

PRESERVING

THE PAST

The Nehalem Valley Historical Society works to collect and share area history

The Oregon Coast is a living, breathing history class. On any trailhead or beach, it's easy to imagine you are following in the footsteps of the area's natives and settlers. What came before the shops, hotels and restaurants? Who walked the trails and fished the rivers when it was for work rather than recreation?

Thanks to the volunteers at Nehalem Valley Historical Society, the answers to those questions and more are right at your fingertips. Be warned: If you walk through their doors at 225 Laneda Ave. in Manzanita, you risk losing a whole day stepping back in time.

The space, housed beneath the Pine Grove Community House, boasts an impressive array of items and an ever-growing document collection. The historical society also maintains an online archive to make materials available to anyone, anywhere.

The society's original iteration was far more casual. It began in the 1980s as a group of residents who shared a love for area history. They met once a month for a potluck at each others' homes to share stories and discuss how best to preserve local history.

"They started coming up with plans to acquire as many documents as they could," recalled Tom Mock, NVHS board presi-

dent. "They knew that it would be much easier in the future for others to look back and see what made the Nehalem Valley what it is."

Mock recalled that interest had grown to a point where the society felt it needed a permanent address. A proposal was once floated that NVHS share a small space within the then-developing Hoffman Center for the Arts. "We'd probably have ended up with about 48 feet of wall space," Mock laughed.

About seven years ago, NVHS finally found a place to call home when the downstairs area of the Pine Grove became available.

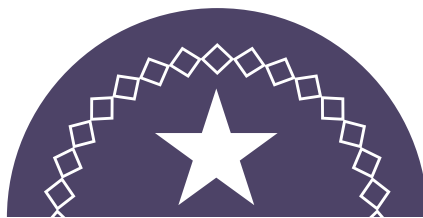
"It made sense because here you have the gathering place for this town since 1928," he said.

Mock credits longtime Manzanita resident and NVHS volunteer Owen Nicholson for generating a \$50,000 grant from Tillamook County to develop the brick-and-mortar operation.

NVHS adviser Mark Beach called the location a perfect fit. "The building is a very historic structure and has meant so much to the community for 80 years now," he said.

Though not technically a museum, NVHS displays a number of rotating items and storyboards highlighting the area's past.

Mock holds degrees in anthropology, history and sociology and



★ 'We want to show what made the Nehalem Valley a special place.' ★

The Glenesslin wrecked on Manzanita Beach at the foot of Neahkahnie Mountain in 1913.



Photo by Dan Haag

Tom Mock, left, and Mark Beach help guide the Nehalem Valley Historical Society in its preservation goals.

has a passion for ancient history. He most enjoys items relating to area Native Americans and stories about first contact with European settlers. He sees those stories as the foundations for the area's 21st century existence.

"We want to show what made the Nehalem Valley a special place," he said. "What the economy was like, what made people originally come here —

timber, fishing, dairy."

Mock pointed out that while some things change, others remain constant. As today, the Manzanita beach drew inland tourists from the very early days of the town. By contrast, the Wheeler Lumber Mill, once one of the largest in the country, has faded into history.

Stories fill the NVHS space; the grounding of the windjam-

The Nehalem Valley Historical Society is located at 225 Laneda Ave. in Manzanita. Visit www.nehalemvalleyhistory.org to view the online archive, or email info@nehalemvalleyhistory.org to schedule an appointment to learn more.

Photo courtesy Nehalem Valley Historical Society

mer Glenesslin on the rocks surrounding Neahkahnie Mountain; a possible visit to Nehalem Bay by explorer Sir Francis Drake; beeswax from a shipwreck.

Of course, with all the nearby shipwrecks over the centuries, visitors are always eager to ask about lost gold.

"Everybody loves talking about buried treasure," Beach laughed.

The quest to acquire and preserve these stories can be daunting. An ongoing project to acquire oral histories has been met with some roadblocks.

"Gathering oral histories and transferring them from old cassettes is very time consuming," Beach said.

Beach, who holds a Ph.D. in history, works to identify and scan old photos for a research website he maintains. His efforts, which he calls "an extensive hobby," have yielded over 2,500 photos.

"It never ends," Mock said.

"There is still so much out there in people's garages, attics or hidden in closets than we'll ever know." The task is made that much more difficult by the fact that many older residents have either moved away or have passed on.

Still, Mock believes that the more NVHS grows and establishes credibility, the more people will feel comfortable bringing such items to them.

Though they don't maintain regular hours, they keep the doors open as often as possible, despite sometimes falling short of volunteer hours.

"The one thing we need to do is keep this place open, even for a couple hours during busy times," Mock said.

He added that people often wander through, not knowing what to expect, and leave with a greater appreciation of area history.

"Once you tap into a person's interest, there's something here for everybody," Mock said.