

# THE SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY



MAKING HISTORY TOGETHER

## THE COVERED BRIDGES OF JACKSON COUNTY

By Carolyn Kingsnorth

*There's something nostalgic about a covered bridge, and folklore certainly contributes to this emotional appeal.*

There are stories that say a covered bridge tricked horses into entering it thinking it was a barn, or that the cover kept avid fishermen dry. Some have suggested that a covered bridge was a way to hide shoddy workmanship.

However, construction of a covered bridge was a matter of practicality—the covering protected bridge trusses from moisture. An uncovered wooden bridge might last up to 20 years, but a covered bridge could last 100. Constructing a bridge with sides and a roof wasn't just an East Coast phenomenon; it also made economic sense in Oregon.

In the mid-1850s, Oregon entrepreneurs began hiring rugged individuals armed with hand tools, sweat, and ambition to build covered bridges spanning local streams and rivers, providing alternatives to fords and ferries. Most of these early bridges were privately owned. Construction was financed through tolls—3¢ for a sheep, 5¢ for a horse and rider, and 10¢ for a team of horses and wagon.

Early Oregon bridge builders used the Smith truss, a design imported from Eastern states, although none of these bridges remain today. Then in 1915, the state Legislature enacted a law requiring all bridges costing \$500 or more to be built under the supervision of the Oregon State Highway Department. The department adopted the Howe truss as its standard—essentially a series of Xs with vertical iron rods and one of the easiest for unskilled workers to assemble. The kingspost (with one central support) and queenspost (with two supports) were also used, primarily on shorter spans.

(BRIDGES, continued on page 2)



*Antelope Creek Bridge—1922*



*Lost Creek Bridge—c. 1880/1919*



*Wimer Bridge—1927/2008*



## BRIDGES

(continued from page 1)

For almost a century, all bridges built in Oregon were covered, and at one point the state could lay claim to more than 600 covered bridges. But then...

In the 1940s and 1950s, covered bridges became an impediment to modern automobiles, and loaded logging trucks found the height restrictions problematical. Counties began replacing them. But the abundance of timber was a boon to bridge construction and, given the shortage of steel during two world wars, many counties continued building covered bridges into the 1950s and 1960s. In general, however, from 1910 to the beginning of World War II, Oregon's covered bridges were being destroyed at the rate of eight per year.

Today, only 54 covered bridges remain in Oregon, and four of them are in Jackson County—Antelope Creek, Lost Creek, Wimer, and the McKee Bridge. Neighboring Josephine County lays claim to Grave Creek Covered Bridge.

Antelope Creek Bridge originally spanned Antelope Creek, a tributary of Little Butte Creek some 10 miles southeast of Eagle Point. It was built in 1922 by Jaston Hartman and his sons using the queenspost truss for its 58-foot length with exterior flying buttresses for stabilization. According to *Oregon's Covered Bridge*, it was designed to carry "the old Medford-Crater Lake Road" over Antelope

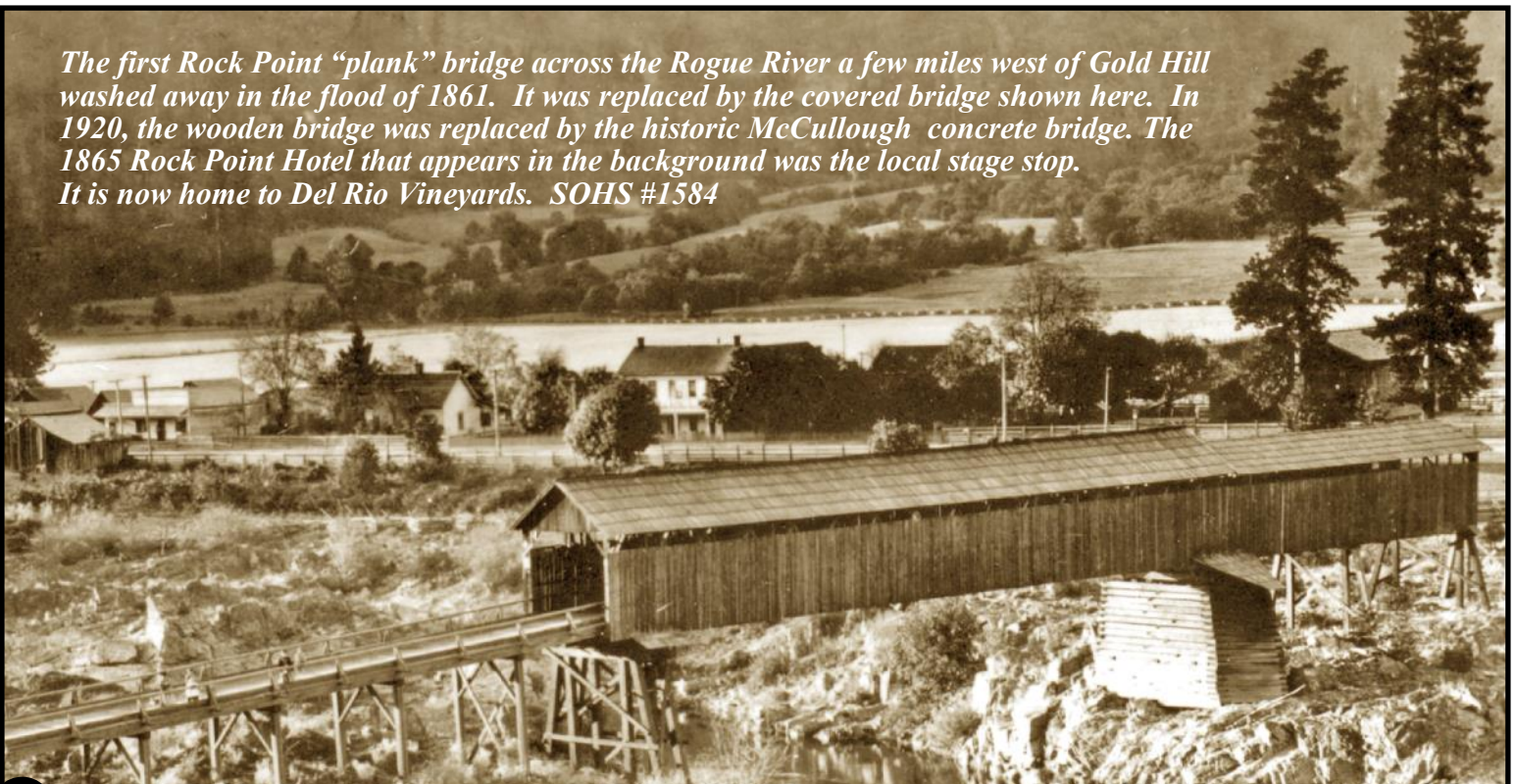
Creek. When it was bypassed in 1975 following the construction of a reinforced concrete span, it was left to deteriorate, even though it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

To save the bridge, volunteers took it down in 1987 and reassembled it over Little Butte Creek in Eagle Point, replacing an earlier covered bridge that had washed away. It was briefly delisted from the National Register when the reconstruction altered the original design. Alterations were corrected, and the bridge was returned to the Register in 2012 by the City of Eagle Point. There it serves as a pedestrian bridge in Covered Bridge Park, adjacent to the Veterans' Memorial Park where it makes a centerpiece for the town's Fourth of July celebration.

At 38 feet, the Lost Creek Bridge, located off Lake Creek Road and Highway 140, is the shortest of Oregon's covered bridges. Its construction date is uncertain although its builder, Johnny Miller, also roofed the nearby Lake Creek span in the 1880s lending credence to the sign nailed to the bridge: LOST CREEK BRIDGE, BUILT ABOUT 1881. The bridge is also a queenspost design with flying buttress braces, hand hewn trusses and a shingle roof.

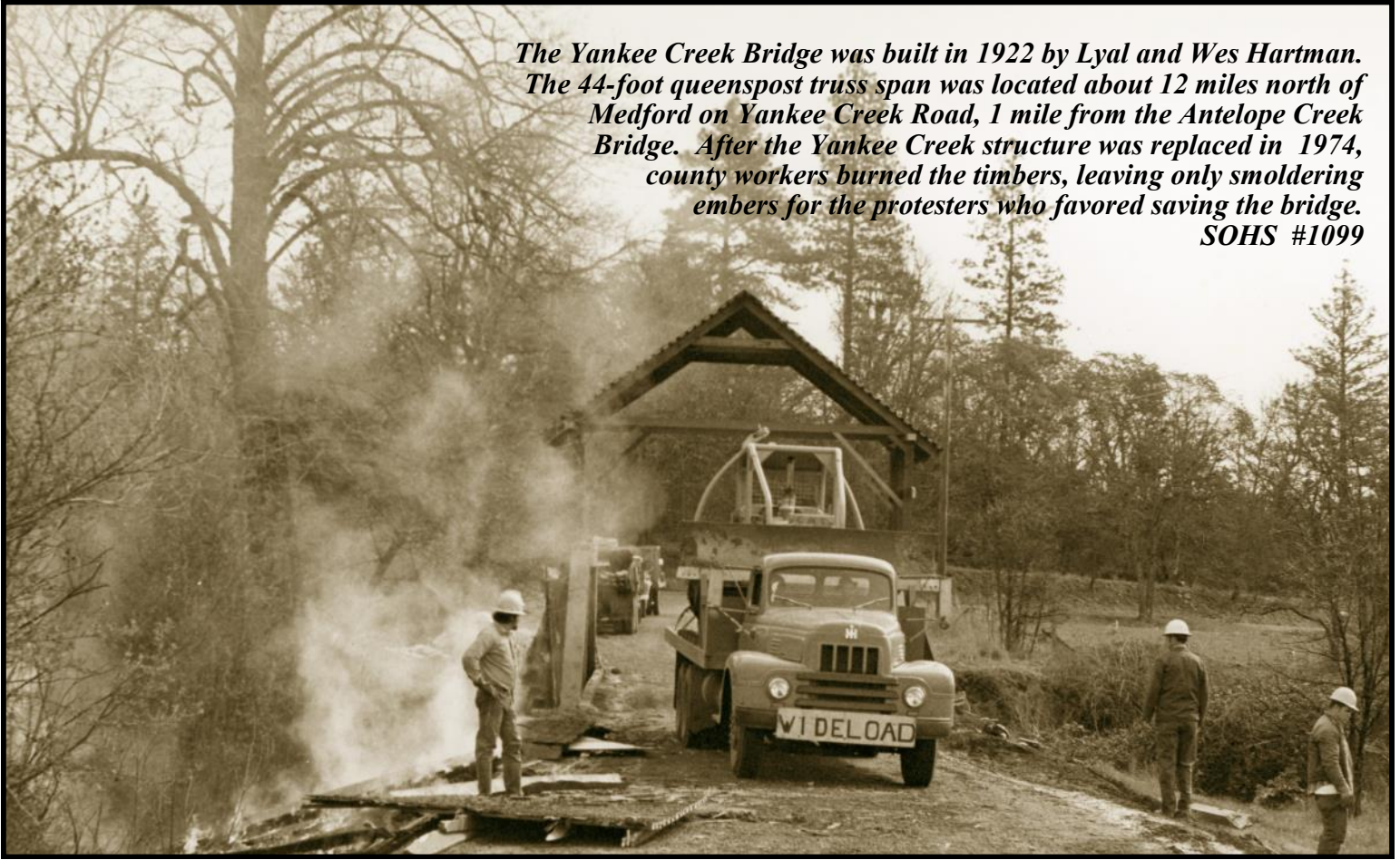
The bridge was nearly lost in the 1964 Christmas flood. As swirling waters and heavy debris lashed at its piers, residents and concerned bridge enthusiasts prayed through the night that the bridge would be saved. According to a local newspaper, as morning came, the skies opened, the

*The first Rock Point "plank" bridge across the Rogue River a few miles west of Gold Hill washed away in the flood of 1861. It was replaced by the covered bridge shown here. In 1920, the wooden bridge was replaced by the historic McCullough concrete bridge. The 1865 Rock Point Hotel that appears in the background was the local stage stop. It is now home to Del Rio Vineyards. SOHS #1584*





*The Yankee Creek Bridge was built in 1922 by Lyal and Wes Hartman. The 44-foot queenspost truss span was located about 12 miles north of Medford on Yankee Creek Road, 1 mile from the Antelope Creek Bridge. After the Yankee Creek structure was replaced in 1974, county workers burned the timbers, leaving only smoldering embers for the protesters who favored saving the bridge.*  
**SOHS #1099**



water receded, and Lost Creek bridge still stood. The bridge may have been partially or totally rebuilt in 1919. A new roof was installed in 1985, and portal boards were added in 1986, restoring the look of the original span before accommodations were made for logging trucks.

Lost Creek Bridge abuts the Walch Memorial Wayside Park. Descendants of John and Marie Newsome Walch built and maintain the park, which includes picnic tables, a bandstand, cooking areas, an early 1900s outhouse, and manicured flower gardens.

The Wimer Covered Bridge over Evans Creek was the only Jackson County covered bridge remaining open to vehicle traffic until it collapsed into the creek in July 2003. Ironically, the bridge had been scheduled for a major overhaul. Engineers had completed blueprints just two months earlier; the construction project was to go out for bid in September; and Jackson County had acquired grants for over a half million dollars. But the tired old structure couldn't wait and gave way in mid-stream. Obviously, there had been a change in plans.

The original Wimer Covered Bridge was built in 1892 by J. W. Osbourne but, in 1927, it was totally replaced by Wes

and Lyle Hartman with an 85-foot queenspost structure with stabilizing buttresses, often described as "a barn over water." Over the years the Evans Creek crossing received numerous repairs, but time and use took its toll on the aging span. In 1962 attentive residents had saved the bridge from destruction when a citizens' effort rebuilt the weakening structure. Load limits were set at 3 tons with no heavy truck traffic allowed.

Less than a year after its collapse, citizens and Jackson County set about plans for rebuilding a replica of the Hartman bridge. In 2008, with federal funds and local labor, the bridge was replaced with look-alike trusses reinforced with metal braces, laminated beams that look like timber, concrete approaches, and industrial roofing made to resemble wooden shakes. The one-way bridge, still the length and width of the original, has a load limit of 10 tons. This version of the bridge opened to traffic in February 2008.

Our last surviving Jackson County covered bridge is the McKee Bridge across the Applegate River built in 1917 by the Hartmans on land donated by Adelbert "Deb" McKee—a story unto itself and intricately intertwined with the story of the Blue Ledge Copper Mine. *We'll let Evelyn Williams and Jeff LaLande share this part of the history with you in subsequent stories.*

# A DAY DEDICATED TO A BRIDGE

## *An Interview with Evelyn “McKee” Williams*

**T**he Applegate’s McKee Bridge will be the focal point on Saturday, June 13, when the McKee Bridge Historical Society hosts McKee Bridge Day. This annual event raises money to preserve and maintain what is deemed the oldest covered bridge in Oregon still standing at its original location. It’s definitely the longest at 122 feet and the highest covered bridge in the state at more than 40 feet above the Applegate River during the average summer flow.

In 1917, after much discussion and attempts by early Jackson County movers and shakers to create a rail line into the Applegate to facilitate moving copper ore down from the Blue Ledge Mine (in the Upper Applegate drainage above Elliott and Joe Creeks), it was ultimately decided to build the McKee Covered Bridge to provide safe crossing of the river.

In 2008, Evelyn Williams, a granddaughter of Adelbert “Deb” and Leila McKee for whom the bridge was named, shared some of the bridge’s history.

“The Blue Ledge Copper Mine prompted the McKee Bridge being built. The mine was actually found in 1898 but wasn’t explored until 1906. Nearly \$2 million was spent in developing it.

“It was the biggest thing that ever happened in the Applegate Valley—it actually rivaled Jacksonville’s gold rush. My relatives worked up there. In February of 1907 the mine had a monthly payroll of \$17,775. That remained relatively steady until 1908.

“They had teams of six to eight horses to haul their equipment and supplies to the mine. And then the ore was hauled to Medford and shipped by train to Tacoma, Washington for processing.”

Either way, the Applegate River had to be crossed twice. “Up above me was the Palmer Creek crossing. They had



*Evelyn Williams*



*1911 suspension bridge across the Applegate River.*



to unload their wagons and make two crossings with the goods.” Goods were then loaded into a large freight wagon. “The Swayne Ford crossing was just above where the Grange hall is now. They had to cross again before the Cameron Bridge was built.

“The eastside road was treacherous. It was a one-way track just wide enough for the wagons, and it was all rock so you couldn’t make it any wider. It was so long you couldn’t see who was coming from the other end. I think they called it Dead Horse Mountain.

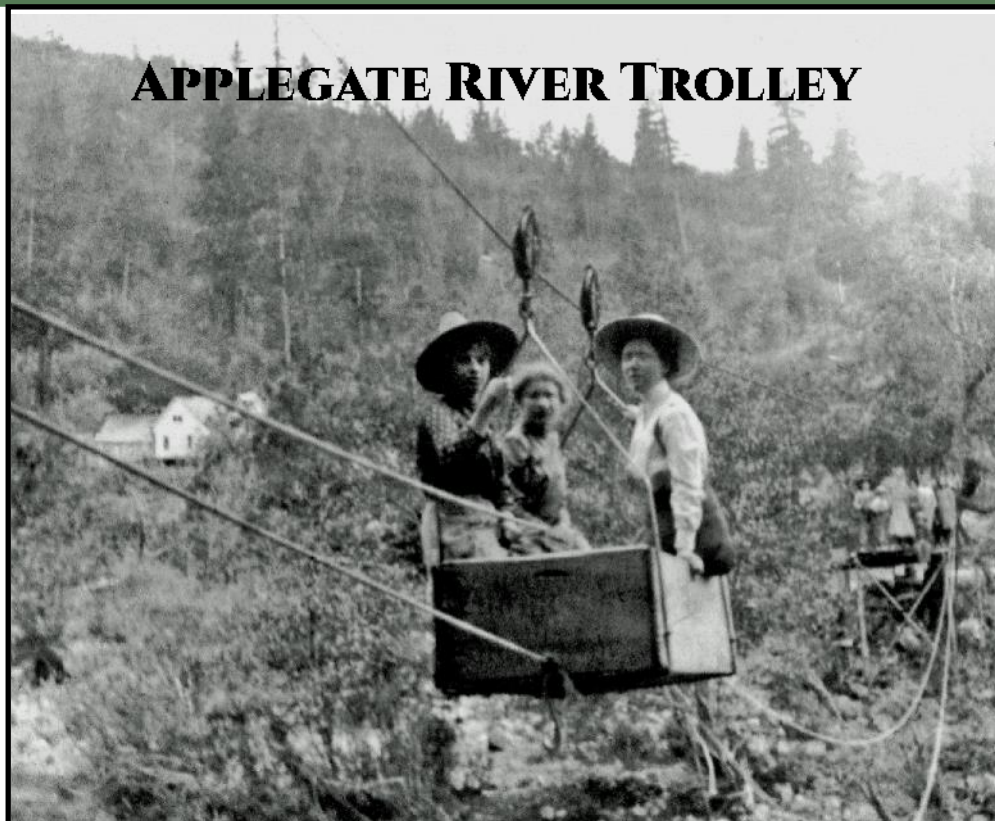
“There were two stages a day for mail and supplies and a lot of ore wagons. My great uncle drove one of those wagons. He put bells on the harnesses of his horses so anyone who was coming from the other end could hear the bells and wouldn’t start the grade crossing.

“There was supposedly a terrible accident in 1916 that involved two wagons colliding. There is no mention of anybody being killed, but one of the wagons went over the bank and down into the river. With this and all the traffic, Jackson County decided to build a new road, and Deb McKee donated the land.”

The McKee home had served as a stage station and halfway point between Jacksonville and the Blue Ledge copper mine since its opening in 1906. Relief horses were kept there for the six and eight-horse teams hauling ore from the mine, and lodging and board were provided for travelers.

“Both the McKee Bridge and the identical Cameron Bridge were built in 1917. There are no known pictures of the Cameron Bridge but I went through it enough to know.

They were built by Jaston Hartman, and his sons Wes and Lyal. While



## APPLEGATE RIVER TROLLEY

*In 1902, the only way for children who lived on the east side of the Applegate River to reach the Beaver Creek school was by “trolley box.” Cables were anchored to boulders on either side of the Applegate River where the McKee Bridge now stands. A box that could seat four people was suspended from the top cable by pulleys, and the teacher and pupils were hand-pulled across. Above, Orpha Lewis, Maude Harr (the teacher), and Aletha Black are “trolleyed” across the Applegate River while four students wait their turn.*

*The teacher boarded with Adelbert and Leila McKee, whose house appears in the distance. So many McKee children attended the Beaver Creek school, it was usually referred to as the McKee School. In 1917 the trolley was replaced by the historic McKee Bridge. The school was subsequently torn down and a new school built on the east side of the river.*

*- Photo courtesy of Evelyn Williams*

they were building it, they boarded with the McKees.”

The McKee Bridge was to have a span of 126 feet. “I understood that when they started building it, they were able to make it a little less than that.

“It was known as the Howe Truss construction—it’s a big timber angled like a ‘V’. It was a fairly new

building technique at the time, and it’s proved to be a very good construction to last this long.”

The Blue Ledge Mine ceased operations in 1919, though it reopened sporadically in later years.

“In 1927 the McKee Bridge was severely damaged by a major flood. Big trees came down and knocked

(MCKEE, *continued on page 6*)

(MCKEE, *continued from page 5*)

boards off the south side. The river took out the approach on the west side, and the children had to climb a ladder to get on the bridge to go to school. Of course, the bridge was repaired.

“Then in the 1940s, the County wanted to build a new bridge. The old Cameron Bridge was needing more work than the County wanted to put into it. They built a new bridge beside it.

“Sometime in the 1940s, the old Cameron Bridge was dismantled and moved downstream near Hamilton Road. They didn’t cover it again; they just used the bridge track to make a bridge down there. Later a flood took it out.

“And sometime in the 1940s there was a collision in the McKee Bridge because the bridge had no windows and it was dark in there. So the County cut out windows.

“In 1956, the McKee Bridge was closed to vehicular traffic.

They built a new McKee Bridge about a quarter mile past the old bridge. After that, the old bridge just deteriorated.”

A heavy December 1964 snow fall caused the bridge roof to collapse. “In 1965, the County was just going to let the bridge go. But the citizens formed a McKee Bridge Restoration Committee. Thanks to the Knights of Columbus and the Grange, we were able to put a new roof on and make major repairs.”

Jackson County made additional repairs in 1985, but by 1989 the bridge was in bad shape. “The roof shakes were badly rotted and needed replacing, so another committee was formed. The citizens got together and had a big work crew. Men hauled Port Orford cedar from near the

coast. They cut up these logs and made shakes. It was a really big deal and no tax dollars were spent.

“Then in 1996, the committee got money from the Oregon Lottery—approximately \$89,000—and we did the preservation work again. We had new siding put on. It was cut the same as the original out of western red cedar.”

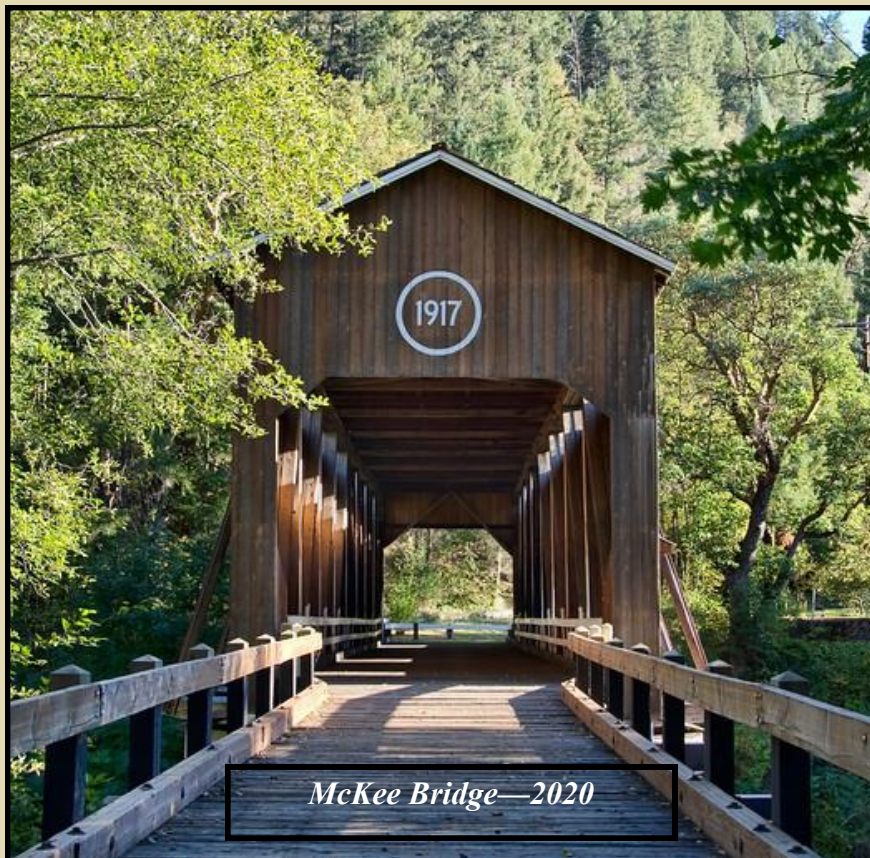
The McKee Bridge Historical Society was formed in 1999.

“It was just volunteer workers and we didn’t have any money, so we decided to form a society. The County had approved the McKee Bridge Preservation Committee, and this committee started the society. We started McKee Bridge Day in 1999, the year that we organized.”

Ever since, McKee Bridge Day has been the second Saturday in June from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the historic bridge and in the adjacent picnic grounds. All funds raised go towards the preservation of Upper Applegate history and maintenance of the bridge. The public is invited to join

the McKee Bridge Historical Society on June 13<sup>th</sup> for craft vendors, a bake sale, a raffle and silent auction, barbecue, bingo, cribbage, and horseshoes.

This year, guests can also enjoy entertainment from entries in a “Creativity Contest.” K-8 students can submit and demonstrate their interpretations of a person, place, event or national resource related to the upper Applegate watershed, i.e., Logtown to the Blue Ledge mine. Entries can be art, music, essays, performance art, or whatever falls within the category of “creativity.” Winners will be determined by age groups and the Society anticipates significant cash prizes for each group. Entry forms and information are available on the McKee Bridge Historical Society Facebook page and by e-mailing [mckeebridge1917@gmail.com](mailto:mckeebridge1917@gmail.com).



*McKee Bridge—2020*



## AN INVITATION TO OUR READERS

A few years ago the SOHS Board of Trustees concluded that Society members deserved something more in the way of regular communication than only the monthly newsletter. The *Quarterly* is the result of that decision. The *Quarterly's* main goals are two-fold: to enhance the benefits that you receive from your SOHS membership, and to publish accurate, interesting articles on Southern Oregon history that will contribute to our region's growing body of historical scholarship. We, the editorial board, hope that you enjoy receiving the *Quarterly*.

***We'd also like to hear back from you!***  
*Your comments – ranging from compliments or (we hope, constructive) criticisms to corrections or even suggestions for future topics – are welcome.* Because of printing costs and other limitations, we cannot promise to publish them. However, when space allows, we will try to include the gist of any substantive comments or factual corrections from our readers in a future issue.

We would appreciate your providing any comments in writing. You can send us comments in the form of a letter addressed to SOHS History Center, “ATTN: Quarterly Editors,” 106 N. Central, Medford, OR 97501). Sending comments in an email also works. Please include the word “Quarterly” in the e-mail's subject line, and send it to [archivist@sohs.org](mailto:archivist@sohs.org).

***Thank you!***

The Editors

Add Some History to Your Garden!

## HANLEY FARM ANNUAL HERITAGE PLANT SALE

Saturday & Sunday  
April 25 & 26  
10am to 3pm

*(SOHS members get in at 9am on the 25th!)*

- 1,000 heritage plants of over 50 varieties
- Old favorites like lilacs, peonies, iris, hellebores, and asters
- Plants for any time of year, any soil type, sun or shade
- Pollinator friendly
- Native plants
- Deer resistant and drought tolerant plants
- Herbs—both plants and dried
- Heritage tomatoes and other veggies
- Strawberries

### Special This Year!

Plants from the Hanley Shakespeare Gardens  
*Get plants from your favorite plays!*

*Plus* a raffle for a wall-hanging succulent garden, wagon rides, food for sale from Crepe Me, and a Mini-mercantile with unique garden items!

Hanley Farm, 1053 Hanley Road, Central Point, OR

## “THANK YOU’S” ABOUND!

***We asked; you responded! And your generosity helped cover some unexpected expenses. A big thank you to our year end donors!***

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# THE HARTMAN FAMILY SPANNED HISTORY

## *The Bridgebuilders of Jackson County*

*By Sharon Bywater*

Whether sitting astride a high beam tightening a nut or drilling holes in bridge timbers with an early boring machine, Jaston Hartman, and sons Lyal and Wes, became legendary Jackson County bridge builders. Over a combined period of 125 years, the Hartmans built and rebuilt over 700 bridges.

Jaston Hartman arrived in Jackson county in the 1890s from Ohio. His first name is hard to know with any accuracy, having been spelled many ways, including Jasten, Jason and Justin, but Jaston is the most consistently used. He started out building barns in Jackson county, but soon moved on to covered wooden bridges, becoming Jackson County's first official bridge superintendent.

In the late 1890s he married an Eagle Point schoolteacher, Alpha McDowell, and settled on a 116-acre farm between Coker Butte and Roxy Ann where their three sons were born: Wesley (Wes), Lyal, and Homer. A daughter, Ellen, was born earlier. Homer was the only Hartman boy who did not stay in the bridge building business. He moved to Idaho and worked for the Forest Service.

The oldest son, Wes Hartman, remembered life on the Eagle Point farm in an oral history archived at the SOHS library. He said people called the area near Eagle Point "the big sticky because the ground turned into sticky mud in winter; people living there were known as 'Stickyites.'" He also remembered going out to the road with his mother to get a delivery of fresh salmon which she

put in a large bucket. The cost of the salmon: 25 cents.

In 1910, Jaston sold the Eagle Point farm and moved the family to the B.F. Dowell house on north 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Jacksonville. Wes said he, Lyal, and his sister Ellen walked barefoot into Jacksonville behind the wagon filled with the family's belongings. Homer, the youngest, rode with his parents in the wagon. The family stayed in Jacksonville and lived in the Dowell house for the rest of their lives.

Jaston taught his sons bridge building from an early age. As teenagers, Lyal and Wes worked with their father on the McKee bridge and considered it their first real bridge building job. Wes Hartman said in an oral interview, "I was 16 and I was a high climber. The higher I could get on any bridge I worked on, the better I liked it." He was happy swinging off the bridge with one hand and working with the other. The McKee bridge was the highest in the state, 40 feet above the Applegate River.



*Wes and Lyal Hartman—SOHS #3468*

In the early days, bridge building was a rough business that required a strong back and hard work. There were no bulldozers or power cranes. Wooden timbers were hauled in place with ropes. Jaston Hartman used a wheel wrench as tall as a person to tighten nuts used in bridge construction. It took four to five men to turn the wheel. Wes, who became bridge superintendent after his father, said: "The only way I got to be bridge superintendent in those days was the hard way, with a pick and a shovel." Tall and powerfully built like their father, the Hartman brothers were well suited for the job.



Before the advent of cars, the Hartmans loaded wagons with tools and provisions to take to their work sites. When working in remote areas, they would camp at the site while the bridge was being built. Roads were not very good then either, with or without a motorized vehicle. The first “motorcar” they were able to use to haul supplies was a Model T Ford truck purchased by Jackson County in 1919. They used the same truck through 1931. The truck reportedly came without much more than a motor, chassis and steering wheel. The windshield, truck bed and driver’s seat had to be built.

Until the mid-1920s, the Hartmans worked on covered wooden bridges, including three of the four covered bridges that have survived to the present day: the McKee, Wimer, and Antelope Creek bridges. Although the state mandated the use of the Howe truss bridge design in 1915, early Jackson county bridges used the queen post truss, with exterior flying buttresses to stabilize the bridge. The queen post truss was a signature style of the Hartmans.

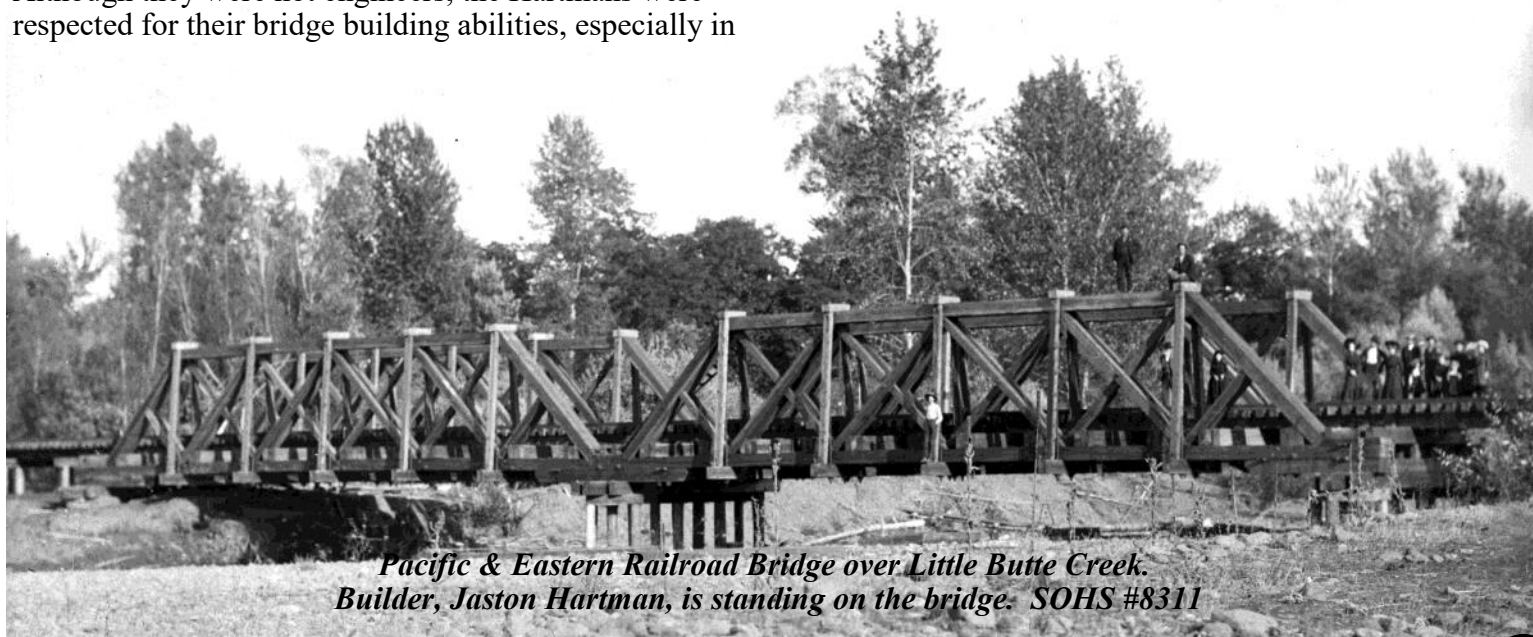
By the 1960s, Wes and Lyal often had to tear down wooden bridges they had helped to build, replacing the originals with concrete spans. The Laurelhurst covered bridge is one example of an original covered bridge that went through many changes. According to Wes Hartman, his father, Jaston, built the bridge early on, then tore it down and rebuilt it in 1909. Wes and Lyle kept that bridge repaired until they had to tear it down again and replace it with a concrete span in 1961. In 1978, the concrete bridge was removed when the U.S. Corps of Engineers filled Lost Creek Lake with water.

Although they were not engineers, the Hartmans were respected for their bridge building abilities, especially in

the days before power machinery. According to county engineer Paul Ryan in a 1959 *Mail Tribune* article, the Hartmans were well liked and worked cooperatively with other county departments. He said that Wes’s knowledge of bridge building would be hard to match. He noted, “In spite of their swarthy appearance, one couldn’t hope to meet any pleasanter chaps than the Hartman brothers.”

Lyal worked for Jackson County for a record 50 years, longer than any other county employee, retiring as county bridge foreman in 1969. After retirement, Lyal followed his love of nature, hiking the hills of Jackson county with a 50-pound bag of salt on his back. His goal was to help outlying deer herds find salt where there was no natural source. Wes became county bridge superintendent and retired in 1963 after 44 years of service. During that time, he also served on the Jacksonville city council and as Jacksonville Mayor. After retirement, Wes became a world traveler, going around the world twice and attending five World Fairs.

A commemorative plaque dedicated to the Hartmans’ bridge building legacy is located on the Middle Fork Bridge over the middle fork of the Rogue River near Prospect. Another can be seen in the town of Jacksonville on a bridge crossing Jackson Creek and F Street. All the Hartmans except for Homer are buried in the Jacksonville cemetery. We’ll probably never know how Jaston Hartman’s name should be spelled. His cemetery record reads Jason, although his wife’s record claims she was married to Jaston. However you spell his name, his bridgebuilding contribution to Jackson County, and that of sons Wes and Lyal is undisputed.



*Pacific & Eastern Railroad Bridge over Little Butte Creek.  
Builder, Jaston Hartman, is standing on the bridge. SOHS #8311*

# MCKEE BRIDGE WAS THE CRUCIAL

By Jeff L

As careful readers of this issue of the *Quarterly* know by now, the McKee Covered Bridge owed its construction to the Blue Ledge Mine, in the upper-most headwaters of the Applegate River. Situated several miles south of the Oregon-California boundary on Joe Creek, near the crest of the rugged Siskiyou Mountains, the copper ore of the Blue Ledge first attracted notice in the late 1890s. With countless miles of copper-wire electrical lines being strung across the nation, this was a prosperous time for copper miners.

In 1905 a group of Medford speculators sold their 26 mining claims along Joe Creek and Nabob Ridge to New York investor Robert S. Towne, who also owned the Mexican Mining Company. Towne began major development of

the Blue Ledge property in 1906. Given its remote location and extremely steep terrain, this was an expensive proposition.

Towne built a large mining camp for his work force of over 100 men. The camp complex, which featured indoor plumbing and heated water, included a mess hall, bunk houses, various log and wood-frame cabins, assay office, and superintendent's residence, as well as a small hydro-electric-generating station – all perched on a very steep slope overlooking Joe Creek. Regular stage service linked the mine with Jacksonville.

The Blue Ledge boom (ca. 1906-1918) encouraged work at a number of other, if smaller, copper mines in

the Joe Creek, Elliott Creek, and Squaw Creek drainages. Farther away, large-scale copper mines operated in the Illinois Valley and on the lower Rogue River. World War I, with the military's need for brass—ranging from bullet casings for rifles to shells for large artillery—boosted the demand for copper.

In its heyday, the Blue Ledge Mine produced many tons of copper ore. The ore had to be shipped to the smelter in Tacoma, Washington. This was the key factor in building McKee Bridge. The covered span enabled the wagonloads (and soon, truckloads) of ore to cross from the east bank of the Applegate to the gentler west side on their way north to the railroad in Medford. (Considerable thought was given during the War to





# LINK TO THE BLUE LEDGE MINE

LaLande

building a smelter as well as a railroad all the way up the Applegate River to the Blue Ledge; although this scheme proved to be impractical, local boosters waxed poetic about the financial rewards it would inevitably bring.)

By the end of the First World War, the Blue Ledge had nearly five miles of adits, shafts, and other underground excavations. With the end of the War, copper prices could not support continued mining at Blue Ledge. After a decade of quiet, it had a brief flurry of renewed mining in 1930, but The Blue Ledge Mine has remained essentially abandoned since then.

One long-lasting legacy of the Blue Ledge Mine has been the highly toxic waste that leaks from the mine's

abandoned workings and ore dumps. As a result, fish and other stream-dependent organisms have been absent from Joe Creek for many years. The Blue Ledge, which became private land during the boom years, was listed as one of the top-ten high-priority "Superfund" sites in northern California.

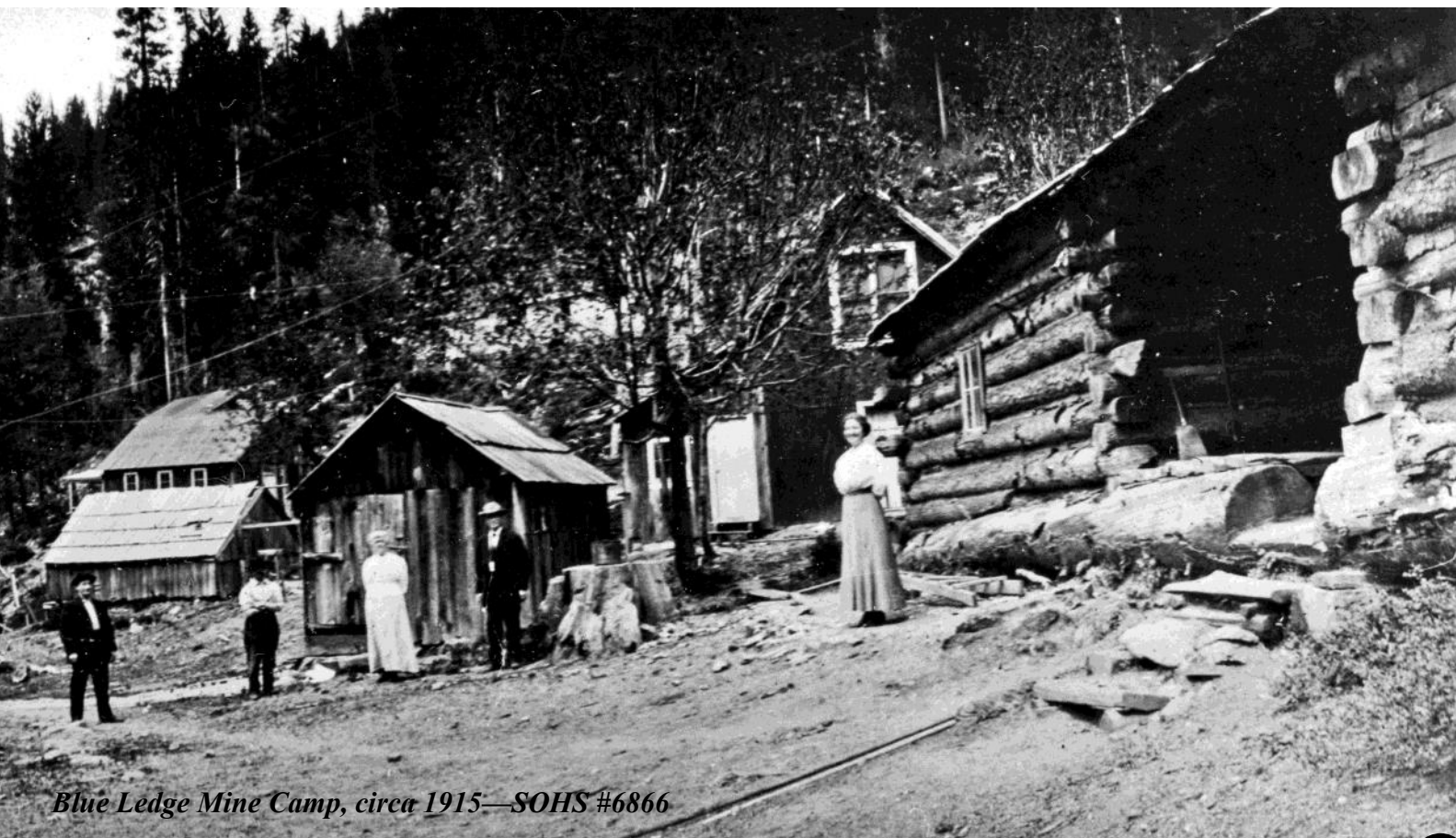
In the early 2000s the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Forest Service brought suit against the owners and in 2010 embarked on an expensive remediation and clean-up of the Blue Ledge's toxic debris. An agreement for settlement of the owners' liability was reached in June 2019.

## Sources:

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*Blue Ledge Mine Camp, circa 1915—SOHS #6866*

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*Before the first bridges were built, ferries crossed the Rogue River.*

*By Jeff LaLande*

The earliest White travelers crossed the Rogue River with their horses at various fording places, including near present Grants Pass and at the Table Rocks. However, such fords could be used only during the river's relatively low flows of summer and early fall.

Later, travelers using wagons on the Oregon-to-California Trail created a demand for an improved means of crossing the Rogue River. Beginning in 1851 and continuing through the end of the nineteenth century, a number of ferries—almost all of them privately owned endeavors—operated on the Rogue. With crossing places ranging all the way from the mouth of the river at Gold Beach to as far upstream as present-day Shady Cove, these ferries were tugged across the current by means of pulley systems, typically powered by teams of oxen, horses, or mules. Named for their owners and now long gone, some of the ferries left us with lasting place names.

In 1851 Joel Perkins operated what is believed to be the first ferry on the Rogue, located within what is now the city of Grants Pass. Subsequently purchased by a Mr. Long and then, in 1853, by James Vannoy, this ferry did a brisk business with both long-distance travelers and local residents for a number of years.

The name “Fort Vannoy” was applied to a fortified farmhouse during the Rogue River War of 1855-1856; today, the bustling Fort Vannoy Farm's on-site market stand sells fresh produce and the Farm's corn maze and pumpkin patch are popular family destinations during autumn.

Farther upstream, in Jackson County, the Evans Ferry provided passage at what would later become Woodville (today's town of Rogue River). The first settler on the creek that now bears his name, Davis “Coyote” Evans started his own ferry business very



*Sheriff William Bybee*

soon after Perkins had begun operating the Rogue's first ferry, located well downriver from Evans Creek.

Over the years Evans actually operated three different ferries along this stretch of the Rogue. His first simply consisted of three hewn logs, each of them about 3 feet in diameter, with a wooden-plank deck that measured about 8 feet wide and 45 feet long. The craft was propelled by means of a winch with a double-pulley system. Evans anchored his winch's cable to an oak tree on one side of the river and to a stout cairn of stacked rocks on the other.

A ferry operated briefly (1854-1859) near Rock Point, the rocky narrows located between Evans Creek and Gold Hill; later a covered bridge spanned the Rogue at Rock Point. Davis Evans operated one of his ferries near Gold Hill, 1856-1857, at a community on the south side of the river called “the Dardanelles” — founded in 1852 by William G. T’Vault, who apparently named it after a town in his former place of residence, Pope County, Arkansas.

The name Dardanelles originally referred to the famous narrow strait of water between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara, which divided Asia from Europe (because the Rogue River was quite narrow at T’Vault’s Jackson County settlement, the name Dardanelles was certainly apt – and it was therefore a suitable place for a ferry).

Probably the best-known ferry in the main Rogue River Valley was Bybee’s Ferry (originally known as Hailey’s Ferry and by the names of other early owners). Crossing the river near Upper Table Rock, it was in operation by 1853.

Rancher/farmer and Jackson County Sheriff William Bybee, one of the Valley’s largest landowners, charged his customers a substantial toll to get to the other side of the Rogue. Bybee, who operated the ferry until 1884, is said to have become so infuriated at riders who tried to save money by fording the river nearby that he took potshots at them with his rifle. In 1876 he was accused of having closed the fords across the river to



Sam's Valley residents, forcing them to cross over on his ferry. Bybee was reelected Sheriff despite these accusations of malfeasance.

Bybee's Ferry gave way to Bybee Bridge. Not many years ago, the wonderful twentieth-century steel-truss Bybee span was removed and replaced by the current (and, some would say, ugly) concrete bridge, next to TouVelle State Park.

Farther upriver, farmer Josiah Hannah operated a ferry on the upper Rogue for a few years during the 1860s-1870s. The Hannah family had become skilled potters before coming to Oregon. They established a commercial pottery on the upper Rogue; their serving pots, crocks, and other ceramic wares are expensive collectibles today.

Dodge Bridge replaced the Hannah Ferry as a river crossing for residents of that vicinity. The bridge's name remembers Burdette Dodge, owner of the 2,000-acre Riverside Ranch.

The first Dodge bridge, a steel-truss structure built in 1911 collapsed in 1950 as a truck was crossing it, and the driver narrowly escaped with his life. The current green-painted steel bridge dates to 1951 and has withstood its share of major floods.

Finally, there was the Kennedy Ferry (and its successors) within the present town of Shady Cove. A Mr. Kennedy established his ferry there sometime prior to 1877; in 1878 it was replaced by Leroy Nail's toll ferry.

After the disastrous flood of 1890 destroyed this and most other ferries

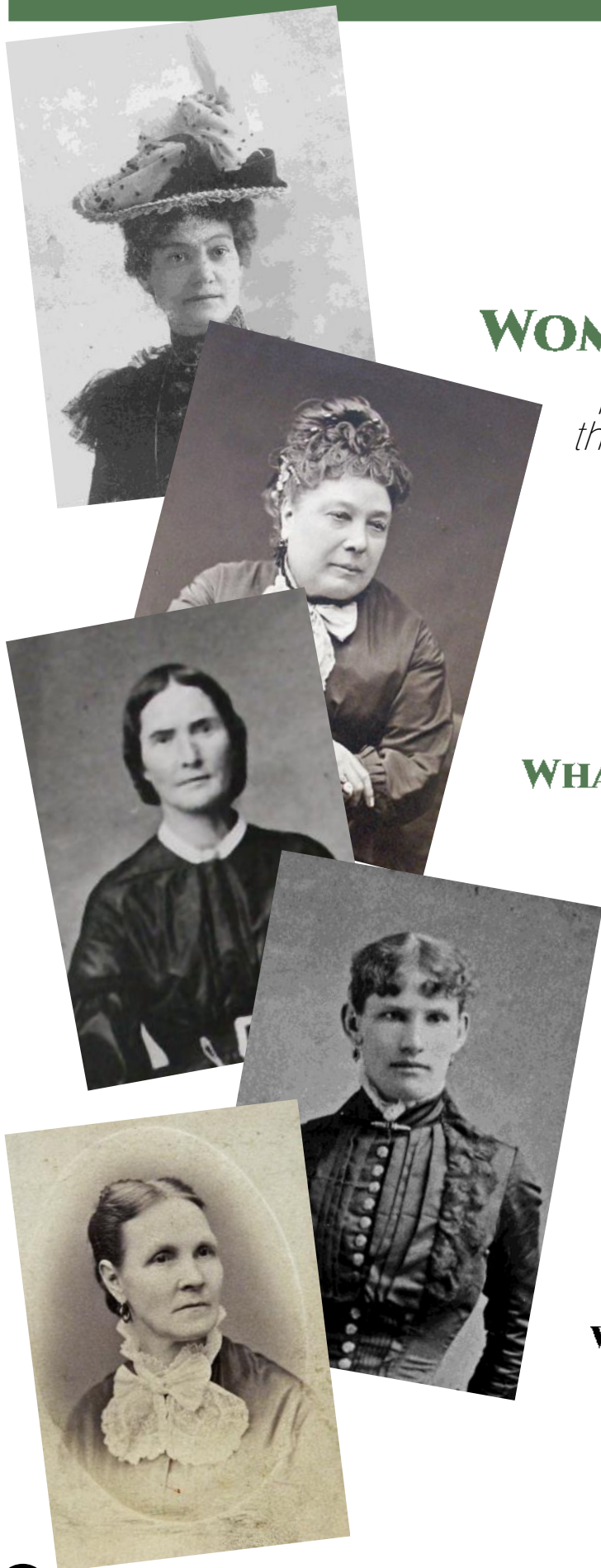
on the Rogue River, Jackson County established a free (and likely steam-powered) ferry at Shady Cove that operated from 1891 until 1921, when it was discontinued. A current street name, "Old Ferry Road," commemorates the ferry's landing place on the left/east bank of the Rogue.

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This article is based on information in Charles Query's 1975 *Oregon Ferries: A History of Oregon Ferries since 1826*; *Table Rock Sentinel* (SOHS), Jan./Feb. 1992, pp.28-29; Joseph Laythe's *Crime and Punishment in a Mining Town: Jacksonville, Oregon, 1875-1915*; as well as research notes by the late Mark Lawrence and summaries compiled by SOHS volunteers Peter and Linda Kreisman.



*Rogue River Ferry at Shady Cove, circa 1891; John Black, Ferryman*



Join the  
**SOUTHERN OREGON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**HER** *in celebrating*  
**WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**

*plus our many 2019 accomplishments and  
the adventures that await us this year at our*

**2020 ANNUAL MEETING**

**WHEN:** Sunday, March 29, 5-7 p.m.

**WHERE:** The Craterian Theater Lobby  
23 S. Central Avenue, Medford

**WHAT:** Heavy Hors d'oeuvres & Hosted Bar  
*Entertainment by*  
*Northwest Troubadour*  
*David Gordon*

Introduction of our New Trustees  
*and a look into the*  
Exciting plans for SOHS!

**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!**  
**\$25 PER PERSON**

*Make your reservations no later than*

**MARCH 25TH** by going on-line to  
**WWW.SOHS.ORG/ANNUALMTG** (preferred)  
or by calling **541-773-6536 EXT. 202**



## *Why should I come?*

SOHS has turned the feedback from our 2018 Community Conversations with individuals throughout Southern Oregon into action items that are becoming reality!

**We've been implementing our Strategic Plan for 2019 and Beyond** with some exciting results and opportunities. And did we **mention there's a MUSEUM** in our future? *Annual Meeting attendees will be the first to preview what's coming!*

You will also be learning about some of the incredible pioneer women who settled Southern Oregon and *meeting the Board of Trustees and Officers* who will be turning strategy into actions.

**You'll hear Northwest Troubadour David Gordon** (who performs to "sold out" audiences) **share popular songs** by women composers along with the stories behind them.

**And you'll enjoy a hosted bar and delicious heavy hors d'oeuvres by Café Dejeuner's own Quality Catering.**

*So come honor our "foremothers" and join us in recognizing the individuals and organizations who are aiding our mission of bringing history to life and sharing it with our community!*



# THE SOCIETY IN 2019: AN OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

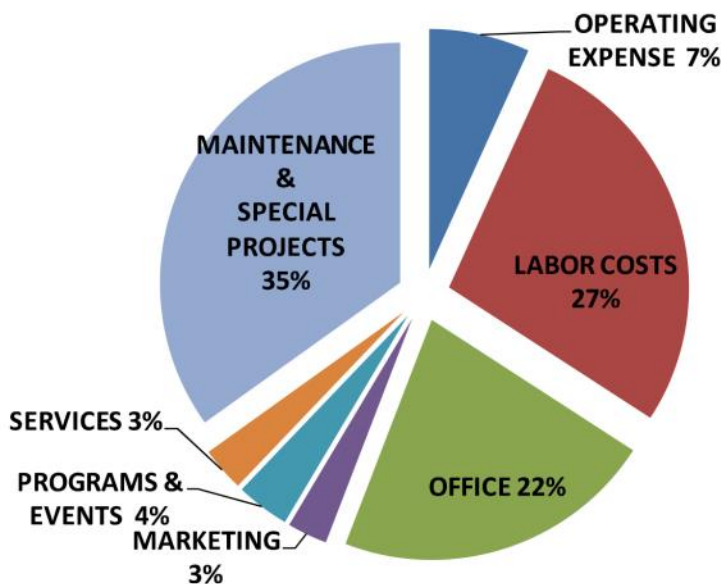
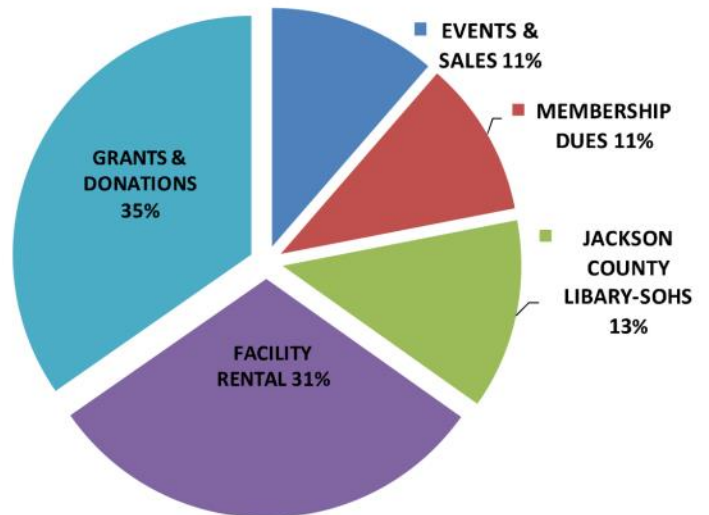
The Southern Oregon Historical Society is a well-managed, financially stable organization whose collection, programs and venues make it one of the premier heritage resources of the Pacific Northwest. The fiscal foundations of the Society allow us to operate a remarkable array of programs and partnerships.

In 2019, SOHS offered a variety of family and student-oriented Hanley farm events, a quarterly historical journal, the *As It Was* Public Radio series, and introduced a new monthly “Pub Talk” series. In partnership with Jackson County Library Services it offered free monthly talks in Medford and Ashland libraries and provided Jackson

## FISCAL YEAR 2019-UNAUDITED

### 2019 Revenue

Events and Sales	\$ 34,428
Membership Dues	\$ 32,082
JCLS - SOHS Partnership	\$ 39,000
Facility Rent Income	\$ 92,504
Grants and Donations	\$ 105,113
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 303,127</b>



### 2019 Expenses

Operating Expense	\$ 25,441
Labor Costs	\$ 102,473
Office	\$ 81,332
Marketing	\$ 10,090
Programs & Events	\$ 13,423
Services	\$ 11,163
Maintenance & Special Projects	\$ 130,687
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 374,610</b>

<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 303,127</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 374,610</b>
	<b>\$ (71,483)</b>
<b>RELEASED FUNDS FROM RESTRICTED BALANCE</b>	<b>\$15,695</b>
<b>GAIN ON INVESTMENT</b>	<b>\$ 118</b>
<b>NET GAIN (LOSS) 2019</b>	<b>\$ (55,670)</b>



County residents free access to our research library five days a week. We continued to maintain the second largest artifact collection in Oregon, sharing items with the public in “pop up” exhibits as we looked to a future with a museum.

The revenues that served these efforts were obtained from a combination of event earnings, membership fees, grants, donations and partnerships. The society receives no direct government funding.

In 2019 the society made a long-term investment in matching grant dollars to upgrade infrastructure at Hanley Farm. These expenditures, resulting in a shortfall in this year’s ending fund balance, will be amortized over the next several years. Meanwhile, the society continued to pay down its long-term debt.

SOHS is a member-based organization whose operations are the product of more than 200 active volunteers and a small administrative staff. Together we are accomplishing our mission of keeping history alive and meaningful in Southern Oregon.

As 2020 begins, the immediate task of the Southern Oregon Historical Society is to assure the income earning capacity of our Medford History Center building. By strengthening its financial base, SOHS will advance its long-awaited History Center Expansion Project. An enhanced history facility in downtown Medford will allow us to make use of our collections and talent to better tell the story of Southern Oregon to our community and visitors. In the process of implementing this plan we will build stronger ties with our members and continue “making history together.”

## SOHS ACTION PLAN FOR 2020

The SOHS action plan for 2020 includes:

### Board Training

We will better inform our Board and membership about progressive museum concepts and techniques.

### Infrastructure Development

Our most important asset is our human resources. A new Exhibit Task Force of professional and volunteer staff has been developed to sustain a museum/ history activity. The group is being trained in curatorial protocols and assisting in such simple set ups as we now offer in the library and Hanley House. It will be charged with developing a launch exhibition for the Third Quarter, with the longer-term goal of piloting a model interactive exhibit, sponsored by one or more local businesses.

### Community Outreach

Our ongoing Living Room Parties and public presentations will be refocused to explain this new direction and use these as a springboard for

recruiting new members. Our promotional video will be updated to capture this vision.

### Fund Raising

A variety of efforts are planned for the coming months, including building lists of potential sponsors, and refining ways of approaching them. To assist with this, we will integrate promotion with currently scheduled events and develop new marketing materials. A possible summer event and the opening of a new exhibit will generate publicity used as a springboard for a Capital Improvement Campaign slated for 2021.

### Enlisting Society Support

The 2020 Action Plan will be presented to the membership at the March 29, 2020 meeting along with specific ways in which members and friends of the Society can involve themselves in this exciting process. It will then be shared with current or new community partners to help build these relationships.

## “POP UP EXHIBITS” HERALD SOHS MUSEUM

As a prelude to launching an SOHS museum in the History Center later this year, our Collections Committee is sharing artifacts from the second largest collection in Oregon through “pop up” exhibits. We encourage you to check out these local mini-museums!

The Bureau of Land Management on Biddle Road in Medford is now featuring our 1924 Ner-a-Car—part car, part motorcycle. “Cheaper than shoe leather,” this economical vehicle was neither car nor motorcycle. In the 1920s this odd machine was billed as “thrifty transportation” well suited for salesmen, messengers or just about anyone on a shoestring budget.

Botanical watercolors by artist Sydney Armer are now on loan to the Oregon Community Foundation Offices in downtown Medford.



New interpretive signage is being added to our 1920s Stutz fire pumper truck on loan to Fire Station #4 on Table Rock Road in Medford, and the City of Jacksonville Fire Department Museum houses a variety of implements, leather helmets and other fire equipment used by the Jacksonville Fire Department in the late Victorian period.

And a wonderful “Treasured Toys” exhibit in the History Center Library invokes the nostalgia of childhood from the 1800s through the 20th Century.

Kira Lesley, our archivist, is working preparing images from the Pinto Colvig archives to be shared and possibly loaned to the German Film Institute and Museum for an exhibit they are doing on Disney films.

We’re addressing the community’s call for sharing our collection as we move forward towards a new museum!

## *From the Library and Archives*

### SOHS-JCLS PARTNERSHIP WRAPS UP SECOND YEAR

The Southern Oregon Historical Society ended its second year in partnership with Jackson County Library Services with some promising statistics. From 2018 to 2019, we increased our foot traffic in the research library and the total number of research requests addressed. The following table illustrates some highlights:

Research Library Interactions	2019	2018	% Increase
Jackson County residents conducting research	371	277	34%
Others conducting research (from outside Jackson County)	64	54	18.5%
Online/website requests	24	19	26%
Total library interactions (including phone calls, letters, and non-research requests not listed here)	1573	1296	21%

The partnership, developed by former SOHS Archivist and current webmaster Pat Harper, secures funding for a paid archivist position at SOHS. In return, SOHS dropped research fees for Jackson County residents and increased open research hours, including Saturday hours. We are in the process of expanding partnership offerings.

*The Spring 2020 SOHS Quarterly is made possible by a generous grant from the Horton Family Foundation in memory of Julia Ann Horton.*





## *History Is Where the Heart Is!* **SPOTLIGHT ON DOUG MCGEARY**

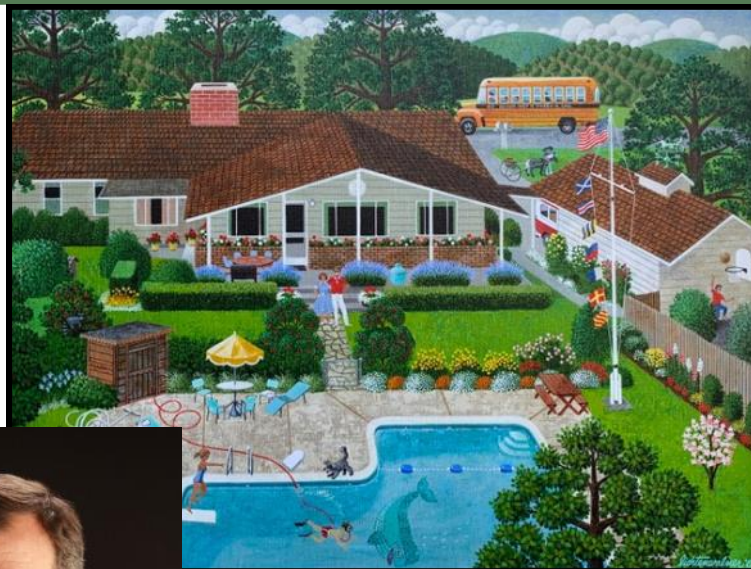
In 1987, well-known artist John Lichtenwalner painted an idyllic scene of a 1960s Southern Oregon country home. One of the children depicted in the painting later recalled, “We lived outside of Phoenix on Calhoun Road among the orchards, and our back porch looked east out at the imposing Mt. Baldy rising up across the valley. It was very peaceful and quiet. We were lucky, of course, but life is always simpler when you’re 10 years old and living at the bottom of a pool.” The young boy was Doug McGeary, the current president of the Board of Trustees of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

The path that brought Doug McGeary to SOHS runs straight through childhood. In 1953, Dr. M. Donald McGeary and his wife Margaret brought their two oldest children to the Rogue Valley from Minnesota. Doug, the youngest of four children was born in Southern Oregon and grew up in a lively home with parents active in community affairs. When the picture was painted, he was riding yellow bus #9 to school each day.

Memories of those early years remain strong. My mom would take me to the museum in Jacksonville and explain what things meant,” he reminisces. “I saw things happening. When I was four years old, I remember my folks taking me to see John Kennedy when he was Grand Marshal of Medford’s Pear Blossom Parade. My father, an avid fisherman, told me stories about the legendary Rogue River guide Glenn Wooldridge, and the accomplishments of Glenn Jackson, head of Oregon’s Highway Commission.

“I remember when we would shop for groceries any day but Sunday at Quality Market on Main Street near Alba Park,” Doug relates. “I remember going to Dell’s for hamburgers and how people throughout the area would go to the Phoenix Bakery for its pink champagne angel food cake with white chocolate frosting. I remember seeing the freeway being built. I recall when Barnett Road leading to what we knew as Rogue Valley Memorial Hospital was just two-lanes.”

A graduate of Phoenix High School, Doug attended Evergreen State College, Portland State and received his law degree from Northwestern School of Law, Lewis and Clark College. He no sooner graduated then he returned



to Southern Oregon. “This was always for me one of the most beautiful places to live. I could not think of a better place to be.” In 1988 Doug began working in the Jackson County District Attorney’s Office. He moved into government law and served on a number of community boards.

It was only then that the past began to take on importance. “When the older generations and their stories started vanishing, I realized that I was losing my connection with these memories.” This led him to SOHS. His parents had been members of the society, and in 2014, fellow lawyer Dick Thierolf, invited him to join to its board of trustees. “It was a quick decision,” Doug explains, “and I am not sorry for it.”

As a practicing attorney, he had experience in working with boards and found the society’s Trustees impressive. “It’s a high-performance group whose members have different skills and whose hearts are all in the right place.” His appreciation for history has also broadened. “The work of SOHS fascinates me because it brings together so many aspects of our community: its arts, history, and personalities.”

In 2017 he was elected board-president. Highlights of his tenure were group conversations in which over 100 members of the community helped develop the society’s strategic plan for the next decade and oversaw the transition of the society into a primarily volunteer-run organization.

In the years that have passed since Doug McGeary was ten years old, Southern Oregon has changed. “Our valley has grown bigger. Where once there were orchards, there are now subdivisions and vineyards.” But for Doug McGeary, the valley that he once viewed from the bottom of the pool, is still the best place in the world to be!



Heritage Plant Sale—April 25th and 26th

## CURRENT RESIDENT OR



## WINDOWS IN TIME



### *Southern Oregon History Series*

*First Wednesdays at the Medford Library  
Second Wednesdays at the Ashland Library  
12—1 p.m.; FREE*

### **THE OLD WOODHOUSE, 1870: ITS HISTORY AND CONSERVATION**

*April 1 & 8 with Skip Gear*

### **SCIENCEWORKS: HOW THE ROGUE VALLEY GOT A WORLD-CLASS SCIENCE MUSEUM**

*May 6 & 13 with Dan Ruby*

### **THE LIFE OF GEORGE WRIGHT: RANCHER, PHILOSOPHER, FRIEND**

*June 3 & 10 with Pat Harper*

## FIRST TUESDAY



*4 Daughters Irish Pub*

**126 West Main  
Medford, OR 97501**

***Talks begin upstairs at 7pm.  
FREE!***

**April 7— “The Land Remembers:  
Photographs Inspired by the  
Rogue River Indian Wars”**

Photographer Rich Bergeman spent 3 years exploring places where one of the bloodiest and longest running wars in Oregon's history raged.

**May 5— “Voices of the Golden Ghosts:  
African American Miners in the Gold Rush”**

Mark Oliver has worked with history professionals, performers, and artists to reconstruct and tell the story of these African-Americans.