



ByGone Times

Quarterly Newsletter of the Troutdale Historical Society

Office: (503) 661-2164 Email: TroutdaleHistory@gmail.com

HO HO HISTORY SANTA COMES TO THE BARN!



On Saturday, December 6th, the Barn Exhibit Hall Museum came alive with holiday cheer during our annual Stories & Smiles with Santa celebration. Nearly 60 families gathered for an afternoon filled with smiles, cookies, warm cider, and festive fun. Santa listened closely to every child's wish list, making sure each one made its way safely to the North Pole, while families shared special moments and created lasting memories. Once again, our incredible Programs & Events team delivered a truly magical event. Heartfelt thanks to Margaret Rice, Jamie LaCour, Joy Beldin, Cathy Peetz, Angel Garza, Helen Wand, Molly Peichel, Adam Klauss, Melba Klinker, Rosemary Griffith, Bonnie Jepson, and of course Santa himself. We were also grateful to Legna Studio for providing free family photos and for helping us launch our first-ever "Crayons to Keepsakes" Ornament Design Contest. Congratulations to Laia, a talented 6-year-old from Troutdale, whose winning design will be available for purchase starting December 20th online and at the Barn. All proceeds support our Hammers for History Fundraiser. Learn more at www.TroutdaleHistory.org.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Teacher, Craftsman, Historian: Len Otto's Lasting Impact on Troutdale

Len Otto grew up in Troutdale, attended Troutdale Grade School, and later taught there for fifteen years before moving to other positions in the Reynolds School District. He has very fond memories of his years as a teacher and of the students he taught. Recruited to THS by the incomparable Sharon Nesbit, Len Otto began volunteering for THS in the late 1980s as a Board of Directors member. Since then, he has served numerous terms on the Board, and has been president once (2015-2016). Additionally, he was a member of the first Barn Museum exhibit, **Smelt Run**, in the late 1990s, and of the Troutdale Centennial exhibit in 2007. In 2011 Otto began working many long hours over a four year period on the King of Roads ~ Byway of the People exhibit currently on display at our Barn Museum. Its opening was in 2015. He currently holds positions on the Collections Committee, and is a volunteer proofreader for ByGone Times, THS' quarterly newsletter. Otto's volunteerism comes, in part, by heredity. His mother was a founding member of the Troutdale Historical Society, and was one of the Society's first volunteers. She volunteered countless hours over many, many years. In his spare time, Otto is a passionate fisherman (Spring Chinook, fall coho, and steelhead particularly) and hunter, a die-hard woodworker ("I love my lathe," he says.), reader (mysteries and nonfiction), and vegetable gardener. He also tends ≈30 fruit trees (apples, pears, Asian pears, plums, and figs). While he has a soft spot in his heart for dogs, he now is a cat lover, too. (He was adopted by a multi-hued female feline a few short weeks ago.) Otto encourages you to volunteer. "Somewhere inside you have a talent THS can use. You could be really helpful to our mission!"



Yarn at the Barn

~Barn Exhibit Hall Museum~

732 E. Historic Columbia River Highway
Troutdale, OR 97060

Program starts at 10:00am until Noon/FREE

Presented by Jamie LaCour

Get creative with us! Our free fiber arts program returns on the first Wednesday of every month from 10:00 am to noon at the Barn Exhibit Hall. Come build new skills, exchange techniques, and enjoy the joy of crafting together. Open to ages 14 and up, with beginner supplies provided. Best of all, it's completely free, join us and start creating!

February 4th ~ March 4th

THS Presents

~Sam Cox Building~

Glenn Otto Community Park

1102 E Historic Columbia River Hwy, Troutdale, OR 97060

Sunday, Feb 15th

Doors at 1:00pm / Program at 2:00pm / FREE

Eccentric Tales of Boring, Oregon

Presented by Bruce Haney

Founded in 1903, the town of Boring is anything but. This small community has a past packed with drama, mischief, and mystery. Locals once secretly hired a rising boxer to take on the town bully, while a Fourth of July gone wrong allegedly burned half the town to the ground. Meet the wild man of the woods, chase Prohibition-era moonshiners, uncover the truth behind the so-called Wild West Gang, and relive the chaos of a runaway train loaded with potatoes. History here is bold, bizarre, and unforgettable.



Renewing the Multnomah County Museum Levy sustains local history. It funds free museum access, education, preservation, and support for community historical societies. A yes vote protects shared heritage, strengthens civic pride, and ensures museums remain accessible to all residents countywide.



History Pubs at McMenamins



~Blackberry Hall at McMenamins Edgefield~
2126 SW Halsey St, Troutdale, OR 97060
Doors at 6:00pm / Program at 7:00pm/\$5

Monday, Jan 12th

Oregon Moonshine:

Bootleggers, Busts, and Brawls

Presented by Bruce Haney

Moonshining runs deep in Oregon's history, filled with secret stills, bold outlaws, and run-ins with the law. As early as 1844, when Oregon was still a territory, moonshiner James Conner challenged a lawman to a duel after his operation was discovered. Others, like the McKenzie River Bandits, successfully hid their bootlegging operations for years. Car chases, shootouts, and even assassination attempts marked this dangerous underground world. Join author and historian Bruce Haney as he uncovers the wild, intoxicating history of Oregon moonshine and the characters who lived it.

Monday, Feb 9th

A Man Called York:

Presented by Zachary Stocks

York, an enslaved man who traveled with the Lewis and Clark Expedition from 1803 to 1806, is often mentioned but rarely fully understood. Historian Zachary Stocks, Executive Director of Oregon Black Pioneers, presents a compelling biography that explores York's life before, during, and after the expedition, and his lasting place in American and African American history. Drawing on deep expertise in public history and interpretation, Stocks brings forward a fuller, more human story of York that goes far beyond the trail.

Monday, Mar 9th

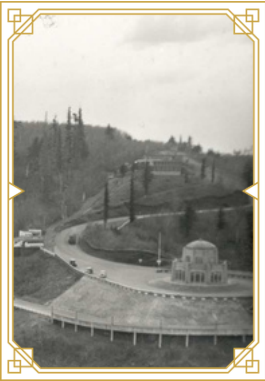
Old Glory Unfolded:

A History of the American Flag

Presented by Chris Garza

Presented by Troutdale Historical Society Director Chris Garza, this engaging program explores the history and meaning behind the stars and stripes of the American flag. Learn how Old Glory came to symbolize the nation and its ideals, followed by a Q&A discussion. The first 50 attendees will receive a special Flag of Honor commemorating those who lost their lives on September 11.

JUST THE OTHER DAY

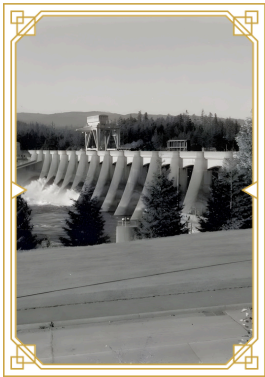


1936 – Still the King of Roads

By 1936, the Columbia River Highway was doing exactly what it was built to do: bringing people through Troutdale and into the Gorge. Tourists arrived, engines humming, wallets open, and no GPS in sight. Local businesses were happy to point the way.

1937 – Power Gets Organized

In 1937, Congress passed the Bonneville Project Act, creating the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to distribute electricity from Bonneville Dam throughout the Pacific Northwest. While the dam itself stood just west of Troutdale, its impact traveled far. Affordable, reliable power helped shape daily life, industry, and growth across the Columbia River corridor.



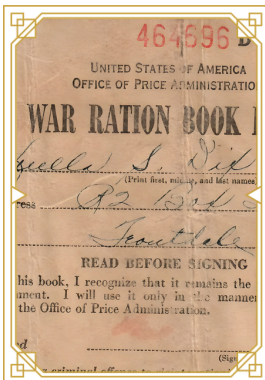
1938 – Lights On!

The completion of Bonneville Dam in 1938 changed everything. Suddenly, electricity became affordable and dependable, lighting homes, powering businesses, and reshaping daily life throughout the region. Life got a little brighter in more ways than one. Progress, it turns out, hums.



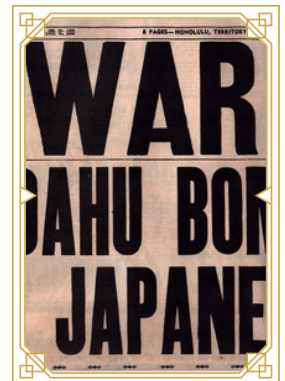
1941 – War Arrives Without Knocking

After Pearl Harbor, Troutdale went to war along with the rest of the country. Young men enlisted, ration books appeared, and scrap drives became part of daily life, making everyone look at old metal a little differently. Nothing was wasted, and even bacon grease suddenly had a purpose.



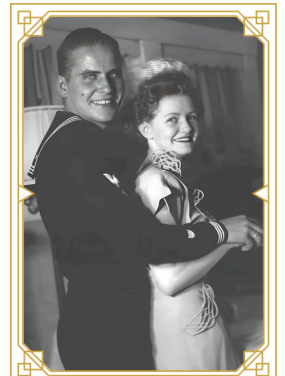
1943 – Make Do and Make It Work

By 1943, rationing was second nature. Victory gardens popped up in yards and vacant lots, nothing was wasted, and Troutdale quietly did its part day after day. It wasn't flashy, but it was steady. And steady, as it turns out, wins wars.



1945 – Home at Last

When the war ended in 1945, Troutdale welcomed home its veterans and began looking toward the future. Babies arrived, houses followed, and a sense of optimism filled the air. The town had weathered hard years together, and it was ready for whatever came next.



A Note of Thanks: We're thrilled to bring back a beloved local favorite, our community column inspired by longtime Troutdale historian and THS founder, Sharon Nesbit. Sharon's original column was a staple of our local paper, filled with wit, heart, and deep love for this town. It's an honor to carry on that tradition. Thank you, Sharon, for the inspiration, and to our readers for the warm welcome back!

WHEN THE RIVER ROSE

REMEMBERING THE 1964 CHRISTMAS FLOOD

In late December 1964, what began as a hopeful holiday snowfall turned into one of the most devastating natural disasters in Oregon history. Heavy snow blanketed the Columbia River Gorge just days before Christmas, piling deep in the mountains and valleys alike. Then came the warm rains. Temperatures rose quickly, the snowpack melted at an alarming rate, and rivers began to swell. By Christmas Eve, the Sandy and Columbia Rivers were rising fast and showing no signs of slowing. For Troutdale and surrounding communities, the timing could not have been worse. As families prepared for Christmas gatherings, wrapped gifts, and planned holiday meals, floodwaters surged over riverbanks, inundating homes, farmland, roads, and businesses. Entire neighborhoods near the Sandy River were cut off, and low-lying areas across Troutdale, Fairview, Corbett, and Gresham disappeared under water. What should have been a season of celebration quickly became one of uncertainty and fear. Infrastructure across the region took a heavy hit. Bridges were damaged or destroyed, highways closed, and rail lines washed out. Power outages were widespread, leaving residents without heat or light during freezing winter temperatures. Emergency responders worked around the clock, often by boat, to evacuate stranded families. Many spent Christmas in shelters, schools, churches, or with neighbors on higher ground. The flood claimed at least 19 lives statewide and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage across Oregon. In the months that followed, communities faced a long road to recovery. Homes were stripped to the studs, roads rebuilt, farms reclaimed, and floodplains forever changed. Today, the 1964 Christmas Flood remains a defining moment in Troutdale's history. It is remembered not only for its destruction, but for the courage, quick thinking, and resilience of those who lived through it, and those whose memories still carry the river's power. For THS volunteer and member Len Otto, the flood was not just a historic event, but a deeply personal memory that has never faded.

A Personal Memory - By Len Otto

Scary flood memories have never left me. My mother suffered the same. In the 1948 Vanport Flood (after nursing men injured in WWII) she lost all of her earthly possessions to a river, yet four years later – over her objections – she was living on a riverbank in Troutdale. She hated the river. Absolutely hated it. In summer there were drownings in front of our house, in winter, floods. The worst flood was December of 1964, sixteen short years after she survived Vanport. I never before nor since saw her as emotional as she was the day the water began rising, around December 23rd. She knew it was going to be bad. She was shaking. Warm rain on six-plus inches of snow never bodes well for riverbank residents. On the day of the dramatic rise in river level, she screamed in horror as we watched friend Eleanor Clark's house float by. We watched the buildings of the Advent Christian Church Camp topple one by one into the muddy brown, raging river. But her worst fear was that she was going to be in the house with five children when the river broke through the narrow section of roadbed separating us – our house – from the torrential river. Mom did not drive at that point, so she (and we) effectively had no escape. I previously have written about how Mom reached out by phone to someone she knew in the county roads department, making the case that the county was going to lose the bridge unless they did something right then, and of how she became a hero that day because of that. That county person took action, and as a result the bridge – and we – were saved. But, Mom was deeply scarred, emotionally scarred, from that day. As noted when I started this memory, Mom hated the river, absolutely hated it.



Sources

Oregon Historical Society, "The Christmas Flood of 1964"; Oregon Encyclopedia, "Christmas Flood of 1964"; U.S. Geological Survey, Floods of December 1964 in the Far Western States; National Weather Service, Portland Forecast Office, "Historic Flood Events: December 1964"; The Oregonian archives, December 1964–January 1965; Multnomah County Emergency Management historical records; City of Troutdale historical accounts and oral histories; Troutdale Historical Society archives and photograph collection.

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New Members Since November

Elijah Polyakov - Emily Hannick - Emmy Ibison
 Jessica O'Brien - Michael Hudson - Sam Benton
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Help Support Our Mission

Support history without having to time travel! Becoming a member, volunteer, or sponsor of the Troutdale Historical Society helps us preserve, share, and celebrate our community's rich past, from barn dances to big floods. Your support keeps our museums open, our programs thriving, and our stories alive. Plus, it gives you bragging rights as a local history hero. Join us, because history doesn't preserve itself (and we've tried asking).

For more information go to

www.TroutdaleHistory.org

email_Director@troutdalehistory.org

or call (503)661-2164

We also extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed through our cash donation boxes throughout 2025. Whether a small gift or a generous one, every dollar truly made a difference and directly supported our ability to preserve, share, and celebrate local history. These anonymous donations collectively have a meaningful impact, and we could not do this work without your continued generosity and support! Please know how deeply grateful we are for every contribution. Thank You!

NEW EXHIBIT AT THE BARN EXHIBIT HALL MUSEUM

Small Town, Big Story: America at 250

From quiet streets to defining moments, **Small Town, Big Story: America at 250** celebrates how our community helped shape a nation. This new exhibit honors the men and women who stepped forward in service, military members, police officers, civil defense volunteers, and the charitable organizations that answered the call when help was needed most. Come see how national history lives right here at home. Come reflect, feel proud, and be inspired by the everyday people whose dedication proves that even the smallest towns can leave a lasting mark on America's story.



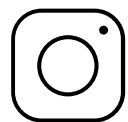
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This Month in the Highway's Past: December on the Historic Columbia River Highway

Each December along the Historic Columbia River Highway carries echoes of its century-long story, from early 20th-century engineering feats to modern trail expansions and community stewardship. As the Gorge settles into winter, this historic roadway continues to evolve, connecting people not only to landscapes, but to history itself.

A Century of Scenic History

Originally constructed between 1913 and 1922, the Historic Columbia River Highway was the nation's first planned scenic roadway. It was designed not just to move people from place to place, but to showcase the natural beauty of the Columbia River Gorge. Over time, Interstate 84 replaced much of the original route for through travel, yet the Historic Highway remains cherished for its craftsmanship, scenic viewpoints, and enduring character. In Troutdale, the highway begins its journey eastward, earning the town its long-held title as the Gateway to the Gorge.

From Trails to Tunnels: Modern Milestones

In recent years, preservation and recreation have gone hand in hand along the highway corridor. Large portions of the old roadway have been reborn as the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to experience the Gorge much as early motorists once did. A major milestone came in 2025 with the reopening of the Mitchell Point Tunnel. Carved into the basalt cliffs high above the river, the tunnel restored a long-missing link and revived one of the most dramatic sections of the original highway. Its reopening marked the return of a feature that had been absent for more than seventy years.

December Planning and Community Stewardship

December has also become a time of reflection and planning for the highway's future. In December 2025, the Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee met in Troutdale to review progress and discuss upcoming preservation and trail projects. These meetings continue a long tradition of community involvement, ensuring that the highway remains both protected and accessible for future generations.

Winter Work Along a Historic Road

Even as winter slows travel through the Gorge, work continues behind the scenes. Restoration efforts on historic road structures near Multnomah Falls are underway, focused on preserving viaducts and masonry that date back more than a century. At the same time, planners and builders are preparing the final connections that will one day complete the State Trail from Troutdale deep into the Gorge.

A Living Highway

This December, as rain clouds gather and the river swells below, the Historic Columbia River Highway stands as a reminder that history is not frozen in time. It is maintained, restored, and reimagined year after year. From the engineers who first shaped this scenic road to the volunteers and planners guiding it today, the highway remains a living part of Troutdale's story and a lasting gateway to the Gorge.

A Message from the President of THS

As we close out 2025, my heartfelt thanks go to our amazing volunteers who make everything we do possible. 2025 brought THS exciting new events like the double-deck bus trip to The Dalles, and continued success with our History Pub nights at Edgefield. Jamie LaCour continues hosting our successful Yarn at the Barn classes, and we need to give her a special thanks for stepping up to become our interim Treasurer. THS Director Chris Garza has some intriguing plans for 2026 including revising some of the exhibit space and the Museum Gift Shop in the Barn – the Board approved Chris's ideas, with details coming soon. During 2025 important and necessary repairs were made to the Barn building to ensure a long and safe future for the structure. And as you can see elsewhere in the newsletter, THS has more stimulating and appealing events planned for the early months of 2026. Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart, for helping us preserve and celebrate the spirit of Troutdale. May you all have a Happy 2026!

With best wishes, sincerely,
THS Board President

David Ripma



Dave Ripma



Volunteer Editorial Team Spotlight

Joy Beldin and Len Otto serve as the Volunteer Editorial Team for the ByGone Times, and their dedication has been invaluable for many years. Through their careful proofreading, thoughtful edits, and attention to detail, they help ensure each issue is clear, accurate, and polished. Their commitment to quality and consistency strengthens every publication and reflects a deep care for our organization's history and voice. We extend our sincere and heartfelt thanks to Joy and Len for their exceptional service and continued support.

THS BOARD

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Editorial Team

Joy Beldin ~ Len Otto

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Rail Depot

Mon - Sun / 9am - 3pm

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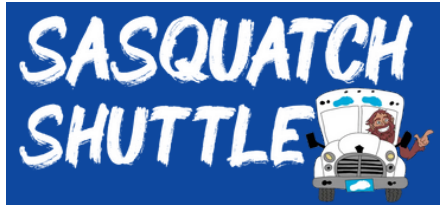
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Troutdale, OR, 97060

Phone: 503-661-2164
Email: Troutdalehistory@gmail.com
Website: www.TroutdaleHistory.org

The Troutdale Historical Society is organized and shall be operated exclusively to gather, preserve and make available museum, record, and other material relating to the history of the community of Troutdale, the northern portion of the Sandy River, and nearby areas to stimulate an interest in, and knowledge of the locality's past.

Thank you for your support!



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