

A short history of Morrow County

By Betty Mills

This is a short history of Morrow County and the families that started some of the businesses on Main Street, which are featured on the mural on the Ag Museum building.

SETTLING SANBURY FLAT

As land now known as Morrow County was being settled in the mid 1860's, little thought was given to farming or ranching. Most inhabitants were drifters seeking their fortunes in gold or free grass. Some raised horses and a few sheep to fit the needs of passing troops of miners. There was little use for cattle since the winters were too difficult for cattle without an ample supply of hay, of which there was very little. For those who raised horses, there was ample grass for them to graze on and a demand for pack animals and riding horses from the earliest settlers.

Ranchers and miners had to contend with the marauding Indian parties that inhabited the area. Small bands of Indians would often harass the settlers, running off with stayed horses and stealing from the miners. Eventually, the U.S. Army set up forts in strategic places in Eastern Oregon to control the warring parties. This led to The Dalles Military Road, which was used to service the various military forts.

This land was mainly a man's world. Few women ventured into the area until the Homestead Act was implemented. This Act entitled farmers to acquire a quarter section of land free if they were willing to spend at least five years of their life developing the land and building fences as well as putting up a modest house of some kind.

Cattle made their appearance in about 1860 when a Texan named Menefee brought cattle from Texas. He located on Birch Creek some distance from Heppner.

With the introduction of barbed wire in 1874, farm land was soon established with specific boundaries. Farmers and ranchers appeared steadily and a settlement was formed on parcels of land owned by George Sansbury, just west of Willow Creek and Hinton Creek. Shortly, Sansbury Flat was renamed after a prominent citizen Henry Heppner. Heppner was the owner of a general store along with Jackson Morrow.

A post office was soon relocated from Butter Creek, without official decree, and the small city began to take shape.

Surveyors established streets, blocks and lots. Main Street was supposed to be 100 feet wide, and side streets 60 feet wide. Main Street was to run due North and South but would wind up being a few degrees east of north.

By 1875, there were enough children in the community to cause Henry Heppner to ride through surrounding community to solicit enough money to build a school. The building was put on Gale Street.

At this time, the population of the city rose to 318 people. Numerous businesses and organizations were formed. There was a Baptist church, which held services once a month. The Masonic Lodge also held meeting once per month. There was a livery stable, hotel, flour mill, blacksmith shop, drug store, variety store, harness shop, general mercantile, four saloons and a jewelry store.

The railroad's appearance gave the Heppner community an outlet for its products of wool, wheat, cattle and even passenger service. As a result, many young women traveled to the area in search for a teaching job in one of the schools being located in the area.

Wool wagons belonging to Thompsons, Wilkinsons, Veys and others rolled through the main street of Heppner. The muleskinners and teamsters usually made it into one of the many saloons for a dust quenching drink of their choice. Then on to the depot just at the north end of town. More about these families will be featured in the next mural about sheep ranches and the railroad depot.

COLUMBUS RHEA



Molly and Steve Rhea

During 1864, Columbus Rhea, or Lum Rhea, came to the area and was the first white man to settle on a creek in the area, that creek today is known as Rhea Creek. Rhea was not satisfied to remain on Rhea Creek and in 1885 he moved to Heppner. There he met Sophronia Adkins and they were married on Jan. 22, 1868. To them were born eight children, Lillie, Ellor, Waldon, Josephine, Ada, Helena, Curtis and Carl.

On Sept. 6, 1906, Curtis married Cecil Rankin. They had eight children. They were Alice Buckley, Carl Rhea, Mary Ashbeck, Marie Headrick, Robert Rhea, Sophronia Kirkham, Curtis Jr. and Josephine Liesegang. Those who are still living in the area are Mary Ashbeck and Alice Buckley who were Carl Rhea's sisters, and of course, grandson, Steve Rhea, who lives here in Heppner today.

Rhea started a bank known as the First National Bank of Heppner. Today, that business still stands with major renovations, which added a second story to the building. Officers of the bank included Lum Rhea, brother, Thomas Rhea who was vice president and George Conser who is credited with the rapid growth of the bank. It was recognized as one of the best banking institutions in the Northwest with over \$436,000 dollars in deposits and offering four percent interest on time deposits.

Alongside of the bank was a grocery store, owned by Rhea and Welsh. It was reported that they carried a good supply of merchandise well adapted to local ranchers and stock growers. Not only did they serve the locals but also for the territory. Rhea was reportedly a good businessman and was on the city council for three terms. Welsh was also a good businessman and took good care of his business.

The establishment of the new bank was a key inducement for the incorporation of the City of Heppner, which took place on Feb. 9, 1887. Sidewalks were put into place, most were boardwalks but some were merely dirt footpaths.

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MC Arts and Crafts plans for St. Pat's Day

Morrow County Creative Arts and Crafts will be in the Les Schwab building on Friday, March 12 from 8:30 a.m. until 6 p.m. and Saturday, March 13 from 8:30 a.m. until 4 p.m., during the St. Pat's Celebration in Heppner. All members are asked to bring an article describing their articles for sale to the Feb. 26 meeting at GD's banquet room at 1 p.m.

Also on agenda will be paintings from Betty Crosswhite for her April 16 and 17 workshop. Pictures of watercolor subject matter will be at the meeting to highlight a

workshop by Joyce Anderson. Any member or non-member interested in these workshops is urged to attend and see list of supplies needed.

Workshop for Crosswhite is six students or more and Anderson workshop is 10 students or more.

Sandra Haynes will do a make-up class in March of colored pencil. Contact Judie Laughlin at 676-9781. Contact Betty Mills for Crosswhite at 676-5546. The public is invited to the meeting and to take workshops.

HLL to hold registration for 2004 Season

Registration for the 2004 season at Heppner Little League will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 18 and Friday, Feb. 20, from 5-7 p.m. Children ages 4 through 12 are eligible to enroll to play Wiffle ball, T-ball and Minors and Majors baseball and softball. Registration is required even if the child played previously.

Registration will be held at the Heppner Neighborhood Center. At least one parent or legal guardian must be present, with proof of residency and a copy of an original or state-certified birth certificate. A driver's license or utility bill is acceptable documentation. For more information, including a description of the boundaries, call Robyn Skaggs at 676-

Navy son reenlists

Navy Chief Petty Officer Rodger J. Arntt, II, son of Sandra K. and Rodger J. Arntt of Heppner, recently reenlisted for four years while serving at Trident Training Facility Bangor, Silverdale, WA.

Arntt is a 1986 graduate of Benson High School of Portland and joined the Navy in June 1986.

Another son returns to Iraq

John Martin, son of Carl and Geri Martin of Heppner, has returned to Iraq. He departed from Miramar Marine Corps Air Station on Feb. 5 with his unit for a second tour of duty. His wife and children will remain at home in California.

For anyone wishing to correspond with John, his overseas address is: CWO2 John Martin, USMC, MWCS-38 UIC 41136, FPO AP 96426-1136.

Free Colorado blue spruce trees

Ten free Colorado blue spruce trees will be given to each person who joins The National Arbor Day Foundation during February 2004.

The free trees are part of the nonprofit Foundation's Trees for America campaign.

Colorado blue spruces have silver blue-green color and a compact conical shape. They can be used as individual ornamentals, an energy-saving windbreak, a privacy screen or as living Christmas trees.

The trees will be shipped postpaid at the right time for planting between March 1 and May 31 with enclosed planting instructions. The six to twelve inch trees are guaranteed to grow, or they will be replaced free of charge.

To become a member of the Foundation and receive the free trees, send a \$10 contribution to Ten Free Colorado Blue Spruce Trees, National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE 68410, by Feb. 29, 2004. Or go online to www.arborday.org.

Ione and Heppner tournament brackets on page three

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