ODE TO A WOODEN BOX

In 1929 the mills of Klamath County set a new output record, producing in excess of 445 million feet\(^1\) of lumber. It was estimated that 60 percent of the lumber output was converted to shooks\(^2\), for use in making wooden boxes. Nearly all of the larger sawmills in the area operated a box factory in conjunction with their sawmills and the local economy relied heavily on the lumber industry. Local boosters claimed that the Ewauna Box Co. factory was the largest such plant in the nation and Klamath Falls was touted as the wooden box capitol of the world.

Three years later, the picture had changed dramatically. The nation was caught up in the throes of the Great Depression, and lumber production in the county had plummeted to a mere 191 million feet, less than half of its pre-depression level. It would not regain its former quantity for another four years. During the same period employment in lumber industry fell from 4,446 to 1,908, and it is important to remember, there were no unemployment benefits at that time.

It is against such a backdrop as this that the Wooden Box Campaign came to the Klamath Basin, flourished for a time and then faded away as the nation found itself caught up in the struggle of World War II and other, more pressing problems.

The goal of the organization was simple: increase output and employment by making people aware of the advantages of shipping their products to market in wooden boxes. Did the campaign succeed? In the long run perhaps not, but if nothing else it gave people a feeling that they were fighting back.-Jack Bowden

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\(^{1}\) Lumbering in Klamath by W. E. Lamm, page 29.
\(^{2}\) Cut up wood for making boxes.
Meetings are held the 4th Thursday of the month — with some exceptions. See schedule or call 883-4208. We meet at the Klamath County Museum meeting room, 1451 Main St., Klamath Falls, Spring Street entrance. Our next regular meeting will be September 28 at 7 p.m. Be sure to call Adra Turner, our Sunshine Lady, if you hear of anyone who is ill or needs cheering up. Her number is 541-884-8756.

**2006 Officers**
President: John Fortune
Vice-President: Paul Fitzhugh
Secretary: Susan Rambo
Treasurer: Avis Kielsmeier

**Board Members:**
Doris Peters
Bob Baker
Carol Mattos

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**Membership Information**

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Make your dues payable to:
Klamath County Historical Society
and mail to or drop off at:
Klamath County Museum, 1451 Main Street,
Klamath Falls, OR 97601

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**2006 Meetings**

**June 11 - Annual Tour**

**July 27 - Summer Potluck**

**September 28 - 7 pm**

**October 26 - 7 pm**

See Page Seven for details on Tour, Potluck and other events.

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**ATTENTION:** The first public hearing for the Motel Tax issue will be held June 13 at 10:30 a.m. in the Commissioner’s Hearing Room. We would encourage everyone to attend and speak up in support of our museums. For further information call 883-4208.
KEEP THE WHISTLES BLOWING

There was a time, not so many years ago, when many of the things we used in our everyday life came to us packed in a wooden box. Much of the food we ate, the furniture in our homes, even cheese came in wooden boxes. We took wooden boxes for granted, breaking them up for use as kindling wood or destroying them in other ways.

By far, the largest user of wooden boxes was the fruit and produce industry. Wooden boxes were so essential to the shipment of their products that many of the fruit companies actually acquired saw mills and box factories of their own, to assure an ample supply of boxes in which to pack them. The wooden box was the ideal shipping container, and Klamath Falls area mills played an integral part in supplying the nation with them. Boxes made from Klamath Basin shooks were highly regarded because the wood was light weight, straight grained and could easily be nailed without splitting. As one reporter put it, “The packer wants a cheap package, the carrier wants a strong package, the distributor wants an attractive package and all want a package that gives full protection.”

But dark clouds were beginning to appear on the horizon. During the 1920s more and more shippers were turning to cardboard cartons in which to ship their
products to market. Then when the bottom dropped out of the market during the Great Depression things rapidly went from bad to worse.

Different companies employed different strategies in their struggle to weather the storm. Some of the mills attempted to stay alive through those dark days by shutting down periodically to allow orders to catch up with production and then shutting down again when they had caught up. Others closed their doors and hunkered down to wait for better times. Some lumber firms did not survive the depression and simply went out of business. Idle mills result in idle employees.

Even those companies that made it through the hard times of the depression intact were not home free, for the use of cardboard boxes continued to make inroads into the box market and use of wooden boxes to decrease. Some of the unemployed workers decided it was time to strike back.

The Western version of the Wooden Box Campaign had its start at Yakima,¹ Washington in the early 1930s, when employees of the Cascade Lumber Company got together and decided it was time to do something themselves to help improve their lot in life. Cascade’s plant was closed down at the time due to poor prices and a glut of box shook on the market. H. L. Watkins an employee of Cascade Lumber Company led the movement. Members of the organization went out and contacted shippers, pointing out the advantages of shipping their products (Mostly fruit) in wooden boxes and urging them to pack and ship their produce in wooden boxes and reminding shippers of the advantages of wooden boxes. The campaign proved so successful that Cascade quickly cleared out its inventory and had to reopen their box factory in order to fill all their orders. Some

¹ Klamath News, June 16, 1938.
Decorative paper labels such as the two pictured above were glued to one end of wooden orange crates for the California citrus fruit industry.

businessmen held back at first, fearing that the Wooden Box Campaign was merely a veiled attempt to intimidate shippers by threatening to boycott those who continued to ship and received their products in cardboard boxes. This was not so. The organization was simply a joint effort by labor and management to give a boost in box shook sales which would ultimately benefit the merchants and shippers as well as the mill’s owners, and employees. Some went so far as to put red tags on all the items on their shelves that had come in a wooden box. The group’s slogan, “Boost wooden boxes and protect local payrolls” said it all. They would simply point out the advantages of shipping their produce to market in wooden boxes and hope for the best. The idea caught on and was backed by a coalition of owners, management and labor. In 1935 Watkins was sent to Klamath Falls to organize a local chapter.

The advantages of packing produce in wooden boxes were not just imagined. The freight claims department of the Association of American Railroads reported that the nation’s railroads paid out the staggering sum of $17,400,000 for loss and damage claims in 1927. The WWBC pointed out that a large part of that loss might have been avoided if more produce had been shipped in wooden boxes.

The organization sent two men east in an attempt to educate people to the advantages of shipping their products in wooden boxes and another man was hired to promote the use of wooden boxes for the packing and shipment of potatoes.

Many local merchants climbed on the wagon and backed the program for it was to their advantage that people have money to spend. Some of the merchants went so far as to place a red tag on all their sales items that had come in a wooden box.

The organization even had its own newsletter, published right here in Klamath Falls, with the first issue going out on May 1, 1936. Each month over 15,000 copies of the Wooden Box News were sent out to pine industry employees throughout the western states. A large part of the group’s operating funds were raised by the annual “Wooden Box Ball.” This gala affair was held each year to raise the funds needed to keep the campaign going.

Was the campaign a success? At this distance it is probably impossible to tell. It could be that its greatest success was its effect on the frustration of those who were involved, for it gave them a means by which to vent their frustrations by doing something to help themselves.
KLAMATH NEWS
(June 16, 1938)
Indication that the campaign for more extensive use of wooden boxes for shipping, launched by the National Association of Wooden Box Manufacturers, San Francisco will be taken up locally, came with a letter yesterday to the local chamber of commerce, asking that the movement be started here. In view of the fact that the average annual lumber production in this district is 400 million feet, nearly one-half of which is remanufactured into box shooks and that the box shooks are nearly all shipped to fruit centers of the south, the advantages to this district of boosting the campaign are pointed out by the secretary of the local chapter.

The Pelican Cafe
We Order Our Goods Shipped in Wooden Boxes

Wooden Boxes Add to Klamath Prosperity
Foods Pack in Wood Come to the Consumer in Perfect Condition. As Food Merchants, We Urge the Use of Wooden Boxes Wherever Possible.
Western States Grocery Company

Help the Wooden Box Campaign and Work for Klamath's Future
CASCADE APARTMENT HOTEL
230 S. 11th St.
Announcements

June 11 - 9:30 a.m. - Annual Tour. The Historical Society will be conducting a tour of the OC&E railroad. A bus has been obtained for transportation. The cost will be $3.00 per person. You need to sign up at the museum. There are a limited number of seats, with paid-up members having priority.

June 13 - 10:30 a.m. Motel Tax public hearing. Need supporters to fill the room and speak in support of our museums. This hearing will help the Commissioners to determine if this issue needs to be put on the November ballot. Please attend and bring your friends and neighbors.

June 25th - Ice Cream Social at Baldwin Hotel Museum. Details to be announced later.

July 21, 22, 23 - Century Days. The Baldwin Hotel Museum will be celebrating its 100th year as a structure. On Friday, the 21st there will be a kick-off dinner for the three-day event. It will be catered and all proceeds will go to the museum. On the 22nd, a non-motorized parade will run through downtown, along with events at the Baldwin & Veterans Park. Sunday, the 23rd there will be a Historic Homes Tour. The Baldwin will be open for tours, as usual.

July 27th - 6 p.m. The Historical Society will have their annual summer potluck. It will be held at the Fortune's home. For further information, please call the museum.

Sometime in the fall the Historical Society will be having a rummage sale. So be thinking of us, when you clean out your garage. You may call the museum for further information.
This 1945 studio portrait of the Rev. Frederick C. Wissenbach was taken at the Kennell-Ellis studio in Klamath Falls.

**Thoughts on 'Winema'**

By Todd Kepple

A large and historically significant portrait of Winema is now hanging in the lobby of the Klamath County Museum, thanks to generous gifts from lovers of local history. You may have seen the front-page article in the Herald and News about the portrait. Here is some more information about the history of the portrait and its creator.

The portrait was commissioned in 1944 by Merle West, Andrew Collier and Tom Watters, the owner/partners of the Elk Hotel, now known as the Winema Inn. They called on a local pastor, the Rev. Frederick C. Wissenbach, rector at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, to do the work. Wissenbach was born in 1887 in Germany. He was reared and schooled in Germany, and earned a master's degree in Paris. He came to the United States in 1912, and began work pastoring three mission stations of the Episcopal Church in Texas.
Being a native of Germany, he was interned during the World War I in a camp near Salt Lake City. From 1919 to 1932 he was rector for several congregations in Wyoming – where he reportedly carried a six-shooter – before returning to Germany for three years.

He was hired by the Episcopal Church in Pendleton in 1935, and it was about that time that his avocation as an artist began to flourish. He created several portraits of Indians from Eastern Oregon while living in Pendleton.

In November 1942, Wissenbach became rector of the Episcopal Church in Klamath Falls. Besides his creation of the Winema portrait, Wissenbach also painted a mural in the nave of the church’s sanctuary, and several other paintings of his hang in the church.

A memorial written for him indicates he liked to gather rocks, demonstrated a quick wit, and was a loyal Rotarian. He died on Oct. 15, 1952, while riding a train in New York. He was returning from a trip to the Holy Land.

Wissenbach’s portrait of Winema hung for many years in the Winema Inn while the building served as a social hub for the city. When the inn closed in 1982, the portrait was removed. It remained in private ownership until earlier this year, when it reappeared at the Uptown Relish antique shop in Main Street.

Dr. Bill Bechen, a member of the Klamath County Museum Foundation board, offered to provide most of the funds that would be required to buy the portrait. The Klamath County Historical Society provided $3,000, while the Klamath County Museum used $3,000 from a fund generated by proceeds from our gift shop. The rest of the cost – nearly $19,000 total – was covered by Dr. Bechen.

It was a bit of a challenge just to find a suitable location to display the huge portrait. The canvas measures 65 inches by 41 inches, and each side of the pine-wood frame is more than 6 inches wide.

It’s worth noting that not everyone in the Historical Society or on the museum’s Advisory Board was in support of spending so much money for the portrait. Admittedly, it may not be the best likeness of Winema. But the landscape in the background clearly resembles the lava beds country, and the provenance of the painting makes it a significant addition to our collection.

Now that we’ve gotten used to seeing the huge portrait looking down on our gift shop day after day, I have to say that it seems like she has ended up right where she belongs. I’m confident that generations of museum visitors will enjoy seeing this painting for many years to come.

Thanks again to Dr. Bechen and to the Klamath County Historical Society for making this acquisition possible.

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New additions to the research page on the Klamath County Museum’s Web site:

- Marks and brands in Klamath County, 1883-1904.
- Records of Justice Court, Sprague River District, 1875 – 1900.
- Modoc Myths and other Stories, 1926.