

The Historacle

Jan. 2008

The Official newsletter of the

Talent Historical Society



105 N. Market Street • P.O. Box 582 • Talent, OR 97540 • 541-512-8838

Storytelling & Takelma Program in January

On January 19, storyteller and author Thomas Doty will perform “Doty & Coyote: Stories From the Native West” at the Talent Historical Society Museum. The performance begins at 7:30 pm and is recommended for ages 6 and older. Admission is free. Doty will be joined by linguist and writer John Michael Greer who will present a talk on the Takelma Indian language. Greer and Doty co-direct the Takelma Language Project. Thomas Doty is nationally known for his impassioned performances of traditional and original native stories. He has released several recordings, including daily and weekly broadcasts on public radio, and has received a number of awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the national American Indian Program. Doty has published many books and is included on The Oregon Literary Map. When he’s not on the road performing and teaching, Doty is Storyteller and Author in Residence at Dragonfly Place, a retreat center in the Siskiyou Mountains near Ashland.

“Stories touch us deeply on many levels of truth,” says Doty. “They entertain, they teach, they heal. I keep the old time stories alive as well as create new ones to keep my art vibrant and healthy.” Doty has been called “One of the best of Oregon’s storytellers” and “a master of his art.” Doty and Greer’s presentation is sponsored by Talent Historical Society and is part of Doty’s Free Public Programs series. For more information, call the society at (541) 512-8838. For more information about Doty and his art, including the Takelma Language Project, visit Doty’s website (www.DotyCoyote.com).

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THS needs your financial and volunteer help!

As noted in previous issues and in our President's Address, we have lost all of our County funding and are currently 100% dependent upon the donations of those who support our mission to preserve, research, and share the valuable local history of the Talent area.

We are grateful to the donors who are stepping forward in increasing numbers to give at the \$100 and \$250 levels and above.

We also need volunteer docents to help keep our Museum open to the public.

You can even help support THS every time you shop at Amazon.com. To find out more, visit our website www.talenthistory.org and click on How You Can Help.

Serious Squabbles on Wagner

All families face conflict from time to time. Yet the conflicts in the McMahan family on Wagner Creek in 1883 escalated beyond the normal squabbles and ended in tragedy. From the coroner's report, newspaper accounts, and Welborn Beeson's diary the following story can be pieced together.

In the morning on the 9th of April, father, Joseph F. McMahan and son, William, got into a heated argument. The night before, William claimed to have witnessed his father sneaking out of his own bedroom into the room where a visiting woman slept. Three different visits to the bedroom were observed by William and he was asking his dad to answer for it on that fateful morning. Joseph did not deny the claims but got very upset that his son would question his integrity. Joseph threatened William and picked up a chair and some sticks and hit his son. The blows to the face and body were clearly visible and smarting when they took the argument outside where Joseph proceeded to tell his son he was going to kill him and picked up a fence rail and hit William on the head. At some point Joseph's wife, Josephine, and the visiting woman both tried to intervene and get the two men to cool off. But the last blow to the head made William snap. He took his pistol out of his pocket and aimed and shot his father in the corner of his right eye. Later, William said he was only trying to scare his father into ceasing the violence. The neighbors heard the ruckus and came from down the lane to see the dead man lying on the ground and William with the gun still in his hand.

A jury composed of Welborn Beeson, William Patton, J. F. Pennebaker, G. F.

Cooley, D. P. Brittain, & J.W. Fitzgerald came to the following conclusion.... "We the Coroner's Jury summoned to inquire into the cause of death of J.F. McMahan, find the said J.F. McMahan was 50 years old and a native of Ohio, and a resident of Wagner Creek, Jackson County, state of Oregon. And he came to his death at his residence about seven o'clock on the morning of the 9th day of April 1883, by pistol shot in the outer corner of the right eye. The pistol being held in the hand of J.W. McMahan and was fired with the intent to kill the said J.F. McMahan, and that the said J.W. McMahan committed a crime by killing the said J.F. McMahan, and we believe he should be arrested and tried for the same."

Joseph McMahan's body was interred in the Ashland Cemetery by the Odd Fellows. Those questioned in the coroner's report portray him as a violent man who had repeatedly abused his wife and children with little provocation. It seemed they were not particularly sad to see him go.

The Ashland Tidings report says that young William was brought to Ashland to await action by Justice Root in the preliminary examination on April 11th. During that examination, William again told his story. The woman in question was not named in the paper but was questioned and named in the coroner's report as a Mrs. Louisa Stearns, age 25 from Josephine County. William paid bail of \$500. but left the area without ever standing trial.

The McMahan family moved to Washington state a few months later in the summer of 1883 and did not live here again. Josephine "Josie" McMahan maintained ties

(continues next page)

Squabbles (cont.)

to the area because she was the sister of Mrs. A.P. Talent and they kept in touch. Wagner Creek was never quite the same after J.F. McMahan was killed by his own son. The neighbors who testified for the coroner called him various names and seem to understand that he had reigned in his home with terrible acts of aggression and kept his wife and children in fear. They might have all been a little more kind and loving towards their own families and tried a little harder to preside over their homes with a soft touch instead of brutality.

Some months ago, a descendant of the McMahan family came to Talent to do research. Their family history had the barest of details about the incident. One letter saved through time reported that a family member lived within view of the grave of J.F. McMahan but it was not known exactly where the grave was. After searching through some of the recommended sources, the family found a treasure-trove of information. One of the first places we looked was in the Welborn Beeson diary and found that the McMahan's were frequent visitors in the Beeson home. His diary entries described the work that they did together. J.F. McMahan had eaten dinner with the Beesons the day before he died.

Doing family research is sometimes a perilous pursuit. One can find out some mighty unpleasant things. Whether the deeds of our ancestors haunt us or give us pride in our heritage, we can not change the past or interpret it any better if we bury the facts with the dead.

The *Historacle* is published quarterly by the

Talent Historical Society

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Comments & letters may be sent to the Editor, The *Historacle*, by mail or by email to: jan@talenthistory.org

Members of the Society receive the *Historacle* free with membership. Board meetings are at 6:00 pm on the 2nd Monday of each month.

Museum is open from 1-5 Wed. - Sat.

Bell House on Market Street

One of the oldest houses in Talent stands in the midst of commercial buildings next to TARKS' parking lot in the downtown area. Though the house was probably built about 1896 by the Hanscom family, it is known as the "Bell House" after Thomas Jefferson Bell Sr. and his wife, Amanda, who purchased it in 1907. The Bell family operated a boarding house there; Amanda did the cooking and cleaning; T.J. was the baker, making bread and sweets for the boarders.



SOHS # 11924 Bell House

Thomas Jefferson Bell was from Missouri coming to Oregon by wagon train after the Civil War. He and his family lived on a homestead north of Suncrest Orchard across Bear Creek before moving into town. Bell wore a beard which was frequently stained with tobacco juice. He liked to show off his surgically - removed appendix which he had on display in a jar.

Amanda was Bell's second wife. She had been tried as an accomplice to the murder of her husband, Lewis McDaniel, but was acquitted. The man found guilty of the deed, Lewis O'Neil, was the last person to be executed by hanging in Jackson County. Amanda's sweet face does not reveal the mystery behind her involvement and her relationship with O'Neil. Her obituary does not mention McDaniel or anything about her close call with the law. Bell family tradition says that Thomas Bell was on the jury that acquitted her, but the newspaper accounts do not substantiate that as fact. She was calling herself a widow in 1893 when she married T.J. Bell. He had 6 children and she had 2 at the time of their marriage.



Amanda Bell from Bell family photo

News and Notes

Jackson County Cultural

Coalition awarded THS with \$1,000. to complete a model of the Welborn Beeson octagonal house that is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Our display will be a dollhouse sized model of the 1863 original Beeson house as it looked before it was drastically remodeled by the Foss family. Current owner, Ms. Wood has graciously agreed to let THS staff and volunteers photograph, measure and examine the house from head to toe to make the model as authentic as possible. If you would like to help with this exhibit, call 512-8838 to volunteer.

To Email or Not to Email

We have nearly 40 people signed up for the email version of the newsletter. If you missed seeing any of the back issues go to the website at www.talenthistory.org for a clearer view of the photos and graphics in the Historacle. Email saves electricity, copies, ink, stamps, etc. Call 512-8838 if you would like to switch to the email edition of the newsletter.

Antique Store Find

It came to our knowledge recently that a old map of the Stearns Cemetery surfaced from a local antique store several years ago. The man who bought it offered to donate it or a copy to THS. This is just the type of thing we are looking for in the museum! We urge you to look through your possessions and see if there is something that would be suitable to display in the museum. Loans or donations are welcomed and can be protected in locked cases.

Food Bank Helps the Hungry

The city of Talent has leased an office space in the old Talent library to Access Food Bank. THS still takes up most of the building with our museum and storage space but on Thursdays it can get crowded. Once a week dozens of people line up outside the building to obtain their supply of necessities. Our board of directors decided to join with the city to welcome the tired, poor, & the huddled masses to our teeming shore. So far we have sold 8 Tshirts and one membership to people affiliated with the Food Bank!

Address by our Board President

At the annual meeting of the Talent Historical Society on November 17, 2007 Bob Casebeer, the president of the board, sketched the accomplishments of the Society over the last two years. As most members of the Society were not at the annual meeting, portions of the speech are presented below.

Speaking for the Board of the Talent Historical Society, we would like to welcome you to our new museum. As many of you may recall, our former location was a small office in the Community Building. With the continued support from the city of Talent which owns this building, the Society was invited to move into these quarters on May 1, of this year.

For years the Society has been prevented by a lack of display space from expanding our physical collection of artifacts which would present the history of the upper Bear Creek Valley to the general public. Instead we have concentrated on doing historical research which has focused on photographs, letters, dairies, historical documents, and an extensive newspaper clipping collection. The artifacts which we took into our small museum collection were generally kept in commercial storage.

Today, thanks to the Talent City Council, the mayor, and the city manager, we can truly boast of having a museum—a museum which will grow and develop and become, like other historical museums in Southern Oregon, a growing scholarly resource and a tourist attraction.

I want to sketch for those of you here today some of the accomplishments of the Talent Historical Society in the past two years.

1. Obviously getting this building has fulfilled a long-time desire and need for the Society.
2. In an effort to utilize today's most effective research and communicative tools, we have created the second historical website in Jackson County, the other being the website of the Southern Oregon Historical Society. We secured a grant, hired a local professional set of website creators to make the site for us. We now send our newsletter by email attachment to any members who have internet access and that allows us to use color. We can now communicate more frequently with some members without increasing our postage costs. Our website is on the Internet at www.talenthistory.org.
3. Perhaps the most significant of our research activities the past two years has involved the 1851-1893 dairies of Welborn Beeson, the son of John Beeson, a man renowned nationally for being the first civil rights activist in Oregon. His views about the injustice of the treatment of the Takelma Indian bands here in Southern Oregon began a decade of effort to change the national attitudes and treatment of native Americans. The diary is the most extensive diary that describes the years of early development of the Rogue River valley. Welborn was a gifted writer, and original copies of his dairies were placed by the family in the Special Collection of the Library of the University of Oregon. However, only the 1853 journey across the plains to Oregon has been published. Southern Oregonians have not had access to these very significant historical documents which trace the economic and social development of Jackson County.

The Beeson family provided a private grant to the Society and we have the entire diary collection which exceeds 1,200,000 words on microfilm. Through a separate grant we secured a microfilm reader printer, and now have available a diary which is considered a definitive source and local treasure.

After we got the microfilmed copy of the diary, we began transcribing. We have completed the 1859 to 1881 entries and copied a portion of the diary on computer disks which the Society has given to every secondary school, college, and library in Jackson County.

Today, we are in the process of moving five additional projects from dream to reality:

1. The first is an oral history project, similar to the Library of Congress Story Corps that visited Jackson County last spring. Tom Doty, a well-known professional story teller here in Jackson County, is heading a program to train volunteers from our local area to collect stories and memories about life in Southern Oregon. We will use technology of today to archive, edit and exhibit the collected stories.
2. We are negotiating with the Oregon State University Press for publication of the Welborn Beeson dairies from 1859 to 1861 to coincide with the Oregon Sesquicentennial celebration and locally with the hundred year celebration of founding of the city of Talent.
3. We have received a grant to create a small model of the 1863 octagonal house of Welborn Beeson for permanent display.
4. Talent's MicroTrains company has volunteered to create a model train display, showing what a 1910 train would look like as it ran by 1910 Talent, and what a 2010 train would look like as it moves through Talent circa 2010
5. Another ongoing project is the erection of a rock wall in our entry way which will provide a space to create the first replica display of the most extensive Takelma pictographs found in Jackson County.

While the libraries of Jackson County have received much local press on their fiscal plight, the historical societies have also experienced exactly the same problem of losing necessary funding even though the citizens of Jackson County in 1948 voted to tax themselves to raise funds to save the historical structures in Jacksonville and created a stable tax base for historical research and the preservation of historically significant artifacts. When the voters of Oregon limited property taxes about nine years ago, the funds created by the 1948 vote were merged with the general fund and are no longer being used for historical purposes. So with the loss of over \$3,000,000 historical dollars, all the historical societies in Jackson county are having great difficulties operating.

In an effort to save the extensive library collections and artifact collections that years of effort have created, the combined historical societies are in the process of forming a historical district which will restore funding and once more enable the history of Southern Oregon to continue to be saved. Recent news articles have covered the initial efforts of a 40 member steering committee and the formation of an Our Heritage PAC to circulate petitions and promote the formation of the Rogue Valley Heritage District. If enough signatures are secured, the public will have the opportunity to vote the district into existence at the general election in November 2008. However, even if the voters approve the creation of the heritage district, no support money would be available until November of 2009 due to the need for a newly elected board to create a budget, procedures for the distribution of funds; and that would mean that any funds generated would not be available until that November date.

Obviously, the Talent Historical Society's new finance committee has its work cut out for itself so we can continue to operate the new museum and continue the collection of history and artifacts unique to Talent and the Upper Bear Creek valley.

THS 2008 Membership

Individual (\$20)

Beryl Banks
Dwayne Guthrie
Barbara Haade
Connie Miller
Carol Muir
Anita Nevison
Brandi Randall
Bruce Snook
Sally Shockley
Arlene Stricker
Charlotte Toon

Family (\$30)

Geroge & Colleen Baylor
Pat Bentley & James Trowbridge
Karen and Robert Carr
Bob & Audrey Casebeer
Bob & Annie Dreiszus
Bill & Sheila Horton
Gifford & Marilyn Lee
Richard & Yolanda Nagel

New Members

Colista Bailey
William & Carolyn Cecil
Grail & Phyllis Douglas
David Gray
Ed Jorgenson
Lori Leyba
James Maize
Mike Meredith
Alicia Moore
Wanda & Carl Perdue *
Claire Sommer

Sponsor (\$100+) *

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Bob & Carol Delsman
Katherine Harris
George Kramer
Boyd & Dorcas Lockwood
Barbara & Dick MacMillen
Patricia Remencuis & Jim Bradley
Carol Samuelson
Carl Shauger
Mrs. Janell Talent
Jackie Wobbe

Can't find your name on the above list? Please help support our local history through membership and donations. Thank you!

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