

Newsletter of the Troutdale Historical Society



BYGONE TIMES

June & July 2013

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Up coming Events

Mark Your Calendars!

Saturday, July 20 Troutdale Summerfest Parade. 11 a.m. on Historic Columbia River Hwy.

Saturday, July 27 All Member Potluck on the Sandy River, 4 p.m.

September 15, Mystery Dinner.

September 21, Trek to the Bull Run Watershed.

We need 20-25 people to go, get your spot on the bus, \$10, by calling the Office.

October Mabel Evans Reunion & Tea at the Harlow House Museum for her former students.

Sunday, November 17 2 p.m. Oral History/ Interview of Korean Veterans.

Saturday, December 7 11

Summerfest Parade "Celebrating Local History"

Look for us at Summerfest parade, 11 a.m., July 20, in downtown Troutdale.

Bess Wills of Gresham Ford has designated Troutdale Historical Society as grand marshals of the parade riding in a new Ford pick-up, of course. The theme is "Celebrating Local History." (Bess is a sponsor of our Historic Highway exhibit as well.)



Picture courtesy of Gresham Outlook.

And then, on your way to Glenn Otto Park or on the way back, member Karen Jordan, creator of a famed Civil War quilt, will show a quilt patterned after the 1863 work of Jane A. Stickle at the Harlow House, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Karen has been a volunteer for THS for at least a decade clipping items from newspapers. The Harlow House or depot are both great places to see the parade, but you should come in early to beat the roadblocks, or plan on walking in.

Potluck Picnic, 4 pm , July 27, Jean Ice's Home

Please join us for a potluck picnic on Saturday, July 27, honoring our volunteers and celebrating our society. Bring you favorite picnic dish . Jean and Bob's home on the Sandy River is on Jackson Park Road on the west bank of the Sandy River. The driveway will be marked. For more information, telephone the office: 503-661-2164.

In memory of author, historian Clarence Mershon

Historian Clarence Mershon died of cancer at his East County home May 10. The retired educator, author of 10 books of local history and a specialist on the Historic Columbia River Highway, was 82. “A native son,” said David Ripma, president of the Troutdale Historical Society while describing Mershon. “Clarence didn’t just know our history, but he taught us about it.”

Ripma presented the society’s member of the year award to Mershon’s family at the our organization’s annual meeting, April 21. Mershon was to appear at the meeting, but his illness kept him at home. He appeared in a video presentation prepared by Len Otto.

That video and completion of one more book on the Columbia River Gorge and Multnomah Basin were on Mershon’s to-do list at the end of his life. (Also on that list was gathering with friends to sing and record songs with his wife, Colleen.)

“Talk about a deadline,” he quipped, observing that he had a good life, that 82 was a good age, and that his chief concern was finishing his last book, which he did.

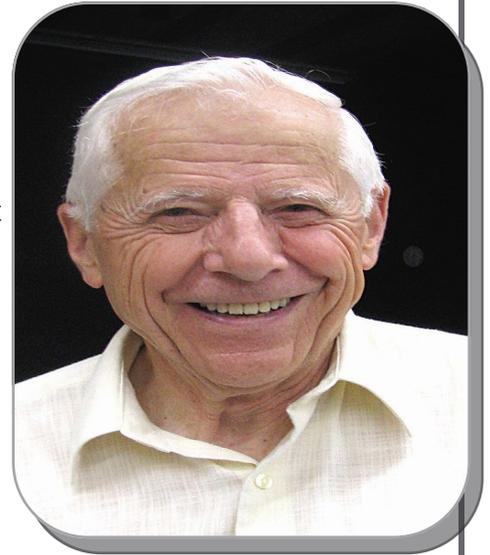
“Life is so interesting,” he said, marveling at the events of his years.

His illness surprised friends who knew the lithe, handsome Mershon as a dancer, karaoke singer, mountain climber, racing official at Multnomah Kennel Club and marathon runner and walker.

“We had hoped for a lot more years from Clarence. We had a lot more to learn from him,” said Otto, who worked on a committee with Mershon for an exhibit on the 100th anniversary of the historic highway. The exhibit, Otto said, will be dedicated to Mershon.

Mershon, born in Corbett in 1931, saw his life and his family’s presence as part of the grand scheme of history. Mershons settled on “the hill” at Mershon and Chamberlain roads in the 1890s.

“My grandfather was killed by the Missoula Floods,” he liked to say, in telling the story of Alfred Mershon who died in 1918 while trying to dig up a large rock — likely a glacial erratic dropped by the Ice Age floods. The elder Mershon was killed when the rock moved and crushed him.



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Inspired by the late Alice Wand at a meeting of the Crown Point Country Historical Society, Mershon, retired administrator from the Parkrose School District, interviewed pioneer families, sitting at kitchen tables, gathering photos, mastering the computer technology to self publish histories of Corbett schools and subsequently stories on the highway, its businesses, local farmers, the flower industry, for a total of 10 books.

Employing his near-photographic memory, he could recite chapter and verse of nearly all of the community's long time residents.

"His memory," Otto said. "I wish I had a filing system half that good."

The Mershons were instrumental in gathering the Charles W. Post art collection for the Crown Point society.

It was in recording the history of World War II veterans, that Mershon, a Korean War veteran, got his hackles up when he discovered that the names of 12 of the area's Japanese-American veterans were not on the veteran's roster at a local church.

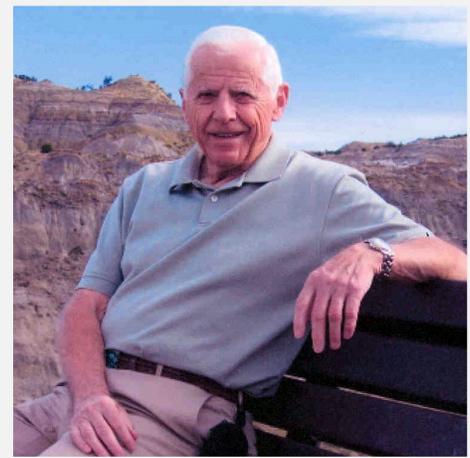
He set out to correct the record, researching and writing their stories. His work on the Japanese was honored by Portland's Nikkei Legacy Center.

His best selling book, however, was a history of the Historic Columbia River Highway, "which helped pay the bills."

Mershon's wife of 63 years, Colleen, his high school sweetheart, joked about her husband's inventory of books. "This stack is high enough to make a pretty good dressing table," she observed.

The two spent much time at local fairs and other events selling books. They were honored grand marshals at the Corbett Fourth of July event in 2007. Parents of four, they helped raise their oldest granddaughter as well. They have six grandchildren, and mourned a seventh grandchild who died of a brain tumor. There are two great grandchildren.

The family suggests contributions to the Troutdale Historical Society for its highway exhibit or to the Corbett Education Foundation for the Clarence and Colleen Mershon scholarship fund.



Trekker Arlie Harris Departs at Age 96

Lois "Arlie" Harris, long time Gresham resident and a member of the Troutdale and Gresham historical societies, died May 25, 2013 at the age of 96. For many years she was a regular on our Troutdale Treks, with a seat at the front of the bus, so that when a story came to her, she could grab the mike and tell it.

Harris, was born March 9, 1917, in Goldendale, Wash. Her narratives were peppered with tales from the years she was an interview specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau in remote stretches of the Western states. "I knocked on the door once and a man answered stark naked," she would say, just for openers.

But her best tale, told without remorse, involves the time in the early 1960s when she and a group of indignant wives burned down a house of ill repute in the Columbia River Gorge near The Dalles.

Irritated by the unsavory commerce that took place there, Harris and her allies gave its occupants fair warning to evacuate and then lit the fire.

"It didn't do a lot of good," she admits. "The girls just moved across the road."

Harris grew up in the Columbia River Gorge in Home Valley, Wash., one of two girls in a tiny school with a total student body of seven kids.

One of her favorite recollections about the East Wind is of riding west around Wind Mountain with her mother at the wheel of a Model T Ford. "We'd just round the edge of the mountain and there was the wind and it would just stop that car. Mother would wait for the wind to let up a bit, and then she'd give it the gas and we'd drive around the mountain."

Arlie was a country kid raised by her mother, Eva, and stepfather, Fred Groshong. She went to high school in Woodland, Wash., and at 18 "knowing nothing about nothing" was in Portland going to beauty school. She had a friend who worked part-time in a tavern and Arlie helped her out a bit when she was sick. "I'd never even seen a man drunk," she remembers now of her initiation into Portland's nightlife. But she met Cliff Harris, 20 years her senior, and they were married in two months.

She and Cliff moved to Gresham in 1946 to watch the community grow from a city of 3,000 into the state's fourth largest city. Her late husband was from a longtime Gresham family. She took his history, as well as her own experiences growing up on a primitive farm, using them to embellish programs for local school children for the Gresham Historical Society.

Arlie was a charter member of Gresham Historical Society and the Salvation Army. Cliff died in December of 1977. Arlie continued a life of adventure, riding in a hot air balloon at 85 and at age 90, celebrating her birthday by sky diving. Being Arlie, she explained that for sky diving, she wore her "incontinence pants" just in case of accident.



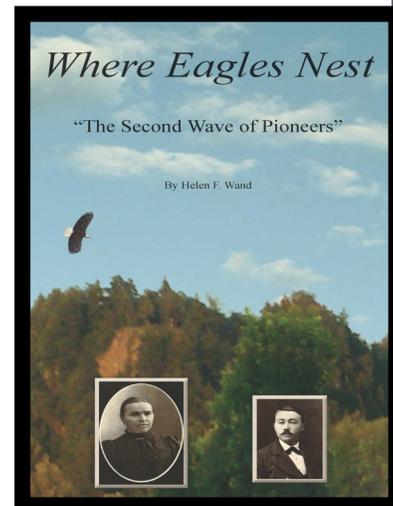
Arlie Harris in second row, center in sunglasses, joined this April 26, 1998 Troutdale Trek to Tacoma and back with a stop for a hamburger on I-5.

Helen Wand pens her first book

Troutdale Historical Society board member Helen Wand has published her book, "Where Eagles Nest", a work of fiction, but built around the lives of her immigrant ancestors who settled in the Columbia River Gorge. The new book is for sale in the depot for \$15. She will be at the depot for First Friday, July 5, from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

Helen researched early Portland and area history to create a story about Alex and Juliana Lampert carving a farm from wilderness on the cliffs above the Columbia River. She describes them as being in the "second wave" of pioneers, arriving by train in 1883. By that time, families had begun to make their way to far East County to settle what is now Corbett and Springdale.

Helen, currently an educator, spend most of her career working as a medical technologist, but her true passion is history. Daughter of Ig and Alice Wand, she listened to the tales of her father and grandmother which whetted her appetite to record their stories.



Finding Lucia Lorain Bigelow Williams in Salem

Sixteen people joined us for our annual cemetery tour down the slab to Salem and back on May 18. We always learn something new from leader, Stan Clarke, this time a little story inspired by a tombstone in Hayesville about how many women were named "America."

However, this time, at Salem Pioneer Cemetery we ran into an old friend, the obelisk marking the grave site of Lucia Lorain Bigelow Williams and other family members. Lucia Williams was the great-grandmother of Helen Althaus, our longtime member and the owner of Sweet Brier Farm, now home of historical society president David Ripma.

Years ago Helen Althaus brought a letter to our meeting, reading Lucia's own account of traveling the Oregon Trail and crossing the Barlow Road. Later published as "A Letter Home," Lucia Lorain's account of the trail, even including the loss of a child crushed by a wagon wheel, is brave and upbeat. Her son, Emmet, became an attorney in Portland, bought and developed Sweet Brier Farm, and often commuted to Portland by fast trotting horse. Thanks to Gresham Memorial Chapel for underwriting the cost of our bus.

Laura Lawry

Laura Lawry died June 19 in her Gresham home. She was the mother of Jeff Lawry and the wife of Jerry Lawry, who rebuilt our depot museum exhibit more than 10 years ago. A retired secretary from David Douglas school district, she enjoyed history and our newsletter, and was present when we dedicated the Depot Waiting Room to the memory of son Jeff, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Jeff and Jerry's creations, the Depot People, still inhabit the exhibit adding a whimsical note to the rooms.

We are planning a Harlow House reception to gather the piano students of Mabel Evans. If you were one of the kids who learned the keyboard at the Harlow House under her tutelage, please call our office, 503-661-2164, or email Helen Wand at hfwand@comcast.net.

Next time you go by the Harlow House, 726 E. Historic Columbia River Highway, stop for a minute and walk around to the back (west side) of the house to see the flower bed the Tuesday Ladies have created.

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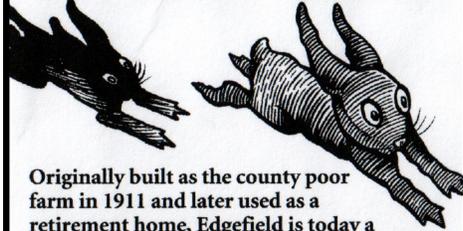


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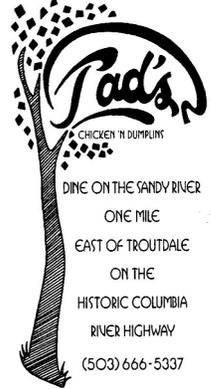
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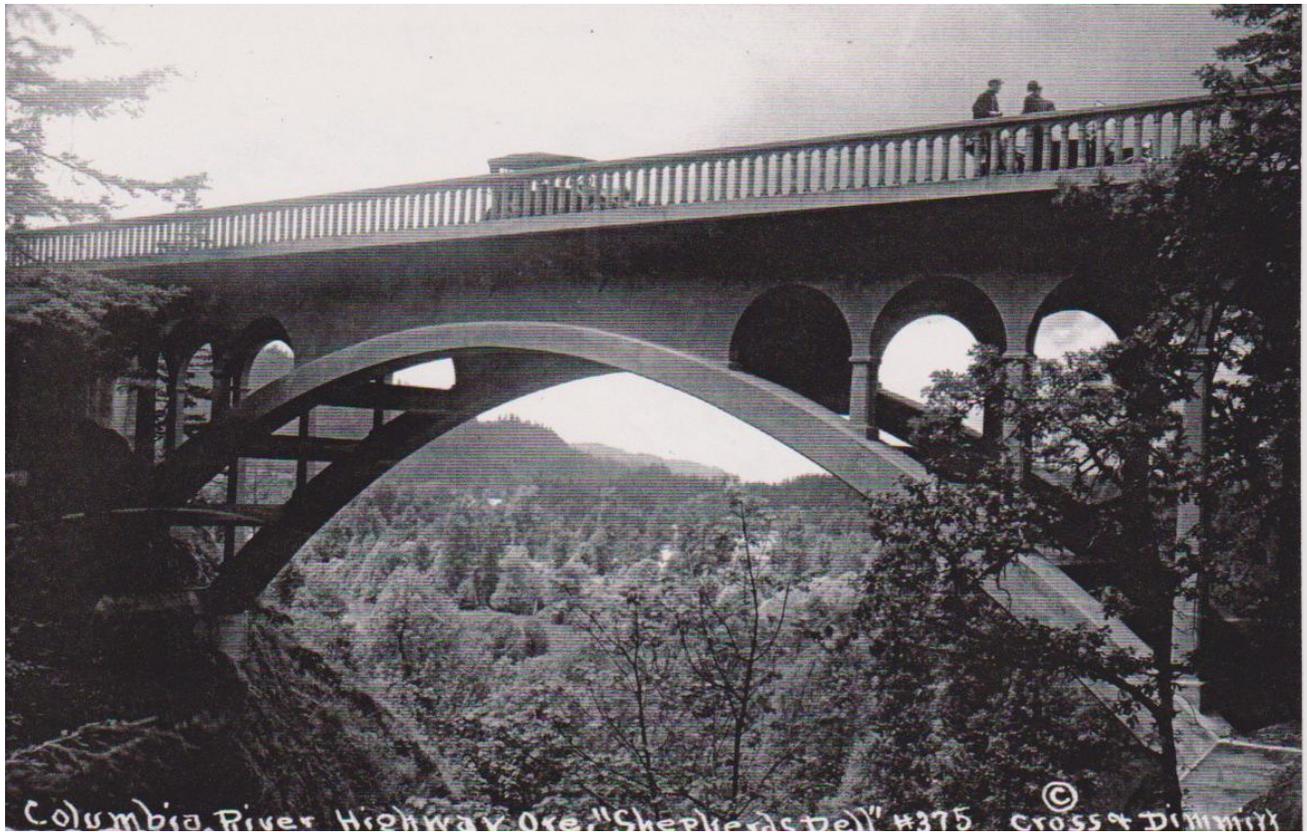
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Mission Statement: To gather, preserve and make available material relating to the history of the community of Troutdale, the Sandy River, the Columbia River Gorge and nearby area: To stimulate interest in and knowledge of, the locality's past.

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