

Commentary...

Railroad opened Central Oregon to commerce

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The coming of the railroad to Central Oregon in 1911 opened the area to increased commerce, with the new rails providing a way to ship out the area's timber, wheat, and livestock to new markets and to bring people into the area.

Last week, we left the tour of the historic Harriman and Hill lines in Opal City, now only a sign along the track between the Crooked River Gorge and Culver. The tour traces the railroads from south to north, although the construction occurred from north to south, from the Columbia River south along the Deschutes River, up onto the plateau and into Bend.

The railroad was completed and first arrived in Culver on April 15, 1911, by which time the town had been moved from its original site near Haystack Butte, where in 1882, the first post office was established. Several more moves were made and the name was changed to Culver after O. G. Collver, who was appointed postmaster.

When news of the coming railroad reached Culver,

it was decided to move the town once again to a location along the rail line and it was originally called Culver Junction. The move resulted in a bustling town that was temporarily named the county seat in 1914 when Jefferson County was carved out of Crook County. At one time, Culver was the largest wheat-shipping station in the country.

The old wooden depot still stands in Metolius, four miles north of Culver, and efforts are underway to make it a museum. German Methodists first settled Metolius in 1903. A railroad station and post office were established in 1911 when the Oregon Trunk railroad arrived in the area, bringing many new settlers. Metolius became the railroad division point, necessitating the construction of a round house.

According to the *Crook County Journal* of February 2, 1911, the steel for the track south of Metolius consisted of 8,000 tons of 90-pound rails to be used in mainline construction and 7,000 tons of 70-pound material for side and passing tracks.

West of Madras is a spot that exemplifies the

competition between Hill and Harriman in their railway duel. A present-day bike path marks the route along Willow Creek of the Oregon Trunk line where it crossed under the Deschutes Railroad steel bridge and entered Madras. The Oregon Trunk line, abandoned in 1928, necessitated the creation of seven tunnels along Willow Creek. Located on the Deschutes Railroad trestle is one of the largest aqueducts on any Harriman line, used to irrigate the agricultural area of Agency Plains.

Hundreds of people came from all over Central Oregon on February 15, 1915, to "Madras. The Gateway to Central Oregon" to witness the track-laying machine of the Oregon Trunk Line connect Central Oregon to distant markets, hear speeches from dignitaries, and enjoy a barbecue.

From Madras, the track was laid to the south at about two miles a day until it reached the Crooked River Gorge, necessitating the construction of a bridge before the line could continue on to Redmond and Bend.

Standing on a hillside above Pelton Dam, one can



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Sign in front of Metolius Depot, which was purchased for \$1 from Burlington Northern in 1983 by city leaders to save it from demolition.

see the cuts in the landscape where ties and rails once marked the Oregon Trunk Line that traveled along the Deschutes River before turning east up Willow Creek. Until 1928, there was a railway station where Pelton Park is now located.

Seven miles northwest of Madras, along the east bank of the Deschutes River, the Vanora station of the Oregon Trunk Line was established on August 6, 1911. The town was named for Ora Van

Tassell (transposing the Van and Ora), a local farmer and real estate developer who owned the property where the station was established. A post office operated in Vanora from 1911 to 1920. At one time, the town had two stores, a grade school, a non-alcoholic saloon, a baseball field, and a grain warehouse. At the nearby Vanora Cut is evidence of the blasting of solid rock needed in some

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