1994 KLAMATH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TOUR

At 8:30 A.M. on July 24, 1994 the Klamath County Historical Society assembled at the Keno Store to begin a tour of the Klamath River canyon. See map.

After driving up highway 66 to the Copco Road we started our tour at the Fred Frain homestead. It was established about 1892 and is located in the Greensprings Mountains, about 8 miles north of the Copco Dam. The homestead presently is owned by Jerry Barry and his step-father, Verlin Hopkins. Jerry Barry's mother married Clyde Laird and they lived at Laird's Landing from 1943 to 1947. In 1947 they moved to this ranch.

The ranch consists of approximately 2,300 acres. About one third of that acreage is in California. Water is plentiful; it comes from springs that feed into Fall Creek. They have the primary water rights dating back to 1892. They irrigate about 160 acres of pasture land.
They raise Santa Gertrudis cattle and have from 150 to 350 animals. They also harvest timber, which pays the taxes on the ranch.

Just off the property, there was an old school house operated around the early '20's. It's believed the school was called Fall Creek School. It was torn down approximately 20 years ago. The school had accommodated about twelve students.

One of the historical highlights of this area was the railroad that went through to Pokeyama. (discussed below.) Before they built the railroad they had a log chute that carried the logs to the Klamath River. The log chute was built in 1892 and was used until 1905. It was more than 2,000 feet long. The loggers skidded the logs up to the chute with teams of horses. These logs were then rafted down the river to Klamathon and Hornbrook. After they had logged the area around the chute, it became impractical to draw the logs in with the horses. They then built the railroad. It went through the ranch and out to Pokeyama.

Our next stop was Copco Dam. Jim Flowers told us about the history of the area. At the Copco Dam site the river flows through Ward Canyon. It was rich farmland owned by several families. The Ward Ranch was the biggest ranch in this area.

In 1911, the power company decided to build Copco Dam. They bought the land from the local ranchers. At the time of their
decision to build the dam, they thought they would have all the
dam sites up to Klamath Falls. The problem Copco ran into after
they built this dam, was they didn't have control of the water in
the river. The Bureau of Reclamation had control of all the
water that wasn't appropriated on Upper Klamath Lake, Klamath
River, Sprague River and the Williamson River. Copco found they
couldn't alway get the water when they needed it. So they set
out to get control.

Copco made a deal with the Bureau of Reclamation to build the
dam at Link River. This required dredging the Shippington reef
to provide water storage of six feet in the upper lake. Before
the reef was dredged, the water would run over it and maybe the
lake would raise a foot or two and that would be it. Another
problem was they didn't have any way of holding the water back in
the summer, so in the fall they didn't have any water for power.
The dredging would provide water year round to run their power
plants efficiently.

In the meantime, the Bureau had built irrigation ditches and
they were using more and more water every year. At this rate
there wouldn't be any water for anyone. So the deal they made
with the Bureau of Reclamation was that Copco would build the
Link River dam, dredge the upper lake and dike all the land
necessary. This way Copco would have the right to run what water
they needed, when they wanted it, if the Bureau of Reclamation
didn't need it. They also took over the liability for any
damages caused by floods. (Which they had to pay a few times.)

In 1921, Copco built the Link River Dam. Once they completed
it they deeds the dam over to the Bureau of Reclamation.
Although the river drops about 2,000 feet between Klamath Falls
and the Copco Dam, they still had problems in getting the water
to the power plant. It would take three days for the water to
reach Copco Dam. The reason for this was because of the vast
amount of land between Klamath Falls and Keno. At Keno the river
ran over another reef. It would take three days to raise the
water up in that area below Midland and Keno, so that they could
get enough water to reach Copco Dam. Therefore, they embarked
upon another project.
In 1931, they made a deal with all the farmers between Klamath Falls and Keno and they built Needle Dam on the Keno reef. That way they could have the water to Copco Dam in eight hours, compared to 3 days and it wouldn't change the river level at Keno. Then in the flood of '64, they found out they couldn't handle the water. They then dredged the channel and built the present dam at Keno.

Jim reminded us of how powerful the power companies could be. He told us a story about an Indian woman by the name of Kitty Ward who lived in the canyon. When it came time to flood the reservoir, she didn't want to leave. It had been her home all her life and she didn't care if she drowned. The power company physically removed her to Hornbrook.

Verland told us of a discovery made during the construction of the dam. They diverted the water out through a couple of tunnels which took them down to bedrock. There they found some crevices that had been filled with seashells. In another area they found a round circular cut made by water action. It was about 10 feet across and about five or six feet deep. In there, they found a skeleton of a prehistoric bison, about 12,000 years old.

When they first put the dams in, Charles Ager, Julian Ager's uncle, said that you could come up here with a wagon and just take a pitchfork and dump the salmon in. Copco Dam is the culprit that has cut off the salmon flows into Upper Klamath Lake.

At the dam we observed the remains of a building that Copco used to entertain VIPs. All that remains now is a chimney.

Our next stop was the Copco Lake General Store, located at the steel bridge crossing the head of the Copco Reservoir. After a short rest we proceeded up the river to our next stop: the Pokegama log chute.

You can still see the log chute. Verland told us there is a photograph of the chute in operation hanging in the library at Oregon Institute of Technology. The logs shot rapidly down the chute. Sometimes they would leave the chute and jump the river. The friction of the logs sliding down the chute caused the logs to heat up. When they hit the river they would sizzle. Julian
Ager told us they would run water down the chute and also grease it in some places so that the logs would slide easier.

Several attempts were made to improve upon the log delivery system to Klamathon. The Klamath Lake Railroad was surveyed in 1901. This railroad was designed to insure a steady supply of logs to the Klamathon mill. The route climbed the Klamath River Canyon in a series of switchbacks. The crews were paid according to their nationality. The Chinese were paid $1.35 a day. The Greeks and other aliens were paid $1.50 a day. The Italians and whites were paid $2.00 a day. The Greeks built their own ovens so that they could bake their bread. They had their own cook crews with them. The ovens are still standing at the top of the canyon, across the river from the Truitt place. (See Klamath Echoes, Number 16, page 28 for additional information on the Klamath Lake Railroad.)

We then proceeded to the Way Cemetery. It is about 4 1/2 miles from Klamath Hot Springs. The Way Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Klamath County. It is located at the foot of Topsy Grade. There are 17 or 18 unmarked graves. The marked graves include four Hoovers, one Overton, one Owens, one Ward and four Ways. We were about one mile from the cemetery when we discovered the road was too rocky for some of the vehicles. We turned around and headed back to Klamath Hot Springs. Turning around was interesting! We had only a single-lane road with large rocks and trees on either side. Each car had to take their turn. Soon our modern-day wagon train was heading back from where we came.

It is sad to note the road that helped to build Klamath Falls is slowly fading into oblivion and unless repairs are made, this road will exist only on a map.

At Klamath Hot Springs we stopped for lunch. Where we celebrated Julian Ager's 89th birthday with a decorated, champagne sheet cake. The picnic area is located along Shovel Creek. The creek empties into the Klamath River. Afterwards, several of us explored the hot springs area. There are several springs located in a cow pasture along the Klamath River. Some are hotter than others. The writer tested the water in one spring with her hand. She didn't leave it in for long. Several of the hot springs are
encased in concrete. The water is clear, with an aqua cast to it. There is no sulphur smell. The individual concrete baths, with stairs leading down into the water, are still visible.

Klamath Hot Springs was at one time called Shovel Creek Hot Springs. In 1869, the Beswicks bought this property. In 1870 they built a 10-room lodge. It was called the Beswick Hotel. It was built of wood. Later, and across the stage road a second and more grandiose hotel was built of stone. This hotel burned in 1915.

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The original Beswick Hotel at Klamath Hot Springs near Shovel Creek on the Klamath River. Built in the mid-1870's, it appeared thus on April 4, 1973.

—Helen Helfricht Photo

The later Beswick Hotel across the stage road north of the original hotel. This building, built of stone, burned and the stone was used to construct a dance pavilion, now also destroyed.

—Maude Baldwin Photo
The stones were then used to construct a dance pavilion. All that remains now is the outer shell of the dance pavilion.

A short distance from the dance pavilion stands the Shovel Creek Store. It is in surprisingly good condition. The counter is still intact and a large safe remains in the building.

Phil Laubacher, current resident of the Klamath Hot Springs site related some of the history to us. In 1899 and '90 a 51-room (or as written in some history books, 70-room) hotel was built out of stone.

Klamath Hot Springs was quite the place to go. It was on the main road between Yreka and Linkville. The Hessigs originally homesteaded this ranch in 1858. Phil and his family moved from
Oxnard California in 1959 when his father bought the ranch. The power company obtained a portion of it in 1967.

Bill Hoover lived above the Laubachers on the other side of the river. Bill related many stories to Phil. One was of the numerous fish that lived in the river. Before they put the dams in at Iron Gate and Copco, the trout used to run up Shovel Creek so heavy that they would knock themselves out of the river. A horse wouldn't cross the stream because of the fish. The fish runs stopped once they installed the dams.

Bill's first job was when he was eleven years old. He would carry water from a spring on the hillside, over to the Pokegama log chute tenders. He said they'd drink it and let it run down their shirt. That used to make him mad, 'cause he'd carried it all the way over there and they wasted it.

Another story related to Phil by Bill, was of his experience of logging at Pokegama in 1912. He made $3.00 a day. They took out so much for room and board. Apparently that was pretty good wages in those days. Also as a young man Bull worked at the resort as a blacksmith.

Bill Hoover built most of the wood bridges in the area. He had a natural talent for building bridges. He didn't need any blueprints or plans. He acquired the logs, made the notches and constructed a bridge.
In 1982 one of the bridges went out. "A" frames had been constructed on it and when the river got too high, it popped the planks up on the bridge. The planks hit the "A" frame and that was all she wrote for that bridge. There was at one time six bridges in this area, but now there remains only two.

Along the road in the Hessig ranch area were many rock walls. They were apparently built from rocks that were cleared from the fields.

Phil said that the fish in the river are primarily Rainbow Trout. His father used to charge $6.00 a day for people to fish the river. That was before 1977. After 1977, accesses were put in and it was opened up to the public.

The elevation is 2,800 feet with fairly mild winters. It might snow a foot and melt down to five or six inches during the day. But they never have three or four feet like the Basin has.

Our next stop was the old Spannus ranch, formerly the Truitt place. It had been the first Frain home location. It apparently was a part of the Hessig property after the Spannus' sold it. The Spannus' lived there from 1913 until 1946. The buildings that are still standing were known as the Truitt Store and Saloon. Verland had some information from a paper in Yreka that talked about Truitt. An open-air dance hall at Truitt was started on July 2, 1890 and was to be finished for the 4th of
July. Dancers were to come from miles around. The blacksmith shop was added later, when the stage traffic increased, but once the railroad came through Midland on May 20, 1909, the stage traffic over the Ager/Topsy Road quickly ceased.

We then proceeded back down the river, past Bogus Creek School, to Ager.

Julian Ager gave us a history of his grandfather, Jerome Bonaparte Ager. He was the founder of the town of Ager in 1887. Jerome was born in New York in 1829. He was one of eleven children. His father was a Baptist minister in New York. At the age of 22 he left New York and went to St. Joseph, Missouri. He met up with a group of two or three wealthy people who had 500 head of cattle and horses they wanted to bring to California. So he hired on and came west.

Once he arrived in California he decided to do some mining. So he, with two or three other men found a rich spot and they made a lot of money. Julian's grandfather wound up with $9,600.00 in gold, which was a lot of money in that day.

Julian's grandmother, Lucy Jane Axtel, was born in Indiana. She married his grandfather in 1860. They ultimately had eleven children.

Lucy Jane came west with her mother and her sisters by way of train to New York, boarded a boat to the Gulf of Mexico, then walked across the Isthmus of Panama, then by boat to San Francisco. They then caught another boat up the Sacramento River to Red Bluff. From Red Bluff there was no boat, so they rode mules and walked from Red Bluff to Yreka. Her father had already arrived in the area and he was operating the first newspaper in Yreka.

In 1887 Jerome Ager decided to start himself a little town. So he built the hotel, which is still standing. He then built a blacksmith shop, some horse corrals and barns. At about that same time the railroad came through and it stopped here at Ager. It was called the Ager Station. All the freight that came in on the railroad was dumped off on a big, long platform and loaded on wagons to be taken by way of Topsy Grade Road to Linkville, then to Merrill and up to Fort Klamath.
The Ager Hotel, built on the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1877. As it looked April 4, 1972.

—Helen Heifrich Photo

Freight wagons at Ager Station.

After a year or two a general store was built. They sold a variety of things, including sugar, flour and salt. All kinds of machinery, dry goods, dishes and whatever else people needed or wanted.

Later on Julian's uncle, Judson, built a dance hall across the road.
As the years went by, other people came into the area and started other small businesses. As time went by, this became quite a town. Some said that it was the busiest town between San Francisco and Portland.

Julian's father, George Washington Ager and his brother Charles who was just a little older than he, didn't stay around here. They went up to Linkville and settled up there. The oldest boy, Jud, stayed here and helped his father with the store business.

The post office started down the road. It was called Willow Creek Post Office. It was later moved up to Ager, California in 1887 or 1888. It lasted until 1940, when both the post office and the store were abandoned. There also is a school called Willow Creek School. It is still in operation today.

It would take about a week to travel from Ager to Linkville by way of Topsy Grade. The loads were very heavy, so they couldn't go too fast. They probably made about fifteen or twenty miles a day.

Pearl Spencer is currently living at the Ager Hotel. She uses it as her residence. She is about the ninth or tenth owner. She purchased it in 1978 and moved here in 1982. Pearl tells us originally there were nine bedrooms and a bath upstairs. However, during the years, someone took one of the rooms out and now there are seven bedrooms and two baths. They converted two rooms into one large bedroom. Pearl has since put in a third floor in the attic, where she has a studio. Otherwise, there's not much that has been changed in the building.

The blacksmith shop, lower barn, and the two original barns down below, where they kept the buggies and horses are all still standing and in pretty good shape.

Ager was the last stop on our tour. We ended the tour at 2:30 P.M. and each went their own way home from there.

Transcribed and written by
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