

115 years in Baker County

Record-Courier

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Intensely local news

Est. Haines 1901 ~ Haines, Baker County, Oregon

Thursday, March 10, 2016

Volume 115, Number 10 • 10 Pages • \$1

MAIL ORDER BRIDE

By Gina Diers Perkins

Jennie Bennett, age 24, answered an ad in a newspaper for a wife written by a Rye Valley, Oregon rancher and mail contractor. She arrived by train to Weiser, Idaho from back East in 1884 to meet her soon-to-be husband, George Rollins. The couple wed on June 8, 1884 in Weiser before traveling through Huntington to her new home, and new life, in Rye Valley.

Jennie's father, Joseph P. Bennett, had been killed in the Civil War in 1862 when she was only 2 and her mother died in 1872, leaving her an orphan when she was 12. Her only brother was severely mentally disabled and was institutionalized. When she became of age she worked at the orphanage at which she had been raised. Her options were likely limited and the ad she saw in the newspaper for a mail order bride must have captured her sense of adventure.

It would have taken great courage to board the train, not having any idea about the man with whom she would spend her life other than what was penned in the newspaper ad. Good fortune or God's blessing found them both to be people of high character and they shared a good life, which included having four children born in the remote corner of Baker County.

Fred was buried on the hill above Rye Valley and in 2010, family members hiked to the grave site and dug up two iris bulbs beneath the beautiful white blossoms in front of the child's grave. The family planted them in their flower garden and in the spring of 2015, the bulbs exploded with vibrant white flowers celebrating the memory of this sweet boy's life, lost 119 years prior.

One can only imagine the heart wrenching grief felt by Jennie and the tender care given as she, and perhaps Nena, planted the bulbs following the boy's death. The tombstone is white and originally had a lamb on top which at some point, sadly, was vandalized.

Nena Carolyn Rollins grew up to be a lovely young woman on the remote Rye Valley ranch. She rode horses, was a beautiful seamstress, adored her parents and was the apple of her father's eye. She learned the art of photography from a friend, Fred Holman of Holman studios in Baker City, and captured the details of her life in Rye Valley. She developed her own photographs in a pantry and the images show life through her young eyes. The subjects of her photos are not staunch and straight-faced. Rather, the images reflect humor, beauty, and uniquely frame the lives of the people captured by her lens.

In 1907, Nena met a young man, a son of a pioneer family who settled in Pocatontos in 1862, at a dance in Baker City. The couple courted for a year and faithfully wrote letters between Haines and Rye Valley, each carefully preserved by the other and saved. The letters shared day to day life experienced by the young farmer and the young lady in Rye Valley. As their relationship grew more serious, the young woman's photographs captured visits by her suitor who was often accompanied by his sister because it was not proper for a young man and woman who were not married, to be alone. The letters still exist as a complete set, each with stamps, wax seals and cancellations from the Haines and Rye Valley post offices.

As the crow flies, it is about 50 miles to Rye Valley from Muddy Creek. Today in a car, the trip takes well over an hour. The choices of transportation in 1908 were limited and duration of the trip considerably longer. The young man would either ride his horse cross country, or sometimes would walk from his farm west of Haines and ride the train to Durkee where he would be met by horse and buggy by his girl and her father. At times, they would meet in Baker for a dance or another special event. In one of the letters, the young man expresses excitement about the purchase of an automobile by his older brother. Nena sharply replies about the danger of automobiles and firmly asserts she would never ride in one. Living until 1975, Nena's stance on riding in vehicles likely waned. In fact, her grandson remembers riding with her and his grandfather in the back seat of a Ford Edsel. The couple pulled over going up Ladd Canyon and he was asked to get out and adjust the two rear view mirrors, one to the proper height for his grandfather and the other to the liking of his Grandma Nena.



Nena Rollins photographing Fred Holman



Transplanted iris from Fred Rollins gravesite



Photo by Gina Perkins

Jennie Bennett's Bible, Nena's snapshot album, postcards

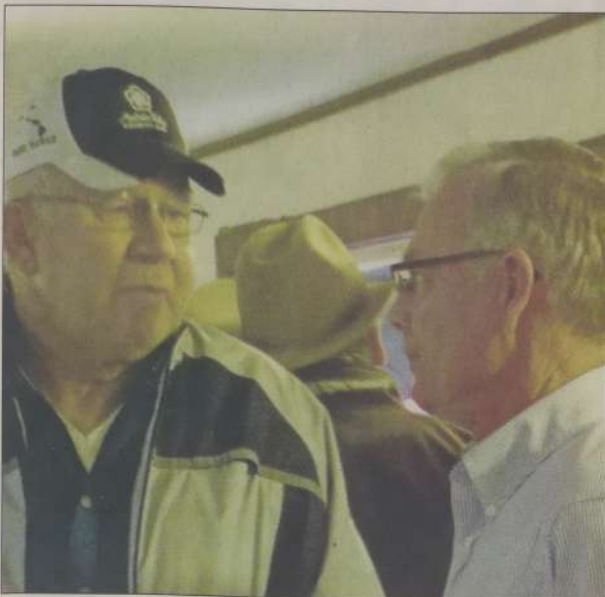
Their first child, Fred Russell Rollins, was born on Aug. 15, 1885. A daughter, Nena Carolyn was born the next year on Dec. 30, 1886. It would be 12 years later until another son, Charles Percy was born in 1898, followed by another girl, Leora Ruth in 1899, when Jennie was 39 years old. This is significant since at the time Jennie was born in 1860, the average life expectancy for a white woman was about 50.

Not a stranger to the death of loved ones, Jennie and her husband faced this agony again when their first born son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. He died at 4:30 p.m. on Monday, March 23, 1896 when he was 10 years, 11 months, and 8 days old. Jennie's father-in-law was a physician, Dr. Charles R. Rollins, who settled and platted the town of Grass Valley, and treated the boy in The Dalles. Fred wrote letters home to his sister, Nena, in beautiful penmanship, some on leather postcards, which are still treasured keepsakes of Jennie's great grandson, now age 67, who resides in Baker County.

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Minding the County's Business

Story / photo by Gina Perkins



Bruce Nichols, CPA and Republican candidate for County Commissioner Position #1, held a Meet and Greet at the Golf Course on Tuesday night attracting a diverse group of business owners, ranchers, and engaged community members numbering about 40.

"Minding the County's Business" with an emphasis on budget and fiscal responsibility and efficiency is a main focus for Nichols.

Those interested in learning more about his positions and experience may visit www.electbrucenichols.com. Nichols may be reached by emailing bruceforbaker@gmail.com or by calling 541-523-6471.

At left, Kent Nelson visits with Bruce Nichols, CPA.

Are You a Woman Minding Your Own Business?

You are invited to join the AAUW for the 2016 Women's Celebration honoring those intrepid women who own and operate their own businesses. The event will be held on Thursday, April 7 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Community Connection.

Women-owned businesses will have the opportunity to set up either a promotional table or create an information card at the event. If interested in participating or for more information, contact Dixie Driggers at gge@eoni.com or call 541-519-8427.

Baker City Golf Board to Meet

The regular meeting of the Baker City Golf Board will be Friday, March 11 at 9 a.m. at Quail Ridge Golf Course.

Daylight Savings Time Around the Corner

Spring is coming... Daylight Savings Time begins March 13!

Maundy Thursday Communion and Prayer from the First Presbyterian Church in Baker City

March 24, 12-1 p.m. All are welcome to come together as a community for the celebration of communion. Pastors and congregants will be serving communion as well as offering prayer to those passing by. This will take place downtown on the sidewalk area on Court Street between Main and Resort Streets next to the Corner Brick over the lunch hour.

Oregon Hunters Association Fundraising Banquet
 Saturday, April 2

Event Center
 541-523-6626

Baker City's Young Life Dessert & Auction
 Friday, March 11

6 p.m. Silent Auction
 7 p.m. Program

BHS Commons

Blood Draw
 March 17, 18, 19

Saint Alphonsus
 7 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

541-523-8102



4005 23rd Street • PO Box 226
 Baker City, OR 97814
 (541) 523-3616



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