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Willamette Valley Voices: Connecting Generations

A publication of the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill

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In This Issue

Willamette Valley Voices: Connecting Generations is the Willamette Heritage Center's biannual publication. Its goal is to provide a showcase for scholarly writing pertaining to history and heritage in Oregon's Willamette Valley, south of Portland. Articles are written by scholars, students, heritage professionals and historians - professional and amateur. Editions are themed to orient authors and readers to varied and important topics in Valley history.

This issue offers articles about Community Celebrations. These celebrations give us an important sense of belonging. They help us answer questions about histories, communities and self and group identities. Community celebrations are important for socialization, for those who are newcomers to an area and for a community's children. Through participation, young and old alike learn of their heritage and culture.

Some articles feature celebrations that were short-lived or are no longer commemorated. These events came into being to fulfill a purpose, but once that purpose no longer existed, the celebrations ceased to serve a function in its community: Salem's Cherry Festival in the article by Kylie Pine, Oregon Normal School's May Day Fete in the piece by Erin Passehl, the Oregon Trail Pageant of Eugene in Julie Voelker-Morris' article, Damond Morris looks at Mount Angel's Flax Harvest Festival, and the Canoe Fete and the Whitewater Parade are featured in "Celebrating our River Heritage" by Jennifer Huang.

Some articles look at celebrations that are decades old, steeped in tradition and that connect generations of Valley residents to a collective past: Linn County Pioneer Picnic in Ashley Sharatt's work, the Fern Ridge Thistle Regatta in Huang's article, and the Lebanon Strawberry and Independence Hop and Heritage festivals highlighted in Phil Decker's photo essay. While other articles focus on celebrations that are relatively new: the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival in Rosalynn Rothstein article, David Lewis looks at the annual celebration of the Grand Ronde Tribe's Restoration, the Aumsville Corn Festival is rendered in photographs by Decker, and the Oregon Country Fair is examined in Shelley Deadmond's review of Suzi Prozanski's book *Fruit of the Sixties: The Founding of the Oregon Country Fair*. These new celebrations are hoped to have a long life that grows and evolves as each generation adds to the event.

In addition, we have a new feature called "In Their Own Words." Through this feature we will be able to provide access to short snippets of oral histories housed in the Center's collections. Preserving the Valley's heritage and sharing its stories is a part of a continuing process and dialogue of which *Willamette Valley Voices: Connecting Generations* is the newest vehicle.

Keni Sturgeon, Curator and Editor

Willamette Valley Voices: Connecting Generations

A Journal of Willamette Valley History

Volume II

Winter 2013

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Celebrating Cherries in Salem

Kylie Pine



Figure 1: Salem Cherry Festival Parade Float circa 1913. Renska Swart Collection, Willamette Heritage Center Collections, 0063.001.0059.003.012.01.

Abstract: Although Salem still calls itself the “Cherry City” and we still ride around on “Cherriots” and cheer on the Cherry City Derby Girls, most people today associate the moniker with the annual cherry blossoms on the capitol mall, not the cherry growing economy of the turn of the last century. Salem was first dubbed “The Cherry City” in 1907 by visitors impressed by the city’s annual Cherry Fair. The first Cherry Fair was held in 1903. At the heart of early Cherry Festivals was the promotion Salem’s agriculture. Prizes were given for fruits and flowers that were put on display by local growers. The celebration was a great marketing tool, advertising local produce and providing a community-wide celebration. Events varied over the years, including everything from a baby parade to street carnival. A booster group, the Salem Cherrians, was founded in 1913, to organize the fair and participate in civic activities across the state. The festival was revived 1947 only to be canceled in 1951. This article will look at the rise, fall and revival of the Cherry Fair as it relates to changing economic and social influences in the Salem area.

Salem the Cherry City?

The attention of cherry producers, buyers and consumers all over the country is attracted, and the magnificent appearance and quality of this luscious fruit proves beyond question that Salem is pre-eminently the Cherry City of the world.¹

While Salem may no longer be considered the “Cherry City of the world,” the legacy of cherry production and celebration remains in the names of businesses and organizations all over the city. From the municipal buses, Cherriots, to our roller derby girls, cherries are still a part of our community’s identity. Salem secured the title “Cherry City” thanks to an annual Cherry Fair it held for just a little less than a decade in the early part of the 20th century. The legacy of the fair, and the cherry-themed identity it produced, would last much longer, inspiring a host of other events, a booster organization and revival celebrations into the 1960s.

A look back at Salem’s cherry celebration history also offers interesting insight into economic, political and social changes within city. The structure of programs, and commentaries from newspaper coverage, offers a view into important issues, perceptions and trends within the community.

Community Celebrations in Context

Oregon communities have a strong tradition of commodity and industry-themed celebrations. These celebrations were held for a variety of reasons. Monetary advantages of large festivals were a clear reason. Creating an attraction brought individuals together and created the potential for commerce. The bigger and more unique the attraction, the more draw the celebration had on out-of-town individuals that would spend money with local businesses. Commodity-based fairs had the added incentive of advertising for a community’s local resources and attracting potential economic development by encouraging businesses and business minded individuals to settle in the region and add to the economy. Commodity-based fairs also worked to celebrate a common identity within a community.

There were numerous commodity/industry celebrations that were established around the same time as Salem’s Cherry Fair. All were focused around a local industry or product and included similar activities like parades, contests for best produce or display and a “royal court” with a king and/or queen to preside over the festivities. The Lebanon Strawberry Festival was established in 1909. The Astoria Regatta, held at the

¹ “Cherries Berries and Other Fruits,” *Capital Journal*, December 11, 1907, 11.

end of fishing season, started in 1894. Two big festivals that remain large-scale celebrations today include the Portland Rose Festival and the Pendleton Round-Up. The first Portland Rose Festival was held in 1907, although the first official rose exhibition was hosted by that city in 1889, and the first floral parade was held in 1904. The Pendleton Round-Up came of age in 1910 with organized promotion of annual displays of ranching skills in Pendleton began.²

The First Cherry Fairs

Salem’s first Cherry Fair was held in 1906,³ although it went under the name “Salem Cherry Festival.” Run by the State Horticultural Society, the one-day event was truly a celebration of cherry cultivation in the region. Part agricultural show, part educational conference, the primary audience was Oregon fruit growers. Fair organizers brought in big name horticulturalists to speak and offered prizes for best displays of cherries.⁴ Prizes, also called premiums, took the form of silver cups valued from 6 to 10 dollars. The prizes were donated by local businesses with a vested interest in cherries and other orchard products, such as nursery outfits, banks, fruit packers, etc.⁵ While the majority of the proceedings focused on cherry production, there was some information presented on walnut cultivation as well.⁶ The event was considered a rousing triumph. Participants at the December meeting of the Marion County Horticultural Society noted:

The cherry fair of last summer proved such a grand success in bringing out strong competition and a big show in all the standard varieties of shippers that an effort will be made to enlarge the scope of the exhibition materially and to do this a larger and more valuable list of premiums will be offered in the different classes.⁷

² Oregon Federal Writer’s Project, “Gala Days,” *Oregon Oddities*, (1940): 183-191.

³ There is some confusion about when Salem held its first Cherry Fair. There are online articles circulating that Salem’s first cherry fair was held in 1903, sponsored by the Salem Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. The citation for this information is not given in the articles. The author of this article would argue that there is published evidence that puts this date in question. The earliest mention of a cherry fair held in Salem found in the *Capitol Journal* newspaper appears in 1906. A December 3rd article titled “Horticultural Society: Will Meet at the Salem City Hall Next Saturday,” lists a presentation by Salem farmer George W. Weeks titled “Some Lessons Learned from the July Cherry Fair.” Several *Capitol Journal* articles published in 1907 (“Cherries and Roses in July,” May 14, 6; “Flower and Cherry Show,” May 20; “Salem’s Cherry Fair,” July 8), identify the 1907 event as the “Second Annual Cherry Fair.” The author believes the confusion of dates may stem from information from Agnes Gilbert Schucking, who stated she was crowned Cherry Queen in 1903. More information about this will be presented in the next section.

⁴ “Salem’s Cherry Festival,” *Capital Journal*, June 8, 1906, 4; “Salem to Be Busy,” *Capital Journal*, June 27, 1906, 4.

⁵ “Cherries Getting Ripe,” *Capital Journal*, June 10, 1906, 10.

⁶ “Great Cherry Feast,” *Capital Journal*, June 16, 1906, 7.

⁷ “Fruit Men Holding Talkfest,” *Capital Journal*, December 3, 1906, 6.

So expand they did. Taking inspiration from the Hood River Apple Show the Marion County Horticultural Society planned the 2nd Annual Cherry Fair.⁸ The three-day event was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Nurserymen's Association.⁹ This partnership expanded the reach of the show and brought a full three days' line-up of professional speakers from all over Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California and British Columbia. Lectures included such titillating topics as: "Commercial Bulb Growing," "Parasitic Work in California," "The Apple in Oregon," and "Marked Line Between Inferior and Superior Nursery Stock."¹⁰

Additional features for the 1907 Fair included a flower show (planned but never materialized¹¹) and an expanded prize list. Prizes in the form of silver cups and paper diplomas¹² were offered in categories broken down by variety of cherry and type of displays (10-pound box, 10-pound box packed in eight cartons and one-pound "plates"). Prizes were also offered for best seedlings, general fruit display, several categories of berries (loganberries, blackberries, raspberries, gooseberries, currents) and flowers. To ensure fairness in the judging, fruits were displayed without names or addresses of growers and judges were specifically picked to represent all three sides of the cherry industry: "the commission business, the practical grower, and the scientific side of horticulture."¹³

The local papers were effusive in their description of the event:

Salem's big cherry fair is in full blast, and is something that has to be seen to be appreciated. No word painting can convey even the beginning of an idea of its beauty. All morning yesterday busy hands were at work draping flags and hanging great branches of Royal Annes, crimson and golden with their loads of glistening fruit, and arranging the boxes of fruit on the tables. And such a display! Rows of boxes of "Bings," too red to be black and too black to be red, round glistening and perfect. Rows of 10-pound boxes, the top layer packed in lines as

⁸ "Salem Plans Cherry Fair," *Capital Journal*, May 12, 1907, 4; "Officers Elected," *Capital Journal*, January 23, 1907, 6; "Cherry Men to Hold Exhibit," *Bohemia Nugget*, May 22, 1907.

⁹ "Nursery Association Meeting," *Capital Journal*, May 29, 1907, 8.

¹⁰ "Fruitgrowers to Speak," *Oregonian*, June 22, 1907, 6.

¹¹ "Ready of the Cherry Fair," *Capital Journal*, July 9, 1907, 1.

¹² Note: while the diplomas were advertised, a mistake caused them not to be printed and delivered to the participants. "Cherry Fair Promises to be Great Fair," *Capital Journal*, June 11, 1908, 8.

¹³ "Industrial Growth of Oregon," *Oregonian*, June 17, 1907, 13; "Marion's Cherries and Roses," *Capital Journal*, June 11, 1907; "Salem's Cherry Fair," *Capital Journal*, July 6, 1907.

true as so many big glass marbles, nine to the row and so near alike that they seemed to have been made in the same mold.¹⁴

The event made a big impression and brought public attention to the importance of cherry cultivation in the state and created an identity for Salem. The Portland-based *Oregonian* editorial staff praised the event: "Salem's fine cherry fair cannot help but stimulate a profitable industry that seldom figures in the grand total at the end of the year. Oregon's annual product of first-rate berries and small fruit aggregates a very large sum very widely distributed."¹⁵ A testimonial also published in the Portland-based paper had Southern Pacific freight agent, Charles A. Malboeuf, suggesting Oregon change its state flower to the cherry blossom. He further states with a twinge of jealousy that would secretly delight any modern Salemite:

Never before have I seen such fine, large cherries. I did not know they could be grown here, though I have lived in Oregon for many years and though I knew all about fruit growing in this state. Displayed as the fruit was in fancy boxes, packed in lace paper, the luscious cherries made a capital appearance. Such exhibitions are a revelation to Oregonians themselves. It is a pity that the fruit was not displayed where Portlanders could see it.¹⁶

The fair even provided Salem with a new title. By unanimous vote of the Pacific Coast Nurserymen's Association, Salem was christened "The Cherry City" in recognition of the "numbers and excellent quantities of those grown in the vicinity."¹⁷ It didn't seem to matter, as the *Oregonian* snidely pointed out in another editorial, that Salem probably did more business in prunes and hops.¹⁸

The new identity was a source of pride to Salemites, a reason to come together and a motivator. The Dalles established a cherry fair in 1908 they hoped would rival that of Salem.¹⁹ This rallied support in Salem. At a June planning meeting the battle cry went out from Salem area organizers: "The Dalles...is trying very hard to get the name of 'Cherry City' from Salem. All the cities of Oregon are having fairs of some special sort. Hood River has strawberries and apples, Albany is to have an apple fair. The Dalles wants

¹⁴ "Finest Cherry Exhibit Ever Made on the Coast," *Capital Journal*, July 11, 1907, 1.

¹⁵ Editorial, *Oregonian*, July 12, 1907, 8.

¹⁶ "Cherry as State Flower," *Oregonian*, July 12, 1907, 17.

¹⁷ "The Cherry City," *Capital Journal*, December 15, 1907.

¹⁸ Editorial, *Oregonian*, July 18, 1907, 8.

¹⁹ "Cherry Fair at Dalles," *Oregonian*, May 15, 1908, 6.

cherries. But we are the 'Cherry City.' Let us push the fair and keep the name that belongs to us to ourselves."²⁰

"GET THERE"

4th Annual Oregon Cherry Fair
SALEM, OREGON

JULY 8, 9 and 10, 1909

Greatest Exhibition of Cherries ever seen
on the Pacific Coast
Fruits and Flowers

Unrivalled Three Days' Carnival of Games
Races, Sports, Music, Gorgeous Parades

\$1,000-Given In Prizes-\$1,000

Mammoth
Exhibits



Daily Enter-
tainments

NIGHTLY REVELRY
SPECTACULAR BALLOON RACES
Three Balloons, Daily Ascensions
Thrilling Parachute Leaps

HIGH WIRE ACTS

Don't Miss the Attractions on the Square
Annual Meeting State Horticultural Society

Figure 2.

²⁰ "Cherry Fair Promises to be Great Fair," *Capital Journal*, June 11, 1908, 8.

Expanding the Scope of the Cherry Fair

In 1908, the Salem Board of Trade took an active lead in organizing the Cherry Fair by appointing a steering committee.²¹ An even bigger and grander event was in the works. Additional prizes were added and it was even suggested that the Cherry Fair be put on instead of the local Fourth of July celebrations because the Cherry Fair had the potential to draw people from all over the state and "do more good to the community as a whole than the mere observance of the Fourth of July."²² This plan was met with some resistance and it was decided that the citizens of Salem would band together and work hard to put on both events.²³



Figure 3. 1st Prize Winning Automobile decorated for annual Cherry Fair, circa 1912. Willamette Heritage Center Collections, 0083.043.0001.103.18.

While the fruit exhibition remained, the programs offered during the Cherry Fair changed dramatically. Out went the lectures and paper readings and in came the carnival, music and entertainment. Organizers envisioned putting on "one of the most extensive street carnivals ever seen in the state."²⁴ Two big parades, balloon ascensions, sports, band concerts, "singing on electric cars," fireworks, a ball and battle

²¹ "Cherry Fair is Coming," *Capital Journal*, April 12, 1908, 2; *Capital Journal*, April 18, 1908.

²² "Board of Trade and Business Men League Take up Discussion Whether Both Events Should be Held," *Capital Journal*, June 10, 1908, 8.

²³ "Cherry Fair Promises to be Great Fair," *Capital Journal*, June 11, 1908, 8.

²⁴ "Fun and Excitement Besides the Cherry Fair," *Capital Journal*, June 29, 1908, 2.

of confetti, and crowning of a “King of the Cherry Fair” were planned.²⁵ Thrilling acts were sought out including “Dare Devil Dick in his sensational hair-raising slide for life” which consisted of him sliding on a rope from the top of the Marion County Courthouse.²⁶ Salem hired a Portland based designer, E.S. Barnes, to create a 176’ x 24’ pavilion on Court Street, situated on the West side of the Courthouse lawn, with floral backgrounds to display the fruit.²⁷ The city was decorated with 3000 feet of electric “streamers” which illuminated events.²⁸ The parade opening the grand event was expected to include “all automobiles in town,” vying for the chance to win the prize of a new electric reading lamp.²⁹

One comical incident reported by the *Oregonian* is evidence of the organizers’ thrift and illustrates cross-county political differences during the time of the fair. Organizers looking to cut costs in their advertising budget re-used an Oregon State Fair banner by sewing the word “Cherry” over state. When a wind gust came up, the patch was dislodged and the sign appeared to read “Oregon Sherry Fair.” The article concludes: “Polk County visitors in the city remark that this is not inappropriate, since Salem voted ‘wet,’ while Polk County is ‘dry.’”³⁰

Even a postponement of the event due to slow ripening cherries did not dampen the enthusiasm.³¹ Prominent Salem business men took leadership roles in planning the fair and donated money to make it happen, realizing that the attraction brought crowds who spent money and took back positive propaganda to other communities in the state. The Salem Board of Trade set up 19 committees to oversee the management of the event.³² Businessmen finagled deals with local railroads to offer special prices and excursion trains into the city to make it easier to attract out-of-town guests.³³ A special envoy of Salem businessmen, including future Senator Charles Linza McNary, was sent to a meeting of the Portland Commercial Club with a load of more than three hundred pounds of cherries to entice those members to make the trip to Salem. At the meeting

²⁵ “Cup for Best Cherries,” *Oregonian*, June 26, 1908, 10.
²⁶ “Fun and Excitement Besides the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, June 29, 1908, 2.
²⁷ “Designing Cherry Pavilion for Salem,” *Capital Journal*, July 9, 1908, 3; “All Portends Success for the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, July 10, 1908, 7.
²⁸ “Putting up Streamers,” *Capital Journal*, July 3, 1908, 8; “All Portends Success for the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, July 10, 1908, 7; “Fun and Excitement Besides the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, June 29, 1908, 2.
²⁹ “All Ready for Cherry Fair Tomorrow,” *Capital Journal*, July 15, 1908, 1.
³⁰ “Wind Makes Freak Sign,” *Oregonian*, July 3, 1908, 7.
³¹ “Cherry Fair Postponed,” *Oregonian*, July 5, 1908, 8.
³² “All Portends Success for the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, July 10, 1908, 7.
³³ “Third Annual Cherry Fair and Carnival,” *Capital Journal*, July 2, 1908, 8; “Southern Pacific Offers Round Trip Ticket for Cost of One and One Third Fair,” *Madras Pioneer*, July 9, 1908, 6.

70 members of the Portland club pledged to go to the fair. An effort to provide lunch for these visiting dignitaries led to a special collection at the planning meeting with several local merchants subscribing on the spot to provide a lunch and car tour of the cherry and prune districts around Salem.³⁴

Efforts like these marked a change in focus of the event from an educational and even agricultural one, to a way to bolster Salem’s reputation and attract new interests and business. Newspapers started talking about the “booster,” an individual that actively advocated and advertised the city through their social activities and monetary contributions.³⁵ This new focus led to the creation of a new cherry-themed booster organization that became the face of Salem.

The Cherrians



Figure 4. Cherrians Marching in Uniform. Willamette Heritage Center Collections, 0063.001.0073.002.22.

Established on June 27, 1913, the Cherrians was Salem’s premier booster organization.³⁶ Its purpose, according to organizational by-laws, was “to stimulate

³⁴ “Excursion to Salem Cherry Fair,” *Oregonian*, July 9, 1908, 12; “All Portends Success for the Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, July 10, 1908, 7; “Will Go to Cherry Fair,” *Oregonian*, July 16, 1908, 10.
³⁵ “Cherry City is Growing Very Fast,” *Capital Journal*, June 20, 1908, 4.
³⁶ “History of the Cherrians,” *Oregon Magazine* LXV, no. 4 (April 4, 1954): 11.

sociability and good fellowship among its members and as a uniformed marching club, to promote the best interests of Salem, the Willamette Valley and Oregon.” Over the years the Cherrians would perform many functions in the community, including planning events, welcoming dignitaries, fundraising and representing the Salem community abroad.



Figure 5. Cherrians in Orchard. Willamette Heritage Center Collections, 2007.001.1687.

Like many fraternal and social clubs of the past, the Cherrians cobbled together a series of titles based off old feudal and royal systems. To this the Cherrians added a comedic cherry twist. There were two levels of membership: Vassals who served as active members and Lords of the Manor who were inactive members. A third honorary membership category applied to those who were honored for service to the organization. The president of the organization was known as the “King Bing.” Officers (a.k.a the Council of Nobles) included: Lord Governor of the Wood (vice president) and Keeper of the Orchard (treasurer). An additional set of officers were given the titles: King’s Jester, Duke of Lambert, Queen Anne’s Consort, Archbishop of Rickreall, Marquis of Maraschino and the Earl of Waldo.³⁷

³⁷ Records of the Cherrians, City of Salem Collection held in trust at the Willamette Heritage Center, Salem, Oregon, T2011.001.0006; C.E. Wilson, “Who and What are Cherrians?” *Oregon Magazine* XXXIV, no. XII (April 1936).

Although the official Cherry Fair seems to have ended in 1915, the Cherrians continued to organize a number of events.³⁸ A spring carnival known as the “Cherringo” raised funds and was held in 1914 and 1915.³⁹

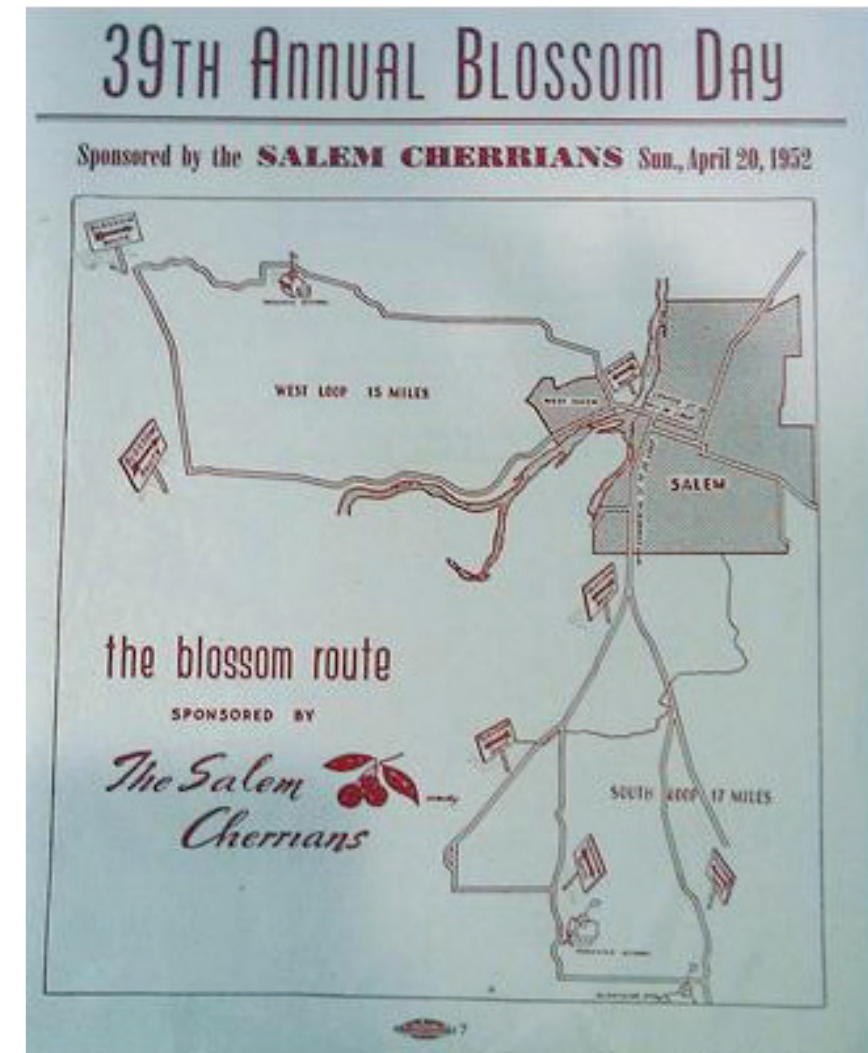


Figure 6. Map given out to visitors of the Blossom Day Festivities showing tour route. Cherrians Records, City of Salem Collections held by the Willamette Heritage Center, T2011.1.6.

³⁸ Margaret Magee, “History of Salem Cherry Festivals” Salem Cherryland Festival Program, 1947, Willamette Heritage Center, 2006.042.0119, states that the Cherrians ran the Cherry Fair in 1913 and 1914, but that no record was kept after that. A search through the Oregon Newspaper Database Online revealed mentions of the Cherry Fair in Salem being held in 1915, but not after that. “Cherry Fair at Salem Successful,” *Tillamook Herald*, July 13, 1915, 2; “Cherry Fair Praised By Brooks in Sermon.” *Capital Journal*, July 6, 1915, 5; “Cherry Fair Program,” *Capital Journal*, July 1, 1915, 1.

³⁹ “Cherrians Decide to Attend Frisco Fair,” *Capital Journal*, April 6, 1915, 8.

The annual Blossom Day (or week depending on the year organized), provided tours through Salem's orchard districts during spring blossom season. As Breyman Boise notes: "When any community has 15,000 to 20,000 acres of white blossoms covering the hillsides all at the same time, that is something to talk about and also something to tell the world about."⁴⁰ So the Cherrians, often with help from other community organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Salem YWCA, planned a tour route, set up signs, offered rides and directed people to the best views in Salem and Polk County.⁴¹

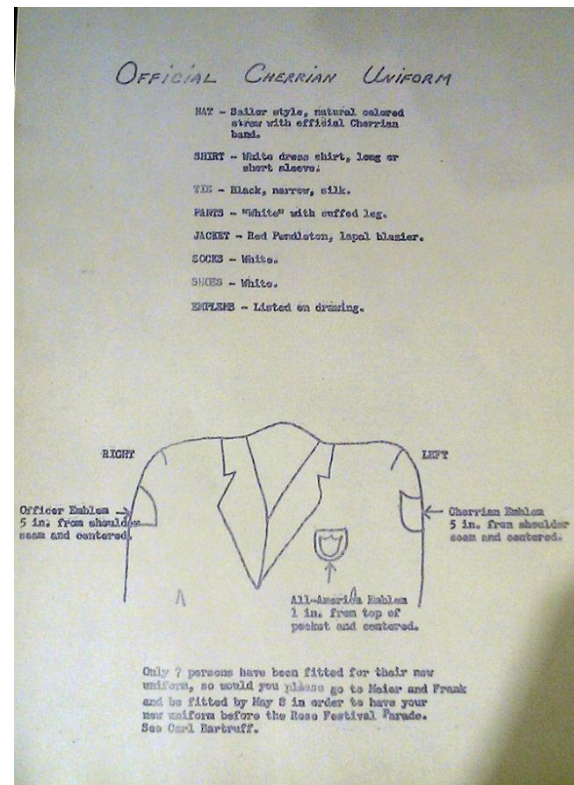


Figure 7. Uniform Instructions for the Salem Cherrians, circa 1950. Cherrians Records, Willamette Heritage Center, T2011.001.006.

The Cherrians were also "boosters" in the truest sense. They would go to special events all over the state and region, dressed in uniform, to support other communities and provide a recognizable Salem presence at their events. Cherrians in their signature straw boater hats with "Cherrian" hat band, greeted Miss America when she arrived in the city and they served as honor guards for Secretary McKay at the dedication of Fort Vancouver. Cherrians chauffeured members of the National Jersey Cattle Show in

⁴⁰ Breyman Boise, "Blossom Day and Cherrians," *Oregon Magazine* XXXIV, no. XII (April 1936): 7.

⁴¹ Breyman Boise, "Blossom Day and Cherrians," *Oregon Magazine* XXXIV, no. XII (April 1936): 7; "Spring is Bursting Out all Over Salem," *Oregon Journal*, April 13, 1957.

Salem in 1955, and represented Salem at the dedication of Detroit Dam in 1953. The minutes of the organization are filled with invitations to represent Salem at parades and celebrations including events like the Stayton Bean Festival, Astoria Regatta, Woodburn's North Marion Country Fair, St. Helens Salmon Derby, St. Paul Rodeo, Rainier Strawberry Festival, British Columbia Dominion Day Celebration, Lebanon Strawberry Festival, Albany Timber Carnival, Dallas Smileroo, Sherwood Robin Hood Festival, Newberg Berry Festival, Turner Lamb and Wool Show, Hillsboro Happy Days, Jefferson Mint Festival, Crab Festival in Newport, Phil Sheridan Days, Bohemia Mining Days in Cottage Grove, Main Street Cowboy Parade in Pendleton, and the granddaddy of them all, the Portland Rose Festival.

King Bings of the Salem Cherrians 1913-1967	
1913 George F. Meyers	1942 Frank Ernest
1914 Milton L. Meyers	1943 Orval Lama
1915 Thomas B. Kay	1944 Frank Chatas
1916 Frank G. Deckebach	1945 Sid McNeil
1917 William F. Lerchen	1946 W.W. Chadwick
1918 Hal D. Patton	1947 William Connell Dyer
1919 P.E. Fullerton	1948 Charles Claggett
1920 C.B. Clancy	1949 Deryl Myers
1921 C.E. Knowland	1950 Paul Hale (Cedric Reaney appointed, but died before could take office)
1922 William McGilchrist	1951 Don Doerfler
1923 W.M. Hamilton	1952 Paul Stege
1925 J.C. Perry	1953 Hunt Clark
1926 H.O. White	1954 Ed Randle
1927 Dr. O.A. Olson	1955 William Healy
1928 P.D. Quisenberry	1956 Ted Jenny
1929 Carle F. Giese	1957 Robert Fischer
1930 Grover Hillman	1958 Clyde Cook
1931 Carl D. Gabrielson	1959 Vemon L. Wadsworth
1932 Gus Hixon	1960 Wayne Adams
1933 Frank G. Deckebach, Jr.	1961 Al Bauer
1934 George L. Arbuckle	1962 Wendell Weckert
1935 William Schlitt	1963 Lane
1936 Breyman Boise	1964 Del Johnson
1937 A.A. Gueffroy	1965 Clarence Frederickson
1938 Tom B. Hill	1966 Don Cooper
1939 Harold Busick	1967 Reginald Jensen
1940 Kenneth C. Perry	
1941 Frank Doerfler	

Figure 8. King Bing List compiled from *Oregon Magazine* articles and Records of the Cherrian organization.

Marching in and entering a float in a Portland Rose Festival parade was an expensive, but important undertaking for the Cherrians organization. Even with services and in kind donations, a typical float could cost upwards of five thousand dollars. It was easily the most expensive event/item in the Cherrians' yearly budget. Expenses from the 1965 float were budgeted at \$8275 and included payment for a motor (to move parts on the float), lumber, dolly, steel and welding, construction and designer

engineers, flowers, glue, dye, paint and payment to bring a local band to accompany the Cherrians in the parade.⁴² The expense often paid off. The Cherrians helped win many prizes over the years for their entries, including the 1938 Non-Commercial Grand Sweepstakes winner in the Grand Floral Parade.⁴³

The Cherrians also took on projects in Salem. They sponsored boxing events to raise money for the March of Dimes. In 1913, they started “illuminating” a tree on the lawn of the Marion County Courthouse. Later they switched to decorating a tree at the post office and the State Capitol. According to an article written by a member, this was the “first LIVING Christmas tree” to be decorated in Salem and may have started the national trend of displaying illuminated Christmas trees in public venues.⁴⁴

During WWII, the Cherrians also undertook to publish a newsletter, filled with news of home that was monthly sent to servicemen at home and abroad. The Willamette Heritage Center has copies of the *Salem Cherrian*, dating from June 1944 through September 1945. The publication included a mixture of news from Salem and updates about the war and other service men. A particularly popular feature included the “Where’s Elmer Column” which listed the names and addresses of service men serving stateside that allowed readers to keep track of friends and family (publishing of addresses for servicemen abroad was prohibited or they would have been included too). The newsletter received rave reviews. As one serviceman wrote: “It certainly makes a fellow feel great to know that the businessmen back home haven’t forgotten them.”⁴⁵

A letter from King Bing in the June 1944 edition sums up the purpose of the paper and life in Salem during the war years:

Well, boys, it surely has been great receiving the many fine letters addressed to the Salem Cherrians of appreciation of our booster newspaper tabloid. D-Day back here in Salem was quiet and serious—most of the town dads were pretty much upset—the radio was doing a good job of keeping everybody advised—all in all it was a mighty serious day and I can best express it by saying that everyone back here in Salem was wishing and praying for a speedy victory and a safe return. The month of June is pretty much like former years; the roses are

⁴² The Cherrians Records, City of Salem Collection held in trust by the Willamette Heritage Center, Salem, Oregon, T2011.001.0006.

⁴³ “Standard Oil and Salem Win Sweepstake Awards in Colorful Rose Parade,” *Oregonian*, June 11, 1938, 1.

⁴⁴ Gardiner Knapp, “History of the Cherrians,” *Oregon Magazine* XXVIII, no. 3 (April 1933): 14; C.E. Wilson. “The Birthplace of Blossom Day,” *Oregon Magazine* XXVII, no. 4 (February 1934): 13; Fred D. Thielsen, “History of the Cherrians,” *Oregon Magazine* (April 1939): 10.

⁴⁵ “Service Letter Pile Up Praise for First Cherrian,” *Salem Cherrian*, no. 2 (June 1944): 2.

blooming and all that is needed to bring back the good old days is victory with lasting peace. Incidentally, boys, the Coco-Cola is getting short, so let’s hope that we don’t have any hot weather. See you in the next issue. With all kinds of good luck from your friends the Salem Cherrians.⁴⁶

Minutes from the Cherrians disappear after 1967, suggesting that the organization folded soon after that. The end of the organization was a long time in coming. A continual plea in the minutes and correspondence of the organization is for membership revitalization. A desperate letter in 1957 was sent out to past presidents of the organization expressing distress that they no longer support the organization.

As you already know, we are striving to re-vitalize the Salem Cherrians to again become a potent booster organization for the city of Salem. Dating back to its origin, 1913, the Cherrians are indeed steeped with tradition few organizations can claim. The Cherrians, you well know, survived two great World Wars, a severe depression, as well as the usual ups and downs so common with great organizations. However, it is appalling to note that so many of the Ex-King Bings are no longer active in the organization.”⁴⁷

While the State Centennial Celebration in 1959 created some renewed interest in the organization, membership numbers continued to decline.

Revival: The Cherryland Festival

In 1947, a nostalgic Salem decided to resurrect the Cherry Fairs of old. The Salem Cherry Festival Association Board was set up to produce a new version of the three-day festival. It consisted of seventeen members led by President Sid Stevens. The program for the event included manufacturers’ exhibits showing things made in Marion and Polk counties, a band concert at Marion Square Park, baseball games, drill team contests, horse show, grand festival parade and air show.⁴⁸ An article in the official program argued:

That Salem should have a Cherry Festival is altogether fitting and proper. For the cherry well represents the orchards which help turn the

⁴⁶ “King Bing Says,” *Salem Cherrian*, no. 2 (June 1944): 2. Willamette Heritage Center Collections.

⁴⁷ R.M. Fischer, Jr. to Ex-King Bings, April 18, 1957. Cherrians Records. City of Salem Collection held in Trust by the Willamette Heritage Center. T2011.001.0006.

⁴⁸ Salem Cherryland Festival Program, 1947. Willamette Heritage Center, 2006.042.0119

surrounding hills into a blossoming paradise in early spring and make this the second largest fruit processing city in the nation.⁴⁹

This revival program lasted into the early 1950s. The 1950 Cherryland Festival included a large scale pageant detailing the history of Salem with participants from just about every school, service club, church and organization in the area. Some of the groups represented included: Young Matrons, Pythian Sisters, Junior Catholic Daughters, Salem Civic Theatre, Chemawa Indian School, YMCA, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Willamette University, Ministerial Association, Knights of Columbus, Rebekahs, Oddfellows, Eagles, American Legion, Paul Armstrong School of Dancing, Progressive Club, YWCA, Salem High School, Sacred Heart Academy, Salem City Schools, Lions, Keizer Grange, Salem Heights Square Dancers, Order of Amaranth, Wiltsey School of Music, Salem Women's Club, Elks, Salem Gateswingers, Kiwanis, Sons of Norway, Sons of Union Veterans, representatives from all major branches of the United States Armed Forces, American War Mothers, National Secretaries Association, 4-H, United Baton Twirlers, Little Salem Misses, and the FFA.⁵⁰ It would be eclipsed by a short run of a newly established festival, the Willamette River Days by 1956.⁵¹

Agnes Gilbert Schucking: The First Cherry Queen?

Long time Salem resident and advocate, Agnes Gilbert Schucking has historically been considered Salem's First Cherry Queen. There are several things that don't line up with this assertion and I believe it has caused a lot of misinformation to be spread about when the first Cherry Festival was held. Mrs. Schucking was most certainly crowned Queen in 1903, but newspaper evidence suggests that it was Queen of a different festival entirely.

The earliest reference to the 1903 Cherry Queen reign of Mrs. Schucking is in the programs of the revival Cherry Festival begun in the late 1940s. In one article, written by Margaret Magee on the "History of Salem Cherry Festivals" for the 1948 program she states: "Details of that first festival held over 40 years ago are sketchy but one Salem resident, Mrs. B.O. Schucking (Agnes Gilbert), still has vivid memories of at least part of the Cherry Fair of that year, for she reigned over it as Queen Agnes,"

⁴⁹ Isabel Childs Rosebraugh. "Salem and the Oregon It Centers," Salem Cherryland Festival Program, 1947. Willamette Heritage Center, 2006.042.0119.

⁵⁰ 1950 Program Salem Cherryland Festival and Pageant of Progress. Salem Public Library. Hugh Morrow Collection, Pamphlet Files.

⁵¹ Cherrians Records. City of Salem Collection held in Trust at the Willamette Heritage Center T2011.001.0006.

suggesting the source of information for this fact was Mrs. Schucking herself. In a speech to the Salem Chamber of Commerce in February 1957, Mrs. Gilbert even states that she was crowned Cherry Queen after she was married, "My second trip to this room was when I was crowned Cherry Queen." There is some internal inconsistency in this story as marriage announcements place her wedding to B.O. Schucking on February 24, 1904, just shy of a year after she was supposedly crowned Cherry Queen.⁵² Other references to the 1903 date include an interview with Mrs. Schucking published in the Oregon Statesman in 1963 and her obituaries.⁵³



Figure 9. 1903, Agnes Gilbert Schucking in her royal robes. Willamette Heritage Center Collections, 2007.001.0804.

A look back through newspaper records from 1903 suggest that Mrs. Schucking was actually crowned Queen of a different festival: The Salem Mid-Summer Festival.

⁵² "Gilbert-Schucking Wedding," *Capital Journal*, February 10, 1904; Society Notes, *Oregonian*, February 21, 1904, 21; "Schucking-Gilbert," *Oregonian*, February 28, 1904, 21.

⁵³ Conrad Prange, "Salem's First Cherry Festival Queen Will Take Active Part in This Year's Cherrian Events," *Oregon Statesman*, May 27, 1963, sec. 1, 1, 3; "Mrs. Schucking Dies at Age 85," *Oregon Statesman*, October 6, 1969, sec. 1, 1, 16; "A Salem Booster," *Oregon Statesman*, October 7, 1969, sec 1, 4.

After a public vote, Agnes Gilbert was crowned “Carnival Queen” in a large ceremony. The “Greater Salem Carnival” included a carnival, music, Ferris wheel and grand parade with the Salem Military Band. As she was being crowned, the *Capital Journal* notes the following words were spoken over her: “Miss Gilbert: You have been selected to act as Queen of Salem’s Mid-Summer Carnival, and it now becomes my pleasant duty to proclaim your title and crown you queen.”⁵⁴ Her court is described as including Maude McKay and Mabel Jones, both of whom appear in the photo illustrating Magee’s article captioned “Royalty of the First Cherry Fair.”

It is not too difficult to create a plausible explanation for this apparent myth. Mrs. Schucking would have been in her mid-sixties when interviewed by Magee and a long time removed from the events at the turn of the century. The similarities in activities held at the 1903 Carnival and later iterations of the Cherry Festival might make it easy to assume they were related. It is possible even that the citizens of Salem felt that Salem’s Mid-Summer Carnival was a precursor in spirit to the Cherry Fair as they were both held during the summer, although it should be noted that there is no mention of cherries in any of the newspaper coverage of the 1903 event.



Use this QR Code to hear Mrs. Schucking tell her story.

Even without the title of First Cherry Queen, Agnes Gilbert Schucking was a pioneering female civic leader in the Salem community. She was an active Red Cross Volunteer during WWII and volunteered tirelessly for the United Fund drives, Salem Hospital, Oregon State Fair Commission, Chamber of Commerce, and the Oregon Roadside Beautification Committee. She even ran for the Oregon Legislature in 1954. Her efforts led to her being honored by the Salem Chamber of Commerce as Salem’s First Citizen in 1957. She was the first woman to be honored with this title.⁵⁵

Celebrations for All?

While the events organized by the Cherrians were ostensibly intended for the benefit of all the citizens of Salem, certain aspects were uninviting at best and even hostile to segments of the Salem population. At first read, the invitation of E. Cooke Patton to

⁵⁴ “Salem Carnival Opens,” *Capital Journal*, June 30, 1903, 4.

⁵⁵ Technically, she was named Salem’s First Citizen for 1956, the ceremony was held in February of 1957. “Salem’s First Citizen Near Tears,” *Oregon Statesman*, February 16, 1957, sec. 1, 1-2; “Rites Wednesday for Civic Leader,” *Oregon Statesman*, October 6, 1969, sec. 1, 1, 16.

Salem’s Chinese community to participate in a parade at the 1908 Cherry Fair is a seemingly bright spot in the city’s historically pretty crumby treatment of the residents of Salem’s Chinatown:

The Oriental section of the Cherry City will be represented by three floats, a full Chinese orchestra, and a marching club of half a hundred Celestials garbed in resplendent holiday attire. This will be a feature the like of which has never been seen or even attempted in Salem or in any other city in Oregon. Practically the whole of Chinatown will be there. The decorations for the floats will be brought from Portland, and an agent of the Chinese residents of this city is now negotiating for the purchase of the expensive Oriental material that will be seen in the parade.⁵⁶

The bright spot fades in reading the rest of the article that indicates that the invitation was not to the opening events parade, but to the Mardi Gras parade, “the great mirth provoking feature of the carnival.” While there is some genuine curiosity towards Chinese customs expressed in the newspaper articles, one has to wonder how the Chinese community members reacted to marching between “Jocko’ the human chimpanzee” and a prominent Salem merchant dressed as an “Indian savage” with very little clothes on.⁵⁷ This was not an isolated occurrence either. Later “Cherringo” celebrations turn into full-scale mockery, with some of the city’s most famous businessmen, assuming fictitious “Chinese” names and serving at a faux noodle house within the carnival grounds.⁵⁸

Despite being relegated to the Mardi Gras parade, it is interesting to note that the Salem’s Chinese and Japanese residents did participate with class and what appears to be a desire to share their history on a larger community stage:

Special attention should be called to the participation of the Chinese and Japanese residents of Salem, who will appear en masse in the big comic parade. The Chinese, headed by Mr. Lai Yick will be represented by three gorgeous floats of character never before seen in this city. All the decorations have been especially imported for the occasion, and the progressive Celestials promise a rare treat to all those who witness their part in the parade. Not to be outdone...the local Japanese have prepared a magnificent float which they will enter in the parade. The subject of

⁵⁶ “Chinatown Will Take Part in Cherry Fair,” *Capital Journal*, July 13, 1908, 7.

⁵⁷ “Chinatown Will Take Part,” 7; “Fun Frolic Parade Tomorrow Night,” *Capital Journal*, July 17, 1908, 5.

⁵⁸ “Throngs Crowd Shows at Big Cherringo,” *Capital Journal*, April 25, 1914, 2, 7.

the float is historical, and according to Mr. Matsui, who is managing the affair, represents 'The Faithful Subjects of the Emperor, Godingo, Who Captured Criminals and Saved his Majesty, Taknori Kojimi.' On the float will appear the famous Japanese 'Cherry blossom tree' containing the secret message which tells the emperor of the conspiracy against him, and saves his majesty's life. The affair is under the auspices of the Japanese Society of Salem. Those who will portray the historical characters of the float are Mrs. Aoki, Mrs. Watanabe, Mr. Matsui, Mr. Usui and the Reverend S. Kodama. The Japanese wish to have it announced that those who will take part in the parade tomorrow evening constitute the respective Japanese element of the city. They are progressive businessmen and take a great deal of pride in the success and reputation of the Cherry City.⁵⁹

The story portrayed in the float seems to refer to a story told in the *Taiheiki* of hero Kojima Takanori, who carved a message of encouragement on a cherry tree for the Emperor Go-Daigo while the emperor was in exile.⁶⁰

Later Cherry Fairs and projects of the Cherrians also include examples of appropriations of cultural histories of minority groups in Salem. Minstrel shows, with Salem businessmen in blackface, appear often.⁶¹ Even in the 1950 Cherryland Festival celebration, Chemawa School was invited to participate in the grand "Pageant of Progress" telling of the Oregon story. Yet the part of the Native Americans were played by Brownies, Cub Scouts, Salem Civic Players, The American Legion Post No. 9 Drum and Bugle Corps, members of the YMCA, Pythian Sisters and Young Matrons.⁶²

Membership in the Cherrians organization was afforded to white men only. While women took part as wives, speakers and assisted in fundraising activities or serving as Cherry Queens, the thought of an auxiliary group of women or inclusion of people of color was looked on with disdain by some of the membership. In his article "Who and What are Cherrians?" published in the *Oregon Magazine*, C.E. Willson states: "You may note that the founders of this organization took in a lot of territory and incidentally

⁵⁹ "Orientals in Parade," *Capital Journal*, July 17, 1908, 5.

⁶⁰ John S. Brownlee. *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1946: Age of Gods and Emperor Jimmu* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 87-88.

⁶¹ Gardiner Knapp. "History of the Cherrians," *Oregon Magazine* XXVIII, no. 3 (April 1933): 15; "Promoters of Cherringo Make Many Promises," *Capital Journal*, April 21, 1914, 5.

⁶² 1950 Program Salem Cherryland Festival and Pageant of Progress. Salem Public Library. Hugh Morrow Collection, Pamphlet Files.

to make sure the Cherrians had the right kind of membership, Article IV provides: "Any white male resident of Salem over 21 years of age shall be eligible to membership.' And so far, no one has had the nerve to suggest there should be a Cherrian auxiliary."⁶³

Cherries in Salem Today

Salem is not the cherry growing center it used to be. Citizens around in 1908 would be disheartened to hear that by 1943, Wasco County seat of former Cherry Fair rival The Dalles, produced almost double the cherry producing orchards that Marion County did.⁶⁴ Although the total number of cherry orchards across the state has declined since then, Oregon still ranks as the third state in the nation for production of sweet cherries, which grosses upwards of 77 million dollars annually.⁶⁵

Following the decline of production and the organizations and events that celebrated in the city, it is likely that the average Salem resident today relates the city's designation as the Cherry City to the annual spring cherry blossoms on the Capitol Mall, rather than to its agricultural heritage.

⁶³ C.E. Wilson. "Who and What are Cherrians?" *Oregon Magazine* XXXIV, no. XII (April 1936).

⁶⁴ Gustav W. Kuhlman and D. Curtis Mumford. "Cost of Producing Sweet Cherries for Processing in the Willamette Valley and The Dalles Area," *Oregon State College Bulletin* 454, July, 1948, 7.

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "2010-2011 Oregon Agriculture and Fisheries Statistics," December 2011, http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/docs/pdf/pubs/agripedia_stats.pdf (accessed November 11, 2012).

Bridging the Community Through the May Day Fete: The May Day Celebration at Oregon Normal School

Erin Passehl, Western Oregon University



Figure 1. May Day Fairy Queen and the Queen's Attendants, 1916.
All images are courtesy of Western Oregon University Archives and have permission for publication.

Abstract: In 1902, a new tradition began on the Oregon State Normal School campus: the May Day celebration. Touted as “an ardent joyous welcome of springtime” and “the most anticipated social event on campus”, the May Day Fete featured a series of events held on a single day early in May, including the winding of the May Pole, an evening dance, costumed drills, sporting events for both men and women, jokes, singing, pageantry, the procession and crowning of the May Day Queen, and the awarding of the trophy in a challenge between the school’s senior and junior class. May Day extended into the community; invitations were issued to other Normal students in Corvallis and Eugene, as well as teachers and their students throughout Polk County. Stores closed early in neighboring towns, and citizens of all ages from the surrounding area were invited via *The Monmouth Herald* to the annual event where everyone cheered and dined together. This article recounts the history and popularity of May Day in Polk County and includes photographs and documents from the event throughout the years, from its inception as a public celebration of springtime up until it molded into what are now campus homecoming events.

Brief History of May Day

The history of the springtime May Day celebration spans a multitude of centuries, geographic locations, and customs. The first May Day celebration cannot be pinpointed to a specific date or place. Author Allison Thompson argues against a common misconception that May Day revolved around “an ancient pagan fertility holiday” that embraced “the maypole as a phallic symbol.”¹ Thompson and historian Ronald Hutton claim that from 1240 until the early part of the nineteenth century, in England at least, there were wide variations in how any individual May Day custom was observed - variations over time, variations between villages or between village and city, and variations based on individual tastes and prejudices as influenced by the budget of the sponsor of the festivities.² Factors such as local pride and interest determined the extent to which people celebrated the springtime event.



Figure 2. Monmouth Training School children line up in Robin Hood & Merry Men costumes.

While early celebrations are difficult to recount, the early revivals found in the mid-nineteenth century emulated “Merrie England” and “Merrie May Day” celebrations from earlier centuries. Familiar May Day images during the time of Tudor England include Morris dancers, May Lords and Ladies, the iconic maypole with flowers and later ribbons, and the eventual linking up with the folklore surrounding the popular outlaw character of Robin Hood.³ Historian Ronald Hutton further discusses the

¹ Allison Thompson, *May Day Festivals in America: 1830 to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 15.

² Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 22.

³ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 18.

connection between Robin Hood and May games in the early sixteenth century, as well as Robin Hood's link to May Day plays and pageants in the twentieth century.⁴

The early revivals were usually organized by local clergymen or gentry; other common images included the folk customs of having a May Queen, flowing dresses, flowers, and games to ring in the season of spring. These early revivals led to more scholarly explorations of May games, merry-making and other traditional popular customs through work published by major literary figures, poets and artists in the early nineteenth century in both Great Britain and the United States.⁵

May Day celebrations emerged in the United States in the 1830s and gained momentum into the early part of the twentieth century. This occurred as both formal and informal manifestations practiced by young girls at their finishing schools and academies.⁶ May Day was first introduced informally as a way to commemorate the coming of spring and the end of the school year through the use of dances, plays and athletic games as outlined in the early revivals in Europe. Some instructors saw this as competition to the formal course of physical education instruction, as well as a possible threat to girls' health and well-being; thus, with its emphasis on folk and aesthetic dances, light tumbling, drills and other gentle forms of movement, the May Day program formed a perfect opportunity for the physical education instructor to demonstrate how her charges had improved during the year.⁷ From there, May Day festivities on campuses extended to include other aspects of earlier May Day celebrations, including the May pole, games, music and pageantry.

Oregon State Normal School Celebrates May Day

The majority of college May Day festivals originated between 1901 and 1920; many of the colleges were small, under 1,000 students. While there are some variations among colleges and even over time within the same institution, the typical May Day fete had five main components: the procession of the costumed participants, the crowning of the

⁴ The theatrical plays about the outlaw Robin Hood were tied to May games and plays since the early sixteenth century due "to the character's association with summer, greenery and careless pleasure." Author Ronald Hutton describes how interest in the outlaw spread socially as well as geographically with Morris dancers (also heavily associated with early celebrations of May Day). Common references to Robin Hood in May Day celebrations included the May queen being met with royal guards dressed in green as the Merry Men, Robin Hood's company usually including Lady May, Friar Tuck, Little John, and Maid Marian (Hutton, 271). These plays continued with May Day celebrations on American campuses in the 20th century, including at Oregon Normal School. For more information, see Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chapters 23, 24, 25, and 28.

⁵ Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 295-296.

⁶ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 38.

⁷ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 52.

May Queen, the presentation of folk or aesthetic dances, the winding of the May pole, and the play or pageant produced for the Queen's entertainment.⁸ Oregon State Normal School (OSNS), a small, rural school located in Polk County that offered classes in teacher training and managed the local training schools and rural teaching centers,⁹ honored both of these trends, as the first school in the mid-Willamette Valley to hold a May Day celebration, which occurred at a nearby field referred to as Cupid's Knoll on May 5, 1902.¹⁰



Figure 3. Cupid's Knoll outside Monmouth, Oregon, where the first Oregon State Normal School May Day celebration took place in 1902.

Although May Day was advertised as an OSNS campus celebration, citizens from the town of Monmouth were invited and participated in the event along with students from both the normal and training schools.¹¹ The inaugural event was billed as an afternoon activity that included "a Maypole bearing the mottoes and emblems of each separate class and the athletic association, each pole draped with the respective colors."¹² In addition to a Maypole dance, the event featured sporting events, the crowning of the

⁸ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 112-113.

⁹ The Oregon State Normal School, located in Monmouth, Oregon, was founded as Monmouth University in 1856 by the Disciples of Christ. It was renamed in 1865 as Christian College and consolidated with Bethel College nearby. In 1881, the school established a "normal department," which was a primary method of teacher training at that time. The following year, the school was renamed Oregon State Normal School and became a public institution that focused on educating teachers and working with nearby children at the local training schools. After the school closed from 1909-1910 due to limited state funding, it reopened as Oregon Normal School in 1911. For a detailed history of Western Oregon University, see Ellis A. Stebbins and Gary Huxford, *Since 1856: Historical Views of the College at Monmouth* (Monmouth, Or: Western Oregon State College, 1996).

¹⁰ Of the three largest schools located in the Mid-Willamette Valley (Polk, Marion, and Yamhill Counties) at this time, Oregon State Normal School held the first May Day celebration in 1902, followed by Linfield College in 1904 and Willamette University in 1909; Marvin Henberg and Barbara Kitt Seidman, *Inspired pragmatism: an illustrated history of Linfield College* (Portland, Ore: Carpe Diem Books2007), 47; Robert Moulton Gatke and Robert D. Gregg, *Chronicles of Willamette* (Portland, Or: Binforde & Mort. 1943).

¹¹ "May-Day Festivities," *The Morning Oregonian*, May 7, 1902, 5.

¹² "May-Day Festivities," 5.

May Queen and her procession, and a promenade concert by the Normal School Cadet Band open to the public. One noteworthy piece of the first May Day formal was the crowning of a male queen, John Tyler – this was due to “an unusual number of pretty girls in school, with the committee not being able to choose just one. A young man was chosen to be queen of May, John Tyler.”¹³ *The Oregonian* noted that, “the envious feelings usual on such occasions were avoided, for the ladies could not envy Queen John Tyler.”¹⁴ Regardless, the 1902 event focused more on sporting events for all to participate in: downhill and barrel races, potato and one-legged races, tug-of-war and a golf match.

The event was a major success: by 1903, the neighboring town of Independence reported that “the custom of celebrating May Day [bids] to become of the fixed events of the school calendar.”¹⁵ Administered by a faculty committee, the second May Day celebration featured “a float and hand-built carriage that carried the royal procession along with ladies of the faculty and students decked in school and class colors with flags and flowers, along with a carriage of citizens...An elaborate throne with canopy and decorated with bunting and a profusion of green boughs, blossoms and flowers.”¹⁶

May Day was reported on in exquisite detail, so much that readers could visualize the event play by play:

The coronation ceremonies were as follows: after a flourish of trumpets by the royal heralds, the grand marshal and queen’s guards took position forming a broad avenue leading from the floats to the throne; another trumpet flourish and the flower girls marched down the avenue strewing flowers and singing a beautiful May song; grand flourish of trumpets and the royal procession started to the dignified march by the Royal Guards Band, the Archbishop leading, followed by Queen Crystal leaning on the arm of the Lord High Chancellor, the page bearing the train, the maids of honor bringing up the rear. The Archbishop ascended the dais in front of the throne, the Chancellor presented the queen while guards, flower girls, and maids of honor grouped themselves in picturesque attitudes. With the words “I crown thee, Crystal, queen of the May, in the name of the august faculty and thy loyal subjects, the

¹³ “The Trail Back,” *Lamron*, May 20, 1933, 2.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, in no publication is it discussed why a man was chosen as queen in 1902, the only year I found that to have happened at Oregon Normal School; “May-Day Festivities,” *The Morning Oregonian*, May 7, 1902, 5.

¹⁵ “May Day Exercises,” *Independence Enterprise*, May 7, 1903, 2.

¹⁶ “May Day Exercises,” 2.

students of the State Normal School...the band played “God Save the Queen”...the night closed with a promenade concert by the Normal Cadet Band at 8PM.¹⁷

The community was quite involved in May Day, to the point where the school encouraged their participation via local newspapers and was even granted a place in the procession on their own carriage. May Day activities continued in a similar fashion for the next decade, until a new tradition was invented: the awarding of a trophy by the Normal School president.

The Institutionalization of May Day at Oregon Normal School

The May Day celebration at Oregon Normal School (ONS) followed many national trends in education occurring at that time. In one of the books produced for colleges and schools to use in preparing for May Day festivals, Jeanette Lincoln, the former director of Physical Training for Women at the University of Illinois, described the May Day Festival as “becoming an established anniversary event in the country...In colleges and schools it supplie[d] a long-felt need for playground pastime and gives opportunity for a great number of children and “grown-ups” to engage in the spirit and merriment of the day.¹⁸ Secondly, pageantry was fast becoming a popular institution through schools and colleges in the United States. The American pageant was a visual experience with many facets: it was a work of art, secular not religious, an evening or afternoon of entertainment, taking place outdoors on a site itself a symbol of the event being celebrated.¹⁹ A definition of pageantry from 1914 described it as “something between a play and a procession...usually containing any or some of the elements of fancy costuming, dramatic scenes in prose or verse, instrumental or vocal music, dancing, pantomime, and tableaux.”²⁰

While many pageants were written and standardized for elementary school children via the American Pageant Association starting in 1913, Oregon Normal School took pride in creating pageants every year written by teachers and students and performed by both Normal School students and the children at the Training School. This new emphasis was due to the hire of a new faculty member in the physical education department, Miss Laura Taylor, in 1914. Taylor provided a different perspective on the campus

¹⁷ “May Day Exercises,” 2.

¹⁸ Jeanette Emeline Carpenter Lincoln, *The Festival Book: May-Day Pastime and the May-pole* (New York: A.S. Barnes Company, 1912), vii.

¹⁹ Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: A Movement for Art & Democracy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 3.

²⁰ George P. Baker, “What the Pageant Can Do for the Town,” *Ladies Home Journal* 31 (1914): 44.

celebration of May Day, bringing with her knowledge of the origins of the holiday and its customs, as well as new ideas and training in physical education and pageantry. Taylor was placed on the planning committee and gave a public lecture on the history of May Day.



Figure 4. Female students dance in costume outside of Campbell Hall during May Day Drills. Slide #LS 2009.5.18.

A second national trend that also occurred at Oregon Normal School was the leadership of the May Day celebration. From the 1890s through World War II, college and urban May Day festivals fell under the purview of the Physical Education department, where instructors used the May Day program as a showcase for the year's work in dance and drills.²¹ Under the direction of Miss Taylor, May Day began a new focus on pageantry, drills, and dance in 1914, which lasted another 20 years.

Miss Taylor was a graduate of Columbia Teachers College in New York, which was known for producing college physical education instructors who were trained in "pageantry symbolism and aesthetics" and known for "taking their knowledge and their

²¹ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 49.

enthusiasm to the schools, colleges, and universities at which they subsequently directed May Day pageants."²² Miss Taylor took this knowledge and created an optional academic course to the Normal School's curriculum: "Festival and Pageant Making," which was offered during the spring term and whose aim was "to aid student[s] in selecting suitable occasions and subjects, in select[ing] related materials to make a balanced whole involving problems, artistic, creative, lyrical and dramatic."²³ The class was offered during the same term that May Day was produced on campus as a way to not only teach students about how to run such programs as future teachers, but also as a way to merge the Normal School and Training School for practice and to better manage the celebration on campus.



Figure 5. Miss Laura Taylor, Physical Education Department, from the 1914 *The Norm*.

Continued Growth: 1912-1916

While those trends were occurring around the United States and on the Normal School campus, the May Day event continued to grow into a gala event, receiving local attention and articles in the local newspaper, the *Monmouth Herald*, months in advance of the event.

²² Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 76.

²³ Oregon Normal School, *June 1918-1919 Bulletin*, 44.

Fast becoming the most popular event on campus, the location moved from Cupid's Knoll to the Normal School campus and expanded from an afternoon event to an entire day celebration. A new tradition was born in 1912: ONS President Ackerman awarded a silver cup to the class wearing the prettiest and most original costume. The town of Monmouth continued to be encouraged to attend through bi-monthly announcements in the *Monmouth Herald*. Additional activities in 1912 included a costume parade by Normal School students and the Training School children, a grand march of the royal procession around campus, individualized drills and dancing by each class, a dramatization of Robin Hood, and a baseball game between the Normal team and the Normal Cadet Band. May Day even received coverage in *The Morning Oregonian* (the state's largest newspaper) in an article describing the day's events and a photograph of students winding the maypole. This demonstrated to readers across the state that May Day was turning into the premier event at Oregon Normal School.



Figure 6. President's Cup awarded to winning class, ca. 1922.

One of the compelling aspects of May Day at schools throughout the United States was how they were easily personalized by each generation of students.²⁴ By 1913, the President's Cup had turned into a contest with three to five judges from outside Monmouth ranking all contests of the day, including the parade, Maypole winding, athletic events (namely tennis), and the drills. It was touted as "a permanent event of the school, with an aim to make it a day full of interest and entertainment not only for students and teachers but for the public generally."²⁵ The 1913 May Day was noted as having more involvement from the community than in years' past; the *Monmouth Herald* reported that "there was a large attendance of the citizens of Monmouth and

²⁴ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 3.

²⁵ "May Day at the Oregon Normal School," *Monmouth Herald* April 25, 1913, 1.

vicinity...and that the Normal appreciated the Monmouth [city] band for the music furnished and the [city of] Independence Ball Club for making it possible to have a matched game of baseball."²⁶ The May Day event not only built camaraderie among the campus but also with the nearby Monmouth community.

The 1914 event continued to invite and involve the greater community. The student yearbook reported that the seats were filled and overflowing and the campus dotted here and there with groups of friends and out of town people.²⁷ The party continued into the evening with the Polk County Band giving a free concert in Monmouth's Main Street Park Bandstand to "a large and appreciative audience, a feature which was the number of automobiles lined up, there being 17 present at one time."²⁸ The involvement of the band was one of the bridges to gaining local support of the May Day festivities, as it played an important role in the community: the community supported the band so much that it erected an eight-sided wooden bandstand in Main Street Park.²⁹



Figure 7. Female students playing tennis with crowd of spectators watching outside Campbell Hall. Slide #LS 2009.10.2.

²⁶ "State Normal School Notes," *Monmouth Herald* May 9, 1913, 1.

²⁷ Oregon Normal School, *The Norm* (1914), 73.

²⁸ "May Day Pleasures," *Monmouth Herald* May 8, 1914, 3.

²⁹ Scott McArthur, *Monmouth Oregon: The Saga of a Small American Town* (Monmouth: Scott McArthur, 2004), 191.

The following year improved on invitations to the general public with the *Monmouth Herald* printing the schedule of events in the local newspaper a month in advance. Specifically, the newspaper announced that “an invitation has been extended to the teachers of Polk County to be present, and in all probability many of them will be with us. It is also hoped that the ranchers of Polk County may plan to give a holiday to their families by visiting the Normal School on that day and witness the exercises.”³⁰ Local news asked nearby farmers to “bring well-filled baskets and have a picnic dinner in the grove and enjoy a social time with their neighbors.”³¹

Reports of the 1915 May Day celebration all indicated that it was yet another success, for both the Normal School and the surrounding area. The *Oregonian* reported that: “More than 1,000 persons gathered on the Oregon Normal School campus Saturday to witness the annual May Day festivities. Considering that there were only approximately 300 students enrolled at ONS, it was quite a crowd. Many visitors brought picnic dinners and enjoyed a holiday; even the merchants closed their stores to join in the fete, and many of the alumni made it a home-coming day.”³² The 1915 School yearbook claimed the crowd was so large with folk from all of Polk County that it made one think of a Fourth of July celebration, typically the biggest event of the year for the community.



Figures 8. Local citizens picnic in the Grove, #LS 2009.10.7.



Figure 9. Crowd of spectators gather in the Grove, #LS 2009.10.2.

³⁰ “State Normal School Notes: Program for May Day Will Begin at 9:00 A.M.,” *Monmouth Herald*, April 23, 1915, 1.

³¹ “A Great Time is Coming,” *Monmouth Herald*, April 30, 1915, 1.

³² “May Day is Celebrated,” *The Morning Oregonian*, May 3, 1915, 5.

The 1916 May Day celebration continued the trend of increased participation by the community. The *Monmouth Herald* reported that “all of Monmouth plans to take a holiday and the stores of the city will close from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. so that all may attend.”³³ The crowd included distinguished guests such as Governor Withycombe with judges from Salem, Independence and Portland. The theme in 1916 was “Old English May Day,” much like those of the early revivals of the nineteenth century. This May Day Festival was distinctively different from previous ones, in that it aimed to celebrate the Tercentenary of William Shakespeare’s death, being carried out as an Old English May Day during the time of Good Queen Bess and William Shakespeare.³⁴ After years of growth in the ONS May Day celebration, it fell directly into the revivals of Old English lore being represented at schools and colleges all over the country.



Figure 10. Old English May Day Queen, Myrtle Cloyville, and her court celebrating the Tercentenary (300th anniversary) of Shakespeare’s death in 1916.

A Break in Tradition: 1917-1920

After years of increased growth and popularity, the Oregon Normal School May Day celebrations were halted with the official entrance of the United States in World War I in April 1917. A decision was made to eliminate the Normal School’s May Day exercises due to war with Germany. Student funds set aside for use in the celebration

³³ “Big Program in Readiness,” *Monmouth Herald*, May 5, 1916, 1.

³⁴ Oregon Normal School, *The Norm* (1916), 85.

were diverted towards funding a large patriotic event for both students and citizens of Monmouth. With war still raging in Europe, the 1918 May Day exercises were abandoned as well.

With the end of World War I in November 1918, the Oregon Normal School student body requested that May Day exercises be observed again. Meetings were held in April 1919 by the faculty committee, led by Miss Taylor, and students selected a May Queen and scheduled practices. May Day plans were completed and the date announced and advertised as late as May 9; later that week, however, it was announced that Monmouth and the Normal School were “in the grip of influenza,” complete with a quarantine ban on social activities.³⁵ The Normal School was experiencing the third wave of Spanish influenza to hit the Monmouth area, the first and second waves having spread on campus in December 1918 and January 1919. According to local author Scott McArthur, some 40 Normal School students were stricken and the county health officer ordered the school closed for two weeks.³⁶ Although Oregon Normal School and the nearby training schools reopened at the end of May, no May Day exercises were held for a third year in a row.

After three years of no May Day exercise, the Oregon Normal School students voted again to give up their traditional celebration, this time due to a new event that began during the war years: a combined Junior and Senior Class Day. This event also took place in the month of May, and students decided not to celebrate both in 1920. So for a fourth year in a row, no May Day activities were observed at Oregon Normal School. Even so, the academic course on pageantry and festival making continued to be taught at ONS during this time, preparing students to create such productions with children, as well as prepare for the time when May Day was once again celebrated on campus.

Back with a Vengeance: the Return of May Day

After a five-year hiatus, the Oregon Normal School began actively planning the revival of the May Day festival in 1921. A new tradition emerged as May Day was combined into the Junior Class day event, which was referred to as Junior Weekend. The event continued to be celebrated by people outside of campus; the *Monmouth Herald* printed the event schedule in advance with the message:

A most cordial invitation is extended to the general public to attend all of these entertainments. It is suggested that families from the country

³⁵ “No New Cases Since Sunday,” *Monmouth Herald*, May 9, 1919, 1.

³⁶ McArthur, *Monmouth, Oregon*, 205-206.

and towns nearby plan to bring lunch baskets and spend the day, Saturday, eating a picnic dinner in the grove on the campus. It is hoped many will find it convenient to attend this celebration as an excellent series of entertainments is being prepared...faculty and students will be pleased to have the people of Monmouth and vicinity as well as those of the surrounding towns come and enjoy the programs with them.³⁷

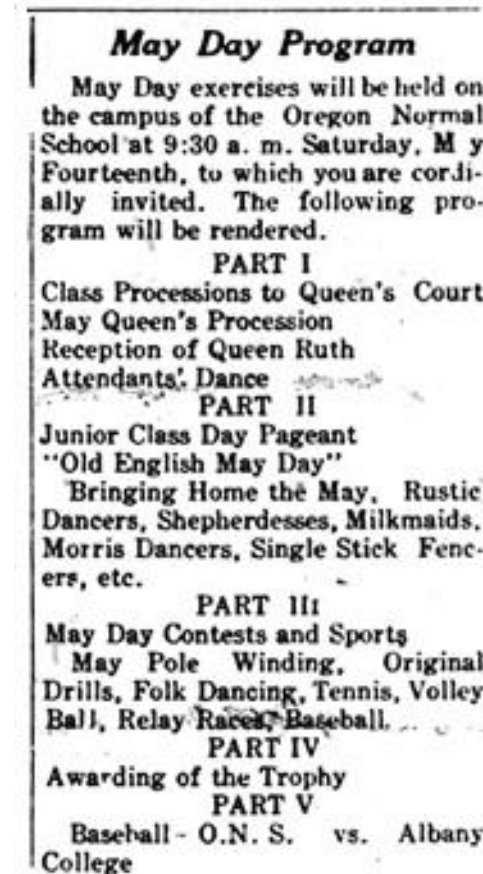


Figure 11. 1921 May Day schedule printed in the *Monmouth Herald*.

Two new additions to the combined event were an evening dance party attended by students at the Normal School, as well as Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) and the University of Oregon. Male students at ONS also played a more prominent role by offering an evening stunt program (known as the *1921 Revue*) open to the public the night before the May Day festival. The combined event drew large crowds from around the state, including Governor Olcott, and was reported with

³⁷ “Many Features on May Day Program,” *Monmouth Herald*, May 6, 1921, 1.

photographs in the *Oregon Sunday Journal*. Even with a noted few years' absence, the May Day celebration at Oregon Normal School remained one of the premier events in the state associated with the spring season.

The number of boys who participated in the May Day weekend increased again in 1922 with the addition of a vaudeville/burlesque show in the chapel. The *Monmouth Herald* reported on the continued support of the Monmouth and Polk County communities, along with the innovation of providing seats for a larger part of the crowd, making it more convenient for all to see.³⁸ The theme of Old English and Merry May Day were once again a hit with the crowd.

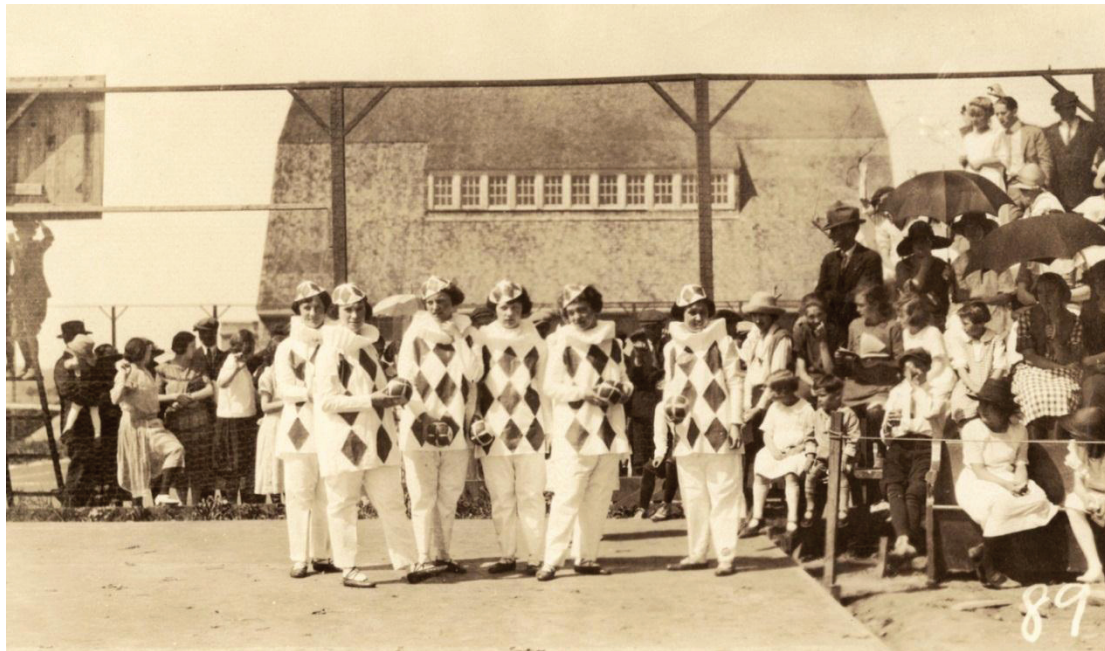


Figure 12. 1923 May Day Pageant in front of Maple Hall.

The May Day celebration continued to increase in size and popularity in 1923. *The Oregonian* reported that over 2,000 people attended the most elaborate event ever held on the Monmouth campus.³⁹ As the red-letter event of the year, the town was taxed to capacity to accommodate the crowds that came to witness the festivities, with every incoming train and stage being loaded for the last two days.⁴⁰ Some traditions were still embraced: old traditions such as the bell ringing from the old bell tower to signify the commencement of May Day reemerged, while the picnic lunch where local citizens and

³⁸ "Merry May Day and Its Programs," *Monmouth Herald*, May 12, 1922, 1.

³⁹ "2000 at May Day Fete," *The Morning Oregonian*, May 7, 1923.

⁴⁰ "Seniors Win May Day Trophy," *The Morning Oregonian*, May 8, 1923, 13.

campus community alike gathered under the campus trees to enjoy the day was still publicized and encouraged.

The 1924 May Day Fete saw the largest crowd yet, as well as one of the most newsworthy events in its history. The number of community members flooded the Normal School campus, with over 3,000 people witnessing the festivities. Reported on in statewide, city and school newspapers, several visitors to campus were injured during the pageant:

The only thing to mar the pleasure of the day was the falling of the spectators seats on the south side of the court which resulted in injury to several people...The fall came while the Springtime of Oregon pageant was being presented. The stand was not crowded and an automobile located at the end of it helped to ease the fall.⁴¹

While the accident caused some delay in the program due to panic, traditional highlights such as the colorful drills, Robin Hood pageant, crowning of the May Queen and winding of the Maypole were discussed in lengthy detail after the celebration.

After the collapse of seating the previous year, the 1925 May Day Fete experienced a number of upgrades related to the high number of community members who came to the event. The Normal School introduced a more systematic approach to accommodate all the visitors on campus:

A special feature of the May Day exercises this year was the order and system displayed in handling students and spectators. The enlarged tennis courts proved an ideal place for the events and as no parking for automobiles was allowed around the courts there was room for all to see.⁴² Ushers [placed] chairs on the terrace facing the tennis courts and as many people as can be accommodated in the space [were] given seats. Rules [were set] in place for seating, an information booth was maintained on the front of campus, and designated areas for parking.⁴³

In addition to the systematic changes in organizing the May Day festival, the most widely photographed part of the event was the male burlesque spoof of the May Queen and procession. Although the event still carried the traditional activities of Merry May Day, the crowd fully embraced the male students and their comedic rendition of May

⁴¹ "May Day Contests Won by Seniors," *Monmouth Herald*, May 9, 1924, 1.

⁴² "May Day Doings Bigger and Better," *Monmouth Herald*, May 15, 1925, 1.

⁴³ "May Day Crowd is Now Awaited," *Monmouth Herald*, May 8, 1925, 1.

Day held the night before. This act was in direct alignment with national trends: by the mid-1920s, men's role had changed from passive spectator roles to young and testosterone-driven engagement in May Day spoofs, pranks, or scraps.⁴⁴ 1925 was the most visible year for male engagement with the May Day Fete, building since the 1921 male stunt program.



Figure 13. Men's Burlesque Show, May Day, 1935.

Although 1921-1925 saw a surge in programming and number of community spectators, 1926 had an unexpected turn of events: May Day was canceled due to a smallpox epidemic. Between 200 and 300 Monmouth residents, many of them students at the Oregon Normal School, were vaccinated against the disease. This left a number of female students ill from the vaccine and resulted in the cancellation of the annual May Day celebration.⁴⁵ The student newspaper, *LAMRON* ("Normal" spelled backwards) reported that "This decision comes not only as a disappointment to the students and faculty, but also to the friends who look forward to visiting the campus on these gala days, for the May Day pageants that have been given here-to-fore under the supervision of Miss Taylor have won so much praise and favorable comment from the larger circles."⁴⁶ The *Monmouth Herald* called the decision "a disappointment to students and residents of Monmouth alike, for the day has become an annual

⁴⁴ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 120.

⁴⁵ McArthur, *Monmouth, Oregon*, 206.

⁴⁶ "A Few Events May Be Saved From Abandonment of May Day Program," *LAMRON*, April 26, 1926, 1.

holiday."⁴⁷ Although the spring dance was held at a later date, the 1926 event did not occur with the usual traditions.

The smallpox outbreak in 1926 did not put a damper on planning for the May Day celebration the following year. The *LAMRON* described spring and the Junior Weekend (which includes May Day) as:

Interesting events for everybody; it means an all-school vaudeville in which the men do some traditional stunts; it means the traditional May Day with its May Day Queen, its class processions, its May pole dances, folk dances, original drills, color, music; it means athletic contests and games with excitement running high for it also means the class contests for the President's Trophy; it means an entrancing outdoor Junior Prom, an all-school party on the courts, to end it all; and last, but it really is first, it means a campus breakfast to start the early May morning with zip and zest for "May time is play time at O.N.S."⁴⁸

The Oregon Normal School continued to embrace its traditions surrounding May Day while adding new acts to the day. The 1928 Fete saw an increase in the number of student organizations participating in the program, giving the program a more inward campus focus. While traditional drills and acts still took place, the student body put an emphasis on the election of a May Queen and the school dance. One example of this can be found in a poem entitled "Who Shall Be May Queen?" featured in the school newspaper, *The LAMRON*.⁴⁹

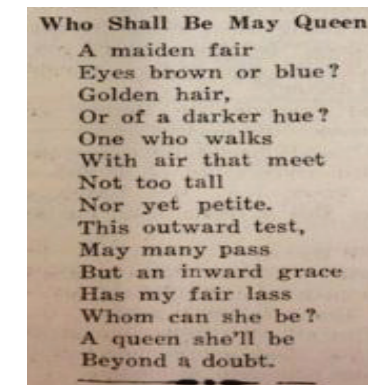


Figure 14. "Ballots to be Cast for May Day Queen Nomination," *LAMRON*, April 2, 1928.

⁴⁷ "May Day Plans are Abandoned," *Monmouth Herald*, April 23, 1926, 1.

⁴⁸ "Spring Brings Preparations For Annual May Day Fete," *LAMRON*, April 4, 1927, 1.

⁴⁹ "Ballots to be Cast For May Queen Nomination," *LAMRON*, April 2, 1928, 1.

The May Day Fete continued to be open to the general public and was met with crowds so large that many people had to stand through the popular burlesque performance the night before. The 1929 Fete was equally as large, with mention that “the railroad station is all humbug compared to May Day on the ONS campus.”⁵⁰



Figure 15. Crowd outside of the train station in Monmouth, ca. 1920.

The *Monmouth Herald* acknowledged the abundance of May Day festivals, by reporting “although it is getting so that many May queens are selected in Western Oregon at this season of the year and rival May Day programs are numerous, the Normal celebration of the old English festival never fails to draw a throng of people.”⁵¹

1930: Celebrating 75 Years of Monmouth’s Campus

The 1930 May Day Fete was exceptionally large, in that it included the celebration of three additional events on campus: the 125th anniversary of Lewis and Clark arriving in Oregon, the 100th anniversary of the first group of Americans to leave for Oregon and

⁵⁰ Oregon Normal School, *The Norm* (1929), 125.

⁵¹ “Students Await Turn of Weather,” *Monmouth Herald*, May 2, 1929, 1.

the 75th anniversary of the founding of the school. The newspapers also referred to this weekend as the annual homecoming event, one of the first times this term was coined on the Oregon Normal School campus. In addition to the routine scenes associated with May Day (May Queen, May pole and other dances), the pageants were filled with pioneer themes and music that depicted scenes of the coming of Lewis and Clark and their physical hardships. The *Monmouth Herald* ran an article with an invitation to the general public to:

...Help with making this weekend even better than the biggest success in the past. Everyone is urged to wear the costume of the years 1830 to 1860. Dig into your attic and produce great-grandmother’s gown, rejuvenate her little parasol and join the fun. Not only the girls but all the men are expected to join in the drifting back to years gone by. We hope to see beards and long hair cuts to match the pioneer costumes. In the words of the famous Nelson, Monmouth “expects every man to do his duty.” Come and do your bit.⁵²

The Oregonian reported on this huge anniversary event in Monmouth with a number of articles, noting the combination of the traditional pageant with a pioneer theme and May pole dance. The multi-themed event was a huge success, and included more than 200 students dressed up in pioneer day costumes, with some of them depicting the part of Native Americans.

With the 1930 May Day celebration, it became noticeable that the increase in number of students attending Oregon Normal School made planning for May Day more difficult than in years past. Student enrollment had tripled; the Oregon Normal School was standardized by the U.S. Department of Education; and an increase in the number of male students occurred with the hire of a football coach and a new emphasis placed on athletics, especially football.⁵³ The most noticeable change to the May Day event was that the evening dance was divided into multiple locations due to the student crowd being too large for any one location in Monmouth. Regardless, both the campus and surrounding community still enjoyed the annual May Day celebration at Oregon Normal School.

⁵² “Leila Pound Wins Honor of May Queen, Pioneer Days to be Revived in Pageant” *Monmouth Herald*, April 17, 1930, 7.

⁵³ Stebbins and Huxford, 93.



May Day 1930

Figure 16. Scrapbook images from the 1930 combined May Day activities from the 1931 *The Norm*.

Changing Tide: 1931-1935

The beginning of the new decade witnessed a lot of turmoil and change at Oregon Normal School. Hearings were held on campus in 1931 after a committee was convened to investigate affairs at ONS under President Landers, who later resigned in the fall of 1932.⁵⁴ The next ONS President, Julius Churchill, was remembered as leading by authoritative rule, one in which his relationship with student government suffered badly over how student fees were to be used on campus.⁵⁵ These administrative challenges, along with deep budgets as a result of the Great Depression, altered campus events including May Day.

In 1931, the annual invitations to the citizens of Monmouth and surrounding areas and the printing of the day's schedule in the *Monmouth Herald* stopped. The newspaper no longer featured weekly front-page articles, instead placing the May Day coverage, if any, towards the back of the paper. Invitations to the general public were replaced with a standing invitation to campus alumni. The *LAMRON* switched its focus to the election of the May Queen and dance, and to alumni memories.

By 1932, the emphasis has dropped from "May Day" (a springtime celebration of the season and the end of the academic year) to "May Fete," which held a different connotation at the Normal School. While a May Queen was still elected by the student body, much of the event had become overly focused on athletic matches throughout the day, which corresponded with the new campus emphasis on athletics. Songs published in the *LAMRON* pointed to an inward focus on the campus instead of the community. May Day shifted to the second day of the two-day Junior weekend, with the placement of athletic competitions and the vaudeville show on Friday, and Saturday being reserved for the Queen's procession, spring dance and some athletics, which remained open to the public. Academically, the pageantry and festival planning class finally ran its course, and stopped being offered in 1933 after almost 15 years.

While no specific reason exists for the change from a public May Day celebration to a more campus-centric approach, there were a number of factors leading up to this change, including: the shifting campus dynamic from female dominant to increased male student enrollment, a significant increase in student enrollment, the growth in campus buildings, and the standardization of education at ONS from the U.S.

⁵⁴ In a letter dated August 26, 1931, Governor Julius L. Meier addressed his concerns regarding the ONS and President Joseph S. Landers to the Oregon State Board of Higher Education; Ellis A. Stebbins and Gary Huxford, *Since 1856: Historical Views of the College at Monmouth* (Monmouth, Or: Western Oregon State College, 1996), 109-111.

⁵⁵ Stebbins and Huxford, *Since 1856*, 124.

Department of Education. Oregon Normal School was shifting from its origins to include other academic disciplines and interests such as athletics.

Although it had undergone changes to some of the original traditions, people still talked about the popularity of the May Day festival on campus. A 1934 local radio program called “Who’s Who in the Faculty Series” featured Miss Laura Taylor and her role in building up the May Day program. It told of how alumni and visitors recall with particular interest and pleasure of the truly beautiful May Day festival still presented on campus under Miss Taylor’s direction.⁵⁶

Reimagining May Day: 1936-1947

Starting in 1936, the annual May Day celebration was absent from the Oregon Normal School’s catalog, yearbook and newspaper, as well as the community newspaper, just five years after one of the greatest celebrations on campus. May Day was replaced with a spring formal dances sponsored by the student club Collecto-Coeds, whose purpose was to aid coaches in handling spectators at athletic functions and to oversee all school affairs.⁵⁷ By changing the sponsorship of the spring dance, May Day was surpassed by Homecoming and other alumni events at the end of the year. The only tradition kept alive was the crowning of a queen. The school did not celebrate any specific May Day activities from 1936-1940 under the sponsorship of the Collecto-Coeds.

The absence of any May Day events coincided with another major change to Oregon Normal School’s identity and population. In 1938, the school was renamed Oregon College of Education (OCE) and was fully accredited to expand its curriculum.⁵⁸ During this change, enrollment continued to grow until World War II; when in 1942, the male student population plummeted. By 1943, there were only 3 male students on campus, and only 147 female students enrolled. Social life on campus was boosted with the presence of men training at Camp Adair fifteen miles south of Monmouth. Girls from OCE were transported on weekends to dances on the base, and men were brought to the campus for various events.⁵⁹

While male students were away fighting the war, in 1943 the May Fete started up after a five-year hiatus, serving as “a modernized rejuvenation of the old time May Day

⁵⁶ Radio Station KOAC, “Who’s Who in the Faculties Series: Oregon Normal School.” (Radio Broadcasts Jan., Feb., and March, 1934), 16.

⁵⁷ Oregon Normal School, *The Norm* (1936), 57.

⁵⁸ “Western Oregon University: 150 Year Celebration – Sesquicentennial,” Western Oregon University, accessed September 15, 2012, http://www.wou.edu/events/150_celebration/.

⁵⁹ Stebbins and Huxford, *Since 1856*, 136-137.

celebrations at the school,” including an invitation to the public like in years past.⁶⁰ These celebrations almost modeled the earliest May Day exercises, where men did not participate in most activities. Activities included the election of a May Queen and court, May pole dances, dancing on the tennis court and new athletic events such as ping-pong. The popularity and coverage of the May Fete paled in comparison to years’ past. The Collecto-Coeds eventually aligned the children’s Play Day at the Training School with the May Fete, much like in previous years on the Junior Weekends. During this time, the college issued public invitations again, although the crowds were never as large as they were in the 1920s.

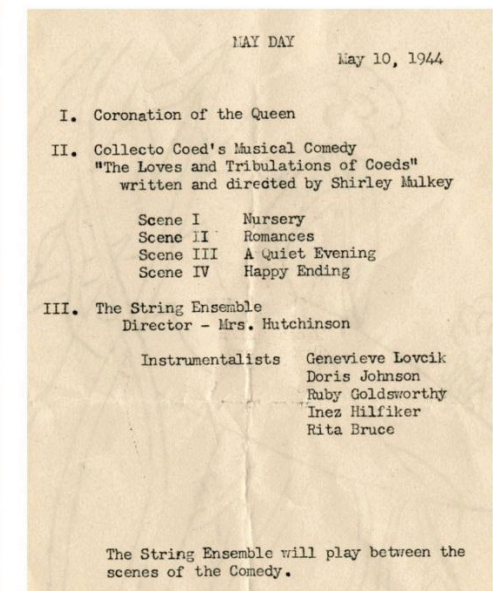


Figure 17. 1944 May Day scrapbook photo of Queen and Princesses and schedule. Note the style of dress was not traditional May Day garb.

After the end of the war, the enrollment of men at OCE exceeded that of women, 198 to 145; this trend continued for the next four years.⁶¹ With the increase in male students, athletic teams were once again thriving on campus. For the next two years (1946 and 1947) the athletic club the Wolf Knights collaborated with the Collecto-Coeds to resurrect planning both old and new May Day activities, the focus being on

⁶⁰ “May Queen Program in Campbell Hall,” *Monmouth Herald*, May 14, 1942, 1.

⁶¹ Stebbins and Huxford, 140.

the coronation of the May Queen and her court. Instead of being open to the surrounding community, as in decades past, the event had officially turned into a campus event, with *The LAMRON* reporting, “This is the one day of the year belonging entirely to the students.”⁶²

May Day Tradition Put to Rest

Although 1946 and 1947 saw a brief revival of a May Day celebration on the OCE campus, it did not last for long. The following year started another absence of May Day events; after building up the May Day tradition for 33 years, it was replaced by Homecoming, alumni events and other formals such as the Sweetheart Ball. In 1960, the *LAMRON* reported that May Day was to be celebrated for the first time in several years on the OCE campus, including a public band concert, baseball game, street dance and winding of the May pole, events taken from the founding May Day activities. However, except for that year, May Day had vanished from the OCE campus.⁶³

The demise of the May Day celebration on the Oregon College of Education campus was not unlike other schools; most of the urban and rural community-based May Day celebrations continued throughout the 1920s and 30s and through the early 1940s, though they diminished in frequency, size, and ambitiousness of scope.⁶⁴ Thompson recalls how many colleges ceased to hold the elaborate May Day pageants in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁵ The dramatic decrease in the number of May Day events happened both in the United States and abroad; Ronald Hutton described how after 1930 the impetus behind the revived May games faltered as a result of the weakening of many communities and the closure of local schools that supported such events.⁶⁶

Locally, while Oregon College of Education (and all of its previous names) was the earliest school in the mid-Willamette Valley to celebrate May Day, with an emphasis on participation from community members for the first 30 years, it was the first to abandon this festival.⁶⁷ Changes in becoming an accredited teachers’ college, the

⁶² “Knights to Direct Festivities,” *LAMRON*, May 5, 1947, 1.

⁶³ The term “May Day” is not used again until the mid-1970s, but this time in an extremely different fashion. The *LAMRON* reported on a series of lectures offered by the OCE May Day Committee in 1976 and 1977. Although public offered, these lectures were not related to the springtime tradition on college campuses, but was about celebrating international workers’ rights. This speaks directly to the changes that came from the 1960s and 1970s

⁶⁴ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 88.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *May Day Festivals*, 119.

⁶⁶ Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 301.

⁶⁷ Oregon College of Education ended by 1960, followed by Linfield College in 1969; Henberg and Seidman, *Inspired pragmatism*, 47.

student population moving towards men outnumbering women, and the introduction of master’s degrees in the early 1950s were some of the factors and influences happening close to the time of the end of the May Day celebration. While there is no specific event to pinpoint why May Day ended, certain characteristics in the changing environment at OCE and society in general led to a new focus internally on campus instead of its past strong connection to bridging “town and gown” like in its past as a Normal School.

The May Day celebration is still talked about on the Western Oregon University campus. To celebrate the centennial of Maple Hall in 2014, which was the Normal School’s first gymnasium and where many of the May Day events were held, there is talk of a revival of the May pole dance program. Using archival materials to visualize the costumes and read intricate descriptions of the dances and music performed by students and children, Western Oregon University may see the first May Day celebration on its campus in approximately 50 years. The elements and meaning behind the celebration of May Day are still prevalent today, although the traditional pieces such as dance, pageantry, and the Queen coronation are no longer practiced.



Figure 18. Female Students dressed in May Day dresses performing drills in Maple Hall, the school’s first gymnasium, circa 1916. Citizens and spectators watch from the back and above the balcony.

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Figure 19. Oregon Normal School's May Day Celebration featured in *The Oregonian*, May 12, 1912.

The Linn County Pioneer Picnic: A Community Celebration Past and Present

Ashley Sharatt



Figure 1. Brownsville's Pioneer Park. Courtesy of the City of Brownsville.

Abstract: 125 years ago, a tradition took root: the Linn County Pioneer Picnic became an annual presence on the lands of Linn County. Originally limited to those pioneers who arrived in 1855, it continued to expand and evolve into a community-wide event. As in 1887, the Linn County Pioneer Association continues to plan the event, and the Picnic continues to honor Linn County's Pioneer past. While the photos and faces may look quite different, what continues to thrive are the parades, coronations, horse shoe competitions, and pie eating contests. The Picnic was named an Oregon Heritage Tradition because of its link to our state's foundation. This article looks at what has come and gone in Picnic events as well as a community's desire to participate in traditional celebration no matter how much contemporary life changes. As Brownsville Times writer Patricia Hainline wrote in 1978, "It is interesting to look back at Picnics of previous years, noting that some things were done differently fifty or sixty years ago, while others haven't changed at all." The Pioneer Picnic is truly a community celebration, past and present.

In June of 1911, James Blakely was one of approximately 8,000 people to walk into Brownsville's Coshow Park for the Linn County Pioneer Picnic.¹ Blakely was one of the first pioneers to settle near the sight of Brownsville in 1846. He was prominent in establishing the town, and named Brownsville after his uncle, Hugh Brown. Mr. Blakely attended nearly every Pioneer Picnic and the picnic of 1911 was to be a joyous event. There was music, dancing, speakers, baseball and even a parachute jump. The festivities began on Wednesday, running for three days. The main event recognized those brave pioneers who settled in and established Linn County.

The Linn County Pioneer Association was formed in July 1887 in order to develop and hold the September 1887 "Pioneer Reunion and Picnic." The initial members of the Association planned the Picnic, organized speakers, and notified the pioneers and their families to attend the reunion that they hoped would become a tradition. The Association continues today. Members run the Pioneer Picture Gallery in Brownsville, Oregon, which houses thousands of photographs taken throughout Linn County. Members also continue to plan the Pioneer Picnic. From the outset, the Picnic was a reunion for those who crossed the plains - to remember what they went through, what they achieved, and to reconnect after time apart. The difficulty of travel and daily life was significant to the founding and success of the event. Visitation was limited between the pioneers, especially for those on the outskirts of Linn County or those scattered throughout the state of Oregon. Travel was long and slow, encouraging multiple-night visits rather than a quick stop at a friend's home. Pioneers thus required a way to reconnect through a festival worthy of an overnight stay. 'Picnic,' as it is now affectionately known by many, was just the event they needed.

One hundred and twenty-five years after its founding, Picnic has continued as a festival to reunite Linn County residents, families and graduating classes. Some of those in attendance are ancestors of the earliest Linn County pioneers, but many are relatively new to the area. They represent their own generation of Linn County pioneer. It is due to this welcoming, historic atmosphere that on its 125th anniversary, the Oregon Heritage Commission named the Linn County Pioneer Picnic an Oregon Heritage Tradition.²

¹ 8,000 in attendance is an estimate. *The Brownsville Times* reported in 1906, that there were 8,000 people in attendance and it was the most ever to attend Picnic. Aside from a report in 1918, the attendance recorded in *The Brownsville Times* continued to get larger and larger until they stopped counting.

² *Albany Democrat-Herald*, "State Honors Pioneer Picnic," June 6, 2012.

The Oregon Heritage Tradition designation is for long-standing annual events that demonstrate broad appeal, allow for mass participation, add to state identity, and reflect Oregon's heritage. Picnic is all of these things. At the outset, it was an avenue for pioneers to reconnect, share their stories, and look back on what they accomplished. After the early pioneers had passed, it became a way to remember their efforts, gather and attend a summertime celebration. Studying

Picnic's history can be a difficult task because the individual pioneer experiences at the Picnic have been lost to time. The events of each picnic are, however, readily available in Brownsville's newspaper, *The Times*, the Pioneer Association minutes, and each of the Pioneer Picnic brochures. *The Times* documented some of the early speeches, as did the Pioneer Association. While we cannot read stories of the individuals attending Picnic, we can look at how the events have changed over time and how the celebration of Linn County has remained a tradition.



Figure 2. The Kiddie Parade marks the beginning of Picnic and shows the next generation of Pioneers. 1963 photograph courtesy of the Linn County Historical Museum.

Picnic Beginnings

The Linn County Pioneer Association's founding members, Robert Glass, George Fletcher Colbert and G.W. Gray, laid the groundwork for a successful tradition.³ These three men were residents of Crawfordsville, one of Linn County's earliest towns. Linn County was settled in the late 1840s by pioneer wagon trains coming largely from Indiana, Ohio, Iowa and Missouri. Among the largest families to settle the Calapooya valley in 1846 was James Blakely's. He was the founder of Brownsville, the longstanding home for the Pioneer Picnic. Much of Linn County was land fed by the Calapooya River and the pioneers' ties to each other and to the area were strong because they understood what each had faced to come to this new land. In time, Linn County was a booming place with mills, farms, ranches, shops, and factories that made the area thrive. Hard work was a necessity and so were ties to family and friends.

This is what brought the Linn County Pioneer Association together. It began as a family reunion, in a sense, to connect those with a similar historical bond, to remember what they had faced and to remind us today how they shaped our history. Speaking at the 1896 Pioneer Picnic, Milton A. Miller, a prominent political figure in Linn County, shared the meaning of Picnic:

If the pages of written history were to be destroyed and every means of its reproduction, the memories of the struggles of the pioneers of Oregon would not soon be forgotten and drop from the minds of the people, but it would be transmitted and handed down from the sons and daughters of the pioneers from generation to generation...Then it is not strange that we should meet today to celebrate the great events and bring up the memories of brave men...We, the sons and daughters of the pioneers of Oregon, should maintain and transmit the great principles of the noble pioneers of Oregon to the millions yet unborn...This day, we honor the pioneers of Oregon. We should make this a glorious and immortal day; our children should celebrate with thanks and shouts of joy.⁴

While Robert Glass and George Colbert's thoughts on creating the Pioneer Association are not available, the necessity of the organization and of the reunion resonates through Miller's words to the Picnic attendees of 1896.

³ W.B. Glass, "July 30, 1887" *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 1.

⁴ *The Brownsville Times*, "An Oration Delivered by Hon. M. A. Miller at the Pioneers' Picnic," June 19, 2012: 1, 4

To form the Association, Glass, Colbert and Gray gathered the citizens of Crawfordsville on July 30, 1887. At this meeting, they discussed the groundwork for the Association, elected members, appointed committees and began planning for what would become the oldest continuing celebration in Oregon.⁵ On September 1, 1887, again in Crawfordsville, Picnic began. The agenda included speakers, musicians and discussion of an official constitution for the Association. For its first six years, Picnic was held in Crawfordsville, South Brownsville (the southern side of the Calapooya River) and Halsey. From 1893 on, every Picnic took place in Brownsville's Pioneer Park. Until 1917, Pioneer Park was known as Coshow Park. It was private land owned by members of the Pioneer Association. In 1917, the City of Brownsville purchased the land with a special stipulation that the Pioneer Association would have rights to the park during Picnic.⁶

Pioneer Park was, and is, an ideal place for Picnic because of its proximity to Brownsville's Main Street and its size. Through the 1890s and well into the 1920s, getting to Brownsville was not an easy task for those living around Linn County or further out. Families did not attend just a single baseball game or talent show, they pitched a tent and "settled in for three days of fun, worship and fellowship."⁷ This camping atmosphere continues to hold true. Once Pioneer Picnic weekend begins, the camping section becomes a first-come, first-serve space to hold as many tents as can fit in the designated area.

A spirit of reminiscence and sharing shaped the early years of Picnic. Article 2 of the Linn County Pioneer Association Constitution states that the objective of the Association is to "collect from living witnesses such facts relating to the Pioneers and History of the settlement of Linn County as the Association may deem worthy of preservation, and to promote social intercourse among its members."⁸ Every picnic included time for Pioneer speeches, during which attendees could share their stories of life on the wagon train and life after settlement. Eliza Spalding Warren, for example, spoke at the 1888 picnic about her experience.

⁵ W.B. Glass, "July 30, 1887," *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 1.

⁶ W.B. Glass, Secretary, "1917," *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association. July 30, 1887 to June 18, 1926. Transcribed by Linda McCormick in 2012*, 162.

⁷ Linn County Pioneer Association, "Linn County Pioneer Picnic 125th Anniversary 1887-2012," *Linn County Pioneer Picnic brochure*, 2012.

⁸ "Constitution of the Linn County Pioneer Association" in *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 10.

Eliza was the daughter of Henry Harmon and Eliza Hart Spalding who came to Oregon in 1836 with Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. Eliza told of her experience at the Whitman Mission, and of her survival in the massacre. She also told of her arrival in Brownsville in 1849. She lived in a small log house and walked three or four miles to visit her nearest neighbor. Eliza had been hesitant about telling her story, but an article in the Oregonian had sparked her interest. George H. Himes, secretary of the Pioneer Association in Portland had written, "Much valuable matter that might have been preserved, is now lost because pioneers have not fully realized their responsibility to those who are to follow, that death has made sad havoc in the ranks during the past year, in few years there will be none left to tell the story, and the places that now know us will no us no more."⁹ Eliza, the Pioneer Association, and the pioneers who shared their stories at Picnic understood the havoc that time caused, therefore understood the huge value in finding this avenue to share their stories with the families and loved-ones attending Picnic.

Trying to create a broader reach necessitated the Association to grow beyond the inclusion of strictly "all immigrants male and female prior to the first day of January 1855 and now residents of Linn County."¹⁰ Today, the Association includes "anyone interested in preserving our heritage, sharing the past, and helping the future...the picnic welcomes all those who enjoy old-time fun and good fellowship."¹¹ Members of the Association plan each Picnic. They form committees to take on each of the events and all of the details that go toward making Picnic a success.

Speakers were a main event for many years of Picnic. Picnic attendees heard about the issues of the day when politicians or groups came to give speeches. The Women's Christian Temperance Union held the stage in Brownsville on June 5, 1891 to talk about the negative effects of alcohol use. Those speaking for the Temperance Union were Mrs. Glass, Mrs. Penlin and Mrs. Stanard, all wives of prominent Association members and pioneers themselves.¹² Many individuals who helped with the formation of the State also came to talk about their Pioneering Spirit and where it had taken them. Those who shared their successes after travelling to Oregon included James Weatherford of Albany. He worked for the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill in Brownsville,

⁹ Eliza Spalding Warren, "Address, Delivered at the Pioneer Reunion at Crawfordsville June 28, 1888," in *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 7.

¹⁰ "Constitution of the Linn County Pioneer Association" in *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 10.

¹¹ Linn County Pioneer Association, "Linn County Pioneer Picnic 125th Anniversary 1887-2012," *Linn County Pioneer Picnic brochure*, 2012.

¹² O.P. Coshaw, "June 5th 1891" *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 26.

Thomas Lister Kay's first mill, and was later elected to the Oregon Legislature.¹³ He gave the annual address at the 1891 Picnic. Judge Melvin Clark George gave the annual address in 1899.¹⁴ He was elected Oregon State Senator in 1876, began the construction of the Columbia River jetties, and oversaw the construction of Burnside Bridge in Portland. Picnic was much more than a look back at the 1840s and 1850s. It was also a celebration of what Pioneers had become and where their Pioneering Spirit had taken them.

In between speeches, Pioneer Park was filled with music, prayer, much chatter among friends, and play. Music has been essential at Picnic, going all the way back to the first meeting. Musical acts included quartets, choirs, bands, harmonica, trombone, trumpet and songs sung by everyone in attendance. Picnic has often also included a talent show, allowing even more music to liven the park. Dancing has often accompanied the music in the evenings. This kept the fun going until midnight. Frequently, the Grand Picnic Dance filled one of the evenings, and a Queen's Ball filled the other. The Coronation of the Queen and her Court is a staple at Picnic, though enthusiasm about the Court has ebbed and flowed throughout Picnic's history. The 1910s and 1920s saw the coronation of a Queen Mother who was a senior woman at Picnic. Often, there is both a Queen and a Junior Queen announced. Among the requirements to become Queen, a Linn County girl must have contributed a certain amount of community service, and be successful in selling raffle tickets for Picnic prizes or for attendance to one of the dances.¹⁵ These dances frequently had live, local bands and catered to either the teenage, or 18 and older crowd, with music lasting well into the night.

Play also added to the celebrative atmosphere of Picnic. Starting in 1910, the balloon ascension was a sight to behold, and a parachutist would come from the sky, often landing in a local field.¹⁶ A carnival was common until the 1990s, providing swings, a Ferris wheel and a multitude of other thrill rides. Picnic does not look exactly as it did in 1887, but it continues to be a grand affair of celebration. As attendee Leisa Keiser noted, "there is an ebb and flow about Picnic traditions. The intent is the same, but the events might be different."

¹³ O.P. Coshaw, "June 4th 1891" *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 24.

¹⁴ "Bio of Melvin Clark George" *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 68.

¹⁵ Many years have had door admission only. 1966 was one year in which Princesses sold tickets to the Saturday evening dance.

¹⁶ J.H. Glass, June 22, 23, 24 1910, *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 117.

Linn County's Heritage Tradition

Because of Picnic's long history, it is full of tradition as well as expectation. The Grand Parade, the Kiddy Parade, good food and friendly competition are all part of the intention of Picnic. The specifics within each piece, though, are able to change with the passing years. The Grand Parade has occurred since the first years of Picnic. Originally, it was a procession of pioneers and their families into the park, accompanied by music, and marking the beginning of Picnic.¹⁷ It was a way to mark the gathering and show all of the attendees. The Grand Parade later grew into a much larger affair. As the founding Pioneers passed away their descendants, as well as new community members, began to attend Picnic and the honoring of pioneers grew to include more than those who came to Linn County with no more than a wagon and a Donation Land Claim. The Parade also developed into one of floats and fire trucks, antique cars and horses, baton twirlers and bands. Competitions were added to pick the best float decorations displayed. One of the 1961 Grand Parade floats showed the pioneering spirit of the day with a rocket ship on the back of the float.

The Kiddy Parade now holds the spotlight as the kickoff to Picnic. This is an event sponsored by the Pollyanna Club, and it reflects the new generation of Pioneers throughout Linn County. The children in this parade ride on floats, tiny buggies and wagons, bicycles, tricycles and walk with their pets. There are also competitions here for the best floats, the best costumes and meeting the years' picnic theme. Picnic attendees fill the sidewalks of Main Street to see the children of the communities and to mark the beginning of Picnic.

Once the festivities begin, so too do the competitions. Fun and friendly competition has been a common Picnic theme for at least 110 years. The first mention of a baseball game was in 1902 with the competitive opportunities growing exponentially in the years to follow. Only once has the Pioneer Association decided to forgo competition. In 1917, *The Times* reported that carnival shows and games were causing too much "noise and confusion" and were thus eliminated from Picnic. They believed the elimination would result in a greater interest in remembrance of the pioneers.¹⁸ Picnic that year did not go as they had planned. On the third day, teams from Ash Swale and Mountain Home started a tug-of-war across the Calapooya River. Ash Swale won the match and Mountain Home fell in the river. The tug-of-war sparked more competition events, and betting on winners. A similar elimination of competition has not been attempted since.

¹⁷ O.P. Coshow, June 6, 7 and 8, 1894, *Records of the Linn County Pioneer Association*, 38.

¹⁸ *The Times*, "Pioneer Picnic," June 29, 1917, 1.

The competitions are family-friendly and provide something for all ages. Baseball has been the longest running of them all, with Little League teams currently being the most common competitors. Since 1954, toddlers through sixth-grade have embarked on the Pennyscramble. Pennies hidden in sawdust fill a relatively large square within the park. At the sound of a bell, kids scramble around to find as many pennies as they can. The winner gets to keep their earnings, plus a little bit more.

Picnic competition tests every kind of talent with an annual Spelling Bee, a pie-eating contest, a horseshow tournament, judging of the flower show, baked pies, quilts and artwork. And, just in case there is not a specific avenue to share ones talents, there is a talent show for both kids and adults. From year to year, there may be slight variations to which competitions actually take place. Interest in basketball or the horse show may wax and wane, but regardless of which competitions take place, there will be a multitude from which to choose. The Association continues to add new events to the agenda. For the last few years, attendees have gathered for the 3K Taking Steps to Find a Cure, and 2012 marked the first year of the Pioneer Dam Run on Saturday evening. Ideas will continue to abound as to which competitions to hold each year.



Figure 3. Tug-of-War across the Calapooya River, ca. 1960s. Photograph courtesy of the Linn County Historical Museum.

The two competitions that seem to hold the most space in peoples' hearts are the Tug-of-War and the Logging Jamboree. Looking back to the impromptu competition across the Calapooya in 1917, the Tug-of-War occurred on and off through the 1900s and was designated the second annual in the 1960 Picnic booklet. Teams lined up on either side of the Calapooya River in an attempt to dunk their rivals. The competition was fierce with teams in training specifically for this event. JayCee Teams from Linn and Lane Counties were common competitors. The 1966 booklet urged spectator attention with "the Springfield team will be here to defend their title from all comers. Albany, Lebanon, and Brownsville, and Sweet Home will try to upset the champs...Be there rooting for your favorite team. Someone is sure to get wet."¹⁹ As interest continued to grow, the JayCeers were no longer the main competitors. Teams of every kind and every number would join to win. Through the sixties, men and women were pulled from the rocks in the riverbank.

In 1978, strict rules were included, stating that "1. No Team may exceed a combined weight of 1,100 pounds. 2. No Corks, Cleats or Holding Devices of Any Kind, on Shoes. 3. Gloves are Recommended (but not Required). 4. All Teams MUST Weigh-In."²⁰ Rules of this kind were necessary. As one frequenter of Picnic remembered, one year a team dug a hole on the side of the riverbank. Their largest member pulled from this spot, and of course the team won the championship. After that instance, platforms were built on either side of the river to keep the competition one of strength rather than innovation. By the early 1990s, interest in the Tug-of-War was still strong, but it had moved away from the river and onto platforms in the park. Once the result of failure was no longer a splash into the Calapooya, the Tug-of-War seemed to lose rank as the most-popular competition of the festival.

The Logging Jamboree is another prized event. It is an excellent showing of skills rarely used today. Local Linn County resident, Bob Weibel started the event in 1956 and has been its prominent advocate ever since. The initial year had four events, axe throwing, log chopping, choker setting and power saw bucking.²¹ Events have later added tree climbing, peavey log-rolling, a springboard chop and a Jack-and-Jill sawing race. Trophies, ribbons, and cash have been among the prizes and high-school forestry students among the competitors.²² As the 1966 program booklet noted, among the

¹⁹ 79th Annual Linn County Pioneer Picnic Program Booklet June 16, 17, 18, 1966, Linn County Tug-of-War, 22.

²⁰ 91st Annual Linn County Pioneer Picnic Souvenir Booklet and Program June 16-17-18, 1978, Tug-of-War, 25.

²¹ *The Times*, "Logger Jamboree is new picnic feature" May 24, 1956, 1.

²² Mona Waibel, "Come to the Pioneer Picnic Loggers Jamboree," *The Times*, June 15, 2007, 3.

many contestants are "world champions, ex-world champions, and future world champions."²³ The Logging Jamboree is one of the many events that keep the spirit of Picnic and help make the event a success.

The founding Linn County Pioneer Association laid the groundwork for a tradition of reunion, celebration and remembrance. Pioneers like Robert Glass, George Colbert and Eliza Spalding Warren were interested in reuniting with fellow pioneers and sharing their stories. Pioneer descendants and later-arrivals like M. A. Miller wanted to continue the pioneer story so it would not be forgotten. All the while, music, competition and celebration were ever-present at each Picnic. The merriment of Picnic drew, and continues to draw, crowds from all around and it serves to bring the entire community together. Since 1959, the community has come together for a breakfast in the Park. Since before 1894, the community has come together for a Grand Parade. Since 1887, the community has come together to honor those who founded Linn County and shaped the way we live today. James Blakely would be proud that the Linn County community continues to celebrate its pioneers.

²³ 79th Annual Linn County Pioneer Picnic Program Booklet June 16, 17, 18, 1966, Logging Jamboree, 20.

Impacts on a Local Community: The 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant of Eugene

Julie L. Voelker-Morris



Figure 1. Oregon Trail Celebrations, Driving the final railroad track stake for the 1926 Oregon Trail to Rail Pageant. Lane County Historical Museum, #CS413.

Abstract: This paper describes a preliminary study of The Oregon Trail Pageants in Eugene, Oregon and the cultural impacts on the city and region. The paper explores questions such as: What tools for economic development arose in direct connection to the pageant? How did the pageant express community identity? How did the pageant enhance cultural and artistic life for the local community? What effects, if any, did the pageant have on continued civic participation? The Oregon Trail Pageants represent the coming together of a community around a comparable cultural heritage and shared geographic location. Beginning in 1926, the Oregon Trail Pageants commemorated the pioneer generation and helped settlement stories shift from first-person oral experience to a medium of recorded history. Until 1950, the Eugene pageants influenced local and statewide presentations of the largest known history pageants recorded in the region. The first pageant is considered in this paper. The paper extends the general public's awareness of the relationship between historical roots and the arts, providing meaning and context to the integration of arts and civic participation. This study strengthens the dialogue about the importance of the arts in defining civic history with overlapping cultural impacts of community settlements and the arts.

The Oregon Trail Pageants of Eugene (1926-1950) represent the coming together of a community around a comparable cultural heritage and shared geographic location. Beginning in 1926, the Oregon Trail Pageants commemorated the pioneer generation and helped settlement stories shift from first-person oral experience to a medium of recorded history. The Oregon Trail Pageants in Eugene are on record as the largest history pageants in the region, stimulating additional local and statewide pageants until 1952. The first of these pageants, *Klatawa: Trail to Rail*, is considered in this paper.

This article seeks to extend the general public's awareness of the relationship between historical roots and the arts, providing meaning and context to the integration of arts and civic participation through the example of the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant in Eugene, Oregon. This study strengthens the dialogue about the importance of the arts in defining specific civic histories with overlapping economic and cultural significance to community settlements and the arts.

Setting the Stage

In the early 1900s, Percy MacKaye (1909), Harvard University graduate and noted playwright of masques and poetic drama,¹ lectured at institutions such as Harvard, Yale and the Society for Ethical Culture in New York regarding the need for a significant American style of theatre. Within his lectures and eventual publications, MacKaye called for theatrical events to be recognized as educational and civic experiences as important as any university course or governing body.² In 2005, the publisher, Adonis Press, noted that "MacKaye was...the inspired leader of the civic drama, which gave new meaning to life in America's larger cities around the turn of the last [i.e. 20th] century."³ He imagined an American style of theatre "fused by the American Spirit...their [landscapes] as well as...their cities...when they look into the past, they shall...reveal its perennial meanings to their modern time...the drama should be *dedicated to public, not private ends*."⁴ The historical pageant movement in the United States - a unique American style for its era - fulfilled MacKaye's vision for a new type

¹ MacKaye's masque plays invited audience and community members (in the hundreds and thousands) to participate in their development and production. The term poetic drama, also known as verse drama, "denotes a drama whose dialogue is rhythmized and presented as discreet lines of verse." (see: Alexander Huber, Alexander, ed. "Verse Drama." *Thomas Gray Archive*, accessed November 2, 2012, www.thomasgray.org.uk/materials/gllitterms.shtml).

² Percy MacKaye, *The Playhouse and The Play and Other Addresses Concerning the Theatre and Democracy in America*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 19, 21-23, 127-128.

³ "Percy MacKaye," Adonis Press for Science, Art, and the Human Spirit. last modified October 20, 2005, http://adonispress.org/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=1_7.

⁴ Percy MacKaye, *The Playhouse and The Play and Other Addresses Concerning the Theatre and Democracy in America*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 114-116, 137.

of civic drama. The genre of historical pageants is one primarily consisting of large-scale dramas featuring extravagant spectacle to tell stories of local history with original scripts and performed within the locality by local amateur performers.⁵

Commonly, pageants of the time were tributes to ancestral traditions of a specific place, celebrating peoples of the past while informing those of the present. Frequently, they were led by community organizers, supported by local governments and presented prominent members of the regional area on stage. This structural design upheld MacKaye's notion that theatre was an art to be experienced and created by the members of specific communities resulting in "consciousness of civic life...[and] communal self-expression."⁶

Klatawa, Trail to Rail (1926): Eugene's First Oregon Trail Pageant

In 1926, the Southern Pacific railroad completed the Natron Cutoff, a new rail line between Klamath Falls in Southern Oregon⁷ and on through Oakridge, Oregon to Eugene. After resolving 12 years of anti-trust lawsuits, this less harrowing cutoff through the Cascade Mountains made Eugene, rather than its southern neighbor Roseburg, a significant transportation hub from Portland to San Francisco and between the coast harbors to points east. During this time, members of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce formed the Trail to Rail Association. The group resolved that a pageant should be part of the celebration of Lane County's new centrality both economically and culturally, to the region.

From this beginning, the *Klatawa* (Chinook for "to travel") Trail to Rail pageant was developed to showcase the "evolution and history of transportation to the Northwest,"⁸ particularly highlighting Eugene's contribution as a hub of travel. The Chamber's intention for the pageant was to display Eugene's modernity by re-enacting Oregon's advancement from backbreaking pioneer trails to smooth transcontinental railroad lines.

⁵ Ayako Yoshino, "The Modern Historical Pageant: Commodifying Locality," (panel on Cultures of Exhibition II: Global Circulations for the Modern Language Association Conference, Washington, District of Columbia, December 27 - 30, 2005).

⁶ Percy MacKaye, *The Playhouse and The Play and Other Addresses Concerning the Theatre and Democracy in America*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 109.

⁷ Southern Oregon is most commonly referred to as the area of Oregon south of Eugene to Grants Pass, and includes Klamath Falls, Medford and Ashland near the California border.

⁸ Southern Pacific Bulletin, (pamphlet available from the Lane County Historical Museum, 740 West 13th Avenue, Eugene OR 97402, August 1926), 7.

Beyond this commercial intent, the Oregon Trail Pageant expressed the prevailing norms of the white settlement identity over those of the local Kalapuya inhabitants with the establishment of industry, farming, logging and other means of "taming" the land for residents of Oregon, particularly within the Willamette Valley⁹ corridor and Southern Oregon. On July 27, 1950, twenty-four years after the first pageant, an article in Eugene's *Register-Guard* newspaper claimed that:

The Oregon Trail Pageant is the finest thing of its kind in this country...the life of the Oregon Trail Pageant is in the thousands of people reliving the epic which is part of this history...the heroes of that epic were the people—men, women and children, moving slowly and irresistibly across a continent...because of the dream which shapes itself around the magic word "Oregon."

On January 5, 2005 Robert Hart, Lane County Historical Museum Executive Director, commented to the author that the Eugene Oregon Trail Pageants commemorated the original pioneer generation while creating a means for the settlement story to shift from first-person oral experience to a medium of recorded history.

At Oregon Trail Pageant performances, audience members were astounded by the spectacle of live oxen teams circling ten standard Conestoga wagons on the massive stage, a functioning steam engine bursting through the set, and a low flying airplane buzzing overhead. The town was converted to "pageant central" as businesses added false fronts to their stores to create the conventional feel on an old West clapboard town. Ancillary activities included industrial and pioneer parades, dances, contests and concerts leading up to the pageant presentations. Young women, sponsored by local civic organizations, vied for the title of Queen Susannah while men, young and old, competed in the "whiskerino" contests or paid a fine for sporting a shaven face.

Between the inaugural pageant in 1926 through the final pageant in 1950, the community of Eugene influenced local and statewide presentations of some of the largest known history pageants recorded in the Northwest. In archival notes, Horace Robinson, distinguished University of Oregon theatre director and professor, noted that the Oregon Trail Pageants were considered, "the oldest community undertaking of its

⁹ "The region in...Oregon...that surrounds the Willamette River...from its emergence from mountains near Eugene to its confluence with the Columbia River...the valley was the destination of choice for the emigrants on the Oregon Trail in the 1840s. It has formed the cultural and political heart of Oregon since the days of the Oregon Territory, and is home to nearly 20% of Oregon's population (or 60% if the Portland area is included" (Wikipedia, last modified, December 6, 2012).

kind with a record of continuous production.”¹⁰ Doris Smith, a leading Portland theatre artist and Oregon Trail Pageant director throughout its longevity, believed that Oregon should achieve the status of “The Pageant State of America.”

The Pageant Experience and Tools for Community Cultural Development

MacKaye’s call for the recognition of community enhancement through theatrical forms of art has gained revitalized importance today. As Bill Flood, former Community Development and Education Coordinator for the Oregon Arts Commission, recognized:

People everywhere...are seeking a sense of their group, their place...to come out of isolation, to celebrate their successes, to utilize their talents and learn new skills - to be creative. Community cultural development embraces the ethic that it is good for people to participate in the cultural life of their communities.¹¹

In an issue paper for the Center for Arts and Culture, Elizabeth Strom summarized areas in which policies for arts and cultural activities can address community development today. Recommendations from this report included:

- Building community identity,
- Building community and economic identity, here community viability and enhancement and cultural tourism being of most significance,
- Enhancing education and cultural literacy, and
- Enhancing social needs and benefits.¹²

Strom suggested that following these recommendations might lead, in part, to social harmony and economic prosperity.¹³ The rest of this article looks at ways in which the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant in Eugene worked to enliven and enhance these aspects of the Eugene community during that time period and with lingering influences felt today. Related recommendations developed by the Center for an Urban Future and outlined in Kleiman’s *Creative Engine* report, the “first comprehensive assessment of arts and

¹⁰ Robinson, Horace. Unpublished papers., n.d. (Available from the University of Oregon Knight Library, Special Collections. 1501 Kincaid, Eugene, OR 97403).

¹¹ “What is Community Cultural Development and How Do We Practice It?,” *CultureWork: A Periodic Broadside for Arts and Culture Workers*, accessed November 1, 2012, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/culturwk/culturework7.html>.

¹² Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 41-45.

¹³ Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 39-44.

economic development in NYC’s five boroughs,”¹⁴ supplement the comparisons of the pageant with contemporary conceptions of community cultural development within this article. Kleiman suggested that a “creative economy brings benefits that go far beyond direct employment”¹⁵ as will be evidenced when describing the pageant organization.

Further, the recent Americans for the Arts’ *Arts and Economic Prosperity IV in the City of Eugene, OR* study will be briefly touched upon. The cultural and economic influences of the unique town of Eugene in 1926 brought business, community and arts leaders together to work towards a combined goal and purpose: celebrating a vibrant history through epic theatrical storytelling that would encourage economic development for a city. Eugene was looking to diversify its economic standing and establish itself as a key player in the transportation system of the Northwest United States. The next sections examine the organization of and community involvement with the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant weighed by the actions recommended in Strom’s and Kleiman’s reports.

Community Identity, Pride, and Participation; Social Needs and Benefits

Strom identified building community identity, pride, cohesion and participation as ways to strengthen communities through culture.¹⁶ Don Hunter, a Eugene resident who assisted with audio production for later Oregon Trail Pageants, noted that despite the fact that not everyone in the local area could financially afford to attend or participate in the pageants, pageant leaders carried on.¹⁷ The desire of town leaders to elevate Eugene’s status in the minds of tourists, financiers, business leaders and other markets, influenced the Oregon Trail Pageants’ attempt to foster community bonds and overcome current social divisions.

The organization, development and production of the Oregon Trail Pageant consciously called for contributions from local community members. One could perform, design, build, direct, promote or merely view the pageants. Residents of the local area, particularly those involved with specific organizations such as churches, Elks, American Legion, the Business and Professional Women Association or within arts training such as dance academies, amateur theatre groups and choruses rallied around

¹⁴ “*The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods*,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

¹⁵ “*The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods*,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 12 & 40.

¹⁷ Don Hunter, personal communication, December 2004.

the idea of the pageant. Within five weeks during July and August 1926, a cast of approximately 2,000 local volunteers completed all rehearsals and performed as actors, dancers, singers and ranch hands.



Figure 2. Participants in *Klatawa: Trail to Rail* performance. Lane County Historical Museum, #GN7759.

Citizens of all ages performed. Calls went out in both the *Eugene Morning Register* and *Eugene Evening Guard* on July 14, 1926 for 100 young female dancers to be waterfalls and forests and on July 17, 1926 for 500 “kiddies” for a chorus of children ages 6-10. That same day, the *Eugene Morning Register* announced that fifty people were needed to play character roles such as the episode announcer, the narrator Klatawa, Lewis and Clark, Sacajawea, Mayan slaves, Native chiefs and Methodist circuit riders so that the expansive human history of the region could be told, albeit from a white settlement story view of related events and characters. Those with other skills and artistry were also necessary as evidenced in the July 24, 1926 *Eugene Morning Register* article when a call went out for buckaroos to break four steers. Similar calls asked mothers to make inexpensive paper costumes ranging from flowers, fruits, and ferns to butterflies and birds for participants to wear.

By bringing in a variety of participants from the region, *Klatawa*, “Trail to Rail” built upon past stories of the natural and cultural history of the Willamette Valley in order to instill pride of place and inheritance, as well as to inspire new honorific leaders and broad popular support for the future direction of Eugene as imagined by the Trail to Rail Association and other organizers of the related pageant events. Describing ways in which community building occurs through participation in arts and cultural community life, Jackson and Herranz painted a similar picture to that of Eugene and its goals for the first Oregon Trail Pageant in their report, *Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework for Measurement*:

Arts and cultural expressions—music, songs, murals, sculpture, stories—often embody the history, hopes, frustrations, and aspirations of a community. Arts and cultural practices, moreover, frequently intersect with other community processes and are deeply embedded in them. Theater and dance can be central to youth development programs. Storytelling is often a key part of community organizing efforts. Cultural heritage initiatives are often anchors for economic development initiatives and key activities in efforts to improve public safety.¹⁸

Asserting itself as a communal, local event that reached out to a broader audience of tourists and investors, the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant was seen as a way to clean up potentially divisive and unsavory elements such as urban growth versus limited boundaries, pressures from the Ku Klux Klan, homelessness and temperance within the community by focusing on and extolling historical moments, characters and tales of significance to foster community bonds, increase economic potential, and overcome current social divisions.

Build Networks and Establish Leadership

Kleiman noted that cultural and economic development programs should be prevented from “working in isolation.”¹⁹ He also endorsed establishing “a local entity at the outset of any development plan, charged with insuring meaningful participation from the community as well as cultural, private and government sectors.”²⁰ In this way, the

¹⁸ Maria-Rosario Jackson and Joaquin Herranz. *Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework for Measurement*. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2002), 13.

¹⁹ “The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

²⁰ “The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

structure and implementation of a development plan could be comprehensive.²¹ The organizers of the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant in Eugene clearly understood such a need.

As previously mentioned, members of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce and leaders in local government and civic organizations realized their new place of importance on the West Coast with the coming of the branch line across the Cascades from Southern Oregon. The Eugene Chamber of Commerce initiated the planning of the celebratory pageant to position the town as the “center” of the state in terms of industry, agriculture, history, modernity and sophistication, and live-ability. Once incorporated, the Trail to Rail Association organized the pageant hiring, promotion, actor calls and overall mission, as well as ancillary activities such as the Queen Susannah contest, automobile promotional tours, ongoing communications with national industry leaders and statewide business and civic leaders.²² Such activities were significant to build momentum, recognition, participants, tourists and additional business backing in support of the pageant.²³

In addition, the Chamber sent out a call to revive the Eugene Radiators, a pre-World War I promotional committee of the Eugene Commercial Club. In a “City of Radiation” (c. 1905) pamphlet,²⁴ the Eugene Radiators promoted the county as radiating wealth in lumber, mining, fruit, farming, dairy and salmon fishing to the world. The reorganization of the Eugene Radiators for the Trail to Rail Celebration called on members to be greeters, marketers and promoters to assigned visitors from cities, industries, chambers of commerce and civic organizations throughout Oregon, Washington and California. The Eugene Chamber of Commerce hoped that investment in these connections would influence future business development. Chamber and Pageant Association members were also appointed to communicate and plan security and traffic routes with the police; designate locations for portable toilets, hitching posts

²¹ “*The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods*,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>; Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 12, 40-42.

²² The Trail to Rail Association, Inc., established in 1926 was disbanded and reformed in 1927 as the Eugene Pageant Association, Inc. in order to capitalize on name recognition for future pageant celebrations.

²³ Eugene Chamber of Commerce. “Letter Regarding Reception Committee for the Trail to Rail Celebration,” (June 7, 1926) (Available from the Lane County Historical Museum, 740 West 13th Avenue, Eugene OR 97402).

²⁴ With a large pictorial spread and two-page discussion of advantages of the area, the pamphlet invited investors and homeowners to Eugene as a “modern” city. Eugene Commercial Club. “City of Radiation.” [Pamphlet]. (c. 1905) (Available from the Lane County Historical Museum, 740 West 13th Avenue, Eugene OR 97402).

and parking; and, assist in finding housing in hotels or private homes for incoming visitors as well as barns for non-local livestock performing in the pageant.



Figure 3. Truck with a giant bull dog on the back. Its sign says, “NEUSTADTER BROS. / ...OF THE... / MANUFACTURERS OF / CUSTOM / MADE / SHIRTS & OVERALLS / PORTLAND - SAN FRANCISCO - NEW YORK.” An automobile with a sign reading “CORVALLIS CO.” is in front of it. Both represent the spread of commerce and business networks beyond Eugene. Lane County Historical Museum, #ER300.

Beyond business sectors, Kleiman also emphasized a need to accurately identify the creative sector of a locality in order to produce quality planning and implementation of a community and economic development plan.²⁵ For the Oregon Trail Pageant, identifying the creative sector meant identifying key leaders in the arts and cultural sectors of the region who knew how to animate professionals and non-professionals alike.

Oregon Trail Pageant organizers felt fortuitous in identifying key players in the regional artistic field, particularly in hiring Doris Smith, a woman whom Horace Robinson described as “of the pre-Hollywood vintage...clean, strong, good-hearted.” Upon her husband’s death, Smith raised her daughter, and taught and directed drama in Portland, Oregon at a private performing arts academy. She also directed a variety of pageants in and around the Portland area before working on the 1926 *Klatawa* Pageant

²⁵ “*The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods*,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

in Eugene. As pageant director, *The Register-Guard* described Smith as “lead[ing] a community to work and play together” and “inspir[ing] each individual participant to contribute all skill and ability.” Smith sought to build cast and community identity by, as Robinson described, “mak[ing] the players understand the importance of their presence “en masse” and yet the necessity of submerging their individuality.”²⁶

Cal Young, a local rancher/businessman was also advantageous in creating local participation for the pageants. The pageant parades organized by Young focused on the uniqueness of each individual, business or civic organization that participated. Young was successful in acquiring goods and services for the pageant parades from “pioneer” individuals and families throughout the state. As *The Register-Guard* of January 27, 1953 noted:

Only a quarter-century ago, Cal Young could issue a call, and...hundreds of people...brought their...equipment and the many skills which they had learned on the frontier...the city folk could contribute music, dancing, theatrical skills, many special talents, and did, but the thing which made the Oregon Trail Pageant really great and different from so many attempts to represent the past was [the]...people who had only to re-live what had been a part of their lives.

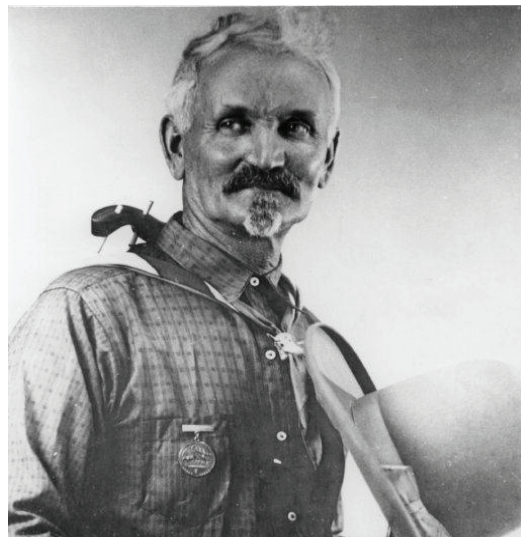


Figure 4. Cal M. Young, 1871-1957; Eugene civic leader, farmer and businessman. Lane County Historical Museum, #GN407.

²⁶ Robinson, Horace. Unpublished papers, n.d. (Available from the University of Oregon Knight Library, Special Collections. 1501 Kincaid, Eugene, OR 97403).

As leaders, Smith, Young and the Trail to Rail Association expanded the range of stakeholders in the pageant’s outcome. They included professionals and volunteers at almost all levels of organization, increasing local interest in Eugene as a culturally and economically vital community at that juncture in changes for regional transportation.

Economic Tools

Strom described the necessity of government and private investment in the arts, particularly through cultural tourism while Kleiman highlighted the importance of the arts in reviving street life and retail for business owners.²⁷

Joseph Koke, the chair of the pageant committee from 1926 through 1947, stated that the fiscal goal for the pageant was that the financial support of local businesses would be self-sustaining, therefore, it required all major and minor businesses to become involved. The pageant organization received cash, credit, and in-kind support from local, state and regional business participants.²⁸ The University of Oregon donated its track, Hayward Field, for the purposes of presentation. The city aided pageant efforts with support from the police, sanitation and licensing departments. And, of course, the many volunteer hours by those involved in the process assisted the pageant’s solvency.

In keeping with Kleiman’s recommendations for continued revitalization of downtown section of cities, the miniature town of “Railhead” was constructed within Eugene’s park blocks, an area that is today, most often associated with Eugene’s Saturday Market and Farmer’s Market. The *Eugene Morning Register* of July 21, 1926 described Eugene’s downtown area being converted to the faux town of “Railhead” with replicas of “end of the construction, wild west town” buildings and offered concessions, carnival games and rides, its own governing policies, and gold and silver spike currency in support of the celebration.

Most ancillary activities such as parades, contests and concerts occurred downtown. Ancillary activities also supported income for the pageant, local businesses, the city and the county. The next day’s *Eugene Morning Register* (July 22, 1926) described how the Queen Susannah Contest brought customers to local businesses and helped pay for related pageant expenses. Countywide organizations such as the Elks, American Legion, and the Business and Professional Women sponsored young women as

²⁷ “*The Creative Engine: How Arts and Culture is Fueling Economic Growth in New York City Neighborhoods*,” Center for an Urban Future, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.nycfuture.org>.

²⁸ Direct income from the pageant tickets was also valuable. Varied ticket prices were affordable and reasonable for most citizens at \$1.00, \$1.50, or \$2.25 for seated admission (1926 Trail to Rail program).

candidates for the Queen Susannah contest. Sponsoring groups held variety shows, swim contests, concerts by contestants, fireworks displays, dances, bridge and whist parties, and speeches to other groups to gain purchased votes for their Queen candidate. Vote cards could be clipped for free from the two Eugene newspapers. In much the same way that online crowdsourcing, crowd voting, and crowd funding function today, businesses of the time offered additional vote cards, as well as special deals and contests (bean counts, a certain number of votes per purchase, etc.) to encourage people to purchase their goods. It should be noted that restaurants and the three town theatres usually sold the most vote coupons in a week.



Figure 5. Presentation of pageant queen Kathleen Powell as “Queen Susannah.” Lane County Historical Museum, #GN7790.

What Strom termed “cultural tourism,”²⁹ was highly emphasized. A July 13, 1926 *Eugene Morning Register* article, “Park Travel is Heavy,” pointed to the rise of tourists to Crater Lake National Park increasing automobile traffic through Eugene’s main streets. Counts of visitors to the city by the number of non-Oregon cars found 416 visiting automobiles registered in Eugene during the month of June 1926. It was

²⁹ “Visitors who are primarily interested in the art and cultural activities of a particular locality [and who] spend money in a variety of ways” Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 29.

expected that visitors, as well as locals, would purchase tickets to the pageant; indeed, that visitors would arrive expressly for the pageant. Tourist advertising gimmicks included auto caravans initiated by the Eugene Advertising Club. In the *Eugene Morning Register* on July 25, 1926, it was announced with fanfare that hats, pennants, posters, stickers and invitations were to be distributed to points along the routes on the coast as well as north and south throughout the Willamette Valley.

To support the influx of additional tourists, special trains were scheduled to run on the new Natron Cutoff on August 20, 1926, the last day of the pageant. The additional trains brought celebrants from Portland and Klamath Falls, Oregon, as well as from Sacramento and San Francisco, California. On July 23, 1926, J. H. Koke, pageant organizer, predicted in the *Eugene Morning Register* that “the running of the special train will increase the attendance here and concentrate interest in the state on Eugene at the time of the pageant of *Klatawa*.” Additional spending by tourists was expected for hotels or room rentals in private homes, food, parking, recreation and gifts.

As a promising creative and economic opportunity, the 1926 *Klatawa* pageant was significant because of the additional economic activities it encouraged in retail, restaurant and recreational business as visitors to the area increased.

Educational Attainment and Cultural Literacy

Strom specified educational attainment and cultural literacy as a must for developing strong communities and economies and for depleting social barrier.³⁰ Asking that “arts education...mesh with history... English...and community based programs...designed to encourage interest in life-long participation in the arts and culture.”³¹ Strom reasoned that “youth benefit from arts...in more ways than learning about aesthetics.”³² *Klatawa*, Trail to Rail was viewed as instructive and valuable in order for youths to comprehend concerns of local history, aesthetics and civics as evidenced in comments from an earlier *Morning Register Guard* article from May 9, 1925. The Dean of Girls at the University of Oregon asserted in a July 14, 1926 article in the *Eugene Morning Register* that as youths participated in performance, behind-the-scenes work or auxiliary activities, the pageants provided a means for older people to guide younger people by letting them “know themselves and know the world” in a safe, controlled

³⁰ Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 13, 42-43.

³¹ Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 43.

³² Elizabeth Strom, *Strengthening Communities Through Culture*. (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, November 2001), 13.

environment. The *Klatawa* pageant was seen by organizers and education leaders in Eugene as a way for young people to become involved in contemporary civic life in Eugene by assisting in telling, performing or otherwise hearing and attending to its stories in a public setting.

Similarly, on New Year's Day 1926, Dr. Peter C. Crockatt, University of Oregon Professor of Economics, recommended in a *Eugene Morning Register* item that all newcomers to Eugene should be given opportunities to develop their leadership potential within the community. In particular, he stressed a need for emphasis to be placed upon "local traditions and history and the natural resources." That is, for newcomers to cultivate not only the land and natural resources, but the people inhabiting and using them. Pageant organizers considered the pageant experience as one way to assist newcomers in understanding local history, aesthetics and civic responsibility. Yoshino, when speaking about the corresponding English historical pageant movement noted that, "the idea of the pageant fostering good patriotism, unity in a community and educating the people about their own history are all framed in the non-commercial terms of a community talking to itself."³³ The pageant was used as way for immigrants to the area to learn about the tales of importance according to prominent pageant organizers and how, as newcomers, they may or may not harmonize within the community given these particular stories and expectations of patriotism, assumed unity, and community conversation.

Legacy

Essayist-poet Wendell Berry has explored ways in which the creating of community has involved a common dependence on a common life and common ground.³⁴ Stan Herd, artist of "Prairiehenge," describes present-day Sedan, Kansas as "a very unique spot for the evolving of an art that is about land and place."³⁵ Bill Kurtis, former anchor for "Morning" on CBS in the 1980s, has financially supported the revitalization of Sedan as an art colony. Kurtis stated that "prairie art strikes...chords of land and heritage."³⁶ Similarly, the *Klatawa*, Trail to Rail Pageant of 1926 created an art linking land, place and heritage to community identity. The pageant represented the coming

³³ Ayako Yoshino, "The Modern Historical Pageant: Commodifying Locality," (panel on Cultures of Exhibition II: Global Circulations for the Modern Language Association Conference, Washington, District of Columbia, December 27 - 30, 2005).

³⁴ Wendell Berry and Norman Wirzba, ed., *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2002).

³⁵ Stephen Kinzer, "Sowing art on the Kansas prairie: Local Boy Returns to Add Color and Commerce to a Fading Town," *New York Times*, January 22, 2004, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

³⁶ Stephen Kinzer, "Sowing art on the Kansas prairie: Local Boy Returns to Add Color and Commerce to a Fading Town," *New York Times*, January 22, 2004, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

together of local residents who identified with one another through comparable cultural heritage and shared geographic location. For MacKaye, these connections would have been built upon "communal self expression" and an "American Spirit" tied to the local landscape and history.³⁷

On January 27, 1953 the *Register-Guard* announced that the Oregon Trail Pageant Association decided not to hold another pageant and, instead, called for "new ideas for an event which can be built around modern skills...an event which will draw together all the people of Lane county as the Pageants did in the past. The spirit need not be lost," the Pageant Association board further noted that, "we are still rich in people and talents."

Eighty-six years after the 1926 pageant, the story of civic participation through cultural events in Eugene and Lane County continues. As the recent *Arts and Economic Prosperity IV* study by Americans for the Arts, a national arts advocacy group, noted:

Arts & Economic Prosperity IV provides compelling new evidence that the nonprofit arts and culture are a significant industry in the City of Eugene - one that generates \$45.6 million in total economic activity. This spending - \$29.5 million by nonprofit arts and culture organizations and an additional \$16.1 million in event-related spending by their audiences - supports 1,739 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$34.8 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$2.4 million in local and state government revenue. This economic impact study sends a strong signal that when we support the arts, we not only enhance our quality of life, but we also invest in the City of Eugene's economic well-being.³⁸

Beyond financial impact, the *Arts and Economic Prosperity IV* study showed that across all communities of similar size studied within the United States, Eugene ranked very high (second) in the number of out-of-town guests who go to an arts event while in the state visiting friends and family and second in the number of people attending an arts event who said they are active art-makers themselves, Eugene was number four in terms of number of hours donated per volunteer and fourth in the percentage of arts-

³⁷ Percy MacKaye, *The Playhouse and The Play and Other Addresses Concerning the Theatre and Democracy in America*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 109 & 114.

³⁸ Americans for the Arts, *Arts and Economic Prosperity in the City of Eugene, OR: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences*. (2012), 7.

event attendees who are 18 to 34 years old, while coming in at seventh for volunteer hours donated to arts groups.³⁹

As Saul Hubbard wrote in *The Register-Guard* on November 9, 2012, “The not-for-profit arts and culture scene in Eugene has a significant impact on the city’s economy, one that is above average when compared with other communities of similar size.” This story finds resonance in much of Eugene’s history and undoubtedly during the opening Oregon Trail Pageant year in 1926 and continuing through additional intermittent pageant event between 1929 and 1950.

A continuous history of creative production, formal organizations, informal associations, financial, business and public support have been reckoned necessary for cultural and economic vitality. Today, Eugene boasts the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, one of few city-operated performing arts center in the country, which was formed from the previous Lane Auditorium Association and other entities interested in public spaces for sharing musical, theatrical and visual arts. Parks throughout Eugene are dedicated to summer band and orchestra concerts, theatre productions for children and adults, arts and nature camps, after-school and other educational programming. In addition, live performances by amateurs and professionals, old and young, thrive at companies such as Lord Leebrick Theatre Company, Actors Cabaret of Eugene, Eugene Ballet, Eugene Opera, Encore Theatre, Eugene Readers Theatre, Upstart Crow Studios and the Very Little Theatre.

Theatrical productions used as instructional tools, as well as aesthetic experiences occur regularly at the University of Oregon, Lane Community College, Rose Children’s Theatre, and area schools. Larger-scale community festivals featuring local, regional, national or international participation exist in events such as the Eugene Celebration, created in 1983 as a way to bring together members of the Eugene community; the Oregon Country Fair (1969), the Oregon Bach Festival (1970) and the Oregon Festival of American Music (begun in 1991) to name just a few examples.

Each of the above represents much about Eugene’s past as found in the 1926 Oregon Trail Pageant, which represented the Eugene Greeting Services’ sketch of “community

³⁹ “AEP4 Findings,” Arts and Business Alliance of Eugene, accessed October 20, 2012, <http://eugeneaep.wordpress.com/findings/>.

values which far outweigh its mere entertainment features.”⁴⁰ While some stories were absent or presented without the complexities of lived or evidential experience, the pageant of 1926 and its ancillary activities stimulated cultural vitality in Eugene.⁴¹ Through artistic theatrical spectacle, contests, parades, specially created town centers and support from local government, businesses and newspapers, the pageant spoke to the everyday stories of life before, during and after the founding of Eugene. It enacted stories of the westward travelers know as “the pioneers” who were seeking homes and land, personal authority and individuation, connections to new places, times, and peoples. It shared stories of the land, beginning with the explosion of Mt. Mazama where Crater Lake now lies, to the logging and farming industries onward. Though the pageant concentrated on stories of pioneer history in the region, it also passed on unfinished stories of the lives of members of the Klamath, Kalapuya, Siletz, Grand Ronde, and other Native Peoples living in the region. It offered stories of pride in one’s community - stories of a place in which many were encouraged to participate in and contribute to the celebration and development of the community. Finally, it offered stories told through an artistic means that enacted MacKaye’s belief in a “consciousness of civic life” through theatrical experience.

Acknowledgements

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Significant thanks to Don Hunter, retired founder and director of the University of Oregon’s Audio-Visual Media Center, for his inspirational multi-slide projector presentation, “Eugene Pageant Years,” presentation in 2001 that started my interest in this project. And a special note of gratitude to Alice Parman and Robert Voelker-Morris for regularly checking with me about “how it’s going?”

⁴⁰ Eugene Greeting Service. “The Pageant City: Eugene, Oregon Welcomes You,” (1949, p. 3). Eugene, Oregon: Ardel Office. (Available from the Lane County Historical Museum, 740 West 13th Avenue, Eugene OR 97402).

⁴¹ “Cultural vitality as evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities.” (See Maria-Rosario Jackson et al., *Cultural Vitality in Communities: Interpretation and Indicators*. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2006), 7.

The Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival: “The Full Spectrum of Natural Fibers” and Festival’s Contemporary Implications for Craft

Rosalynn Rothstein



Figure 1. The 2012 Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival. Photo taken by the author.

Abstract: The Oregon Flock & Fiber Festival is a yearly event in Canby dedicated to the full spectrum of contemporary fiber arts. This extends from creating and dyeing materials, producing garments and the animals the fibers come from. The festival describes their mission as such: “to exhibit and demonstrate the full spectrum of natural fibers (plant and animal) from beginning to end, from the animal or raw fiber to the finished product.” The popularity of knitting and other fiber arts has extended to an interest in the process and animals that create the yarn and materials. I will look at the festival from a folkloristically based perspective and provide my own emic analysis of the festival since I am a knitter who already has an interest in this festival and fiber arts in general. I will conduct research on the significance of festivals and gatherings in communities centered on specific crafts and draw on research from other folklorists on these topics. I will also conduct an ethnographic analysis of the event, by being a participant observer. This will help draw larger conclusions about the role of fiber and fiber arts in the larger mid-Willamette valley geographic area and the significance of this event for participants.

The Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival is an annual event in Canby, Oregon dedicated to the “full spectrum of natural fibers.” This includes creating and dyeing raw materials, producing garments and showing the animals from which most of the natural fibers are created. Attendees can take workshops such as “Combing and Carding for Spinning Success,” visit livestock barns to view goats, alpacas, rabbits and sheep, participate in a spinners’ circle, purchase yarn and eat lamb. The festival describes its mission as such: “to exhibit and demonstrate the full spectrum of natural fibers (plant and animal) from beginning to end, from the animal or raw fiber to the finished product.”¹

The popularity of knitting and other fiber arts and crafts has extended to an interest in the process of creating fibers and the animals the fibers come from for many crafters. As a knitter and someone interested in DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, this is what initially drew me to this festival. As an urban resident who has been knitting for six years, I was thinking about being more active in creating my own yarns and wanted to visit the festival. Ultimately, I believe this exhibition of the “full spectrum” of fibers is what draws the festival’s numerous attendees. During my fieldwork at the festival, many participants commented on this, expressing interest in exploring fiber arts and crafts they were not currently practicing, and viewing the fiber-producing animals. Several other participants I talked to expressed similar goals and concerns to the ones I had. However, I also recognize the variety of experiences and perspectives present at the festival.

This article draws conclusions about the role of online participation in this specific festival and in general, in order to be applicable to other types of festivals, and seeks to further the discussion of all practices related to fiber arts and crafts in the field of folklore. Analysis of contemporary fiber arts and crafts practices is active in other fields, and I incorporate some folkloric perspectives on these forms of expression. Although there has been some recent research on knitting in the field of folklore, to my knowledge, there are no contemporary articles. Recent presentations at the 2012 convening of the American Folklore Society included two presentations on the knitting and crocheting website “Ravelry.com” – <http://www.ravelry.com>. But there are many more elements of contemporary fiber arts and crafts, which are relevant for exploration and reincorporation into folklore studies. Here, I examine the festival from a folkloristic perspective and incorporate research by folklorists on festival and material culture. By examining the history of the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival we can see

¹ Flock and Fiber Festival Official Website (<http://www.flockandfiberfestival.com>). Accessed November 16, 2012.

the role of festival in cultivating fibers arts and crafts communities, historically and into the present.

I visited the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival on Saturday, September 22. The history and current thoughts on the festival are largely drawn from an interview conducted with several women involved in running the festival. Their input is instrumental in understanding the festival's current role in the contemporary fiber arts and crafts community, along with the significance of this event for participants and organizers.

I conducted the interview at the Wilsonville McMenamins Old Church and Pub on November 16, 2012. The interview took place before an Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival board meeting, and several individuals began to arrive for this meeting as the interview concluded. Present at the start of the interview were Sue Gee, Kristi Gustafson, Jan Hinkamp and Naomi Royle. Brandy Chastain, one of the founders of the festival, arrived later in the interview. Quotes used in this section of the article, as well as later, are taken from a transcribed recording. The use of some portions of the interview was hampered by a loud restaurant atmosphere with animated conversations occurring at neighboring tables.



Figure 2. Pygora Goat, winner of the Diamond Award for Supreme Grand Champion Doe, OFFF 2008. Image from <http://www.thepinesfarm.com>.

OFFF, a commonly used acronym for Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival, began in 1997. It was founded because the original five women involved in the festival wanted an opportunity to show their Pygora goats, a cross breed of goat which originated in Oregon. Brandy Chastain, the festival director and one of the founders, discussed the founding of the festival with me during this interview. "There were five of us, all women, all Pygora goat breeders. We were just unhappy with not being able to show them, so that was really all that started it off. I had just bought some, so I was disappointed not to have a place to show them since I was new to the whole animal thing. I was a city girl starting out. One of us was willing to say 'yes, I will do the fiber part' and a couple others had more experience with animals and they did the livestock."²

Fluidity of expression was instrumental to the founding of the festival. Kristi Gustafson, the fiber exhibits co-chair, reiterated a similar discussion of how the festival was founded. She also noted these animals were not included in other festivals like Black Sheep Gathering in Eugene. Chastain answered my question inquiring as to how the festival has changed since its founding: "The first year we decided to just be bold . . . so we printed a catalogue not that different from what we have now. The first one was self-published completely."³

She mentioned the founders got a mailing list from Woodland Woolworks, with recipients in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada and Northern California. Other fairgrounds in Oregon were not receptive to the festival, but the Clackamas County Event Center in Canby was interested and gave the festival founders a date. There are vendors and participants who have been with the festival since 1997 and are still attending. From a 500-600 person turnout the first year, attendance has grown each year the festival has taken place. Today, thousands of people visit the festival, many returning every year.

The first year the festival was a livestock and fiber show with vendors and no classes or workshops - these were added later. Chastain also responded to my question about how online forums have impacted the festival. "When people started talking about us on Ravelry.com, attendance exploded. It took two years, it [attendance] doubled. We were not really prepared."⁴

² Personal Interview between Brandy Chastain and Author, November 16, 2012.

³ Personal Interview between Brandy Chastain and Author, November 16, 2012.

⁴ Personal Interview between Brandy Chastain and Author, November 16, 2012.

Ravelry.com is a free website that structures itself for knitters and crocheters. Users can post on forums, buy patterns, post images of their finished projects and participate in a number of other features. Three years ago, Chastain and the other women first noticed the increased attendance because of exposure on this site. This was my first year attending the festival, and also Naomi Royle's, who was present at the interview and is becoming a fiber exhibits co-chair this year.

This description of the founding, and continued success and growth of the festival leads to two conclusions. First, a supportive fiber and livestock community that relied on sharing the means of communication at the time - mailing lists - resulted in a successful initial expression of the festival. Second, the continuation of these communicative networks into online forums - specifically Ravelry.com - have contributed to increased attendance and interest in the festival from participants outside of the regional area and from different segments of the fiber arts community. With an understanding of the history of OFFF, and using research conducted by folklorists and anthropologists, I will briefly examine the process of object making and the significance of fiber arts and crafts through the lens of folk art.

When discussing the aesthetic forms of folk art, Michael Owen Jones states, "the maker and others respond to the form aesthetically by perceiving it, being affected by it, making judgments concerning it, and recognizing it as transforming the ordinary into something extraordinary."⁵ He also concludes makers are motivated by a quality of specialness in the process of art making and the form created, "intend to construct another level from quotidian practical life by shaping or embellishing everyday reality, transforming the ordinary into something extraordinary."⁶ We can assume this transformation of ordinary into extraordinary applies to both the product and the process of creation. Jones goes on to stress, in his article *Why Make (Folk) Art?*, that folklorists should ask not only historical and cultural questions about art making, but also behavioral ones, in order to understand the motivations of the makers of artwork.

In another article, Jones notes that many folklorists had focused on the group practices and collective practice of tradition. Jones instead examines tradition as "symbolic construction in the activities and lifestyle of an individual who intentionally selects elements of what he or she conceives to be a tradition in order to fashion an identity

⁵ Jones, Michael Owen. "The 1995 Archer Taylor Memorial Lecture: Why Make (Folk) Art?" in *Western Folklore* 54 (1995: 253-276), 260.

⁶ Jones, Michael Owen. "The 1995 Archer Taylor Memorial Lecture: Why Make (Folk) Art?" in *Western Folklore* 54 (1995: 253-276), 260.

articulated through various media."⁷ Individuals choose specific elements of tradition when they continue their practice of a certain craft of folk art. This allows tradition to be dynamic and change as individuals continue certain practices and incorporate new elements. Jones's analysis of folk art is prominent within the field of folklore and has been influential in the study of material culture.

This brief presentation of his work allows us to apply his analysis to craft and, consequently, the practice of many of the fiber arts exhibited at the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival. Jones's analysis demonstrates to us that a folk artist - and I contend that crafters and fiber artists fall under this rubric - are involved in manipulating the spectrum of a tradition in order to express aesthetic concerns in objects and transform these objects into a meaningful touchstone of expression in their own practice.⁸ I think the application of Jones's work to fiber artists and crafts is relevant, but there are also larger questions about how the process of making fiber arts and crafts is categorized.

The scope of Jones' article pays only brief attention to the distinction and dialogue around the questions of "craft" vs. "art" vs. "folk art." Margaret Mackenzie, a writer in residence at Haystack Mountain School of Craft, an anthropologist, and who worked in the humanities department at the California College of Arts and Crafts, states concerning the imbalance between craft and art, "the discrimination appeared worse for craft media customarily thought to be the province of women. Nor was it long before I heard the bittersweet joke that if a man made an object it was 'soft sculpture,' whereas if a woman made the same thing, it was 'textile.'"⁹ She continues, later in the same article, "craft did not need to find worth and significance in claiming to be art when it was said to transcend whatever might be counted as its lesser characteristics. Certainly it did not need to transcend its characteristic of being grounded in function. This concept of the function of language as constructing the limits of our categories of thinking, or possibilities of meaning, may seem to be abstruse theorizing far removed from the realm of function in craft."¹⁰ The discussion about craft she was engaged in at Haystack appeared to center on whether categorization structured reality. The treatment

⁷ Jones, Michael Owen. "'Tradition' in Identity Discourses and an Individual's Symbolic Construction of Self" in *Western Folklore* 59 (2000: 115-141), 120.

⁸ For an in depth analysis, from a folkloristically-based perspective, of a specific individual's relationship to their craft, see Geraldine Niva Johnson's "It's a Sin to Waste a Rag: Rug-Weaving in Western Maryland" in the collection *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*.

⁹ Mackenzie, Margaret. "Words and Worth: An Anthropologist Interprets Function and Craft" in *The Haystack Reader: Collected Essays on Craft, 1991-2009*. Orono: The University of Maine Press (2010: 89-100), 91.

¹⁰ Mackenzie, Margaret. "Words and Worth: An Anthropologist Interprets Function and Craft" in *The Haystack Reader: Collected Essays on Craft, 1991-2009*. Orono: The University of Maine Press (2010: 89-100), 98.

of craft's relationship to art is clearly too broad of a topic to approach in this short essay. However, we might use this brief discussion to keep the place of craft, as a specific categorization, in the production of material culture in mind. Furthermore, we should consider the marginalized role of women's crafting skills throughout history, including the narrative about crafts reclamation in its contemporary articulations.¹¹ What then is the role of a fiber festival, like Oregon Flock and Fiber, in defining and structuring the process of object making for participants?



Figure 3. Rabbit fur being gathered and spun into thread at the OFFF 2012. Photo taken by the author.

The OFFF is a forum to examine contemporary articulations of tradition in the context of fiber arts. There are intersections in fiber arts between traditional methods and the forces of a hobby market driven by and influenced by capitalist markets. Interviewee Kristi Gustafson explained how the fiber arts competition was judged at the start of the

¹¹ *The Haystack Reader*, a collection of essays, was especially helpful in constructing my consideration of craft in this article. This collection contains many pertinent essays on the role of craft, from its importance in relationship to digital technologies to the role of materials in the production of craft. As I stated in the body of the essay, I will not be doing a larger treatment of the relationship between craft and art, but this collection would be a place for those interested to begin their analysis.

Flock and Fiber Festival. Each piece was judged based on the type of object. Therefore all scarves were judged together, whether they were knitted, crocheted, woven or otherwise. She then explained that not all judges would have the skills needed to assess items made from a variety of techniques, "so I split it up. I also changed it, I don't know if it was required to have handspun [at the beginning of the festival] I think they may have but I said lets do away with that. Black Sheep¹² does that but I think that is too limiting. I want to pull in more knitters and get them involved, although I don't think many of them know that."¹³ Another interviewee, Sue Gee, asks Gustafson "It has to be out of a natural fiber doesn't it?"¹⁴ Gustafson then told the group an item must be eighty-five percent natural fibers. In this way, the goals of the festival are represented in the judging of crafted items. Currently objects are judged based on the method of production used to create them. Individual objects are significant but dialogue between different methods of production of objects, knitting vs. weaving, is also meaningful.

I asked how the interviewees feel about the festival displaying the entire spectrum of natural fibers, which is what drew me to the festival. This was a goal of the festival. Jan Hinkamp referred to the spectrum of the festival as "cross pollinating,"¹⁵ which is a useful designation when considering how attendees interact with the festival. Gustafson noted the festival started with spinners and producers, and Jan Hinkamp noted, "it was like bringing the producer and the user [interjection from other interviewee: "connection!"] together, shortening the distance between the producer and the user of the product they were producing."¹⁶ The connections created by the festival are tangible such as knitters obtaining handspun yarn, but there are also connections crafters and producers are making which are intangible. Everyone involved with the festival is being exposed to other modes of production. Looking at material objects can be significant, but as the interviewees pointed out, the connections created at OFFF are often intangible connections attendees can make when they view the spectrum of natural fiber production present at the festival even if it does not directly impact what they do. Notably, all the women present at the interview were engaged in more than one craft process including spinning, felting, knitting, crocheting, weaving and others. To understand the dialogue between participants at OFFF, I will turn to some research done by folklorists on quilting to considering how people "do" craft.

¹² Black Sheep Gathering in Eugene, Oregon.

¹³ Personal Interview between Kristi Gustafson and Author, November 16, 2012.

¹⁴ Personal Interview between Sue Gee and Author, November 16, 2012.

¹⁵ Personal Interview between Jan Hinkamp and Author, November 16, 2012.

¹⁶ Personal Interview between Jan Hinkamp and Author, November 16, 2012.

There has been significant research by folklorists on the process of quilting and to enhance work done on the material object of the quilt. Linda Pershing writes about The Ribbon, a project started by Justine Merritt in 1982. The project circled the Pentagon on August 4th, 1985 with a ribbon of decorated fabric. Different individuals, mostly women, created fabric panels to make up The Ribbon to protest the nuclear arms race. Pershing writes, “panel makers valued the “doing,” the process of participation in The Ribbon and the opportunities for social commentary that participation provided for each individual. It wasn't just that the project worked, the Pentagon was encircled, or that the garment was repaired, with an emphasis solely on the results. What was important was *how* it was done, the careful reweaving of the damage, and the lives that we changed as a result.”¹⁷ The project was successful, since the Pentagon was encircled, but participants drew their satisfaction from the project by making their segments of the piece and performing the act of sewing with others. The process was as significant as the product.



Figure 4. Women from the Ribbon International Project visit Ground Zero on the 9-11 anniversary in 2010. Photo from <http://www.jarvishouse.blogspot.com>.

¹⁷ Pershing, Linda. “Peace Work out of Piecework: Feminist Needlework Metaphors and The Ribbon Around the Pentagon” in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, edited by Susan Tower Hollis and Linda Pershing. Urbana: University of Illinois Press (1993: 327-357), 349.

Another folklorist, Joyce Ice, writes about her fieldwork with the Lytton Springs Quilting Club in central Texas, a group of women who work on quilt tops together. Ice states, “It is clear that women value the process as well as the products of quilt-making. When they discuss a quilt as a finished product, they often are talking about the process as much as the product. Their preference for handmade quilts over machine-made quilts, for example, involves not only aesthetic processes but also social processes that take time to unfold.”¹⁸ In both of these examples we see the process of crafting, specifically sewing, is instrumental in shaping the value participants get out of projects.

In the case of a festival, the *doing* of craft might be relegated to a home or a smaller guild of fiber artists for certain participants. My own knitting relates, as I was drawn to the craft because I work the night shift and sometimes need to occupy myself at 3 o'clock in the morning. Other crafters, such as spinners, and knitters who are active in knitting groups might be more accustomed to practicing their crafts in public settings. While there are spinners spinning and knitters knitting at the festival, all aspects of participation are *doing* craft. A knitter visiting alpacas at the barn to understand where the fiber he uses comes from is *doing* craft. A livestock breeder who purchases yarn from a spinner, who sells their products on Etsy.com throughout the year is *doing* craft. They extend their practice of raising livestock, which facilitates knitters and spinners in practicing their craft, beyond raising livestock and into other realms of the “full spectrum of natural fibers.” This spectrum of representation available to attendees means that *doing* craft extends outside the practice of making a single object.

OFFF extends the discourse attendees have with their specific niche of practice in the “spectrum of natural fibers” to other aspects of the continuum of fiber arts and crafts practice with which an attendee might not typically engage. This might include a knitter who sometimes spins viewing the animals the fibers are made from or a spinner who doesn't dye fibers attending a class on natural dying. The *doing* of the craft process becomes significant at the festival beyond the material culture created by crafting processes. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett presents an analysis of indigenous festivals: “In contrast with conventional exhibitions in museums, which tend to reduce the sensory complexity of the events they represent and to offer them up for visual delectation alone, indigenous modes of display, particularly the festival, present an important alternative. As multi-sensory, multi-focus events, festivals may extend over

¹⁸ Ice, Joyce. “Women's Aesthetics and the Quilting Process” in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, edited by Susan Tower Hollis & Linda Pershing. Urbana: University of Illinois Press (1993: 166-177), 174.

days, weeks, or months. They require selective disattention, or highly disciplined attention, in an environment of sensory riot.”¹⁹

Although contemporary articulations of festival are arguably different than indigenous festivals, as folklorists have argued through criticizing commercial elements in contemporary festivals, there is still significance we can draw from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s statement. Festivals are “multisensory, multifocus events” and require visitors to suspend their usual attention spans in order to engage the event. It is arguably difficult to find a festival not influenced by some commercial elements in Western society, even if it only incorporates commercially made goods. Consequently, we see festivals like Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival as a method for attendees to suspend their usual focus and incorporate other perspectives.

Another folklorist, Beverly Stoeltje, describes the complexity of a festival setting: “Festival involves us in a shift from the communicative forms of routine, modern life to the multiple communications of celebration, based on principles of repetition and simultaneity... like communication, the temporal reality of festival has multiple dimensions.”²⁰ Furthermore, “a second dimension of temporal reality focuses on the dialectical process of tradition and change. Substance in festival derives from traditions based on common identity; thus festival emphasizes the past. Yet festival occurs in and for the present; thus social change emerges.”²¹ Stoeltje’s last argument relies on communities “with a common identity.” I would not argue this is the case at OFFF, but there are many attendees with common interests. I would however argue the dialectical process between tradition and change is still occurring at festivals even when the participants do not have a common identity. This dialectical process is where new ideas are incorporated and traditional elements are continued year by year, or discarded. At this particular festival tradition is managed through a discourse about the “full spectrum of fiber arts” which now includes online articulations of the festival as well.

It was noted earlier in the article that Ravelry.com had a significant impact on attendance at the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival. There are also other personal websites, blogs and posts on social media that have content related to this specific festival. Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival has its own Facebook page. A recent

¹⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1998), 58.

²⁰ Stoeltje, Beverly. “Festival in America” in *Handbook of American Folklore*, edited by Richard Dorson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1983: 239-246), 240.

²¹ Stoeltje, Beverly. “Festival in America” in *Handbook of American Folklore*, edited by Richard Dorson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1983: 239-246), 240.

Facebook post asks visitors to the page “Are you working on any fiber related projects for holiday gifts? What are you making? Did you purchase the fiber, yarn, pattern, etc. at OFFF? We would love to hear about it.”²² Several users responded by detailing the projects they were working on, these included a sweater and spun hair for a doll. Sue Gee, who maintains the OFFF Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Oregon-Flock-and-Fiber-Festival/198066350228459>) shared her motivation behind this recent post, “Towards the festival it is a lot more active and I am posting a lot more. But I am trying to keep in there at least monthly to try and get some interest going and find out what people are doing. It has been fun, people want to show off their stuff.”²³

The festival organizers search for connections with attendees throughout the year and want to maintain a connection with the experience. Notably the conversation in the interview then turns to the lack of response to a recent post asking for recommendations for teachers. The consensus, and explanation within the group, seems to indicate attendees have turned their attention to “Madrona”²⁴ and Judith MacKenzie’s loss of her entire studio in a fire.²⁵ Therefore users are active right before or after the festival, but during the rest of the year they are engaged in other elements of the fiber arts community’s online presence, though some participants extend their relationship with OFFF throughout the year through internet resources. The community of attendees, however, also has interests in other fiber arts and crafts events and news.

Personal webpage authors also use the internet and specific forums to interact with OFFF. One personal webpage, *Fickle Knitter Design* (<http://www.fickleknitter.com/>), is the webpage of Michelle, who writes knitting patterns with a focus on projects that use a single skein of luxury yarn. She included posts from 2012 announcing she would be attending the festival to sign books and a post from 2010 where she discussed preparing for her festival booth. The post read, “I’ve been dyeing, spinning, skeining and knitting till the wheels fall off.”²⁶ User posts in the comments section of the page show that they were excited to see this designer at the festival. OFFF is a commercial venue for designers and producers, but these designers and producers also have interactions with other attendees on their websites and through social media. Other users, such as Maria and Dr. Joe, post their interactions with OFFF by positing videos

²² Official Oregon Flock and Fiber Facebook page, Accessed November 15, 2012.

²³ Personal Interview between Sue Gee and Author, November 19, 2012.

²⁴ Madrona Fiber Arts Winter Retreat.

²⁵ There are several voices talking at the same time and due to the loud volume in the restaurant I can’t distinguish which interviewee’s voice makes which comment. There seems to be several markers of tone and non-verbal expression which consent to consensus on this assessment.

²⁶ Fickle Knitter Design. Accessed November 15, 2012.

of their experiences on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/>). These forms of expression chronicle visitors' interactions with certain elements of the festival and include their perspectives on the festival's events for anyone who watches the video.²⁷ A particular YouTube post contains montages of still photography shots and video. It also includes footage from the Northwest Quilting Expo. Noticeably, this user does not distinguish between the crafts they are interested in within this posting. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMcqjScpQnU> for this post.

These are just some examples of how visitors to the OFFF interact with the festival before they arrive, immediately after and throughout the year. As the women I interviewed indicated, Ravelry.com had a significant impact on the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival. Its postings increased the number of people attending the festival in general and especially from urban locations. It also serves as another mode of "doing" craft, since user interactions with Ravelry.com, official Oregon Flock and Fiber webpages, social media sites and their personal webpages allows them to articulate part of their process of interaction with the festival.

The OFFF serves individuals with numerous interests. There are a number of different aspects of the festival to explore and hopefully my inclusion of folkloristic analysis has led the reader to conclude the experience of a festival is based on individual interpretation. The spectrum of representation available to attendees means that *doing* craft extends outside of an individual's usual practice and ensures that each attendee will have a unique interaction with the festival. Therefore there can be a number of interpretations of the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival which are conflicting. The online expression of and about the festival reiterates this, since users might incorporate their posts about OFFF with visits to other festivals. By combining experiences, this festival and festivals in general allow visitors to interact with tradition and develop new trajectories.

What motivates those attending the festival? Naomi Royle discusses her first visit to the festival three years ago and how her initial interest in finding alpaca yarns to make socks lead her to the festival. "Then I went to Oregon Flock and Fiber and there was a plying class. It was intro, but not really intro, you were supposed to have some kind of idea... and she [the instructor] made it so simple and easy it saved my life."²⁸ Learning a new technique from a skilled instructor can be one benefit to a visitor of the festival.

²⁷ YouTube post "Oregon Flock & Fiber Festival*Northwest Quilting Expo," by electricdrjoe. Accessed November 15, 2012.

²⁸ Personal Interview between Naomi Royle and Author, November 16, 2012.

Brandy Chastain also presented a perspective on her continued interaction with OFFF. "Underlying all of it is the idea that if it isn't fun for us to do it then don't do it. I have always felt that way, 'cause everyone is doing it for their own pleasure."²⁹

Significantly, both a relative newcomer and one of the founders of the event gained pleasure from their experiences there. Festivals are fun but they also serve a purpose for attendees. At the Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival, they witness a dialogue between all the different aspects of natural fiber production and extend their practice of *doing* craft into a realm that incorporates these perspectives. As with any writing about festivals, however, my analysis only presents one aspect of the experience. There is a variety of experience to be had, limited only by the numbers of participants and I have tried to be transparent about my perspective on this festival, which is strongly motivated by my position as a folklorist and a knitter.

²⁹ Personal Interview between Brandy Chastain and Author, November 16, 2012.

Celebrating our River Heritage

Jennifer Huang



Figure 1: The upper Willamette River in Eugene, Oregon, April 10, 2010. Source/author: Jsayre64.

Abstract: Community celebrations are ritual expressions of regional identities. Not only do they provide a sense of collective citizenship, but they also serve to reconnect us with our life-place. As stated by Robert Thayer in his work *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), a life place is “a unique region definable by natural boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and nonhuman living communities.” Through active participation in community celebrations, citizens can relearn how to live in place by interacting with the unique living and non-living systems of a particular region. In doing so, a new bioregional identity will be born, one that has the power to supersede ethnic, political and socioeconomic barriers and induce a deep affinity with place.

Introduction

Throughout our history, community celebrations based on a shared faith or past, have served to reinforce cultural identities. From the county fair, to music festivals, to the annual pie-eating contest, we look forward to these events, big or small, as a reminder of our place in a larger social cycle. As stated by Winbush Riley, “Humankind created rituals or minidramas that engraved order and acceptance of the circular cycle in the minds of the participants. Such rites are common in every society and establish and maintain cultural identity.”¹ Cycles of anticipation and remembering are significant human rituals and provide meaning and coherence to our daily lives.

How do we choose the things we celebrate? The genesis of many deep-seated traditions is owed to an acknowledgement of an intrinsic connection between man and nature. Early forms of pagan festivals were related to the natural cycles of seasons and remind us of the ecological truths that govern all living things. Richard Heinberg indicates, “The old seasonal festivals deepened people’s sense of connection with land and sky. The sun, moon, stars, trees, crops and animals were all included in the celebration. Each person felt a heightened connection with the Source of all life. In short, the festival was the community’s way of renewing itself and its bonds with nature.”² Like any healthy relationship, there is an open communication between people and their natural surroundings. Be it through a walk in the first rainy week of fall or a summer hike to Spencer Butte, we show an understanding and love of place.

These small actions are cultural expressions of our natural environments, or put in other words, reflections of our unique bioregions. A bioregion is quite simply a geographical area characterized by distinct ecological boundaries. Living *within* a bioregion goes beyond jurisdictional, county, and state borders and implies a deeper affinity and connection with place. As stated by bioregionalist Peter Berg, “A bioregion is defined by the unique natural characteristics that occur throughout a particular geographic area, such as climate, landforms, watersheds, soils, native plants and animals, and other features.”³ Connecting community celebrations with bioregions allows us to identify with each other across racial, political and socioeconomic boundaries. In essence, it instills an approach to living within a place through “a deep understanding of, respect

¹ D. Winbush Riley. *The Complete Kwanzaa: Celebrating Our Cultural Harvest* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 2.

² Richard Heinberg. *Celebrate the Solstice: Honoring the Earth's Seasonal Rhythms through Festival and Ceremony* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1993), 6.

³ Peter Berg. *Envisioning Sustainability* (San Francisco: Subculture, 2009), 189.

for, and ultimately, care of a naturally bounded region or territory.”⁴ Bioregions are predominantly defined by watersheds, or the area drained by a river system or body of water. The formation of watersheds often prefigures concentrated biotic and abiotic growth, conditioning the normative characteristics of the surrounding environment. Much of the Willamette River Basin was formed over 35 million years ago with movement of oceanic plates and subsequent volcanic activity, creating a coastal mountain range and an inland sea which eventually drained and became the present valley floor.

In Lane County residents love to hike, fish, kayak and occasionally enjoy a glass of Willamette Valley’s finest. It comes as no surprise then that our bioregion is characterized by its dynamic system of waterways, fertile soils, and abundant rainfall. Early Oregon settlers, weary from the western migration, referred to the valley as the Eden at the end of the trail. As noted by William Robbins, “Those who came later to the Oregon Country, most of them heading for the green valley of the Willamette, were ecstatic about the mild climate, long growing season, and fertile soil – the Eden-like qualities that by the 1840s made Oregon, in the words of historian James Ronda, the fabled land of promise.”⁵ The importance of our watershed has been in our bioregional history before the first Euro-Americans settled in the valley. The river was of central importance, and the Willamette Valley’s first people, the Kalapuya, had many original names for the river. Harold Mackey uses information from the journals of Lewis and Clark to show the evolution of the name *Walama* to the modern-day Willamette.⁶ It is thought that prior to contact with French-Canadian traders, many of the Kalapuya bands referred to the river as *Walama*,⁷ which is thought to mean “to spill or pour water.”⁸

What then do we choose to celebrate in the Willamette Valley? We celebrate water. The Willamette Valley has a history of celebrations that take place on the river, ranging from canoe fetes to white water parades. These celebrations mark important moments in our history and show how our watershed has influenced our culture and shaped our unique bioregional community.

⁴ Robert L. Thayer. *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 5.

⁵ William G. Robbins. “Willamette Eden: The Ambiguous Legacy,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 2nd ser. 99 (1989), 189-219.

⁶ Harold Mackey. *The Kalapuyans: A Sourcebook on the Indians of the Willamette Valley* (Salem, Oregon: Mission Mill Museum Association, 2004).

⁷ Mackey. *The Kalapuyans*, 19.

⁸ Mackey. *The Kalapuyans*, 18.

The Canoe Fete

Much of Eugene’s success in its early development is owed to the millrace, stretching two miles between the Willamette River and Franklin Boulevard. Before the days of electricity, active waterways were important to the development of industrialized societies, providing power, transportation, irrigation and waste disposal. As a result of this, towns would prosper and develop along canalized water systems. The millrace was completed in 1851 by Hillyard Shaw who leveraged the water’s potential to power to a sawmill. During the years 1877 to 1898, the millrace attained its height as the industrial heart of Eugene. In an article published by the *Register Guard*, Bob Tweedell states, “New industries were located by the race, such as Eugene Electric Light Company and the Eugene Canning and Packing Company, forerunner of the Eugene Fruit Growers Association.”⁹

The first celebration that marked the importance of the millrace was the 1915 canoe fete organized by the University of Oregon’s junior class as a part of the Junior Weekend festivities. Envisioned as an elaborately decorated canoe contest on the water, the millrace had entered a new phase in its cultural significance from strictly providing power and energy to industries to becoming recognized as a community centerpiece. From the beginning, the celebration was a success and gave birth to a new tradition that grew increasingly spectacular with each following year. University of Oregon undergraduate Penny Nichols writes, “Rowdy millracing, lazy canoe trips, the picturesque water fete, the soph-frosh tug-of-war – the millrace is indeed high in the Oregon tradition.”¹⁰ Another student remarks, “Hardly a student at the University of Oregon today remembers the water carnivals as the high point of Junior Weekend, but in the 1930s ‘Canoe Fete’ and ‘Junior Weekend’ were the same thing.”

The millrace was once part of the Willamette River and at the time of its canalization it existed in the form of riverbed scars that had been abandoned when the water changed its course. It is tied to our watershed and has become part of the Willamette Valley’s bioregion. As Peter Berg states, “Watersheds designate local natural communities and provide an organization for bioregional life through enlarging tiers of spring-creek-river networks; they can serve as a basis for organizing relationships between human communities in a bioregion as well.”¹¹

⁹ Bob Tweedell. “Millrace History,” *Register-Guard* (1949).

¹⁰ Penny Nichols. “Down by the Old Millrace,” *Old Oregon* (1942) 3.

¹¹ Peter Berg. *Envisioning Sustainability*, 202.

Today the fate of the millrace stands as a testament to the relationship between living and non-living systems. The traditional canoe fete met its first signs of trouble when a series of floods in the early 1940s destroyed the intake channel and the diversion dam, and left the millrace dry. Mary Allen, in her publication on the history of the millrace states, “Where once its meandering course provided canoeing, dunkings, picnics, bonfires, and the traditional Oregon Canoe Fete, today’s millrace is a sluggish, unhealthy and unsafe eyesore for both the city and the University community.”¹² Attempts at resurrecting the millrace to its prior glory have been suggested in the past and in 1955 the canoe fete was revived for the first time, 14 years since the war. However, a number of human disruptions, a removal of industries, haphazard highway construction, and conflicts overseas, diverted funding and interest away from the millrace.



Figure 2. Several floats float down the Eugene Millrace as part of the 1965 Canoe Fete at University of Oregon at sunset. Lane County Historical Museum, #DH6237.

At its height, the waters of the millrace provided the City of Eugene and the University of Oregon student body with a community celebration unique to this area. For one day every year, the community would gather along its banks and to celebrate the millrace as an important component of our life-place.

¹² Mary A. Allen. “Millrace Unfinished Story,” *Old Oregon* (1956), 4.

Fern Ridge Thistle Regatta

Before dams and flood control measures were introduced in the twentieth century, the Willamette Valley was characterized by massive seasonal flooding understood to be commonplace fixtures and a natural part of daily life. In an interview conducted by Maude Conner, one Lane County resident recalled, “Eugene was used to winter and spring floods. The Amazon Creek ran undiked through the town and flooded yearly. Frequently the waters stopped traffic at Thirteenth and Willamette Street. River Road was the highway going north to Portland, and at least once a year it was flooded. Also, heavy rains would cause the Willamette River to wash over the highway at Judkins Point, stopping traffic to the east. Flood control dams have changed all these problems.”¹³



Figure 3. The 1965 “Thistle Regatta” on Fern Ridge Reservoir, west of Eugene. Dick Brust of Salem, Oregon and 2 crewmembers have their weight to port side as they shift sails on the “Windrush.” Lane County Historical Museum, #GN6366.

¹³ Maude Conner. “Season of Harvest: Recollections of Lane County,” *PLNA Quarterly* (1977), 220.

In 1940 the Fern Ridge Reservoir was completed by the US Army Corps of Engineers and was the first dam of the “Willamette Valley Project” to be completed.¹⁴ Created by the damming of Long Tom River, the Fern Ridge Reservoir was an attempt at water resource development to serve multiple functions including flood control, irrigation, navigation, hydropower, and steam purification. Aside from providing flood mitigation, it also sustains important breeding habitat for multiple bird species that live in the surrounding marshlands. Currently the Fern Ridge Reservoir is a 12,000 acre artificial lake that is drained during the winter seasons to prevent flooding and then refilled each subsequent spring. Marking this natural cycle of water is the Fern Ridge Thistle Regatta held annually by the Eugene Yacht Club. The celebration is a competitive race of thistle boats that takes advantage of western prevailing winds along the five-mile reservoir. The first regatta was held in 1945 and it takes place annually around Memorial Day.

Floodwaters used to be the source of social and economic damage and flood control technologies were seen at the time as blessings. Some of the immediate benefits of the Willamette Valley Project were flood prevention, irrigation, and the newly created recreational uses. Technology is often criticized for removing mankind from nature, creating a comfortable buffer that protects us from natural disasters such as flooding; however, to counteract this disassociation, community celebrations such as the Fern Ridge Thistle Regatta serve to keep us in touch with our roots and remind us of the ecological cycles unique to our bioregions.

The White Water Parade

Community celebrations not only commemorate moments in history when ecological environments are altered, they are also used to celebrate natural features of our existing waterways. The McKenzie River is a tributary of the Willamette River and is the source of Eugene’s drinking water. The 90-mile-long stretch of rushing water, moss covered banks and towering trees, has captured the attention of the region’s inhabitants for more than a century. Its source is in Clear Lake, near the Santiam Pass in the Willamette National Forest. From there it winds its way down the valley, “narrowing here, widening there, slowing, then quickening its pace” in the white water to converge with the Willamette River near Harrisburg.¹⁵ The White Water Parade began as a casual expression of our affinity for the river’s natural beauty and soon became a unique cultural tradition of the bioregion.

¹⁴ Nora Hagerty. “Fern Ridge, Then and Now,” *The Artifact* 181 (September 2006), 1.

¹⁵ Leroy B. Inman. *Beautiful McKenzie: A History of Central Lane County* (Roseburg, OR: South Fork, 1996).

The first White Water Parade was held in April 1938 on the rushing water of the McKenzie River. Organized by Prince Helfrich and twenty other river guides, the seasonal ritual became an annual tradition for almost 30 years. It began by the guides and their wives floating down from Belknap Springs for a preview of the river before the opening day of fishing season. What started as an unofficial event soon brought crowds of sports enthusiasts to the area to join the community celebration of braving the rapids in the 20-mile stretch from Blue River and Leaburg Lake. By 1962, more than 300 boaters were part of the parade. Invited guests included state dignitaries, radio and TV personalities, magazine and newspaper writers, and other publicity agents.¹⁶ The event was described in 1964 as the “turbulent tossup is the 26th annual running of the ‘White Water Parade,’ a bouncing, daredevil trip down Oregon’s McKenzie River.”¹⁷ Although the Parade ended abruptly in 1970 with the accidental drowning of two men, the early success shows how informal acts of recreation can evolve into large-scale community celebrations.

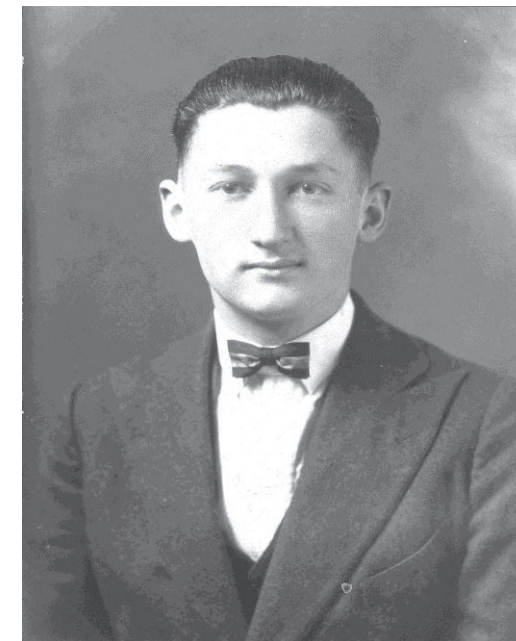


Figure 4. Prince Helfrich, McKenzie River guide for many years. He was born October 19, 1907 and died June 23, 1971. Lane County Historical Museum, # GN8733.

¹⁶ “Nimrod to Blue River.” *Nimrod to Blue River*, <http://mckenzieriverreflectionsnewspaper.com/book/export/html/20> (accessed June 11, 2012).

¹⁷ “Oregon McKenzie River Historical Information.” *Oregon McKenzie River Historical Information*, <http://www.christmas-treasures.com/AboutUs/McKenzieHistory/McKenzieRiverHistory.htm> (accessed June 11, 2012).

Conclusion

Community celebrations are ritual expressions of regional identities. Not only do they provide a sense of collective citizenship, but they also serve to reconnect us with our life-place. As stated by Robert Thayer, a life-place is “a unique region definable by natural boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and nonhuman living communities.”¹⁸ In the wake of escalating natural disasters, communities are struggling to rebuild their natural life-place with concerted efforts placed on environmental health and security. Among sustainable urban development measures and green technologies, urban planners are now looking to unleash the latent potential of our waterways as the determining factor for environmental health. A healthy watershed, as corollary to a healthy ecosystem, is congruent with the understanding that water is the traditional center of life. Consequently, the wellbeing of our rivers is crucial for achieving environmental stability. As we begin to question the longevity of our way of life, it becomes apparent that a change in our relationship with our bioregion is essential.

Annual festivals, such as the Canoe Fete and the White Water Parade, are examples of celebrations that reconnect people to natural surroundings. Although former relationships with the Willamette River have largely been conditioned by industrial and economic advantages, a renewed connection, based on civic engagement, can protect important ecological resources from future erosion by once again integrating them into our celebrations. Movements to restore our waterways, protect our rivers, and mitigate the deleterious effects of rainwater runoff are happening everyday. The Willamette Valley Riverkeepers, founded in 1996, is an organization that advocates for the environmental protection of our rivers. Throughout the year they host a series of paddle outings, volunteering events, and educational programs that keep communities engaged and informed about watershed health. In July 2012, the Willamette River was added to the National Water Trail System, a designation that will bring recognition and attention to its importance. Through active citizen participation, communities can re-learn how to live in a life-place by interacting with the unique living and non-living systems of a particular region. In doing so a new bioregional identity will be born, one that has the power to supersede social and environmental barriers and induce a deep affinity with place.

¹⁸ Thayer. *LifePlace*, 3.

We are Here to Stay: The Annual Celebration of the Restoration of the Grand Ronde Tribe

David G. Lewis, PhD



Figure 1. Youth Dancers at the Restoration Pow wow. From left, Makai Simmons (Traditional Dancer), Redsky Clawson (Fancy Dancer), and unknown boy. Photo Michelle Alaimo, *Smoke Signals* Newspaper.

Abstract: November 22nd every year marks the date when the tribe was restored to federal status by the Federal Government and holds a Restoration Celebration. The event brings together tribal members, community and friends to celebrate the tribes restoration. Attendees witness native music, video histories, speechifying, and recognitions of people important to the tribes restoration. People are re-energized by their reflections on the tribes tumultuous history, and the struggles our elders underwent to bring the tribe back from non-existence. Tribal members can then reflect on what happened to the tribe when we were terminated. How much of the culture and language was lost, there was no tribal center and many people lived in poverty for three decades. After restoration the tribe then had to re-establish its economy, its membership, and slowly build community and member services. The casino helped make this a reality and had fueled the government for nearly 20 years. Attendees can then celebrate all of the wonderful things the tribe has done to help tribal members and larger community. The celebration is now in its 29th year of celebrating the tribe’s restoration.

Each year, since November 22, 1983 the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde renew the celebration of their restoration from federal termination. The event normally features ceremonies, speeches, song and much sharing of food at the tribal center located in Grand Ronde, Oregon. The celebrations are visited by about 500 participants who experience presentations from current and past tribal leaders, performances by tribal musicians and films and video presentations about tribal history. Tribal ceremonies are held in the tribe's traditional Plankhouse.

For some twenty-seven years the tribe endured federal termination where many people lived in a nexus of being tribal - the descendants of over twenty-seven tribes from western Oregon - while at the same time being federally terminated - having no rights to any services for tribal peoples, and divested of the right to the permanent reservation land base promised in seven ratified treaties. Many in the tribe felt that the government had been wrong in terminating the tribe, and that termination had destroyed the remaining tribal spaces that kept the tribal cultures alive. The tribal story of continuous loss and eventual renewal contains many dramatic qualities which make the restoration a truly remarkable event.



Figure 2. Hand Drumming in the Tribal Plankhouse during the Restoration Celebration. From left, Eric Bernando, Izaiah Fisher, Dakota Ross, Travis Stewart, Dustin Ross, Greg Leno, Richard Sohappy, Brian Krehbiel, Bobby Mercier, Nick Atanacio, Chucky Fryberg, Madison Leno, Tammy Fisher, Susan Fisher (Siletz Royalty), Emily Mooney (Grand Ronde Royalty) Photo Michelle Alaimo, *Smoke Signals* Newspaper.

In the 1850s, more than twenty-seven tribes came to the Grand Ronde Reservation. The tribes came from the Columbia River, the Willamette Valley, the Cascades, and the Umpqua and Rogue River basins. American settlers, ranchers and miners invaded tribal lands, taking farmstead, ranch-land and mining claims regardless of the tribes already living there. To eliminate the tribal presence, volunteer militias were formed by the territorial government and fostered conflicts, committed massacres, and inflicted wars on tribal villages in their efforts to drive the tribes from the land. In the 1850s, many American settlers, the newcomers, believed the tribes needed to be exterminated and horrendous genocides of tribal village populations occurred. The tribes answered these attacks through thefts, attacks and depredations against the settlers.

To find peace and security the tribes signed seven treaties with the federal government that removed them to temporary reservations at Table Rock and the Umpqua Valley by 1854. The local militias continued to press their attacks on reservation tribes and conflicts erupted again in 1855. As a result, the tribes were removed by the United States Army onto the Grand Ronde Indian Reservation in 1856. From 1856 to 1956 the confederated tribes of Grand Ronde existed as a distinct tribal community until federal termination took their remaining lands and forced the tribal people to leave - to become assimilated Americans living in the cities of the Willamette Valley and elsewhere.

Through the treaties the tribes ceded over 14 million acres to the federal government in exchange for a little over 60,000 acres of the reservation. The reservation was created to be their permanent home thereafter, as was promised in the treaties. The tribes accepted this situation because their survival was a concern as they were quickly dying from the efforts of the newcomers invading their homelands. The tribes also were to receive some money, food, supplies and services so they might live well at the reservation. Some of the treaty provisions were honored by the government, schools were built and people received some services and food for many years thereafter.

In the twentieth century, the tribes lost over 30,000 acres of their reservation after individual allotments under the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. From 1901 to 1950 many more thousands of acres were sold as the tribes sought to endure vast changes in their lifestyle and survive in American society. By 1950 there was slightly more than 400 acres remaining under Indian allotment at Grand Ronde. The political environment had changed by 1940 and the United States government now wanted to liquidate all tribes in the nation, removing that burden from their bottom line. The Western Oregon tribes were the first to be subjected to termination, as they were deemed to be 'assimilated enough' that they did not need any further government support.

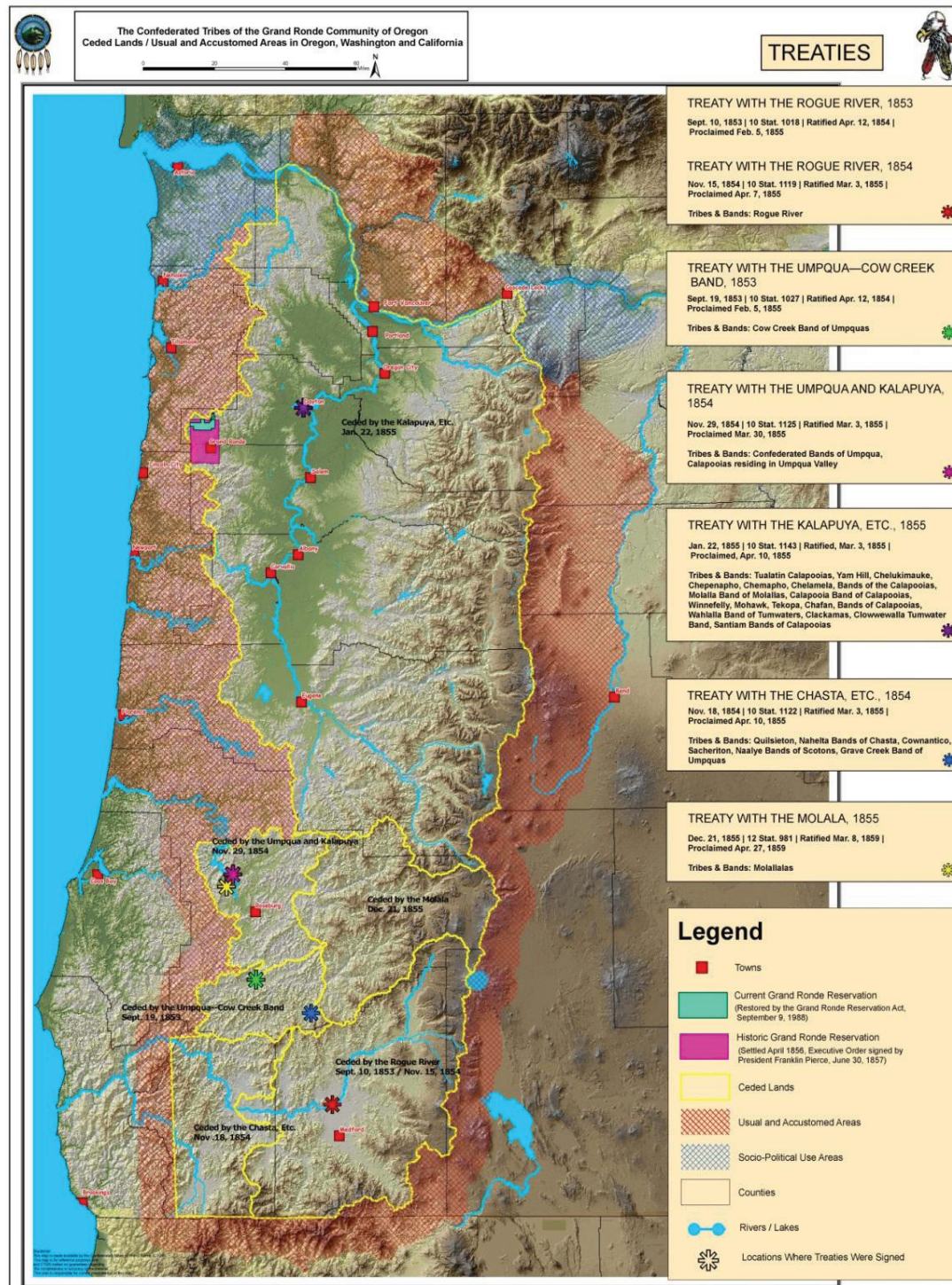


Figure 3. Ceded Lands. Courtesy of the CTGR's Cultural Resources Department.

In 1953 these tribes were presented a choice to be terminated and they refused to agree. And because the government had not settled the Indian Claims Cases, the tribes lobbied against the government. Nonetheless, the tribes were terminated in 1954 without their agreement, and in 1956 lost their federal recognition and rights guaranteed under the treaties. In one hundred years, tribes went from owning all of the land under aboriginal land claims to owning nothing. And while the government suggested the Indian allottees could purchase their allotments, very few tribal people had the resources to do so.

In 1956, the payment for each Grand Ronde member's share in the reservation was \$35. Most tribal members had to leave the area to find work in the cities and many lived in relative poverty for over two decades. During this period, many people did not learn the tribal cultures or languages, or get passed-on the knowledge of what their tribal genealogy. Some people turned to drugs and alcohol, and people's tribal identity became a question. Recognized tribes began to reject members of the terminated Grand Ronde tribe, thinking they had accepted termination, and were therefore no longer deserving of being Indian and attending Indian events. Grand Ronde members questioned whether they were Indian, and many did not know if they could still fish and hunt under their Indian rights, rights that were not addressed in termination. Many people developed psychological trauma due to the extreme loss they had endured in termination.

In 1975, the United States conducted an investigation to see how well termination had worked for the tribes. The American Indian Policy Review Commission: Task Force Ten for Terminated and Non-federally Recognized Indians first met in Salem, Oregon to conduct interviews with tribal leaders. Jo Jo Hunt was the Chair of the Commission and a member of the Lumbee tribe. Robert Bojocas of the Klamath Tribe (who passed on in 2008) and Merle Holmes of Grand Ronde testified at the commission, as follows:

Mr. Bojocas: The rationale used in terminating tribes was instead to put the Indians in the mainstream of society. Has that been successful in the Grand Ronde case?

Merle Holmes: It would have if it put them in the mainstream of society, in as much as it run most of us out of there. There was no way to make a living in there. After I went out of the service, I came out and ended up here in Salem and I don't know, there's no way I could have got anywhere if I would have stayed there. Nobody wants to walk around in the woods soaking wet all winter long, and it's not the kind of life for

most of us, and it scattered us all around. We have people who took advantage of the education. I know one gentleman who lived in California. He was educated in diesels there, and he still lives there.

Ms. Hunt: So termination not only did ruin tribal structure, but any sense of community in being able to do things on a collective basis?

Mr. Holmes: This is true. We're pretty much victimized being isolated like we are in Grand Ronde. There's the nearest town, Willamina. You're looking at nine miles there. So you have to drive to Lincoln City and we're isolated to just the lumber industry to sustain. So we need the vocational training to get the people into a little bit of a better blue collar work.¹⁹

In the 1970s, tribal elders organized the tribe to get restored and were greatly aided by the successes of the Menominee and Siletz tribes which had been restored in 1973 and 1977 respectively. The findings of the Task Force Ten commission report helped as well:

No referendum vote on the subject of termination by Oregon Indian Tribes ever took place... A strong case can be made that most Indians were unaware of the important features of the termination bill, and that cooperation and participation in the passage of the bill was extremely limited... There is simply no evidence that termination in any way on any measure had a positive effect on Klamath or Western Oregon Indians.²⁰

The tribe sought support from local governments and local politicians like Senator Mark Hatfield and Congressman Les AuCoin. The tribe was restored in 1983 after a decade of work on the part of the tribal elders and their political allies.

The final few years of political work were tough on the tribe. There was little money and elders would give some of their Social Security to help with travel expenses to Washington, DC. The tribe held bake sales, sold canned foods and held pow wows to raise money. In addition, there was quite a bit of opposition to Grand Ronde's restoration due to political opposition on the part of some local governments and the

¹⁹ American Indian Policy Review Commission: Task Force Ten, Transcript of Proceedings, 13 May 1976. vol. 1, National Archives, 1, 133-134, NADP Document D142, Seattle.

²⁰ Final report to the American Indian Policy Review Commission, Task Force Ten: Terminated and Non-federally Recognized Indians, October 1976.

timber industry. The fears were that the restoration of the tribe would limit or eliminate the timber industry in Polk, Yamhill and Tillamook counties. Timber industry leaders sent letters of opposition to the politicians that championed the restoration of the tribe, causing long delays. The tribe addressed the concerns of timber executives and local folks with a meeting at the Grand Ronde Elementary School where tribal leaders sufficiently alleviated their fears enough to eliminate opposition to their restoration.

There was also some opposition from fishing and hunting organizations fearing that the tribe would limit the average American's ability to freely fish and hunt in western Oregon. This opposition, however, had already run its course against Siletz before they were restored in 1977 and Oregon's politicians had already worked out a solution. The solution was to present a restoration bill where hunting and fishing rights of tribal members were revoked by restoration. This provision appeared in the Grand Ronde bill before serious opposition could be mounted by the fishing and hunting organizations. The opposition to Grand Ronde's restoration caused at least five years of delay in restoring the tribe as politicians sought to introduce the bill in a friendly political environment so that it would be successful. Congressman Les AuCoin shepherded the bill through the U.S. House of Representatives where it was approved on November 22, 1983.²¹

Elders state that when they heard that the tribe's restoration bill was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, they were elated. Many people gathered at the tribal office, the shed in the tribe's 2.5 acre cemetery, to celebrate. They stated that people were shouting and cheering as they had fought for restoration for about a decade and finally won. Elizabeth Furse, former Congresswoman and one of the legal team who helped the tribe in restoration has stated that the Tribe had nothing, and they were the best they could be in that final effort for restoration.

Our people celebrated their restoration, believing that now they could begin to address all of the economic and social problems that had plagued them for over a quarter century. The restoration also created a list of tribal people who are now legendary to the effort, Margaret Provost, Merle Holmes, Marvin Kimsey, and Former Tribal Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison. Margaret, Merle and Marvin initiated the effort and worked hard to make it successful. Kathryn, who worked on both the restoration of the Siletz Tribe and the Grand Ronde Tribe, later became a legendary tribal chair for the tribe. Former Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy, Barbara Mercier, Jackie Whisler,

²¹ Grand Ronde Restoration Act (25 U.S.C. 713 et seq.).

former Tribal Chairman Mark Mercier, and many others, all had parts to play and became tribal leaders in the following decades. Of the non-tribal names, Senator Mark Hatfield, Congressman Les AuCoin, and Congresswoman Elizabeth Furse, all worked to help the tribe be restored, while President Ronald Reagan signed the tribe's restoration bill. These people are all included in the tribe's restoration as celebrated figures in our recent history.



Figure 4. Margaret Provost in 2012. Image from www.andvjenness.wordpress.com.



Figure 5. Marvin Kimsey. Courtesy of the CTGR's Cultural Resources Department Archives.

The question of why we were restored is explained by Kathryn Harrison. Harrison said that the tribal council got the political leaders to agree that restoration was the best thing that could occur to save the tribe. The tribal people had suffered so much with termination that only the ability to help themselves would preserve this vital Oregon culture. In the era of civil rights, the tribes benefitted from national cultural conflicts by successfully presenting the situation that they needed federal status to preserve their culture.

Therefore, every year on or about the 22nd of November the tribe has a restoration celebration, and each year the format is a bit different. All tribal members and their families are welcome, and the tribe issues special invitations to a number of dignitaries. All of the events are open to tribal members and invited guests, while the pow wow at the end of the day is open for anyone to attend. Many tribal members travel long distances to return to the tribe for just this celebration so they may see all of their relatives.

In 2012, the 29th annual celebration, the tribe had its celebration on Sunday the 18th of November because the anniversary fell on Thanksgiving Day. The tribe began with traditional songs and dances in the Plankhouse in the morning. The membership witnessed the traditional ceremony of hand-drum songs and dances by gathering in the stands. During this part of the day, the ceremony was led by Bobby Mercier who talked to the tribal ancestors in Chinuk Wawa and told the history of tribal struggles to the audience. Elders, tribal council members and important tribal dignitaries also spoke and sang if invited to.

This event blessed the day and about noon the membership and guests convened at the Tribal Gym where they prepared for a brunch and watched video presentations of tribal history. The Tribal Council made a presentation about the meaning of the celebration to the tribe and the assembled watch a video showing who among the tribe's elders have passed in the last year. A genealogical chart was strung along one wall of the gym and people were invited to add details as they need to.



Figure 6. Tribal members viewing the tribal genealogy chart. From left – three unknown tribal members, Steve Bobb (Tribal Council) and Dave Leno on right. Photo Michelle Alaimo, *Smoke Signals* Newspaper.

After these presentations, the assembled membership and guests ate together while participating in raffle giveaways. Dinner was of traditional foods, salmon and elk meat, and served by tribal councilors, managers and supervisors in the tribe. Entertainment during the brunch was provided by Jan Looking-Wolf who played a flute song from his award-winning repertoire. The Canoe Family sang at least three drum songs while the dancers danced around the perimeter of the gym.

After brunch the gym was transformed into a pow wow arena and welcomed anyone to attend. Chairs were arranged circling the center and tribal vendor tables ringed the walls. This year we had at least six drum groups from Warm Springs, Klamath, Chemawa, Salem and Grand Ronde at the celebration. The Grand Ronde Veterans Honor Guard opened the pow wow by bringing in the flags. The drums played many different songs, and the intertribal, round and owl dances were meant for all attendees to come dance on the floor. We also heard traditional songs for fancy, traditional and jingle dancers. We also had Chemawa students doing exhibitions of fancy dancing and hoop dancing. This year we had visitation from a tribal film crew recording a documentary about native dance. The event ended at eight in the evening.



Figure 7. Serving the Restoration Dinner. From left – Jack Giffen (Tribal Council), Chris Mercier (Tribal Council), Lisa Archuleta, Gladys Hobbs, Dan Ham and other tribal members. Photo Michelle Alaimo, *Smoke Signals* Newspaper.

The restoration celebration reminds the people that the tribe was on the brink of absolute destruction, that we were suffering from assimilation and loss of identity, and that many of our people had lost connections with their families and tribes. It also reminds us that the tribe has come back from this brink to become one of the most successful of the restored tribes in western Oregon. Today, the tribal population is over 6000 members, one of the largest in Oregon, and our casino, Spirit Mountain, is the most successful in the Northwest. The tribe has given over 56 million to cultural, social and tribal organizations in western Oregon, and is one of the top ten giving agencies in the state. It remind us that the tribe is a significant member of the Oregon community and is dedicated to remaining fully immersed as a partner in state, federal and local organizations. And it reminds us that the tribes of Grand Ronde have been here for at least 14,000 years and we plan to stay a vital part of the Oregon community forever.

Mount Angel's Flax Harvest Festival and the WPA: Weaving Vaudeville into the Fabric of the Willamette Valley

Damond Morris



DEMONSTRATION OF METHOD OF PULLING FLAX—STATE PROJECT,
SALEM, OREGON

Figure 1. J. Frederic Thorne, *The Culture and Manufacture of Flax for Fibre and Seed* (University of Oregon, 1924), 6.

Abstract: In 1936, the Works Project Administration (WPA) sought to prop up the sagging flax industry in Oregon by constructing flax processing facilities in the towns of Mount Angel, Springfield and Canby and supplying WPA laborers to harvest and process flax. To celebrate the renewed industry, a flax harvest festival was celebrated at Mount Angel, introducing new artistic branches of the WPA to rural Oregon. Harvest festival entertainment not only included the crowning of a flax harvest queen, a flax parade with political dignitaries in attendance, a semi-professional baseball game, wrestling match, and a fireworks display, but also introduced performances by the newly formed Oregon WPA orchestra and Federal Theatre Project (FTP). The Oregon unit of the FTP was comprised of out of work vaudevillians, and their performance of 'Flaxville' and 'Flaxiana', each year from 1936-1938, follow the story of flax in Oregon through the embodied talents of acrobats, contortion artists, clowns and dancers. This article will follow the artistic contribution the FTP had on the festivities of the flax harvest festival, from the continuation of the vaudeville format after the dissolution of the FTP in 1939, to the presentation of 'Flaxiana' at the dedication of Timberline lodge by President Roosevelt in 1937.

For four days in September 800,000 people visit the community of Mount Angel, Oregon to enjoy Oktoberfest, the largest folk festival in the state.¹ The list of celebration activities is enormous. Sausage, sauerkraut and beer. Dancing, dancing, and more dancing... from the fast paced chicken dance, to a community "Flash mob" dancing to "Do-Re-Mi" from *The Sound of Music*. Weiner dog races. Professional music in the Oktoberfest Weingarten, to The Salzbruger Echo Alpine Horn Players playing traditional alpine horns in St. Mary's Church. The Mount Angel community connects to their German (and Swiss) heritage with a festival that began as a harvest celebration. While the origins of what is known today as Oktoberfest date back to a milk festival in 1966, the town of Mount Angel has a long tradition of celebrating the harvest that dates back to the Great Depression. Before the town embraced beer, sauerkraut, sausage and milk, they were the capital of a crop now extinct in the Willamette Valley – Flax. At the height of the Great Depression Mount Angel was the largest national producer of flax, the fiber found in linen, and second only to Belgium worldwide. The high quality flax grown in the rich soil of the Willamette Valley created the finest linen on the market, in an era before synthetic materials like nylon and polyester. The farming community of Mount Angel had much to celebrate, with the flax industry helping to pull many farming families out of destitute poverty.

A cataclysmic drought hit the Willamette Valley in the summer of 1935, at the pinnacle of Midwestern Dust Bowl. Crop yields and the quality of farm goods plummeted in Oregon, leaving many farmers without the means to buy seed, repair equipment or pay taxes on their property. Unemployment nationally was over 25 percent, with Oregon hovering well above that figure in most counties. It was upon this backdrop that Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent the Second New Deal to congress to give immediate relief to ranks of farmers and the unemployed. Under the Second New Deal the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was formed, headed by Harry Hopkins, to get the nation back to work, building and rebuilding city, state and federal infrastructure, and—above all—to provide jobs to save the "body and spirit" of the unemployed.²

In Oregon, the WPA went to work on several projects to help the unemployed and Willamette Valley Farmers. With the help of the WPA, Willamette Valley farmers would supply flax fiber for the production of linen that would rival the quality linen

¹ Oktoberfest has laid claim to the "largest folk festival" on their website, <http://www.oktoberfest.org>.

² Harry Hopkins was quoted as saying, "Give a man a dole and you save his body and destroy his spirit. Give him a job and you save both body and spirit." [Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression* (New York: Three Rivers Press), 256].

products of Belgium while supplying flaxseed for the production of linseed oil. Farmers who grew flax in the Willamette Valley were bolstered by processing plants constructed by the WPA, and their Flax Harvest Festival was the scene of an initial offering of another branch of the WPA - the Oregon Unit of the Federal Theatre Project. The Federal Theatre was a theatrical WPA troupe, under a WPA division titled "Federal One." Upon the Flax Festival stage, the Oregon unit of the Federal Theatre Project created a vaudeville performance, which told the story of flax, a crop perfectly suited for the climate of the Willamette Valley.

With a parish full of struggling farmers, Benedictine Father Alcuin Heibel of Mount Angel, dubbed "The Flax Priest,"³ was a staunch advocate of the crippled flax industry, visiting Washington D.C. in 1935 just as the Second New Deal was taking shape.⁴ Emerson J. Griffith, the head of the Oregon WPA, heard Father Heibel's request and placed flax production in the Willamette Valley as a top priority for his state agency. Three processing facilities were constructed with WPA relief labor in Willamette Valley in the cities of Canby, Springfield and Mount Angel. WPA retting and scutching plants were formed as farmer cooperatives, and were primarily constructed with Federal WPA assistance with the State of Oregon sponsoring the project.⁵ In addition to WPA labor in the construction of the processing facilities, labor was also provided under the WPA to help bring the initial crops to market. Modern labor saving scutching machines were installed at the WPA processing plants, while local mills in Salem and Vancouver, WA spun the flax fiber to bring the linen to market.⁶ As the industry demonstrated promise, a benefit payment by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration of \$5 a ton was placed on Willamette Valley Flax in 1937.⁷ The first flax production facilities were completed in 1936 and to celebrate the harvest Father Heibel helped form the first Flax Festival in Mount Angel.

The process and production of flax was on display during the Flax Festival, educating the public on the production of linen. Flax Festival parade floats featured the "Queen of Flaxiana," to mirror the Portland Rose Festival "Queen of Rosaria," and were draped in

³ *The Oregonian*, 8/10/1946.

⁴ Susan McKenzie, "Monk Helped Boost Mount Angel Flax Industry," *Catholic Sentinel*, 6/8/2001, <http://www.catholicsentinel.org/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubSectionID=35&ArticleID=1778> (accessed 6/7/12).

⁵ Oregon Experiment Station, "Cost in Fiber Flax Production in the Willamette Valley Oregon," Oregon State System of Higher Education (1938): 8.

⁶ Oregon Experiment Station, "Cost in Fiber," 4.

⁷ Oregon Experiment Station, "Cost in Fiber," 8.

various artistic formations of flax, just as the Rose Parade floats of Pasadena, California and Portland, Oregon are covered in rose petals today.⁸ On hand for the flax parade and festivities were farmers as well as local, state and international dignitaries. Oregon Governor and brigadier general Charles H. Martin, Senator Charles L. McNary, Oregon WPA director E. J. Griffith and A. J. Herman of the Belgian Consul were among those celebrating the renewed industry in Oregon. After the parade, a semi-professional baseball game and sports were featured, followed by a grand concert in front of the Mount Angel schoolhouse by "a chorus of 100 male voices" and the Oregon WPA band.⁹ The WPA band and later the orchestra performed across the state and featured world-renowned performers. In the evening, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) performed a one-act play, *FLAXIANA*, in the St. Mary's Catholic Church auditorium, followed by a wrestling match and "\$250 fireworks display" financed by the Shell Oil Company at Ebner Park.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP), an artistic branch of the WPA, was in its infancy when it performed *FLAXIANA* in September of 1936, and would return in 1937 to perform *Tapestry in Linen*, a play concerning the history and use of flax in the valley. By 1938, the company was ingrained in the Mount Angel festivities, and returned to their vaudeville performance. The head of the FTP in Washington D.C., Hallie Flanagan, charged with putting unemployed actors and theatre technicians back to work in the ranks of the WPA, was sworn in the year before the first Flax Festival. Rather than creating a national theatre, or focusing the FTP on New York's Broadway, Flanagan created large theatrical units in New York, Los Angeles, Seattle and Chicago, with smaller units in cities like New Orleans, Oklahoma City, Charlotte, Minneapolis, Detroit, Cincinnati, and Portland. This decentralization, overseen by an FTP office in Washington D.C., allowed the FTP to hire a large number of artists that could speak to the needs of a local audience.

Flanagan asked Bess Whitcomb, former artistic director of the Portland Civic Theatre, to head the Oregon Unit, and work Whitcomb's connections to Portland theatrical talent. FTP regulations specified that only people formerly employed in theatre could be hired in the FTP. The only theatrical talent making a living in Portland prior to the country's economic collapse was vaudevillians, who had toured west coast vaudeville circuits. Because legitimate actors in the Portland Civic Theatre were well-trained

⁸ For a detailed list of Portland's Rose Festival "Queen of Rosaria," visit <http://www.rosefestival.org>.

⁹ "Flax Festival Schedule," *Mount Angel News*, 8/13/1936.

volunteers, the Oregon unit was comprised of out-of-work vaudevillians. The vaudevillians Whitcomb worked with transformed the productions from legitimate plays to sketches and skits. With their first production three months prior to the Flax Festival, the Oregon unit's company of vaudevillians used their various talents in their production of *FLAXIANA*.¹⁰ *FLAXIANA* may have been the first vaudeville performance in the auditorium at St. Mary's Church in the town of Mount Angel. While the performance sounds sacrilegious because of vaudeville's modern connotations, the opposite is true. Vaudeville is often conflated with burlesque and the *Ziegfeld Follies*, which took some of the structure from vaudeville, but were very separate forms of entertainment.

Vaudeville, unlike burlesque, was wholesome family entertainment with strict rules on and off the stage. The theatrical performances were at home in the wall of the Catholic Church. Traditional vaudeville acts were not allowed to use profanity or "off-color" language, and strict clothing policies were issued for female dancers.¹¹ While west coast vaudeville circuits from Western Canada to California had looser rules than their eastern counterparts, the major circuits like the Orpheum and Pantages, maintained strict rules of conduct. Many of the FTP entertainers of *FLAXIANA* were from smaller vaudeville circuits connected by rail to cities like Eugene, Bend and Salem. The vaudeville performers working for smaller circuits were a thick-skinned and adaptable lot, with vaudeville houses often constructed in makeshift storefronts rather than large glitzy theatres found on the east coast, and their pay reflected the quality of circuit and their position on the playbill. The FTP entertainers understood how to play venues accounting for religious morals like those of St. Mary's Church. The west coast performer was paid a lower salary than their eastern counterpart, with shorter engagements, enduring poor travel and work-place conditions. It is from this cloth that the Oregon FTP performers were ripped.¹²

While a program of the first Flax Festival performance can be viewed at the Willamette Heritage Center's archive, little is written about the first performance by the troupe. Scripts were often not available for vaudeville productions, with many performers learning their craft and jokes by stealing from other acts. The craft of the vaudevillian

¹⁰ For a complete history of the Federal Theatre Project see Hallie Flanagan, *Arena*, (New York: Limelight, 1985).

¹¹ Charles W. Stein, *American Vaudeville: As Seen by its Contemporaries*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), xiii.

¹² Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times*, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1940), 219-220.

was learned through the school of hard knocks, and by older vaudevillians relaying their experience to the coming generation. While an exact description of the first performance is not extant, we can draw information from performances around the same period and the specialized talent of the individual performers allows us to draw an approximation from the descriptions of similar entertainers.

The Oregon unit's first mention in the news was a performance at Portland's Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children on July 21, 1936. The production was unscripted and the only printed description comes from the *Oregon Daily Journal* reporting, "Uncle Sam sent a new kind of tonic to crippled children... when the vaudeville unit of the Federal Theatre ..., a WPA project, put on a real old-fashioned vaudeville show for the little patients."¹³ The *Journal's* description of the event gives a flavor of the fast-paced lighthearted comedy of the vaudeville performance. "Bursts of laughter mixed with gasps of amazement as the professionals went through their tricks at the hospital."¹⁴ Clowns and comedians in the troupe like Al Adams were responsible for the "bursts of laughter," but what in their production was "amazing?"

As a vaudeville routine, the strongman was a specialty act, often placed as the opening act after intermission.¹⁵ Strongman, Ernest Carrier, was featured in all of the Oregon unit vaudeville performances and takes after the tradition of Eugene Sandow, one of the first strongmen in the U.S. promoted by Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. in 1893. In his book *On With the Show*, Robert C. Toll describes Sandow's act as "rather ordinary;" bending bars, holding a man in the palm of his hand and picking up a 300-pound dumbbell. Ziegfeld promoted Sandow as "the perfect man", having him flex through classic muscle bound poses accompanied by a piano player. "Sandow lifted the pianist high in the air with one hand, put him down to applause, and then nonchalantly lifted the piano."¹⁶ Such acts of strength would be greeted by "gasps of amazement" from the children at the Shrine Hospital and such an act would be incorporated into the first *FLAXIANA* performance. The amount of flax history told through such strongman feats is questionable, but the Mount Angel audience would experience the same "amazement" as the children at the Shrine Hospital.

¹³ *Oregon Daily Journal* 7/22/1936, 28.

¹⁴ *Oregon Daily Journal* 7/22/1936, 28.

¹⁵ Robert M. Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830 to 1910*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2003), 336.

¹⁶ Robert C. Toll *On with the Show!: The First Century of Show Business in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 298.

In 1937, the Oregon unit began performing a play written specifically for the Flax Festival called *Tapestry in Linen*. This play was in the style of “the living newspaper,” a theatrical format founded by the Federal Theatre. The living newspaper pulled information from written material - often newspapers - to tell the story of socially important and current issues. The Federal Theatre created living newspaper plays about sub-standard tenement housing (*One-Third of a Nation*), electricity generation (*Power*), and the rise of fascism in Europe (*Ethiopia*).¹⁷ In the case of flax in the Willamette Valley, the work of the WPA and history of farming was central to the play.

The Mt. Angel News describes the *Tapestry in Linen* production in 1937 as a “rapid fire musical drama dealing with the history and development of the flax industry in Oregon.”¹⁸ The history of flax in the Willamette Valley is a story of crop rotation and cooperation. Before the invention of a flax-pulling machine in Ontario in 1924, flax was pulled by hand, and the production of the crop was limited by the cooperative man-hours available between neighboring farmers. Flax was a minor crop on diversified farms across the Willamette Valley, evidenced by a 1934 survey taken by the Oregon Experiment Station finding an average of nine acres out of a 78-acre farm planted with flax. Subsistence farming and bartering for needed supplies substantially fed the rural family farm, an opportunity not available in the city. Before the intense use of chemical fertilizers, farmers rotated flax and other crops with legumes to keep the quality of the flax, and the market rate high.¹⁹ Furthermore, after the plant was pulled from the ground during harvest, farmers brought their crops together for families to process and extract the fiber. *Tapestry in Linen* relayed the story of how flax brought the farming communities of the Willamette Valley together.

The 1937 production moved out of St. Mary’s auditorium to a stage constructed in Ebner Ballpark and incorporated “dancing, juggling acrobatics and specialty numbers” to tell the story of flax in the Willamette Valley.²⁰ While this production was more refined than *FLAXIANA*, “combining the techniques of radio, theater and ballet,”²¹ the embodiment of the production process of flax into linen is inherent in the original title. *Tapestry in Linen*, like *FLAXIANA*, utilized vaudeville talent to embody the Willamette Valley and the farmers who settled the region.

¹⁷ Hallie Flanagan, *Arena: The Story of the Federal Theatre*. (New York: Limelight, 1985).

¹⁸ “WPA Play to Feature Saturday: Tapestry in Linen,” *Mt. Angel News*, 8/12/1937.

¹⁹ Oregon Experiment Station, “Cost in Fiber,” 10.

²⁰ “WPA Play to Feature Saturday: Tapestry in Linen,” *Mt. Angel News*, 8/12/1937.

²¹ “WPA Play to Feature Saturday: Tapestry in Linen,” *Mt. Angel News*, 8/12/1937.

Oregon FTP director, Bess Whitcomb, choreographed a dance that celebrated flax at a Federal Theatre retreat in Poughkeepsie, New York in June of 1937. The dance portion of the *Tapestry in Linen* performance at Mount Angel was significant because it was a repeat performance first witnessed by local, state and federal officials at the inauguration of Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, just prior to the Flax Festival. Prior to President Roosevelt’s Timberline Lodge dedication speech, the Oregon unit actors performed several dances, unveiling Whitcomb’s work titled *Dance of the Flax Scutching Machine*.²² This “modern dance” took on the mechanistic characteristics of the scutching machine, which allowed flax fiber to be separated and a single worker to process far more flax per hour. The scutching dance celebrated the WPA’s contribution to the Willamette Valley, and foregrounded the importance of flax production for Governor Martin, President Roosevelt and his staff at the Timberline Lodge. While the officials experienced modern dance, the acrobats and tumblers, comedians and clowns of the Oregon unit repeated their scutching machine performance when the production was moved to Mount Angel. This modern dance must have seemed very edgy to the rural crowd in Ebner Park.

In 1938, the production moved back into St. Mary’s auditorium, away from *Tapestry in Linen* and back to original vaudeville routines. While the production in 1938 was not the living newspaper production, the description from *the Mt. Angel News* helps paint the picture of previous flax celebration performances. The paper describes the types of vaudeville acts found in “the Flaxville, vaudeville show,” which were standard fare for the troupe. Fourteen acts of vaudeville included “rapid-fire juggling, daring gyrations of trapeze aerialists, witty patter, accordion solos, native Hawaiian vocal and instrumental selections, hand balancing and ‘Indian rubber’ contortionist.”²³ “Indian rubber” contortionists often found work in sideshow “freak” carnival attractions rather than vaudeville. Contortionists (seen today in Cirque du Soleil performances) often worked solo with musical accompaniment. This was probably the first time an entertainer dislocated various joints to contort into strange shapes inside the walls of St. Mary’s.²⁴ The cast of 35 actors and musicians joined in a “cavalcade of popular song hits” at the end of the production. The celebration of flax through music, acrobatics,

²² Flanagan, *Arena*, 298.

²³ *Mt. Angel News*, 8/11/1938.

²⁴ Many of the contortion artists from Cirque du Soleil come from an Asian acrobatic tradition, connected to a troupe of entertainers rather than a solo artist. For a detailed description of contortion artists, see Frank Cullen, et. al, *Vaudeville, Old and New: Encyclopedia of Variety*. Psychology Press 2006, 265.

juggling and contortion speak to the wide variety of entertainment brought to an ever-growing festival.

The vaudeville actors who embodied the land in their performance from 1936 to 1938 in Mount Angel were bound together with the farmers struggling after the collapsed economy and 1935 drought. In 1939, the FTP, the only national theatre the United States has seen, was removed from the WPA by a budgetary move in Congress. With the action the Oregon Unit of the Federal Theatre died, never to grace Ebner Ball Field or St. Mary's Church again.²⁵

Flax Festival organizers and patrons would not be deterred by the loss of FTP vaudeville and continued to include vaudeville performances each year in the celebration schedule from 1939 to 1941. The unlikely pairing of farmer and vaudevillian celebrated the hope of a renewed industry through the direct action by the WPA and the federal government. The WPA pulled people who labored for their art and on their land from destitute poverty, to come together and celebrate the harvest in a small town northeast of Oregon's capital. For the farmer and the vaudevillian, the work of the WPA helped maintain livelihoods and represented permanence on the land by keeping a roof overhead and food on the table.

Oktoberfest in Mount Angel is steeped in Bavarian folk harvest traditions, linking the current celebration held the first weekend in September to the Flax Festival, which also occurred on the same weekend. The ancestors of the Germans and Swiss families struggling financially to survive in the Willamette Valley during the Great Depression needed an occasion to celebrate, and their need links current Mount Angel residents to their past. In the 1930s, the community celebrated the injection of support by the WPA, both financially and physically. There was pride in the celebration because the support given by the government allowed the tough people of the Willamette Valley to build a world class Oregon flax industry. The government assistance wasn't a hand out, but a hand up for a generation that knew how to make something out of nothing. Today, the Oktoberfest celebration, anticipated by Oregonians far and wide, is steeped in culture and tradition and pulls residents together to form a self-identified Mount Angel community.

²⁵ For more information about the death of the Federal Theatre Project see the film: Schwartz, Bonnie Nelson, Ira H. Klugerman, and Judd Hirsch. *Who Killed the Federal Theatre?* (New York: Thirteen WNET, 2003).

Harvesting the Flax Crop in Clark County

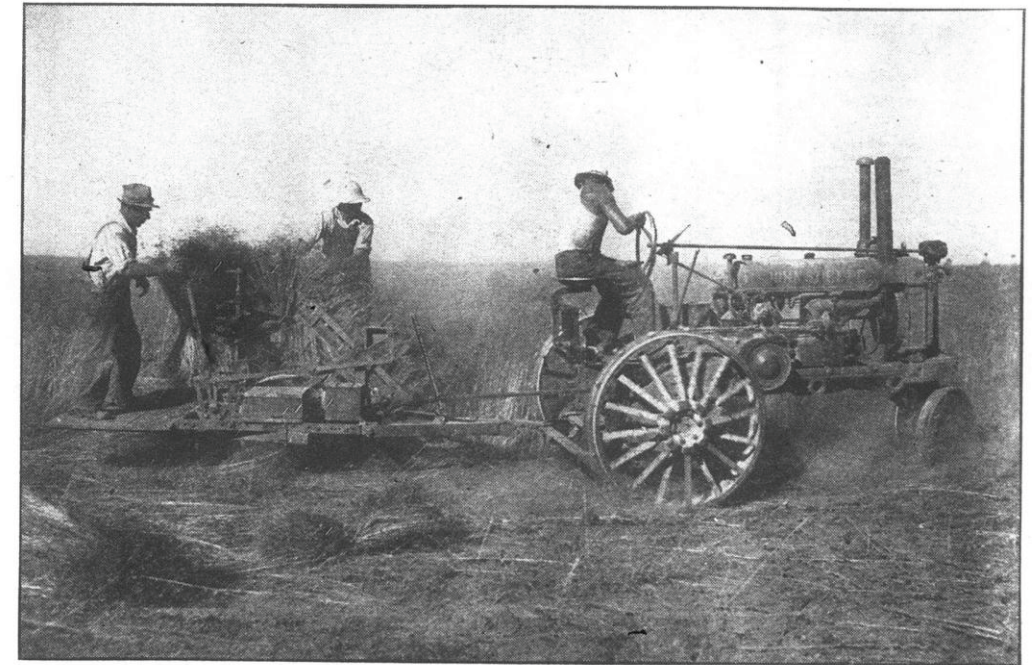


Figure 2. "Harvesting the Flax Crop in Clark County," *Oregonian, Home and Garden* September 5, 1937, 6.



ENTERTAINING IN PARKS OF THE CITY

Figure 3. "Entertaining in Parks of the City," *Oregon Sunday Journal*, August 16, 1936, 5.

Willamette Valley Crop Festivals

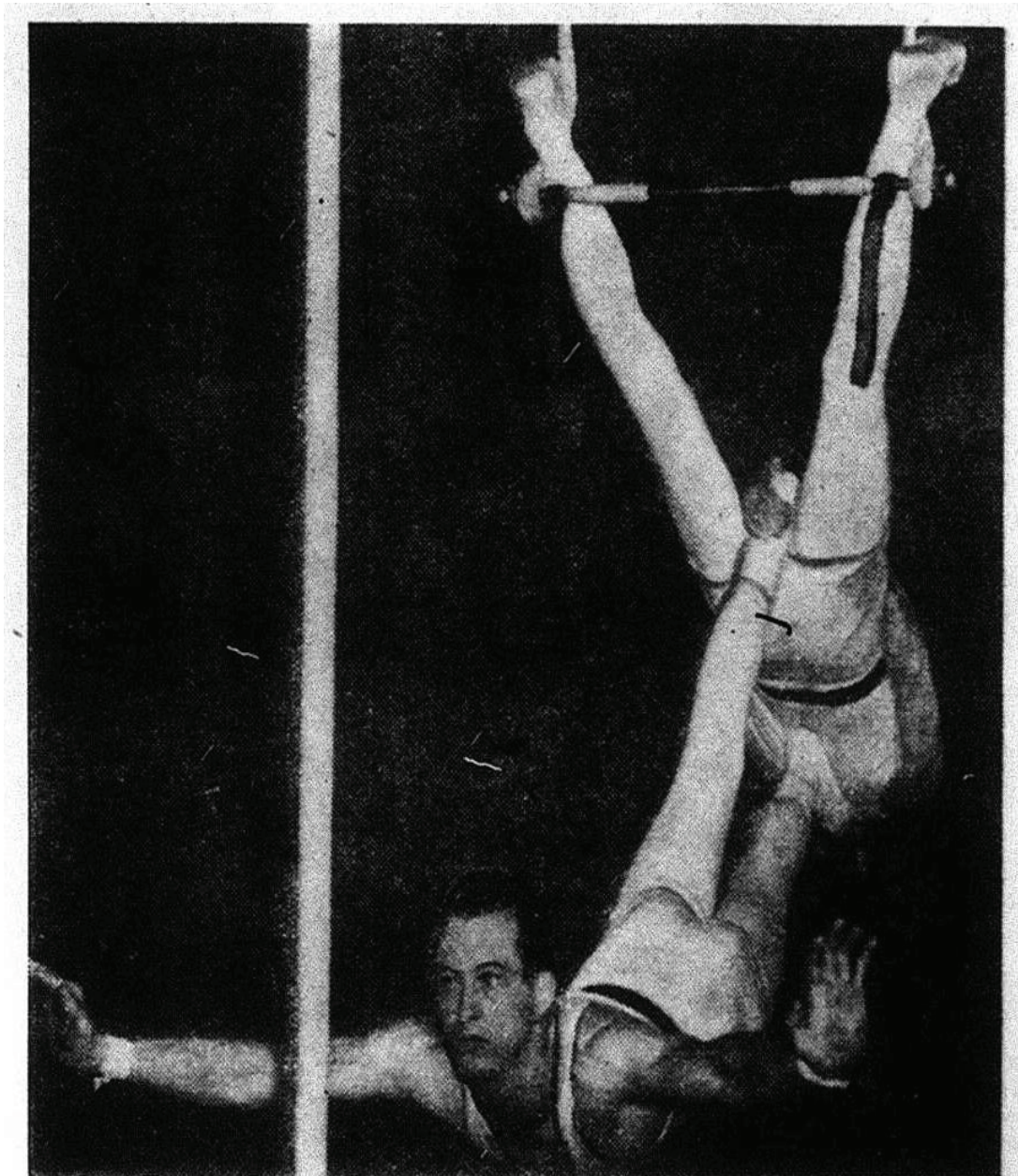
Photo essay by Phil Decker

Throughout Oregon there exists an abundant tradition of small town crop festivals. During the summer and fall, rural communities celebrate local harvests as diverse as potatoes, apples, onions, huckleberries, garlic, pears, watermelon and mushrooms. Some crop festivals have been preserved for over a century, while others have emerged within the last few decades. There are festivals in honor of harvests that are a current source of income; however, other festivals pay homage to crops that are no longer essential for local economies.

Yet independent of these distinctions, all crop festivals foster a sense of pride and identity for rural communities. Neighbors and visitors come out of the woodwork to reconnect and enjoy classic American events such as parades, eating contests, crafts, food booths, library book sales and live music. Towns in the fertile Willamette Valley are no exception. Some notable crop festivals in our region include: the Lebanon Strawberry Festival (June), the Hubbard Hop Festival (July), the Aumsville Corn Festival (August), the Independence Hop and Heritage Festival (September), and the Molalla Apple Festival (October).

During the summer and fall of 2011 and 2012, I enjoyed visiting and photographing small town crop festivals throughout the state. I am intrigued with this unique Oregon ritual. Growing up in Maryland I remember crab festivals and music festivals, but never festivals dedicated to each small town's local crop. Further, as a photographer, these crop festivals are a pleasure to document. There are so many people, events, and interactions, in every direction, all day long. I like the challenge of trying to capture a few moments that distill the spirit of the festival.

For this photo essay, I have selected four images from three different Willamette Valley crop festivals that I recently photographed: the Lebanon Strawberry Festival, the Aumsville Corn Festival, and the Independence Hop and Heritage Festival. Let's look briefly at each festival in turn.



THE RAYMOND BROTHERS, aerialists with the project, accomplish this feat in their performance, to the edification of large audiences

Figure 4. "Uncle Sam's Thespians," *Oregonian Sunday Journal*, September 5, 1937, 2.

The **Lebanon Strawberry Festival** is first up in the Valley crop festival season, typically falling on the first weekend in June. It began in 1909 as a salute to abundant berry fields. The organizers consisted of prominent citizens and businessmen from Lebanon. The festival's claim to fame, the "World's Largest Strawberry Shortcake," became a tradition in 1931. Now the cake is served free to over 20,000 spectators after it is showcased along the parade route. Other events include the Strawberry 5K Run, a carnival, fireworks, the Queen's Coronation and many other civic events. My images are from the 103rd Strawberry Festival in 2012.



Figure 1. The World's Largest Strawberry Shortcake.



Figure 2. Festival Queen Hands Out Free Strawberry Shortcake.



Figure 3. Marching Bands in the Parade.



Figure 4. Strawberrians Ride the Limo in the Parade.



Figure 5. Honest Abe at the Parade.

The **Aumsville Corn Festival** is always the last Saturday in August. The festival was founded in 1967. The day kicks off with a parade through downtown Aumsville, where kids scurry to collect candy thrown from parade floats. After the parade, the crowd migrates to Porter Boone Park to enjoy live music, food booths, contests, craft booths and swimming in the creek. A line forms for free hot buttered corn. My photos are from the 44th and 45th Aumsville Corn Festivals in 2011 and 2012.



Figure 6. Boy Scouts Preparing for the Parade.



Figure 7. Corn Eating Contest.



Figure 8. Volunteer Shuckers.



Figure 9. The Crowd Enjoying Their Free Corn on the Cob at Porter Boone Park.



Figure 10. Scurrying for Candy at the Parade.

The **Independence Hop and Heritage Festival** has undergone transformation. The original Hop Festival, also known as the Hop Fiesta, was founded in the early 1930s, growing out of a celebration in migrant camps. During this era, Independence proclaimed itself as the “Hop Center of the World.” The Hop Fiesta continued until the mid-1950s. The current Independence Hop & Heritage Festival began in 2001, to revive the hop festival tradition and to celebrate the local community. The festival boasts of many events including lawnmower races, a pie eating contest, a car show, a pancake breakfast, and a hot air balloon lift-off. My images are from the 11th Independence Hop and Heritage Festival in 2011.



Figure 11. Lawnmower Races.



Figure 12. Beer Brewing Lesson.



Figure 13. Luau Pig Food Booth.



Figure 14. Square Dancing in the Streets.



Figure 15. The Crowd at the Pie Eating Contest.

The “Oregon Crop Festivals” document is a work in progress, since there are several community festivals that I still haven’t visited, yet. My hope is that the images will encourage others to participate in at least one crop festival this upcoming harvest season. You’ll have a chance to savor and support local abundance: our crops, our people and our communities. I also hope that my photo document will serve as a historical resource in the future. For a calendar of Oregon Festivals go to www.oregonfestivals.org. To find out more about the festivals featured in this article, please visit the following sites:

Lebanon Strawberry Festival, www.lebanonstrawberryfestival.info

Aumsville Corn Festival; www.aumsville.us

Independence Hop and Heritage Festival; www.independencehopandheritage.com

Book Review by Shelley Deadmond

Fruit of the Sixties: The Founding of the Oregon Country Fair

Author, Suzi Prozanski (2009)

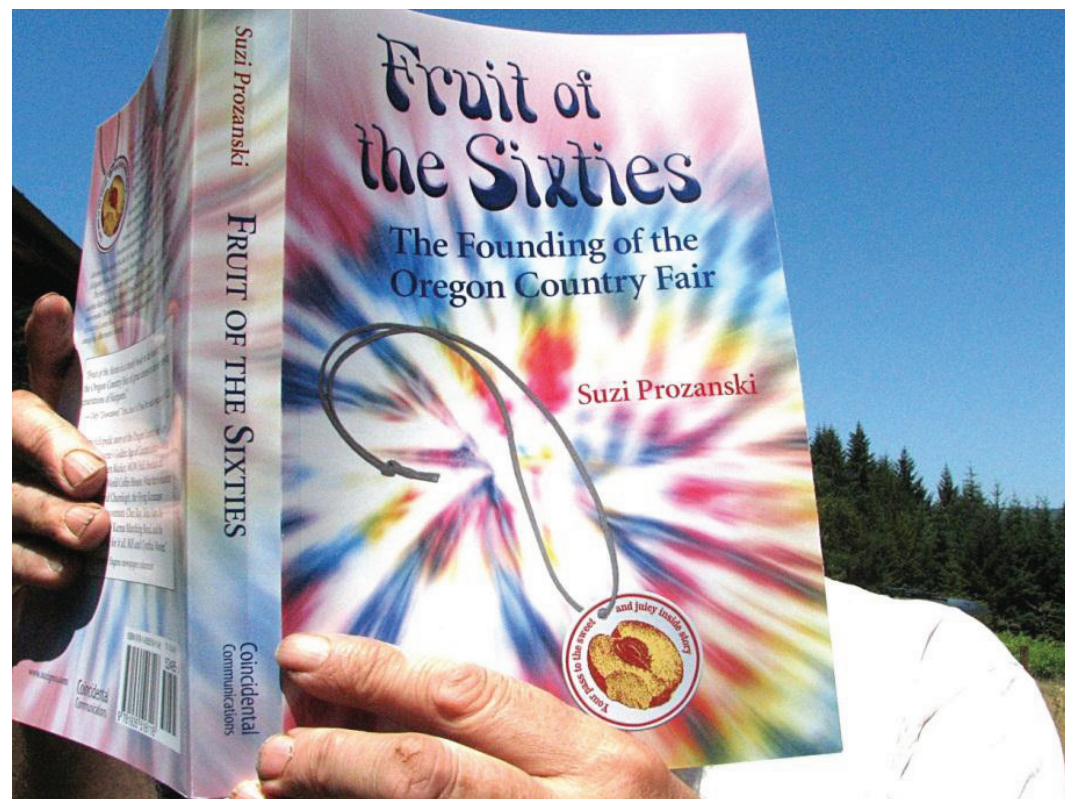


Author, Suzi Prozanski.

Homegrown from sweat and ideals in Eugene, Oregon, the Oregon Country Fair and social change organizations of the 70s are given proper attention by Prozanski in this anecdotal history book.

From the plethora of performance styles to the endless variety of costumed theatrics; from the delectable culinary choices to all the co-operative work that goes into creating the experience, the Oregon Country Fair is unarguably unique. In her book *Fruit of the Sixties: the Founding of the Oregon Country Fair*, author Suzi Prozanski sings the story of the place and time from which the celebrated Oregon Country Fair came.

The 447-page volume details various aspects of what began in the fall of 1969 as a grassroots fundraiser named the “Renaissance Faire,” but which over the years morphed, developed and spawned a slew of offshoot projects in and around Eugene and came to be known as the Oregon Country Fair.



The festival carries mixed connotations nowadays, from delight to disillusionment, euphoria to indifference, yet one thing is undeniable: the Oregon Country Fair is firmly established as a Lane County summer staple event, with more than 20,000 yearly attendees. Even if you've never been to the sprawling forested site near the sleepy town of Veneta that comes alive each summer, if you live in Eugene, you've definitely heard of it. The book, created from the weaving of hundreds of interviews from the people who helped develop and mold the fair in its nascent years, is the yarn ball that resulted from Prozanski tugging at a thread of history.

In what amounts to a collection of short, interwoven stories, the volume paints a picture of the Fair and the community that created it; sometimes overstating the connection of projects and groups in Eugene to the Fair and vice versa, sometimes not. The White Bird Sociomedical Aid Station for example, now White Bird Clinic, started out as a consensus-based volunteer service to provide crisis counseling or drug rescue around the same time that the Fair got going. Prozanski proclaims that "each has shown a commitment to cooperative models of management" and "the two organizations have always relied on volunteers to accomplish much of their work" (41). The Fair and White Bird also shared multiple key players in their formative years, for example, Fair

founder and co-coordinator Cynthia Wooten was hired as Director of White Bird in 1974-5 just as the Fair was gaining momentum (194).

While an uninterrupted reading will leave one with a comprehensive abundance of sometimes superfluous, yet admittedly fascinating information to the interested (probably local) reader, each chapter also has the ability to stand on its own. Aspects of the Fair are detailed, as well as community-driven projects started in Eugene around the same time, sharing page-space and often trading chapters back and forth. For example, "the Hoedads did security, so to tell the story of the Security Crew I needed to tell the Hoedad's story," said Prozanski in an interview about the tree-planting co-operative that ran early Fair security. "That's what started drawing me in more and more to these other organizations because they brought what they had to the table and what they learned at the table at the Fair they took back to their organizations as well."

What is claimed to be a history of the founding of the Oregon Country Fair, thus, after a few chapters starts to feel more like an anecdotal remembrance of counterculture activity and organization in Eugene in the 1970s than an exclusive account of the Fair's establishment. This is important because it shows how the Fair came about, by people getting together and talking about life and imagining the kind of world they'd like to live in.

We are reminded that the "Eugene Scene," in which the Fair unfolded was in those days characterized by people who had returned to the land as a result of the Summer of Love, concentrated in the San Francisco Bay. People gathered who were inspired by the communal counterculture ideals of groups such as the Diggers, a politically active improvisational theater group, and lyrical artists inspired by the Beat poets of the 50s and thus the product of those gatherings was fairly free-form and had an outspoken anti-establishment bent.

Prozanski elaborates, "reading the newspaper accounts of the time was really enlightening and how people were moving here in droves. It was really a formative time here in Eugene and the Northwest of change; the draft had people moving closer to Canada, honestly, and this was on the way and they had this haven, in a lot of ways, there was a back-to-the-land movement and it all just made Oregon like this nirvana for a lot of people."

Eugene's alternative magazine of the time, the *Augur*, described the first summer Fair romantically in June 1970. "The woods became enchanted, and beautiful people begin

to blossom like flowers. Pure love flows as a crystal clear spring. Friends are coming from all over, San Diego to Seattle. This place is a rainbow of human experience. Looks like the whole scene is moving to Eugene for the summer.” This description could not account, however, for the less “groovy” incidents of early Fairs that had not yet come to pass, such as the time a group of motorcyclists’ bonfire nearly set fire to the forest or when late spring rain occasionally made the Fair site (a natural flood plain) a wet, muddy mess.

While speaking of the scene, Eugene’s resident celebrity couldn’t be overlooked. Prozanski gives due time and homage to Ken Kesey, author and counterculture deity known for his playful antics and charisma. Kesey was a regular Fair attendee (along with the pet parrot that rode on his shoulder) all throughout the 70s, and interviewees recall their peculiar encounters with him to amusing effect.

“Nearly everyone had a Ken Kesey story,” said Prozanski, herself a multi-decade Fairgoer. “I didn’t tell all of them. Some remain untold for good reasons. He was kind of crazy and hard to deal with if you were talking to the people who were putting on the Fair; he had kind of an ego and wanted to do things his way. He was Kesey—he questioned authority and that counted for the authority of the fair as well.”

Contrary to its claim, the book is less about how the Fair contributed to the development of local efforts such as White Bird, the Hoedads tree-planting co-op and the Saturday Market, and more about the burgeoning of a tightly-knit community discovering its many connections through the yearly gathering.

Perhaps the greatest feat of the book is the vast number of intimate interviews Prozanski collected, over 400 of them. Hearing the stories in their own words gives the work legitimacy and character. In some small way it de-romanticizes the time surrounding the beginnings of the Fair because it was just regular people with ideas and ideals, and the energy to implement them. Yet the stories ring true and readers can admire these trailblazers’ work and celebrate their contributions to what is now a culturally institutionalized event that brings to life values of equality and cooperation in a way that few other endeavors have done.

Granted, Prozanski skims over the commercialization of the Fair once it had been firmly established, but this and other aspects of how the Fair changed over time will be the focus of a second book, for which work has begun. “When the Fair bought the land, a lot changed and that’s the next part of the story.” said Prozanski. “How could they

reconcile this ethic of anarchy/ free love/ everyone-do-your-own-thing with the reality that there could now be a legal consequence of losing the land if some Fairgoers' took part in unsafe activities or illegal activities. The Fair had to figure out how to handle that.”

To trace the weavings of such an elaborate, decentralized production that by many accounts is unique to the beholder was a bold endeavor - but the authors’ commitment to letting those who lived it tell the story themselves proves to be worth the effort, and this is one history book well worth the read.

In Their Own Words

Beatrice Crawford Drury on Salem Welcoming Soldiers Home from the Philippines

The following is an excerpt from the autobiographical recollections of longtime Willamette Valley resident Beatrice Crawford Drury, entitled: "Help Yourself, There's Plenty" (2012.007.0010). Mrs. Drury was born in May 1895 in Marion, Oregon to John H. and Lulu Crawford.¹ She attended school in Stayton and worked for a time as a stenographer in Salem.² According to newspaper coverage of the big return home of Oregon Soldiers, the plan was for soldiers to be met at the Southern Pacific Depot and marched via State, Commercial and Court streets up the west steps of the old Capitol where they would be addressed by the Governor and Mayor.³



Beatrice Crawford Drury at the Annual Meeting of the Marion County Historical Society October 7, 1981. Willamette Heritage Center Collections: 0084.053.0247. Gift given in memory of Clark Moore Will.

...along with a few hundred Salem residents, I went with my parents, my sister Edna, my Uncle Larsen Oliver, his wife Aunt Essie, my cousins Bertha and Burl, Grandmother and Uncle Gene and his bride, my Aunt Tina, to meet the troop train coming up from San Francisco, carrying our "boys" home: Oregon Volunteers, Co. K, 162nd Infantry, National Guard Unit that had been these weary months in the jungles of the Philippines fighting yellow fever, mosquitos, dysentery, insurrection—just war. So the good folks of the town and the statehouse in particular—maybe the Adjutant General—planned a big, big spread for a welcome home.

Caterers—local hotel and restaurant owners—set up tables on the main lobby floor and around the circle balcony of the old marble statehouse with the brass railing atop the iron. White tablecloths and silver, glass and china. Then somehow a rumor floated around that

there were only a dozen or so men on the train. They had been mustered out in San

Francisco, a lot of their sweethearts had been waiting at the gate (Golden Gate, that is), and they were celebrating there and would be home later. All that ton of food! Scurry, scurry, and the powers that be, Governor Greer (?) in particular, appeared on the iron portico at the top of all those beautiful steps and invited the waiting crowd to come in and partake of the food which would only spoil. To my family's great happiness, Uncle Frank was on the train. His girl was there, too, my Aunt Charlott to be...Charlott Gilliam from east of the mountains where her folks were homesteading and for whom some landmark or other is named, a county I believe.

It took several seatings to accommodate the crowd - and I don't remember eating anything except - loaf sugar! First I ever saw and thought it was candy. In fact, my cousin, Burl Oliver, told me it was and gave me a few squares the while he filled his pockets.

¹ U.S. Federal Census, 1900. District 0141, Marion, Marion County, Oregon, 5.

² U.S. Federal Census, 1910. District 231, Stayton, Marion County, Oregon, 17; Polk's Salem City and Marion County Directory. Portland, Oregon: R.L. Polk & Co, 1915, 65.

³ "Volunteers Coming" The Daily Journal. 9 August 1899, 1.

Author Biographies

Shelley Deadmond earned a B.A. in Journalism at University of Oregon in 2010 then returned to school to complete the 'Oregon Leadership in Sustainability' graduate certificate in 2012. She currently works in sustainability-based organizing in Eugene, Oregon and is a contributing writer to the Eugene Weekly newspaper. She had her first experience at the Oregon Country Fair in the summer of 2012 and for once, found herself speechless.

Phil Decker is a documentary photographer who studied at the International Center of Photography in New York City. He is a facilitator of the Salem Photo League, a local group of documentary photographers. Phil also serves as an elementary school principal in Salem. Phil holds a BA in Philosophy from the University of Maryland, an MA in Latin American Studies from Stanford. He is a graduate of the Bilingual Teaching Program at San Diego State University and the Educational Administration Program at Portland State University.

You can see more of his photo essays at www.phildeckerphotos.com

Jennifer Huang is a graduate student studying at the University of Oregon. She is currently in her last year of a Masters of Architecture program in Portland and is expected to graduate in the spring with an M.Arch III and a Certificate in Ecological design. Originally from the east coast, Jennifer completed her undergraduate degree at Smith College, a four-year liberal arts institution, in Massachusetts where she graduated in 2008 with a Bachelors of Arts in Architecture. In 2010 Jennifer moved to the Pacific Northwest to pursue her belief in environmentally responsible design. After graduating it is her intention to remain in Oregon and work towards obtaining her architecture license.

David G. Lewis is an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and descended from the Santiam Kalapuya, Chinook, Takelma and Yoncalla Kalapuya peoples of western Oregon. In 2006, he became manager of the Grand Ronde Cultural Resources Department and in 2012 he became the Tribal Museum Curator and Cultural Liaison for the tribe. David completed his PhD in Anthropology at the University of Oregon in 2009, and while a graduate student was Director of the Southwest Oregon Research Project. His dissertation is "Termination of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde: History, Politics, Identity." David regularly presents on and has written numerous articles on the subject of the tribal histories of Oregon. He also serves on numerous public and volunteer committees and was appointed to the Oregon Heritage Commission in 2008. David currently lives in Salem with wife Donna and sons Saghaley and Inatye.

Damond Morris is a scholar of the Great Depression and recently taught a literary summer course, Theatre of the Great Depression, which helped guide his theatre direction of the play *Awake and Sing* by Clifford Odets, set in the Great Depression. He is currently PhD ABD and a Graduate Teaching Fellow in the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Oregon (UO), with an emphasis on theatre history. His dissertation looks at the formative forces of the Oregon Unit of the Federal Theatre Project, under the WPA, including the Little Theatre Movement, West Coast Vaudeville and the Oregon State Mythos. He holds an MA from Western Washington University and a Masters in Sustainability Leadership (Oregon Leadership in Sustainability) through the PPM program at the UO. Damond has been an instructor at Seattle University, Western Washington University and Skagit Valley College.

Erin Passehl is the University Archivist and Digital Collections Librarian at Western Oregon University. She manages the university archives, exhibits, and institutional repository/digital collections for archival and scholarly content. Erin holds a Master of Science in Information with a specialization in archives and records management from the University of Michigan and a B.A. in history and political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Passehl is an active member of the Northwest Archivists and serves on the steering team for Northwest Digital Archives.

Kylie Pine is the collections manager at the Willamette Heritage Center. Her work processing collections and fielding research requests has introduced her to a wide variety of fascinating materials held by the Center. She is excited for this opportunity to use the Willamette Valley Voices to enhance the Center's understanding of these collections and make them more accessible to the public. Kylie is a graduate of Willamette University and received her Master's Degree in Museology from the University of Washington. Most recently she worked on helping develop exhibits for the new Oregon State Hospital Museum that opened October 2012.

Rosalynn Rothstein graduated at the end of 2012 with an M.A. in Folklore from the University of Oregon. She received her B.A. from Grinnell College in Comparative Literature. Her thesis examined the storytelling practices of 9-1-1 dispatchers and call takers at the Bureau of Emergency Communications in Portland, Oregon where she is employed as a Senior Dispatcher. Rosalynn studies multi-modal storytelling practices, issues of authenticity in various contexts, and expression of belief in online forums.

Ashley Sharratt is the Museum Coordinator at the Linn County Historical Museum and the Assistant Records Manager at the Willamette University Archives. She realized her place in the archives and museum while studying for her B.A. in History at Willamette University. She completed her M.A. in Museum Studies from the University of Kansas in May 2012, after which she came back to Oregon.

Julie Voelker-Morris is an educator, editor, writer and artist. With a focus on gender and the arts, as well as ways of engaging undergraduates in instructional practice, Julie has been an instructor for the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program for 10 years. Additionally she serves as Copy Editor for the National Art Education Association's journal, *Studies in Art Education*, and as Co-Editor for *CultureWork: A Periodic Broadside for Arts & Culture Workers* (<http://culturework.oregon.edu>). She has a special interest in issues related to gender and art, art and oppressions, and various elements of performance, process, and production of identity, particularly through theatrical and visual arts. The history of the arts and community engagement related to civic responsibility is of special interest as well. She has conducted independent research on the history of large-scale theatrical pageants in Eugene, portrayals of comic book superheroes, and local birth stories.

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