

Goldschmidt names day to honor Senate historian

By John Tapogna
Of the Emerald

Old age is an asset to a historian, but it has taken its toll on Senate Historian Cecil Edwards. A magnifying glass waits to assist his 81-year-old eyes in reading the fine print of a seemingly trivial law.

But trivia is Edwards' specialty. A glance at his files uncovers problems most everyone else has long forgotten. The California-Oregon boundary dispute is one of his favorites.

His small office doubles as a museum of Oregon's past. On the walls, a map of the Lewis and Clark Trail, a photograph of the old State Capitol and a painting of the 1959 Centennial Exposition together chart the state's history from the beginning to present.

And to honor the man, Gov. Neil Goldschmidt has proclaimed today Cecil Edward's Day and initiated House Concurrent Resolution 13, which honors Edwards' commitment and service to the Legislature.

Edwards puts all his projects on hold as a young page wanders into his office. He spends a moment explaining how the original Capitol building burned to the ground.

For Edwards, talking about history is a treat.

"I'm not a trained historian, I'm just a history buff," says Edwards, who after 54 years at the State Capitol may know more about Oregon political history than just about anyone alive.

"I became interested in Oregon history in high school. Mary Eyre was my teacher. She always humorously said I was not one of her brightest students. If she was really truthful, she would have just said I was lazy," Edwards says.

"When you realize what an excellent historian he has become, the grades seem perfectly ridiculous," says Eyre, whose 69-year-old grade book shows Cs and an occasional B in Cecil Edwards' column.

Apparently, the grades didn't reflect the interest that would develop into a lifetime obses-

sion. "I started accumulating books on Oregon's past after high school. I got more books when I went to work for the state in 1933," he says. "My library gradually built, and as friends have known of my interest, they've given me books."

Edwards has a copy of every Oregon Blue Book ever printed, Oregon Historical Registers dating from 1901 and Who's Who in the State Legislature from 1916 on.

"I'm always looking for used

books... Sometimes you find things that are worth a lot to you in books that don't seem to have anything to do with it (Oregon history)," Edwards says. He estimates his book collection to be 1,000.

After more than 60 years of collecting all sorts of literature in Oregon, Edwards doesn't hesitate to take pride in his library, and he's willing to share his information with anyone who calls him. "It's a working type of library for people who want to know things in

a hurry," he says.

He demonstrated that fact when he temporarily forgot who Oregon's first provisional governor was. It took only five seconds to locate Gov. Abernathy's name in a book located behind his desk.

Fifty-four years in Salem have also allowed Edwards to make a slew of legislative contacts, and he says he acquired a great deal of historical knowledge by simply making conversation in the halls.

"There were some legislators who were very oriented to the histories of their districts," he says. He tells the story related to him on how Greenhorn, Ore. was established.

"These old tough rock-hard guys were sitting around drinking, smoking and lying to each other. Then this newcomer came and wanted to know where he could dig for gold. They pointed to a place up yonder. He went up there and struck it rich, so that became Greenhorn," he said.

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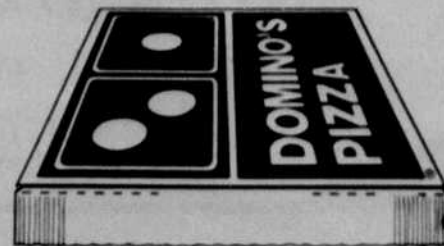
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