THE MEMORIES OF CHET HAMAKER

On September 28, 1995 Chet Hamaker spoke to the Klamath County Historical Society about the early days in Klamath County. Chet has lived in Klamath County for eighty-plus years.

Chet told us about life in his neighborhood. He lived on Michigan Avenue, which is across the tracks from the Museum. According to Chet, Michigan Avenue was not then what it is now. At that time Michigan Avenue was on the edge of town. In the teens and twenties you lived in your neighborhood and that's about all you knew. If you went any place, you had to walk or saddle a horse. There weren't many cars around.

His family moved to Michigan Avenue in the spring of 1919. The house was a large two-story. Apparently there had been a fire in the house previously to Hamakers moving in. It had been remodeled and the kitchen had been added to the back of the house. There were four bedrooms upstairs. However, two of the bedrooms were only used during the summer. They were screened-in sleeping porches. Chet's brother and he would lay up there at night in the summertime and listen to the coyotes howl over on Hillside Avenue.

It was a lot of fun to live in Klamath Falls in those days. World War I had just ended. Chet's brother liked to tease. When they were lying in the sleeping porches during that summer, they would hear the thunder. His brother told him that what he was hearing was the cannons from the Germans. Chet was young and he believed him.

Sometime after the war had ended, Chet and his family took a drive to Malin. Chet was afraid to go, because he thought that's where the Germans were. He had heard his parents speak of Berlin,
where the war was going on. He thought Malin and Berlin were the same.

Back in the teens and twenties, the neighborhoods were a lot different. Michigan Avenue was a muddy street. It would freeze up in the winter-time and you could get over it pretty good, but when the spring thaw came, you just didn’t get anyplace. Esplanade was paved and you could go clear up to the top. Chet thinks that was probably because of the Klamath Development Co. The Klamath Development Co. developed the Hot Springs area. Main Street was paved up to the railroad tracks. There was only one track in those days and it was a muddy, rough road that went across it. When it was raining, Chet was supposed to walk up Esplanade and stay out of the mud. But boys being boys, he’d forget and he’d take the muddy route. When he got home, he had his mother to answer to.

During this time wagons were still being used for transportation. The truck had been developed during World War I. World War II developed the airplanes. The airplane replaced the train and the trucks replaced the teamsters. Chet remembers the Southern Pacific freight shed where they had dray teams. The dray wagons would go to the freight shed, pick up freight and deliver it to the merchants around town. It was a lot different when wagons were used; it was a slower life, because the wagons didn’t move very fast. In Chet’s neighborhood there were two people who were in the teamster business. They lived up on the end of Menlo Way. One of the teamster’s names was "Buster" Kaylor. He was very active in the Humane Society for many years. The other neighbor was Jim Kaylor, who at one time ran an ambulance service and had an automotive repair shop. Every once in a while the team would run away. And according to Chet, "If you’ve never seen a team run away, you’ve never seen anything". They would run down Menlo Way and then they would get to the corner on Michigan Avenue and go south on Michigan Avenue. Chet never did see where they would stop, but he always stayed out of the way. (For further reading on early day transportation in Klamath country see Klamath Echoeg, Number 11, 1973.)

The dividing line for the schools was Sixth Street. The
people up around High, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Sixth Streets went to Riverside. A few people Chet remembers was Bob Elliott and Al and Ethel Carlson. Chet’s wife lived on the corner of Sixth and High and went to the old Central School. She later moved across the street and then went to Riverside School.

One family Chet recalls was the Timms. They had a shoe-shine parlor. Bill Timms was a rodeo rider. When he came to visit his mother, which was every summer, he would stop by to see Chet. Chet and Bill became good friends. Bill’s mother had a church down on Broad Street. Chet had Aladdin’s Valley Rental on East Main Street at the time. Bill eventually became a doctor, an O.B. and a gynecologist. He set up his practice in Southern California. Chet tells a story about one time he was in Disneyland. He had gone into a place where you sit around a table and drink Pepsi, it was what they called a Pepsi show. There was a young couple who sat at the same table. Chet thought of his friend, Bill and that maybe this couple might know him, being a young married couple of child bearing age and possibly needing a doctor. Chet asked them if they might know a doctor by the name of Bill Timms. This girl got the funniest look on her face. She said to Chet that he had married her aunt. It’s a small world.

The Fred Fleets had the first radio Chet ever listened to. They lived up on Alameda, just north of the canal bridge. Chet and his brother went up to the Fleets one night to listen to the radio. They got so involved in listening that they stayed too long and had some explaining to do when they got home.

When the Great Northern came in, Chet remembers the argument whether they were going to have their own track and come through Bonanza or come in this way. They wound up sharing the track with Southern Pacific. They are still doing it. The Great Northern is now the Burlington Northern. At Chemult the Burlington Northern has their own track. It goes up to the Columbia River and beyond.

Burlington Northern had a big depot they were building on Sixth Street, just beyond where Fifth and Sixth Street come together. It’s where Klamath Cold Storage is now. Chet remembers sitting on the rafters in the BN depot when they were building it.
It was going to be their passenger depot. They were going to run one of their crack trains, the Empire Builder, through here. Then about that time the Depression came along and people couldn’t afford to travel.

Chet and his brother would pass the time on summer evenings riding their bicycles around the SP depot. It was a big event for everyone to congregate at the depot to see who got on and who got off the train. The train was the main means of transportation. About seven o’clock was the arrival time. It stayed here over night and the next morning it went up to Kirk. The train stopped to pick up every milk can. After the train returned from Kirk it went on to Weed and San Francisco. (See Klamath Echoes, Number 16 for further reading on the railroads.)

There was no train beyond Kirk. You could only go south. If you wanted to go north, you would go to Weed and then you’d catch the train north, heading up through the Rogue Valley. About 1923, they started extending the railroad from Kirk up to Eugene.
The Hall Hotel and the White Pelican Hotel had an electric bus. It would meet the train and take the passengers either to the Hall Hotel or to the White Pelican Hotel. (See Klamath Echoes, Number 5, 1967 for further reading on the White Pelican Hotel.)

Chet was at an age when big engines and machinery fascinated him. He recalled the heavy equipment that was hauled over the tracks and how it would shake their house. It felt like an earthquake.

The roads weren't that good. You could get in by car, but it was very tough to do so. The Greensprings Highway hadn't been built yet. You had to come over Topsy Grade or you had to come up through Malin from Alturas. (For further reading on Topsy Grade see Klamath Echoes, Numbers 5 & 11.) Chet's dad owned one of the first cars in the county. It was purchased about 1915 or '16, when they lived out at Bonanza. The car has been in the family ever since.

When the railroad opened up this was a boomtown. Most of the growth was out in Mills Addition and in Hot Springs. The growth continued up until the Depression hit. Things were pretty tough and all those nice big houses up on Pacific Terrace were foreclosed upon. That area was known as "Mortgage Row".

The little houses built out in Mills Addition were affordable, because people that did have money could rent those places. Chet bought a house out in Mills Addition. They had built three houses on two lots. The building codes weren't very strict and you'd be surprised how those houses were built. They would build a stud wall and they'd put siding on it. That was the outside wall. The inside wall was lath and plaster. The plaster was porous as all get out. As Chet put it, "when the north wind blew, it didn't have to come in the back door to go out the front door." It just went right through the plaster.

You heated with a wood stove, which may have had a coil that heated your water. You usually had a wood cook stove. Very few people had electric ranges. There just wasn't enough electricity supplied in those days to have electric stoves.

The population of Klamath Falls in 1920 was around 4,000 and
in 1930 had increased to 16,000. It was a 400% increase in that ten years. When you have a 400% increase in population, you have trouble. Sewer, water, streets, and schools all had to be built or improved.

It was exciting for Chet to hike up to the old quarries just beyond the top of Esplanade. He and his friends would hike up to where OIT is now. Nearby is a place they called agate cave. It contained a moss agate of some sort. They polished up nicely. They had a lot of fun searching for those agate rocks. (Editor's note: The agates can still be found.)

One time they went for Christmas trees up on Hogback, up past Collman's Dairy. They found a tree. It was a little tough finding a suitable tree, because there weren't many short firs up there to get. As they came home, that tree got heavier and heavier. So they kept cutting a little off the bottom. By the time they got home, they didn't have much of a tree left.

Once they hiked over to Moore Park and crossed Link River on the Copco Dam. They saw a big snake lying there in the road and couldn't figure out what was wrong with it. It had a big bulge in its middle. They killed him, cut him open and found a frog in him.

The PP&L nature trail was the old West Side Road. Before Fremont bridge was built you used that road to get to Geary's Ranch or Lake of the Woods. It was just a canal bank then.

Chet also told us about the soapbox derby racers he and his brother made when they had derby races in Klamath Falls. Near the museum there was an auto wrecking yard where they were able to get parts for their racer. They used a 2x12 for the body. The axle was a 2x4 with a bolt through it to which small wagon wheels were attached. They would attach it with a bolt to the body so the axle would swivel. Then for steering they attached a rope to each end of the axle and wrapped the rope around a broom stick. Then they would take a steering wheel and mount it to the broom stick. They would race down Esplanade with those things. Esplanade was also fun in the winter. They would coast down Esplanade, hoping a car would come along and pull them back up the hill. They didn't have to block the streets off, because there just weren't that many
cars. If you saw three or four cars a day, you saw a lot of cars.

Everybody heated their house with wood or sawdust in those
days. Most people burned the slab woods. Back then people didn't
conserve anything. You'd take a log and cut a big slab off the
side of it. They would then cut that piece into four foot lengths.
It would eventually be cut into sixteen inch lengths to use in your
heating stove.

There was a Peyton Wood Company and Frankfurt Fuel Company
where you could get blocks free. If you go out to Jeld-Wen past
the golf course, you can still see their big block storage bin.
There were chutes going down the side of the bin. The trucks would
back under the chutes. A gate would be opened and the blocks would
run down into the trucks. It was known as Pelican Bay Lumber
company in those days. The box factories made the block wood. All
sizes were available. Most of it was two inch; what they call an
eight quarter. It depended on what the box factory was cutting as
to the width of it. If they were cutting orange ends, the scraps
were wide. The knots had to be cut out. They used what they
called a cut-off saw. They'd cut the blocks off and what was left
Chet's family used for kindling. The Hamakers would get about ten
loads of the slabs for their winter wood supply.

Everybody had outdoor privies, with a few exceptions. They
didn't have the sewer in at that time and you didn't have any
septic tanks. You had cesspools. The cesspool and the septic tank
were different in that there was no drainage out of a cesspool.
The affluent just soaked into the ground and into the ground water.
You raised beautiful dahlias and other flowers over the cesspool.
Halloween was not the time to have a privy. Chet remembered one
time that he and his friends upset an outhouse three times in one
night. Luckily they never caught anybody in one.

Sheep and cattle were a big item. The ranchers would move the
sheep from winter pasture to summer range over the hill, above
Pacific Terrace. They also would take the herds right through the
middle of town. At one time Judge Ashurst had put a ban on the
movement of cattle through town, but he later relented and allowed
it.
Chet remembers Judge Ashurst as always wearing a swallowtail coat. His brother was a senator from Arizona. Chet had the Saturday Evening Post agency. He delivered the Saturday Evening Post to the stores. A son of Judge Ashurst was selling the Saturday Evening Post for Chet. When Chet would go down to collect his money for the magazines, Judge Ashurst would always write a check for the amount. It didn’t matter that it was less than a dollar. He always had to write a check, he seemed to never have any cash.

Main Street was a lot different. Main and Sixth Streets were the center of town. First National Bank and American National Bank were located on that corner. (See Klamath Echoes, Number 5, 1967 for further reading on the banks.) You had your big stores such as Moe’s; the Golden Rule store which in later years became J.C. Penney’s; the K.K.K. store and K. Sugarman’s. K. Sugarman’s motto was “I ain’t mad at nobody”, which he had painted on a lot of the farmer’s wooden fences. Chet delivered the ice to Mr. Sugarman’s house in 1935. His wife still had an icebox. They lived up on Lincoln Street. Chet remembers them as a real nice family.
Chet also had a paper route. His first route started at 7th and Main Streets. He recalled for us some of the buildings that were located in the downtown area. The Central School was situated on the two blocks between Eighth and Tenth Streets on Main. Ninth Street didn’t go through at that time. It ended at Pine. After they tore the Central School down and Fremont School was built, Ninth Street was opened up. Then on those two blocks the newspaper office was built where the parking lot for South Valley State Bank is now. The Golden Rule store, which later became J.C. Penney was originally located at Fourth and Main, then moved to Eighth and Main where South Valley State Bank sits presently. Chet and his friends played marbles on that spot when the school was still there.

On Klamath Avenue, about where the Stiles building is, there was an old livery stable that had been made into a grocery store. It was called the Blue Front Grocery. The grocery store was on a fairly high level. It had a basement of some sort, so that you had to walk up the same ramp that the horses and everything else had walked up on at one time.

On the corner of 9th and Klamath, there were a group of little cabins. An old man who apparently had skin cancer lived in one of the cabins. He couldn’t come to the door. So, Chet would always open the door and put the man’s paper inside. The man had some kind of a vaporizer going. Chet didn’t ever know what it was that was used in the vaporizer, but boy did it stink. While Chet had the paper route, the old man died.

Oak Street was paved. Plum Street was not. From there you went into the Red Light District on Broad and Commercial and surrounding areas. Yes, we did have a red light district. Chet didn’t know anything like that existed. It was all foreign to him. One evening Chet and his brother were out delivering the paper and collecting the money. The Evening Herald at that time was sixty-five cents a month. They went to this one place and they knocked on the door. This woman came to the door and she asked the boys to step in. Chet’s brother swore up and down at the time, that one of these women had a dress made out of crepe paper. When she paid the
sixty-five cents, she gave them each a dime extra. The first person they ran into was one of the express messengers that worked with their dad. They told him about it. He said that it was hush money.

Some of the houses Chet recalled was Myrtle's, the Thirteen Steps and the Iron Door. The Iron Door was down on Spring Street. One time some WWI veterans went down there and tore up the place. The operator of the house went across the street to Klamath Iron Works and had them build an iron door so it wouldn't be so easy for unwanted people to get in. Irene's was located on Commercial Street.

Myrtle's was on the corner of Elm and Spring. The ice plant was across the street from Myrtle's. Chet was her first paper boy and her last ice man. She had what was known as a hundred pound cooler. Chet would place a hundred pounds of ice on his shoulder and take it across the street from the ice plant.

Chet concluded by reciting a ditty he recalled that immortalized Myrtle in verse:

Rich men sleep in feather beds,
Sailors sleep at sea,
But the davenport in Myrtles's house,
Is home sweet home to me.

With that, the Klamath County Historical Society concluded their meeting with refreshments and lively discussion of memories of Klamath Falls.

Transcribed and Written by Susan Rambo
Edited by Mae Smith
Arrival of a Southern Pacific passenger train at the Klamath Falls depot in the early days.

Miller Co. Photo

Klamath Falls' third school, the Central, built in 1905 and replaced by Fremont School in 1925. It was demolished about 1927. Location, approximately the center of Ninth Street, between Main and Pine.

—Unknown photographer.
THANK YOU NOTES:

We want to thank everyone who helped to make the Antique Toy Show a success this year.

Thanks also goes out to the supporters of the Annual Volunteer Lunch.

WANTED:

Volunteers. We have jobs for all interests. As the funding for the museum's operations continues to decline, we are looking for ways to keep the museum open with a minimum of General Fund Support.

Donations to the Endowment are a tax-deductible event. Not only is it a way to lower your bill to Uncle Sam, but it helps to keep the museum open for future generations.

Ideas for fund raising projects. Short term time involvement get the best results.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM DONATED $8,000 TO THE ENDOWMENT THIS YEAR?

Can you believe that another year is coming to a close? In November, I completed my 11th year at the Museum which is hard to believe. None of it would have been possible without the generous support of so many of you who give me encouragement, helping hands, kind words and words of wisdom and laughter, the best antidote for any problem. I want each of you to know how very much I appreciate every, and I truly mean EVERY, bit of support given in so many ways. The museums are important to the community for the roles they fulfill. Our rich heritage is found in museum records, photographs, newspapers, and the items which make up the exhibits. Visitors learn about our historical attractions and stay longer to enjoy them which enhances our economy and retains jobs. We have had a lot of media coverage this year. How the West Was Lost, the Modoc Episode aired early this year on the Discovery Channel. In September, Northwest Reports featured the Baldwin Museum on Gerry Frank's weekly program which brought a lot of inquiries and visits. In mid-December, National Geographic will be visiting the Baldwin. We have been fortunate to have this free exposure.

HAPPY NEW YEAR from Pat