Hello everyone!

It’s so nice to be back in touch, again, albeit in a somewhat restricted way. I’m very happy to report – as most of you I’m sure already know – that the museum is now back open during regular hours. However, as I’m sure you also know, this could change again at any time…as our coronavirus world continues to fluctuate. As much we want to see all of our friends again (old and new), we are asking everyone to please wear face coverings and practice social distancing. Needless to say, your safety is always our number one priority.

Although the museum is open, I must also report that our regular monthly and seasonal activities continue to be on hold or are postponed. This means (unfortunately!) no fall tour, no quarterly meeting, no “People From Our Past” living histories, and no events in our community room. We are, however, planning to go forward with our fall lecture series in October (please see insert) in a virtual format. The presentations will be live with an opportunity at the end for questions. It is an especially exciting lineup of topics and presenters, so please stay tuned to our website for instructions on how to participate.

While our short-term programs are on hiatus, our long-term goals continue to move forward. First among these is our planned exhibit center at the old Hans Pharmacy building. Our Board has approved the final plan and we will now be presenting it to the Court for final approval. We’re well on our way!

I am also very pleased to welcome a new staff member, Sadee Moss. Sadee is our new collections assistant and will be handling a plethora of varied duties including collections processing, historical inquiries, administrative tasks, and general assistance. Sadee has deep roots in the community, a strong museum background, and a passion for local history. We are extremely happy to have her on our team.

Be well, my friends. Come and visit, but please stay safe!

Sandy
President’s Message

Fall greetings!

I sat down months ago to write a spring/summer newsletter note, but those seasons got put on hold. We are excited for the Museum to be open once again after a Covid hiatus.

Eloise Brummer retired from the Museum last March. Unfortunately the planned open house party in her honor became instead a quiet small gathering due to coronavirus concerns. We appreciate her many years of dedicated service to the Museum and her remarkable knowledge of Crook County history. Sadee Moss joined our staff full-time beginning August 17th and we are extremely happy to have her back in Prineville and at the Museum. Stop by to say hello to Sadee and share some stories of local history with her.

We are moving forward with caution and optimism with new things coming your way from the Museum.

Thank you for your continued support!

Marlise

ATTENTION MEMBERS

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS HAS RECENTLY PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE MUSEUM BYLAWS. YOU ARE WELCOME TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT CROOKCOUNTYHISTORYCENTER.ORG IF YOU WISH TO REVIEW THESE CHANGES AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK.

MEMORIAL FOR CROOK COUNTY PIONEER QUEENS

Two Past Pioneer Queens have passed away since our last newsletter

Corrine Blackstone Neeley
1918-2020
Queen 2016

Cassandra “Casey” Hanford Dutchuk
1935-2020
Queen 2015
MEMORIALS SINCE FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Joyce Stearns Barney  
by Marv & Anita Kelso  
Barbara Groff  
Tom & Marilise Jay  
Mary Albert  
Dave & Jan Anderson  
John & Linda Shelk  
Skip & Mary Russell  
Stahancyk Kent & Hook  
Donna McCormack  
Doug & Jean Breese  
Denison Thomas  
Susan Shelk Fischer  
Marilyn Jay  
Patricia Thissell

Jim Beyer  
by Barbara Groff

Helen Schnabele  
by Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine  
Renee Reufs & Paul Smith  
Gary Bedortha  
Alan & Shirley Jacobs  
Richard & Audrie Bedortha

Corinne Blackstone Neely  
by Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine  
Donna McCormack

Kenneth Kuehn  
by Annette Kuehn

Jerry Apperson  
by CCHS Class of 1957

Andy Hermreck  
by Gary Bedortha  
Richard & Audrie Bedortha

Eva Gassner  
by John & Lynne Breese

Darrell Davis  
by Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine  
Pat & Snoden DeBoard  
Stahancyk/Crawford Family  
Fred & Betty Bushong

Bob Scanlon  
by Pat & Snoden DeBoard  
Fred & Betty Bushong

Dan Howe  
by Pat & Snoden DeBoard

Jan Gillette  
by Shirley McCullough

Kathy Fahlgren  
by Shirley McCullough  
Stahancyk/Crawford Family

Nancy Litteral (Bell)  
by Stahancyk/Crawford Family

Charles Boyd  
by Stahancyk/Crawford Families  
Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine  
Bill and Allene Plant  
Kathy & Gerald Tinkle

Larry Piatt  
by Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine

Bill Kime  
by Pat and Snoden DeBoard

Jody Stafford Beebe  
by Pat and Snoden DeBoard

Mal Hawley  
by Marv & Barbara Ferenstein

Casey Dutchuk  
by Steve Lent & Barbara Fontaine  
Mary Albert  
Ron & Dawn Alexander  
Jerry & Eloise Brummer  
Denison Thomas  
Stahancyk/Crawford Families

Patricia Endres Annicelli  
by Stahancyk/Crawford Families

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Bill Christopher  
Steve & Jan Uffelman  
Jan Yount  
Lawrence & Ruby Garside (reinstated)  
Ruth Ann Brown  
Teresa Brown-Douglass  
Stephanie Schmidt  
Christopher Maloney  
John Arntz

Advertisement in 1903
Elton Carey Relates Story of Skeleton Rock

Note: The legend of buried gold from a military payroll robbery near Skeleton Rock has long been an item of interest to several museum visitors. At least three times a year someone inquires about the event and want to search for the gold. Local rancher Elton Carey, whose ranch was near Skeleton Rock, wrote this account in his later years.

In 1925, when I was fifteen, my older brother Wayne and I rented a ranch from our uncle and proceeded to go into business, raising hay and cattle and grain. The place we rented is located on the upper Crooked River, in Crook County, Oregon, about twenty miles south of Prineville, which is the oldest town in the Central Oregon country.

At this place the river runs through a wide fertile valley. About midway on this ranch is a creek running into the river from the south, called Sanford Creek. Both the creek and the river are quite heavily lined with a lush growth of willows. Set back a little from this juncture, and rising directly from the valley floor, is a very steep flat-topped hill. On the back side of the hill from the river there is a short steep pitch of about fifty feet and then the hill slopes out into the foothills.

The top of this hill is covered by a jumble of lava rocks which have spilt into tiers as if they had been piled up by a stone mason. In some places the tiers have tilted and formed crevices which have filled with sands to form little paths. The top is about an acre in size, and is nearly oval in shape. Coming up from the shallow side, the rocks have spilt to form a steep trail which goes up and directly across the middle of the rock. The rock is also spilt on the steep side and it is possible to climb from the steep side to the flat below. It is about 150 feet to the bottom.

One day in August my brother and I were finishing the last of the haying when late in the afternoon we saw an old covered wagon coming up the road. A covered wagon was a thing you seldom saw in that country, even in 1925, so we watched with much curiosity when it turned in at our gate.

When it approached where we were working, we saw that one man was very old, with a long white beard. The driver was a man about my brother's age. When it approached where we were, the one man came over and asked if they could camp by the hill across the river. My brother said "Sure, camp any place you want and stay as long as you wish." The stranger thanked us and they drove on across the river.

After they had driven away, we discussed how odd the old man had acted. He did not look around him like a person in a strange place usually will, nor did he show any interest in what was going on. He finished hauling the last of the hay to the stack and went on home.

It was in the morning, two days later, when we got back over to the place. When we came up the gate we saw that the campers were preparing to leave, so we rode over where they were

After we talked a little, the young man motioned us to follow him and led us out of the old man's hearing. And then he told us this story:

It was back in the year 1870, when a young man named John Holt and, a friend called Jack, decided to make their fortunes in one bold try. So together they held up the mail stage caring the army payroll to the forts in southern Oregon and northern California. In 1870, the army had its camps and forts spread from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. And from the Canadian border to the border of Mexico. Many of these outposts, such as Fort Klamath and Camp Pendleton in Oregon were supplied by army wagons or by stage lines which carried weary travelers and the United States mail. The roads ran through country which was uninhabited or very sparsely settled. Under such conditions the stages were always subject to Indian attack, or became the prey of that era's holdup artists.

There was a shipment of gold on the stage, besides the payroll. They loaded the mail sacks and the strong box on their horses and headed across country to the west. They planned to close their tracks in the Crooked River breaks, then cross the desert country to the west and drift into the settlements in the "Willamette Valley" where strangers and gold were nothing new. The one thing they failed to consider was Indians.

Late in the afternoon on their second day of flight, they were riding along slowly, resting their horses, when they came out into the top of a hill over-looking a deep canyon. They could see patches of willow and brush in the bottoms and were glad to be near water and grass for the horses. Farther down, the canyon widened out and they knew they were coming to the Crooked River where they might be able to lose their tracks. An army patrol would soon be in pursuit of them.

Their elation was short lived for when they started down into the canyon they were brought up short by the blood-curdling yells of a small war party of raiding Indians, who liked nothing better than to catch a couple of white men out by themselves.

The two men took one look back at the brush of the creek bottom and a chance lay in getting down into the brush of the creek toward the river in hopes they could find a place to hole up.

Though the outlaws had some close call, they managed to stay ahead of the Indians and get into the creek bottom, which they followed to the valley where the creek and the river joined.
Just short of the river was a round steep hill jutting up from the valley floor, on the side next to them a horse could be ridden up to the cap-rock which covered the top of the hill. If they were lucky maybe they could save the horses. Both the Indians who were following them and some who were flanking them began shooting wildly, fearing their prey might get away. The horses seemed to sense the urgency of the riders for they put on a last burst of speed as they raced up the slope to the rock wall; but just short of the wall John's horse was shot. He snatched the saddle bags from his saddle and followed Jack up to the rock wall which covered the top of the hill.

The horses were abandoned and the pair started climbing up the crevasse which led over the top. Just before they reached the top Jack was hit by a bullet and John had to help him over the top. He then ran down and brought the mail sacks and the gold, but before he got over the wall again he received a flesh wound in the thigh. It was not a dangerous wound, but was quite painful.

They were able to stave off the Indian attack which followed, and the Indians drew back and surrounded the hill but did not attack again. Jack died from his wounds. John hid the body of his partner to keep the Indians from knowing he had been killed. When darkness came he slipped out of the rocks and escaped up the willow-lined river.

The next day he reached the small settlement now called Prineville, where he had his wound dressed; but before the day was gone, and he could acquire a horse and go back for the holdup loot that he had buried beside his dead partner, an army patrol rode in. When they learned a wounded man was in town, they became suspicious and he was placed under arrest.

When John came to trial, there were witnesses who recognized him as one of the holdup men who robbed the stage and he was sent to the pen for life.

John was a good prisoner who found life behind bars not too hard, but when he was about sixty he began losing his eyesight and by the time he was seventy, he was totally blind.

In 1923 John Holt was given a pardon and at last found himself free to go pick up the treasure he had buried nearly forty years before.

When he finally found a man he could trust, they got together a wagon and team, and in the month of August, 1925, they arrived at the place on Crooked River where he had lost his partner and almost lost his life.

The man John had hired was the young man who told us this story. When he and the blind man got up on the rock the young man was unable to find the place the old man described to as where he had buried the treasure and the body of his partner. After two days of searching, they were giving up for they could not be sure if this was even the right rock. And the young man was beginning to doubt the old man's story. So they got in the wagon and drove away, and we never saw either of them again.

Of course my brother and I lost no time getting up on the rock with a pick and shovel. After a thorough search we decided to dig in one of the crevices half filled with sand and grown over with rye-grass. We had dug only a foot or so when we began to find human bones, teeth, then we found rib and arm bones, but no bones from the lower part of the skeleton.

We found pieces of rotting wood, and steel straps made from old horseshoes which could have been used to strengthen a strong box, but when we had dug as deep as we could in the crevice, we still had found no treasure. We searched but never found the other half of the skeleton. Of course we didn't find the treasure either, but still believe it is there...for someone. While our uncle lived, we never told the story for he did not want people digging all over the place.

It was thirty years later, after I moved to Arizona that I read in a book, Indian wars of America, where in 1870 a stage carrying the army payroll to southern Oregon and northern California, was held up robbed of the payroll which was never recovered. This account seemed to confirm the old man's story. So some day I hope to go back and again search the rock which was called Skeleton Rock after we found the bones buried there.

The spot is partly surrounded by water now, for the government built a large dam a few miles down the river, and water backs up beyond the rock. However, the part I am interested in is still there, well above the water line, with its horde of gold buried in some crevice. Maybe when I find the other half of a body, covered with rock and sand I will have learned the secret of Skeleton Rock.
NEW BOOKS AT THE MUSEUM
Members Receive 10% Discount

Elected Through Terror: The Rajneesh Through the Eyes of a Local Sheriff
by Art Labrousse
$11.99 Paper 157 Pages

Art Labrousse served several terms as sheriff of Wasco County, Oregon. His first year in office there was a flood of followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh to the old Muddy Creek Ranch in eastern Wasco County. The book tells of his experiences in dealing with a religious cult that conducted the first terrorist attack in the United States.

Out in the Middle: Scenic Wonders of Central Oregon
by L.D. Hills
$19.95 Paper 159 Pages

Central Oregon is a major tourist destination. Whether you are a local or one of those visitors touring our glorious region this book provides a picturesque view of places to visit. There are several photographs of prominent places in Central Oregon.

The Other Oregon
by Thomas R. Cox
$29.95 Paper 398 Pages

Eastern Oregon is distinct from the rest of Oregon historically and geographically. The relationship between people and land has always been central to life in the region. The author explores the complexity of interactions among the people, land and natural resources in Eastern Oregon. It is a historical perspective on specific issues of the eastern part of the state.

Central Oregon Walks, Hikes & Strolls
by Marsha Johnson & Wendy Gray
$15.95 Paper 158 Pages

This book is a detailed guide of hikes for mature folks. The book provides a guide to 60 outings within 50 miles of Bend. It is a great introduction to walking Central Oregon for those that are not into hard-core hiking but looking for a pleasant walk for variable levels of physical condition.
Though we all wish we could get back to our regularly scheduled programming, COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all in ways we did not expect this year. Suddenly, we had to think about the potentiality of preserving a museum collection from afar in the event of a lengthy quarantine, how to effectively sanitize surfaces and maintain social distancing, and enforcing new regulations to protect our staff, volunteers, and visitors, all while trying to continue to tell the story of Crook County.

As we settle in to our new normal here at the Bowman Museum, I started to wonder about how past pandemics and public health crises shaped Crook County. The Influenza pandemic of 1918 was similar to the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways, from the shocking toll on our communities, to the waxing and waning spikes leading to hospital bed and equipment shortages, even to the government-mandated mask regulations and anti-mask sentiments.

Unfortunately, despite having quite a collection of medical artifacts, documents, and photographs, we do not appear to have many artifacts or documents relating to prior epidemics in Crook County. We are all currently living through the COVID-19 pandemic in real time, but fifty years from now and beyond, this will be an important part of our history. Future generations may be interested to learn about what Crook County did to help prevent the spread to our most vulnerable residents; how medical staff responded to ever-changing regulations as we learned more about this new virus; how schools effectively instructed our children from afar; how non-essential staff managed through lay-offs, furloughs, and teleworking; and how essential staff safely provided essential services to the public despite the risks they faced themselves.

Knowing how important this information may be to the future of Crook County, we would like to request any objects or documents relating specifically to the Crook County response to COVID-19. We are interested in collecting home-made masks, locally made hand sanitizer bottles, or other similar objects; as well as documents, fliers, and photographs relating to our local response to this pandemic.

If you have objects you would like to donate, please first contact us by phone at 541-447-3715—our space is limited so depending upon the response, we may not be able to take everything that may be offered.

We would like to thank everyone in Crook County for their patience as we navigate these unprecedented times, and we wish you and your families health and happiness.