

TThe Historical Summer 2014

The Official Newsletter of Talent Historical Society



Oregon Encyclopedia Features Article About Talent by Jan Wright

Jan Wright, the former director of the Talent Historical Society Museum and present Society board member, has had an article about the history of Talent included in the Oregon Encyclopedia. For those of you who want an additional concise history of Talent, copies of her article are available upon request at the Talent Historical Society Museum. Her one page article is not only historically accurate, but it also will help explain why the Talent area is so unique. It is the best short history of the Talent area currently available. Here is Jan's article:

“Once called Wagner Creek, Talent is located in southwestern Oregon between Ashland and Medford. Situated near the confluences of Wagner and Anderson Creeks with Bear Creek, the town sits astride important travel routes, including the California Trail, the Applegate Trail, the California-Oregon stage road, the Southern Pacific Railroad, the Old Pacific Highway, and Highway 99.

“Jacob Wagner filed the first Donation Land Claim along Wagner Creek in 1852. During the Rogue River War of 1853, Fort Wagner, a temporary fortification constructed on Wagner’s land by U.S. Army troops, provided shelter for a group of emigrants traveling on the Applegate Trail. While "forting up," the parents in the group demonstrated their intent to stay by planning for the education of their children. In May 1854, they built what is believed to be the first schoolhouse in the valley, near Bear Creek.

“During the final Indian war of 1855-1856, John Beeson, a newspaper correspondent, accused whites of causing the hostilities for personal gain. He was forced to leave the valley in 1856, when his neighbors threatened him after intercepting an article he wrote for San Francisco newspapers. Beeson's wife and son remained in Jackson County while he lived on the East Coast, where he tirelessly plead for the Indian cause. His son, Welborn Beeson, kept a diary of events in Jackson County settlements, which is still used today to study the area’s history.

“The community grew into an important agricultural center that kept the gristmills in Ashland and Phoenix busy. Still, many of Wagner Creek's first

citizens—including Jacob Wagner, Albert Rockfellow, and James Thornton—preferred business ventures to farming and moved to Ashland. In 1876, Aaron Patton Talent bought most of Jacob Wagner’s land and applied for a post office under the name of Wagner Creek. The approved application named the new post office Talent.

“A.P. Talent surveyed and divided up parcels of his land to sell, opened a store, planted orchards, and built houses. He also served as postmaster. After the railroad came through the town in the mid-1880s, shops, a hotel and restaurant, a doctor's office, a two-story brick schoolhouse, a box factory, three churches, and a cannery were built. In 1910, when the population reached 250, the City of Talent incorporated.

“Fruit orchards proliferated during the early twentieth century, and the Talent Irrigation District was formed to bring water to the entire Rogue Valley. Sawmills operated along Wagner and Anderson Creeks during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After World War II, a number of loggers were employed by the gyppo outfit, Skeeters Logging Company. In recent decades, with major population growth and dense residential development, Talent has become a bedroom community for Ashland and Medford.

“In the 1880s, a Universal Mental Liberty Hall was built to provide a place for debate and social gatherings. Schoolteachers Willis J. Dean, Rosa Waters, and others were intent on teaching Wagner Creek students to think for themselves and to challenge traditional notions with scientific methods.

“Many Talent residents practiced spiritualism, were skeptical toward conventional religions, and supported Free Thought. Spurred on by the Talent News in the 1890s and through the 1910s, many residents had populist and even socialist leanings. The citizens of Talent elected William Breese, by all but one of the votes cast, as the first Socialist mayor in Oregon. Shortly after women got the vote, Talent elected Leta Luke to serve as the first female city recorder. Two socially and politically savvy women, Mae Lowe and Alice Burnette, typed, mimeographed, and delivered their own publication, the Talent News Flashes, from 1934 to 1989. The Talent News and Review continues that tradition. **The**

Siskiyou Pass Has Been Difficult for Years

The long distance truckers find the mountain pass between California and Oregon the most difficult spot on I-5. At 4310 feet, the Siskiyou summit is the highest pass on Interstate 5; and winter brings snow and ice. Travelers can be halted on both sides of the pass when winter weather bears down on the Siskiyou mountain complex. This pass was even more difficult historically than it is today.

Here is what C. C. Beekman--the pioneer banker of Jacksonville, and for over half a century was one of the leading citizens of Jackson County--said about the Siskiyou pass back in September 1913:

"It has been one of the desires of my life to see a fine highway over the Siskiyou. Ever since I conducted the express office at Jacksonville in the early '50s [1850s] and carried millions in gold over the mountains for the argonauts, I have looked forward to the time when the two states should be permanently linked together by a trunk highway.

"The old trail of pioneer days served its purpose long ago and the toll road which followed it has also had its day. The time is ripe for the coming of the real highway, one that both county and state can be proud of, and one that will provide a fitting entrance into the most beautiful valley in the country that is the gateway to the finest state in the Northwest."

Initially, members of the Shasta and Takelma tribes visited each other via an Indian trail over the Siskiyou. Then the Hudson Bay Company in the early 1820s began using that trail as they traveled south to the San Francisco Bay area to pick up their annual supplies which British ships brought into the Bay area. Usually in early October of each year, the pack trains of Hudson Bay would bring those supplies north to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. Hudson Bay avoided the bar of the Columbia River because they feared the supplies might be lost as that bar has been notoriously difficult to cross. Hudson Bay did not go south to California until 1828 when they reached French Camp near present Stockton, California. At that time the trail was known as the California Brigade Trail.

In 1834 mountain man and trapper Ewing Young brought a large herd of horses from California to the Chehalem valley in Northern Oregon using the Hudson Bay trail. In 1837, he duplicated that feat by bringing 630 California cattle north to cattle-poor Oregon. However, he basically avoided the gorge of the Sacramento River where both I-5 and the railroad currently run, preferring instead to go west of what is now Redding, and going north to the Scott River valley west of Yreka.

When gold was discovered in California at Sutter's mill, Oregon pioneers used the old Indian-Hudson Bay trail to go south for gold, and after 1851 California '49ers used the trail coming north to seek gold in Northern California and in Southern Oregon. They would go to what is now a Jacksonville-like town of Shasta west of Redding (which was not in existence in 1851) and then go north apparently from what today is Weaverville to the Scott River Valley and then to Yreka, avoiding the gorge of the Sacramento River.

In 1841, an overland party of the United States Exploring Expedition led by George F. Emmons came south over the trail bringing the first scientists and cartographers with them. The United States Exploring Expedition is often called the Wilke's Expedition after its leader Navy Lieutenant Charles Wilkes. After the middle of the 1830 decade, and the malaria epidemic which reduced Indian populations in both California and Oregon, the route was changed from the Scott River to the gorge of the Sacramento where Pacific Highway and U. S. 99 and Interstate 5 were all located.

However, in the 1860s when a stage company sought to make commercial travel between Oregon and California, the route over Siskiyou pass needed to be improved. A. G. Rockfellow, of Wagner Creek (now Talent), laid out a toll road which would accommodate stage and wagon traffic. Portions of that road still exist on private property. That toll road allowed uninterrupted stage travel between the two states. And in 1864, the first telegraph line connected the early towns along the Siskiyou Trail.

The Oregon & California Railroad Company finished construction of a railroad link between California and Oregon in 1887, but it took five steam engines to put a loaded railroad train over the Siskiyou Pass, and that effort contributed to further destruction of the pine trees on the floor of the Rogue Valley since there is inadequate coal available in the Rogue Valley.

It wasn't until the mid-1910s that the pioneering Pacific Highway provided easy automobile traffic between the two states. The Pacific Highway was subsequently named Highway 99, and then in the 1960s Interstate-5 was completed. And when it snows, even though the state highway department works mightily to keep the Siskiyou pass open, the snow will stop all traffic.

Rare Beeson Diary Now Available at Museum

Welborn Beeson started a diary on his 16th birthday in 1851. When his family started for Oregon in 1853, ultimately joining what has been called the "Preacher Train," that particular portion of the diary is the only one that has ever been published. Medford publisher Bert Webber's book is titled Oregon & Applegate Trail: Diary of Welborn Beeson in 1853.

Welborn continued his diary until his death in 1893, and wrote over 1,400,000 words. It is the most complete record of events in the Talent and Jackson County area yet unearthed. Welborn wrote his diary in little chapbooks, buying a new one when each was filled. When Welborn died, various members of the Beeson family had the original chapbooks. Eventually, they decided to gather them all up, and deposited them at the University of Oregon Library.

Today, those original diaries are locked away in the Special Collection at the University in Eugene. Only qualified researchers were able to view the original diaries. Jan Wright, then the Talent Historical Society Museum director, contacted the Beeson family who contributed a sizable sum of money and with a grant secured by the Talent Historical Society, the University of Oregon Library microfilmed all of the diary chapbooks.

After the Society secured the microfilm and purchased a microfilm reader-printer, the Society created print photocopies of each diary booklet. Able local transcribers (working with Jan Wright, at that time the director of the Society museum) have transcribed into print format all of the years of Welborn's diary except for 1893. That last year is still in the process of being transcribed.

Copies of the original diaries (which the family gave to the University of Oregon) are in the Talent Historical Society Reference Library as are the transcriptions plus explanatory added detail for several of the diary years. Individuals who might want to read the diaries can now do so in the Talent Historical Society Reference Library. They cannot be checked out, but must be read in the Museum as they are the only copies of Welborn Beeson's monumental diary that exist.

The Society and those who worked so hard to transcribe the diaries welcome those who wish to read either the copies or the transcriptions during the Museum's open hours.

Pioneer Oregonians were Bi-Lingual

When the editor (Bob Casebeer) of this newsletter was a young boy, he often stayed at his great aunt's home, for his dad left to work for the U. S. Forest Service in early April during the 1930s, and his mother often went some 34 miles up the North Umpqua with his father, leaving his great aunt to "babysit" him. However, whenever she and her visitors of the same age wanted to talk to each other and did not want to share those thoughts or that gossip with him listening, they would use the Chinook jargon which most of her friends of her age all knew and could use fluently.

The Chinook jargon was a pidgin trade language of the Pacific Northwest and was commonly called the "chinuk wawa." a phrase that meant "Chinook talk" The jargon was related to but not the same as the aboriginal language of the Chinook people, Native Americans who lived on the lower Columbia River. The jargon was used first in what is now Oregon and Washington states, but spread into British Columbia, Alaska and the Yukon territory, often taking on the characteristics of a creole language.

Many of the words used remain in common use in the Western United States in both the indigenous languages as well as regional English usage, to the point where most people are unaware that the word was originally from the Jargon. The total number of words in the Jargon numbered only in the hundreds so it was easy to learn, and it had its own grammatical system, a very simple one, and it too was easy to learn. However, the consonant "R" is rare and so loan words from English or French are altered. For example the word "rice" becomes "lice" and the French word "merci" becomes "mahsie."

Welborn Beeson listed a few words he wanted to learn in his April 1859 diary. Here are the jargon words he was using at that time (the jargon word comes first, followed by the English word): Alker—After; Boston Man---white man; Clatawa—go away; Cahsco---come; Cos---where; Chuch---water; Close---good; Cultus---bad; Copesit---break; Ceneten---horse; coper---to; Hiou---many; Hias---very; Hiac---hurry; Hictger---what; Hilie---land; Seters---things; Much Much---food; Mowitch---deer or cattle; Memloose---kill; Polole---amunition; Mesica---we; Mica---you; Nica---I; Nanitch---see; Norwitca---yes; Okoke---that; Olo---hungry; Potelach---give (we still use the word "potlatch"); Piea---fire; Sahala---high; Siya---far away; Saxe---sir; Scucum---strong (current usage in Northwest dialects "skookum" meaning "good, as in "skookum chuck"---good food); Sullex---mad; Tia or Tyee---chief; Teca---want; Tenas---little; Wake---no, Wawa---talk; Yowa---there; Yocwa—yonder.

Amazon.com lists several books about the Chinook jargon including these: Holton, Jim. Chinook Jargon: The Hidden Language of the Pacific Northwest.

WaWa Press, July 2004. Paperback 137 pp. Price: \$346.38 or in Kindle at \$4.99.

Gibbs, George. A Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon, or the Trade Language of Oregon. Price: \$15.78 Paperback

Shaw, George Coombs. The Chinook Jargon and How to Use it. A Complete and Exhaustive Lexicon of the Oldes Trade Language of the Pacific Northwest. Paperback: \$17.05

Ray's Market News Flashes: Started Talent Paper Name

Ray J. Schumacher, owner of Ray's Market, a grocery store in Talent, circa 1934, employed Mae Lowe to create and edit a newsletter for his business. The paper was distributed to Talent residents apparently free of charge. The Talent Historical Society, thanks to the efforts of Alice Burnette, has some original copies of Ray's Market News Flashes.

After some years of publication the Ray's Market efforts were imitated by other Talent stores. Some of their attempts to woo customers have also been kept

and given to the historical society. These include three pages of a similar publication by the Talent Market, editor unknown, date unknown. Two pages (in two similar copies published for distribution in Talent) also exist with a fictional section titled "Tales of Talent Hills"--author unknown.

At some point, apparently in December 1937, Ray's Market ceased publication, and editor Mae Lowe began publishing and circulating a similar publication now just named News Flashes. However, Mae continued to use the same format and continued to use the pre-existing Volume and Issue numbers previously used for Ray's Market News Flashes. The Historical Society does not have all the early News Flashes issues.

The Ray's Market issues seem to cease in December 1937, and a variety of different publications (all apparently created by Mae Lowe) fill the gap until more continuous publication began in 1939. The first issue housed at the Society is September 22, 1939. The last issue published by Mae Lowe and Alice Burnette was in September 1989.

However, the Flash name used for distribution of news and information for Talent area citizens has not vanished. In 1998, the City of Talent monthly newsletter assumed the Flash name; and in 2008 when the Talent News and Review began publishing the city newsletter regularly in their publication, the Flash name which had graced the city newsletter for over seventy-four years became a regular feature—focusing completely on City of Talent activities and communications.

Hiram Colver Had a Big Impact on the Upper Bear Creek Valley

October 20, 1850, marked the day that Hiram Colver arrived in Oregon according to his Donation Land Claim application, a land claim that was adjacent to his brother Samuel Colver's donation land claim. The Colver land claims were near and included today's city of Phoenix. Hiram Colver, a lawyer by occupation, made his land claim on 13 January 1852.

Hiram was born in 1819 in Irwin, Union County Ohio, to Samuel and Rachel Colver. He was admitted to the bar in Ohio in 1845. He originally settled in the southern part of the Willamette Valley, but moved his wife and children to his Jackson County land claims in 1853. Eli K. Anderson in a deposition dated 19 September 1853 indicated that

“he was in no way interested in the tract or tracts of land claimed by Hiram Colver, particularly described in the annexed notification to the Surveyor General of Oregon, and stated that he was personally acquainted with Hiram Colver, and knew that he had personally resided upon and cultivated the said tract of land continuously from

the twentieth day of January 1852 to the 19th day of September 1853”

This statement was required because the land had not yet been surveyed.

E. K. Anderson was an adjacent land owner. The quotation above was signed in the presence of Edward Sheil, U. S. District Clerk on October 29, 1853. Hiram claimed 640 acres of land just south of the butte in the south part of the present city of Phoenix, and on the west side of Bear Creek, then known as Stewart River. Incidentally, that butte was covered with pine trees in 1853. Hiram's land claim also included a hot spring. His claim was bounded on the north by the claim of his brother Samuel Colver, on the west by W. M. Lynch, and on the south by the claims of Woodrow Reams, and Chase and Nelson D. Smith.

At the time Hiram was married to Maria, and at this time had five children: Maria, Hiram, Solon, Abi, and Martha. He and Maria were married on April 10, 1841, in Madison County, Ohio. In 1855, Hiram built a frame house for his family for by that date several sawmills had been established in the upper Bear Creek valley—one in Ashland, one in Talent, and one in Phoenix which was then called “Gassburg.” In 1856, Hiram Colver served in Company A, First Recruiting Battalion of the Second Regiment, Oregon Mounted Volunteers during the Rogue River Indian War. Politically, Hiram Colver was instrumental in the first effort to establish the Republican Party in the state of Oregon.

Some of the generally accurate historical records claim that Hiram Colver died on November 28, 1858. Both Elbert D. Foudray's Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon and the Phoenix Cemetery Index use that date, but the court document filed when Hiram's estate was probated have Hiram's death as November 14, 1857—this is a document signed by Samuel Colver (Hiram's brother) and Maria Colver. Hiram's widow. Hiram died at age 42. That death date also appears on a court order by L.J. C. Duncan, Judge of Probate, which appointed Samuel and Maria Colver as administrators of the estate, and is signed by both Duncan and Samuel and Maria on 10 December 1857.

The huge house built by Hiram's brother Samuel Colver, which stood until a few years ago along Highway 99 on the south side of Phoenix, A piece of the log timbers from Samuel's burned house is on display outside the Phoenix Historical Society Museum, but Hiram's 1855 house is stillstanding and is now 159 years old. It is located at 117 West First Street in Phoenix.

WHEN TALENT AVENUE WAS PACIFIC HIGHWAY TALENT HAD EIGHT GAS STATIONS

Today, in 2013, the City of Talent has two gas stations—the Union station roughly at Colver Road and Talent Avenue, and the Chevron Station on East Valley View down by Bear Creek. However, during the thirty year period beginning 73 years ago (circa 1940), Talent residents and travelers down Old Pacific Highway and then present Highway 99 had a variety of places where that gas tank near empty could be filled. Bowing to historical necessity, and relying on the sharp memory of long-time resident Robert Burnett, here is the list of one-time Talent gas stations:

Beginning up where Colver Road and Suncrest Road intersect with Highway 99, the service stations string out until a driver reaches where Creel Road meets up with Highway 99 and Old Pacific Highway (now Talent Avenue).

There was a Texaco station on the east side by Suncrest Road facing Highway 99. That building was where the Clayfolk supply store was after it moved out of the concrete building across from the Talent Club. At one time, a man named Deitrich operated that Texaco station.

Across Highway 99 from that Texaco station, was a Union Station (and there is a Union station there today. However, when Highway 99 was expanded from a two lane to a four lane highway, a number of cabins adjacent to the present station were demolished. Several individuals owned or operated that station during the years. That station may have been a Shell station during part of the 73 years being documented. Burnett says Eddie Heim owned it at one time.

Another Union station was located on the northeast corner of East Valley View road and Highway 99. At one time during its existence, Al Graber operated that station.

There was a Flying A station located where the current video store and Quick Stop market are located. The Skeeter logging company operated that gas station as it also serviced their logging operation.

Moving over to Talent Avenue (old Pacific Highway and before that the Applegate Trail), a Chevron station was located at the corner of Main and Talent Avenue. Currently, the Harvest restaurant is in that structure. Apparently during the late 1940s a man named Grady Caldwell had that station and it was a wooden structure. When it was sold to Jiggs Conner, he brought a metal building over from Medford when 10th Street was extended to Riverside Avenue, and got rid of the wooden building. That structure is still the framework for the building. When Conner retired, the station was sold to the Stark family who operated until they

moved from Talent. The new owner leased the building out as a restaurant, and it has been one from then until now.

The Stark family also purchased a Mobil station (which is now a coffee shop) located at the southwest corner of Wagner Avenue and Talent Avenue.

Somewhere located about halfway between Rapp Road and Creel Road on Talent Avenue was one of the really old gas stations. It was called Norris Grocery and Gas and was basically forced out of business when Highway 99 replaced the old Pacific Highway. For several years it had a glass gas pump standing where it was located, and it stood there unused for a number of years according to Burnett.

Gas station number 8 was also a combination small grocery and gas station and was owned by Dean Blackburn and was called Snappy Service. Today that same building which lies on the east side of Highway 99 north of the Creel Road junction is an auto repair shop.

**The Museum Will Be Open All Day During the Annual
Talent Harvest Festival. Do Drop In and Look Around!**

**Talent Historical Society
P. O. Box 582
Talent, Oregon 97540**