Stories from the Lansing Research Library

Ask a Researcher

By Richard Whitwer

Research requests come into the Lansing Research Library in numerous ways. Some are phoned in, others come by email, and some are received from people walking into the Coos History Museum. One thing is common with all these requests - a curiosity about aspects of Coos County life. Some requests are fairly common and we see repeat requests on certain obvious topics like family genealogy, history of specific buildings and property, logging operations, shipping and shipwrecks. Others are unique. Here is a sample of some recent research requests that our volunteer research hosts have dealt with:

• “Was there a submarine base at or near Coos Bay?” We have no record of such a base. However, we did have two submarines visit a Front Street dock in 1917.
• “Where was the Fat Elk School District?” Fat Elk School District #19 was formed in 1873 southwest of the city of Coquille. It closed in 1949 and consolidated with the Coquille School District.
• “Was there a nitrate blast at Port Orford during the WWII era?” We found no such information but were able to refer the patron to information on the large nitrate explosion in Roseburg in 1959.
• “Did a railroad trestle fall down outside of Bandon?” The Seeley and Anderson Logging Company over Bill Creek (just east of Bandon) fell on November 25, 1912. It had just recently been constructed and on the first trip of a logging train over the high trestle, it collapsed. Six men were killed and one man survived.
• “I’m writing a historical fiction novel involving a character from Coos County. Can you help with information about coal mining activity?” We referred the patron to several books in our museum store and provided photographs of the Libby Mines.
• “I found an old police patch. Is it authentic?” The question led us to Empire where, apparently, it was worn by a female dispatcher/matron in the police department.
• “Can we use historical photos for interior decor work for the North Bend Safeway remodel?” Yes! Check them out next time you shop at NB Safeway.
• “Can the museum provide photos for visitors to view on a new Coos Bay boat tour?” This summer, Brian Kraynik started a new business giving boat tours on Coos Bay. The CHM provided photos of historic activities on the waterfront of Coos Bay and Isthmus Slough.

If an individual wants to complete their own research, we have volunteers that will help get you started for free. Please contact the museum to set up an appointment to visit and work with one of our volunteers. The Lansing Research Library is generally open Tuesday through Friday, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Historic photos in the museum’s collection can be obtained for a fee.

If you would prefer for our volunteers to complete your research, let us know. The first half hour of our time is free as we determine what and how much information we might have. Additional research time by our volunteers can be arranged for a fee.

We welcome all requests, common or unique!

A submarine at a Front Street dock in Marshfield during WWI. [CHM 959.89c]
President’s Message

Carol Ventgen

Summer at the museum is going quickly and plans for fall and winter activities are underway.

The history of the Lee Valley, Dora, Sitkum area was highlighted by the July 20 tour organized and led by museum trustees Bill Mast, Anne Guerin, and David Laird. Lunch in the impressive Dora Community Center/Library was served by the Dora Friendly Club and was followed by showing of an excellent 1930s-era film about logging in the area, narrated by David’s father, Murl Laird. By the time you read this, Professor Robert Miller will have given a fascinating talk about “Tribes’ Economic Development Strategies” during his August First Tuesday talk, sponsored by Al Peirce Company.

Mark your calendars for Thursday evening, October 10, when Teddy Roosevelt will pay a visit to the museum. This fundraiser features amazing tribute speaker, Joe Wiegand, and is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank. It was arranged for us by Oregon Historical Society Director, Kerry Tymchuck. Not to be missed.

Also Saturday, January 25, there will be a gala evening at Restaurant O, sponsored as a fundraiser for the museum by museum members, Greg and Barbara Rueger. Stay tuned.

I want to applaud members of the museum staff, and your museum trustees, for doing an outstanding job helping the museum through this time of transition. In the absence of an Executive Director, the work of this position is being covered by a trio of talented people, with Museum Curator Debra Semrau overseeing daily operations, Museum Trustee Steve Greif handling facilities matters, and Trustee Suzy Callery taking care of technology issues. We thank Debra for taking on these extra duties along with collections and exhibits duties. A search committee has begun work on finding a new Executive Director.

Other staff changes are bittersweet. We are losing long-time Education Coordinator Amy Pollicino, who has done such an outstanding job building the museum’s excellent education program, which really serves as a model for other programs in the state. Amy is leaving to further her education in New York, where her family lives. A special search committee is seeking a new person to provide education services as well as head up program activities for community members of all ages.

Happily, Joni Eades, who had to resign last January as coordinator of rentals and marketing, has returned to handle the marketing portion of the position, working with Pam Cottrell, who recently came on board to fill the rentals aspects of the job. They are a dynamite team and have some great ideas for expanding use of our beautiful facility and boosting attendance at our programs.

Speaking of ideas, your Board of Trustees members are interested in any you have to make our museum succeed.

Coos County Historical Society

Staff
Executive Director: TBA
Curator: Debra Semrau
Education Coordinator: TBA
Volunteer Coordinator & Store Mgr.: Valerie Caskey
Rentals Coordinator: Pam Cottrell
Marketing Director: Joni Eades
Visitor Services Assistant: Becca Hill
Bookkeeper: Terri Knight

Board of Trustees
President: Carol Ventgen
Vice-President: Kristi Pennington
Secretary: Anne Guerin
Treasurer: Jan Hooper
Trustees: Suzy Callery, Steve Greif, Ryan Hogan, Courtney Krossman, David Laird, Bill Mast, Tina Mendizabal, Arlene Roblan

Museum Admission
Open Tuesday thru Sunday, 10–5
Adults = $7, Children 5-17 = $3
Family Rate (household) = $17
AARP, AAA, and senior discounts.
Free admission to CCHS members, NARM program members, and active-duty military.

541.756.6320, www.cooshistory.org

CHM Annual Meeting Awards

Award winners (L-R): Tom Orsi, Tom Leahy, and Andie Jensen. Tom Orsi was honored with the Martha Butler Service Award, given to a person who has provided exceptional assistance or service to the Coos County Historical Society or museum. Tom Leahy received the Mary Banks Granger Maritime History Award, given to a person who contributes to the preservation of Maritime-related history. The Nathan Douthit Local Historian Award, given annually to a person who has made significant contributions to the preservation of history in our area, went to Andie Jensen. Photo by Steve Greif
Annual History Tour

(From to back, at right) Bill Mast, Anne Guerin, and David Laird led a school bus load of attendees on an all-day journey to Lee Valley, Dora, and Sitkum, starting at the Myrtle Point Logging Museum. Among the many stops was an opportunity to wander through a couple pioneer cemeteries. Jo Rieber, one of the tour participants, photographed the gravestone with its cluster of angelic figures, while the photo in front of the old Gearhart home in Dora, was taken by CHM board president, Carol Ventgen.

We are always looking for volunteers to help out at the museum.

Contact Valerie Caskey at volunteercoordinator@cooshistory.org

or call 541-756-6320 for more information.

Volunteers Tom Orsi, Joan Greif, and Kathy Sprague helped to install a new exhibit in the Welcome Gallery in mid-May. The exhibit showcases unusual handmade/handcrafted artifacts from the museum’s collection. Also working on the exhibit, but not shown in the photo, were curator Debra Semrau, and volunteers Richard Whitwer, Tom Hines, and Steve Greif.

Photo by Steve Greif
Birth of the “Coos Bay News,”
and an Account of Early Publisher Thomas B. Merry

By Cory Smith, 2019

Empire City was founded in 1853 and developed rapidly due to the obvious aesthetic and economic attractions of the area. What came late to the growing area was the printed word as a source of news and entertainment. Coos County’s first printing press arrived in Empire City in October of 1870. That year the “Monthly Guide” began publication as a four-page 6”x4” pamphlet. In November of the following year “The Rustic” began bi-weekly publication, but lasted only about a year. In 1873 the “Monthly Guide” morphed into the “Coos Bay News,” published weekly. In 1874 the “Coos County Record” and “The Bumblebee” also began short-lived stints as weekly papers.

Thus, the “Coos Bay News” was arguably the first full-size regularly published newspaper in Coos County. It began publication in March of 1873 in Empire City, was moved to Marshfield in 1875, and ran for more than 46 years. It was considered the “official organ” of Coos County and was distributed weekly on Wednesday. Its first publisher was T. G. Owen and the editor was J. M. Siglin, but Thomas B. Merry soon arrived and was hired to be editor and publisher in May of 1873.

Merry was with the newspaper for only a short time, which seems to have been his modus operandi. Thomas Brown Merry was born in New York City on June 6, 1835. His father, Charles J. Merry, was a shipmaster. Following a trail of census records and city directories reveals that Thomas Merry chose the eventful life of an itinerant journalist. Beginning around 1865 and continuing until close to his death in Alameda County, California on January 5, 1915, he bounced all over the west coast, working for newspapers.

By the time he came to Empire in 1873, at the age of 38, he had spent time on newspapers in Red Bluff, California, Nevada City, California, and Ashland, Oregon. He was editor of the “Coos Bay News” for three years at most. After that he spent time in Seattle and The Dalles, and stayed as long as six years in Portland from 1882 to 1888. He eventually settled in Los Angeles around 1893, married in January of 1897, and stayed there until about 1910, when he reappeared in Portland at the age of 75, working for “The Journal.”

Despite Thomas B. Merry’s short tenure at the “Coos Bay News,” he provided the written history of Coos County with a colorful account of what it was like to make the trip from Empire to Bandon 145 years ago. A trip that takes less than an hour by automobile today took more than twelve hours by boat and rough tracks.

A Merry Excursion:
Voyage on the Coquille River, 1874

[This is the third printing of Merry’s story. It originally appeared in the “Coos Bay News” on Wednesday, July 8, 1874, and was reprinted in “The Bandon Recorder” on September 21, 1915.]

We left Empire last Wednesday about noon on the Satellite, in company with some dozen of our fellow citizens bound for the blue Coquille. Friend Wm. Saunders went ashore at North Bend and borrowed a boat with which to go down Beaver slough, which boat we launched at Dr. Henry’s and made sail on her. George Quigley was pilot and when we got up to Isaacs’ landing we partook of a hearty dinner and then made the best of our way across the Isthmus. Arriving at Judge Hall’s
that gentleman informed us he had that day sold out his “railroad” to Messrs. Utter and Fitzhugh for $8,000. We got our boat hauled on the car by a single patient mule, whose voice was “echoless and alone” as he brayed along the little tramroad through the wilderness. Suddenly the heavy droning buzz of a circular saw broke upon our ears, and we came upon a steam saw mill owned by the Isthmus Transit Railroad company and managed by J. F. Dunham, formerly [of] North Bend. We found all hands at work, as hard as they could drive, not only getting out timbers for the new railroad, but actually cutting out an order for a building in Marshfield. This is worse than shipping coal to Newcastle.

Beaver Slough was reached at last, and I was totally astonished to think how all the trade and travel of the Coquille valley had to pass through this narrow gutter. There were four of us in the skiff. Saunders and Quigley (who did the poling for six miles through the tortuous and narrow passage), Geo. Bennett of Bandon and the writer. The dense brush overhung the channel the entire distance but at length we came to the farm of Y. M. Lowe, and suddenly about an hour before sunset, burst upon our admiring view “The Blue Coquille.” Yes, after a year of patient waiting it was before me at last, the most beautiful if not the grandest river in Oregon. Its fame had not belied the extraordinary beauty of its source of wealth to Coos county, and will be the want of means of shipment, the principal difficulty has heretofore been the want of means of shipment, the principal difficulty has heretofore been the want of means of shipment, the principal difficulty has heretofore been the want of means of shipment, the principal difficulty has heretofore been the want of means of shipment.
wake up a little. We saw her lying at anchor just below Pohl & Grube’s mill, loaded with cedar lumber for San Francisco. She would have gone to sea several days ago but for the serious illness of one of Capt. Rackliffe’s family. In addition to her, a steam scow called the Twin Sisters comes in here occasionally and takes off about 80,000 feet of lumber at a load.

It was high noon, overcast and sultry on Friday when Saunders and myself bid adieu to the hospitable mansion of Mr. Pershbacker. We were bound for the celebration at Coquille city and carried our patriotism in a jug. Of what befell us, more anon. [A search of succeeding issues of the Coos Bay News, which is available at the North Bend Library on microfilm, found no further account of Mr. Merry’s excursion.]

Bibliography

Historic Ranch Tour

Gregory & Carter McClarren and Norman Herning & Linda Bufton (left to right) stand on the porch of the pioneer home called Eckley, owned by the Dement Ranch, LLC. Along with touring Eckley and some of its prairies in the back hills, they visited the Powers Ranch adjacent to the Dements, up the Salmon Creek Road from Powers. The pioneer Wagner House in Powers, on land donated by the Powers Ranch, was also included on the tour; led by Anne Guerin on the CHM Board of Trustees. The tour was offered in the silent auction portion of the museum fundraiser last fall. [Come to the October 10 benefit for the museum to see if another pioneer ranch tour is offered.] Photo by Anne Guerin

A big thank you to nine North Bend High School sophomores and their advisor, history teacher Dustin Hood, and CHM volunteer Steve Greif, who pulled a truck load of weeds from the berm in front of the CHM on a wet Wednesday in May. Over 27 man-hours of volunteer labor were contributed by the group to get the museum landscape ready for summer visitors. Photos by Steve Greif
Comings and Going at the Museum

The CHM Board of Trustees recently welcomed Courtney Krossman, currently an Archaeological Assistant for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, where she is also an enrolled Tribal Member. She is interested in offering a Tribal perspective relating to their cultural practices and visions for the community, and can serve as a link for collaboration between the Coos County Historical Society and CTCLUSI.

The Board of Trustees recently said goodbye to two board members, Toni Ann Brend and Xandra McKeown, both of whom added solid value to the organization and will be missed.

Pam Cottrell, long-time assistant and coordinator of events and programs for the Chamber of Commerce, has accepted the position of rentals coordinator. Joni Eades, formerly on CHM staff, has returned as a marketing director, a new part-time position at the museum.

Amy Pollicino, Education & Programs Coordinator, left her post at the end of July to return to the East Coast to further her education. A long-time employee, Amy offered great value to the museum, and is particularly noted for managing the education program for 4th and 5th grades. Many people gathered to say goodbye and wish Amy well at her recent farewell party.

Tracy from Art Signs is placing a donor sign from John and Teri Whitty near the kitchen at the Coos History Museum. Recently, all donor signs were updated and installed at the museum. Photo by Steve Greif
Calendar of Events

We are working hard at bringing new and relevant public programming to the community. The following is a partial list of upcoming events. Check the museum’s website for a full calendar of events, www.cooshistory.org.

AUGUST

6 – First Tuesday Talks: 6:30-8p.m. $7 Adults/FREE for Museum Members. Speaker: Dr. Robert Miller, Tribes’ Economic Development Strategies. Sponsored by Al Peirce Co. with additional in-kind support from The Mill Casino.

11 – Second Sundays Museum Free Day: 1-3p.m. Free admission all day plus hands-on activities for kids and the young at heart. Sponsored by Coquille Animal Hospital.

SEPTEMBER

3 – First Tuesday Talks: 6:30-8p.m. $7 Adults/FREE for Museum Members. Speaker: Samantha Clayburn and Elissa Wells, Master Gardening, Youth Development, Community Service: OSU Extension. Sponsored by Al Peirce Co. with additional in-kind support from The Mill Casino.

9 – Second Sundays Museum Free Day: 1-3p.m. Free admission all day plus hands-on activities for kids and the young at heart. Sponsored by Coquille Animal Hospital.

12, 19, 26 – Toddler Yoga: 10:30-11:30a.m., $7 Adults/FREE for Museum Members (Family level or above). Kids will learn traditional yoga poses as well as singing songs, playing games, and other activities that challenge their motor and social skills.

OCTOBER

1 – First Tuesday Talks: 6:30-8p.m. $7 Adults/FREE for Museum Members. Speaker: Bill Mast, South Coast Agriculture: A Historical Perspective. Sponsored by Al Peirce Co. with additional in-kind support from The Mill Casino.

3, 10, 17, 24, 31 – Toddler Yoga: 10:30-11:30a.m., $7 Adults/FREE for Museum Members (Family level or above). Kids will learn traditional yoga poses as well as singing songs, playing games, and other activities that challenge their motor and social skills.

10 – Annual Fundraising Dinner Auction Event. 5-9p.m. Advanced tickets required. Details forthcoming.

12 – Oregon Authors Day: Workshops 1-2p.m. Author readings 2-4p.m. $10/adult, $8/student. Museum admission fee applies. For more information visit: https://cooshistory.org/events/oregon-authors-day-2/

13 – Second Sundays – Museum Free Day: 1-3p.m. Free admission all day plus hands-on activities for kids and the young at heart. Sponsored by Coquille Animal Hospital. Look for details on the Holiday Market in the next issue of Waterways.

Norma Davis donated this quilt for a CHM fundraising raffle this spring, with the drawing for the winner being held on Mother’s Day. Janice Caruso sewed the quilt, in a design pattern called “Oh, my darling.”

Photo by Steve Greif
One of the many benefits of getting a Friend membership or higher is being able to gain free access to the 1,013 museums that are a part of that association.

More information is available at the museum or on the website: [www.cooshistory.org](http://www.cooshistory.org)

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### Is it time to purchase or renew your annual membership? Make a donation?

**Annual Fee:**
- ___ Student ($15)
- ___ Individual ($35)
- ___ Household ($50)
- ___ Friend ($100)
- ___ Benefactor ($250)
- ___ Historian ($500)
- ___ Curator ($1,000)
- ___ Business membership ($100 or above)

___ Donation $_______

Membership has its rewards in shopping locally. Show your membership card when you shop at **Tru Furniture** and **Katrina Kathleen's** to receive 10% OFF regular prices.

At the Friend level and up, you can now receive an additional new benefit – membership in the North American Reciprocal Museums program with free admission to 1,013+ museums across the U.S. A link to the list of NARM members is posted on our website and available for review at our front desk.

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**Your annual membership becomes active from date of purchase.**

- **Member Name:** ___________________________ **Date:** ___________________________
- **Business Name:** ___________________________
- **Mailing Address:** ___________________________________________________________________
- **Phone #:** ___________________________ **Email:** ___________________________
- ___ Yes, send information about events via email.
- ___ Send information about volunteering and gifting.
- If your VISA/MasterCard/DiscoveryCard is by mail: **Card Type:** __________
  **Card #:** ___________________________ **Exp Date:** _______ 3-digit Security Code: _______

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### Job Announcements for the Coos History Museum

*We will begin seeking applications the first week in August 2019 for the Executive Director position. Date will be announced for the Education Coordinator position opening.*

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:** The Coos History Museum is seeking a dynamic and entrepreneurial leader to accept responsibility for and further the growth of the museum's financial health, new program development, and management of the museum.

**EDUCATION COORDINATOR:** The Education Coordinator is responsible for advancing the Coos History Museum's mission to provide excellence in education and engaging the local community.

Please see the museum's website soon for more information. [https://cooshistory.org/employment-opportunities/](https://cooshistory.org/employment-opportunities/)

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Volunteers **Steve Greif** and **Pat Cross** (on ladder) designed and installed a roof over the garbage/recycle stall, allowing for a more secure and attractive structure in the parking lot. *Photo by Amy Pollicino*
ABERNETHY HOUSE

Annual history tour participants passed by this well-known historical home in the Dora vicinity on July 20th. Photo, taken by Richard Kirk, was part of the Local Lore program in Dora. Linda Kirk provided a copy of the photo.

WATERWAYS

is the quarterly publication of the Coos County Historical Society and sent to all members.

Funding for this newsletter is generously provided by Ann Collins.