

OUT OF THE VAULT

Historic mining town incinerated for third time

By Renee Struthers
EO Media Group

With the cry of "Fire!" at 7:30 p.m. on April 19, 1937, the historic business district of Canyon City in Grant County burned for the third time since its founding in 1861.

Buster Cresop, who lived in the old Elkhorn Hotel, looked out his window and saw smoke billowing up from the attic of the old wooden frame building and sounded the alarm. Some 25 guests were evacuated from the hotel, which was soon reduced to ruins. The flames, pushed by a stiff south breeze, rushed northward and soon most of the wood-framed buildings in downtown Canyon City were ablaze. The fire burned through the night, and when the smoke cleared, 15 businesses and an apartment building had been destroyed. Cause of the fire was reported a carelessly discarded cigarette in the Elkhorn Hotel. Damages were estimated at around \$150,000.

The town of 350 was left with its homes, a service station, a Pastime house (bar and card room), the post office, a relief station, the theater and a barber shop. Neighboring John Day sent emergency food supplies to hungry Canyon City residents, and other area cities, including Pendleton, sent relief supplies or cash donations to help the town get back on its feet. One boy almost lost his life



Contributed photo/Grant County Historical Museum

Remains of the Blue Mountain Eagle office (foreground) and Masonic hall across the street after the 1937 Canyon City fire.

when he attempted to plunge into a burning building in search of his mother. A guard restrained him, and he was later reunited with his equally distraught parent. Two John Day volunteer firefighters were temporarily overcome by smoke, but recovered. And a woman fainted after being evacuated from her home. Otherwise, the townspeople emerged from the fire unscathed.

The tinderbox-dry buildings threw flames so high that they could be seen 25 miles away in Seneca, and within a few hours more than a thousand people had gathered around the fire zone; the city promptly put the gawkers to work in a bucket brigade. In all, more than 500 volunteers pitched in to fight the blaze. In addition to the Canyon City firemen, John Day, Prairie City, Mt. Vernon and

U.S. Forest Service crews laid extra hoses to keep the flames from historic buildings like the former home of poet Joaquin Miller and the Episcopal Church, which had survived two earlier fires as well.

Last to leave the downtown inferno was Mrs. Hilda Valade, a telephone operator who stood by the switchboard to call for help through the Mt. Vernon exchange, 10 miles away. She escaped through a rear exit only after the telephone offices had started to collapse.

At the Blue Mountain Eagle offices in John Day, editor Clint Haight busily put out a special edition of the paper, but his Canyon City building burned as well, destroying all the newspaper's files and archives. The Eagle (then the Grant County News)

had been the only downtown survivor of the 1898 Canyon City fire that started, mysteriously, in the room of a traveling performer about an hour after he sang "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" in the town's New York Theatre. He was arrested and put on trial, but acquitted for lack of evidence. An 1898 East Oregonian story reported an oil lamp exploded in the room of a "morphine fiend."

Canyon City first burned to the ground in August of 1870, when the town was a much larger, bustling gold mining town. Because the town was built in a narrow valley, and the main street was originally so narrow, no insurance companies would insure the businesses, and in the first and second fires the town was a total loss.

Renee Struthers is a community records editor for EO Media Group. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com.

Mushroom picking this spring? Read this

Blue Mountain Eagle

The U.S. Forest Service offers guidelines for local mushroom hunters this spring.

Permits are not required to harvest, possess or transport less than a gallon in Oregon or less than five gallons in Washington. That amount is intended for personal consumption and not to be sold, bartered or given away.

A commercial permit is required for those 18 years and older who want to harvest mushrooms to sell, or who plan to harvest, possess or transport more than the previously mentioned amounts. Commercial picking is prohibited in wilderness areas.

Commercial permit rates are:

- Consecutive day: \$2 per day for a minimum of 10 days.

- Annual permit: \$100 for the period Jan. 1 to Dec. 31.

- Buyer's permit: \$600 plus administrative costs.

An industrial camping permit is required if harvesters and buyers plan to camp overnight on national forest system lands.

People are reminded that some road and area closures may still be in effect from last year's wildfires.

Those harvesting mushrooms on the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests are required to display a recreation pass in their vehicle when using a designated fee trailhead. Passes are \$5 per day or \$30 for an annual pass.

Mushroom hunters are cautioned that many forest mushroom varieties are poisonous and cautioned to use field guides for proper identification.

UP CLOSE WITH NEWBORN FARM CRITTERS



Members of Colleen Robertson's Vet Science 4-H club and Jan Bauer's Rocky Top Riders 4-H horse club met at Neil and Jan Bauer's home near Mt. Vernon on April 10 to see two new foals and twin calves. From left, Neil Bauer, Kaytlyn Wells, Riley Robertson, Kaitlyn Hughes, Dalli Girvin, McKeely Miller and Jan Bauer.

Kids can apply for aerospace camp

Blue Mountain Eagle

ONTARIO — Registrations are now being accepted for an aerospace technology camp for youth to be held Aug. 1-12 at Treasure Valley Community College's Ontario campus.

The two-week camp is open to middle- and high-school students who will experience hands-on learn-

ing in the aerospace technology field. Topics to be covered include: GPS and GPS satellites, robotics, drones, aerodynamics and the physics of wing structures, computer-aided design, pre-flight planning, photography, advanced aerospace welding and careers and more.

The main goal of the camp is to prepare youth to train

for jobs readily available in the community. Preference is given to students in Malheur, Baker, Grant and Harney counties, and spots are limited.

A grant, provided by the Oregon Department of Education, will fund the camp for two years.

For more information, visit <http://www.tvcc.cc/academics/cte/aerospacecamp.cfm>.

Angus junior member is from Long Creek

Blue Mountain Eagle

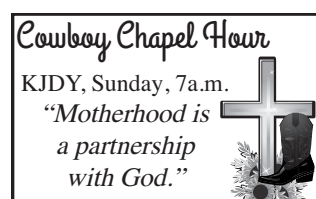
The American Angus Association has named Evangeline Schultz of Long Creek as a new junior member of the group.

Junior members of the association are eligible to register cattle in the association,

participate in programs conducted by the National Junior Angus Association and take part in association-sponsored shows and other national and regional events.

The American Angus Association is the largest beef breed association in the world, with more than 25,000

active adult and junior members.



Greenhouse opens just in time for Mother's Day

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — People can grab a great gift for mom while supporting Grant Union High School with a Mother's Day sale Friday and Saturday, May 6 and 7, at the school's greenhouse located in back of the school at the north end.

The greenhouse will be open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. both days. Regular hours are 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday.

This is the 18th year for the sale.



Elect
Mary Weaver
Grant County Treasurer

- 36 years bookkeeping and office management
- 5.5 years County Budget
- Leadership Council for Oregon Community Foundation
- Leadership in The Ford Family Foundation
- Leadership to create **community unity** during the fires this summer
- Honest, hard working and **motivated to help Grant County**

You know me... **Mary Weaver**. Vote for me for **YOUR Grant County Treasurer**

Paid for by the committee to elect Mary Weaver




Pick out a good one for Mom
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