



The Tale Persists, Theft in the Night

By Dorothy Taylor

Newcomers to Coos County and the younger generation may not have heard of the rumored escapade regarding Coos County's earliest records.

Two elections took place in 1896 to remove the county seat from Empire to Coquille. The first election was held in June and the second one in November. On July 1, 1897 the records were removed from Empire and the courthouse functions began in the Masonic building in Coquille a short time later.

The story.... "It was a dark and stormy night in Coos Bay when a band of Coquille Valley dairy farmers went to Empire to make sure that the courthouse was in fact moved to Coquille. They were tired of making the long journey to the bayside lumber town to conduct county business and were leaving nothing to chance.

"The Empire courthouse was locked but not secured. The farmers were disguised as lumbermill workers to hide their identity. It took very little time for them to find access to the records through the fairly flimsy wooden structure. Loading up the records, they stole off into the night, returning to Coquille City where they locked the records in the vault of the Leneve building to prevent any reciprocate snatching of the records by Coos Bay-Empire residents. The furor died down and the records were not returned to Empire."

It has never been explained why this rumor led to the belief that the records were not returned to the courthouse in Coquille, or that they disappeared completely never to be located again.

The truth is that the records were brought from Empire by a dairy farmer, Frank Ross, who was hired for \$100 to do the job.

The records are in the courthouse regardless of how they got there or when.

In about 1986-87 I was asked by Coos County Clerk Mary Ann Wilson and Election Director (now Commissioner) Beverly Owen, when I was working in the election department, to redo the archives and separate physically what had become state records from the county records and prepare an inventory.

This gave me the opportunity to verify first hand that the records are all intact.

The project took about four months of concentrated work to complete, with records being inventoried, stored and made available to the public. Some of the records were housed in the basement and some were in the clerk's office on the main floor. Many were in book form and some were in files.

Marriages, naturalization, deed records, liens, license to operate a vehicle, nurses licenses, medical licenses, bee keepers, horseshoers, and other records that many people do not know about, are housed in the clerk's office. Birth, death and probate become state records and are available through the state offices. Probate for Coos County is still stored in the Coos Count Courthouse. Birth and death records can only be obtained from the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Portland.

Originally in the early days of Coose County (that's how it was spelled in many records!) all records were kept at the county level. Consequently there are records such as Articles of Incorporation, 1864-1942; Applications for widows pensions, 1915-1917; Dependent mothers until 1933; Indigents, 1926-27; U.S. Tax liens, 1924-1951; Hospital liens, 1933-1966; Physicians Certification, 1890-1965; Record of Registered Nurses, 1911-1965; Dentists licenses, 1902-1953; Optometric licenses, 1905-1950; Assignments to the TB hospital 1925-1933; Licenses to carry concealed weapons 1946-1967; Dance Hall licenses, 1922-1956; Pool Hall licenses, 1933; Game Skills, 1935; Liquor Law, 1929; Game licenses 1921-27; County Farm records, 1920-1940; Cattle TB tests, 1923-1944; Farm Names, 1911-1964; Animal Brands; Notice to destroy Noxious Weeds, 1925; Beekeepers, 1923-1930; Deeds, patents and mortgages to Mines-location; Road cases, Road Districts, Drain Districts; Election; Explosive licenses, 1941-1944; Sugar ration, 1941-1944; Sheriff sale, 1887-1905; County Court, Board of Equalization; Circuit Court Journals; Mortgages, 1873-1913; Military discharge papers, enlistment papers; probate records, 1854-1902; School census records, 1909-1934; St Lawrence Hotel (Coos Bay) register, 1927-1929.

Appointment of Admeasure of Dower, 1895-1896; Register of Titles, 1909-1965; Articles of Incorporation, 1909-1958; Records of Endorsed Warrants, 1890-1935; Water Power records; Law Books, 1843-1920; Stock Brands, 1915-1945; Log Brands, 1857-1942; Bounty records, 1909-1924; Mortgages 1873-1913; Probate court books; Register of Peddlers, 1909-1916; Record of Contagious Diseases, 1909-1923; Index to stills; Mechanics liens, 1859-1891; Laborers liens, 1859-1908; Record of Motor Vehicles, 1911-1913; Authority to Solemnize Marriage, 1910-1965; Record of Stallion licenses, 1911-1926; Index of Horseshoers liens, 1917-1927; Bills of Sale, 1908-1921;

Powers of Attorney, 1908-1965; Notary Publics, 1891-1961; Chattel Mortgages, 1881-1942; Chattel liens, 1913-1961; Index of Wills, 1870-1955; and Inheritance Tax and record of estates.

The average comment about these record generally is, 'who cares?' Many of the records are simply interesting to read. They help to convey a sense of the past and what occurred in Coos County. Another comment is, "And I thought we had a lot of licenses and records now!" The difference is that these records were on a local county level and the revenues were used in the county.

One not mentioned previously is the delayed birth record, housed in the County Clerk's office. When Social Security was first developed, then as now, one of the requirements was a birth certificate. 'Delayed' birth records were allowed to be secured by affidavit and other means for the birth record of a person who did not have one or was born before the recording of births became standard. These records could then be used to obtain Social Security and are valid birth records. They were accepted by the passport agency also. The years for recording delayed births were in the 1940's. Persons taking this route and applying for Social Security were in their 60's, so most of them are deceased now except for those applying for child benefits, etc. These records now are valued by genealogy researchers and historians. The confusing aspect of delayed birth records is that they are recorded in the county of application and not the state or county of birth. Prior to 1907 there are no birth records except in church records and newspapers.

Naturalizations are one of the most vital records for genealogists and history buffs. They begin in 1876 in Coos County and continue in full until 1929 with some spotty records of a few court orders and depositions until 1957, since naturalization became a federal function. Naturalization papers contain the records of the country of origin of the immigrant and frequently names the parent, children, birthdates and other vital information. In reading the index, one finds names similar to those in the phone book today, indicating that people have remained in the area for years. Some of the names one finds are Airola, Andrews, Backman, Berg, Biasca, Dalton, Detlefson, Domenighini, Gillespie, Grimes, Gunnell, McCurdy, Megale, Philpott, Reeves, Sandin, Scolari, Stone, Sundbaum, Yate, Youngmayr and many others!

More fascinating reading is the inheritance tax reports and conveyances.

They begin in March, 1945 and end in June, 1956, forerunners of the IRS inheritance taxes. These records are a part of wills and list the heirs. They are useful to establish ownership of land, for historical and genealogical research. Inheritances are by death; conveyances by gift. Some of the names appearing that one would recognize today are Aasen, Barklow, Briggs, Church, DeLong, Dornath, Fish, Gearhart, Messerle, Noah, Randleman, Robison, Stonecypher, Stone, Weekly, Lillie, Kruse, Russell, Schroeder, Taylor, Belloni, Görst, Laird, Randleman, Woodruff, and lots of others.

Probate begins in 1854. One of the most interesting probate records is that of Christopher Long, dated April 28, 1857. Christopher Long is associated with Bullards Park and is buried in the cemetery with other early settlers. The lighthouse at Bullards Beach State Park is also celebrating its 100th year. Christopher Long's relatives still live in the area as well as relatives of the constructing lampist of the lighthouse.

Mary Dinsmore, Bandon, and her children, are direct descendents of Long. Ray Norris, her grandson (Coquille hospital maintenance engineer) his children, Joe Norris and Julie Kohl; his grandchildren, E.J. Leep, Jeremy and Alyssa Norris and many other people scattered here and there claim descendency.

Joseph Bien was appointed lampist for every lighthouse from Guaymas, Mexico to Alaska and placed the inner lamp works in every lighthouse on the Pacific Coast. He also constructed some of the lighthouses. His commission is on record with the U.S. Corp of Engineers, 12th District, San Francisco and the national archives.

He also constructed the lens for the Cape Blanco lighthouse which was vandalized a few years ago, and the lens replaced. Joseph Bien was my great-grandfather's brother. I have a copy of his commission and other papers regarding some of the lighthouses and their costs.

To look at probate records, go to the state courts in the Coos County courthouse with the name or names you want to research, get a number and then take it to the county clerk's office to view the microfilm records. If you like to simply scan and look at a lot of miscellaneous records, you can do that by going directly to the clerk's office.

Some wills are housed in the clerk's office. They begin with 1870 and continue until about 1955 when wills were no longer recorded with the clerk. They are indexed. There is also a record of