

SOUTHERN OREGON

HERITAGE

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Today



COPS AND ROBBERS

*Stories of Crime and Punishment
in Southern Oregon*

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear SOHS members and friends:

We are very pleased to present our fall issue of *Southern Oregon Heritage Today*. It features a fascinating and fact-filled look at the history of crime in the region, some of those who perpetrated those crimes, and some of those who brought the



criminals to justice. One thing the stories tell us is how little changes over time. Crime may change, and become more sophisticated, but at its very heart there is little difference between theft in the 1900s and theft today, or murder, or assault, or white-collar crimes. There is something morbidly reassuring about that fact. We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

In our next quarterly publication, due out on January 1, 2007, we'll dedicate the entire issue to SOHS's amazing and extensive collection of artifacts and documents. They range in size from a flea to a fire engine, and include hundreds of thousands of other three-dimensional artifacts and two-dimensional documents and photographs. The January issue of *SOHT* truly will be a collector's edition.

Speaking of our collection, as most of you know many of the historic buildings that SOHS manages and operates are in fact public buildings, under Jackson County ownership. Those include our two museums in Jacksonville, the U.S. Hotel, the Beekman House and Beekman Bank, and the Catholic Rectory. The fate of those buildings is in question as Jackson County moves to further reduce its expected budget deficit for 2007 and coming years. That's why it's important right now for SOHS members and others in the community to speak out for these buildings. They must remain in public ownership and accessible to the public. If you are concerned about the fate of our historic buildings, I urge you to contact the Jackson County commissioners to express those concerns. We are beginning discussions in coming months about the future level of support the county will provide to main-preserve the historic buildings, and it is important the commissioners know how you feel about this important issue.

Contact the commissioners at:

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The railroad car dynamited by the De Autrement brothers during their infamous Tunnel 13 train robbery, 1923. See the related article on page 11. SOHS Photo #6791

CONTENTS

SOHS Today 4

Exhibits 5

From the Collection:

Tools of the Trade 6

Then and Now 7

Features:

Murder on I-5 8

Of Vice and Men 11

Honoring the Fallen 13

White Collar Crime 15

Machine Gun Kelly 16

The Last Hanging in Jacksonville 19

Members / Donors 20

Sponsors 21

Member Profile:

Carl Brophy 22

ON THE COVER:

In November of 1884, Ashland, Oregon police arrested Lewis O'Neil for the murder of Lewis McDaniel. A rumored affair between O'Neil and McDaniel's wife apparently led to the confrontation that resulted in McDaniel's death by gunshot. O'Neil spent more than eleven months in the Jackson County jail. On March 9, 1886, he was hanged on these gallows built for the occasion, located between the jail and the Jackson County Courthouse in Jacksonville. This photo was taken prior to the hanging. Read more on page 19. SOHS photo # 2422



Peter Britt photo of Native American woman known as "Old Jennie," ca. 1893.



New Native American Exhibit

A NEW NATIVE AMERICAN EXHIBIT will be installed on the first floor of the Jacksonville Museum. When open this winter, it will feature a number of artifacts from the SOHS collection as well as provide program space for our Native American cultural interpreter Tom Smith. We will announce details of the opening in our monthly membership postcard and online at www.sohs.org.

Holidays at Hanley

Saturday, Dec. 17, 10 am - 3 pm

OUR POPULAR "OLD-FASHIONED holiday celebration" is back! The Hanley Farmhouse will be decorated and open for tours with costumed interpreters sharing traditional holiday customs from the 1860s through the 1960s. In addition, there will be wagon rides, miniature horses, and festive live entertainment. Local artisan food vendors will offer free product samples and items for sale for "last-minute" holiday shopping. Hot refreshments, cornbread, and roasted chestnuts will also be available.



Beekman House Victorian Christmas

ON TWO CONSECUTIVE WEEKENDS, Saturday and Sunday, December 2 and 3, and December 9 and 10, from 12:00 noon - 4:00 pm, the Beekman House will be decorated and open for tours with costumed interpreters. Holiday cookies will also be served.

January Closing

THE JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM and Children's Museum, and the Medford Research Library will be closed in January for our annual maintenance and cleaning. The museums will re-open on Thursday, February 1 at 10:00 am, the library at 1:00 pm. SOHS administrative offices will remain open during our usual business hours, Monday through Friday, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, throughout the month.

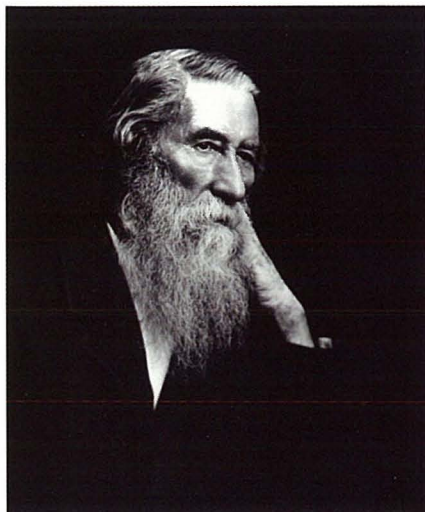


Meet the Hanley Farm Manager

KYLE RIGGS is the Historical Society's new Hanley Farm Manager. Originally from Oklahoma, Kyle was raised in California and spent summers on his grandparents' farm in West Virginia, where he learned about tractors climbing on his grandpa's Farmall Model H, explored the Civil War era barn, sifted through the treasures in the attic of an 1814 log cabin, and rode horses. "Being connected with that old farm and that part of the country gave me an interest and appreciation of history which the suburb I grew up in could not," he says. Kyle has a degree in Biology and Environmental Studies from Sonoma State and most recently was at Mendocino College in Ukiah, California, where he served as the greenhouse manager, maintaining the demonstration gardens, instructing students, and overseeing the nursery's successful plant sales. Kyle and his wife Nancy live in Talent with their two sons, John-John, 6, and Jasper, 1-1/2.

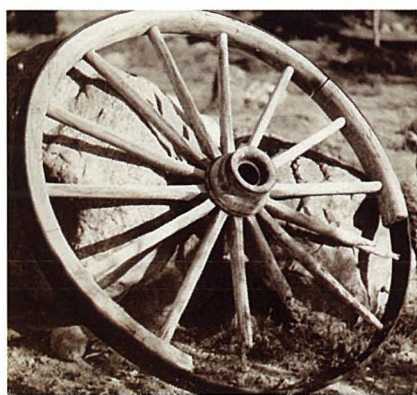
Exhibits

NOW AT THE JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM



Peter Britt: The Man Beyond the Camera

COME EXPERIENCE our most innovative exhibit to date, featuring nearly 400 artifacts and images from the Society's extensive Peter Britt collection, many of which are on public display for the first time. See the many interesting facets of Peter Britt's life in a contemporary, entertaining format with items ranging from Britt's personal diaries, which date from 1859 through 1905, to some of his earliest oil paintings, photographic gear, and the 1872 Steinway square grand piano he bought for his daughter Mollie.



Toward the Setting Sun: Traveling the Oregon Trail

OUR NEWEST EXHIBIT is filled with artifacts such as pioneer diaries, clothing, tools, and furniture, as well as photos, interactive components, and a documentary entitled "A South Road to Oregon: The History of the Applegate Trail," produced by Southern Oregon Public Television. Don't miss it!



Jackson County Milestones

THEY CAME TO JACKSON COUNTY looking for treasure, and carrying some with them. In this fascinating exhibit, you'll discover how immigrants to this area changed it forever and see many of the artifacts that they brought with them. You'll also get to know the farmers, miners, loggers, merchants, and railroad workers who fueled the growth of towns such as Ashland, Phoenix, Jacksonville, and Medford. It truly is "history in the making."



Miner, Baker, Furniture Maker

UPSTAIRS IN THE FORMER courtroom of the Jackson County Courthouse, underneath the soaring 20-foot ceilings, you'll discover an adventure of yesteryear. MBF, as we often call it, is more than just an exhibit—it's a portal waiting to transport you to an earlier time when life was a bit rough around the edges and work called for strong backs and calloused hands. Discover the tools, architecture, agriculture, and fraternal organizations that shaped Southern Oregon.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The SOHS collection contains a large number of artifacts relating to crime, punishment, and the various tools used by law enforcement and lawbreakers. The items on this page were originally part of the collection belonging to the Jacksonville City Museum. Unfortunately, museum records at the time were very limited so important details regarding their origins and histories were missing when the items were donated to SOHS in 1950.

1. **HACKSAW.** Apparently homemade, this crude device was made out of a bent piece of wire, 1/8 inch in diameter, with a blade set attached by a wing nut. While there is no way to verify the claim, records read: "Claimed that a prisoner sawed his way out of the...jail with this improvised saw." SOHS Accession #297



1.

2. **ROPE.** Claimed to be from the main rope that was used in the hanging of Captain Jack at Fort Klamath, Oregon, November 11, 1873. Captain Jack was hung for the murder of General Canby of the U.S. Army. SOHS Accession #488



2.

3. **LEG SHACKLE.** Pair of heavy iron leg shackles, hand forged. Each shackle has two holes for pins or rivets and is hinged around the ankle portion. The two ends are connected by a 7 inch iron link. According to the collections records, these shackles were riveted to a prisoner's ankles by a Jacksonville blacksmith and removed when the prisoner entered the state penitentiary. SOHS Accession #498



3.

4. **HANDCUFFS.** Black iron held together by three links of heavy chain. According to the Jacksonville City Museum records, this pair was used on prisoners at the Jacksonville Jail (year unknown). SOHS Accession # 306



4.

Then and Now



Two of the greatest technological advances in law enforcement were in transportation and communications. From Sheriff Jim Birdsey and his trusted steed (ca. 1890) to the two-way radio installed in police cars of the 1950s to the state-of-the-art, computerized, 150-mile-per-hour police interceptors of today, the need to stay one step ahead of the “bad guys” has produced some impressive crime-fighting innovations.

Top:

Jim Birdsey was Jackson County Sheriff from 1888-1891. SOHS Photo #759



Center:

A Medford police officer calling in on his two-way radio, ca. 1950s. SOHS Photo #16072

Bottom:

Chief David Towe of the Jacksonville Police Department utilizing his patrol car's sophisticated computer technology, 2006. SOHT staff photo



MURDER ON I-5

by Lore Rutz-Burri

On a Sunday night, late in September 1993, I was the on-call deputy district attorney in Josephine County, Oregon. Around 10:00 p.m. I got called to join the Sheriff's deputies at the Manzanita Rest Area off of Interstate 5 just north of Grants Pass. A German national, John Wetzel, had been shot.

HIS COMPANIONS, Erwin and Monika Rochholz, had driven him to a nearby home and had summoned help. Mr. Wetzel, however, died shortly thereafter, and the Sheriff's office began its investigation.

The investigation was complicated by a language barrier—Erwin Rochholz spoke no English, Monika spoke very little. Because my role in the case was as a “legal advisor” not an investigator, I tried to keep out of everyone's way. However, I speak some German (having lived in Austria for eighteen months and being married to

a Swiss man), so I listened intently to ascertain if the two were making any incriminating responses to one another in German.

A German teacher was later called to the station to assist with the investigation by translating the Rochholz's initial statements. These revealed that John Wetzel was Monika's boyfriend and that the two had met at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility in Germany. Thereafter, Monika and Erwin were divorced, and John and Monika came to the United

States together. Later, Monika encouraged her ex-husband to join John and her in the United States. Originally, they lived in the Northeast where John had family ties, but soon all three moved to

approached, shot John, and then fled. The crime scene investigation did not support her story, and soon detectives speculated that Erwin had shot John Wetzel because of his jealousy over Monika and John's relationship.

Although their travel arrangements seemed a bit suspicious, they had been traveling together for at least a month, so, we wondered, why did Erwin wait until the rest area? Wouldn't Bear Camp Road have made a better place to kill and thereby avoid

detection? Further

investigation revealed that Monika was the one with knowledge of weapons and was a registered owner of a small handgun. Perhaps she had gotten into a quarrel with John and shot him?

Neither Rochholz was saying much, and due to the language barrier it was somewhat difficult to seriously interrogate them. Because they had overstayed their visas, Erwin and Monika were in violation of immigration law, and the Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) placed a “hold” on



Interstate 5 north of Grants Pass, Oregon.

Florida. They spent about six months there, operating (and perhaps owning) a carwash. The business began to fail and money dwindled, so they packed up and left (with their Old English sheepdog) for Vancouver, B.C.

On the day of the homicide they had traveled in their conversion van from the Oregon coast over Bear Camp Road, landing—much later than anticipated and with frazzled nerves—on Interstate 5. They stopped at the Manzanita Rest Area. According to Monika, a stranger

“The FBI investigator’s interrogation revealed that John Wetzel had been drinking heavily that day, and had become antagonistic and increasingly aggressive to Erwin. At the rest area John came after Erwin with the handgun. They struggled, the gun went off, and the bullet struck John.”

them. This hold allowed investigators more time to determine whether Erwin and Monika were themselves somehow involved with the shooting. We soon located an FBI agent fluent in German who was able to come to Grants Pass and interrogate them.

Meanwhile, the investigation continued locally



The Manzanita Rest Area

and under much scrutiny. Although homicides are occasionally committed in Josephine County, they rarely receive international or even national attention. This case, however, was different. Because it involved German citizens with connections to Florida, the media perhaps assumed some tie to several recent and highly publicized cases in which German nationals had been killed while vacationing in Florida (apparently, Florida license plates denoted rental cars, and international visitors in rental cars had been selected as vulnerable prey). For several days after the shooting, then District Attorney Tim Thompson handled calls from international media (particularly German newspapers and magazines), national media, and, of course, the local media. This case may have been the most widely publicized homicide in Josephine County history.

The FBI investigator’s interrogation revealed that John Wetzel had been drink-

ing heavily that day, and had become antagonistic and increasingly aggressive to Erwin. At the rest area John came after Erwin with the handgun. They struggled, the gun went off, and the bullet struck John. The District Attorney’s Office did not file charges based upon the justification of self-defense, but INS still proceeded with deportation. The Rochholzes were transferred to Clark County Jail until they waived hearings and were flown from Portland back to Germany. My recollection is that Rochholz was released to the custody of his family while the case was investigated in Germany and that German officials also decided not to prosecute.

My connection to the case continued long after Erwin and Monika left the county. I met with Erwin Rochholz while he was housed at the Clark County Jail. Also, once the investigation was finished, and upon Erwin Rochholz’s request and expense, Sheriff’s Detective

“Dutch” Whitehead and I retrieved personal belongings from the van and mailed most to Germany. Animal Control gave me custody of “Wueschel” the sheepdog. I kept him for about four months until Erwin’s family sent the \$800 needed for his “ticket” to Germany. (My husband and I sadly drove him down to San Francisco to see him on the plane!)

Finally, over the next twelve years I routinely passed the blood-soaked van that had been impounded that September night in the Sheriff’s impound lot. It was recently demolished, understandably never having been claimed by Wetzel’s parents — the registered owners.

DR. LORE RUTZ-BURRI, JD, is the former Deputy District Attorney for Josephine County and an experienced criminal trial lawyer. She is currently an Associate Professor of Criminology at Southern Oregon University.





OF VICE AND MEN

The Evolution of Crime and Policing in Southern Oregon

by Mike Moran, Medford Police Lieutenant (Retired)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mike Moran served on the Medford Police Department from 1976-2006. During that time, he was the department's unofficial historian. This afforded him the opportunity to learn many interesting things about the evolution of crime and crime fighting in Southern Oregon. In this article, he briefly examines the growth of policing in Southern Oregon, the growth of the Medford Police Department, the changing nature of the crimes committed over the last 100 years, and a brief overview of some high-profile murder cases in Jackson County.

Crime in the Past

Crime has always been with us and has evolved and changed right along with other aspects of our society. We often hear crime statistics reported that give us an impression of how bad or good the quality of life may be within a community. Mark Twain put crime statistics in proper perspective when he quoted Benjamin Disraeli in his autobiography: "There are three kinds of lies: Lies, damn lies and statistics."

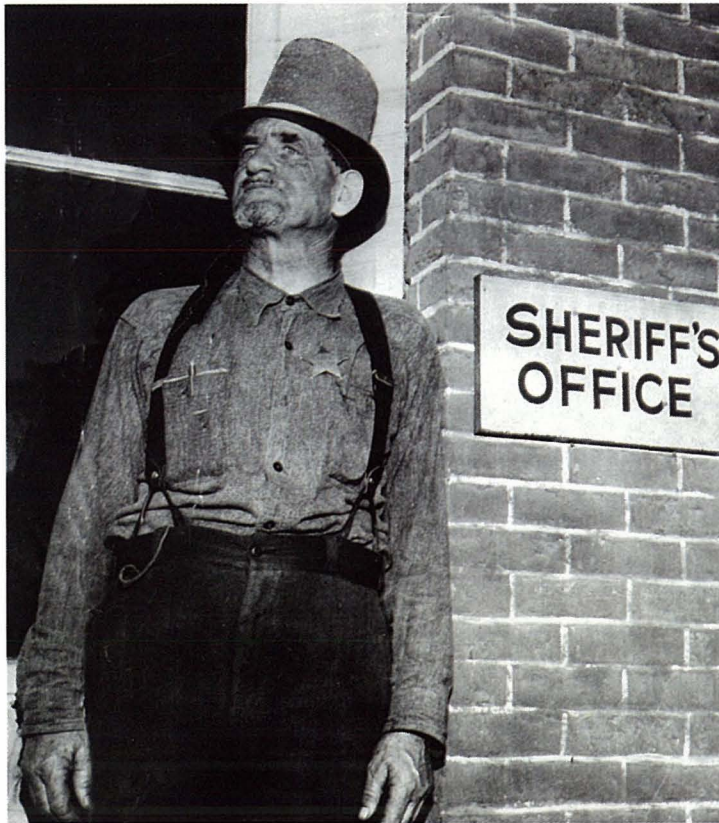
Our country did not begin gathering nationwide crime statistics until 1935. That year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began asking local jurisdictions to report their crimes to the Bureau in a standardized format that is used to publish the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report. Today, current information about every county and most cities in the country is readily accessible on the Internet.

In looking for crime statistics from the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, a general feel for things is best gained from reading local newspapers from the time. From these we learn that crime in the past was much like crime today. The majority of cases involve crimes against persons, such as assault, and property crimes such as theft. There are always new wrinkles that develop over the years but essentially crime is consistent and predictable in that it will occur because human nature doesn't change.

Chief J. Clateous McCredie (center, with hand on rail) and members of the Medford Police Department, ca. 1950.

“The Jackson County Sheriff’s office was formed along with the county itself in the 1850s. The office of Sheriff is actually mandated in the Oregon Constitution. The office of Sheriff was the first local civilian law enforcement official in this area.”

The Medford Police Department’s earliest archives are microfilm police logs from the 1920s. The logs, known as “Trouble Sheets,” were handwritten chronologies of police events from the mundane to the most serious crimes. Each individual “Trouble Report” usually had one to four entries and even something as serious as a death investigation was often reduced to a single sentence. Written in basic and direct verbiage, the Trouble Sheets seem quaint and give an impression that not a lot was going on in Medford. The following are several examples:



*Sheriff Isaac Coffman in front of the Jacksonville City Hall, ca. 1940s.
SOHS Photo #16070*

January 28, 1933: “...(suspect) picked up prowling in Medford Building has mother on Coleman Creek. Brother in law...on N. Front. Nothing missing this morning so turned him loose. Claimed he was looking for warm place to sleep.”

March 8, 1933: “Be sure and see about dog at end of Beatty Street. Complaint about cow...on W. 11th tied two (sic) a tree bawls all the time.”

March 11, 1933 Medford Police Daily Trouble Report: “Be sure and get Earl Binn’s milk lic(ense) to him”

March 15, 1933: “Bungalow Store 409 North Riverside was entered through side door, 15 lbs of butter, 3 or 4 lbs of bacon, \$25 fishing tackle, \$20 worth of watches, ½ dozen pipes, small safe.

August 1, 1934: “... Robert, 1019 W. Main, reports that a dog belonging to William, 1600 N. Riverside, bit him on the arm yesterday afternoon.”

August 5, 1934: “... Somebody took the fire extinguishers down at the N-side Apts. and squirted it all over the hall...Clyde S., Grants Pass, had stolen last night four wheels & tires off Model A Ford.”

A more complete overview of crime in the past is provided by a crime chart from a report on the Medford Police Department issued in 1951.

According to the report, in 1945 there were 194 Major Crimes committed in Medford. Major Crimes included Homicide, Negligent Manslaughter, Rape, Robbery, Burglary, Aggravated Assault, Theft, and Auto Theft. There were no reported crimes at all in the first three of those categories; the largest category was Theft with 115 cases.

By 1950, total Major Crimes in Medford had nearly tripled to 326 with similar high Theft numbers. From 1945 through 1950 there were three murders and twelve robberies, with burglaries averaging around five per month.

Today, the additional crime of Arson is counted in the Major Crime Index. Deducting Arson numbers, the 2004 Uniform Crime Report for Medford was 4,321 cases. Of course it serves to remember that Medford’s population in 1950 was 18,000 compared to today’s nearly 70,000.

Growth of Policing

Fortunately, law enforcement has improved and evolved to meet the increasing challenges of fighting crime. Today in Jackson County there are several Federal agencies present including the FBI, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the

continued on page 14

HONORING THE FALLEN

Jackson County Memorials to Slain Law Enforcement Officers

by Craig Stillwell

SEVERAL SITES IN JACKSON County memorialize the law enforcement officers who have lost their lives while on the job.

In the August D. Singler Memorial Justice Plaza, next to the County Jail in Medford, a granite monument honors the first Jackson County lawman to fall in the line of duty.

A respected Medford constable since 1909, thirty-six-year-old August Singler was elected county sheriff in the fall of 1912.¹ An enterprising sleuth, Singler was the first Southern Oregon law officer to use bloodhounds and fingerprinting in his work.² He had been in office only four months when, on the evening of April 22, 1913, he approached a hillside cabin a mile southwest of Jacksonville with an arrest warrant for nineteen-year-old Lester Jones, a fugitive wanted for burglary. While a deputy waited at the foot of the hill, Singler—revolver drawn—went up the steps of the cabin. From inside, Jones fired three shots, and even though one bullet pierced both Singler's lungs, he was able to fire all six rounds in return, killing Jones.³

Singler was rushed to Medford's Sacred Heart Hospital, where he died the next morning, leaving behind a wife and eight children.⁴ On the day of his funeral, flags were lowered to half-mast and all Medford businesses closed. Twenty years later, another highly respected law officer, sixty-three-year-old Constable George J. Prescott, was shot dead on a Medford front porch as he tried to serve an arrest warrant.⁵

In the early years of the Depression,

Lewellyn A. Banks, a failed orchardist and newspaper owner, and real estate speculator Earl H. Fehl spearheaded a movement of small orchardists and rural residents that railed against the county's more affluent and powerful political and business leaders, whom they called the "Gang."⁶

In the bitter election of 1932, Fehl was elected County Judge (the equivalent of today's Commissioner), and Gordon Schermerhorn, a Banks/Fehl supporter, narrowly defeated incum-



Constable George J. Prescott, 1933. SOHS Photo #9154

bent Ralph Jennings for sheriff. In January 1933, the county's growing anti-insurgent faction was able to get a ballot recount of the sheriff race. In response, Banks and Fehl organized the "Good Government Congress" and then orchestrated the February theft of the contested ballots from the unfinished vault of Medford's newly built County Courthouse. Stolen ballot bags were later found in the Rogue River and the courthouse furnace.⁷

Banks was implicated in the ballot theft, and on the morning of March 16, 1933, Constable Prescott knocked on the door of his West Main Street house. Banks' wife opened the door and Banks shot Prescott in the chest with a deer rifle, killing the officer instantly.⁸ Banks was sent to prison where he later died.

In the mid-to-late-1930s, a 1,740-

acre park on Roxy Ann Peak was built by men of the Civilian Conservation Corps and named in memory of George Prescott.⁹

Another Medford park named for a fallen law enforcement officer is Fichtner-Mainwaring Park, south of Stewart Avenue. Ken Mainwaring was a thirty-one-year-old Medford crime prevention officer who drowned in June 1974 while taking a group of youths on an overnight hike down the Lower Rogue River.¹⁰

A bronze plaque in the Singler Memorial Plaza bears the name of three other officers who lost their lives while on duty: Charles Basye, a jailer who was bludgeoned to death in 1917 by an inmate escaping from the Jacksonville jail¹¹; and Samuel Prescott and Victor Knott, two Ashland policeman, who were shot and killed in separate incidents in 1931.¹²

CRAIG STILLWELL has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Notre Dame and is currently an instructor in the Colloquium Program at Southern Oregon University.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Sheriff Singler Died as a Hero." *Mail Tribune*. February 28, 1985, p. 15.
- 2 "Party I Am Working For." (Document in "Singler" vertical file at the SOHS).
- 3 "Sheriff Singler and Young Bandit Both Slain in Duel with Revolvers." *Mail Tribune*. April 23, 1913; Campbell, Mary Ann. "Shootout." *Mail Tribune*. February 18, 1979, p. 6A.
- 4 Hill, Tom, "Honor Sought to Slain Sheriff." *Mail Tribune*. December 25, 1992, p. 3A.
- 5 "Banks Slays G. Prescott When Arrest Attempted." *Mail Tribune*. March 16, 1933.
- 6 LaLande, Jeff. "Jackson County in Rebellion: The Turbulent 1930s." In *Land in Common*. Southern Oregon Historical Society, 1993, pp. 83-101.
- 7 & 8 *Ibid*.
- 9 LaLande, Jeff. "A Historical Overview of Roxy Ann Peak and Prescott Park." (Report Prepared for City of Medford, Department of Parks & Recreation), 1983.
- 10 Hutchinson, Peggy Ann. "Medford Police Officer Missing in Rogue River." *Mail Tribune*. June 14, 1974.
- 11 "Prisoners Break Jail and Escape." *Mail Tribune*. June 12, 1917.
- 12 The Officer Down Memorial Page, Inc. <http://www.odmp.org>

Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The Oregon State Police, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2006, has been providing invaluable assistance to the public and other police agencies since its inception.

The Jackson County Sheriff's office was formed along with the county itself in the 1850s. The office of Sheriff is actually mandated in the Oregon Constitution. The office of Sheriff was the first local civilian law enforcement official in this area.

Over the years, as towns formed local governments, police services were provided through the office of Town Marshal in most communities. Today, there are ten municipal police departments in Jackson County providing law enforcement services to their cities.

Medford was one of the municipal latecomers to the valley, forming a town government in 1885. In March of that year, J. H. Redfield was appointed the first Town Marshal. Marshal Redfield was paid \$500 per year and later that year the Town Council voted to purchase him a Marshal's star for \$2.50.

In June 1885, Isaac Woolf was appointed a "special policeman" to assist the Marshal. He also was given \$500 per year. Modern police agencies struggle to ensure that supervisors receive compensation higher than those they supervise. The issue is known as "compaction," and it apparently existed in the early days of the Medford Police Department.

In addition to the "special policeman" or night watchman, a pool of part-time

helpers could be called upon to assist the Marshal by patrolling the town during the nighttime hours. They were paid at a rate of \$3 per night.

The Marshal's position was an elected

of ten in the first twenty-two years. However, there have only been eighteen police chiefs in the history of the department, suggesting that stability of leadership is more prevalent in recent years than in the department's early days.

Chief J. Clateous McCredie presided over the longest tenure (1927 to 1953) and during a time of great changes in Medford. He was assisted by one of the better-known officers of the department, Joe Cave. Cave worked his way from patrolman to Assistant Chief during his years with the Police Department. He retired in 1949. MPD has actually only had two men who held the title

Assistant Chief. Cave was the first and the other was George Lucas who retired in 1981 as Assistant chief.

The department grew slowly in the early years. Until 1911 only the Chief and night watchman were full time. Two officers were added that year and the three men and the Chief handled all the policing duties until 1921. Prohibition and the growth of the city demanded adding more officers. There were a total of nine in 1935. That number remained constant until 1942 when Camp White opened in the Agate Desert, where White City is today.

The U.S. Army base brought an estimated 40,000 soldiers to the area. When they visited town it increased the need for police services. The police



Medford Police, ca. 1900. SOHS Photo #5246

one, but there were several appointed Marshal's due to resignations. Medford grew rapidly from 1885 to the beginning of the 20th century and town leaders changed the city government and police department to keep pace with that growth. On January 1, 1901 the Town became the City of Medford and Marshal Charles G. Johnson became Medford's first Chief of Police.

It was a mixed blessing for Marshal Johnson for the newly appointed Chief Johnson had to take a one dollar cut in pay from \$46 to \$45 per month. However, he did get a new badge that said Chief of Police. It cost the City \$2.65.

During the early years of the department there were many chiefs—a total

continued on page 16

WHITE COLLAR CRIME:

The Collapse of the Bank of Jacksonville

by Margaret LaPlante

IN MANY OLD MOVIES "The Roaring 20s" were symbolized by the prototypical Chicago mobster: tough guy with a cigar in one hand and a Tommy gun in the other. When he and his gang robbed a bank, they did it in style: bursting through the front doors, guns drawn, yelling "Get 'em up, this is a holdup," then leaping into the getaway car and leaving behind a couple of dead bodies and the smell of burning rubber.

But you never see too many old movies about white-collar crime of that era. Perhaps it was too subtle, too boring. But in the summer of 1920, just such a crime took place in the little town of Jacksonville, Oregon that had all the makings of a classic film noir. For on August 11 of that year, the state bank examiner locked the doors of the Bank of Jacksonville and arrested its president and vice president.

W.H. Johnson, President/Cashier of the Bank of Jacksonville, was indicted on 30 counts, including misstatement of the bank's condition, receiving monies in a known insolvent banking institution, false certification of checks, and making false statements to a bank examiner. R.D. Hines, Vice President, was indicted on seven counts and charged with the same crimes.

The citizens of Jacksonville were shocked to learn of the accusations against the men. Johnson and Hines were half-brothers and highly regarded members of the community who were active in church circles. Panic spread throughout the town for in those days, monies in the bank were not insured as they are today.

Johnson and Hines initially pled innocent but later changed their pleas to guilty. They were sentenced to ten years in the state penitentiary in Salem. The prosecuting attorney, E.E. Kelley, called it "The most colossal bank failure in the history of banking."¹

Soon, dozens of prominent citizens were arrested and charged with "aiding and abetting a bank cashier to defraud a bank."

One such person was C.H. Owen. Johnson was the star witness in the case, admitting under oath to using the bank

monies as his own to invest in real estate with Owen. At the time of the bank closure, Owen's personal bank account was overdrawn by \$60,000. Mr. Johnson admitted that he falsified the records for Owen's bank account to defraud the bank examiner. Owen was convicted and sent to the state

penitentiary.

A similar situation existed with Chester Kubli, son of a prominent pioneer family. Johnson testified that he had falsified the bank records on behalf of Kubli after using \$16,000 of the bank's money to help Kubli finance a cattle business. As of August 1920, Kubli's bank account was overdrawn by \$42,000. Kubli was also convicted and sent to the state penitentiary.

One of the largest depositors in the Bank of Jacksonville was Jackson County itself, which lost \$107,000 in the scheme. Jackson County Treasurer Myrtle Blakely was arrested and charged with "aiding and abetting a bank cashier to make a false entry in a bankbook" and "malfeasance of office." Blakely's first trial resulted in a hung jury. The outcome was the same for her second and final trial.

Finally in 1930, the state bank examiner completed the investigation and was able to liquidate the bank's assets as of the date of closure. Many of the banks' customers lost their entire life savings. After waiting ten years, most received a mere seventeen cents on the dollar.

Maybelle Offenbacher recalled that she and her husband had \$800 in the bank that August. The day before the bank closed, her husband had sold a wagonload of grain for \$30. He stopped at the bank to deposit the money, but his wagon team was acting up and the bank was busy, so he headed home figuring he would deposit the money the following day. After the bank closed that \$30 was all they had to their names.

¹ *Medford Mail Tribune*, 5-24, 1921 p. 1

Oral history of Maybelle Offenbacher, March 6, 1980 by Marjorie Edens. Tape #141, Southern Oregon Historical Society.



The Bank of Jacksonville, ca. 1915. SOHS Photo #10270

The Medford Connection: “Machine Gun” Kelly and the House on Peach Street

by Margaret LaPlante

THE KIDNAPPING OF THE INFANT SON of Charles Lindbergh and his wife Anne was still on the minds of many Americans when they picked up their newspapers July 23, 1933 to read that Charles Urschel, one of the country’s wealthiest oilmen, had been kidnapped from his home in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Two men stormed Urschel’s home and took him at gunpoint to a house out in the woods. The kidnappers demanded \$200,000 in unmarked bills. The FBI noted the serial numbers on the bills before handing the money over to a friend of Urschel’s who had been selected to do the handoff. Upon receipt of the money, the kidnappers released Urschel nine days after his ordeal had begun.

The FBI headquarters had received tips that one of the nation’s most notorious criminals, George “Machine Gun” Kelly, was involved. Kelly was no stranger to the law; he had earned quite a reputation for bootlegging and robbing banks. It was thought that Kelly and Harvey Bailey were probably the ones responsible. Bailey had just escaped from the state prison at Lansing, Kansas, and was thought to be on the run with Kelly.



The FBI found Bailey a short time later in Tennessee and arrested him. Tips had come in to the FBI headquarters that Kelly was hiding out in a house in Memphis. The FBI stormed the house and arrested Kelly and his wife Kathryn.

Nearly 17 months later, on November 7, 1934, Alvin H. Scott was seriously injured in an automobile accident in Roseburg, Oregon. When he was admitted to the hospital, it was discovered he had two wallets filled with Urschel’s ransom money totaling \$1,360. Upon further investigation, the FBI discovered that Scott and his girlfriend, Margaret Hurtienne, and her five children had rented a house on Peach Street in Medford. Scott was related to one of the accomplices in the Urschel kidnapping.

The FBI descended on the house on Peach Street. At first glance, everything appeared normal. Then one FBI agent noticed a white piece of paper in a rafter in an outbuilding. The other agents began digging directly below the piece of paper and discovered a fruit jar filled with Urschel’s ransom money buried in the ground. They continued digging throughout the yard and by the time they were done had discovered \$6,140—all buried in fruit jars.

The FBI took another look at the house Scott and Hurtienne had rented on Peach Street and noticed it had recently been painted and a room had been added to the rear of the house. The addition had a special ventilation system and an electric heater. The FBI noticed the walls were stuffed with newspapers so one FBI agent stood inside and screamed for help to see if the agents outside could hear him. None could. The FBI speculated that this secret room was intended for another kidnap victim, possibly a wealthy person living in California or Oregon.

Scott and Hurtienne each received five years for their part in the Urschel kidnapping. Their sentences were suspended and they were placed on parole. In all, twenty-one people were convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the Urschel kidnapping. Both “Machine Gun” Kelly and Bailey were sent to Alcatraz.

force was increased to eleven that year, but those numbers were augmented by Military Police (MPs). City police were each accompanied on their rounds by two MPs. MPs were able to take action against miscreant soldiers more quickly and effectively than the police offices. The police department later hired one of the MPs, Roy Erickson, after the war.

Officer Erickson had many stories of the booming Front Street area. After the war and continuing into the 1960s, rowdy nightspots stretched from 4th Street to 10th Street. Erickson and fellow officer Bob James were both hired in 1947 and made Front Street their long-time foot beat. The first thing that began to slow the rambunctious Front Street was the loss of passenger rail service from Medford in 1955. Today, Front Street has a growing number of restaurants and is enjoying the benefits of downtown renovation.

By 1960, the full strength of the police department was thirty-seven sworn officers, from Chief Charles Champlin to the newest patrol officers.

Serious crime in Medford took a major spike after 1968. Up to that year, serious crimes were essentially constant with prior year numbers and Medford continued to enjoy (and still does today) a relatively low annual murder rate. However, starting in 1969 and increasing through 1972, the total number of Index Crimes increased about 93%.

Burglaries, thefts, and auto thefts were the main areas showing an increase. The number of robberies also grew, more than doubling from less than one per month to two per month. The results of a survey of the Medford Police Department conducted in 1973 led to recommendations for several changes in the structure of the department to enhance its crime-fighting ability. By the end of 1973, the department had increased to a total of forty-six sworn officers.

A heinous murder of a young Medford girl in 1976 led a shocked city council

to authorize an immediate increase of ten patrol officers in 1977 (see details below). In the mid-1990s, instances of “big city” crime started to surface with increased gang activity. The new growth in crime activity led to a tax levy passed by voters that would increase the size of the department. Today there are ninety-five sworn officers serving the City of Medford.

High Profile Crimes

Looking back, many might think that there were no high profile crimes in Jackson County in the past. That, sadly, is not true. The most famous was what

has been called the “Last Great Train Robbery.” That well-chronicled crime occurred in Tunnel 13 on the Southern Pacific Line south of Ashland on October 11, 1923. Four men died in the botched robbery committed by the De Autremont brothers.

There are many crimes that outrage or disturb a community. Few strike at the heart of a community more than the murder of a police officer. In Jackson County’s history there have been five such cases. During just a twenty-year span from 1913 to 1933, four local law enforcement officers were murdered in the line of duty: Jackson County Sheriff August Singler (1913); Ashland Police Officer Sam Prescott (1931); Ashland Police Officer Victor Knott (1931); Medford Police Constable George Prescott (1933); and Oregon State Police Officer Phillip Lowd (1952). (See related article on page 13.)

Murder is a crime that often defines the livability of a community. One for-

tunate statistic over Medford’s history is the low number of homicides that have occurred in the city when compared with the national homicide rate.



Officer Roy Erickson on duty in downtown Medford, ca. 1950. SOHS Photo #16982

From 1945 through 1950 there were three murders in the City of Medford. From 1969 through 1972 there were six, and in two of those years there were none.

A low murder rate is still the norm for Medford, and from 2000 through 2002, and in 2004, there were no homicides. In 2003 there were four, considered high by Medford standards, and just one in 2005.

The fact that overall homicide numbers have been low, however, does not mean that some of the homicides did not garner notoriety. There have been three homicide cases in the past thirty-seven years that brought national and international attention to Medford as the investigations unfolded.

1969

On February 3, 1969, Medford Police responded to the 2500 block of Gould Ave. in North Medford on a reported homicide. Laverna May Lowe, mother of five was killed by a man who

had been allowed to stay with her the night prior because he was a friend of a friend and had no place to stay. Russell Loren Obremski had been in

town working and ran out of money. Obremski killed Mrs. Lowe sometime after her husband and children had left for work and school.

Later that afternoon, a woman who had been waiting outside the West Main Pharmacy for her children was reported missing. The woman, Betty Ann Ritchie, had sent her sons into the store and when they exited

the store she and her car were gone. Jackson County Sheriff’s Deputies found a truck belonging to Obremski in the parking lot and contacted the Medford PD to coordinate their investigations. Later that night Mrs. Ritchie was found murdered near Copper in the Applegate Valley.

These murders created a great deal of fear across the valley. The tragic circumstances were more frightening knowing the suspect was still at large. The suspect was arrested on February 4, 1969 near Capitola, California.

Obremski tried to evade an officer who spotted him driving the car he’d stolen from Betty Ann Ritchie. The officer forced him to the side of the road and arrested him at gunpoint. He still had a loaded weapon in the car.

Eventually, Obremski was sentenced to life in prison. However, this case became noteworthy again in 1994 when Obremski was paroled. CBS News sent Dan Rather to Medford to do a story for the program “48

“A low murder rate is still the norm for Medford, and from 2000 through 2002, and in 2004, there were no homicides. In 2003 there were four, considered high by Medford standards, and just one in 2005.”

Hours.” Within weeks of the story, Obremski had violated his conditions of parole and was returned to prison.

1976

In October 1976 the City of Medford was shocked by the murder of a six-year-old girl in Bear Creek Park while on an outing with a youth group. Elizabeth Ann Marken had moved to Medford from California with her mother who wanted to escape from life in the “big city.”

Elizabeth had gone to Bear Creek Park with a group from the YMCA after school on a Friday. At some point that afternoon she was found missing. Meanwhile, a bicyclist on the bike path found her in a small pond where a suspect had left her after sexually assaulting and murdering her.

The police department worked on the case virtually non-stop for several days. The Marken’s neighbors rallied to help. One of those neighbors who came to meetings about the murder was eventually identified as the suspect. Robert McBride lived in the Marken’s West Medford neighborhood and was found to have been in Bear Creek Park on the day of the attack.

He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

1995

Perhaps the most infamous crime in the history of Medford occurred in



Medford Police officers destroy an illegal pinball machine, 1966. SOHS Photo

December 1995. This case drew international attention when two Medford business and life partners were murdered. Both Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill were activists for gay and lesbian rights. When they first went missing on December 4, 1995 there was a palpable fear in the valley, and particularly in the gay community, that they were victims of a hate crime. The case immediately became an international concern as the search continued. On December 7, Michelle and Roxanne were found dead in the back of their pickup in another part of town from where they had been kidnapped.

The suspect, Robert James Acremant, was arrested weeks later in California. He also was a suspect in a murder of a friend near Visalia. Acremant originally conceived his plot as a robbery to finance his infatuation with a Las Vegas stripper. Later,

Acremant admitted knowing the couple were lesbians and that it was a factor in his actions. Acremant was sentenced to death for his crimes and is currently on death row awaiting execution.

The Future of Policing

From the installation of computers in police vehicles, to increased cooperation with and communication between local, state, and federal agencies,

policing in the Rogue Valley has become a much more efficient—and complex—profession than it was in the days of Charles G. Johnson, Medford’s first Chief of Police. As new technologies are developed, and as the population grows, crime and law enforcement practices will continue to evolve.

Studying the history of the profession, however, reveals that there are at least two constants: the ever-present danger for those who serve and an unending need for their service.

MIKE MORAN was a Medford police officer for 29 years. He is currently a realtor and a member of the Medford School Board. Mike lives in Medford with his wife Julie and sons Jake and Murphy.

THE LAST HANGING IN JACKSONVILLE

by Margaret LaPlante

ON NOVEMBER 20, 1884, Anson Jacobs was walking towards his house on Church Street in Ashland just before midnight when he saw something in the road. He held his lantern up to get a better view and was shocked to find his neighbor, Lewis McDaniel, near death from a gunshot wound. Jacobs rushed to get help but McDaniel succumbed to his injuries shortly after a doctor arrived.

The townsfolk had been gossiping about Lewis' wife, Mandy McDaniel, and a man by the name of Lewis O'Neil. They claimed that Lewis McDaniel had warned O'Neil to stay away from his house and his family.

The police found O'Neil and arrested him for the murder of McDaniel. O'Neil was placed in the Jacksonville Jail to await his trial. Four days after the shooting, the murder weapon was found. O'Neil admitted he had previously owned a gun similar to the one found but said he had "sold it awhile back."

On February 17, 1885 Judge Webster sentenced O'Neil to death by hanging. The gallows were built between the jail and the Jackson County Courthouse, with the jail forming one wall of the fence and the courthouse another.

The day arrived and approximately 200 people who had tickets for the "event" gathered on the lawn of the courthouse. Father Blanchet accompanied O'Neil to the gallows and when Sheriff Jacobs asked O'Neil if he had any final words to say, it was Father Blanchet who replied that O'Neil did not. After the hanging, O'Neil was buried in the pauper section of the Jacksonville cemetery. The rope used was cut into small pieces and distributed amongst the crowd.

Sometime later, letters were found that O'Neil supposedly wrote, including one to his brother George. Following are excerpts from the letter O'Neil may have written to his brother:

"My health is very poor, owing to trouble and close confinement. I have not seen the sun for over eleven months and I have suffered a thousand deaths since I have been here shut up. If I get no assistance I will have to hang in nine days from now.

"According to my age I might live long enough to raise my children so they could take care of themselves. And as for you, you have lived to be very old, and in the natural course of events you can expect to live but a few years more, and are liable to drop off at any time. If you had one hour to live it would be a hard request to ask you to come and state that you done the killing and that I had not any hand, act or part in it or any knowledge of it. That would clear me, and spare me to my children, and only on their account I can I think of making such a request to you."

O'Neil goes on to ask his brother to keep the letter a secret, but if he does comply with the request to say that he had had a grudge against McDaniel for more than twenty years. He reminds George of the date the murder took place and instructs him that he will need to sign a confession, witnessed by others.

We will never know whether George would have been inclined to help his brother. George died March 5, 1886, at the age of 72 of typhoid fever, four days before the hanging.

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Member Profile

CARL BROPHY, one of the most distinguished attorneys in Southern Oregon history, is also a long-time member of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Mr. Brophy was raised in Portland and attended Oregon State on a basketball scholarship, intending to become a chemical engineer. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942, and after transferring to the University of Southern California to begin officer training, became interested in law. He served as a Marine officer in the South Pacific, and upon his return in 1946 entered law school at the University of Oregon, where he received his law degree in 1949.

Carl practiced law in Medford for over fifty-three years. In his early years, before the office of Public Defender was established, he and other Jackson County lawyers often served as court-appointed criminal counsel. And for many years, before there was a legal aid office in Jackson County, he and other lawyers provided free legal service to those unable to afford representation. In his practice, Mr. Brophy concentrated on civil matters, including extensive work in the agricultural and wood products industries.

During the Civil Rights movement, he traveled to Mississippi to provide legal services for African-Americans. President Kennedy had initiated this program in 1963 because few southern lawyers were willing to represent blacks in civil rights cases. In 1998, Mr. Brophy and twenty-three other Oregon lawyers who had volunteered in this program were awarded the ACLU of Oregon's highest award, the E.B. McNaughton Award, for their service. In 1999, Mr. Brophy also received the Award of Merit, the highest award of the Oregon State Bar, for his many contributions to the bench, bar, and community.



Carl and Retha Brophy. Photo courtesy of Carl Brophy

The field of law changed tremendously during Mr. Brophy's long career. In the early days, there were no computers or electric typewriters, and no copy machines. Everything had to be typed with multiple carbon copies, and if a mistake were made, it had to be painstakingly corrected on all the copies. Dictation was done on old Dictaphone wax cylinders that required shaving on a small lathe-type machine after each use. Since there was no computer for research, travel by train or car to law libraries in Salem or Portland was sometimes necessary. Fees were occasionally paid "in kind," which included, in one case, payment in eggs from a farmer.

In 1948, while in law school, Carl married Retha

Rendahl, then a student at OSU, whom he had met on a blind date on his first weekend home from overseas in 1946. Together, they raised five children in Medford and are now the proud grandparents of twelve grandchildren.

Why does Carl Brophy support the Southern Oregon Historical Society? "Tradition and history are two of the things that attracted me to law in the first place. As an attorney, I represented a lot of people who had resided in Jackson County for a very long time. That stimulated my interest in the earlier years of Jackson County. It's fascinating to learn about earlier life in any community and the Historical Society provides a place for that learning.

"Also, I believe strongly in tradition and values. Our predecessors coped with severe problems and adversity, and the values that guided them can continue to guide us today and help us cope with modern problems. SOHS helps us remember those values."

What inspires *you* to support SOHS? Please let us know your story by calling Richard at 541-773-6536 ext. 226, or e-mailing development@sohs.org.

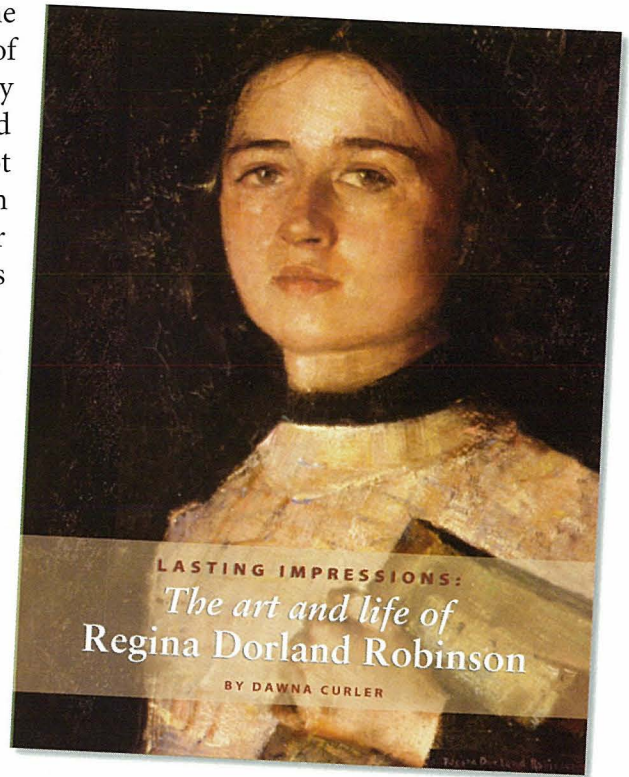
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A routine traffic stop in the late 1950s, somewhere in Medford. SOHS Photo #16987

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