

# WATERWAYS

COOS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY • SUMMER 2020 • WWW.COOSHISTORY.ORG

## Doc Straw

By Jon Littlefield, May 22, 2020

In 1905, Edwin Ephraim Straw had only been in Marshfield about four years, when friends and acquaintances urged him to run for mayor of the town. He was just 28, but an audacious fellow — to run against incumbent mayor Henry Sengstacken, 54, described as “an institution in Coos County for half a century.” Although Straw filed too late to get his name on the printed ballots, his supporters wrote in his name, and he won by 76 votes. “Sengstacken Covered with Straw” was the joke around town. At that time Straw was the youngest mayor in Oregon. He was reelected to three more consecutive terms and served as mayor from 1906 through 1913, becoming one of Marshfield’s longest serving mayors. Moreover, Straw served during a time of unprecedented development in the Coos Bay region, when Marshfield was “emerging from the country village class into a city,” as a local newspaper put it. Its population more than doubled between 1900 and 1910 and continued to grow apace.

E. E. Straw grew up on a farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwestern Virginia. He graduated from Virginia Agricultural College, got his medical training at Vanderbilt University, and headed west, eventually to Klamath Falls and then, in 1901, to Marshfield. He set up practice as an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, but he also assisted with surgery and the general practice of medicine. His office in Marshfield was first in the Henry Sengstacken Building, next in the Lockhart Building, and finally in the Flanagan & Bennett Bank Building. A year before his sudden death from a heart attack in 1929, Dr. Straw became associated with the Keizer Brothers Hospital in North Bend.

Dr. Straw held several other official positions besides mayor. When the Coos Bay Division of the Oregon Naval Militia was organized, he was its first lieutenant; later he became one of five members of the State Naval Militia Board and held the rank of lieutenant commander. For a time he was state health officer for Marshfield and later was government quarantine officer for the port. He was president of the Oregon State Medical Association in 1917-1918.

In Straw’s time, before today’s extent of state and federal reach, the role of mayor was a big one: preside over all aspects of nascent city government, initiate and direct municipal operations, influence the awarding of franchises and other contracts, recruit and hire city employees, develop policies and procedures, draft ordinances, declare proclamations, speak at public and private gatherings



Mayor Straw (third from left) helping to initiate construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad to North Bend and Marshfield, 1913. CCHM 982.190.35

whenever called upon, and rally the community to action. It was an era of action, as President Theodore Roosevelt exemplified from the highest office in the land. It was also a time when the field for action was wide open — when it seemed like just about anything could be done if money and manpower could be found to do it. Dredge the bay. Fill the land. Build roads. Create city facilities. Protect health. Improve minds. Mayor Straw had a hand in all aspects of the town’s doings.

Dr. Straw’s interest in community improvements was boundless. He lobbied for sewer line construction. He advised placing sand under low lying buildings to eradicate standing water. One of his earliest moves in the port town of Marshfield was to campaign against rat infestation. The *Coos Bay Times* on March 4, 1908:

“Mayor E. E. Straw is leading the Marshfield rat campaign...compiling copy for a number of placards to be posted at conspicuous corners in the city, informing all that the city will pay in good hard coin one nickel for each rat, dead, dying or alive, delivered into the hands of Jack Carter, marshal [police chief].”

Straw was the first to proclaim annual “clean up days,” urging his townsfolk to make “a spotless town.” The *Times* on October 5, 1907:

“Mayor Straw has secured the services of enough teams and wagons to more than take care of the rubbish which will be collected. All citizens will be asked to do is to put the rubbish they collect in the middle of the street. The wagons will come around and collect it.”

On April 13, 1910, the *Coos Bay Times* reported that, at Mayor Straw’s request, the city council authorized him to close the “bawdy houses” in Marshfield’s “restricted district” on North Front Street, “although if the houses can

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# President's Message



Ryan Hogan

Hello Members,  
I hope this *Waterways* edition finds you and your families well. I want to thank **Carol Ventgen** for her leadership as Board president over the past several years. Our museum has been challenged in more ways than one, yet Carol remained steadfast to see us through it.

I would like to thank Carol, **Arlene Roblan**, and **Jan Hooper** for their excellent years of service and tireless dedication to the museum and our community. They have each left their distinct fingerprint on the Board and our museum as an organization. I will always be grateful for their insight and guidance.

I want to welcome our new Board members: **Chief Don Ivy**, **Sara Stephens**, **Alissa Pruess**, and

**John Bacon**. They bring a diverse depth of knowledge and experience that will help to strengthen our Board as well as have an immediate impact on the success of our museum.

As we are all living in this new world of social distancing, we are being forced to rethink how we engage with our museum and community members while continuing to be a valuable regional resource for Coos County and the South Coast. That said, we are beginning to see some new and unique opportunities open up for the museum and our educational programming. I, for one, am very excited for some of the events, discussions, and exhibits that we have in the works. Stay tuned and be safe!

## Intersection of History and Memoir

Recently, **Annis Cassell**, local writer, poet, and teacher, and **Steve Greif**, local historian, lecturer, and writer, joined to discuss ways in preserving local history. A theme of their discussion revolved around the intersection of history and memoir, that while digging into one's own personal and family history, one may reveal the larger historical context in which the personal events were occurring. Also, as a seasoned author, Cassell focused on some memoir writing do's and don'ts and mentioned that she offers classes in writing one's memoirs. Greif, a long-term Coos History Museum Board member, noted that one can locate interesting memoirs/diaries in the museum's collections.

If you missed this hour-long conversation at the North Bend Public Library on June 17, access it by watching it on Youtube. A link is also available on the museum's website. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxJhbMBQpY>

## Zoom First Tuesday Talk

**Steve Greif**, a volunteer with the Coos History Museum, gave the museum's first ever history presentation via Zoom at a "First Tuesday Talk" on June 2, 2020. Zoom is a digital video conferencing platform that has been used by many organizations during the COVID-19 crisis. Greif's topic was "A Brief History of Music in Coos County." 40+ people watched the presentation and, afterwards, responded with over \$300 in donations.

Greif based much of his presentation on the research of local music teacher, and Civil War historian, **John Hartman**. People are invited to view the presentation which is available on the CHM website.

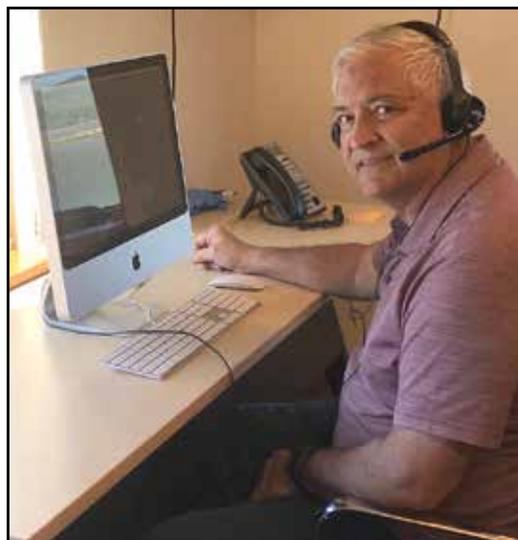


Photo by Joan Greif

## Coos County Historical Society

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### Museum Admission

Temporarily closed due to COVID-19. We hope to open soon; call ahead. The Museum Store is now on-line at [coohistory.org/museum-store/](http://coohistory.org/museum-store/)

541.756.6320, [www.coohistory.org](http://www.coohistory.org)





Marcia Hart

# Executive Director's Note

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Museums are a vital part of how we tell the stories of who we are, who we've been, and how we will live together. They maintain our cultural heritage and teach us about all the ways we are different and the same. Reflecting the diversity of that heritage is a critical part of the Coos County Historical Society and the Coos History Museum's work. We work towards highlighting diversity, equity, and inclusion as a key focus area in our strategic priorities and educational programming. Inclusion is how we move toward our equity goal, and diversity describes the breadth of our experiences and perspectives.

The Society acknowledges the acute trauma and pain experienced by African American/Black people over the past weeks, months, and years and throughout our history as a country. We support local, state and national voices of peaceful protest and change. We promote taking time to reflect on the lynching of **Alonzo Tucker** in 1902, the impact of **George Floyd's** murder at the hands of police, and how systems of oppression are impacting every Black person in Oregon and across America. We also acknowledge the even larger picture of oppression of all people of color, from the Native People who lived on this land before the white settlers, to the immigrants of all races who were brought to this area in the early 19th century.

These are historical times. It's time to ask ourselves "What kind of ancestor will I become, what will be our legacy in Coos County, and how will future generations view our actions during this exceedingly difficult time in our lives? When future generations ask, "Why did the community act in this manner?" what stories will be told?

As members of the Coos County Historical Society we have a responsibility to advocate for the unheard and the unseen. We will continue to collect and tell stories from multiple perspectives in the

spirit of equity and inclusion. We will look to offer transformational educational experiences which allow our community to remember and reconnect with the value of our humanity. The virus has literally "taken the breath away" from those who contract the illness. The Black Lives Movement is saying, "I can't breathe." Is it too much to ask, to expect that everyone has the "Right to Breathe"?

We encourage our citizens to learn more about state and local history regarding civil rights. The following books are recommended to begin understanding regional civil rights issues. Check out our online Museum Store to purchase, <https://cooshistory.org/museum-store/>



Crowd at Alonzo Tucker Event, Feb. 2020

- *Law on the Bay: Marshfield, Oregon 1874-1944* by Andie E. Jensen (2010). The author shares extensive newspaper research about the crimes and law enforcement officers in old Coos Bay and includes newspaper accounts of the Alonzo Tucker lynching.
- *The Coos Bay Region 1890-1944: Life on a Coastal Frontier* by Nathan Douthit (2nd edition, 2005) is a book about the pioneer era. The author relied on many oral history interviews as well as historical documents and photographs. Some discussion of minority issues, including the Alonzo Tucker event, are covered.
- *Made in Japan and Settled in Oregon* (1990) by Mitzi Asai Loftus, formerly of Coos Bay, describes a first-hand account of the Japanese relocation camps of the WWII era.
- *Paper Fight: The Coos Bay Times and the Ku Klux Klan* by Jon Littlefield (2014). Discusses the competition of the two leading newspapers in Marshfield in the 1920s and the influence that KKK activities had on local and state politics. Good biographies of the Maloney brothers (who ran the *Times*), Charles Hall (businessman who ran for governor).
- *Between Two Worlds: Chinese of Marshfield, Oregon* (3rd edition) by Jon Littlefield (2016). Chinese immigrants came to Coos County to build the railroads, work in the mines and canneries, serve as cooks in lumber camps, and operate stores. The story of several Chinese families, especially the family of Gow Why, from about 1880 to 1940.
- *Stars in the Dark: Coal Mines of Southwestern Oregon* by Dow Beckham (1995). Discussion of the minority workers at the mines, markets and competition, coal transportation and mining industry changes.
- *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon 1820s-1860s* by Nathan Douthit (2002). Investigates the Hudson's Bay fur trading company and its relations with Indians on the South Coast, white exploration, conflicts with settlers, the removal of Indians to reservations, and the culture afterwards.
- *She's Tricky Like Coyote: Annie Miner Peterson, An Oregon Coast Indian Woman* by Lionel Youst (1997) is the story of the last native Coos language speaker who lived on the Coastal Reservation in the late 1800s and later served as an informant to anthropologists in the 1930s.

Please contact Executive Director, Marcia Hart, at [director@cooshistory.org](mailto:director@cooshistory.org) if you have any questions or have an interest in becoming a volunteer at the Coos History Museum.

## ... Doc Straw *(continued from page 1)*

find an isolated site where they will not be objectionable to the public, they may be allowed to run there.”

A few more of Mayor Straw's many other initiatives: In 1906 he called for everyone in the city to bake bread to be shipped to San Francisco along with blankets and clothing after the big earthquake. In 1909 he encouraged authorizing a franchise for an urban electric railway (streetcar system) “to hasten development of Coos Bay” (although one was never built). In 1910 he invited all city mayors in Oregon to come to Marshfield to form a state association of mayors for an exchange of municipal ideas (presaging the formation of the League of Oregon Cities by more than a decade). He drafted an ordinance for garbage disposal and in 1908 he worked with the city attorney in consultation with architects to draft a “quite stringent” building ordinance. He successfully lobbied the city council to grant a franchise to Home Telephone Company to consolidate and expand local telephone service. He filled vacancies on the city council with men he wanted and he recruited and hired city employees, sometimes getting ahead of the rest of the council when he did so. As early as 1910 Straw publicized the need for a new city hall.

Marshfield almost lost its mayor in a close call that happened in October, 1909, and illustrates some of the street hazards of the day. Dr. Straw took his wife for a little spin in an automobile he borrowed from a doctor friend. They drove out onto the elevated plank roadway on North Front Street. In the process of shifting gears to try to turn the car around, Dr. Straw mistakenly shifted into high gear, and the car shot through the railing, “turned turtle,” and landed on the mudflat below. Both Dr. Straw and his wife, Sara, were pinned under the vehicle. Fortunately, the tide was out, so the water was only about 18 inches deep. Mrs. Straw, “with the strength of necessity,” as the *Times* put it, was able to drag herself from underneath the auto and then lift the car enough so that Dr. Straw was able to free himself. He suffered a broken shoulder, a dislocated shoulder, and multiple contusions and bruises; she was bruised up, too, and “suffering nervous shock.” The auto was not badly damaged, just a bent frame.

Although not short on enthusiasm, Dr. Straw brought a mixed bag of other attributes to the Marshfield City Council. He fitted the progressive mold of the time insofar as he was an educated, middle class professional who believed government could be a tool for positive social change. He was a social activist, bent on modernizing, advancing, moving forward, progressing. He had some of the qualities essential for a good doctor and a good politician: intelligence, toughness, tirelessness, determination, confidence, and high energy — on occasion he was fairly bursting with ideas for improving the town. But he lacked other qualities associated with a skillful politician: patience, diplomacy, flexibility, and tact. He became visibly exasperated when individuals he sought to lead were slow to follow. He could be peevish, as when, after his third reelection, councilors said they knew he had

more ideas for the city and they would like to hear them — to which Mayor Straw replied that he did have some more ideas, but why would he suggest them, when “you don't carry them out?” Straw was also prone to take unilateral action when group consensus was called for. As he said more than once at council meetings, his approach to “diplomacy” in working with property owners resistant to paying for street improvements was “I don't care what they think”: just forge ahead with the paving, if the council and city engineer agreed, and then send the assessments to the property owners. In other words, give them progress whether they want it or not.

And Mayor Straw did not have a thick skin. In a word, he was short-tempered. Numerous newspaper reports about stormy Marshfield City Council meetings during his administration depict Dr. Straw as testy, hot headed, domineering, cantankerous, and bullying: the irascible Mr. Mayor. Councilmen who challenged his statements or actions as autocratic found themselves on the receiving end of demeaning treatment. On October 1, 1913, for example, the *Coos Bay Times* rebuked Mayor Straw for “forgetting the decency and dignity of his office” at a council meeting, when he called a councilman “a damn liar” and offered to adjourn the meeting and settle matters with a fistfight “there and then.” The *Times* reported that set-to under the headline “Lively Time at the Council” and said it looked as though the city recorder, city attorney, and police chief “might have to invoke the anti-prize fighting ordinance.”

During much of Straw's time as mayor, he crossed swords with Mike Maloney, the editor of the *Coos Bay Times*. The *Times*

was not shy about reporting controversy or even stirring it up on occasion. Maloney was public spirited, “for the people,” and outspoken — plus, he had the newspaper for his voice. Initially Maloney sized up Straw as a man “of decided determination, always ready to state his position” — “a man who is easily met and is known especially for his frank and outspoken way” — “Doc” to his friends and acquaintances. Straw's impatience to act without consulting other council members (he was accused more than once of acting like a dictator) led to friction within the city council, and his hot tempered nature and easy use of profanity when he lost his temper made for entertaining print. Early on, in 1908, Straw took the *Times* to task for publishing a story he wanted killed. He vowed to Editor Maloney, henceforth, to “refuse to give the *Times* any news concerning anything, official or otherwise.” Maloney called him on it, publicly, in an editorial discoursing on freedom of the press and the public's right to know about its government. An uneasy relationship between the *Times* and the mayor continued throughout the remainder of Straw's time in office. The *Times* continued its reporting about the mayor, sometimes favorable and sometimes not, never missing a beat when controversy arose. A sample of headlines over the years reads “Mayor on Warpath” (over private owners' objections to street improvement assessments); “Mayor Straw Goes Up in the Air” (over resistance to street improvements); “Mayor Goes into a Tirade” (again over opposition to street



An early advertisement for Dr. Straw, *Coast Mail*, June 14, 1902.

improvements); “Council in Bad Mix-up” (over Straw’s vacancy appointments); and “Bitter Tilts between Mayor and Four Council Members.” More than once the mayor got in shouting matches with councilmen.

Occasionally Mayor Straw would let fly with the racist views he brought with him from his time in the Jim Crow Old Dominion. In 1910, when Jack Johnson, a black American, beat James Jeffries, a white American, and won the heavyweight boxing championship, race riots broke out around the country. The fight had been billed beforehand as “the Fight of the Century,” and with money to be made, the fight was filmed, and the film was distributed around the country for viewing. Whether to allow the film to be shown in Marshfield came before the Marshfield City Council in January, 1911. Mayor Straw opened the discussion by saying that he thought the film, and some others being shown around town, were demoralizing and degrading and he would not “stultify” himself by going to see the picture. Using the N-word several times to refer to the black fight champion, Straw said he preferred to not even honor the fighter by mentioning his name. The *Coos Bay Times* explained that Straw’s racist outburst was the product of his upbringing. “Having been raised in Virginia and the south, Mayor Straw still retains the strong anti-negro sentiments of that section.” Today Mayor Straw’s remarks would remove him from office. Instead, later that evening, the city council approved “a general resolution without personally mentioning Johnson-Jeffries to bar demoralizing and degrading films” (although one councilman wanted to know who should determine whether a picture was good or bad).

As time passed, the *Coos Bay Times* grew more critical of the mayor, eventually announcing that the newspaper was “not a personal or political friend of Mayor Straw.” Straw was supported by established interests in Marshfield and often sided with them; he saw the newspaper as too nose-y and too critical. Editor Maloney of the *Times* was wary of Straw’s close ties with certain prominent citizens and the influence they had through the mayor in awarding city business. “Franchise after franchise — telephone, street railway [never built], gas and electric light — have been given by the mayor and city council without a vote of the people,” Maloney wrote. “It’s a nice thing to be loyal to one’s friends but it’s a good thing to be loyal to one’s community also.” Being cozy with contractors was illustrated by a story in the *Times*, when it was reported that Mayor Straw called back two men who got up to leave a city council meeting after they had been awarded a contract by the council. Straw asked them not to leave, because it was customary, he said, for such recipients to celebrate by taking the council out to dinner and drinks after the council meeting.

In 1911 the *Coos Bay Times* went all-out against Mayor Straw. It endorsed Straw’s opponent for mayor. The *Times* had been lobbying for the city to take over the town’s privately owned water company, whereas Straw favored continuing the private franchise that had existed for many

years (and was granted to one of his steadfast supporters). The local water system had been an issue for some time. In 1906 the existing water company serving portions of Marshfield and North Bend was reorganized as the Coos Bay Water Company, privately owned, operating under a franchise from the two cities. James Flanagan, Joseph W. Bennett, and Ralph F. Williams were the company’s principal owners; all were affiliated with the Flanagan and Bennett Bank, the oldest bank in the county. There followed years of customer complaints about the water system — poor quality and limited quantity, even an outbreak of illness.

In 1911 two businessmen from Omaha came to town looking to buy the Coos Bay Water Company for \$150,000, provided the Marshfield City Council would grant them a 50 year exclusive franchise to continue to supply water to the towns of Marshfield and North



Dr. Straw as the young mayor of Marshfield. CCHM 978.1.38

Bend. Nolan and Jackson by name, the two gentlemen promptly made the front page of the *Coos Bay Times*, repeatedly and unfavorably. For quite a while the *Times* had been critical of the existing privately owned water company. The newspaper had been urging the municipalities to cease the franchise arrangement and to take over the water system. Now, over the summer and fall of 1911, the *Times* ramped up its coverage of “the water question.” It opposed the terms of the sale to “an Omaha syndicate” as favoring private over public interests. The *Times* accused Mayor Straw of being in the pocket of the locally prominent owners of the waterworks. At the height of the newspaper’s campaign to end the water franchise and replace it with a municipally owned water system, the newspaper ran a “paid advertisement” on its front page in the form of a scathing cartoon that played on Mayor Straw’s name by depicting him as a “straw man” backroom accomplice of local vested interests.

On Election Day, 1911, the outcome of the mayor’s race was anyone’s guess until the final minutes. Straw won by only eight votes, a margin so close it was contested in court. The *Times* said the election was “one of the closest and most exciting mayoralty contests ever known in the history of Marshfield.” A crowd gathered at City Hall that night to learn the result. “The windows opening from the council chamber into the hall were kept open so that the crowd could watch the count and hear the votes called off by the judges to the clerks of the election.” Late in the evening, when Straw learned he had eked out another term as mayor, he wanted to have all the saloons in town stay open for election celebrations, but the city attorney told him that would be illegal. (In that same election, the voters of Marshfield defeated a measure to change the name of the town to Coos Bay, 607 to 160.) So the newspaper’s campaign against Straw was unsuccessful; Mayor Straw continued in office; and the water system continued in successive private and corporate ownership for many years until the creation of the Coos Bay-North Bend Water Board, in 1946, when the two municipalities took over the system.

Mayor Straw's name lives on in landmark Oregon case law. In 1909 the Oregon Legislature passed legislation enabling the formation of port governing bodies in counties bordering on waters navigable from the sea, provided the voters in the affected territory approved. Such a newly formed port authority would then take control over wharves, docks, channel improvements, and the like, which had formerly been within the jurisdiction of the included towns; and the port governing body would have taxing authority for harbor improvements. Even before the legislation, there was talk around Coos Bay about forming a port commission, so the proposition was soon put to a vote. The citizens of Marshfield, North Bend, East Marshfield (Eastside), and Empire City overwhelmingly voted for it by a margin of eight to one. Because the law was new and untested, the newly appointed port commissioners promptly decided to initiate a "friendly lawsuit" to definitely confirm the constitutionality of the port law in order to settle all questions of validity before attempting to float a bond issue to finance the port's operations. Mayor Straw became the plaintiff in the lawsuit testing the constitutionality of the incorporation of the port (with the intention of losing the challenge so as to uphold the creation of the port). The main contention of the nominal plaintiff was that the new law, in effect, amended the charters of the towns, an action that an Oregon constitutional amendment prohibited. Straw's suit against the port's initial board of commissioners (W. C. Harris, Dr. Everett Mingus, Henry Sengstacken, and others) was tried before Judge John S. Coke, in Coquille. Judge Coke upheld the new law. His decision was promptly appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court. The Supreme Court also ruled the port legal, with the result that the case of *Straw v. Harris* (1909) became a leading case about home rule in Oregon, often cited in later litigation. But because of delay caused by a subsequent not friendly lawsuit challenging the port's legitimacy and bonding authority, *Bennett Trust Co. v. Sengstacken* (1911), the Port of Coos Bay operated without a tax levy for three years, went into receivership, and had to be reorganized with a new board of commissioners in 1913.

The most controversial chapter of Dr. Straw's leadership of Marshfield came during the final months of his mayoralty in 1913, when the Wobblies came to town. Working conditions in the timber industry on the West Coast were harsh — long hours, raw danger, poor food and lodging, and low wages were major complaints — and those conditions had drawn the attention of the International Workers of the World. By the spring and summer of 1913, that attention had grown into active agitation in a number of communities in the Pacific Northwest. The incendiary rhetoric of the I.W.W. and rumors of "direct action" that might be taken by its members — sabotage of factories, for example — quickly led to counter-measures by businessmen in places where alleged Wobblies could be found. Beginning in May, 1913, Editor Maloney of the *Coos Bay Times* frequently reported the labor friction occurring elsewhere and favorably editorialized about the how businessmen dealt with it there. Readers of the *Times* learned that "deportation"

of the "anarchist agitators" seemed to work effectively, whereby businessmen formed vigilante groups, abducted the labor activists, and escorted them out of town, threatening harsher treatment if the deportees returned. Maloney reported how this technique had been employed in Port Angeles, in Salt Lake City, and (in the case of Emma Goldman) in San Diego. Mayor Straw issued an edict against "street speaking" (street corner orations, which the Wobblies used to advance their cause), resulting in the arrest and jailing of nine Socialists who had been addressing crowds each evening from a "cracker-box platform" on the corner of Front and Market Streets. Out on bail, some of the arrestees hired lawyers to try to throw out the ban on street speaking as a violation of freedom of speech. Meanwhile, anticipating trouble, Mayor Straw said he would swear in a number of Marshfield businessmen as deputies "to cope with any situation that might arise."

After another round of arrests, matters escalated beyond judicial resolution. On June 24, 1913, some "500 to 600" Marshfield businessmen undertook the deportation remedy reported in the news. They relieved Marshfield's marshal (chief of police), Jack Carter, of the custody of Wesley Everest, a Wobbly organizer, and W. J. Edgeworth, secretary of the local I. W. W., whom the marshal had arrested for vagrancy. The businessmen and other citizens put Everest and Edgeworth on a boat and deposited them across the bay, at Jarvis Landing, and sent them on their way up the beach toward the Umpqua River — but not before making them kneel and kiss an American flag. It was rumored the businessmen also brandished a noose and told the deportees, "You come back here and this is what you'll get." Later the same day, two more alleged Wobblies got the same boat ride. On July 11, 1913, about 200 businessmen in Bandon, with the assistance of several carloads of businessmen from Marshfield, forcibly deported Dr. Bailey Leach, a Bandon resident who espoused socialism in his locally published journal. He, too, was sent off up the North Spit — and he kept going right to the office of Oregon Governor Oswald West, who hit the ceiling over what the governor viewed as flagrant violations of free speech and failure of local officials to enforce the rule of law — specifically the failure to act by Marshfield Mayor Straw, Marshal Carter, long serving Coos County Sheriff William Gage, and Coquille and Bandon officials. Governor West dispatched Oregon's Attorney General at the time, Andrew Crawford, who arrived in Marshfield to investigate the deportations as well as alleged I. W. W. acts of sabotage. Remember that Dr. Straw was an officer in the Oregon Naval Reserve, a state appointment, which gave Governor West the idea that he might institute court martial proceedings against Mayor Straw. Crawford, a Republican and not a fan of Governor West, a Democrat, investigated (briefly) and then issued a report a month later that found no one guilty of wrongdoing in the deportations. Governor West was livid, accusing Crawford of making "a pleasant vacation out of his mission" — and Governor West revoked Mayor Straw's commission as lieutenant commander in the Oregon Naval Militia. But West's attention was soon drawn to his own ethical problems; and the Wobbly deportations from Marshfield faded from the news if not the judgment of history.

Mayor Straw is best remembered for being an advocate of good roads in Marshfield and beyond. When the Coos County Good Roads Association was launched, in 1909, its first priority was improving the road from Myrtle Point to Roseburg. The association had representatives from all Coos County communities. Mayor Straw was on its Executive Committee. Mayor Straw was also a perennial proponent of a “boulevard-to-the-sea” from Marshfield to the lower bay, in order to shorten the roundabout route that then existed from Marshfield to Empire via North Bend (the Old County Road, now approximately Lakeshore Drive). He never saw his vision realized, but in later years Ocean Boulevard was built, although it runs from the west end of Central Avenue instead of the west end of Anderson Avenue or Elrod Avenue, as discussed in Straw’s time.

However E. E. Straw may be judged by today’s standards, he received unusual thanks at the conclusion of his time as mayor of Marshfield. The *Coos Bay Times* reported on April 10, 1915, that Dr. Straw and his wife, Sara, were given a house on North 3rd Street in Marshfield, designed by local architect William S. Turpen, and built and paid for by “friends who chipped in.” The house was “a token of appreciation,” the newspaper said, for Dr. Straw’s “efficient work for the city” during the eight years he served, without compensation, as mayor of Marshfield. Contributions came from “practically all of the larger property owners in the city.” Dr. Straw protested the gift as unnecessary, because, he said, “the people of Marshfield owe me nothing.” He left to his wife the decision whether to accept the gift. (The Straws had married in 1907 and resided on North 1st Street in Marshfield.) The gift house was accepted but it did not result in a home life for the couple. Rather soon thereafter Sara Lakeman Straw changed doctors by divorcing Dr. Straw and eventually becoming Mrs. Dr. George E. Dix, residing for the rest of her life in a stately house on South 5th Street.



*Mayor Straw favorably depicted by an editorial cartoonist as a champion of good roads, Coos Bay Times, December 13, 1913*

Dr. Straw had a remarkable record of accomplishments while he was in public office. Back in 1905, when Straw took the mayor’s seat, not a yard of hard surface paving existed on the bay, and teams were often mired in mud on the main streets. Straw’s early pronouncement was, “We’ve got to have paving.” He went to Eureka, California, at his own expense, to inspect paving there and he returned with Willard O. McCann, a street paving contractor, who soon started work excavating and laying

down “bituminous rock” (a form of asphalt) in parts of Marshfield. On August 29, 1908, the new asphalt on Front Street was swept clean, and Mayor Edwin E. Straw of Marshfield and Mayor Louis J. Simpson of North Bend and their wives led townsfolk onto the street “for a grand ball” to celebrate the improvement. By the end of Mayor Straw’s tenure, block after block of paving was down, “with more in sight.” “Good roads” were the mayor’s passion, but his time in office also included the other accomplishments described in this article, and, in addition, construction of sewer lines in the southern and western parts of the town, construction of a bayside road to North Bend, installation of street lights, creation of the Carnegie Public Library, and formation of the Coos Bay Concert Band. Dr. Straw was identified with many of the progressive movements of Marshfield, both as mayor and as a private citizen. He was one of the most widely known men in the community. In 1915, two years after Dr. Straw stepped down as mayor of Marshfield, and when no candidate seemed interested in taking the job, Louis J. Simpson, ex-mayor of North Bend, teased Edwin E. Straw, ex-mayor of Marshfield, with the idea that maybe both of them should get back into politics, but switch places — with Straw running for mayor of North Bend and Simpson running for mayor in Marshfield. “We can easily change our residence,” Simpson joked. “It seems to be the only solution.”

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# Membership Roll Call April - June 2020

## Individual Renewals

Alford, Evelyn  
Banks, Sheila  
Caruso-Davis, Norma  
Clarke, Nancy  
Conway, JoAn  
Davis, Norma  
Eck, Betty  
Followell, Laurie  
Forrester, Lois  
Gill, Mary  
Jones, Ruth  
Kuenzli, Robert  
Matthews, Verena  
McGuire, William  
Nylander, Carol  
Readel, Elizabeth  
Soper, Noma  
Stephens, Chris  
Strain, Patti  
Toliver, LN Pixie  
Valerio, Marie

## Household Renewals

Ahuna, George & Eva  
Besser, Richard & Yvonne  
Bonk, Joyce & Lesley Cox  
Bunch, Wilton  
Cook, Joe & Anne  
Cox, Jerry & Bonnie  
Davidson, Scott & Peggy  
Engle, Les & Becky  
Flaxel, John & Joy  
Gibson, Michael & Linda  
Gossard, Derry & Mary

Haavig, Steven & Paula Scavera  
Jacobson, Tom & Rose  
Keller, Diana  
Kelley, John & Bette  
King, Charles & Judy  
Kirk, Richard & Linda  
Knutson, John & Judy  
Mast, JoAnn  
Noggle, Burl & Miladean  
Richards, Jon & Kathy  
Russell-Miller, Mary  
Scott, Patty & Jeff Hash  
Seguine, Larry & Trish  
Shimotakahara, Steven & Eva

Simon, Gary & Diane  
Sweatt, Dana & Linda  
Taylor, Barb & Steven Fowler  
Terry, Ted  
Thrift, Diane & Clyde  
Wallenstein, Janice & George  
Wilson, Marilyn & Karen Blew

## Friend Renewals

Bowman, Richard & Sandra  
Cribb, Barbara  
DeLeon, Adrian & Jenni  
Engels, John D  
Jordan, Dave & Marcella  
Jorgensen, Korey, MD  
Lum, Bruce  
Main, Craig & Shari  
Manders, Ernie & Sandra

Mast, Dan & Lisa  
Munding, Siegfried & Judith Pittam Hunt  
Ousley, Yvonne & Michael  
Petterson, Linda  
Proehl, James A  
Richardson, Pat  
Sickels, Cheri  
Sund, Irene  
Sweet, John  
Talboy, Dean & Linda  
Verger, Jim, & Diane  
Watson, Larry (WOW)  
Wegner, Maxeen  
Wheeler, Diana  
Zimmerman, Al & Elaine

## Business Renewals

Nasburg Huggins Insurance  
Sause Bros.

## Benefactor Renewals

Finlayson, Cindy  
Grant, Robert & Barilynn  
Holman, Blaire and Ginny Tabor  
Mattecheck, William & Hillary  
Rueger, Gregory & Barbara  
Verger, Joanne

## Historian Renewals

Callery, Martin & Suzy  
Mast, William

## New Individuals

Custer, Geoff  
Hunt, Shannon

# Exploring Education

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."*  
— Nelson Mandela

**Hello!** The Education Department at the Coos History Museum is excited for the day when we can all see each other again, but education does not have to wait. We are continuing to work on improving our virtual and alternative programming while the museum is closed by providing Explorers Club activities online, live virtual First Tuesday Talks, and updated resources on the museum's website. Education is a vital tool that can be used to open minds, hearts, and opportunities for endless learning. We will continue to improve upon and expand our educational programming to provide our members, visitors, and entire community with diverse, inclusive, and accessible programs for everyone. Remember to always feel free to email the Education and Community Engagement Coordinator, **Ariel Peasley**, at [education@cooshistory.org](mailto:education@cooshistory.org) with any questions, comments, or suggestions.

**Upcoming Events!** We are excited to continue forward with our (virtual) First Tuesday Talk program. On August 4th, **Allen Solomon** will speak about "Global Environmental Change: Reason for Optimism?" which you can register for by sending an email to [community@cooshistory.org](mailto:community@cooshistory.org) and stay tuned for information about future talks. Another potential upcoming program is a History Book Club which will focus on diverse historical topics, perspectives, and stories held by museum staff member Ariel Peasley. Lastly, future Explorers Club activities and the Free Day at the museum will be taking place on the Second Saturday of each month when the museum reopens.

**Featured: Calling All Writers!** The Coos History Museum is hosting the 5th annual Writers Day competition and event this year, virtually. 'Write' now, is the time to send in your poetry and short-story fiction submissions and remember that the deadline is August 31st. We are very excited to receive your submissions and continue to discover all the great writers we have right here on the South Coast. Don't forget to check out our website and fliers about the highlights and changes to this year's event; and help us spread the 'word'.

# DONATIONS 2nd Quarter 2020

*Thank you to all on this list for your generous contributions.*

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Forrester, John & Ruth  
Fox, Stacy  
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Greif, Mike & Marti  
Greif, Steve & Joan  
Halopoff, Luba

Halvor, Paul & Marilyn  
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Stamper, Tom & Joan  
Stephens, Chris  
Strine, Linda  
Talboy, Dean & Linda  
Taylor, Barbara & Steven Fowler  
Terry, Ted & Carolynn  
Toliver, Pixie  
Uno, John & Judith  
Uno, John Van Duzer  
Verger, Joanne  
Vigue, Dick  
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# Comings and Goings at Your Museum

The CHM Board saw the retirement of three members in June: **Carol Ventgen**, president; **Jan Hooper**, treasurer; and **Arlene Roblan**. All three brought significant skills and leadership to the museum and will be missed. Also, due to personal circumstances and a family relocation to Eugene, **Debra Semrau**, curator, is resigning this month. Her deep experience in museum collections made Debra a valuable asset to the museum, and we wish her well in her next journeys. She, too, will be missed.

Three new Board members bring a variety of backgrounds, talents, and community involvement.

**Dr. Bacon** earned his Doctor of Business



Administration from George Fox University and spent over a decade as a professor teaching marketing, management, and business skills to undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, he has over two decades of experience in Fortune 500 organizations, large regional, private companies, and small start-up organizations. John also has been involved in nonprofit leadership as a board member,

board president, and as an executive director for several organizations in the Pacific Northwest. Currently, he serves as the Executive Director of the Southwestern Oregon Community College Small Business Development Center and is dedicated to helping educate and develop the entrepreneurs, business owners, managers, and supervisors of Oregon's South Coast.

**Alissa Pruess** moved to the Coos Bay area in 2010



when she began to volunteer locally and build a small social media marketing business which evolved into research and consulting. She currently works with Coos Health and Wellness to develop their website to educate youth and young adults on the subject of sexual and reproductive health and partner with CHW to complete a study analyzing the maternal and child

health needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. She serves on the Coos Bay Public Library and Zonta Boards and is a member of the Coos County Friends of Public Health and the Coos Bay Surfrider organization. A former Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia, Alissa enjoys traveling domestically and internationally. She is an avid skier, former ultra-marathon runner, mountain climber and surfer.

**Sara Stephens** is currently the Executive Director



for the South Coast Regional Early Learning Hub, previously the Development Director at Oregon Coast Community Action, Board Chair at United Way of Southwestern Oregon, Emergency Food and Shelter Board, Systems of Care Executive Committee, and Commissioner for North Bend Housing Authority.



## 5th Annual Writers Day

Coos History Museum is hosting the (virtual) 5th annual Writers Day competition and event on October 17, 2020 at 2:00 PM. There will be readings and a Q&A session with our talented guest authors. In addition, this year's competition winners, along with other brave souls, will be presenting their writing to a live audience in a virtual open mic event.

Please visit [coohistory.org/writers-day](http://coohistory.org/writers-day) for more information and to sign-up for this virtual event!

## Presidential Sign-off

By Carol Ventgen

I write this on my last day serving as your president and as a member of the Board, though my support and appreciation for the museum remain strongly in place.

My two years as president have been interesting, educational, challenging, and sometimes tumultuous. I leave as one of the museum's biggest challenges yet is upon us - COVID-19.

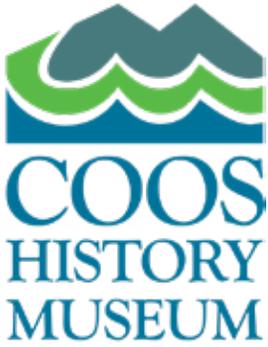
In response to the crisis, the museum quickly began to adapt, innovate, reinvent. I know that the best of what the museum has offered will be salvaged and much will be reimagined and recreated, despite the restraints of the pandemic crisis.

The staff is extending the museum's reach by using technology to offer services, while planning for the day when in-person interactions can resume. These adaptive methods will, I think, serve the museum well into the future.

The Board has begun to reexamine the museum's mission in light of changing community priorities. The history of Coos County is being made every day, and maybe the museum's role in that evolving process will take a reimagined path.

In any event, you have just the team to make sure the organization survives and succeeds. You have new Board members with diverse talents and abilities, and community credentials, who will bring fresh eyes to the museum, joining seasoned members who contribute their own talents and institutional memory and, in some cases, family history that helped create the Coos region. You have a strong, skilled executive director and a capable staff who bring an energetic can-do attitude to it all.

I hope all of you will join me in supporting the museum and enjoying its many services for years to come. Thank you.



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## Memorial Bench Naming Rights

Recently, **Cherylee Sickles** donated a sum to the museum in honor of her husband **Michael** to acquire naming rights to the second to last black walnut bench provided by Board member **Bill Mast** of Lee Valley. The inscription reads: "From memories we educate the future." One bench remains to be "adopted" and named. If interested, contact **Marcia Hart**, Executive Director.

## WATERWAYS

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