

COVER STORY — 'WE CAME BY BOXCAR'

VIRTUAL CELEBRATION & ENTERTAINMENT

SUPPORTS Maxville's heritage

JOSEPH — “We Came by Boxcar,” a virtual gala, live performance and fundraiser, will be presented Oct. 24 by the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center in Joseph, which seeks to gather, catalog, preserve and interpret the rich history of the multicultural logging community of Maxville and similar communities in the Pacific Northwest.

The event will take the audience on “a journey through timber culture and heritage” exploring “the untold stories of one of Oregon’s Black and multicultural logging communities.” Interpretive performances and entertainment will be highlights of the online program.

In its heyday, between 1924 and 1933, Maxville, about 13 miles north of the town of Wallowa, was the largest town in Wallowa County. Unlike most timber towns in the Pacific Northwest, it was home to Black loggers and white loggers who worked side by side felling timber.

Many of Maxville’s loggers and their families came from the South and the Midwest in search of work in the early 1920s. The Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company, which owned the town, brought the Black workers and their families to Maxville even though Oregon’s exclusion laws prohibited “free Negroes” from moving to the state to live and work.

Both Black and white loggers from the South, local loggers and homesteaders logged Maxville. Through historical records, the Maxville Heritage Center has identified Maxville loggers of Black American, Greek, Philippine, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Latinx and Native American descent, among others. The lumber town was home to 50 or so Black Americans and their families and had the only segregated school in Oregon at the time.

Despite Bowman-Hicks’ enforcement of Jim Crow-inspired segregation mandates, Maxville’s isolation from mainstream society encouraged the formation of interracial friendships. Black and white townspeople socialized and often shared resources.

Economic conditions, especially the Great Depression and consequent downturn in the lumber market, led to Maxville’s decline. In 1933 Bowman-Hicks closed its

operations, and Maxville eventually became a ghost town.

When Bowman-Hicks ended its logging operation in 1933, the schools desegregated and the remaining Maxville students attended school together.

Some 60 years later, the children and grandchildren of the original logging families began researching the history of the town and uncovering the stories of their ancestors. This effort led to the founding in 2008 of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, 103 N. Main St., Joseph.

As stated on the organization’s website, the mission of the Maxville Heritage Center is “to serve Oregon and the greater Pacific Northwest by preserving resources and providing information and education about this little-known chapter of the American experience.”

Visitors to the website can virtually experience the center’s collections, exhibits and program-

ming. Its archives include historical photographs, oral histories and audio interviews.

“We Came by Boxcar” begins at 7 p.m. Saturday. There is no fee to join the “gala,” which can be viewed on the center’s Facebook page or via Zoom. To register for the link and more information, visit the Events section of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center’s Facebook page. Information also is available at 541-426-3545 or info@maxvilleheritage.org.

The program is hosted by Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center and Beyond Toxics, a non-governmental charity organization based in Eugene that “strives for a clean and just Oregon.”

Maxville Heritage Center’s governing board members represent national, regional and local volunteers dedicated to educating the public about the significant history of Maxville and similar communities.



Maxville Heritage Center Timber Culture Exhibit / Contributed Photos

In 1926, buildings to be used as schools were hauled to Maxville. The school for Black students (above left, circa 1926) was located on the north side of town, and the school for white students (above right, circa 1926) was on the south side of town. Maxville’s schools were the only segregated schools in Oregon at that time. Despite such ethnic separation, there is evidence that friendships were formed among all of Maxville neighbors (far left, circa 1937).



FRIDAY
High 46 Low 29
Rain and drizzle



SATURDAY
High 34 Low 5
Partly sunny



SUNDAY
High 33 Low 17
Sunlit and cold



**Your
One Stop
Music
Shop**



**Get Everything
You Need to Keep
the Beat Going**

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1206 Adams Ave
La Grande, Oregon
97850
(541) 962-0307