



HOME OF THE POTATO FESTIVAL is shown in this aerial photo taken several years ago. Merrill hosts the 24th Annual Potato Festival this year October 21 and 22. The festival was first originated in 1934 as a community celebration, and has since grown into a Basin area activity

celebrating the potato harvest each fall. This year's queen is Donna Lee Micka of Malin, the third Malin girl to be so honored in the series of 21 monarchs chosen for the event.

Merrill History Reviewed Showing Potato Industry Growth

Editor's Note — Reprinted from the October 7, 1937, issue of The News and The Herald as written by Ruth King.

50 YEARS SEE MANY CHANGES IN FARM AREA

In the late '80s meat on the hoof was traveling between ranges of the southern part of Klamath County and Montague, California, 75 miles distant. Mail for residents scattered about foothills came to the little settlement of Gale. Malin was undreamed of. Canals had not as yet carried water to the rich agricultural area that is now known as the Merrill district. Sage brush stretched from the lake edge to and across the hills.

Ed Ball, Whitney Brothers, Nathan Merrill, and Gene Hammond were experimenting with patches of grain against the foothills and after good harvests were hauling their crops to Montague by way of the old Montague road now known as Main Street. Steve Stukel, Mike Hartery, Frank Sadacchio, Dan Colwell, Ed Ball and H. I. Anderson were in the cattle business and potato culture was unknown.

The trip south was a hard one on man and beast but crops must be marketed and grain must be milled. Tom Martin, then living in Klamath Falls, saw the need of his neighbors to the south and saw too the possibilities for business. The old mill, first building to be put up in the town of Merrill, still stands. Tom Martin was the miller but no records remain of early yields.

The town of Merrill was laid out by Nathan S. Merrill about 1890. Old records of the actual date have been lost. The post office of Gale was moved intact across country from its original position for the new townsite and Merrill began to grow.

Jim O'Farrell built a store on the present site of the Safeway

The 1960 Potato Festival queen and her court gather amid the realm of their kingdom. Shown, left to right, are Patricia Trulove, Chilquin; Sharon Baghoff, Tulelake; Queen Donna Lee Micka, Malin; Carol Merrilees, Merrill; Dana Reed, Henley, and Katherine Tafell, Bonanza.

store. Blacksmith Woodcock made horseshoes where Robert Walker now fills automobiles with gas and H. E. Momyer, father of Ida Momyer Odell, Klamath Falls, opened a general store in a tiny building where everything from liver pills to horse collars could be found. Louis Moore now occupies the last of the buildings left in Merrill that was hauled the three miles from Gale.

In 1896 George Offield, who has served the town of Merrill as mayor for 20 years, arrived to teach the younger generation at Gale and later at Merrill. Suitable school accommodations lacking, he helped to rebuild the old schoolhouse, long since torn down.

Still later, the town opera house went up, business buildings began to cluster along the main street and Merrill was well on the way to being the thriving town that it is today, located in the center of thousands of acres of the most productive farm land in Oregon.

With the country's diversified crops, proximity to market, fine soil and surplus of water, it is a magnet to those seeking an ideal homestead.

While hay and grain bring a neat revenue to the farmers of this section of the south end, it is largely acreages of Klamath Netted Gems that have brought returns great enough to put the Merrill district on the map as being one of the greatest potato producing areas of the numerous potato sections.

According to C. A. Henderson, Klamath County agricultural agent, 6,750 cars of tubers left Klamath County in 1936 or nearly one entire trainload of 30 cars per day during the months of September, October, November, and December. Ninety-five per cent of the crop goes to southern markets, through buyers who contact local growers.

Potatoes here are graded according to Oregon and Northern California United States grading requirements, are sacked, state and federal inspected, marked, loaded, 300 sacks to the car prior to October 1 or during the time that the skin is still thin and the potato may be easily bruised. After regular digging time 300 sacks are shipped to the car.

Refrigerator cars are heated in cold weather and loss en route is negligible. With few exceptions, according to Henderson, all potatoes leaving here have been pur-

chased for cash with few cars going on consignment. Consequently there is little or no flooding of the potato markets such as growers of the East and Middle West frequently experience.

Adequate storage is available on the tract to care for the entire crop grown here with between 30 and 40 new cellars being built this year, each cellar large

enough to accommodate approximately 8,000 sacks or a total of one-quarter million.

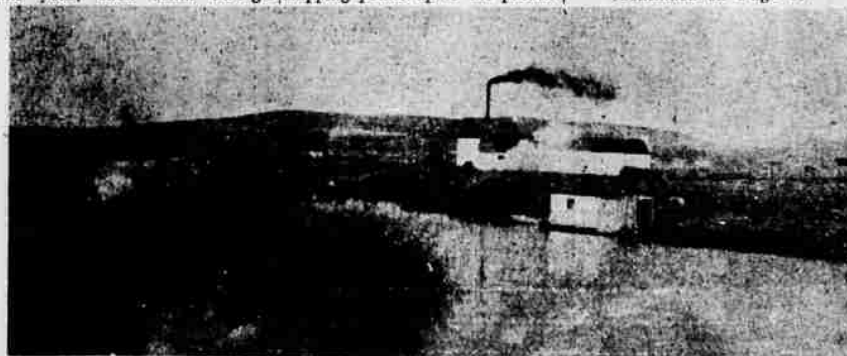
Approximately 18,000 acres were planted in the Basin this year with prospects for a fair crop that has improved over the past two weeks of good growing weather. Between four and five hundred cars have left the local shipping points up to the present

time. Digging will be in full swing by October 10.

Henderson stated that the national estimate is 403 million bushels for this crop against 329 million in 1936.

More certified seed was grown this year than in any past year with 540 acres passed. Little cer-

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GROWTH OF MERRILL is recorded in these three pictures. Upper photo shows an early day view of the community before trees began to grow, exact date unknown. Center picture was taken in 1909 and shows the old planing mill. Lower photo was taken in 1937.