

The Troutdale Historical Society

On February 28, 1968, about a dozen Troutdale residents met in city hall to talk about saving the city's history.

Under the leadership of Mayor Glenn Otto, Troutdale had begun to change. Though a community of less than a thousand people, it was beginning to grow as Portland's suburbs crept east along the Banfield Freeway, later Interstate 84. By 1971 the town on the Sandy River would have its first subdivision and a population of 3,000.

Otto and his wife, Helen, worried that small, shabby Troutdale; its past written in the old storefronts on the Columbia River Highway, might lose its history unless care was taken to preserve it.

But most of the talk that first night was about the future. "We should have a museum," people said. Others dreamed that the old Harlow home, then owned by Lee and Mabel Evans, might be that museum.

The Troutdale City Council gave \$35 to the fledging historians and the Troutdale Lions paid postage costs for the citywide mailing announcing formation of the historical society. A March 1968 meeting brought 63 people as charter members. Erick Enquist, former mayor and fisherman, spoke on the era of fish wheels on the Columbia River.

First officers were Marilyn Oakes, president; Ray Moore, vice president; Joe Lucas, treasurer; Sharon Nesbit, secretary.

A few months later Glenn Otto suggested that older members who were unable to attend evening meetings might like a daytime event. That June 300 people filled the old dance hall in Troutdale City Hall for the first ice cream social.

In 1970, historian Clare Belsher recognized that the old route up the hill near the Harlow House was a branch of the Oregon Trail that took pioneers from the Sandy River to Oregon City. Alex Jones, Troutdale resident and retired Wisconsin school administrator, was president from 1971 to 1975, when a log historian marker was placed on the north side of the historic highway by the State of Oregon.

In 1971, the city offered the society a concrete block building in the park, originally a camp counselor's dormitory, for a museum. Two years of volunteer work prepared the building for a 1973 opening.

Sam Cox was elected president in 1975, a job he held until 1993. Saying the historical society "traveled on its stomach" he saw occasion as an opportunity for dinner or coffee and cake. He introduced banana splits at the ice cream socials and later fried onions and hamburgers at the city picnic.

Troutdale joined the U.S. Bicentennial Celebration as a Bicentennial City, securing a small grant in 1976 to move the Troutdale Rail Depot.

The society added on to the museum in the city park in the summer of 1977. Ted Schult supervised a crew of CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) novices. The federal jobs program also provided two full-time employees to work in the museum office.

In 1977, on its 10th anniversary, the society dedicated the new museum addition and relocated rail depot. But more changes were brewing. Sam Cox was then on the Troutdale City Council in charge of the city park system. After 1979 death of Mabel Evans, her home, Harlow House, was offered for sale. Cox added acquisition of the house and grounds to a parks bond issue that had previously failed. He believed securing a future museum and park might carry the measure, and it did. The city kept the grounds for park use, offering the historical society the home for \$20,000.

In October 1979, mortgage in hand, the society packed up the old museum and stuffed its contents into the Evans/Harlow house. The home had been empty for a year. The furnace had backfired, belching soot and blackened the walls. The building had no heat, hot water, or overhead lights in the two front rooms. At the first evening meeting in the house, members stumbled in the gloom.

With the house barely functional, caretakers Ken and Linda Grassman moved in, living six weeks without hot water. They were roused from bed the first night by Troutdale police keeping their promise to look after the place. Linda Grassman spent Christmas watching Sharon Nesbit, Jean Holman, and Dorothy Sturges decorate for the first Christmas open house in 1980. Ted Schulte was the first Santa, followed by Bob Mitchoff and a handful of other red-suited gentleman. That year the society taped its first live oral history and reconstructed a gazebo on the Harlow House grounds that had been washed out of Depot Park in 1977 winter flood.

In 1982, after the closure of Edgefield Manor, three truckloads of artifacts from the old poor farm came to the society. Vera Strebin began hunting portraits of Troutdale mayors to display in Troutdale City Hall. Volunteer Curt Kaiser researched and prepared a nomination to place Harlow House on the National Register of Historic Places. The designation became official on February 14, 1984.

Also, in 1984 Sweetbriar School was added to the Troutdale walking History tours for school children. The walks began at Troutdale Grade School and progressed downhill to the historic highway. They always included a reenactment of the pool hall robbery, visits to the Harlow House and Rail Depot museums and, in later years, sessions on city government in Troutdale City Hall with Mayors Sam Cox or Paul Thalhofer.

Finding Dick Jones

Dick Jones attended the society's first tour of historic homes in the Columbia Gorge in 1985. He stayed to visit and took home an old pew from the porch of Harlow House, restored it,

and brought it back within a week. Jones took on restoration of the interior of the Harlow House and later, was first construction supervisor of the museum barn. He always said to his volunteers, “Until you’re better paid, thank you.

John Nasmyth was at the first Troutdale Grade School Reunion in 1985. He jumped on the dream of building a barn near the Harlow House, making substantial donations to a construction fund. That year, too, a standing-room-only crowd showed up for a program of historic pictures of the Columbia River Gorge, which was then being proposed as a national scenic area.

In February 1986, Multnomah County decided to tear down Edgefield Manor and the buildings of the old poor farm. The society voted to oppose demolition.

In January 1987, a mortgage-burning party was held at the Harlow House. Sadie Riley painted signs for the lawn that said, “Paid For.” That same year, as the battle for Edgefield heated up, the historical society joined in developing downtown Troutdale plan focusing on the city’s historical building, and resolved to begin a barn, choosing as a model the barn on the Helen Althaus farm.

At the 20th anniversary in February 1988, Sam Cox’s goal of a 500-person membership was achieved – plus four. Cox joked that most of the bodies he signed up were warm.

With \$25,000 in the barn fund for materials, contractor Dave Traxler offered to do the job at no charge, except benefit cost for his workers. On July 6, 1988, John Nasmyth turned the full shovel of dirt in the yard south of the Harlow House and gave – a later forgave – a construction loan of \$15,000. A \$7,000 check from Burns Bros., a Portland firm with chain of truck stops that included Troutdale, put on and saw the building sealed before fall rains.

In early 1989 the barn loft was dedicated and named for John Nasmyth, the rear workshop for Dick Jones. The first Harvest Faire and auction in September 1990 made about \$9,000 and involved such a crush of people that Judy Jones was reduced to serving up Tad’s chicken and dumplings on stork paper plates left over from her daughter’s baby shower. It was the push needed to get the barn painted.

Early in 1990, McMenamins Pubs and Breweries announced purchase of the Multnomah County Farm buildings and 12 acres to create a destination resort called Edgefield. It was an “I-told-you-so moment” for the historians who spent four-and-one-half years arguing to save the structures.

The June 1991 ice cream social marked the 75th anniversary of the Columbia River Highway. A 1992 celebration noted 100 years of Troutdale School at its site on the hilltop. The 1992 sesquicentennial of the Oregon Trail saw interpretive signs placed at the Columbia Gorge Factory Outlet stores and the Harlow House.

Down at the barn, builders estimated that \$30,000 was needed to complete the building. The society had raised \$80,000 in cash, donations, services, and labor from 203 individual donors, two organizations, 23 businesses and corporations, one foundation, and the hands of 52 different volunteers.

In 1994 a committee began planning exhibits in the barn, by then, a barn in name only. The interior was a modern exhibit hall. Though the building was not quite done, John and June (McGinnis Sherman) Nasmyth, who met at a historical society meeting, were roasted there for their contributions. It was in the nick of time, because John Nasmyth died unexpectedly in 1995.

By 1995, downtown Troutdale began to change as Max and Sheryl Maydew launched a north side business development focusing on Troutdale's historic look. On the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II the society collected portraits of veterans. A Sunday trip to the Sandy River Delta celebrated purchase by the U.S. Forest Service of the site locally named Thousand Acres.

At the death of Dick Jones to Lou Gehrig's disease, Bob Strebin assumed the task of finishing the barn.

In February 1998 the society was 25 years old. Jean Hybskmann planned the first tea and tour at the former Portland Automobile Club, home of Junki and Linda Yoshida. The barn was dedicated ten years after the construction began, and the first exhibit, "Smelt Run!" opened.

In 1999, President David Ripma accepted a Union Pacific caboose for the society and saw it moved into place at the Rail Depot. Bob Strebin planted a new S-shaped Lover's Oak behind the Harlow House.

In 2000 the Harlow House celebrated a 100th birthday. McMenamins Edgefield had a 10th anniversary, introducing Poor Farm Pinot Gris in a gala party organized by Mary Bryson and Jean Hybskmann. The historical society got a dollar a bottle from sales of the wine.

In 2001, the society suffered embezzlement by its only paid employee and regrouped under the leadership of President David Ripma. Members rallied with donations to keep things going, and hardy volunteers put it together again. Ultimately most of the loss was recovered. Jerry and Jeff Lawry spent the winter building a new depot museum exhibit that opened in spring 2002.

In the spring of 2003 Sheryl Maydew volunteered as director of the society, bringing the organization, at 35 years old, into the technological age with a new computer system to catalog artifacts and photos. "Q is for Quicksand," a children's book by Sydney Stevens about Lewis and Clark, was published.

In 2004 Native Americans joined in telling the Lewis and Clark story in the barn. Mayor Paul Thalhofer was interviewed about his three decades in public service. The Lewis and Clark exhibit, "Quicksand and Condors" opened in the barn.

Walter Nasmyth took on the task as THS photo librarian which was not only in disarray, but ready to move into the computer age. With the help of many volunteers, more than 1,100 photos were scanned and information entered using *Past Perfect*, a museum computer software program.

In 2005 Troutdale Historical Society has its own website up and running. It includes informative pages about our museums, posting of events and an online store. The new historic Troutdale timeline map, along with text panels is an exhibit displayed in the barn museum.

In 2006, work began on the Troutdale Centennial celebration of 2007.

In May 2007, Terry Huston became the new THS director. She grew up in Troutdale, and has a good understanding of Troutdale, working on projects and preparing the THS newsletter, *Bygone Times*.

In the fall, there was groundbreaking ceremony for the new Troutdale Centennial Arch. The Barn Museum re-opened with a new exhibit, *What Went By*, which focused on Troutdale's 100 year history. Troutdale historian, Sharon Nesbit, had written a newly-published book; *It Could Have Been Carpdale, Centennial History of Troutdale, Oregon*.

The Troutdale Historical Society turned 40 in 2008. It is an organization of volunteers that continue to fulfill its mission:

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.

The Troutdale Historical Society and its many volunteers operate and maintain the three museums: the Barn, Depot and Harlow House with their wonderful historical artifacts and exhibits. It conducts educational tours and treks; provides curation services, preserves and maintains precious artifacts (including photos, print and video library). The THS provides year-around programs and speakers of historical significance. Other annual events are: Tea & Tour, Ice cream Social, Historic Cemetery Tours, Historic Treks, Harvest Faire, and the Harlow House Christmas.

The Troutdale Historical Society is indeed Troutdale's Memory.

Charter members of the Troutdale Historical Society

Edna R. Alexander	Mary Knarr	Ethel Peterson
Emil Carow	Richard Knarr	Marlin Pope
Georgia Mae Carow	Barbara Lampert	Martine Rathman
Beryl P. Cook	Don Lampert	Vernon Rathman
Ada Cox	Evelyn Lampert	George Schatz
Clara Cox	Nora Lewis	Louis Schatz
Nancy and Sam Cox	William Lewis	Arthur Scofield
Rankin Davis	Dorothy Lucas	Emily Scofield
Sue Davis	Joe Lucas	Frank Simons
Louise Dix	Arthur Matches	Irene Simons
Luella Dix	Marjorie Matches	Alfred Stoeckel
Robert Dix	Miriam McGinnis	Margaret Stoeckel
Teresa Doolittle	Roy Meger	Kay Struckman
Mary Ray Eaton	Ray Moore	Dorothy Sturges
Jack and Mabel Evans	Sharon Nesbit	Robert M. Sturges
Arthur A. Heimstra	Marilyn Oakes	Don Vorpahl
Justa L. Hewitt	Glenn E. Otto	Laura Vorpahl
Mary Hughes	Helen Otto	I.B. Wand
Robert Hughes	Dale Parsons	Truly Wright
Laura Imthurn	Margaret Parsons	
Charles V. Jackson	Olive Parsons	