

# Founding the Finn District

I live in a several square miles-sized neighborhood north and east of Pendleton which is referred to by locals, particularly “old-timers,” as the Finn District.

This unofficial title will not be found in any atlas or guidebook, but has been in vernacular use for more than a century. Its origins are quite simple. In the 1870s and 1880s when this part of the country was being homesteaded following the general subjugation of the native peoples (I am not qualified nor inclined to comment at length on that episode in American history), a number of first-generation immigrants arrived in this area from Finland.

Although some came here directly from the Old Country, most of these travelers had made a stop in or near Calumet, Michigan, where they principally found employment in that region’s copper mines before moving west. Incidentally, Calumet’s most famous former resident was not a Finn farmer but rather a football player at Notre Dame named George Gipp — forever immortalized by Ronald Reagan’s portrayal in the 1940 film “Knutie Rockne, All-American.”

The first Finn to arrive and stake a homestead claim in what is now the Finn district was Elias Peltopera in 1876. He sent word back east of the fertile soils he found in Eastern Oregon and by 1877 and 1878, many of his fellow Finlanders followed his example and trekked to Chicago to board a train for San Francisco and thence a steamer ship to Portland. There was no Oregon Trail oxen-pulled wagons for these folks — they

enjoyed modern conveyance and likely arrived at their destination within a month of leaving the Upper Peninsula.

The Homestead Act of 1862 allotted every settler who “proved up” (lived on and improved the place for five years) on his homestead claim 160 acres of free land. Eventually, a wife could claim 160 additional acres and, in some cases, another 160 acres could be had by planting trees under the Timber Culture Act of 1873.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century in our area, these acreage figures were sufficient, with hard work and some luck, to support a family. Please remember, however, that these homesteaders had an entirely different view of what was necessary to survive than we do. Everyone had a garden, chickens and a milk cow. No one had air conditioning or indoor plumbing.

Even I have come to appreciate certain aspects of modernity; I don’t mind a privy out back but I’ve become addicted to my nightly hot shower.

Speaking of water, one of the early challenges facing the Finn homesteaders was securing a supply of water for every farmstead. Relying on their mining experience, the Finns used drills and dynamite to tap into aquifers just below the surface of their farmlands. Our neighborhood is blessed with adequate water; my modern domestic well is approximately 150 feet deep and yields better than 40 gallons a minute, which is plenty for daughter Annie’s yearly garden patch.

The Finn District denizens were quick to establish two of the three important institutions in any community.

For their spiritual needs a church was built in 1884, which still stands — sans plumbing or electricity to this day. Multiple schools have existed in the area and the last country Finn School, which ceased operations in the late 1930s, has for decades served as a farm repair shop on my cousin’s place. As to the concern regarding imbibement, the homesteaders were almost universally Finnish Apostolic in their religious beliefs and therefore officially teetotalers.

However, Helix has always had at least one tavern, just in case anyone lost their balance while aboard a Weber or a Studebaker. Through hard work, frugality and abundant rainfall (our neighborhood average precipitation is about 14-15 inches) the Finns became well-established agrarians and built permanent homes to replace their homestead shacks and constructed substantial barns (many of which still stand) to house grain, livestock, feed and equipment.

Though many of the Finns kept their original monikers from their homeland, some changed difficult spellings or altered their names entirely. I live on the former Elmer Hendrickson farm — their name was once Keskitalo. My son is buying the Ben Hendricksen farmstead — they were formerly known as the Kotajarvi clan.

I was recently mowing around the graves at the Greasewood Cemetery north of the Finn Church and taking in the spectacle of the million dollar view of the Blue Mountains to the east and the surrounding abundant harvest-in-the making punctuated by a locust grove here and a barn there.

I marveled at the longevity of many



**MATT WOOD**  
FROM THE TRACTOR

of those now planted forever in the New Country. Johana Johnson (Janislampi) lived to 101; Alvin Christopher was 99; Sakris Hendrickson farmed and preached at the church and almost made 90 — 83 years ago! (He died the year Dizzy Dean and the Gas House Gang Cardinals beat the Tigers.) I’m not sure I’ll match their longevity, but I am certain that I will stay in the Finn District for as long as I have remaining.

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*Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.*

## How to collect art, not pretentiousness

By ROBERTA LAVADOUR

The term “art collector” often conjures up the vision of a pretentious name-dropper at a museum gala. Photos from *Architectural Digest* come to mind.

But many art collections come together in modest settings and reflect deeply personal connections to travels, special events or local artists. Pendleton provides plenty of opportunities to encounter art and fine craft that can form the core of a meaningful art collection that won’t break the bank.

Christina van der Kamp and Will Perkinson’s North Hill home provides a lesson in how to start an original art collection and how to integrate the work into a busy household. Van der Kamp grew up in a home filled with original artworks, some as large as eight feet across, and her parents taught their kids to appreciate the creative work of others.

Perkinson, a local attorney and municipal judge, remembers a couple pieces his grandfather brought back from southeast Asia that spurred his interest in art. When the couple settled in Pendleton in 2005 they sought out the city’s cultural organizations — attending galleries, music performances and special events. They looked for hangouts that had a vibe they liked. The Pendleton Farmers Market and the Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co. drew them in right away.

Before long, they started meeting artists and encountering artwork that spoke to them. The first piece of local art they purchased was a note card featuring a song sparrow painted by Hiroko Cannon. It’s framed and still hangs in their master bath.

“We started out really small,” said van der Kamp. “I picked up posters from gigs and events. I would just ask Peter Walters for a band poster after an event and he was happy to give me one.” Walters designs posters for musicians performing at Great Pacific and other venues. Van der Kamp also cited posters from Pendleton Farmers Market and the Helix Rodeo as free or low-cost art acquisitions.

“Having fun things like that in our home makes me feel connected to the creative energy of the community,” she said.

Some of the more substantial works in the family’s collection were the result of high bids at fundraisers hosted by local nonprofits. Donations from artists often form the backbone of silent and live auctions at these events and artists like James Lavadour, Shari Dallas, Lorie Baxter, Hiroko Cannon and Jenny Morgan have helped organizations raise thousands of dollars over the years.

“It’s really a win-win situation when you can support an organization like the Oregon East Symphony or Pendleton Farmers Market and get a piece of art you love in the process,” noted Perkinson.

The couple also owns several original prints created at Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts. The organization provides opportunities for collectors looking to make a larger investment in a work by nationally known artists like James Lavadour or the late Rick Bartow, start more modestly with notable regional artists like Frank Janzen or Whitney Minthorn, or pick up affordable student work. Perkinson and van der Kamp attend Crow’s Shadow’s Monothon events, which invite emerging and established artists from across the Northwest to make prints that the organization then makes available for sale for less than \$200.

Group exhibits like the annual Open Regional Exhibit at the Pendleton Center for the Arts or the Student Art Show at Blue



Photo by Roberta Lavadour

William ‘Tater’ Perkinson running past artworks by Shari Dallas, Bonnie Griffith, a Monothon print and an antique work on paper.

### Tips for starting or building an art collection

- If you notice a poster in a storefront is past the event date, ask the store owner if you can have it.
- Keep an eye on the websites of your favorite nonprofits for fundraising event dates, and find out if they allow for a “sneak peek” at auction lists.
- Watch the Facebook pages of local estate sale businesses. Many, like Vintage Court Antiques, will post images of items before the sale opens.
- Don’t forget to browse the card racks when you’re at shops, art fairs and outdoor markets.
- If a piece that speaks to you is beyond your budget, ask about making payments. Most galleries will allow for interest-free layaways.

Mountain Community College are another avenue for finding affordable art, sometimes providing an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of an emerging artist’s career. Of the 173 artworks submitted to this year’s Open Regional at the Arts Center, which runs through June 23, many have price tags under \$100.

Unexpected gems can also be found at the area’s estate sales and antique stores. Works by beloved local artists like Betty Feves and Alice Fossatti show up on occasion, and by looking beyond a tattered frame or water-stained mat board, an original silk screen or vintage oil painting might find new life with a fresh presentation.

When asked if they keep the art in their home well out of reach of their children, ages five and three, both parents chuckle.

“We want them to respect it, but also to know that art is something you live with and enjoy,” said van der Kamp. “Getting in touch with what moves you and what you think is beautiful is important for people all ages. But, really, they’re more interested in making their own art right now. They take a lot of pride in the art display wall we created after the fridge got overloaded.”

The main advice the couple has for would-be collectors: Buy what you love.

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*Roberta Lavadour is executive director of the Pendleton Center for the Arts.*

## Fighting to preserve local input on land management

Oregon has a long history of pioneering innovative ways to resolve pressing public land management issues.

Our state was built by Americans who relied on the land for their livelihood, and it has been protected and preserved by generations of Oregonians who want to ensure we can all enjoy our state’s wild places and public lands while putting people to work.

Among the tools that Oregonians have used to balance these interests are resource advisory councils, or RACs. Under the U.S. Department of the Interior, RACs help agencies and stakeholders navigate projects that can affect the health of the environment and the strength of the local economy. Public land management issues can be very contentious, particularly in the West, and RACs help to work through difficult issues and to get meaningful local input. Balancing these interests is challenging. But with RACs, projects are more likely to succeed.

However, we recently heard from members of Oregon RACs that their meetings were postponed until September, pending a review by the Interior Department. Our offices did not receive notice of the postponements, and RACs got little explanation for the action.

Suspension of RAC meetings could hold up planning of innovative local projects, such as the “rails to trails” bike trail proposed along the Deschutes River. There, the RAC is needed to help resolve issues among boaters, rafters, and cyclists.

And — with the timing of the administration’s decision to reconsider the designation of 21 national monuments — the



RON WYDEN  
Comment



JEFF MERKLEY  
Comment

suspension could mean the review of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument could go forward without RAC input.

We expressed our concern to U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, and urged him to allow RACs to continue their regular meetings. As a former congressman from Montana, he knows the importance of local input and collaboration on public land management issues — a point he stressed during his confirmation hearings.

RACs were formed to generate that local input and collaboration, and there are thousands of examples of RACs across the country contributing to successful projects that improve the quality of our public lands management. Postponing their progress hurts public land and forest management goals; to jobs and local economies; and to public confidence in the federal government.

It is critical that local voices, including RACs, have the opportunity to provide input and take part in the process at all times — not just when those local voices align with the administration or a large special interest. Recreation, land use planning, grazing, and other land management issues take all of us working together — as generations of Oregonians did before us — to be successful. We encourage Oregonians to be heard, and join us in urging Secretary Zinke to allow RACs to continue their regular meetings and advance the important work Congress directed them to do.

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*Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, represent Oregon in the U.S. Senate.*

## What’s it like to live in the West?

By BRIAN DOYLE  
High Country News

Here and there when I am traveling people ask What’s it like to live in the West? And they always ask it with that capital W on West, you can really and truly hear it, And this just happened in Illinois, in the seething earthy redolent middle of nowhere, A young man asked it, and you know how sometimes way too many answers crowd Into your mouth at the same instant so you really are technically speechless for once?

So we stood there, the curious student and the gaping older guy, me wanting to emit Something eloquent about mountains being testy Mountains and not old mossy hills, Or the clarity and power of wild water, or salmon and elk and falcons and wolverine, Or maybe quote my boy Wallace Stegner on how the West is the geography of hope, Or say that people here are riveted by new ways of living and are bored by classness,

Or quote my boy David Duncan about how the American West is in the final analysis The place where the Rockies make love to the Pacific Ocean and we all get to watch, Or say something piercing about aridity being the true story except where I get to live, Or something politically prescient about Cascadia extending from Northern California Deep into Alaska and east as far as where huge trees peter out and the sage takes over,

Or for once be a totally honest man and say I don’t have the slightest idea whatsoever About the nature of the West, there being just as many Wests as there are Westerners, But then something did pop out, without me thinking about it, just like Ronald Reagan, Who for all his ranching and horses and seeming Westernness was a guy from Illinois, And I have been thinking about what I said ever since, pondering the thing like a koan.

There’s a day in spring, I said to the student, when cottonwood trees let go all at once, And the air everywhere you turn is filled with cottonwood snow. It’s cooler than cool. That’s what it’s like to live in the West. And the student, to his eternal credit, grinned. I think he got it. It’s hard to explain why it’s so cool but somehow it’s just everything. It only happens when the sky is so blue you want to just stand there and laugh all day.

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*Brian Doyle wrote this for High Country News in 2007. The Oregon writer and teacher authored many books, essays, nonfiction, and “proems.” He died this week at the age of 60.*