

WATERWAYS

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

Are You Curious About a Long Dead Relative?

By Cory Smith

Doing family history research is like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. The puzzler starts with a vision in mind and a box full of hundreds of small pieces, sorts through them, divides them into likely sets of similar pieces, studies their shapes and colors or patterns, and finally methodically interlocks all the pieces to make a tableau, landscape, or action scene. The family history researcher begins with a person in mind, and that person is full of his or her life experiences plus the DNA of generations of ancestors.

The researcher has access to a wide range of tools with which to learn as much as possible about the person's background, family, and life experiences. As the facts of the person's life are discovered, they are organized into the various phases of life, including ancestry, when and where the person was born, lived, traveled, worked, married, had children and died. A unique individual emerges.

Using as an example the story of "Marshfield's Broadway Chanteuse," I began with old photographs of two pretty girls, which were brought to me by our archivist **Debra Semrau**, with her request that I try to find out who they were, if they were from Coos County, and hopefully explain the glamorous pictures of them. So, I set to work.

One of the girls was **Pearl Riggs**, and I wanted to find out if she was related to a Marshfield photographer named **J.W. Riggs**. Using the website Ancestry.com, I searched a variety of databases including census and vital statistics records, obituaries and family trees of other researchers. Pearl was indeed the daughter of J. W. Riggs and was born here in Marshfield. I also discovered that her mother, **Josie Bonebrake**, belonged to a pioneering family that settled here in 1866. I learned that Pearl left Marshfield in 1911 and married in 1912. From there I searched newspapers and found that Pearl was acclaimed prettiest girl in Portland in 1912.

But there the trail stopped, because names can be tricky. So I turned my attention to the other girl, identified as Nina Hines in most of the photos. Finding nothing relevant, I thought I had hit a dead end; however, I noticed that one of the pictures had her name as **Nina Hinds**. At first I thought that was an error, but the opposite turned



*Nina Hinds (L) and Pearl Riggs.
CCHM 988.21.31*

out to be true. When I looked in the records for Nina Hinds, the floodgates opened and I found several articles tying the two girls together and a long obituary of Nina which gave a lot of information about both of them. And, most importantly, I discovered that Pearl Riggs had adopted the first name of her first husband, **Leonard Rodby**, as her stage name. After 1912 she was known as Pearl Leonard. Another tool in this case were the professional photographers who had taken the photos. From their studio names and locations (San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York) I could follow the girls' moves as they climbed up the entertainment ladder.

I was also able to use federal census records to locate both of them over time. Census records are a treasure trove even though they are only recorded every decade. There is also a 70-year hold on releasing them to the public, so in a few years the 1950 census records will be digitized and searchable. From census records, voter registration rolls, and city directories, I was able to track Pearl's life after she dropped out of the limelight. I never found an obituary of Pearl Riggs (Leonard) Crosby. By the time she died, she had reached the age of 87, had no children, perhaps no close living relatives at all. There was no one to give her a proper send off.

Using the tools I have described, I was able to make those old photographs come to life. We now know Pearl's pioneer family history, her ambition to perform on the stages of major cities, and how she fulfilled her dreams. I used Ancestry.com, which can be prohibitively expensive for the beginner. But many of the tools incorporated into that website are available on free family history sites, the National Archives, etc. Also, between them, the Coos Bay and North Bend Libraries have Coos County newspapers either digitized or on microfilm going back to the early 1870s.

So don't be afraid to venture into looking for your ancestors. Everyone has them! But a word of caution: doing family history research can become addictive. And also beware that once you start, you will probably never be satisfied that you've found everything there is to know about your whole family. I've been doing it for 30 years and still have many questions. I wish you luck!

Exploring Education

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.” – Marian Wright Edelman

By Ariel Peasley

Hello! At last the museum is open! While we are not yet hosting educational programs and events at the museum, we are glad to be able to see smiling faces again in the museum space. We are continuing to provide virtual *Tuesday Talks*, online *Explorer's Club* activities, and some new programs as well. We are working on updating our website and providing more resources and activities so be sure to check back at cooshistory.org/education. We are always happy to get more stories and images for our *Coos County: Our Covid-19 Story* so check out our website for more information and submit your historical accounts. Remember to always feel free to email the Education and Community Engagement Coordinator, **Ariel Peasley**, at education@cooshistory.org with any questions, comments, or suggestions.

Upcoming Events! Our (virtual) *First Tuesday Talk* program is going strong, and we will continue to have presentations each month so be sure to tune in and learn more from our amazing presenters. *Writer's Day*,

hosted in partnership with the Southwestern Oregon Community College is taking place on October 17th at 2:00 PM, so be sure to sign-up soon. You can learn more about the event and sign up by visiting cooshistory.org/writers-day. And of course, don't forget to tune in during our week long annual fundraising event, *Celebrate Coos History*, for a number of educational programs and an historic scavenger hunt.

Featured! The Coos History Museum in partnership with the Coos Bay and North Bend Public Libraries are excited to announce the formation of the *Unlimited Book Club*, created “to encourage awareness and foster community discussions on equity, diversity, and inclusion through reading and thoughtful conversation.” Our first introductory meeting was held on September 10th, but we welcome anyone to join at any time. We meet virtually each month on the second Thursday at 6:00 PM, but will resume in person when possible. For more information, you can visit us at cooshistory.org/unlimited-book-club. See you all at the next program.



Photos by Steven Greif



A new panel in the main exhibit hall at the Coos History Museum expands on the story of **Alonzo Tucker** – a black man who was lynched in Marshfield in 1902. The panel, designed by CHM volunteers **Richard Whitwer** and **Steven Greif**, and produced by **Maya Graphics**, displays a previously unknown photo of Tucker as well as text about his background and the lynching. The panel also described the soil collection held in Tucker's honor at an event in February 2020 on Front Street. Two jars of soil, collected at several sites connected with Tucker, were filled by local citizens at the February event. [See the CHM website for more information.] One jar is on display at the National Museum for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. The other jar of soil is now exhibited in a case near the new Tucker exhibit.

Coos County Historical Society

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Museum Admission

Open Wednesday thru Saturday, 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



Executive Director's Note



Marcia Hart

Resilience

I have a question I ask my family and friends sometimes, "Could you have imagined, one year ago, where you are today?"

One year ago, I was interviewing for the position of Executive Director of the Coos History Museum, when I was working as a Human Resources Consultant and looking for a change. Being a long-time resident of Coos County and business owner, I knew of the museum and was very supportive of the mission and vision. I knew going into the position there were going to be financial challenges similar to other non-profit organizations I supported. I also knew there was potential for the museum to grow into a vital business partner and community resource; to support business growth and tourism to our area. I knew there were trustees, volunteers and staff committed to carrying out the museum's mission to be "a community gathering place" and keeper of the stories of our Oregon South Coast. Little did I know or could I have envisioned a

pandemic that would threaten the existence of the museum.

On August 1, 2020, and after 4 ½ months of being closed to the public, the museum re-opened to an outpouring of relief and public support. With the help of Federal CARES Act and COVID-19 Relief assistance, the museum has made it through the first seven months of this pandemic, and we are thankful to all who have stepped in to help us during our closure. I am personally thankful to our volunteers, who have returned to the museum despite all our COVID-19 safety protocols, to continue the work they started before the pandemic. I especially want to thank **Steve** and **Joan Greif** for their tireless support. When in early July, our curator **Debra Semrau** left us to move to Eugene, Joan and Steve stepped in to organize and coordinate the research volunteers working on research requests and grant projects. Steve has also been instrumental in helping us pivot our lecture series, First Tuesday Talks, to a virtual version using the Zoom webinar platform. You can also see him with the lawn mower or weed eater, cleaning up our landscaping around the building. Staff have also

stepped up with the steep learning curve necessary to switch from the personal to virtual world. I want to thank my team, **Ariel, Becca, Valerie** and **Terri**, for remaining positive through all this uncertainty. Resilience comes to my mind when I think of the trait needed and demonstrated by our staff and volunteers. Resilience.

The GOOD NEWS is that despite all we've been handed over the past months, on September 15, 2020, the Coos County Historical Society completed its New Market Tax Credit obligation and now owns our building. What started as a vision in 1999, comes to completion in 2020. We will be celebrating this wonderful occasion with our upcoming Fall Fundraiser: Celebrate Coos History 2020. Check out our website cooshistory.org/celebrate-coos-history for a link to our online fundraiser and Calendar of Events for the week of October 17 through 24.

I don't know what the next seven months have in store for us. My natural way is to think about the future and possibilities. I set out plans and follow those plans. I see us weathering this storm and keep moving forward. Resilience!

Acknowledging our Lifetime Members; Thanks for Your Support

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Marshfield's Broadway Chanteuse

By Cory Smith

Among the notable celebrities who were born and raised in Coos County, there was a dazzling Roaring Twenties singer and dancer called **Pearl Leonard**. She was born Pearl Bronte Riggs on November 8, 1891, in Marshfield and grew up there. Her father was a locally well-known photographer, **James Wesley (J.W.) Riggs**; and her maternal grandfather was **Jacob Bonebrake**, who settled on Catching Slough in 1866 with his wife and six of their seven children, including Pearl's mother, **Margaret Josephine (Josie)**.

Pearl Riggs left home and Marshfield at the age of 19. In fact, she and a young man named **Leonard Rodby** ran off together to Portland. An article in the August 12, 1911, edition of The Coos Bay Times reported that "Miss Pearl Riggs, a well-known Marshfield young woman and daughter of J. W. Riggs, has been acclaimed the prettiest girl in Portland." She won a beauty contest conducted by the Portland Daily News.

A year later, on August 14, 1912, she and Leonard were married in Vancouver, Washington. Leonard appeared to have found his niche working in hotels. In 1908 he was in Portland and working as an elevator operator at the Imperial Hotel. In 1910 he was living in



Portrait of Pearl Riggs. CCHM 988.21.34



Pearl Riggs poses in a theatrical costume of tulle with a rhinestone headdress. CCHM 988.21.5

a residential hotel in Marshfield and working as a hotel clerk. That was how they met. However, according to a 1913 Portland city directory, Leonard was working as chief clerk at the Washington Hotel and there is no wife listed with him. Evidently, Pearl had much grander plans and the marriage didn't last long, maybe just a few months.

So, it was in 1912 that Pearl went to San Francisco to find fame and fortune. Even though she and Leonard had split up, Pearl used his first name as her stage name and is found in records and other sources thereafter as Miss Pearl Leonard. In the 1920 federal census she is listed as Pearl Leonard, living in San Francisco by herself, 29 years old, and employed as an entertainer in a café.

Around 1921 Pearl teamed up with another aspiring entertainer, **Nina Hinds**. Nina was born on May 24, 1904 in Eureka, California, and moved with her family to Berkeley. Pearl and Nina were billed as the "Melody Maids" and became very popular in the San Francisco Bay Area. They performed before the footlights of various theaters, on radio station KFRC,

and had made three Victor records by 1927. According to an article in the April 6, 1927, edition of the San Francisco Examiner, their statewide reputation had gained them an extended engagement in Los Angeles. They then made the leap to the New York stage, appearing in several Broadway productions and touring with the Keith, Fanchon and Marco vaudeville circuits.

Around 1930 the careers of Pearl and Nina parted ways. Nina Hinds went on to perform as a well-known soprano. She was called the "Nightingale of the Golden Gate." She had a daily radio program, worked in movies in Hollywood, and appeared in supper clubs and shows in San Francisco and Hollywood. She later moved to Reno, where she married **Charles Reed** and performed as a songstress in such establishments as Eugene's Restaurant and Johnny's Open Door. She died of cancer in Reno on May 24, 1961 at the age of 57.

At some point in her professional journey, Pearl met the noted actress **Marie Dressler**, who encouraged her to pursue wardrobe and costume design. Sometime before 1930 she studied dressmaking and design in New York, then returned to San Francisco and opened a dress shop, sewing elaborate beaded dresses for high society women until the early 1940's.

According to the 1930 federal census, she was living in Berkeley with her older brother **Elfie**. She gave her age as 36, her marital status as divorced, and her employment as "Musician, Voice." By the time of the 1940 census, at age 50, she was living in San Francisco and working as a dressmaker. Also living with her was



Pearl drapes herself in a fur for a glamour shot. CCHM 988.21.11

her niece **Frances Wesley**, age 19. In the early 1940's Pearl bought a large house in Berkeley and opened a boarding house for college girls, serving as housemother. Apparently, some of her boarders included "Rosie the Riveter" women as well. In a 1944 California Voter Registration she is listed as Miss Pearl Leonard, 2520 College Avenue, with an occupation of "boarding house."

Sometime after 1945 she married **Magnus Charles Crosby**, becoming what appears to have been his fifth (and last) wife, after the death of his fourth wife in July 1945 in Seattle. Magnus Crosby was a traveling salesman and various documents show him married to different women in Boise 1904,

Oakland 1910, Portland 1917 and Seattle 1940. He was born in Astoria, Oregon, on October 25, 1880, and sired two sons, **Charles** and **Pierre**. Magnus Crosby died of cancer at the age of 82 on November 13, 1962 in Oakland and is interred at Mountain View Cemetery Mausoleum. According to his obituary in the Oakland Tribune, he belonged to an impressive array of fraternal lodges and temples.

Pearl died at the age of 87 on April 8, 1978 and is interred beside him, as evidenced by a plaque in the Mausoleum. There is a photograph of Magnus' and Pearl's home in Oakland, a handsome single story upper middle class house with large well-kept gardens.

It is likely Pearl never returned to Coos County after she left in 1911. Unfortunately, no obituary or any other source of information about her later years was found while researching this story.

Chalk the Vote

Sue Patterson and Wendy Davis contributed their artistic skills in front of the Coos History Museum for a "Chalk the Vote" activity in late August, commemorating the 100th anniversary of women gaining voting privileges in the United States.

Photo by Steve Greif

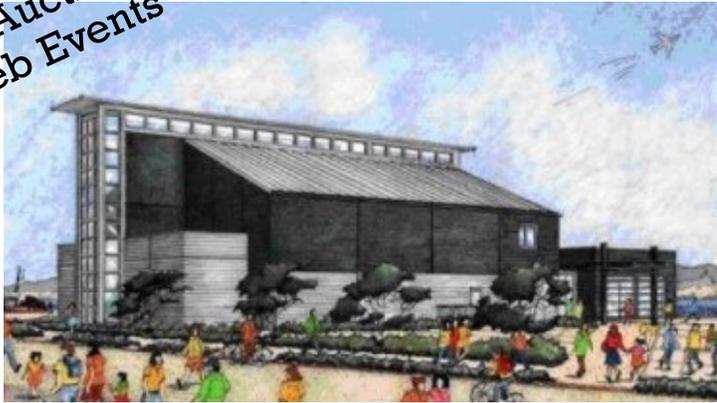


Celebrate Coos History 2020



October 17-24, 2020

Scavenger Hunt,
Online Auction,
and Web Events



Calendar of Events

Register @ coohistory.org/celebrate-coos-history/

Saturday, October 17th 5 pm

CHM Annual Awards Ceremony

"Tootsie Rolls and History Museums:

A Walk Down Memory Lane"

with Annie Donnelly, Bill Lansing,

Terri & John Whitty,

Caddie McKeown & Jennifer Groth

"Celebrating Coos History Video Presentation"

Kick-off for Week-long Online Auction

Coos History Scavenger Hunt Begins

Sunday, October 18th 5pm

Encore Recorded Presentation

*"INEQUITY: Social Injustice in Oregon &
the South Coast"*

with Patty Whereat-Phillips, Taylor Stewart,

Jon Littlefield, and Steve Greif

Monday, October 19th 5pm

"Pacific Seafood Virtual Cooking Class"

with Chef Eoghain O'Neill

Tuesday, October 20th 5pm

"Mrk and More: Celtic Roots"

with Robert More and Mrk

Wednesday, October 21st 5pm

"South Coast Tales of the Sea"

with Steve Greif

Thursday, October 22nd 5pm

"Connection to Place"

with Jesse Beers—Confederated Tribes of Coos,

Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

Friday, October 23rd 5pm

"Historic Preservation at Battle Rock"

with Cassandra Rippee—Coquille Indian Tribe

Saturday, October 24th 5pm

Mortgage Burning Ceremony

"Celebrate Coos History: The Next 5 Years"

with Marcia Hart—Coos History Museum

Greg Drobot—Coos Bay Village

Rodger Craddock—City of Coos Bay

Online Auction Closes 6pm

Coos History Scavenger Hunt Ends 6pm

Honoring the Past, Engaging in the Present, Reaching out to the Future.

1210 Front St. Coos Bay, OR 97420 — 541.756.6320

For more information email events@coohistory.org



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Executive Committee Change

Kristi Pennington, former vice-president, has been called to other duties recently and has left her position and the Board of Trustees. As a retired attorney at law, Kristi provided valuable advice on many aspects of museum business and will be greatly missed. The Board has named member **David Laird** to the vice-presidency, filling Kristi's position until June 30, 2021.

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.

Your annual membership becomes active from date of purchase.

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Yes, send information about events via email.

Send information about volunteering and gifting.

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 Bessey, Patricia
 Bream, Jennifer
 Davis, Valorie
 Matson, Lucille
 Penny, Donna
 Philpott, Jim
 Scoville, G. Kent
 Simons, Les

Renewed Household

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 Capps, Jerry & Lori
 Coraor, Robert & Susan
 Denton, Ken & Cathy
 Erickson, Russell & Kathleen
 Hartman, John & Gayla
 Mahaffy, Charles & Joan
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 Koch, Monte & Karen
 Rogalsky, Derek & Rebekah

Wood, Harry & Nancy
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 & Brad Carlson

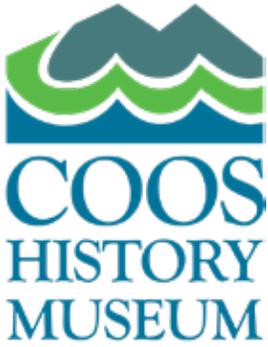
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We are always looking for volunteers to help out at the museum. Contact Valerie Caskey at volunteercoordinator@coohistory.org or call 541-756-6320 for more information.



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*The photo offers a glimpse of the mezzanine exhibit **Coos County Life A to Z**.
With the reopening of the museum, you have an opportunity to browse the
many objects not before on display.
Photo by Becca Hill*

WATERWAYS

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