

The Historacle for September 2010



The Official Newsletter of the **Talent Historical Society**

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A HISTORY OF TALENT

By John W. Childers

(I am grateful to my grandfather for the information in the following article.) [Note: Grandfather was John Robert Robison; son of Samuel M. Robison who was a son of John F. Robison, settler of August 31, 1853.)

The history of Talent dates back to the time when four frame houses constituted the town. They were located between Medford and Ashland on what is now the Old Pacific Highway. From all indications it was one of the worst roads in the county. In the summer it was well graveled but in the winter the ruts came to the wagon hubs. The four houses were occupied by the Reeds, the Alfords, the Pennabakers and the Talents, who gave their name to the town.

A. P. Talent was set on being a farmer but it didn't bring him a big enough return, so in 1883 he built a small frame building and started himself a grocery business. Since his was the only store between Medford and Ashland, the profits were large. He stayed in business for several years and added to his building another room or two. By that time Talent had grown to be quite a community and a one-room school house was built on what is now the old Carter place. Incidentally, the school house didn't have a floor. Sawdust from a nearby mill was spread over the flat ground to keep the children's feet from getting too cold. There was a small heating stove in one corner of the room which gave out very little heat. The little girls were allowed to sit closer to it and the boys, in an effort to keep their feet warm, stomped their feet and caused no end of confusion.

Late in the year 1898, a Grange was formed and a hall was built. Due to the fact that the school was a long way from the majority of the homes, it was moved into the Grange hall where the conditions were much better. At about the same time, some of the God-fearing folk got together and built a Baptist church on the ground where J. J. Tryon's store now stands. If you happen to be in Talent on a Sunday morning you may still hear the bell. I can remember the sound of it's clatter very well for I used to attend Sunday School there when I was a small boy.

About eleven years later, in 1909, Talent was incorporated and held its first

election. Mr. W. H. Breese was elected the first mayor of Talent and served for several years in that capacity. Two years after the incorporation A. P. Talent's store burned. Charley Wolters bought the location and put up a brick store which was torn down in 1938.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was put through in 1884 and stimulated the growth of Talent considerably. Most of the land was used [formerly] for grazing sheep and the new railroad offered easy shipment for the products. It was at this time that fruit trees began to sprout up over the valley and in a short time there was a number of packing houses in Talent. The railroad company put in a switch the next year and the mail was dropped at Talent.

While all this was going on Mr. Van Dunlap built the second store in Talent which had gasoline as an extra ware. Talent was soon a busy little town with a bank and a cannery added to its credit. The first story of the second school house was also completed during this time. The building was not completely finished until 1914 however. It still stands and is one of the finest of its class in the Rogue River Valley. [This refers to the building that was removed where the elementary school now stands.] The students who were in high school went to Ashland until the new building was completed.

Talent had a fair water department to rely upon for a large well was dug west of town. It is the main source of the water supply yet. A small auxiliary well was dug a few years ago because during the summer the supply ran low and the pressure was poor.

In conjunction with the water department was the fire department which was nothing more than two hose carts equipped with axes, etc. It was not too well organized, but the volunteers managed to save many buildings from total destruction.

From the 1930's on, Talent has been in a slump as far as business is concerned. Pears lost their large profits and live-stock raising has nearly disappeared except for a few of the larger stock men.

Logging has fast become one of the leading industries around Talent. It is the only industry which seems to be making money. Mr. Charles Skeeters was one of the outstanding loggers around Talent and maintains a large payroll which benefits the men of Talent and vicinity.

In 1938 the New Pacific Highway was completed. In its course it left Talent off the map or to be more specific, it put Talent off the main highway to the West. Many people objected to the new highway leaving Talent, but nothing was done. There were many who believed that Talent was lost since the highway did not run through it, but I think, as many others do, that it won't make a great deal of difference because Talent never did benefit to any great extent from the tourist trade and that is the only reason why some didn't want the highway to leave. The town lies only three hundred yards

from the new road now and has two good junctions which lead to the center of town.

Talent, as it now stands, is an ordinary little town, content to be alone and undisturbed. Everyone has his job to do and consequently things go well. It still has the gossip that it had when it was young, as must be in all small towns. The roads make it nice for the old folks to walk on for they have been paved and are in the best condition. I am told that in the old days the roads were bottomless.

Nowadays the lawns take the place of the tall wild grass that grew so abundantly in the early days. It was over shoulder high and thrived among the black oak trees which covered the valley down to Bear Creek.

There is very little left to say about Talent except that it has a population of nearly five hundred now and the business district is comparable to any up and coming little community in the state. There are four groceries, four service stations, one feed store, a second hand store, two cafes, one general merchandise store, and a meat market. They are all well-stocked and treat the public well.

Although Talent will never be a great industrial center, it will continue to grow and will be a good place in which to settle down and raise a family.

The original of this copy is in the household of the Childers family. This short history was written when John Childers was a student at the Medford Senior High school. [Written about 1938-39]

The author of this history, John William Childers was born January 1, 1920 in Talent to William A. Childers and the former Ethel Robison. He was the great great grandson of pioneers John and Susan Robison who arrived in the Rogue Valley on August 31, 1853, on what has become known as the Preacher Train.

John Childers graduated from Medford High School in 1939, and attended Southern Oregon College (now University) until entering the U. S. Army on January 15, 1942. Trained as a member of the Army Air Force he was assigned in 1943 as a B-24 co-pilot and completed 51 missions in the European theatre. He returned to the States in 1944 and became a B. 24 instructor at Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho. He was discharged as a first lieutenant and later attained the rank of major while serving in the reserve.

On June 23, 1945, Mr. Childers married the former Lida M. Baylor in Medford. He later completed his collegiate studies at Southern Oregon State College and obtained a teaching certificate. In 1947 he was appointed principal of Roosevelt Elementary School in the Medford district. He held that position until 1958. From 1950 to 1960 he was also a pilot with Mercy Flights Air Ambulance service.

Retiring from his educational career, John Childers began a career with the U. S. Forest Service spending two years as a smoke jumper pilot, and fire bomber lead pilot based in Cave Junction. He relocated to Portland in 1962 and remained there until in

1966 when he became an Air Officer in Albuquerque, New Mexico for the U. S. Forest Service, Region 3.

He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers, Goddard Association of America, 98th Bomber Group Association, the Oregon State College Alumni Association, and the Southern Oregon Historical Society. Both he and his wife Lida, a noted historian in her own right, are buried in Talent's Stearns Cemetery. *[We here at the Talent Historical Society are indebted to Lida Childers, who was a member of our Society until her death in 1995 for she has left scores of historical documents with us including John Childers' 1939 history of Talent.]*

The Royal Way that the first Methodist Preachers Raised Money for the First Protestant Church Built West of the Rockies

When the Preacher Train came to the Bear Creek Valley in October 1853, several Methodist preachers arrived in Oregon. The Royal family had three, and Rev. Stephen Phelps Taylor, who became the first Methodist minister in Phoenix, Rev. Joseph Smith who became the first minister in the Jacksonville Methodist Church, followed by the Rev. Thomas F. Royal in 1854, and Rev. Stearns, a 72 year old Baptist minister, were all members of that unique wagon train.

Rev. William Royal preached the first sermon in Jackson County in the newly acquired log cabin which John Beeson had just bought in Wagner Creek, later to be named Talent. The next day, Rev. Royal and his son, the Rev. Thomas Fletcher Royal, went to Jacksonville and boldly began preaching in the Jacksonville saloons, and solicited funds to build a Methodist Church. Here is how Thomas Fletcher Royal wrote about that encounter as his father dealt with the gamblers, the patrons and the owners of the saloons.

"One day (Rev.) Royal walked into the leading Jacksonville Saloon, where Ad Helms and Charley Williams were busy at faro (a card game). 'Boys, we must have some help in building our church and I want you fellows to give us a lift,' the preacher is quoted as saying. 'But,' remarked Helms, the dealer, 'you wouldn't use money got in this way for such a purpose.'

'Oh, yes,' replied Royal, 'and we would turn it to a better use.'" *Memoirs of Thomas Fletcher Royal*

The funds raised there and by subscription elsewhere in the valley, including funds from donors at Wagner Creek, made the construction of a Methodist church in Jacksonville to be erected in the spring of 1854. That church became the first Protestant Church to be built west of the Rocky Mountains.

The lot upon which the church was built was donated by James Cluggage, the man who took the first gold out of Daisy Creek in Jacksonville. According to Rector Paul Habliston who wrote a brief history of what is now St. Andrew's Anglican Church in 1990:

"In its earliest years the church was truly a community church, since it served the presbyterians on alternate Sundays, the Baptists and Christians as well as various itinerant

Preachers and circuit riders. About 25 years later the Presbyterians built their own house of worship. The first musical instrument was a rosewood melodeon. It is presently exhibited as at the Jacksonville Museum. The Bible last used in the church was given by the young men of Jacksonville in 1877.”

The church remained a Methodist church until 1928 when the congregation disbanded. In 1937 the structure was bought by the city of Jacksonville, and for several years the building remained vacant although used occasionally by various church groups holding revival meetings. The Anglican Diocese of Oregon made efforts to establish a mission in Jacksonville, and the current present St. Andrew's Anglican congregation is the result. Recently, the City Council of Jacksonville considered selling building to ease its budget problems, but community opinion prevailed and the present congregation still has the old church completed in 1854 as its home.

1911 Methodist Church Cook Book Now Available At Museum

In 1911, about a year and one-half after the Methodist Church in Talent was formed, the Ladies' Aide Society issued the Mount Wagner Cook Book. Today readers assume that it was intended to be a money raising effort on the part of the Methodist women of the Talent church.

The Talent Historical Society has a photocopy of that rare and unique publication. Those whose culinary efforts include cooking rather than just eating can now look up recipes and read directions for the following categories of food: Soups, Salads, Meats, Vegetables, Bread—Rolls—etc, Pies, Cakes—Cookies—Puddings, Ice Cream and Sherbets, Candies, Pickles and Preserves.

Interestingly enough, the largest number of recipes, collectively, involved the desserts and candy areas. Apparently, the desires of those who lived in Talent about one hundred years ago have transmitted directly their dietary choices to their great grandchildren.

The Society will keep this document out for a about a month so that interested folk can look up these hundred year old recipes. We will try to steer interested folk to somewhat more nourishing recipes.

[The Museum at 105 North Market Street currently has an historical display featuring the Talent United Methodist Church.]

Obviously the Society urges members to visit the various displays currently available for viewing! We welcome you!

Talent Avenue Has Been a Major Thoroughfare for Years

The long street that binds most of Talent together has an interesting transportation history. Initially, what today is Talent Avenue was the Applegate Trail, located by 15 men from the Willamette Valley, led by Jesse and Lindsay Applegate and Levi Scott, who were seeking a southern route to Oregon. The Talent portion of the Applegate Trail

later was the Overland Mail Route to Oregon from California finally established in 1860. The line covered 710 miles from Portland to Sacramento, making it the second longest stage line in the U. S. The company had 28 stage coaches, 30 stage wagons, 35 drivers, 14 district agents, 75 hostlers, and used 500 horses. By 1880, Wells Fargo had 50 offices in Oregon, and the stage coaches kept running until 1887 when the north-south railroad line linking Oregon and California was completed.

The yellow house, now owned by the Tanners, which stands at the corner of Rapp Road and Talent Avenue was also a stage stop. It had an outside staircase in front which the drivers used to reach the sleeping loft. As near as can be determined, in 1859 the Rockfellow's owned that place and had a contract for carrying the mail from Jacksonville to Yreka. They had a four mule wagon, and carried passengers and freight. According to Beeson's diary, they also operated a tavern. The Helms family seems to have secured the property later; a family named Barnes remodeled the house, and the present fireplace was rebuilt using original bricks when the Tanners bought the property in 1959. The stables for the stage line were located down by Wagner Creek.

Talent Avenue was part of the Pacific Highway which linked Washington, Oregon and California together. In 1926 the Pacific Highway became U. S. Highway 99 and it was the main highway artery along the West Coast for over 40 years, until it was gradually decommissioned and replaced by I-5. Interestingly enough, Jackson County's portion of the Pacific Highway was the first part of the Pacific Highway to be have its entire length covered with asphalt blacktop. The present route of Highway 99 seems to have occurred around 1948.

When today's Talent Avenue was part of the main route to California, a host of gas stations marked the city of Talent, an auto court was established and its remains are located on the east corner of Valley View and Talent Avenue. All of the buildings on the east side of Talent Avenue were part of the auto court, stopping at the present sculpture studio. A ghost sign for the auto court can be seen through the paint on the north side of the first building facing Talent Avenue at the intersection.

One of the photographic exhibits at the Talent Historical Society museum shows the route of the Pacific Highway before Highway 99 bypassed the business district of Talent creating considerable local controversy. That picture was taken sometime between 1943 and 1946.

Soon a new roundabout will alter the Valley View/Talent Avenue Intersection, and the Camelot Theatre relocated to the north.

What Has Been Happening Elsewhere

Bellingham, Washington:

Fossil track of a huge flightless bird was found in sandstone east of Deming, Washington in May, 2009. Dated in the Eocene geologic period 56 to 34 million years ago, the track of a Diatryma, a 7 foot tall, 350 pound bird, roughly the size of Shaquille O'Neal, had a massive beak. The track of the fossil is of a three-toed 11 by 10 inch foot print. Several other similar tracks have been found around the Seattle area previously. The Pacific Northwest climate at the time the bird lived was similar to what might be found in Central America or Southeast Asia. At that time, the bird lived in a swampy lowland covered with palms, ferns and vines. The sandstone track will be displayed at Western Washington University after being studied further. A previously found track is currently on display at the University.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

The Klamath County Museum in Klamath Falls is suffering from the same kind of economic crisis that has confronted all of the museums and historical societies in Jackson County...the county budget committee and commissioners have chosen not to include that well-known museum in the current budget. As a consequence, the board is considering using Oregon's special district law to establish a heritage district and seek direct tax funds from the residents of Klamath County. A similar effort here in Jackson county failed to secure the required signatures to place a similar issue on the budget, even though over 10,000 signatures were collected, not enough were gathered in the time frame required to see if Jackson County residents would choose to reinstitute the tax support that the voting citizens of Jackson county had authorized in 1948.

Portland, Oregon

The Multnomah County commissioners have placed a local levy option on this November's ballot which if passed would dedicate funds to keeping the Oregon Historical Society open. **[currently the Talent Historical Society is open more hours weekly than the Oregon Historical Society and we are only open 20 hours weekly.]** At the rate of five cents per \$1000 dollars of assessed property value, this measure will generate the funds necessary to keep OHS in full operation. The typical Multnomah typical household would pay \$10 a year if the measure is successful in November.

The funds generated would a. keep the Oregon Historical Museum open 40 hours a week. Keep the historical Library open to the public 32+ hours weekly, and avoiding closure and would restore the current cuts to service. Additionally, curation for the museum would be restored so that exhibits are rotated and the collection and protection of Oregon's historical artifacts and documents can continue. Educational programs, with free child admission would be restored.

Annual Meeting Date Set for the Talent Historical Society Membership: November 13, 2:00 P. M. at Museum

As of August 1, 2010, membership in the Talent Historical Society now numbers one hundred and fifty eight. We also have approximately eighteen business memberships. Each November the membership of the Society elects board members from a slate proposed by the Society Board. Individual members who may seek membership on the Board are urged to send a resume to the Society at P.O. Box 582, Talent, Oregon 97540, prior to November 8, 2010. The Board meets on November 9, 2010, at 4:00 p.m. in the Museum at 105 North Market Street, Talent, Oregon, and will authorize the candidates for the Board at that time. At the present time the Bylaws of the Society authorize eleven board members. This year the board consists of President, Robert Casebeer; Secretary Katherine Harris, Treasurer Lysa Gore and Board members William Horton, Ralph Hunkins, Diane Glendenning, and Greg Goebelt. We have four open board positions to fill to reach our eleven maximum board membership.

October is Family History Month

For those of you who have not been in the Museum recently, you may not be aware that the Society maintains a rather extensive collection of Talent area family archives. Area families are welcome to review the information that has been collected on these families, and are urged to contribute family data for inclusion in our archives. We have obituaries, news paper clippings, family group sheets, and similar materials current available on many area families.

Since October is nationally Family History Month, here are a few items that each family can do which will increase family members focus on their particular family history. Of course, older members of the family do tell younger ones about “the good old days, when I had to walk to school through three feet of snow...going up hill both coming and going to that school!” Seriously, though, the only way most of us know what happened in our grandparents' era is from listening to their stories. And the only way that our kids and grandkids will know what our lives were like, plus those of our parents and grandparents, is if we take the time to tell them, and in such interesting ways that they will want to listen.

Here are some suggestions for preserving your own family heritage:

1. If your photos aren't already in albums, spend a few evenings arranging them, being sure to write identifying information on the backs of the photographs in addition to similar data recorded on the album pages themselves.
2. Tape record older family members while they tell stories. **[And THS would like a copy for our oral history files as well]**
3. Video record Grandma showing off her dishes, knick-knacks, and other family heirlooms while she tells where each one came from and what its significance is.

4. Take a trip to the cemeteries where family members are buried.
5. Drive past former homes or the places where “home” used to be. List on paper the addresses or locations of all the places where you have lived.
6. Make a family tree. For those of you with computers there are several ways to do this. One is to use a ready-made genealogy program. If you do not have a computer, you can just type in the family information. Locally, visit the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society in Phoenix at 95 Houston Road. They even give classes for family searchers.
7. Make a family quilt, putting each person or family's name on a square. Put the generation you begin with in the center. If you have old photos, you can take them to a copy shop and have them copied to heat transfer paper. You can then apply the transfer to your quilt block or take it home and do it yourself with a hot iron.
8. If a family member fought in the Revolutionary or Civil War, a trip to a battlefield would be great. In this valley historical markers regarding the Rogue River Indian War (between the Table Rocks) and the Civil War (Camp Baker on Camp Baker Road and Fort Lane—north of Central Point) can be visited.

FOR SALE NOW – Great for Christmas
TALENT CENTENNIAL BELT BUCKLE
Talent’s own heirloom commemorating 100 Years



Limited edition, numbered with brief history of Talent engraved on back
Other Centennial Items for sale include:
Centennial T-shirts
Centennial Quilt Posters

New and Renewing Members for the last quarter are listed below.

Individual memberships:

Joel Goldman

Pamela Grove

Alison T. Hoffman

Charlotte Spohn

William Horton

Family memberships:

John Abbott

Carl & Wanda Perdue

Robert Holdridge

Business Sponsorships:

Chrysalis Cottage: Nancy Rush-Yates

Thanking our Volunteers and Supporters:

Pat Bentley

James Bradley

Karen Carr

Liz Carter

Dragonfly Custom Screenprinting

Margaret Duggar

Pamela Grove

Ron Hodgdon

David Mihalievich

Janice Pacitti

Tarks Market

Don Tarter

Banjo Bill

James Trowbridge

Jan Wright

Julia Hunkins

Emma DiFruscia

