



Benton County Genealogical Society

♦
JANUARY 2026



Welcome to 2026!

A new year invariably brings a time of reflection. At this time in my life, I am thinking back to what the world was like for my parents and grandparents.

In 1926, my parents would have their first birthdays. All four of my grandparents were still living, and five of eight great-grandparents were living.

My maternal grandparents lived in Lobster Valley, Oregon. By 1926, they had a telephone but no electricity and no indoor plumbing. It is hard for me to imagine raising my own three children without an indoor bathroom, especially in the winter months. I cannot fathom how my grandmother raised 12 children that way!

I did an online search for what life was like in 1926 and it was clear there was a huge difference between city and country living.

Most of the larger world problems did not touch my grandparents out in Lobster Valley. Even as Oregon was shifting toward a more urban/industrial economy, my grandparents continued to eke out a living as farmers. Difficult but sufficient.

Though I never really knew my maternal grandparents, I think they simply accepted whatever circumstances they were in to build a life filled with faith, love, and contentment. And that is the most important takeaway for me. ~ LJC

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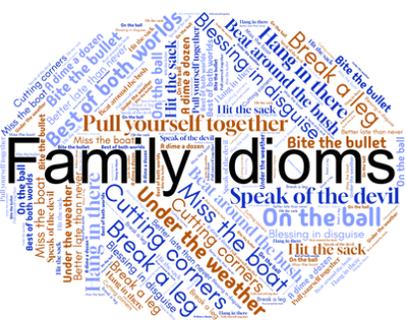


Thank you, George and Kathryn!

A tribute to George Davidson, our long time society president, and Kathryn Moss, our long time Vice President.

Each came to our society about the same time 8 years ago and both graciously offered their leadership skills. George led us out of the dark ages with his excellent command of computer skills and developed our BCGS web page. Kathryn was more than capable to preside as president when necessary. Both presented programs for the society at various times, and members felt comfortable with their leadership. It's time now to give them a much deserved break and for new leadership to help carry our society forward.

~ Linda Olsen, Secretary



Many of us have letters and postcards that had been sent to/from our parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents long ago. In addition to holding the history and voices of our ancestors, they sometimes include words or phrases that are both amusing and confusing. How many of those old family idioms are still in use in your family today? Here are just a few that I still hear myself saying. I wonder how many of these my children and grandchildren will still be using after I'm gone.... ~LJC

Toolies

("I live out in the toolies." Similar to "boonies"; meaning a remote, rural location.)

Pert near

("She pert near tripped on that rock!" Short for "pretty near"; meaning "almost")

Everybody and their dog

("Everybody and their dog was out shopping today!" Meaning a large number of people.)

Diddly-squat

("He didn't make diddly-squat at his old job." Meaning nothing or very little.)

Fair to middlin

("How are you today?" "Oh, fair to middlin." Meaning "average" or just okay.)

Herding cats

("Gathering everyone for the group photo was like herding cats." Meaning an attempt to control the uncontrollable.)

Spotlight: George Davidson

George recently shared with Philomath News: "On the north side of Marys Peak, there used to be an old town called Peak, Oregon," Davidson started out. "My father (Melvin) was born there, my grandparents and great grandparents are buried there. So, the family tries to keep the Davidson cemetery cleaned out, which is in dire need right now." Thirteen people are buried in the Davidson cemetery, the most recent occurring in the early 1940s.

But it seems there is much more to George's family history. When I asked how he first became interested in genealogy, George said, "Mom told me as a very young teen that my father had adopted me. It took me years before I was able to understand why and since she gave me photos of (my biological) Dad while he was stationed at Camp Adair, OR, I decided to try and find more info. Mom said my biological Dad had been killed in WWII while in Germany. About 1995/1996, my story started with me looking on the then-new internet."

George's mother had not known that his father was actually still alive. Her parents destroyed his letters from Germany without her knowledge to keep her from associating with him. Meanwhile, his father assumed her lack of response meant she was not interested, so he moved on with his life, unaware that he had a son.

George said, "I found an 'Ivan W. Anderson' (the name on my birth certificate) living in Iowa. I wrote him a letter and enclosed the photos Mom had given me plus a copy of my birth certificate asking if he might be the Ivan Anderson that was at Camp Adair. After about 6 weeks he wrote that, yes, he was at Camp Adair, knew Mom, and was not aware of my birth. Long story short, he and his wife Marianne accepted me as family, a blessing for sure. I've been in contact with my 1/2 siblings ever since. In 1997, I flew to Iowa and met Dad and Marianne. He was in very poor health and passed away in 1999."



George Davidson (right) with his biological father, Ivan Anderson. George is holding the purple heart that Ivan earned in World War II.

When asked what his biggest challenge had been when researching ancestors, George replied, "My adoptive father, Melvin Davidson, gave me his surname at adoption in 1948. He was a wonderful loving man. His ancestors have been a challenge to research as his family migrated from Virginia and settled in Ohio and Oregon. His great grandfather is said to have died in Illinois about 1849 while enroute to the West, leaving the mother and five children alone. (This is a 'brick wall' I've been unable to break concerning his death, location and his parents.) The mother and children went to Ohio where she had family. They all stayed there except for one son (Harrison) who ended up in Peak, OR. Melvin was born to Harrison and Virginia Davidson in Peak in 1915."

If George could go back in time and give one piece of advice to his younger self it would be to, "Listen and record family stories that Mom and my grandparents told me that I paid little attention to. I regret it so much now. Those old family photos -- put names and places on the back for future family members to see."

For aspiring genealogists who need more than census data, George recommends Ancestry.com for help finding birth/death records, Findagrave.com for family info, and researching military records, such as WWI and WWII draft registrations. ~ LJC

Johnson Collection Center



If you have not yet taken a tour of the Benton County Historical Society's Johnson Collection Center, there are more opportunities coming up on February 28th to get a behind-the-scenes look at their vast collection of materials, not to mention their state-of-the-art storage facility! The \$20 ticket is well worth it, especially for anyone who remembers their school field trips to Horner Museum in the Gill Coliseum basement. The center is also a great resource (by appointment) for anyone researching the history of Benton County.

The tours fill up fast so don't wait to make your reservation. bentoncountymuseums.org/tours





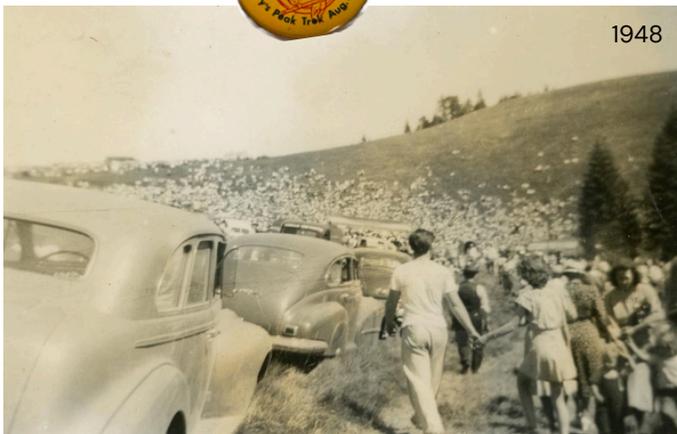
1946

BCHS 1999-104.0060-1

Picnics at the Peak



While going through my collection of weird and useless things, I came across some of my fundraiser buttons from the Mary Peak Treks that helped fund the Shriner's hospital in Portland. The earliest event I attended (at least according to my button collection) was probably 1966, which was the Trek's 21st annual event. It was held in Avery Park. By 1968, the Trek was back up on Mary's Peak which is where I have the strongest memories: a huge crowd (11,000 people that year), a lot of good food, and great entertainment, including acrobatics, comedy, music, and air shows. And of course the men in their "funny" hats. They reminded me of the Grand Poobah and his Loyal Order of Waterbuffaloes. (My dad loved Flintstones cartoons.)



1948

BCHS 2018-056.0015

I don't remember how many events I attended with my family over the years. And, unfortunately, I can't find any pictures of us attending those events, so I've had to rely on other sources to help spark my memory. There are surprisingly few photos available online through a Google search so it felt like I'd struck gold when I found these pictures in the Benton County Historical Society collection. (Special thanks to Patti Larkin!)

Do you have memories of the "Biggest Family Picnic in the West?" ~ LJC

Picnics at the Peak (continued)

Trek Trivia

- The largest crowd was in 1951 when an estimated 15,000 people converged on Mary's Peak.
- The largest donation was in 1977. Despite a heat wave that year, \$46,000 was raised for the Shriner's Hospital.
- The Benton County Sheriff's Posse provided traffic control. Traffic was one-way up the 11-mile road until about 2:00 pm, and then one-way down the mountain after the barbecue. Never a traffic jam.
- From 1947-1954, actor Monte Blue (a Shriner himself) was the emcee. He is credited with the Trek slogan, "No man stands so straight as one who stoops to help a crippled child."
- Percy Locey served many years as the trek manager and Al Oliver was the barbecue chef.
- Prizes included new cars, boats, trips, bikes, appliances, and more.
- From the 1st event in 1946 to the 39th event in 1984, only five events had to be moved to either Avery Park or the Airport due to road conditions on Marys Peak.
- The 40th and 41st events were held at the Airport, and the rest (1987-2015) were held in Philomath in conjunction with the NW Junior Rodeo.



BCHS 2016-072.0009.01-12-14



BCHS 2016-072.0007.01-14-1



BCHS 2016-072.0009.01-12-10



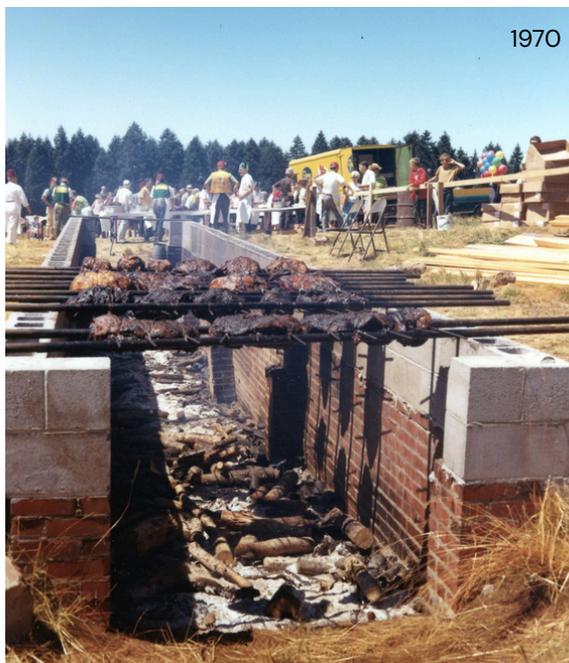
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Picnics at the Peak (continued)



1972

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1970

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1972

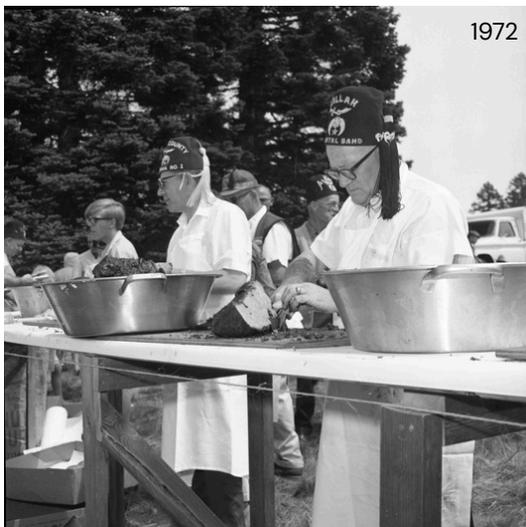
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Marys Peak Trek: A Happy Accident

In 1946, Dr. Harry J Anderson helped assemble a feast on Marys Peak for veterans returning from the war. Although he had advertised, folks apparently thought it was "too good to be true." He had thousands of pounds of leftover meat. What now?

Anderson and Percy Locey convinced the Shriners at the Portland Temple that they could host a barbecue on Marys Peak as a fundraiser for the hospital. They were skeptical but agreed to a one-year experimental event.

That experiment turned into a 70-year annual fundraiser that brought at least \$1.4 million to the hospital.



1972

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1972

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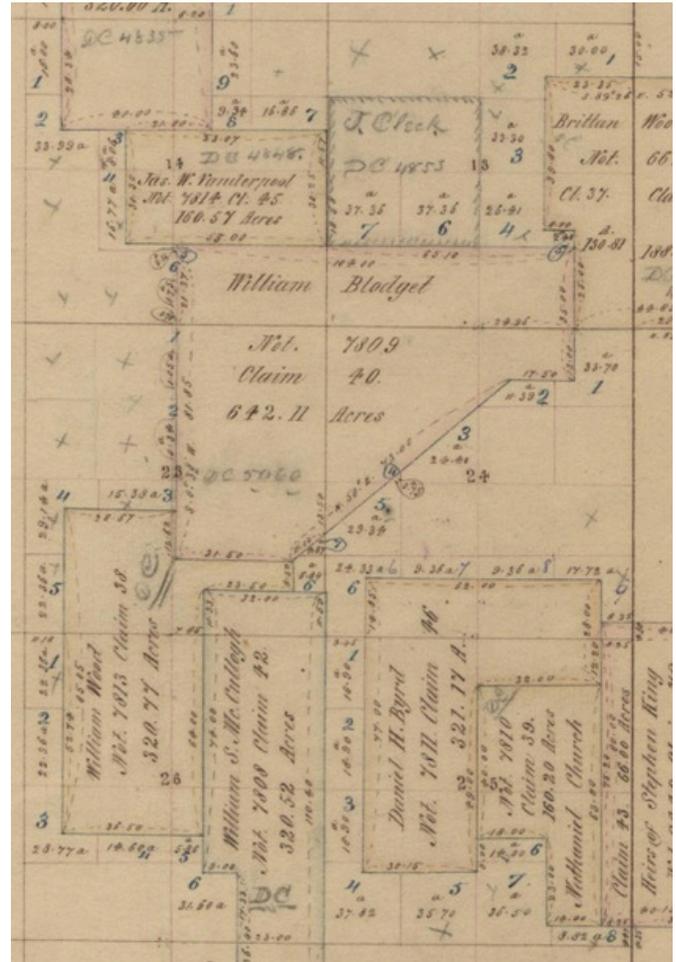
BLM General Land Office Records: Survey Plats

Before Google Earth's satellite images and the use of drones for aerial shots, we had Survey Plats! Some of those old maps hold a lot of information about property lines, acreage, neighbors, topography, and even soil types. The two sections of plats below are for Township 11 South, Range No. 7 West, Willamette Meridian. (Hills and farmland in the Blodgett area.) As you can see, the surveyors adjusted the details over time.

1856



1858



Unfortunately, navigating the BLM website is not necessarily intuitive. Most people are content to use the Search feature to locate a single individual's land patent documents. Here is a description of how to get to the survey maps:

[GLORECORDS.BLM.GOV](https://gloreCORDS.BLM.GOV)

Scroll down and click on **Survey Plats and Field Notes**. Under the **Search Documents By Type** tab, click on **Surveys** in the left margin.

Under **Land Description**, enter the **Township** and **Range**. (In the above example, it would be 11 and 7.) Click **Search Surveys**.

In the **Results List**, you will see links to the original surveys and the year of each.

If you do not know the Township and Range, you can select the **Search Documents By Location** tab. From there, you can zoom into the area in Oregon you want, then right-click on that location on the map and select **"Map Township."**

*Our **January 10th meeting** will include a program presented by Larry Landis and Lauren Gwin. We hope to see you all there! The regular meeting starts at 10:30, and the program will begin at 11:00 am.*

Letitia Carson Legacy Project

Letitia Carson was one of Oregon's first Black pioneers. Born into slavery in Kentucky, Letitia made the 2,100+ mile Oregon trail journey in 1845 with her Irish husband, David Carson, giving birth along the way. They settled in the Soap Creek Valley in spring 1846, but she was forced off the land in 1852. Letitia was a farmer, mother, midwife, entrepreneur, and likely the first Black woman in the country to receive a homestead patent under the 1862 Homestead Act. We will tell Letitia Carson's amazing story and also share the origins, partners, and goals of the Letitia Carson Legacy Project.



Larry Landis



Lauren Gwin

Larry Landis is the Benton County Historical Society Board President, former Director of Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC), and an orchardist at Territorial Road Orchard south of Corvallis.

Lauren Gwin, PhD, is the Director of the OSU Center for Resilient Agriculture & Food Systems, which includes the Letitia Carson Legacy Project (LCLP).

Mr. Landis and Dr. Gwin are LCLP co-founders.

We need you!

Several positions are still open. Please consider ways you can be involved. Ask an officer if you have any questions about the appointed positions.

*** REMINDERS ***

Annual \$20 membership fees are due in January. Not yet a member? See our website for how to join.

Linda Olsen is still collecting old family recipes.



Officers

George Davidson, President

Kathryn Moss, Vice President

Lois Courtney, Treasurer

Linda Olsen, Secretary

Appointed Positions

Membership: **Candy Koetz**

Programs: *** OPEN ***

Librarian: **Liza Wilson**

Audit: *** OPEN ***

Refreshments: **Pegge Gee**

Host: **Kathryn Moss**

Research: **Lois Courtney**

Book Sales: *** OPEN ***

Website: **George Davidson**

Facebook: **Payton James-Amberg**

Publicity: *** OPEN ***

Library Volunteers: **Lois Courtney**

Newsletter: **Laurie Corliss**

Thank you for supporting the Benton County Genealogical Society

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BCGS-OREGON.ORG

Meetings are held
on the second floor at the

Benton County Historical Museum
1101 Main St
Philomath, OR 97370