

OUR HERITAGE MATTERS

Notes from the Big Butte Historical Society

By Charleen Brown

I am taking a break from my usual articles because I feel there is an important issue for the voters of Jackson County in November 2008. Not only will we be electing a new president in November but here in Jackson County we will have the opportunity to vote to leave a legacy for future generations. So, this is a message with a little historical information for the registered voters of Butte Falls and if you are not a registered voter, I urge you to become one.

In the 1948 election, exactly 60 years ago, citizens of Jackson County realized that rapid change was putting our heritage at risk. The voters of Jackson County passed a tax levy to provide funds for historic preservation. This levy established the necessary support to preserve historic buildings and artifacts, document the stories of families and towns and to educate children about our past. Also, because of this funding, communities throughout Jackson County were able to establish local historical societies and museums. A group here in Butte Falls founded the Big Butte Historical Society which operates our two very interesting museums, the Bill Edmondson Memorial Museum and the Medco Caboose. Both document and preserve our local heritage which would have been lost without this dedicated effort.

Years went by until 1996 when Measure 50 passed and all levies, including the 1948 historic fund levy, were rolled into the Jackson County general fund to be administered by the County. As timber revenues declined, Jackson County made up some of the shortfall in county revenue by reducing the amount of support provided to the historical societies and museums. This reduction in funding continued until July 1, 2007 when the Jackson County Commissioners refused to renew the contract with Southern Oregon Historical Society and public funding was eliminated for all 15 societies and museums throughout the county. This loss of funding has and will continue to adversely affect the operation and perhaps even the very survival of these museums.

Concerned about maintaining historic preservation, a group of Jackson County citizens began working to establish a countywide heritage district. Our state legislators supported the passage of HB 3538 in the 2007 Legislature to allow the formation of such a district. A measure will be on the November, 2008 ballot which if passed by voters will establish the Rogue Valley Heritage District. This will be the first heritage district in Oregon. The measure will have a cap of 7 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, which will amount to approximately \$14.00 per year for the average Jackson County property. The Rogue Valley Heritage District will be operated by an elected Board of Directors and the funds will be managed separately from county funds. This will provide the 15 organizations that form the Jackson County Heritage Association a stable base of funding.

Petitions to gather voter signatures to place the Rogue Valley Heritage District on the ballot in November, 2008 will begin circulating soon. If you are a registered voter in Jackson County you may be asked to sign a petition for the purpose of placing this measure on the ballot. Every signature from a registered Jackson County voter will be vitally important. We hope you will support this effort because once lost, our heritage can never be replaced and Big Butte Historical Society needs your support to continue the very important work of preserving our past for the future.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - \$5.00 per household

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Send to:

BIG BUTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 379
Butte Falls, OR 97522