

Rachel Harnett, a most remarkable woman

by Justine Weatherford

"We all keep hearing that no person is irreplaceable. However, the growing number of visitors to Morrow County's outstanding museum and those families who appreciate its fine historical collections and its records, feel that Rachel Harnett is very close to being an irreplaceable person. They sincerely hope there will be no need to try to replace her in the foreseeable future," states the first paragraph of the document read at a large, civic banquet where the Soroptimist International named its Heppner's woman of Achievement in 1975.

Last week, when the county began to seriously pare its twice-defeated budget, Rachel was approached about changing her work schedule. It was agreed that Johanne Wood, who has long been the occasional weekend substitute for Rachel and who works in the courthouse will come to the museum for 20 hours each week, and Rachel will continue as director, serving five hours each week. She will also be able to occasionally substitute for Johanne.

However, the two women will hold at their present schedules (Johanne being at the courthouse 40 hours and Rachel staying 25 hours at the museum) until a revised county budget is approved.

Rachel has been the curator of the museum since before it was developed in 1960 and housed in the memorial building presented to the county by Amanda Duball. She has been active in the community in many ways during her lifetime here. She was born here on October 24, 1906, the only child of Charlotte Shipley Scherzinger and Henry Scherzinger, married here in 1877 and lived in Spring Hollow off Rhea Creek. That land is still family owned by Rachel and her only child, Melvin Harnett. Shorty Peck had farmed it for years. Dean Wright presently farms it for the Harnetts.

Rachel began and completed her public schooling in Heppner, being graduated by Heppner High School in 1924. She attended Oregon State College for several years. She is a member of the Christian Church, of the Order of Eastern Star, is a Past Noble Grand of the Sans Souci Rebekah Lodge, is a past president of the Kate Young Degree of Honor Protective Association, is a former member of Soroptimist, is a life member of the Disabled American Veterans' Auxiliary and is a director of the Morrow County Historical Society.

Rachel lived away from the county for a period but returned early in 1960 after the death of her husband, Marion Harnett. She assumed the responsibility for organizing the museum here in 1960, and she also took on other activities. She began teaching knitting and handwork to 4-H girls, and during the succeeding years her pupils have won

many prizes at county and state fairs. She also taught quite a few adults to knit. For a number of years she served as Mother Advisor to the Rainbow Girls Assembly in Heppner.

Rachel has contributed many historical articles to the museum from her own family. Her maternal grandfather, Dr. Lewis Francis Lynn Shipley, came to Heppner with his wife, Sarah Emily, and their two children, Frances Marion and Charlotte, in 1880. He left a successful practice at Dayton, Oregon, to come to this "vast part of Umatilla County where there was no doctor within more than 60 miles of the little, new town called Heppner." (He was a medical graduate of Willamette University in its fourth class of medical students in 1869. He married Sarah Emily Williamson that year.) He was the first, real, licensed physician here—only "Doctor" Shobe, a druggist who came in 1872, set up a drug store in Heppner, and practiced a pioneer-type medicine, predated Dr. Shipley.

While his family stayed temporarily with Mrs. Hiram Clark down Willow Creek, Dr. Shipley went hunting for housing. The first person he met in Heppner was Henry Scherzinger who was then working for Pap Simons in his blacksmith shop which stood where McDonald's Chevrolet stands now.

The doctor bought two and one-half acres with a house on it northeast of Willow Creek and west of Gale Street near where Tom Springer's TV Shop is now. After many unusual pioneer experiences he died at the age of 54 in 1898, and the Shipley home was washed away in the 1903 flood. His widow built a new home up on Elder Street where Eva Griffith lived later. Rachel's grandmother lived in Heppner until her death in 1923.

In 1881 Henry Scherzinger patented his homestead in Spring Hollow and began buying additional land. By 1905 he was known as a prosperous stockman when he married Charlotte Shipley, six years after her graduation from Heppner High School Class of 1899.

The Scherzingers bought a Center Street home in 1912 when daughter Rachel was ready to start school. For a while they lived there winters and in Spring Hollow summers. That home, a part of the first Heppner schoolhouse, is where Rachel lives presently.

Rachel's versatile father learned the leather trade and shoe repairing and bought into Matt Linenthal's shoe business here (later Gonty's and now the Shoe Box and Farra's Shoe Repair). Henry was active in public school supervision, was a member of the Heppner Volunteer Fire Department and belonged to several lodges. He continued to operate his ranch until 1917 when he rented it and moved the family to Heppner full time. He died in 1938, 62 years after he came to Morrow



Rachel Harnett

County from his family's home near Oregon City where they had settled after moving on the newly completed transcontinental railroad from Wisconsin to Sacramento and up the coast by boat.

His widow, Lottie, lived on in the Center Street home until her death in 1960 when Rachel returned to Heppner and to

that home.

Rachel's son Melvin is a professional federal, hospital supervisor. He and his wife Barbara have three children, Dawn, Sherrie and Shawn. Rachel visits them often and enjoys having them visit here quite regularly.

Rachel has devoted much beyond the hours for which the county and the museum

board engage her. She responds to calls during her off-duty hours, coming quickly and cheerfully to open the museum to out-of-town visitors. She has so carefully cataloged each item received by the museum. She has studied museum management and the keeping of folders of information about county

families which are filled with documented notes and news clippings.

Now approaching her 74th birthday, Rachel is this county's oldest employee. In November 1979 she fell at work and needed some hospitalization, however, she has since continued her Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday museum hours without interruption. She has long been a great help to the Heppner librarians who share the same building.

Not many of us can know that our work will become

more valuable after we must leave it. Rachel's work will increase in value very much as the years pass. The Soroptimists were wise in

honoring her as their 1975 Woman of Achievement, and her fellow citizens recognize her as a most remarkable woman today.

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.. Rides will be available from Heppner City Park, Del's Market in Lexington, and Ione City Park for those needing rides.

.. Departure time from these points is 9:00 a.m.

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