

Woman keeps the Grand Ronde Library alive

By TOM HENDERSON
For The Oregonian

GRAND RONDE — Members of the Grand Ronde Women's Club started the community's public library in 1958, at what used to be the local bank off Oregon 18, with only a spiral-bound notebook to keep track of who borrowed what book.

They thought that would be enough — at least for a little while. After all, the library would only be open Monday afternoons.

Now, some 3,300 Monday afternoons later, the notebook still has room for more visitors to write down their names and the books they're borrowing. In fact, the 64-year-old notebook records approximately 3,500 library visitors in all — about one per week.

Harriet House was visitor No. 1. She checked out the first book Oct. 15, 1958. Reynaldo Schneck is visitor No. 3,510.

The author of books on cycling such as "Bicycle Manifesto: The Little Red Book For Bicycle Enthusiasts" and "Bicycle: A Practical Guide," Schneck stumbled upon the library almost by accident.

"I was just passing through on my way to Mitchell, Oregon, when I found the library," the 64-year-old Seattle resident said. "I'm helping out at a local farm while I stay here. This is my fifth visit to the library. I love visiting with Amelie."

That's Amelie Redman, the librarian. The 79-year-old Willamina resident drives 6.7 miles every Monday to open the library from noon to 4 p.m. The building, once the Bank of Grand Ronde, is packed to overflowing with books of every description, almost all of them donated by members of the community.

Redman arranges them by subject — more or less. However, she admitted the library is organized more by madness than method. There is no decimal system, Dewey or otherwise.

It wouldn't help anyway. There's no card catalog, either on paper or computer. The cataloging software is in Redman's head. If people can't find the right book, she's happy to help them.

"I love recommending books to people," she said.

The library also has no website, no email address and no telephone. How do people contact the library? "They can always leave a note on the door," Redman said. "Other-



Tom Henderson/For The Oregonian
Amelie Redman has been the librarian at the Grand Ronde Library since 2013. The library has no computers, no internet service and no telephone.

*'THIS IS MY WAY OF KEEPING
THE SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE ALIVE.'*

Amelie Redman | librarian at the Grand Ronde Library since 2013

wise, they just need to drop by a Monday afternoon."

Visitors often have to walk sideways to make their way through the narrow spaces between the shelves. Redman said she doesn't mind if they knock a few books to the floor in the process.

"It's hard not to," she said. "It can get pretty cramped in here."

Among the other things the library doesn't have is a heating system, unless one counts the potbelly stove behind Redman's desk.

"The first thing I do when I arrive in the winter months is build a fire if it's necessary, and it generally is," she said.

The Grand Ronde Women's Club still runs the library — at least on paper. The club

has long since disbanded.

"On the paperwork, we still get together because we all go to the same church," Redman said.

Funding for the library actually comes from the family of Elsie Werth, who served as the librarian until 2013.

"Her family keeps the library going in Elsie's honor," Redman said. "Dennis Werth, her son, kept the library open in December after I was bitten by a dog and couldn't come in that month."

It costs very little to keep the library open, she said.

"Of course, I don't pay for anything," she added. "I'm just a volunteer. Power is about \$24 a month. Sewer rates just went up to \$12. There's just not a lot of overhead."

Monday afternoons at the library can be lonely, Redman said.

"Every once in awhile, no one comes. I've definitely had a few days when no one comes in at all.

The library has no connection to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The tribe operates its own library farther up Grand Ronde Road, which is open by appointment weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Unlike Redman's tiny library, it has all the usual modern amenities — including tribal archives.

Sarah Frost, the manager of the nearby Willamina Public Library, said the small library at the old bank is still important.

"Having the library in Grand Ronde is so important for their community and ours," said Frost.

When some students came in last month to find information about Martin Luther King Jr., Redman was able to provide them with some books. Few other people have dusted off the books in the past 64 years, she said, but it was nice to have the books there, just waiting for the right readers.

"At least they're getting a pretty good education in bigotry and racism," she added about the books she retrieved for the students.

Even with more modern libraries nearby in Willamina, Dallas, McMinnville and just down the road in Grand Ronde, Redman said she never questions the importance of keeping her library alive.

"A good friend of mine was dying, and I was taking care of her," said Redman. "She asked me why I did it, and I said she would do the same for me. Then I thought about it some more and said it was really because of the beauty of her soul.

"It's the same with the library, I suppose. I do it for the beauty of its soul."

The library reminds her of "A Gift Upon the Shore," a 1990 novel by Oregon author M.K. Wren. In the novel, a writer and a farmer live on the Oregon Coast in the aftermath of a nuclear war. The two women are determined to collect and preserve the written word for a new civilization.

"This is like the gift upon the shore," Redman said of the library. "These books are still here. Where do kids see the old books? We tend to shine things up and throw them away. This is my way of keeping the spirit of knowledge alive."



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