

Quick takes

Less controversial Pendleton statue ideas:

- George Pendleton, slavery-loving namesake of the town
- A 10-foot tall bottle of Pendleton whiskey
- A tall, thin bronze Pendleton blanket
- A kitten
- A llama
- Ryan Gosling, wearing his Pendleton Round-Up shirt.
- Dually pickup, or dueling pickups
- Reba McEntire
- A giant salmon footbridge across the Umatilla held up by giant wheat stalks
- A bronze of "The Fonz"
- A piece by Robert Mapplethorpe
- Bust of former Atlanta Braves third baseman Terry Pendleton
- A statue of a James Lavadour painting
- A life-size Godzilla peeking over the St. George
- A windmill
- The Boardman to Hemingway transmission line
- A wolf
- An ISIS flag
- A committee

—EO edit board

Maybe we need a big tear drop for all the crying around here.

— Frank Taylor

Chewbacca

Leslie Halbert

Lets get a life-size statue of Mayor Houk since thats probably what he ultimately wants anyway! Just kidding!

—Cody Cimmiyotti

How bout a big bronze Hermiston Bulldog? They were state champs in football this year!

— Jon Patterson

How about putting up a bronze Home Depot sign to wake somebody up

— Rick Hoisington

A statue of a person making a statue.

— Todd Copenhaver

How about something honoring your new status as a biker town. Retired CPAs have a lot of money!

— Jeremy Clark

How about a dead horse! Because that's what Pendleton is turning in to!

— Cori Theis

Grumpy cat.

— Janelle Tate

Landon Donovan.

— Jose A. Molina Barahona

Carl Sagan.

— Brian Barnes

I vote for Terry Pendleton. Not only does he have a name that ties locally, but he and I graduated from the same high school. (Channel Islands for those interested) Go Raiders!?

— Mike Hachquet

A mini wiener dog.

— Karen Malcolm

Nicolas Cage and Gary Busey riding a unicorn together.

— Clint Shoemaker

Unicorns for sure.

— Michael Conrad

How about statues of past history like Chevrolet, Ford, Chrysler, Honda, Volkswagen dealerships.

— Jay Britain

How about a statue of a nice road with no potholes that's titled 'keep dreaming'?

— Colton McGee

Me, I wouldn't mind a statue of me.

— Martina Gordon

Obama bronze, lol.

— John Cimmiyotti

One that will actually cross the street when you stop for them!

— Rebecca Rooke Adams

A big ball of yarn for the woolen mills.

— Jovanna Centre

Maybe something depicting a time warp, or a very tiny town being eclipsed.

— Aaron Thomas

I'm thinking a statue of Pendleton crumbling to the ground.

— Shalena Michael

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Our public lands and our public employees

Increasingly we are seeing an irrational and unfair anger build up against public lands and the people who work for the federal government. The *High Country News* in October 2014 published an extensive article about threats and physical violence against people who work for the Forest Service, the BLM, the Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others.

We should, however, ask ourselves, "What would the country be like without these land agencies and their employees?" One individual, a rancher, saw it both before and after major federal oversight and regulations, and this is what he wrote in 1943:

"After centuries of flagrant waste America had at last discovered the word conservation. The Federal government took over as the national forests the timberlands, together with their grass and water. Henceforth these resources were to be used with tomorrow's needs and not today's quick profits in mind. To graze stock on the forests both sheep and cattle ranchers had to pay a fee and abide by many regulations concerning the quality and handling of their animals. . . .

"At first there were howls of indignation. Western politicians beat the drum of state's rights, insisting Washington had gone too far. Back home there were lawsuits, name callings, defiance, and letters to the editor. But gradually, as the beneficial results of the program became manifest, opposition



TOM GAGNON
Comment

simmered down. In the main even sufferers admit that the forest policy is correct in principle, despite some errors in application, and it provided control to the entire public domain.

The day of the 'free' or 'open' range is forever gone, and in spite of occasional bunkhouse fumings over bits of local injustice, there is not a rancher who would willingly return to the former catch-as-catch-can ways of obtaining grass."

This is from David Lavender's outstanding memoir, "One Man's West." Today's issues would include, in addition to grazing, all the extractive industries like coal, oil, gas, and uranium, solar and wind farms, as well as countless recreational activities, and wilderness and historical designations, too.

Could we count on the people who are interested in these issues to cooperate with one another and make everyone happy? In light of the probable answer, is the authority of a strong referee, such as Uncle Sam, not advisable?

Would it be better to let states or even counties, or corporations or individuals, have the ultimate say over what happens on the public lands? Do locals "know better"

and "do things better" and are they "more just?" My rule is: The best ruler is strong and far away, the worst is weak and nearby. A homier way to envision this is to imagine your grumpy neighbor suddenly becoming your community's dictator. In that case, would everything be hunky-dory?

We should view our public lands and federal employees in an objective way. Currently we have free, or nearly free,

and easy access to most of the public lands for recreation, whereas if it were private land this would not be the case.

The employees shop at the same stores as everyone else, their kids go to the same schools, I know some who are generous in their communities and through their churches, they go to the same hospitals as you, they often watch the same lousy T.V. shows as you, and eventually they'll probably be buried in the same cemetery as you.

If you're lucky you may be set to rest beside a land-use planner, and in this case you'll be able to argue public-lands policy for eternity. Let's try living in peace so that later we can rest in peace.

Tom Gagnon lives in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Would it be better to let states or even counties, or corporations or individuals, have the ultimate say over what happens on the public lands?

The riddle of the circle of ancient power

By ALAN KESSELHEIM
Writers on the Range

"Walk left," the sign says, at the entrance to the roped-off site.

It's a place that hammers me in the chest. The world spills away, down into the Bighorn Basin, across Wyoming and north into Montana, a huge gallop of space. Brown miles stretch out veined with river courses, serrated with ridges and mountain ranges. Gray clouds bulk up on the horizon.

The Medicine Wheel is made of stones and rests close to 10,000 feet on the exposed northern end of the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming. It is the end of a lingering fall, but it feels like storm. Wind tugs across the bare ridge through tufts of brittle grass. A skiff of snow sticks to the ground, blowing in hard pellets. I fight the urge to return to safety, to get to lower ground, to pavement and the warm car.

I've been instructed to walk left. So I do. I edge around the roped circle, looking in, wondering how to be here. Hundreds of offerings flap in the wind: Knotted scraps of red fabric, intricate bows, medicine bags, beaded necklaces, a pottery bowl, a buffalo skull, a hawk feather, a jaw bone. They are the artifacts of prayers and stories, gratitude and pleas, all gathered to this airy perch so

starkly moving yet mysterious.

The wheel is nearly 100 feet across, a ring of stones seamed with 28 spokes, which some think might represent the lunar cycle. Stone markers sit at the four directions, including the points where the sun rises and sets on summer solstice. All laid out in this most remote, most wind-bitten, most grand perch. What it means, no one knows, or is saying, any more than anyone knows what Stonehenge in England means. What the Forest Service says is that circles like this one reflect the 7,000-year-old occupancy of Native Americans on the continent.

The Crow Tribe has a legend of a young man with a burned face who traveled here on a vision quest, and who first laid out this wheel. It has been noted that this site forms one point of an equidistant triangle, the other points being Devils Tower and Hell's Half Acre, near Casper, Wyoming.

There are a great many stone sites scattered across the Great Plains — sacred hoops, altars, animal designs — some added to over many generations. Few are preserved. Most are unrecognized. Many have been plowed up or paved over or otherwise destroyed — another part of the legacy of oppression. Some are kept secret. The Medicine Wheel has been recognized and made a national historic landmark, for better or worse.

I walk left all the way around, looking in, then out across the sweep of distance, and close up, into the mountain valleys. The wind hammers my face, and then my back. I contemplate the offerings, imagine the people and lives they signify. I pull out my bandana and knot it around the rope, thinking about Mother Earth. It flaps in the wind. I imagine it fraying and fading along with the rest of these tattered prayer flags. It is inadequate, I know, not properly considered. It is also an impulse I can't deny.

We make one more lap, lingering, our faces cold, the wind rising. It had been an effort to come here, up the winding miles of 10 percent grade, out the snow-cruled dirt road and slippery track to the ridge. I think of the ancients walking up the long river valleys, climbing past the last tongues of trees, emerging into the exposed high country.

Why did they come? To sit? To fast? To sing? To pray? To dance and celebrate? To be grateful? To find solace? To understand?

It isn't the impulse to be of that culture that I feel, standing here in this raw wind. Nor is it the voyeuristic urge to peek at forbidden sanctuary. All I have is the abrupt command to walk left, and to make what I might of this lonely circle of stone humming with power on the lip of the earth.

Alan Kesselheim, of Montana, is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, a column service of *High Country News*.

Pioneer women get the Hollywood treatment

By MARCIA HENSLEY
Writers on the Range

Did any Western history buffs besides me see *The Homesman*? A hot box office ticket earlier this winter, it's hard to find in theaters now, though the cast was impressive — Tommy Lee Jones, Hilary Swank, Meryl Streep — and most reviews were positive. Three pioneer wives have gone crazy in a small Nebraska community, and the task of returning them to civilized Iowa falls to a single woman homesteader, Mary Bee Cuddy. Because she needs a man to help, she enlists a claim jumper with the promise of payment at the end of the trip.

As evocative landscapes swept across the screen and the plot unfolded, I had an unexpected reaction: Increasing annoyance. The women were portrayed as victims, and the men as callous and brutish. As one reviewer put it, the movie focused on "the horrors of pioneer life."

Anecdotal stories of pioneer women going mad from loneliness, overwork, illness, loss of children and other hardships are not uncommon, of course, and pioneering men could become violent for some of the same reasons. But there is no evidence to support the idea that madness was more widespread among pioneer women than the general population.

Could something like the events in the movie have really happened? Well, yes. The movie is based on a 1988 novel of the same name by Glendon Swarthout. In the afterword to the 2014 reprint, Swarthout's

son, Miles, explains that his father spent a lot of time researching the novel but had trouble finding much history about this harsh frontier era, the 1850s. He ended up relying largely on old memoirs, which kindled his interest in "the losers of Western history, the settlers who headed back East," having been "denied their dream of wealth and happiness in the Golden West."

The *Homesman* does, indeed, create awareness of a dark corner of the pioneer past, and I can relate to Swarthout's dilemma in researching an overlooked era of Western history. When I was looking for information for a book about women homesteaders, I, too, found that major history texts barely mentioned them. But by going to memoirs, letters and newspapers in local history archives, I was able to find many of their stories.

That's why I found the movie off-base. I found many historically accurate accounts of women who chose to go West and were not defeated. Rather, they reported being empowered by their experiences, despite the severe hardships. Single women like Mary Bee Cuddy chose to become homesteaders because they saw homesteading as an economic opportunity and an adventure. It's hard to imagine any of them so desperate that (spoiler alert) they would propose marriage to men ill-suited to them, then commit suicide when rejected.

Statistics show that 12 percent of all homesteaders in the early years of the 20th Century were single women. Research also indicates that about 44 percent of all homesteaders of both sexes, including

family groups, were successful, suggesting that women were no more likely to be overwhelmed by the difficulties of homesteading than were men.

Some might see these statistics as evidence for the movie's thesis, since 56 percent of the homesteaders — over half of the total who went West — didn't make it, for whatever reason. The *Homesman* shows how homesteading could have ended tragically for some of them. But Cuddy's grim story is no more a complete representation of pioneer life than stories that emphasize successful homesteading experiences.

As *Denver Post* movie critic Lisa Kennedy pointed out in discussing the historical inaccuracies in *Selma*, a recent movie about Martin Luther King, "too many of us are fine with learning about the past solely from popular culture." That is the problem: I believe that *The Homesman*'s overwhelmingly negative depiction distorts the truth. What the movie rendition reminds us is that Hollywood often paints a one-sided picture of history.

The *Homesman* will soon be out on DVD. It's worth seeing as long as you recognize that the Hollywood hype this time is on the negative side. Many single women pioneers succeeded as homesteaders; what's more, they had a great time building a new life.

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