

# Life in Coos County often hard for pioneers

By Marilee Miller  
Special writer

Have you ever wondered what the people of Coquille were doing in 1885? Certainly in the outlying districts, the country was still a rough frontier. Settlers cared out homesites and garden plots from the forest. Yet even homesteaders in the remote could now take advantage of the "culture" and the "taste of civilization" afforded in a place like Coquille city.



A sawmill already in operation down along the river must have given some persons employment. And no doubt the mill did a brisk business in local trade for the new houses ever going up. The stores in the business district, the hack lines and street builders, the riverboats, all must have provided incomes apart from agriculture or the fledgling timber industry. Without even leaving home, "Ko-kwellers" could go to college -- that is, get a sound secondary education or prepare for advancement in life by taking business courses.



The "predominating topic" at the outlying settlement at Fairview might be finding a way to build bridges over the North Fork, but the next most important subject was "the flourishing condition" of the Fairview Church, presided over by the Revs. Edmunds and Hollenbeak. Fairview may have been a little ahead of Coquille in this direction. A church directory for Coquille mentioned only the Methodist denomination, which held preaching services once a month. "We aren't told whether there were Sunday "class meetings" in the interim, but only that Circuit Rider Rev. H.B. Swafford conducted services on the "first sabbath" of the month at North Fork, the second at Lampa Creek, the third week at Fish Trap, and the fourth in Coquille City." The 1884 papers listed, beside the Methodist services, both Baptist and Universalist services. Whether the church directory was a paid ad or not all churches contributed, or whether

Coquille went "backwards" in its adherence to religion, is not clear.

Bancroft's second volume, a history of the West Coast, was received very favorably by those who were delighted to read all about the exploits of Lewis and Clark, and the Astor colony at Astoria. And poetry by local correspondents appeared in the Herald nearly

every issue, about a wide variety of serious or nonsense topics.

Entertainments and musical pursuits were of importance to local citizenry in that "progressive" year. To celebrate the advent of 1885, a grand ball was held on New Year's Eve "under the auspices of the Coquille City Brass Band."

"The affair was a success in every feature; there being a numerous attendance in honor of the occasion. . . The members of the band are persistent in their efforts to obtain proficiency -- they are punctual in attendance without regard to the severity of the weather. May they meet with the success they deserve. We understand that they will give a dramatic entertainment on some day in the coming month."

The Coquille Thespians were performing in town -- and before Myrtle Point audiences -- a "fascinating and soul-stirring play, 'Among the Breakers.'" This play, or some other entertainment, put on by The Coquille Thespians, earned enough money to purchase a "magnificent bell" to be hung in the schoolhouse. The 475 pound bell cost \$60 in San Francisco, plus shipping fee by coastwise vessel. Because the Thespians still owed \$21 on the bell and freight, they planned another fete to pay off the bill.

Other articles in the Herald lamented that the lumber trade was "unusually



## Depressed wood economy even then

dull. . . , money being scarcer in this part than at any time since its discovery by whites."

In 1885, there wasn't an indoor bathroom in all Coquille. Nor had anyone

electricity, telephone or any easy mode of transportation. A depressed economy from a sagging lumber trade made times very hard. There were arguments and trouble-raisers, just as there were the neighborly and signs of progress. But Editor Dean manages to portray life in Coquille as quite appealing a hundred years ago.

We wish the City of Coquille a  
**Happy  
100th Birthday**

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