# Historical Society Hears Talk About Pack Trains in Salmon River Country

Yreka – Jim McNeil, president of the Siskiyou County Historical society, spoke to that group recently on "Pack Trains of the Salmon River Country."

Having worked with pack trains from an early age as a "bell-boy", the speaker had first hand knowledge of his subject, though he admitted he couldn't "drag halters across the corral" with some of the old timers.

McNeil pointed out that pack trains were the earliest mode of travel and transportation since the days when Cortez made the first Spanish explorations in the 16th century, on down through history to the days of Lewis and Clark, and the Hudson's Bay company in the early days of the West.

Trading posts were established with the supplies transported by means of pack trains. McNeil believes the largest trains used, were owned by the early Spaniards before the establishments of missions and roads connecting them, which made the use of ox carts possible.

In the northern California area pack trains were used by the miners to bring their needs into the primitive area. Many of the early settlers made a living by this trade.

Each head packer trained a bell mare to guide the rest of the mules or horses, not only harnessing and loading, but in conduct on the trail. It was a matter of pride of the packer when all were lined up in proper relation.

**Mule's Average Load**

The speaker said that the average load for a mule was 300 pounds, but a few had been known to carry much heavier loads. He knew of a mule owned by the Denny Bar company, which had carried a safe weighing 830 pounds for some distance. Some animals were especially useful for carrying loaded barrels. Not all were willing to carry that type of load. A good pack mule and its rigging cost an average of $120.

A good packer had to learn to pack the mule so that the load was well balanced, so it would not slip during the day's travel, or rub sores on the mule's back. All sorts of hitches had to be perfected. Wages for a head packer averaged $69 per month, while the hind-packer would get $45 and the top pay for the bell-boy, who did the cooking and was the apprentice packer, was $35. All men in the trade had to possess good horse sense.

**Traveled 14 Miles a Day**

Average pack trains in the Salmon area were from 6 to 10 animals, but a few large ones of 30 to 35 were known to operate at times. An average days drive was 14 miles when loaded and 25 when empty.

Great rivalry existed among the pack train operators. Many humorous incidents–such as the necessity of draining the liquor barrels were recalled.

Whenever snow was deep enough that it came to a man's knees, it was time to put snowshoes on the pack animals. A wooden snowshoe was shown to demonstrate to the audience how they were applied and used.

McNeil stated that mules had to be broken in to the use of snowshoes before hitting the trail. Not every mule could be trained to wear them.

James Hartley, vice president, conducted the business portion of the meeting. Some 50 members and guests were present.

Mrs. Hazel Pollock, the curator, reported that more than 700 visitors had viewed the museum during the month of March, which included several groups of school children. All of the momentos of the late Alec Rosborough have been grouped in one show case.

Tom Bigelow, field trip chairman, has made plans for the next field trip to be to the Ski bowl, Strawberry valley and Old Sisson sometime in late May. The definite date will be announced.

Fred Stratton, membership chairman, announced the membership to be 1,066. He added that he had been a head packer for the 91st division of the U.S. Army during World War I. Ammunition and supplies were carried to the troops in France by mule train, usually 50 animals to a train. During attacks of poison gas the mules, as well as the men, had to be equipped with gas masks. He recalls that many lives, both human and animal were lost by gassing.

**Old Millinery Modeled**

Musical enterainment consisted of two numbers by Mrs. Maurice Dittner accompanied by Mrs. Joyce Sanderson. During the singing of "Easter Parade" four old hats from the millinery shop in the basement of the museum were modeled by Mrs. Athea Smith, Mrs. Orlo Davis, Mrs. Dennis Broderick and Miss Amelia Andrews. A record of "The Holy City" was played on the music box.

Refreshments were served by Mrs. Hazel Rider and Mrs. Pollock.

# Sacred Indian Spring Will Be Covered by Dam

By JOSEPH H. CARTER

Cawker City, Kan.–(UPI)–A natural salt spring, once worshipped by primitive Indians for its healing power, soon will be covered by the Glen Elder dam reservoir.

The lake not only will cover a place of Indian lore, but will bury a colorful chapter in the history of the Great Plains pioneers and Kansas–a sanitarium-resort near the rich mineral waters.

Indians told their children about the legend of "Waconda," which means God or Great Spirit in the language of the Otte and Pawnee nations. The story tells of Waconda's love for a warrior of a rival tribe and the war it ignited. When she saw the young man fall in battle and tumble into the water, she leaped and drowned behind him.

**Healing Virtues**

Thus, the legend said, waters of the Waconda or Great Spirit Spring took on healing virtues. Indians drank it and bathed in it for health.

When pioneers trekked across the plains, they heard stories of the spring. They were amazed at the 35-foot high mound that the spring had built for itself.

Dr. Carlos Bingesser, who operates the nearby sanitarium, said the mound–which forms a 50-foot round basin–was formed by evaporation and the deposit of minerals on the other side.

The pioneers called it "the Great Salt Spring," or "Waconda."

Bingesser's grandfather, G. F. Abrams, built a native stone building nearby and from 1890 to 1906, excursion trains brought thousands from the east and nearby cities to view the "Eighth Wonder of the World," or "A Bit of the Lost Sea," as it was advertised.

**Gay Parties**

Race tracks, gay parties and dancing spiced the trips. But visitors came mostly to view the spring, taste its cleansing waters and to enjoy a spa or health bath.

Abrams lated converted the four-story building into a sanitarium. Bingesser described his German-born grandfather as a "doctor who never saw a medical school . . a necessity on the plains."

Bingesser, himself an osteopathic physician, said the water serves as a laxative and to "neutralize poison in the body." He said it healed trouble with mucous membrane. He said the World's Fair at St. Louis judged the water as the "highest medicated water in the world."

**40 Persons**

At one time, up to 40 persons came daily for treatment at the sanitarium. The doctor said publicity about Glen Elder dam led many to believe the spring already was inundated and business fell off. He said, however, the spring probably would be accessible until 1965, but he may leave sooner.

Bingesser said he can remember once when a group of "modern" Indians carried a woman to the spring. "They sprinkled her with water and she walked away," he said. "They believed in the water's great healing power."

The spring was estimated at 8,000 years old, but government scientists who studied Waconda spring said its source of water was "indeterminable." The flow is unaffected by drought and the temperature remains constant.

"But I have seen it in at least seven different colors," Dr. Bingesser said, "from milky to yellow to blue."

**RIBBON WINNER**—One of the 10 blue ribbon winners at South Gate, Calif, art exhibit was an untitled "expressionistic" black and white painting done by 22-months-old Theresa Bates, shown with her work. "Very sensitive and reminiscent of strange creeping insects" was the way judge Frederick Black, director of the Long Beach Museum of Art, described the work. Some of the artists were so shaken they picked up their entries and went home. (UPI)

# Low Bids Opened For Astoria Bridge

Salem–(UPI)–Two low bids totaling nearly $14 million for completion of the major part of the Astoria-Megler bridge were opened Wednesday by the State Highy Commission.

An apparent low bid of $10,121,862 for construction of the super-structure was submitted by U.S. Steel Corp, American Bridge Division, Portland.

On the Desdemona-Sands viaduct portion of the bridge, Pomeroy and Gerrick Co., San Francisco, submitted an apparent low bid of $3,777,140 on alternate "A" and an apparent low bid of $3,870,140 on alternate "B".

Both alternates call for span construction using prestressed beams, but the first calls for a poured-in-place deck and the second for precasting a portion of the deck slab.

## City Clock Watchers Complain to Mayor

Midvale, Utah–(UPI)–The city hall clock, which had been running late, was corrected after a complaint to the mayor.

A petition was sent to Mayor Henry Beckstead signed by "Official Clock Watchers of Midvale City, Inc." It noted the clock had been an hour behind, meaning it was hard to tell when quitting time came.

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