

# Riding the old train line

Once a month I have the good fortune of dining with a group of distinguished local citizens who convene in order that they may discuss (or occasionally debate) important issues of the day. This jovial assemblage represents a true cross-section of local luminaries who are part of a club formed in 1933.

At our last gathering, one of two special meetings a year when spouses are invited to attend, I was presented with an envelope from one of our more experienced members which contained a handwritten recollection of bygone days when the train connected Pendleton to the Walla Walla Valley and Wallula on the Columbia River.

I have a personal interest in the aforementioned subject because it is not only intriguing local history, it is also what brought my maternal ancestors to the Helix area more than 130 years ago. My great-grandfather helped construct the rail line which, for approximately one hundred years, ran through Vansycle Canyon. He then took up a homestead claim near Ring Station (formerly "Canon" according to my 1893 "Arnold's official map of Umatilla County") and began growing wheat, an activity which my son and I and several other of J.P. Dorran's descendants still pursue.

The railroad was an absolutely vital

link to the world beyond Umatilla County in 1880s and for several decades thereafter. Grain and livestock from the area were shipped out to market while farm equipment, household goods, building material and too many other things to list were shipped in. It is also important to note that passenger transport was an important role played by the railroad.

My grandfather used to tell about riding the train to town to visit relatives, purchase goods, or go to the doctor. Sometimes they would even take advantage of a sympathetic crew and board the train at a rural siding such as Ring Station without the official process of purchasing a ticket.

The Great Northern Railroad served a number of places, particularly grain elevators, which are mostly forgotten these days. After departing Wallula and traveling through the Touchet Valley, one could have enjoyed a scenic trip up Vansycle Canyon passing through places such as Ring, Vansycle, and Stanton.

At Killian Junction a "Y" (or split) in the tracks presented an opportunity that Yogi Berra (who was quoted as saying "If you come to a fork in the road — take it") would have appreciated.

Turning east would mean you were headed to Athena via Hillsdale (later called Duroc), Grandview and Waterman — where the steam engine could, not surprisingly,

take on water. My nonagenarian friend recalled that a good number of hobos would have opted for this route in search of work in the pea harvests around Athena, Weston and Milton-Freewater.

If the traveler of yesteryear opted for the southern route, then you were headed for Pendleton via Helix, where for many years it served a flour mill, thence Warren (now called Myrick), McCormach, Fulton, and Saxe — whereupon the track paralleled Wildhorse Creek on its way to Pendleton and the depot now occupied by the Historical Society Museum.

Over the years, I have collected or witnessed a number of things which recall the era of steam-powered trains. I have a book of blank grain warehouse tickets for Ring Station in which the date reads 191\_ (the blank to be filled in by the warehouseman, namely my great-grandfather.) While working on a neighbor's shed I spied a packing crate marked with a destination of "McCormach Station."

I have a photo of Helix, circa 1914, with a wooden boxcar front and center labeled "Northern Pacific." Examinations of windmill towers in the county reveal numerous places to which they were originally shipped including Ring, Vansycle and Nolin. Havana is not only the name of Cuba's capital city — it was also the moniker given to a grain elevator once located between Adams and Pendleton. I have a friend who has a Coca-Cola vending machine which came out of the Duroc Elevator.

While riding the Sumpter Valley railroad a few years back, I briefly lamented that I was born in 1969 instead of 1869. However,



**MATT WOOD**  
FROM THE TRACTOR

given my inability to avoid manual labor, I probably would have just ended up shoveling coal or stacking sacks of grain and fighting with a hobo over a cup of soup from some gurgling, crackling cauldron in some train yard.

■ *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.*

The railroad is what brought my ancestors to the Helix area more than 130 years ago.



## There's crazy, then there's gun crazy

We've all had abundant time to think about gun laws, gun violence, dead children on schoolroom floors, and the Second Amendment. Who can even keep track of the number of times we've been asked to send our prayers out to the victims and survivors of the ongoing carnage?

No American mass shooting would be complete without reminders from the National Rifle Association that the problem in this country isn't guns; it's mental illness. Mental illness exists everywhere in the world, of course, but mass shootings do not. In this country, however, they have become so commonplace that our response to more death is almost ritualistic.

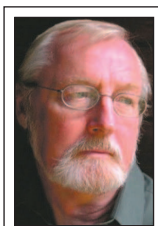
After every mass killing, we keep hearing this blather that amounts to "Nothing can be done" from Paul Ryan, Marco Rubio and other elected representatives. We hear it almost before the echoes of the gunfire have faded. We heard it after Columbine, Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, and now after the Parkland day of death in Florida. The difference this time is that classmates of the dead teenagers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are saying loudly and clearly that gun violence must be stopped.

Doesn't it seem clear that anyone who feels the need for an AR-15 is already displaying abundant evidence of disordered thinking? If you are paranoid enough to think you need so much firepower for home protection, that's more paranoia than sanity can contain.

If you say you need an AR-15 to go deer hunting, that's preposterous. And if you think that you and your patriotic buddies, armed with a small arsenal of semi-automatic rifles converted to full-auto with bump stocks, can resist an American government supported by the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force, then that's clear evidence of lunacy.

I grew up playing with toy guns, shooting other kids "dead" with caps or sound effects, dramatically acting out my own death countless times whenever they "got me" first. I graduated to a single shot .22 rifle when I was 12, and then to a .410 shotgun when I was 13. As a grownup, I bought my first pistol when I was in my mid-20s.

As the years advanced, I acquired a .12 gauge pump action shotgun, a .50 caliber breech-loading Sharps carbine, a .45 caliber Hawken, and several handguns, mostly single-action Rugers or Colts. As a boy, I



**JAIME O'NEILL**  
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hunted with my dad, though I never hunted as an adult because I didn't need or want the meat.

Several guns I once owned have been stolen. That's a thing that happens with guns.

One high-priority item on the Republican "to do" list has been to expand open-carry laws state by state, normalizing dangerous tendencies throughout the nation. I recently saw a testimonial to that madness in the parking lot at our

local Lowes. "Live to carry, Carry to Live" was emblazoned on the back window of an oversized truck. "Live to carry"? Really? That sounds like a fragile reason for getting up in the morning. As for carrying to live, everyone should know by now that the chances of dying go up dramatically when you're packing heat, or when you've got a gun in your house for "self-protection."

My congressional representative here in Northern California is Doug LaMalfa, a rice farmer and major recipient of government subsidies. All cowboy hat, boots and no cattle, he's a devotee of the NRA, a Trump loyalist on every issue, and he resists any and all sensible restrictions on guns. He does not agree with me that a nation that includes heavily armed men who "live to carry" offers little prospect of safety for anyone.

The history of the West includes images of guns, mostly those muzzle-loading rifles carried by trappers or explorers like Jim Bridger, Kit Carson or Jim Beckwourth. A powder horn and a Hawken rifle are part of the romance of that storied past.

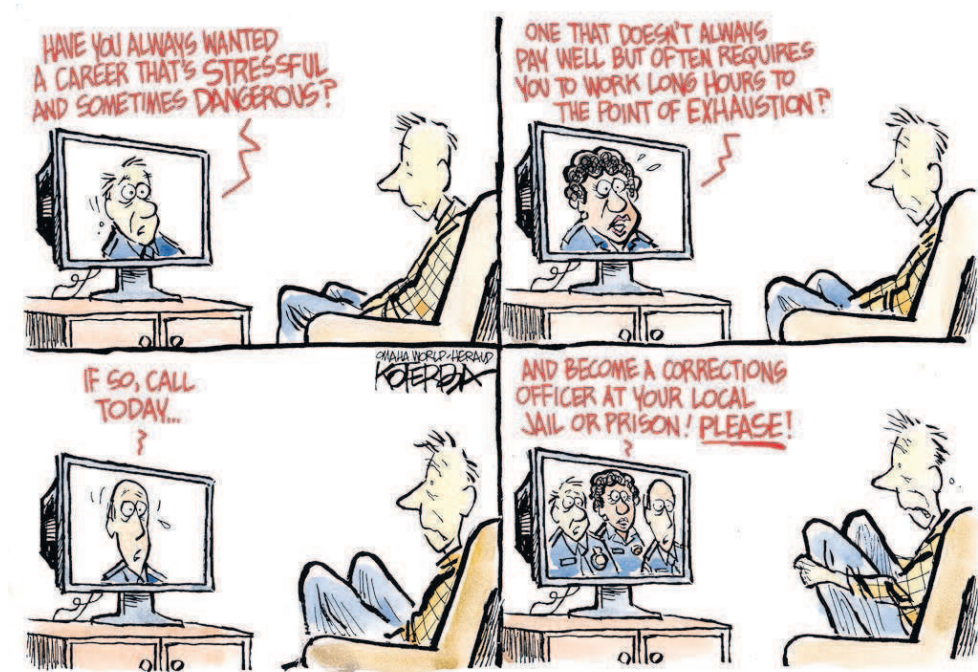
But those simple guns fired one round at a time before requiring reloading. And the reloading process took even a proficient shooter several seconds to complete before he was able to shoot again. There is no record of any of those mountain men engaging in a school shooting.

Anyone who sincerely believes he needs a semi-automatic weapon has already revealed enough muddled thinking to be denied possession of one. Killing many people quickly is the true purpose of these guns, and that has nothing to do with the Second Amendment's "well-regulated militia."

It is long past time for Congress to once again ban the sale of these weapons that are so frequently the guns of choice for murderers of children.

■ *Jaime O'Neill is a contributor to the opinion service of High Country News.*

A powder horn and a Hawken rifle are part of the romance of the West's storied past.



## The bravery and eloquence of the Parkland students

On the morning of February 22 I was having breakfast in Dave's 12th Street Food Mart and gas station here in Pendleton, which has a breakfast menu including great burritos. This while waiting for my pickup to be repaired at G & R Truck and Auto Repair.

Sitting in a booth I could watch the news on a big TV screen hanging from the wall. Soon I realized that Fox News (which never in my born days have I watched) was live covering the students from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, who were holding a kind of news conference. But it was so much more than that.

About 10 survivors of the killing ground came before the camera with a handheld microphone to make these absolutely thoughtful and insightful statements about the massacre of 17 students and faculty. Some had written out their comments, while others just said what needed to be said. After I listened to about five of them I began to tear up — something that older men often do.

These kids were so eloquent and powerful I will never, ever forget what they said. They spoke from the heart but also with much political savvy and knowledge about what had happened to them on February 14 and the ins and outs of gun control. And, I was so proud of them. From online articles:

Parkland student Alex Wind: "In Newtown the students were so young they couldn't stand up, but trust me, we are going to be the change. It is absolutely insane that a 19-year-old cannot purchase alcohol but can walk in and buy an AR-15, a weapon of mass destruction."

David Hogg, the apparent leader of the student group: "Would American patriots try to buy our elections and our children's lives by lobbying for lax gun laws even after massacres? To Congress, you have the power to change this and if you don't, then we will change you. We may be too young to vote, but soon we will be able to vote and we will vote you out."

Then, during an appearance on ABC's "This Week" on February 25 he let loose on the NRA: "Honestly, it's disgusting. The NRA acts like they don't own these politicians, but they do. They've gotten gun legislation passed before in their favor, in favor of gun manufacturers. The NRA is an organization that's completely broken."

Florence Yared: "Instead of returning for our studies, instead of preparing for exams,



**TOM HEBERT**  
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and instead of grieving for our dead classmates and teachers, we are out here advocating for change. Some of you said it was too soon to talk about gun control ... If we wait until then your children might become a victim too."

Dan Linden: "We've had enough of thoughts and prayers ... we are coming after every single one of you and demanding that you take action, demanding that you make a change."

Delaney Tarr, she of the big black glasses, said on Vox: "We are lucky enough to come from a very affluent neighborhood. We go to an amazing school that's been giving us

so many opportunities to learn about government, to learn about policy, to learn about social issues. We have so many clubs and classes dedicated to this type of thing, so we know what we're talking about. And we've always been ready to speak out about it, but this has hit so close to home that we have to speak out about this, right now. We are still, of course, grieving, and we do lash out at moments, but ultimately, we are not making this a partisan issue. We are making this a life-or-death issue."

As a result of this hard-edged thinking, under the rubric of #neveragain, the survivors are organizing the March 24 March for Our Lives against what the NRA has done to America, its schools, and its children. According to a mission statement for March For Our Lives, students across the country will converge on Washington next month to say the nation can no longer wait to tackle issues of school safety and gun control reform.

As it happens, most Americans are on their side. A February 23 CBS poll found that 65 percent of Americans now say laws covering the sale of guns should be stricter — an eight-point increase from December. The rise has been primarily among Republicans and independents, with a large increase among Republicans from last December. Democrats remain in favor.

A Politico Morning Consult poll released on February 28 shows support for stricter gun laws among registered voters at 68 percent, compared to just 25 percent who oppose stricter gun laws.

I don't know if a parallel march will happen here in Pendleton, (a Western gun-toting town) but if a march is organized I'll be there.

■ *Tom Hebert is a writer and public policy consultant living outside Pendleton.*

"We are making this a life-or-death issue."

— Delaney Tarr, Student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School