

# Benton County Genealogical Society Newsletter

P.O. Box 1646, Philomath, OR 97370

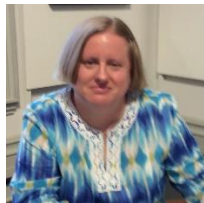
Volume 31 Issue 7



## From the Desk of the President

September 2015

I hope this newsletter finds you well and anticipating the replenishing moisture to come after a harsh summer of desiccating heat, a promise of that relief thankfully came to ease the fire danger of summer's drought. It was strange to find that the temperatures were more moderate in Utah than at home while I attended a 4 day family history conference; that is just so **wrong!** Did your daydreams about the summer of 2015 resemble the banner above but in hindsight more closely resembled the photo banner below? Thankfully, dreams have intrinsic value even if they are not realized!



In July the historical society hosted a presentation by author Melinda Marie Jette, PhD, whose book, "At the Hearth of the Crossed Races" reveals the early settlers of what is known as French Prairie, a unique culture of the French Voyagers and the local natives. This was well worth the time commitment on a great Summer's day. Several society members joined a goodly number of the community who attended the presentation; a copy of the book is in our library and a review is enclosed.

Later in the newsletter as well is an offer of a **free digital i-book of Fort Hoskins** and a series of interesting presentations of Fort Hoskins history and research which are scheduled in September and October; an excerpt from the news release describes these opportunities and follow in the newsletter.

We hope you will meet with us when we resume our society meetings on Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup> and share with us your summer family history experiences! A thought, it is not too early to plan next Summer's activities to achieve what you'd like to have accomplished **next** Fall!

A reminder that we welcome submissions of upcoming conferences schedules, newsworthy matters of genealogical interest and articles written by our membership, a great way to share your expertise and knowledge!



## June's Potluck and Library Tour!

Our June program on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> was a fun gathering which included a potluck lunch at the annex, a chance to share our planned summer activities, current research and time to visit with fellow society members. A tour of the library's reference materials was provided by several of our volunteer staff which helped several members become familiar with these treasures. I wouldn't mind having some of the potluck delicacies again! Thanks to all who contributed to my waistline! Ron D.

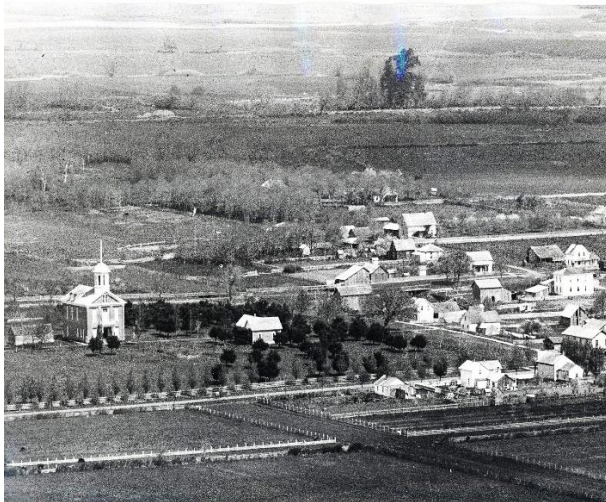




Our society is now on Facebook. We will do our best to post dates our meetings and other happenings that you might find interesting. Our page is Benton County Genealogical Society: Oregon. Stop by and like us!



## The Bennett Letters, A Window to the Early Years in Philomath by Ron DeYoung



Philomath College and town from Bennett Hill

The Benton County Historical Society has extraordinary collections which enrich my life as a volunteer; one of many thousands of collections is the Bennett letters, a large group of family correspondences that spanned the period from the 1850s to the 1920s.

The large hill directly south of the Philomath fire station is known as Bennett Hill, named after the family who built a home and lived there in the early 1860s. The subject of this article is drawn from the letters of Alexander and Margaret Bennett, and following the latter's death in childbirth, Alexander's 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, Sarah and their families.

In 1853, 16 covered wagons and a company of 96 members of a church colony set out from Ohio and arrived in Philomath that summer. Hearing of the need for Christian missionaries in the new Oregon Territory, Alexander Bennett, a young, single, ordained preacher from Leipsic, Ohio responded as well and sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, walked across its width and sailed north to San Francisco. As his



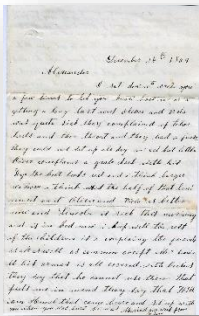
Bennett Hill & Farm from Philomath College

resources were then depleted, he worked for a number of months in the goldfields then continued his journey by sail to Astoria. Crossing overland he made his way to Philomath, took out a donation land claim on Bald Mountain just west of Corvallis, married Margaret Hendrickson of Vancouver, Washington Territory in 1858 and settled on this property. Finding it was not suited for farming, he sold the property (now the Corvallis Water Supply Reservoir) in 1865 and purchased the property which became known as Bennett Hill. The Bennetts enlarged the farm eventually to 340 acres and was where he lived until his death in 1903.



Alexander Bennett was a United Brethren preacher who rode the circuit on horseback four times a year, each circuit lasting weeks; a circuit riding preacher was the only means by which disperse settlements had access to ministers. The letters home to his wife often relate the marriages, baptisms, sermons performed and the challenges in the journey. His possessions on the circuit were few, a small Hudson Bay trunk in the museum's possession reportedly was carried upon his horse as they rode the circuit which included current Rogue River, Coos, Umpqua, Calapooia, Benton, Marion, Clackamas, Yamhill and Yaquina counties plus Columbia County in Washington Territory, current day Vancouver, Washington state. When home in Philomath, he served in the local United Brethren Church and the Philomath College as well, the now expanded building we know as the Museum today. His compensation for this work was meager, there was no salary, any money received was just that volunteered by church members which was often in short supply. One of the letters relates that he received on his circuit two dollars which would permit him to have his horse, Doll, shod.

That small, well-traveled Hudson Bay trunk was passed down in the Bennett family, ultimately becoming the possession of a descendant who donated the trunk and letter collection to the Museum in 1986. In the trunk were the correspondences which number in the hundreds, letters between the Bennett family including Alexander Bennett, his numerous children, his wife Margaret who died in childbirth in 1874, his second wife Sarah Clark, then a widow, various in-laws, siblings and friends. One becomes familiar with the handwriting, spelling, thoughts and feelings of the various writers whose hand, in distinctive pen and ink styles, speak of life on the Oregon and Washington frontier of the 1800s.



Cholera, smallpox, diphtheria, influenza, boils, rheumatism, ague, cancer and many other disorders afflicted these people. In a series of letters between Alexander Bennett at the homestead in Philomath and Margaret, at the home of her parents in Vancouver, Washington Territory, one learns the complexity of her attempt to return home during a period of flood and contagion. The local smallpox epidemic caused Margaret to take refuge with their children in the relative safety of her parents' Vancouver home; her return was delayed for months by the vagaries and danger of transportation in the recurrent epidemics of the early 1870s. The risks of each mode of transportation were discussed over the three month period that they tried to get Margaret and the children home. Discussed in letters whose responses involved delays of several weeks were the various option available, the expense but comparative safety of river boat travel was now thought to present the greatest risk of infectious exposure to closely-packed people on board; also problematic was the multi-day overland route of wagons, unpleasant in the cold and rain of a particularly wet fall and winter with its inherent need to camp out at night or risk exposure in wayside homes. Mentioned is the wistful hope that soon the railroad would be completed; these were tough and stalwart people accustomed to challenge and carried onward!

The fabric of the family comes through in these letters, the birth, illness and death of family members, agonizing injuries and infections with only "medicinal" home remedies, some of the latter's contents

were listed, the components are now known to be toxic and the administration, unsettling! In their distinctive script and style are described the day to day challenges of farming and animal husbandry whose production was always dependent upon the elements; the health and available time of those laboring often were in short supply and a favorable outcome never guaranteed.

One's heart goes out to Margaret particularly in letters written to her husband while he was away on circuit, relating the challenges of running a farm, haying, managing teams, plowing, caring for animals and children on the farm without machinery or power beyond that of what horses and one's own muscles provided. One letter related their daughter Viola's dress which caught fire, burned the young girl severely and Margaret as well when she worked to extinguish the flames. We take for granted the solution, pouring water on the clothes but "no water was in the house and the spigot was too far away". There were great sacrifices among this family that they might meet the needs of their own support and the faith that sustained them in their trials.



John Bennett, youngest son, at Bennett Farm



Alexander Bennett, who served as a United Brethren preacher for 50 years, died in 1903 and is buried in the Mount Union Cemetery by his first wife Margaret, near the site of the old Bethel Church, the first area church which he helped found in the late 1850s. It is estimated that he traveled approximately 100,000 miles by horse or foot during his years as a circuit rider preacher; as most rivers then had no bridges, he would disrobe, tie his clothes in a bundle and ford the streams. Our nation was founded by such people who cared for their families under overwhelming odds; they worked hard, expected nothing but the hope of a piece of land, a chance to provide for their family, to dream big and serve one another with a trust in God which sustained them. We today all stand on the shoulders of such men and women.

Sources:

- The Bennett Collection, property of the Benton County Historical Society, Philomath, Oregon
- The Sunday Oregonian, Portland, Oregon, September 28, 1952; by Hazel Higbee Waterman
- Benton County Historical Society archives, Philomath, Oregon
- Photos with permission from the BCHS Archives, some from early glass emulsion negatives



***It's the first of the month,***



***back up your files!!***





## History Of Fort Hoskins Goes Digital! News release (excerpt), September 1, 2015



“The Alliance for Recreation and Natural Areas (AFRANA) announces the release of the free “Fort Hoskins iBook and Walking Tour”. Available through the iBook Store, the interactive program guides history buffs and students through the founding of Fort Hoskins in 1856 to its decommission after the Civil War. With interviews, narrative, historic documents and photos, and film of current activity at Benton County’s Fort Hoskins Historic Park, the iBook lets digital and park visitors

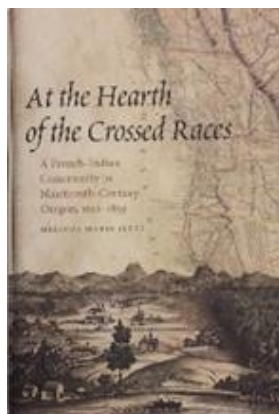
explore the significance of the Fort to the Native American residents’ lives, the role it played for Oregon’s political leanings during the Civil War, and the later logging and farming settlements. “

AFRANA invites the community to the Old World Deli at **6:00pm on Wednesday, September 16**. Meet some of the iBook’s creators and see the iBook in action.

On **Saturday, September 26 at 1:30pm**, AFRANA will host a talk by Dr. David Brauner, OSU Professor of Archeology, at the Benton County Historical Museum in Philomath, to support Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department’s ongoing efforts to restore the Commanders House at Fort Hoskins and expand education about the fort.

On **October 10**, the Alliance and the County are hosting **Public Day at Fort Hoskins Historic Park**. The Commanders House and the Franz-Dunn house will be open for tours. We encourage you to bring your iPads to the events.

For a link to access the iBook, visit AFRANA’s Facebook page: [Afrana-Alliance-for-Recreation-and-Natural-Areas](#) or the website [www.afrana.org](http://www.afrana.org) “ by Carol Leslie, Secretary, AFRANA



### New Local History Book In Our Library!

As I have not finished this fascinating book which prods me from the perch at my desk, I include the review from OSU Press, publisher of Melinda Marie Jetté, PhD’s work, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*”. I find the history of this blend of French Voyagers and the indigenous natives a local “echo” of my Acadian line’s experience in the Maritime Provinces long before; history does repeat. Ron D

*“Despite the force of Oregon’s founding mythology, the Willamette Valley was not an empty Eden awaiting settlement by hardy American pioneers. Rather, it was, as Melinda Jetté explores in At the Hearth of the Crossed Races, one of the earliest sites of extensive intercultural contact in the Pacific Northwest.*

*Jetté’s study focuses on the “hearth” of this contact: French Prairie, so named for the French-Indian families who resettled the homeland of the Ahantchuyuk Kalapuyans. Although these families sought a middle course in their relations with their various neighbors, their presence ultimately contributed to the Anglo-American colonization of the region. By establishing farming and husbandry operations in the*

valley, the French-Indian settlers enhanced the Willamette Valley's appeal as a destination of choice for the Anglo-Americans who later emigrated to the Pacific Northwest via the Oregon Trail.

Upon these emigrants' arrival, the social space for the people of the "crossed races" diminished considerably, as the Anglo-Americans instituted a system of settler colonialism based on racial exclusion. Like their Native kin, the French-Indian families pursued various strategies to navigate the changing times and Jetté's study of French Prairie takes on the relationships among all three: the French-Indian families, the indigenous peoples, and the Anglo-American settlers.

With *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*, Jetté delivers a social history that deepens our understanding of the Oregon Country in the nineteenth century. This history of French Prairie provides a window into the multi-racial history of the Pacific Northwest and offers an alternative vision of early Oregon in the lives of the biracial French-Indian families whose community challenged notions of white supremacy, racial separation, and social exclusion." by Oregon State University Publishing



**Writing, anyone?** We're also starting a writing group for people who want to write some of their family histories. We had a short meeting after the potluck in June and came up with a few ideas of how to proceed. The ideas included having a short lesson on some aspect of writing family history, reading what we've written to the group (not required), and gently supporting each other to start writing.

We'll probably have our first meeting in October and will announce it on Facebook.

If you want to be on the list of people who are interested, contact me at [vanlaere@proaxis.com](mailto:vanlaere@proaxis.com).



## Ancestry Launches Largest Online Collection of Wills and Probate Records in United States

[Dick Eastman](#) · [September 2, 2015](#)

Release from Ancestry: "More than 170 million documents from 1668-2005 now available exclusively on Ancestry; this new collection provides a wealth of deeper stories about ancestors' lives. With searchable records included from all 50 states spread over 337 years (1668-2005), this unprecedented collection launches a new category of records for family history research never before available online at this scale the United States. Wills can offer an incredible view into the lives of your ancestors, going beyond names and dates, and providing insight into their personality, character, achievements, relationships, and more. Reading these records you will find a deeper level of understanding about who your ancestors were, who they cared about, what they treasured, and how they lived."



**Family History Fairs:** These are free half or full day conferences on a variety of topics which are available to the public. Full day conferences often come with a free lunch to those who register online, there is even one in Spanish this fall. For a list of where these are located and to register online, go to: [https://www.lds.org/topics/family-history/host-a-family-](https://www.lds.org/topics/family-history/host-a-family-history-fair/search?lang=eng)

[history-fair/search?lang=eng](https://www.lds.org/topics/family-history/host-a-family-history-fair/search?lang=eng) and enter your zip code to find those close to you.

Ron D



Would you like access to Ancestry, Fold3 and other subscription services for **free**? These and many others are available for use at the Family History Center, 4400 Harrison Blvd, Corvallis.  
Hours: 9a-4p and 7p-9:30p, Tuesday-Thursday. Consultants are there to help!



### **Benton County Genealogical Board Contacts**

[Names, email and phone numbers have been removed for security reasons.](#)



**BCGS General Meetings** held on the 2nd Saturday in the month September through June. The September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting will be at 10am in the Social Hall of the College United Methodist Church, Philomath, everyone is welcome! The program will be a round table sharing of the Summer's research and or travel activities; please come ready to share!

**Board Meetings** are held the Tuesday before the general meeting; in September it will be on Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> in the Philomath Public Library meeting room from 10am to noon. All members are invited.



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