A REASON TO CELEBRATE

In this issue of The Trumpeter the focus is on Fort Klamath. More specifically, it is on the rebuilt museum at Fort Klamath. On September 5th we will hold the Grand Opening of the rebuilt facility at the old fort site and there is good reason to celebrate. What is so significant about that date? The answer is that it was on date in 1863 that the original Fort Klamath was opened. That makes this the 140th anniversary of the original opening of the fort. But of course we are not so much celebrating the birth of the fort as we are the rebirth of the Fort Klamath Museum. Things looked pretty bleak after the fire destroyed the old museum building on October 2001. It was a great loss and no one knew then if we would be able to rebuild or not. It wasn't easy, and it took a lot of hard work by a lot of people to bring it about, but we did rebuild and we have reason to celebrate.

Much of the information contained in the accompanying article on old Fort Klamath was gleaned from the pages of Buena Cobb Stone’s book, “Old Fort Klamath.” This book contains a wealth of information about the history of the fort and may be purchased at the museum. I would urge anyone interested in learning more about the history of Fort Klamath to pick up a copy. △
**FORT KLAMATH TIME LINE**

1863  Decision is made to erect the fort in the Wood River Valley, and construction begins.

1864  Indian tribes gather at Council Grove for the treaty with the United States, in which they agree to relinquish their land and move onto the reservation.

1867  Regular army troops replace Oregon Volunteers.

1872  Beginning of Modoc War.

1873  End of Modoc War. Trial of the Modocs. Execution of four Modoc Indians.

1875  The remains of those killed during the Modoc War were moved from their temporary burial site at Tule Lake and interred in the post cemetery.

1876  New hospital erected at Fort Klamath.

1881  Military reserve and hay reserves reduced to a total of 1,000 acres.

1885  Fort Klamath attains its maximum size, with more than 40 structures.

1886  Secretary of War recommends that Fort Klamath be closed down, but the proposal meets with so much opposition that the fort remained open.

1889  Fort Klamath is closed down. John Loosely appointed caretaker.

1890  Fort Klamath military facility abandoned.

1966  William Zumbrun donates two acres at the site of the old fort to the county and agrees to sell six additional acres.

1973  Fort Klamath Museum and Park dedicated on August 19th.

2001  On the night of October 16th the museum building (Restored guard house) burns to the ground.

2002  Construction begins on the new building to replace the one destroyed by fire.

2003  Grand opening, September 5th.
OLD FORT KLAMATH

Fort Klamath was established September 5, 1863 in the beautiful Wood River Valley about eight miles north of Upper Klamath Lake. Set in the midst of a lush meadowland, watered by streams of unbelievable clarity, bounded on three sides by lofty, forested mountains and with an unobstructed view of Mount Shasta, over 90 miles to the south, it is hard to imagine a situation more pleasing to the eye.

Sites for military outposts are not selected on the basis of their beauty however, and there were those who questioned the wisdom of placing the fort at this location. A site at Lost River Gap and another near Link River were also being considered and those opposed to building in the Wood River Valley pointed out that the troops stationed there would be too far from the usual trouble spots along the Southern Oregon immigrant route to effectively provide protection for the immigrants. Subsequent events seem to have borne out this contention.

Be that as it may, the Wood River Valley had a number of advantages beside its beauty to recommend it and in the final analysis it was this
site that was chosen. For one thing the lush meadowlands in the immediate vicinity of the fort would provide an abundance of hay for the livestock. This was an important consideration for a post with a large number of cavalry horses and mules to be fed. In addition the nearby forests could be counted on to provide a virtually unlimited supply of logs to be cut into lumber for use in the construction of the fort's buildings.

Not the least consideration was the health of the soldiers who would be stationed there. Captain James Van Voast, sent to inspect the post in November 1863 stated, "There can be no question of the fitness of the place selected for the new fort if the only consideration were for the health of the troops and the concern for their support."

One might suppose that once I had been built, the fort would have remained more or less unchanged. This was not the case. From observations made at different times we can deduce that changes were continually being made. At its height, in 1885 the facility consisted of more than 40 structures, ranging in size from the two story cavalry barracks, measuring 135' x 33' down to the so called "Oil house," a single story building, with a floor space of only 150 square feet. This large complex was situated on a 1,050 acre military reserve. There was also a 3,135 acre hay reserve where feed for the horses and mules of the cavalry was raised.

Perhaps the most thrilling sight at the fort was the flag, a symbol to one and all that the authority of the Government of the United States extended even to this remote location. Fluttering in the breeze, 125 feet above the ground, it was the first indication to the weary traveler that he was nearing the fort. It could hardly been anything less than impressive. But the flagpole was more than that. It takes on added significance when we consider that it was the center point from which all surveying and measuring was done. By knowing the exact location of the flagpole it has been possible to determine the exact location of structures that have been gone for years.

Fort Klamath must have seemed remote indeed to the soldiers who were stationed there. Railroads were non existent in this part of the world and the trails that passed for roads in the area were only slightly better than no road at all. Ashland,
over 90 miles to the southwest was the nearest town of any size and it was only reached over the most rudimentary of roads that wound its way over the Cascade Mountains.

The best route for bringing in supplies was by way of Crescent City, California. Goods could be brought into this port in ships and then be packed on the backs of mules the final 300 miles to the fort. A round trip to Crescent City for this purpose took five or six weeks and could not be made during the winter months.

It would be a mistake to suppose that all the men had to do was to drill, and go on scouting trips against hostile Indians. A large part of their time was taken up with more mundane tasks such as shoveling out the horse barns, digging ditches and the never ending job of cutting firewood. They built roads, fences and telegraph lines, felled trees in the nearby forest and sawed the logs into lumber in the post sawmill. During the winter months they shoveled snow. Although civilians were later hired to perform some of these menial tasks, at one time or another the soldiers did about everything that had to be done to maintain the facility.

The first attempt by the government to close the fort came in 1886 when Secretary of War, William A. Endicott informed President Grover Cleveland that the facility was no longer needed. When news of this decision reached the Klamath country it stirred up such a furor that the proposal was withdrawn. This decision was only postponing the inevitable however, and the fort was finally closed down in 1889. On August 9th of that year the flag was ceremoniously lowered for the final time signifying the official abandonment of Fort Klamath.

The winter that followed was one of the worst on record. Snow began to fall in early December and continued to come down throughout the month. By the 20th five feet had piled up on the ground and rooftops and the old
cavalry barracks came crashing down under the accumulated weight. As it continued to come down the snow reached unprecedented depths and it became impossible for the skeleton crew left in charge of the abandoned fort to keep up. In February it was reported that over 20 feet had fallen. As a result other buildings began to fall and soon ten other structures had come down.

Various plans were put forward to find a use for the abandoned fort. In 1900 an attempt was made to have it set aside as a “front door” to Crater Lake National Park. All these plans came to naught however, and the property eventually reverted back to the Indians.

People from the surrounding area soon began appropriating lumber from the old buildings and in some cases even removing entire buildings. The little Williamson River Church was built with lumber salvaged from the fort and in time the entire fort had either been crushed to the ground, burned or been carted away. The fort that been such an integral part of Klamath County history for 27 years simply vanished. A stranger passing by on nearby US Highway 97 could easily have passed the vacant field where the fort had once stood without knowing it had ever existed.

How then did the present museum come to be? Things such as this don’t merely come about by accident. It takes people with a vision and people of action to bring them about and the establishment of the Fort Klamath Museum Park was no exception. The seed was planted by the Klamath County Historical Society as far back at May 1957, when the members passed a resolution urging the establishment of a “public wayside” at the site of old Fort Klamath. Nine years later, in 1966 their efforts began to bear fruit, when the William Zumbruns donated two acres and sold six additional acres to the county. The eight acres thus acquired is the land on which the Museum Park is now located. After that it was yet another seven years before, the dedication ceremony was finally held at the park on August 19, 1973.

What of the future? We have eight acres of the old military reserve. Will we perhaps reconstruct some of the other buildings that once stood on this property? Will we expand in other ways? Do we want to? Anything we do, of course will take money. Where will it come from? Our greatest resource is our people and their willingness to make things happen.

In 1863 when the fort was first established the nation was in the grips of the Civil War and there were no regular army troops available to garrison the fort. The soldiers that
garrison the fort. The soldiers that came to the fort at that time were all volunteers. Not only did these cavalrymen have to provide their own horses, with no compensation, a newly passed regulation even required them to pay for the feed they fed their mounts. And yet they came. To a degree, that same spirit still prevails today. Much of what the County Museum accomplishes today is through the generosity of its volunteer help. Surely without our volunteers the rebuilt guardhouse at Fort Klamath would not be what it is today.

THE MODOC WAR

Although the military post at Fort Klamath was in use for 27 years it faced its greatest test during a few months in 1872-73 as the Modoc War, and the trial of the Modoc Indians that followed commanded the attention of the entire nation. Eastern newspapers carried daily accounts of the activities of the United States Army and Captain Jack's band of Modoc Indians.

Although trouble had been brewing for a number of years, it wasn't until November 1872 that open warfare actually erupted. That month post commander, Major John Green ordered Captain James Jackson to go to Captain Jack who, with his band, had returned to their ancestral camp in the Lost River area and return Captain Jack and his band to the reservation. This was to be done peacefully if possible, but with the use of force if necessary. Unfortunately it was not done peacefully. Thus began the tragedy that was the Modoc War.

After a bloody skirmish with the soldiers, the Modocs withdrew to the relative safety of the lava beds where for almost five months 52 of the Indians held off the army.

Soldiers from the fort were actively involved with the fighting, but it was in the period following the surrender of Captain Jack and the Modocs that brought the greatest attention to the fort itself. The trial of the Indians, the subsequent hanging of Captain Jack and three other Modoc leaders and the banishment of the remaining Modoc Indians brought an end to this sad chapter in the history of Fort Klamath.
A recent photo of the rebuilt guardhouse at Fort Klamath.

Like the phoenix, rising to new life out of its own ashes, the Fort Klamath Museum has sprung back to new life, following the disastrous October 2001 fire that destroyed the "Guard House," and its contents. Thankfully the museum had closed for the season and many of the historical items had been removed and taken back to the main museum in Klamath Falls for safe keeping. Without minimizing the loss, it is safe to say that it could have been worse.

Since that time the guard house has been completely rebuilt and gives promise of being even better than ever. The new 40 by 40 foot building has been erected on the exact site of the original structure. As Judith Hassen, the museum curator likes to say, it is "placed over the 'footprint' of the old building.

The first step in the process of rebuilding was to quantify the loss; an accurate inventory was necessary for insurance purposes, as was an estimate of the value of the losses. Insurance covered much of the loss, but it is impossible to place a monetary value on things that can never be replaced. Items such as the chair in which Captain Jack sat during his trial, for example, are simply irreplaceable, and sadly, there were a number of such items lost in the fire.
In the weeks immediately following the fire the rebuilding of the museum was not a foregone conclusion. Only after two public meetings with the citizens of the town of Fort Klamath, considerable dialogue with the Museum Advisory Board and input from the Klamath County Historical Society indicated that there was indeed a desire in the community to rebuild was it decided to go ahead with the project. The ultimate decision, of course was up to the Klamath County Board of Commissioners, and more specifically Mr. Al Switzer, the liaison commissioner to the museum.

At this time a number of new people became involved. Plans for the replacement building were drawn up free of charge by James Matteson, but it quickly became apparent that the insurance money was going to fall short of the actual cost of replacing the old building. Although Bogotay Construction Co. did everything possible, consistent with quality to reduce expenditures, anticipated construction costs still ran considerably higher than the amount of money available. A number of things contributed to the increased costs. To begin with, at 1,600 square feet, the new building was nearly 600 square feet larger than its predecessor. Yet another contributing factor was the requirements of the modern building code that must be met in order to qualify as a “public building.” Even after Bogotay Construction Company donated $25,000. in labor, there was still a large cost over run.

At this point several steps were taken to bring the cost down to a manageable level. At the suggestion of Tom Derrah, “value engineering”...
was introduced which substantially reduced cost without compromising quality. The foundation was changed to a monolithic slab and the building was lowered eliminating the need for handrails. Further steps were also taken to reduce the cost of building by stripping everything from the initial plan that could be added later by non-construction personnel.
You are invited!

Klamath County Museums celebrates
the 140th Anniversary
of the establishment of
Fort Klamath
with the
Grand Opening
of the newly rebuilt

1863  2003

Fort Klamath Museum

Ceremony at 3:00 p.m., September 5, 2003
Festivities to Follow
Static Period Displays
Potato Bar