Meetings Schedule 2012

March: Life in a Logging Camp, Karen Williams and Dorothy Fairfield

April: History of Kingsley Field, Ryan Bartholomew

May: 100 years of HooHoo in Klamath Falls, Ron Loveness

September: Early School Houses in Klamath County, Todd Kepple

October: Rustler, Rogues, and Range Wars, Liz Budy

Tours and Walks

Spring: Walking Tour; Historic High Street Houses, Carol Mattos

Summer Bus Tour: Along the Trail of the California Northeastern, Todd Kepple et al.

Possible Summer Trip: Paisley Caves and Summer Lake

Fall: Hanley Farm Harvest Festival

Upcoming Events

February 4. Celtic Society, Irish Americans in WWII. A talk by Carol Mattos, 1 pm, Oddfellows Hall.


Museum Happenings

January 14, Star Party, a Look at the dazzling winter sky, 6 pm, Lower Klamath Lake Road. Weather Permitting.

January 21, Heritage Gun Show, A Display of the Museum’s Many Firearms, 10am—4 pm, the Museum.

February 29, Second Annual Leap Year Party, a Light Look at Klamath History, 7 pm, the Museum.

Check the new Midge for Museum details and a list of other cultural happenings in the community, midge@co.klamath.or.us.
Houston Hotel Fire: A Tribute to Victims

Liz Budy & Carol Mattos

The Houston Hotel fire of September 6, 1920, was the worst tragedy in Klamath history. Two blocks of the business district were destroyed, and more lives were lost in the fire than in any before or since. The true death toll will never be known, but as many as 14 people died in the blaze, including the remains of many who were never identified.

A monument to the unknown victims of this tragic fire will be installed in Linkville Cemetery where the unidentified lie in unmarked graves.

In the early hours of September 6, the night patrolman, sleeping on his porch on the hill above, awoke and noticed the fire under a smoldering rubbish pile at the rear of the Houston Hotel. He reported it at 3:17 am, but by that time, the fire had already engulfed the hotel, which was located at Second Street and Main.

While people were running and jumping from the hotel, the fire leaped across Main Street to the row of wooden buildings on the south side, engulfing all and totally destroying the Houston Opera House. The fire then jumped across Second Street to an apartment house, consumed it, and two adjacent large houses (Wynn 2005: 316).

A few lucky survivors related their harrowing escapes. One man jumped from a third floor window, grabbed a sign, which unfortunately gave way, and he fell to the pavement badly bruised and burned. A woman and baby on the third floor narrowly escaped. She threw her newborn baby out the window, which fortunately was caught by her husband below before jumping herself. Both escaped serious injury. With all exits blocked by towering flames, another man drove through a window headfirst and crawled along the blazing walkway outside his room, where he eventually was rescued. Bloody and burned, he said that was the longest crawl he ever hoped to make (Evening Herald September 7, 1920: 1,4).

When Labor Day dawned, 17 persons were known to be dead or missing and $100,000 of buildings were reduced to blackened masonry and twisted metal. When the area cooled down and bodies began to be brought out, the death toll was lowered. Only 9 bodies could be identified conclusively as human, but as many as 14 people were possible from fragmentary remains (Evening Herald September 8, 1920: 1).

The fire chief Keith Ambrose said that “the last three bodies he helped take out consisted only of charred backbones recovered from the twisted metal of bedsprings.” The true toll of the fire was never known since the hotel records were all destroyed (Wynn 2005: 316).

Identification of victims was further complicated because the city was filled with people in anticipation of Labor Day celebrations. A mammoth parade of union members, a list of speakers for the morning exercises, 25 separate events in the afternoon, a street dance, and boxing match at the Opera House between Wild Bill Reed vs. Earl Ritchie for the northwest heavy-weight title (Evening Herald, September 3, 1920).

People flocked into town from miles around and the town of Weed, cooperating with Klamath in the affair, moved almost en masse the day before. Klamath hotels were packed and people were sleeping in cots in the hallways (Wynn 2005: 316).
With thoughtful resolve, organizers decided to go ahead with Labor Day celebrations. When the special train from Weed arrived, a parade was formed that marched past the block of still-burning buildings “... where charred bodies were plainly visible to the paraders” (Evening Herald September 7, 1920: 1).

As labor leader Kay noted, the people who were destroyed by the fire were not “businessmen, doctors or lawyers...but working men and women.” They included a chambermaid, a lumberman, a peanut vendor, a highway worker, a one-legged man, a young woman, and a mother and daughter, at least five unidentified others, and probably many more (Evening Herald September 7, 1920: 1).

The remains of the unidentified victims were buried in two unmarked plots in Linkville Pioneer Cemetery.

As a tribute to the nameless workers and lodgers who died in that fateful Labor Day fire, the Klamath County Historical Society membership voted to install a monument to them at Linkville Cemetery at a cost of $1,780 (Meeting November 13, 2011).

During speeches that day, labor leaders decried the firetraps posed by the many lodging houses and hotels throughout the city. They blamed the politicians who approved the license of the Houston Hotel as a lodging house, in spite of its lack of any fire prevention measures.

As one labor leader pointed out, knotted ropes dangling from the upper story of the Houston Hotel “were the only provision made for escape from the fire, which everyone knew to be inevitable” (Evening Herald September 7, 1920: 1).

But there were many others just like it throughout the city. The mayor and health officer sent a telegram to Governor Olcott requesting a special investigation. They opened “the battle to get rid of firetrap rooming houses,” claiming many of them were no better than the Houston Hotel (Evening Herald September 7, 1920: 1). The ensuing public outcry in the days following resulted in many new safety regulations (Helfrich 1967: 71).

Sources
Evening Herald, September 3, 7–9 & December 3, 1920. Newspapers are available online at chroniclingamerica.org.

Carol Mattos compiled newspaper research at the Museum archives; Jackie Bonner located photographs and other sources.
**Sue Fortune Is Retiring as Board President**

Sue, who has served on the Board in a variety of positions for many years, is retiring as co-President.

Sue has volunteered on many projects for the Museum and Historical Society since she came to Klamath in 1977. She has been a museum docent, served on the Museum Advisory Board, and continues as guide at the Baldwin, among numerous other projects.

Sue will continue on the Board as past president and she and husband John help print and mail the *Trumpeter*.

**President, Liz Budy**

Liz, who was elected in 2010, will continue as president. A semi-retired anthropologist-archaeologist, she began her career working for the Desert Research Institute in Reno, Nevada, worked on many interdisciplinary projects with Intermountain Research, and came to Klamath to work for the Winema National Forest in 1990.

She especially enjoys researching and writing about local history and hiking along Todd Kepple’s often irregular trails.

Liz is dedicated to the support our Klamath County museums and to providing quality research and public appreciation of our unique Klamath history.

**Polly Tickner, Vice President**

Polly, a member of the pioneer Tickner family, was born in the Bay area and didn’t discover her Klamath roots until some years ago.

Polly is a contract archaeologist who has worked in northern California and southern Oregon since 1994.

She has strong interests in both local archaeology and history and will share her special expertise as a member of the *Trumpeter* Editorial Board.

**Phyllis Goebel, Secretary**

Phyllis and her husband Paul are Oregon natives, avid sports fans, and dedicated walkers and explorers. Both have served as Museum and Historical Society volunteers for many years.

Phyllis has a degree in Business, and with her shorthand skills, is especially well qualified as Board secretary.

The Goebels kindly serve as hosts for our annual summer picnic at their lovely cabin on the Williamson River.

**Jackie Bonner, Treasurer**

Jackie Bonner has served as treasurer for the last two years and is willing to continue for another term.

Jackie is an avid history enthusiast, prepares the “Looking Back” articles for the *Herald and News*, and contributes to numerous Museum projects.

Her recent adventures documenting the buildings on Main Street with Gloria Sullivan and Bill Anderson were recently highlighted in a full-page newspaper article.
Historical Society Board Members at Large

Carol Mattos
Carol is a past president of the Historical Society and is our most dedicated archival researcher.
A member of the Society for the last 30 years, Carol has mined the newspaper archives and compiled biographies for more than 400 pioneers.
In addition to her many Museum volunteer contributions, she conducts annual public tours of Linkville Cemetery and is preparing a historic walking tour on High Street for 2012.

Mae Rutherford
Mae migrated to Klamath from Texas, by way of California, some years ago and has served on the Board for the last three years.
Mae has worked at the front desk of the Museum for six years and serves both community and tourists with her intimate knowledge of our local history.

Gary Mattos
Gary has been a member of the Historic Society for more than 30 years and has served on the Board for 3 years.
An old car enthusiast, Gary enjoys touring through history and contributing to the Society’s many history projects.

Ongoing Research and History Projects

Walking Guide: A Walking Guide of Linkville Pioneer Cemetery is in preparation, with the City Park’s successful award of a grant from the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries. Liz Budy and Carol Mattos are preparing text for the guide, KoKo Graphics will design and print it, and Ken Hay and Todd Kepple will provide critical review.

Women’s History: The Historical Society is working with the American Association of University Women and the Klamath County League of Women Voters on an essay contest for 7th and 8th grade students in Klamath County. The contest celebrates the 100th anniversary of Oregon women’s right to vote. A special program at the Klamath County Library will celebrate the anniversary on March 4, the essays will be read, and several speakers will talk about women’s rights in Klamath. Sue Fortune is contributing historic research for the project.

Chiloquin Italians: Remo Minato has been working with Liz Budy on compiling highlights of the Italian community in Chiloquin for a forthcoming article. Remo’s father Anselmo Minato immigrated to the US in 1913 and moved to Chiloquin in 1926 to work for the Chiloquin Lumber Company. In the 20s through the 40s, there were 20 Italian families living in Chiloquin and Remo relates his experiences growing up as an Italian in a diverse, multi-ethnic community.

High Street Houses: Carol Mattos has been searching the Museum archives for her spring tour of the historic High Street houses and has uncovered many fascinating stories. The American Legion building is one example of the complex history of many historic buildings. Initially a private residence, the house was lifted up and a church auditorium built below. The rock walls of the building today preserve Klamath County’s precious stones – agate rock, red cinder, and Glass Mountain obsidian.

Irene Curran 100th Birthday
Join Irene to celebrate her 100th birthday on January 29 from 10 am to Noon at the Klamath Yacht Club
RSVP by January 18 541-892-1836.
We are redesigning the Trumpeter and propose to join the many organizations that are going green and using electronic publishing.

The newsletter is published quarterly, and future articles will highlight new research and special reports on unique aspects of Klamath County history.

You will still receive a paper copy via the regular mail in 2012 to maintain minimum needed for our bulk mailing permit, but we will ask that you specify your delivery preference in the upcoming year.

If you do not want to receive the Trumpeter via email, send a note to klcohiso@yahoo.com

Please feel free to share with friends.