Vignettes in Klamath County Education

By Valeree Lane

The 2009-10 academic year will be a historic one, when future residents of Klamath County look back at its milestone moments. The retirement year of Klamath City Schools Superintendent Cec Amuchastegui will be one area of interest, as will the closure of two schools (Altamont and Fairhaven) and the switching of Mazama High School to the County School District. Budget cuts and reduction of school days will be of interest, but they must be compared to other years and events throughout the history of education throughout Klamath County.

A cache of letters and documents from the educational archives of the County School District now reside at the Klamath County Museum. What follows are a selection of documents that serve as vignettes from a different time in local history. If there is a moral here, perhaps it is that public education is not only a right in the United States — it is also a responsibility.

A schoolhouse near you

At the turn of the 20th Century, there were numerous school districts, and schools, across the county. Each had to be within easy traveling, walking, distance from its pupils. An Aug. 14, 1906, letter from E.T. Abbott, general manager of Klamath Lake Railroad Company, to the superintendent of county schools sought to move a building closer to the student body.

Dear Sir:

There is a school district, No. 32, at Pokegama, Ore, and Miss Applegate is now the teacher in a temporary building about three-fourths of a mile from the Pokegama station, at a spring which is an ideal spot for a school house. The regular school house belonging to this district is something like two and one-half miles away, and absolutely worthless for school purposes where it is now, near the Potter Mill, which is now shut down with no prospect of its again being operated.
I do not know whether I have done this thing well or not, but we want a school there and we want the school house moved from its present location down to the spring, which I can do for $250.

I caused notices to be posted for about 20 days at the depot, the post office, the Potter’s Mill and at the school house. These two meetings were held in accordance with the papers enclosed. I had no copy of the school laws at hand, but from the best information I could get, presume we have substantially complied with the law. As I understand it, the clerk is also the treasurer. The papers enclosed will of course, explain themselves. Will you kindly forward to me, at Thrall, Cal., the necessary bond for the clerk and the oaths of office for the other directors, and inform me how we can get our hands on the present money available and how much more there is in the hands of the state of some one else to which we are entitled. In short, I wish you would write me on receipt of this, fully just what we can and cannot do. I want a school there and want to move the school house, and if there is not money enough available to do it, this company will advance it. Of course, we must pay the teacher. I do not know quite how this is being done at the present time. There is no one left of the old board except Mr. Hill, with a likelihood of him not being a resident there very much longer. Mr. Potter has left the country for good and Mr. Richardson is now located at Klamath Falls.

Pokegama was not the only site in need of a schoolhouse. S.C. Hamaker wrote to County School Superintendent J.G. Wight on June 23, 1908, to request a facility in Bly.

Dear sir
We are endeavoring [sic] to Bond school dist No. 9 in the sum of $900.06 to erect a school building have circulated a Petition among the legal voters and received the proper amount of signers Held Election & there are no voters [sic] against the Question of the Bonded Debt I send you certificate of the Judges of Election also Clerk. Now will you kindly help us to go a head [sic] with this proposition and give any instructions you can how to Proceed [sic] next thanking you in advance for your kindness in this matter.

Before civil rights
An April 30, 1912, letter from Attorney General A.M. Crawford to Oregon’s Superintendent of Public Instruction L.R. Alderman dealt with the issue of equitable education for Native American students. The School District No. 7 mentioned is Fort Klamath.

Dear Sir:

In compliance with request of recent date, I have had under consideration the question raised by the letter of Honorable J.G. Swan, County School Superintendent of Klamath County, asking a solution of the question presented in School District No. 7 of said county, on account of the attendance at the school of Indian and half breed Indian children who are afflicted with tuberculosis and venereal diseases.

Answering I would say, that any of said children who have any of those diseases, can, in my opinion, be excluded from the school, under the authority of the district to exclude persons having contagious or infectious diseases. This would probably require an examination by the County Health Officer, or some other competent physician, certifying that they are afflicted with such diseases. Also, if the electors of the district are in favor of segregating children of Indian blood from the white children, they can by vote, authorize the directors, at a meeting called for the purpose, to build and equip a separate school, in which shall be furnished equal facilities.
for the attendance of such children. Indians who have severed their tribal relations, or have received allotments of land are, under the United States laws, citizens of the United States and entitled to all of the rights and privileges of citizens under the laws, and therefore cannot be discriminated against on account of their race, but it has frequently been held that it is not a discrimination to separate the races, if equal facilities are furnished to the two races.

One or the other, or both of these remedies, are about all that occur to me to be applicable to the situation present.

Four years later Klamath Agency Indian Service Superintendent W. Freer wrote to County Superintendent Fred Peterson on Oct. 5, 1916, to establish a new school for Native American children in the eastern part of the county.

My dear Mr. Peterson:

In connection with the proposed establishment of a school district near Trout Creek about 12 miles this side of Yainax, you are informed that the Government is willing to pay a reasonable monthly tuition for the Indian children who may attend the school, whose parents are not tax-payers. There is no fixed tuition but I should be willing to recommend that the sum of $2.00 for each pupil per month be paid on the basis of enrollment, with the understanding that the pupils attend with reasonable regularity.

Educational lobby
In an effort to standardize education statewide, Senate Bill 8 was introduced by Senator Eddy and read for the first time January 13, 1925. It reads, in part:

Sec. 5293. To course of study for high schools in this state shall embrace a period of four years above eighth grade of the public schools of the state, and shall [contain two years of required work] embrace the required work herein specified, which shall be uniform in all high schools of the state. Such required course of study [for the two years of required work] shall be laid down by the superintendent of public instruction, after due consultation with all county and district high school boards in the state, and such required work, which shall be obligatory upon every high school student, in all high schools of the state, shall include United States history; the history and leading principles of American constitutional law, in simple form; American literature; the English language, including grammar, composition, rhetoric, spelling and punctuation; penmanship; bookkeeping; practical operations in arithmetic. Such studies and the optional work hereinafter mentioned shall be so combined or distributed as to permit of earning necessary credits for entrance into higher institutions of learning in this state.

A Western Union telegraph was sent to County School Superintendent J. Percy Wells on Feb. 10, 1925, to rally opposition to the bill:

HELD CONFERENCE WITH FIFTEEN REPRESENTATIVE SCHOOL MEN FROM SALEM PORTLAND AND WILLAMETTE VALLEY POINTS TO STUDY EFFECTS OF SENATE BILL NUMBER EIGHT BY SENATOR EDDY ALL UNITE IN DECLARATION THAT IT WILL GREATLY INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL COSTS STOP MOST SERIOUSLY EMBARRASS STATE INSTITUTIONS IN COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS STOP DECIDEDLY LOWER THE PRESENT STANDARDS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL STOP BE A SERIOUS MENACE TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM STOP SEE YOUR BOARD AND HAVE THEM IMMEDIATELY WIRE YOUR REPRESENTATIVE TO KILL IT IN THE HOUSE
Teacher compensation

With schoolhouses spread across the county, part of a teacher’s wages could include a place to live. Roads were not in good repair, nor were automobiles an everyday convenience. In a July 19, 1927, letter to Klamath County School District Superintendent Fred Peterson, Mr. H. Evans wrote:

Dear Sir:

Mrs. Evans and I stopped at your office to see you on our return from Sprague River, but you were not at the office, and since we were in a hurry we left without seeing you. There are several matters we wished to talk to you about.

Mrs. Wann showed us through the school building and apartment. We noted several things we would like to have done, if possible. The school rooms appeared to be in fairly good shape. I believe a heavy coat of oil about one month before school begins will put the floors in first class shape for half the school term. Mrs. Wann mentioned that the blinds were purchased but not forwarded to the school. They would add to the appearance of the school rooms. Mrs. Evans says she would like to have a long window put in the end of the teacherage downstairs; high enough that a piano would go under it. She would appreciate having the walls tinted and the floors painted. This may be asking quite a bit for newcomers but we feel that good environment has much to do with the success of the school.

We look forward to a pleasant school year at Sprague River.

Deferred maintenance

During periods of economic concern, one area of expense that is routinely reduced is maintenance on buildings. It is a constant concern in the kindergarten through high school arena and the higher education environs. An undated document, which was filed among other papers from the 1930s, requests immediate action for maintenance at Bonanza School:

To The Klamath County School Board,

We, the undersigned voters of Sub School District #2, Klamath County, located at Bonanza, Oregon, petition your board as follows:

That present alterations and repair work on the Bonanza School to place same in a safe, sanitary and healthy condition, fit for the proper housing of the children that they may do their best work, continues.

Further, we feel the work as being carried on is in competent hand, and that there be no change and that the work be hastened so as to cause no delay to the opening of our school term.

The above is expressly necessary as thru some oversight our budget only levied $2600.00 [editor’s note: this number is crossed out in pencil and $29.50 written after the paragraph] for repairs which is so grossly inadequate as to be absurd.

Thru the adoption of the County Unit plan of School Administration, active matters pertaining to our school has been taken away from the local board and responsibility for the safety and health of the schools attendants placed in your hands. An examination of the school showed same to be in an unsafe condition, the burden of responsibility which we will not assume for our children and which we do not believe you care to assume, and your Chairman under the directions from your Board in conference, with our Board, held on the ground, have agreed on the necessary work to place the building in a safe, healthy, sanitary and comfortable condition.
Under former school law we would be free to meet this emergency but as authority has been transferred to your Board and we are left without recourse to remedy conditions, which we know are bad, we respectfully urge that you afford us immediate relief from our emergency.

**Arts education**

A well-rounded education has always included exposure to the arts. In February of 1938 local granges petitioned the County Superintendent to seek music instruction at local high schools. The charge was initiated by the Bonanza Grange No. 772.

WHEREAS Mr. Christiansen, of the Portland Music Co., has surveyed Klamath County as to its needs and possibilities for orchestral work in both the schools and Granges, and

WHEREAS he has agreed to return to this County in the fall with a competent instructor, provided the schools and Granges want this service, therefor be it

RESOLVED that we ask Fred Peterson, our County School Superintendent, to do all in his power to interest the County School Board in cooperating to the extent, that they, at the budget meeting in July, ask that the County Unit bear part of the expense of bringing a first class teacher to handle all county schools; that the County pay $150.00 per month for the teacher to handle all County schools part time, leaving the balance of his salary to be derived from private lessons in the different communities, and be it further

RESOLVED that all Granges of the County be asked to endorse this Resolution, after being properly presented, and then sent to the Pomona Executive Committee for their endorsement and finally presented to Fred Peterson.

Special thanks to our guest writer, Valeree Lane, for her story about schools in Klamath County.

**Upcoming Events**

**September Program: Klamath Brick and Tile**

A four generation story will be unfolded at the Klamath County Historical Society meeting Thursday, September 17, at 7 PM. Richard Smith will relate the history of his family's business, the Klamath Brick and Tile, a company begun by his grandfather, Ralph W. Smith, about 1917. Smith was known to family and friends as "R.W.". The fourth generation of Smiths will be represented by Scott Smith. He will participate with his father, Richard, in the program discussion and visual aspects.

October 22: KCHS program; Cliff Ambers: The Travels of John C. Fremont

November: Holiday Pot Luck, TBA
Klamath County Museum Manager’s Report: by Todd Kepple

Technology’s rapid and unceasing pace of change affects nearly every aspect of our lives, and the business of gathering, researching and preserving history is no exception. Nearly two years ago I wrote about how technology is forcing museum administrators and conservators to consider new questions regarding preservation of artifacts and creation of online exhibits. At times the constant progression of technology can seem vexing. No sooner do we learn one software program or become accustomed to some complicated device than something new comes along to replace what we were just becoming comfortable with. But there’s no question that technology is improving many aspects of our business.

In recent months, the Klamath County Museum has stepped up its use of the Internet – specifically eBay – to locate and acquire items that enrich our understanding of local history. A longstanding county policy prohibits the museum from using tax funds to purchase artifacts. We continue to hold to that policy, but we also continue to do what museum staff has done for decades: we find donors to provide the money needed to acquire items that simply cannot be passed up.

The practice of using private funds to buy artifacts for the Klamath County Museum goes back quite a ways. More than 40 years ago a group of generous museum supporters – including Merle West, T.B. Watters, and Scott Warren – provided the funds necessary to acquire the Frank and Doris Payne collection of Indian artifacts. That collection remains one of the most valuable set of artifacts in the museum system. What’s different now is our ability to use the Internet to learn about the existence of objects scattered all around the country, and participate in competitive bidding for many of those objects. Museum staff and certain dedicated volunteers regularly monitor the eBay online auction site, keeping an eye out for objects that have a direct connection to the Klamath Basin.
Over the past several months the museum has acquired more than a dozen items, ranging from photos and post cards to historic documents and research papers. We've also picked up a matchbook cover from the Winema Hotel, and a milk bottle from the Lost River dairy.

Costs have ranged from less than $3 for a photo of the Klamath River to $250 for an 1883 military report to Congress on the recommended expenditures for frontier fort buildings. (Sadly, the report recommends that Fort Klamath be abandoned. But the report also includes detailed drawings of buildings similar to what stood at Fort Klamath.)

It's likely that all of the items we've purchased in recent months have been sitting in someone's shoe box or hiding in an antique shop far from Klamath County – waiting to happened upon by someone who might be interested in them.

The Internet is helping thousands upon thousands of such objects find new homes.

It's important to note that we don't bid on every object with a Klamath connection. We already have many of the photos and objects that appear on eBay.

Furthermore, some objects we see are simply too expensive for us to pursue. Last year, for instance, we saw a listing for a sterling silver teapot from the White Pelican Hotel with a price tag way out of our range. Fortunately in that case, the Mattos family won the bidding for the teapot, and they donated it to the museum! It now holds a position of honor at the Baldwin Hotel Museum.

Our recent string of purchases was made possible because of a very successful fundraiser we held in June 2008. The purpose of the fundraiser was to raise enough money to buy a beautiful set of news magazine illustrations from the Modoc Indian War. We raised more than twice as much money as we needed for that particular acquisition, and so the surplus has been used to buy numerous other artifacts.

The "acquisition war chest" is getting pretty low, however, and we'll soon have to withdraw from the market, or else round up some more cash. We started out 15 months ago with more than $1,000, and have tried to judiciously utilize those funds to acquire
worthwhile artifacts that complement our current holdings. We're now down to a little more than $200.

Since we don't want to miss out on future opportunities, we've come up with a plan.

On Oct. 8, 2009, the Klamath County Museum will hold an "Acquisition Exhibition" to show off the items we've purchased over the past year or so. Those interested in seeing our newly acquired objects are invited to join us for a $10 catered luncheon.

Those who are so inclined will be invited to help replenish our acquisition fund.

We invite you to come see what we've bought, examine the objects up close, and tell us whether you think we're making good use of donated funds. If you'd like to participate, please call the museum at 883-4208 to reserve your seat at the noon luncheon on Oct. 8.

This photo of the Klamath Falls Post Office building, constructed in 1930, is among those acquired by the Klamath County Museum recently.
Klamath County Historical Society

Meetings are held on 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 St. entrance. For more information call the museum.

2009

Meetings
June Tour
July Potluck
September 17 - 7 PM
October 22 - 7 PM
November Potluck

If you would like to be notified of meetings and other happenings by email, please send your address to klcohiso@yahoo.com

KCHS Officers
Co-Presidents: Sue Fortune & Carol Mattos
Secretary: Phyllis Goebel
Treasurer: Avis Kielsmeier
Board Members:
Mae Rutherford
Gary Mattos
John Fortune, Past Pres.

Dues
Dues are due at the end of each year. If you look on your mailing label, you will see an entry above your name. A date entered indicates you are paid through that year. Initials indicate you are receiving a complimentary issue or are a Life Member. If there is no entry, you either haven’t paid for a while or we are sending you a complimentary issue, hoping you will become a member.

Membership Information
Individual Member: $10.00/yr.
Supporting Member: $25.00/yr.
Life Member: $100.00

Make dues payable to:
Klamath County Historical Society
and mail to or drop off at:

Klamath County Museum
1451 Main Street
Klamath Falls, OR 97601