

# The Real Story -- Better than the Rumor

*Commissioner Gordon Ross*

You've all heard the rumor, "Farmers from the Coquille Valley, under cover of darkness, came to Empire and stole the records, moving the County Seat to Coquille".

Most rumors have a basis, but in searching the records, I have not found a basis for this one. What I have found is a much better story, and a true one.

There is no doubt that by 1896 Empire was one of the least accessible places in Coos County. Nearly everyone in the county would agree the county seat should be somewhere else, except possibly those living in Empire. In 1893 train service had connected Marshfield with Coquille and Myrtle Point, and there was daily boat service on the Coquille bringing people from Bandon and any point along the river to Coquille. Empire was at the end of a long muddy road or around the bend from Marshfield by boat. Consequently when the people of Marshfield asked the state legislature to allow a change of location for the county seat of Coos County, there was little opposition.

The state legislature passed legis-

lation allowing Coos County to hold an election to choose a new county seat. Apparently the ballot gave several choices because it was stated at the January 1897 term of the county court that Coquille had overwhelmingly been chosen by the voters as the new county seat.

Preparation was made to find temporary lodging for the court proceedings and records which had to be moved by July 1, 1897. An architect was chosen to draw up plans for a permanent "brick" courthouse. I've looked in vain in the local papers for a record of the election results and a local response, so I can only guess by a preceding that took place in circuit court four months later that Marshfield wasn't a very good sport about losing its bid for the county seat.

In the spring term of court, bids were received and contract awarded to a Salem firm to build a "brick" courthouse for \$11,800.00

The commissioners asked the treasurer to give an accounting of the uncollected taxes for the past three years, and

it was found to be \$34,000.00. This was then set aside as a building fund. This maneuver caused the writer to raise his eyebrows just a little, so I was not surprised to find in the records a "special meeting", called in April that began with the phrase, "the County Court, having received competent counsel". The purpose of the meeting was to rescind the order setting up the building fund using uncollected taxes (most of which belonged to school districts).

This however, was not the end of their troubles. The southern Oregon Company made up of mostly Marshfield business men, where the names Flanagan and Merchant stand out, entered in circuit court a suit against Coos County Judge Henry Schroeder and Commissioners Ross and Weekly, asking that the court enjoin them from spending such an extravagant amount of money on a brick courthouse because, as it was asserted, for \$3,500.00 a structure could be built that was as large as the one in Empire and would likely be adequate to the county's needs for 10 or 15 years.

The board met again and rescinded the order awarding the bid and cancelled the contract.

The records were moved July 1, 1897 into temporary quarters. The court eventually ruled in favor of the county. The contract was renewed with the same firm for \$400 more because prices had increased. The courthouse was built although I do not believe it was brick, and this is the rest of the story....

**None of the commissioners were ever re-elected!**

Only Commissioner Weekly ever served in the new building, as he had two years left on his term.

And so things continue in Coos County and those striving to deliver county services get exasperated at the public that demands accountability. But I receive an inward comfort as I reflect on this, for I know in Coos County the bureaucracy will never grow very fast, and the real story will always be better than the rumor.

# Meeting the Needs of the Community — My Goal

*Commissioner Beverly Owen*

## Looking into the Future:

\* Move the 911 Center and Command Post from the basement of the Courthouse to a remodeled building East of the courthouse.

\* Expansion of the jail for an expanded women's section.

\* The people passed a bond to finance a Veteran's Nursing Home..this has been in cooperation with the City of Coquille.

\* Planning a celebration of 100 years of housing the courthouse in Coquille.

\* Concerns with the Coquille Indian Tribe's request for 59,105 acres of public forest from the BLM to the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) for the purpose of management of the land by the Coquille Tribe.

\* There have been daily activities and numerous night meetings to serve the county and meet the needs of Coos County residents.

\* Obtaining funds to purchase and remodel a building for a business incubator, which will provide space for start-up businesses and encourage industrial business growth.

\* Working on bringing natural gas line from I-5 to Coos County.

## Accomplishments - 1993-1995 and Goals:

\* The people passed a bond to upgrade the solid waste facilities: This has been completed and tested and has met the state DEQ's requirements. We are now looking at ways to use the heat that comes from the burners for industrial use.

\* Remodeled the Enlund building for a Parks and Forestry building.

\* Worked with City of Powers on expansion of Powers Park; upgrading and improvements of boat ramps in Coos County.

In 1992 I was elected to the Board of commissioners. This experience has been exciting and challenging. My goal has always been to be the best that I can be in anything that I do. I have 34 years of combined experience in government, business and management. My main responsibility as Commissioner has been administration and human service areas., working with the following agencies: Commission on Children and Families- past chairman; member of SWO Community Action Committee - chairman; Coos County Fair Board Coos-Curry Business Development - vice chairman, Belloni Boys Ranch, inc. and South Coast Business Employment Corp. - chairman. Commission-

ers also serve on state boards.

I have served on the Mayor's Forum which provides an avenue to keep in touch with the goals and problems of the cities of Coos County, helping to create a working relationship with cities.

The Miss Coos County pageant has enabled me to help young women improve and meet their highest potential. Working as a reserve in the Sheriff's department helped me to understand how law enforcement agencies work. Membership in American Business Women's Association has given me an opportunity to improve personal and business contacts.

Being the best commissioner that I can and attempting to meet the needs of the community now and in the future in all of Coos County is my goal. Being a commissioner is exciting and challenging particularly when solving a problem and giving people more faith and trust in our local government. I feel one of my greatest assets is that I listen to people and try very hard to address their concerns and find a solution if possible.

I was born in Mast Hospital, Myrtle Point and lived my first 6 years in Powers. In 1935 we moved to Coquille and have lived here ever since. I married Bill Owen in 1949 and we raised

three children, Gail, Jim and Patty, all married and with children of their own. We have seven grandchildren and our first great-grandchild who becomes a 7th generation in our family to be born in Oregon.

My first responsibility was to raise the children. When they were grown, I started working full time for the Coquille School District from 1962 to 1969. We started our own nursery business shortly after that time. I worked for Trans-America Title and in January 1974 began working in the elections office for Fay Crabtree, who was county clerk then.

I was active in the union and served as vice-president, president, negotiator and steward before moving to management around 1979.

For 19 years I served as head of the election department, upgrading the system until we became totally computerized. In 1979 we were counting punch cards by computer and also hand counting. Oregon started registration and voting by mail while I was working in the election department. Oregon has been in the forefront nationwide in many improved election procedures.

A strong faith in God has been my foundation for family growth and career advancement.