

Pioneer legend Nettie Connett tough 'queen of moonshiners'

by SHARON NESBIT
For The Post

She could spit faster than a speeding bullet. She dressed like a logger and was the first woman in the state convicted of brewing moonshine.

She was a crack shot. Nearly every deer-hunting season she walked off with the prize in Sandy's big buck contest, though the game warden was always suspicious.

And she could stand on her head—no hands—on a bar stool in a condition of inebriation that would render an ordinary man too drunk to walk.

She was Nettie Connett—part legend, part kindly grandmother, part ring-tailed rascal—and the most famous citizen of Aims. Newspaper reporters loved her. Just when things got dull, Nettie would come to town dragging a dead varmint of some sort and pose, gun in hand, for a trophy picture.

She died in 1964 at the age of 84 and a chunk of colorful history went with her. The Troutdale Historical Society gathered friends and neighbors of Nettie last month to reminisce about her.

"She really put Aims on the map," says 83-year-old Clara Baker, who has lived in the rural community since 1921.

Tucked next to the Multnomah-Clackamas County line and penned in on two sides by the Sandy River and the Bull Run reserve, Aims was an ideal backwoods retreat for Nettie and those who shared her dim opinion of the 18th

Site lease clears path for Skipper

A 20-year airport lease has been issued to Country Squire Airpark for a "clear zone" and "approach surface" on public land at the west end of the existing runway near Sandy.

The lease authorizes Arthur Skipper, owner-operator of the public-use airport, to keep the 15.74-acre area clear of obstructing vegetation.

Existing timber in the lease area will soon be sold to Skipper. The lease will enable Country Squire Airpark to meet Federal Aviation Administration safety requirements.

Annual rental for the first three-year term is \$260.

A second lease covering the same area is under consideration by the Bureau of Land Management.

This lease would allow Skipper to use the clear zone for the production of ornamental shrubs. The agricultural lease would require an additional payment of fair market rental value.

Park info site open for calls

The State Parks Campsite Information Center opened for the year on March 1, according to Frank D. Stiles, Portland regional parks supervisor.

Stiles said the center will be staffed between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. from Monday through Friday until the Labor Day weekend next September. The facility is located in the Region 1 Headquarters, 3534 SE 82nd Avenue, Portland.

The toll free number is 1-800-452-5687. Portland and out-of-state residents may dial (503) 238-7488.

Clerks on duty are able to provide information on campsite availability within the State Parks system. In addition, reservation cancellations can be handled at the Center but not reservation applications, which must be processed at the specific park for which they are requested.

The 13 State parks that accept reservations have approximately 3,600 campsites. There are another 2,100 sites

Amendment—the one that prohibited manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.

According to her obituary, written by Sandy Post editor Elizabeth Hartman, Connett and her small son moved to Aims in 1910. "I lost my husband," Nettie once said. " . . . he didn't die. I just told him to get lost because he didn't treat me right."

But Nettie didn't lack for companionship. A procession of male "winemakers" came and went at Nettie's ranch. Neighbors shook their heads at the goings-on up the road.

By 1920, she was known as "Queen of the Moonshiners." Revenue agents were awed when they raided her elaborate still. Concealed 10 feet underground behind a door covered with ferns, they estimated it cost \$1,500 to build. It boasted a 90-gallon copper still and piped-in water.

When the law caught up with Nettie and she did a stint in jail, she kept a good attitude.

"She did the most beautiful needlework when she was in jail," recalls Allen Baker. "She never called it jail, though. She said she was in the Multnomah Hotel."

Nettie always mixed myth and fact. In her later years she claimed to have nursed dozens of neighbors and raised bunches of orphans.

"I don't remember anything like that," says Clara Baker. "Oh, she was good to help out when we were raising money for the school and things. But I don't recall her nursing anyone. Mostly, the kids were scared of her."

Certainly, if Nettie had been a movie, she'd have been rated R.

"Her profanity was tremendous," recalls longtime Sandy resident and Reynolds High School teacher Bob (Buck) Woodward, who was a veritable innocent on the day he wandered into a Sandy tavern with his father-in-law and watched Nettie drink and cuss and stand on her head on a bar stool.

"She'd win the contest for the biggest deer in Sandy nearly every year. Just after dawn she'd come into town with a big buck. The

game warden tried for years to catch her. He couldn't prove it but you'd swear that deer had been dead two days," Woodward laughs.

But just when she threatened to become predictable, she would strike out in a new direction. When the notion took her, she would have her hair fixed, get dressed fit to kill and turn up at a fancy affair acting like a perfect lady.

"She came to our wedding and I didn't even know her," says Allan Baker. "And that's the same woman who once told me there was no point in taking a bath before you went to a dance," adds Clara Baker. "She said you were going to get all sweaty dancing anyway."

"She chewed tobacco, you know," adds longtime Corbett resident Bob Kerslake. "And we tried to watch her spit. You never could. You could see what she hit, but when she spit it came out of the corner of her mouth like a bullet."

"I drank some of her moonshine. It was OK as far as moonshine goes," adds Kerslake.

Nettie mellowed in her later years and even took the showing people pictures of her grandchildren. But she was still a tough act to follow, according to

Troutdale resident Vern Rathman. He recalls a day when he followed Nettie through the timber, clambering over fallen logs and cutting through brush to inspect a logging job. "She was 70 or so. I was 24 and I couldn't keep up with her."

Toward the end of her life Nettie had a brush or two with respectability. A Clackamas County medicare plan was named for her. She hauled truckloads of granite for use at the entry way of Gresham's hospital.

But she remained a hard driver and that is what killed her.

"She had more accidents," recalls Allan Baker. "She'd be going home down Meing Hill (IN Sandy) and roll one of her old cars right over the side—maybe 400 feet and she'd crawl back out. She was probably a little inebriated, which is why she survived."

But an auto accident claimed Nettie at last. The way the story goes, most people in Sandy knew when Nettie was driving in town and watched for her.

But the day came in 1964 when an uninformed non-local . . . her broadside as Nettie went barreling through a stop sign. She died five months later.

Legends don't die easy.

Sandy fire hall now issuing burn permits

The residential burning season began March 1, and runs through June 15.

If a person doesn't have a permit, stop by the Sandy fire station and one will be issued.

They are free of charge and are issued for a lifetime at an address.

If one has lost a permit, or forgotten the permit

number, contact the Sandy Fire Department and they will look up the number.

The Department of Environmental Quality regulates burning and they contact fire stations about 8 a.m. Persons should call the Sandy Fire Department at 668-8093 to find out if it is a burn day.



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Collette Little, left, and Mike Hamrick took advantage of some of the nice weather last week and got in some exercise at Sandy Elementary.

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