

# Grave markers preserve pioneer history

by Elane Blanchet

Each small, stainless steel marker tells a story that stands by itself, yet leaves so much unsaid: "Freize—Graves of three children of the Frieze Family"; "Infant son

of Robert and Jennie Medlock, 1900"; "Grave of a man named Ricks"; "Cople—Charles Wesley 1861-1879, William Harvey 1868"; "Graves of 2 children of C.D. Robinson".

Each marker is designated for a presently unmarked grave on some hidden site that was once a would-be settler's homestead.

"I have a theory that each country burial place was established with the hopes that his would be a permanent home for the family, that generations of the same family would take care of the graves," commented Harold Becket, chairman of the Morrow County Historical Society Grave Marker Committee.

The committee is in charge of locating, researching and marking as best it can the many pioneer graves scattered throughout the county. Most of the graves have nothing to indicate they are burial spots, original wooden markers long ago weathered away or burned in grass fires.

Three years ago the grave marker committee was formed by the Historical Society so the old graves—and the settlers they represent—would not be forgotten. So far markers have been placed on ten graves with 15 more graves located and researched with markers ready for them when road conditions to the out-of-the-way locations improve later this spring.

Becket, a retired welder, constructs the Historical Society markers out of post-card sized stainless steel plates stamped with all of the information about the deceased turned up by extensive research, often pitifully little. The plates are then welded on steel fence posts with barbs on the end to ensure they will stay in place.

Many possible grave sites are still under investigation, Becket said, and he encourages anyone who knows the location of an old grave to bring it to the attention of the Historical Society.

One burial location currently being researched is in a canyon on Big Butter Creek, identified on the county map as Morris Canyon. At the upper end of the canyon lies the

remains of a very old rock wall which Beckett believes might have been built around the gravesite of a man named Morris and possibly members of his family.

"It's very hard to research these old graves, it's been so long with the family long since gone," Becket said.

Probably the oldest grave site found so far is located on Luke Bibby's place on Balm Fork near where an old house once stood. The final resting place of two children is known almost exactly, traced by the description of a relative living in The Dalles who left this area in 1900. Becket estimates the graves, still under investigation, date back to the 1860's.

Becket credits Rachel Harnett, curator of the Morrow County Museum, and herself the daughter of an early pioneer family, with doing much of the research involved in ferreting out the secrets of the old graves, using family records in the museum.

"You learn things you've never known about the history of the area researching these graves," Becket commented. "Even the Heppner Cemetery is very interesting when you think of it in connection with county history." He said the earliest grave in the Heppner Cemetery is marked 1878.

Becket said he was especially impressed with the inaccessibility of the old homestead locations and the hardship this imposed on the settlers. "It must have been very difficult to get anywhere, especially when the road and weather conditions were bad," he commented.

The history of Morrow County is tied up with the pioneers who settled here when life was far from easy. And in each unmarked grave lies a small part of that history.

The Morrow County Historical Society urges anyone who can help locate or identify an old grave to contact Harold Becket, Rachel Harnett, Delpha Jones or Ruth McCabe of the grave marker committee.

Each grave marker helps to preserve a small bit of county history and recognizes the importance of each early settler in building the foundation of Morrow County.



Harold Becket, chairman of the Morrow County Historical Society grave marker committee, displays markers he made to place on the burial places of early homesteaders.

## THE GAZETTE TIMES

SECTION B THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 1978

### BMCC nursing test slated today

The National League for Nursing Pre-Nursing and Guidance Examination will be given at Blue Mountain Community College Thursday, March 16 at 6 p.m. The test is required for all students entering both the practical nurse and the associate degree nursing programs at BMCC next year.

This will be the last time the test will be offered at BMCC before the opening of school next fall. The examination takes about five hours to complete. Fee for the exam is \$10.

Anyone interested in taking the examination may call the BMCC Counseling Center. Phone 276-1280 in Pendleton.

### Spring classes still open

Spring classes for the Blue Mountain Community College evening division are rapidly filling up, with pre-registration due to close March 24.

Classes still open for additional students include drawing, welding, section A tennis (1), botany, physical fitness for women, history of World War II, expectant parents class, advanced tole painting

(4), Spanish, multi-media art, guitar, upholstery, microwave cooking, golf and hunt seat riding.

Send registration forms and checks directly to the college, P.O. Box 100, Pendleton OR 97801. Forms and information about any of the classes are available from Nancy Brownfield, local BMCC coordinator,

676-5039.

Please note that the welding class has two sessions listed. Be sure to indicate which session is desired.

Registration is possible for some of the classes on the first night of the class, but only if an opening exists, so students are encouraged to register early.

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