

Descendent of pioneers to speak in Sisters

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Three Sisters Historical Society will present its second free Fireside Stories event on Tuesday, March 13, at FivePine Conference Center. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. with the program starting at 7 p.m.

Janet McKinnon Hodgers, of Bend, is the descendent of several of the earliest families in the Sisters area. She will be sharing family photographs and stories of those early days in her talk, "Camp Polk and Sisters: Life and Times of the Early Settlers."

Her ancestors traveled the Oregon Trail seeking land and a place to call home.

According to Hodgers, "Most eventually settled in Oregon — Eugene in the west, and east of the Cascades in Redmond where I grew up with my parents and three brothers. They also settled in Burns, Prineville, Sisters, and Camp Polk."

Her ancestors' names familiar to those acquainted with Sisters history are the Cobbs and Hindmans.

"My father's great-grandparents arrived in what is now Sisters in 1889 and established the Cobb Roadhouse, a way station for weary travelers. I am the great-great-granddaughter of Martha Cobb-Hindman who eventually married Charlie Hindman and spent her last 40 years at Camp Polk until her death in 1940," explained Hodgers.

Camp Polk Meadow, part of the Deschutes Land Trust conservancy, has a long history. Native Americans camped in the meadow for centuries, where they found abundant food and water. The Wascos and Piantes made seasonal migrations through this area that served as the hub of all the surrounding waterways — the Deschutes River, Whychus Creek, Indian Ford

Creek, the Metolius River, and numerous other creeks and rivers.

In the early 1800s, European trappers and explorers entered the area. In 1843, Captain John C. Fremont crossed the meadow on his way to California. Migration west on the Oregon Trail followed, as adventurers, cattlemen, and gold seekers established trails across the Cascades from the Willamette Valley to Central Oregon.

In 1865, the meadow became known as Camp Polk when returning Civil War soldiers from Polk County in the valley were sent to establish a fort to protect travelers along the Santiam Wagon Road from "hostile Indians," of which there were none at the time. They were commanded by Captain Charles La Follette and were only encamped in the meadow from September — May 1865-66.

Hodgers will describe the Hindman's role in Camp Polk Meadow, where today the only remains of their homestead are the framing timbers of their 75-by-50-foot barn and stable constructed from hand-hewn ponderosa beams, one of which came from a single tree. The logs were reportedly taken from the Camp Polk buildings.

The Hindman Station, which provided for travelers with a store, lodging, and food and shelter for their animals, lost its position of prominence when the post office was moved to Sisters in 1887 and a new bridge across Whychus Creek was built in Sisters in 1891.

Hodgers' great-great-grandfather, Alfred Cobb, and his family came to the Sisters area in 1889 and established a homestead east of present-day Sisters on what is now the Lazy Z Ranch. The home became a way station for travelers, managed by Mrs.



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

The remains of the Hindman Barn at Camp Polk Meadow Preserve.

Cobb, while "Cobb operated a blacksmith shop where he repaired the wagons and shod the horses of the travelers." (Wilson and Scott, "That Was Yesterday").

Hodgers said that thanks to Martha Cobb-Hindman and her granddaughter, "I inherited all the wonderful family albums and boxes of photos documenting the journey from California to settle in Sisters and then in Camp Polk."

Her presentation will also include information highlighting the many hardships endured by the families who chose to come west in search of a better life.

Prior to Hodger's talk, local artist, songwriter, and musician Dennis McGregor will entertain with songs, stories, and readings from his first book, "Dream Again," in which he wrote, "The

pioneers came west with the American dream. When I was a kid in the fifties, that dream was still alive. Today, more than ever, people want to dream again."

Dream Again is the story of Annie, a young girl on the Oregon Trail, who has only one thing to remember her family by — a patchwork quilt made from their worn-out clothes. When the quilt gets lost near the end of the Oregon Trail, an epic adventure begins. Copies of the book will be available for sale that evening.

A special feature of the evening will be a silent auction of unique antiques. Three Sisters Historical Society is in partnership with the Des Chutes County Historical Museum in presenting approximately 10 items representing a range of prices, including one very

special Heywood wicker baby pram considered to be quite valuable.

Other items include wooden snowshoes, native baskets, a 39-star flag from 1889, oval convex glass frames, and a few smaller items. Come prepared to take home a little piece of history. Proceeds will benefit both Three Sisters Historical Society and the Des Chutes County Historical Museum.

Also available for sale will be copies of "That Was Yesterday" by Tillie Wilson and Alice Scott and "Oregon's Sisters Country" by Ray Hatton. The historical society has also been gifted new copies of Martin Winch's seminal book on Camp Polk Meadow, "Biography of a Place: Passages Through a Central Oregon Meadow."

Dessert and beverages will be served.

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