the same problem with malt barley: if they can't deliver the barley, they'll lose their established contracts.¹⁶

Last May, Klamath Basin farmers and their supporters staged a "bucket brigade" in Klamath Falls to symbolically protest the cut-off of irrigation water; 10,000 people thronged Main Street as fifty buckets of water were passed hand-to-hand for a mile, then dumped into the project's main irrigation canal. The person selected by the local community to dip the first bucket of water was veteran homesteader Jess Prosser. The front page of the local paper featured a photo of Jess, then 85, standing in the lake in his irrigation boots—surrounded by photographers and TV cameras—filling a bucket with water.¹⁷ 🏠

Doug Foster is a writer and historian living in Ashland.



ENDNOTES

1. *Klamath Falls Herald and News*, 8 July 2001; *New York Times*, 9 July 2001.
2. None of the farms on the Klamath Project have been owned by a publicly traded agribusiness. Interview with James Bryant, chief of land and water, Bureau of Reclamation Klamath Area Office, Klamath Falls, 17 July 2001.
3. Marion Palmer, "The Palmers—1932 Homesteaders," in *The Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society*, No. 18, 1996, pp. 109-110.
4. Marie Gentry, "Experiences of an Early Homesteader," in *Tulelake Irrigation District 1972 Annual Report* (Tulelake Irrigation District, Tulelake, Calif.), pp. 19-31.
5. Taylor, "Memorandum re: Lower Klamath Lake, Klamath Irrigation Project, Oregon-California," (20 February 1926), U.S.B.O.R. Klamath Project Office, Klamath Falls, Archival File 565.
6. Interview with Jack and Virginia Liskey near Merrill, 12 June 2001.
7. Interview with Abe Boehm near Merrill, 12 June 2001.
8. Liskey interview.
9. Interview with Dick Henzel in Klamath Falls, 30 January 1990.
10. Liskey interview; *Herald and News*, 11 July 1991.
11. Interview with Jess and John Prosser near Newell, Calif., 10 June 2001.
12. Frances Johnson, "The Johnsons—1946 Homesteaders," in *The Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society*, No. 18, 1996, pp. 118-123.
13. Prosser interview.
14. Eleanor Bolesta, "A Woman Wins," in *The Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society*, No. 18, 1996, pp. 87-94; telephone interview with Eleanor Bolesta on 20 July 2001.
15. Interview with Cindy Wright, director of the Tulelake-Butte Valley Fair Museum, in Tulelake, Calif., 12 June 2001.
16. Prosser interview.
17. *Herald and News*, 7 May 2001.





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Sweet Violets

by Donn L. Todt and Nan Hannon

FEBRUARY IN THE ROGUE

Valley teeters on the edge of spring. The weather seesaws between wet Pacific storms and the early preludes to spring warmth. Off the back porches of older homes throughout the valley, rainwater seeps through rooftop mosses and drips onto decaying leaves lodged in porch-side shrubs. Between storms the sun warms the emergent green shoots of bulbs and lights up the tidy green scallop-shaped foliage of sweet violets. The violets (*Viola odorata*) already show a sprinkle of flowers that may be white or pink but usually display their namesake color. By Valentine's Day, if warmth holds, the delicate sweet scent of violets perfumes dooryard gardens throughout the Rogue Valley.

Though the scent is delicate, the plant itself is less so, having pioneered its way into many of our domestic landscapes and parks, expanding its range into the environments it prefers: summer-shaded nooks with plenty of spring moisture. Sweet violets, like most of us, are from elsewhere, native to such far-flung places as Europe, Africa, Eurasia, and the Himalayas. Though the plants are sometimes intentionally planted or transplanted, often they just appear on their own. If we create a shady environment, they will come. If we build houses and plant trees and shrubs, they eventually create shady areas that serve as violet habitat. If the once-sunny lawn thins in the shade, soon we are mowing violets. Many arrive as stowaways on nursery stock or with transplants from neighboring gardens. In older neighborhoods violets are as common as housecats.

Sweet violets have many of the qualities we associate with weeds. They originate in

the Old World, have a high reproductive rate, have multiple methods of regeneration and have pronounced colonizing abilities. However, with their low stature, tidy foliage, and fragrant flowers, they hardly seem bothersome enough to be called weeds. Yet one measure of a weed is an ability to adapt to and persist in human-altered environments. Violets camping just off the porch have made a close accommodation. They are "domestic" not in the sense of being bred, but by way of their association with our homes. Sweet violets are a part of our companionable household flora and active participants in the ecology of the expanding communities in which we live and garden, and have been since pioneer days in Southern Oregon.

Violet flowers and leaves are edible. Today cooks use them for color and interest in salads, or candy them for confections and cake decorations. But in pioneer times, women gathered the abundant violet leaves in late winter for teas and tonics. Violet flowers and leaves contain large amounts of vitamin C and vitamin A, and after a winter without fresh fruits and vegetables, pioneer families especially needed vitamin C, which the human body doesn't store. Over more than 2,000 years, herbalists have found many other uses for violets.

During the Middle Ages, Europeans believed that violets could inspire passion. Shakespeare frequently mentioned violets in his plays. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they are used as a love potion, and in *Hamlet*, violets are strongly associated

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
A Midsummer Night's Dream



with fair Ophelia. Because violets bloom in time for Valentine's Day, they are often gathered in nosegays to give to friends and sweethearts. Their slightly drooping, delicate flowers became symbols of shy love, modesty, and fidelity in the Victorian "language of flowers," in which a bouquet could speak volumes. Sweet violets make sweet gifts to loved ones on February 14. 🌸

Ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt and anthropologist Nan Hannon garden in Ashland.



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