

HISTORY

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This almost 600-page work contains extensive information on the history of Freemasonry plus biographical information of almost everyone in Oregon, Idaho, Washington and Montana who was a member of a Masonic Lodge in 1902.

"It is pretty exciting (to make this book available)," said Lou Gerber, a member of La Grande Masonic Lodge No. 41.

Gerber arranged for copies of the "Masonic History of the Northwest" to be loaned to the Union County Museum and the Wallowa History Center. He did so after receiving permission from the Masonic Lodge of Oregon. Gerber hopes to later distribute the extra copies of the book the Masonic Lodge has available to libraries and other museums and history centers in Northeast Oregon. He will do this after the remainder of the books available are restored.

The public was first given

access to the book at the Wallowa History Center in 2018, and the book at the Union County Museum became available to the public this spring.

The work was published by The Historic Publishing Company of San Francisco. Its authors were John Milton Hodson of Oregon, William H. Upton of Washington, Jonas W. Brown of Idaho and Cornelius Hedges of Montana. All were identified in the book as Freemason past grand masters.

All Masonic Lodges in Oregon have copies of the book, but until now, nobody in this region could see one without getting permission from a Masonic Lodge chapter. Gerber hopes that having easy access to the book will help people doing genealogical research.

A retired National Guardsman, Gerber became interested in sharing "Masonic History of the Northwest" with the public after finding information about his great-grandfather Henry Gerber in the book. His great-grandfather was born in Pennsylvania's Allegheny



Photo from Masonic History of the Northwest

Officers and past masters of La Grande Masonic Lodge #41.

County in 1859 and arrived in the town of Wallowa in 1877. He was a blacksmith and the first man initiated into a Masonic Lodge in Wallowa County.

Today Joseph has the only Masonic Lodge in Wallowa County, but in 1902, when "Masonic History of the Northwest" was published, there were also lodges in Enterprise and Wallowa. Union County had Masonic lodges in La Grande, Elgin, Union and Cove in 1902 and

still does today.

"Masonic Lodges of the Northwest" contains photos of leaders of all the lodges in Union and Wallowa counties in 1902.

The volume is an ornate work, one with high-quality, heavy coated paper and steel and halftone engravings. The book has more than 100 photos, black and white snapshots of an era Gerber hopes is never forgotten.

"(The book) is a slice of time," Gerber said.

POVERTY

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Several at Tuesday's discussion talked about their own experiences, with some saying they had grown up in poverty but hadn't realized that fact until years later.

Tucker pointed out that for many, it's a taboo subject, something that people don't like to talk about.

"It's a very uncomfortable topic for most people. It's often something that is shamed or covered up," Tucker said.

According to the Department of Health & Human Services website, the poverty line in the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia in 2019 is at \$12,490 for one individual. That dollar amount increases by \$4,420 for each additional person in a household. The poverty line for a family of two, for example, is \$16,910. Different websites vary, but most say about 40 million people in the U.S. live below the poverty line. In Oregon, almost 538,000 were living in poverty in 2018, according to talkpoverty.org.

The main purpose of the discussion was to bring the topic of poverty in the open, talk about beliefs and — maybe — dispel misconceptions about it.

When the discussion turned to the causes of poverty, it became clear there

were no easy answers.

Some shared they had always assumed individuals living in poverty were doing so because of their own choices. Others said no two circumstances are the same, and that while someone could be in that position because of poor choices — such as getting involved in drugs or alcohol — others could be there due to no fault of their own. A sudden illness. A loss of a job. One of the conclusions reached was that it's easy to pass judgment on a person for being in that situation when you don't know the circumstances.

Later in the conversation, Tucker passed around an illustration that captured that truth.

A cartoon drawn in the mid-1990s showed two homeless men next to each other. One was a small, frail individual wearing a loincloth and holding a bowl. The other was a much larger, scruffy, burly man who was fully clothed holding a sign asking for food. The cartoon pictured the bigger person calling the smaller man a "show-off."

That cartoon elicited numerous thoughts: Had the larger man recently become homeless? He didn't look poor — was he faking it? What caused each situation? Were the two men in competition? Was one more deserving than

the other?

"They're both hungry, but in our nature as humans we judge them" was one response.

The discussion went into what should be done to help those who are asking for money. Do you give it to them? Do you give them food? Do you build a relationship with them to see what they truly need?

An individual shared a story of buying an item for a homeless man, who in turn took it back to the store and returned it for money. The group discussed the importance of not jumping to a negative conclusion — such as assuming he would use the money for drugs — simply because he was obviously living in poverty.

The individual shared that she now doesn't look back when she gives money to someone so that she doesn't speculate. "Once you make the decision to give it, it's not yours. It doesn't matter," she said.

Many of the event's participants left with more questions than they had when they arrived — an indication that the discussion had successfully challenged them to view poverty in a different way, and to continue the conversation in their day-to-day lives because, as one person concluded, there needs to be "more (done) to raise awareness."



Dick Mason/The Observer

La Grande pilot Jim Holloway in his Kit Fox #7 airplane Saturday at the La Grande Union County Airport.

PILOTS

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pursue a career as a pilot because it pays well and flight instruction training is becoming easier to receive. Many commercial pilots now earn between \$70,000 and \$100,000 a year, and many airlines are now covering the cost of pilot training, which can be at least \$45,000.

It used to be that pilots

had to pay for all of their training.

"I had to pay all of my training expenses out of pocket," said Tim McCoy, a member of EAA Chapter 1575 who earlier flew as a contractor for the U.S. Forest Service.

Holloway hopes the open house will inspire more people to begin pursuing flying as an avocation. He said that many people perceive

being a pilot as something only rich people can do.

"That is a myth," Holloway said.

He explained that flying is now more affordable than it has ever been. He said that many good used planes are available at low prices because many older pilots are getting out of flying and selling their aircraft.

"The average used plane is about \$35,000. People pay

almost as much for their cars," Holloway said.

Holloway said it costs about twice as much for fuel in a small plane as it would in a car to travel the same distance, but the tradeoff is that you get to your destination twice as fast.

For additional information about the Young Eagles open house, send an email to bluemtchapter1575@yahoo.com.

PERS

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combined changes were estimated to save the state between \$1.2 billion and \$1.8 billion every two years.

The lawsuit challenges two of the changes contained in the law: a tweak to a savings plan and a new cap on a number used to determine retirement benefits for each employee.

Oregon public employees get a retirement plan that has two distinct parts: a basic defined-benefit pension, and a market-based savings account that's similar to a 401(k).

Senate Bill 1049 cuts the amount of money going to the savings account.

Employees will contribute the same amount of money to their retirement, but a greater portion will go to fund pensions. As a result, employees say they will end up with less money when they retire.

The tweaks to the savings plan affect the vast majority of public employees in the state — workers who make \$30,000 a year or more.

The law also caps what's called final average salary, or, in simple terms, a number that the state uses to calculate each employee's benefits when he or she retires. The final average salary is capped at \$195,000.

In each generation of hires — there are three tiers of PERS that are based on when an employee was hired — that change could reduce benefits for a fraction of 1% of workers.

The changes to the savings plan will impact workers such as Jennifer James, a secretary at Mulino Elementary School in Clackamas County.

James is the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit.

Due to Senate Bill 1049, James expects to have \$18,000 less at retirement than she previously thought.

"That's a lot of money out of my retirement," said James, who has been working at the school for 20 years.

James took the job when her kids were young.

The hours meant she didn't need to send her kids to child care, and she knew that while she would make less money than she could in the private sector, the retirement benefits would be "good" and "solid," she said.

"I love our families and our students," James said. "Working at an elementary school with young children, it's very gratifying. You get to watch little kids grow up."

James said she expected those benefits.

"Maybe it's naive in hindsight," James said, "but when you get a job working for the state, you just assume that your benefit is a guarantee, that the state is going to keep its word and this is what you're gonna get."

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Facing mounting debt in the retirement system, Senate Bill 1049 also created new financial maneuvers to try to tame the impact that debt is having on government year-to-year.

By and large, state and local government entities such as cities and schools have to pay more money toward employee retirements every year. Combined with limits on local property taxes, proponents of the law say, the situation is putting the squeeze on government services, diverting money to pension costs instead of local services.

"Vital services and public sector jobs would be at risk," said Rep. Tiffany Mitchell, D-Astoria, in a letter explaining her vote for the bill. "Not only that, but the long-term viability of our pension system would be threatened if the legislature didn't act."

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