



Hiram Merry

The man with a cat in his arms

By Steve Forrester
Wallowa County Chieftain

Photographers were virtual historians in the 19th Century. In 1901, invention of the Brownie camera would allow anyone with sufficient purchasing power to become a photographer. But until then, photographers who roamed the West became social historians – snapping pictures of homesteaders and an Indian life that was fading from view.

Some of these photographers became renowned. The collection of Lee Morehouse of Pendleton for instance, is now housed at the University of Oregon.

Hiram Merry is less well known. The expert on early photographers, David Weaver of Wallowa, writes that “Merry came to Wallowa County from the Walla Walla area in 1895, or so and built a homestead just north of Troy in the little community of Grouse. Many people from the surrounding area came to him to have their portraits taken.

“Most of these portraits, he produced as photo post cards, which were popular at the time. He also took photographs of the homesteads of the area, scenes of daily life and the surrounding landscape. The body of his work forms an amazing record of life in that remote part of the county at the turn of the century up through the late 1920’s.”

The image of Merry on this page is part of a folio that Weaver shared at a recent workshop at the Josephy Center. I liked it for two reasons. Merry bears a resemblance to Henry Fonda playing Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. And Merry is clutching a domestic cat. Of this self-portrait, Weaver says: “The fact that he chose to take a portrait of himself holding a cat is, well... unusual for the time – not exactly the image of the rugged western frontiersman.”

Weaver adds: “He is a favorite photographer of mine, in that there is an empathy for his subjects (including animals) that shines through in his photographs.”

Bullying takes a toll on our children

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

Bullying has unfortunately become a staple topic in coming of age stories and young adult fiction. If your child is the victim, bullying is an especially sensitive topic.

Showing of the movie “Bully” at the OK Theatre last Thursday was an emotional moment. Steve Tool’s front page story describes the scene. It also tells the story of a local boy’s experience in Wallowa County schools.

Enterprise High School freshman Jadon Garland showed courage in bringing this movie to the OK Theatre. Students from all three districts attended. So did Enterprise Police Chief Joel Fish. But Tool reports that school

administrators were absent.

In other school districts, administrators have moved against the culture of bullying. When the racial mix of Astoria High School shifted in the 1990s, administrators noted an increase in bullying. The principal, Larry Lockett, created a Diversity Day, capped by an all-school assembly. It had a tangible effect. The school continues to celebrate student diversity, defining that in many ways.

There is value in putting a name on the elephant in the middle of the school hallway. There is no value

in denying the existence of that elephant.

Throughout the cultural history of postwar America, there have been moments when sensitive topics were dragged out of the shadows. During her three years as first lady, Betty Ford talked openly about having breast cancer, and her revelation generated a marked increase in women getting breast exams. Similarly, Mrs. Ford changed our culture by publicly admitting to substance abuse. Then she founded the Betty Ford Clinic. Today we talk openly about alcoholism and drug addiction.

Bullying is dangerous to young people. Schools must talk about it openly.

Meditating on the Wallowa Mountains

By Steve Forrester
Wallowa County Chieftain

In the United States, there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes America what it is.

Gertrude Stein

Wallowa County has been part of my family’s life since the 1950s. We started coming here because my father’s cousin, Jean Sharff, lived in Enterprise with her physician husband, Dr. Bob Sharff.

On our first visit to the Sharff home, I marveled at Prairie Creek, which rushed through their yard on Southeast Second Street. In the 1960s, Bob took me fishing on the Grande Ronde at Troy, Oregon.

When our publishing company purchased the Wallowa County Chieftain from the Don Swart family in 2000, our family’s relationship with the Switzerland of America deepened.

Now my wife and I are concluding three weeks in Enterprise while I’ve been interim editor of the Chieftain.

It has been a gift to reside here for more than a two-day stay. We climbed the East Moraine of Wallowa Lake. We took in a fabulous Bluegrass band at the OK Theatre. We heard the Blue Mountain Old Time Fiddlers at the Hurricane Creek Grange – an evening that was like a moment in a movie. We’ve found great places to eat. And we’ve met quite a spectrum of people. This culture of Wallowa County is rich.

It has been a delight to gaze at the Wallowa Mountains on my walk to work. If one had the time, he could make a meditation of this mountain range, as the Japanese do with Mount Fuji. In my own musing on the mountains, I imagine that the Valkyries of Norse and German mythology live up there. It’s where they fly to on horseback, with fallen heroes.

The Astoria counterpart would be the surging Columbia River, on its final sprint to the Pacific Ocean. Gaze across that wide span in mid-November with some imagination and you’ll see Lewis and Clark’s canoes, on the brink of what would become a dangerous week, trapped at what Clark called “this Dismal Nitch.”

There is a striking similarity between Astoria and Wallowa County – one I did



Cheryl Jenkins/Chieftain

On a springlike afternoon, reporters Kathleen Ellyn and Steve Tool converse with Steve Forrester (center).

City dwellers succumb to the illusion that big things don’t happen in small, rural places

not anticipate. In both places the weather dynamic can change in a matter of minutes. In Astoria, the Pacific Ocean generates the weather. In Wallowa it seems to be the vast mountain range.

If you write for a daily newspaper, your nervous system becomes wired to reach a peak at certain hours in the day. For me, at The Daily Astorian, it was 10 am.

The weekly newspaper rhythm is different. I had done this once before, in the first three years of the Portland alternative paper, Willamette Week. Once the cycle peaks and the paper is in print, your nervous system begins the gradual ascent to the next paper.

To survive in newspaper publishing demands innovation in the digital world. That is what our company is doing. One of our innovations, called Marketplace, recently won first place in a national competition. The Local Media Associ-

ation, a national organization, gave EO Media Group first place in the category of Best New Digital Initiative. It was sweet recognition, because our team was pitted against much larger media organizations.

Even with the overlay of technology, our company’s basic mission remains the same. And that is news gathering. When I arrived here in February, reporter Kathleen Ellyn had finished a major article on how the Affordable Care Act affects Wallowa County and its hospital. Ellyn’s got to the heart of how the ACA debate in Congress affects rural America. Two weeks later reporter Steve Tool turned out a story freighted with emotion – on bullying in the local schools.

City dwellers succumb to the illusion that big things don’t happen in small, rural places. But they do. Moreover, the human fabric in small towns is just as rich as in cities. Our small weekly, the Blue Mountain Eagle in 2010 covered a huge story when a branch of the Aryan Nation sought to make Grant County its new home.

My wife and I leave Enterprise this week excited about this place. If our publisher Marissa Williams needs help again, I expect we’ll sign up.

Steve Forrester ends his term as interim editor of The Chieftain. He is retired editor of the Daily Astorian and is president and CEO of EO Media Group.

What is Rep. Greg Walden doing?

LETTERS to the EDITOR

A quick look at what our Republican administration has accomplished for us in January and February.

Two new laws, HJ Res 38, reducing our waterways’ protection by removing controls on waste from surface mining and HJ Res 41, repealing reporting requirements for oil and gas firms when making payments to foreign nations (bribes), were signed and made into law on February 1, 2017. HJ Res 40, removing restrictions on gun sales to the mentally ill, including the violent, has been approved in the House and Senate and is on the President’s desk waiting his signature.

An additional 19 bills such as repealing Federal literacy standards (HJ Res 57) for our children or defunding family planning clinics (HJ Res 43) have been approved in the House and sent to the Senate for party line approval before being presented to this minority president for his signature.

Is this attack on our public protection what voters had in mind? Our Representative, Greg Walden, does not seem to find these actions in conflict with his

position as our representative, since he has voted yes on each. I hope every voter will remember the representation they have received when at the election booth.

David Ebbert
Enterprise

The article in last week’s Chieftain (Feb 22), “ACA and the Working Poor” had me fuming. Fraught with unashamed bias in support of a horrible piece of legislation, Kathleen Ellyn failed to investigate the unfortunate reality for so many of the “working poor”, the very demographic she sought to highlight in her piece.

While it’s apparent the ACA has been beneficial for those eligible for subsidies or enrollment in the OHP/Medicaid, what she fails to acknowledge is that for an even larger portion of the “working poor”, insurance premiums have skyrocketed. The rates for my husband and I alone (young and healthy) have nearly TRIPLED from \$250 to over \$600/month, with an increase in out of pocket costs that make insurance basically worthless except in the case of a catastrophic event. Before the ACA, young, healthy people could choose a low-cost, high deductible plan that would act as

a stop-loss in the case of a tragic event. Now, however, we’re forced to choose between shelling out nearly a grand (now that we’re growing our family) each month on insurance premiums for coverage we will never use, or spending that money on things like auto maintenance or our retirement savings.

My family is one of the newly uninsured due to the ACA, and while it’s great that Obamacare has helped the poorer among us it’s regrettable that that help was not extended to those workers who don’t qualify as poor, not to mention the “pre-elderly” demographic like my folks who are spending half their monthly income on insurance premiums. There’s always two sides to every story.

Rebecca Patton
Joseph

The Editor replies: Some may have missed the information presented in the sidebar: “Insurance for Working Poor Benefits Hospitals” on page A8. This is where Ms. Ellyn talked about individuals who are being hurt by the skyrocketing cost of insurance – many attempting to manage that by paying deductibles so high that their insurance coverage is virtually unusable.

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