The Homesteader

Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter – October 2017

HAUNT WALK RETURNS AT A NEW TIME
Mark Your Calendar for October 13 & 14

Get ready for the haunting to begin! The Deschutes Historical Museum’s Historical Haunts of Downtown Bend is returning this fall for more ghostly fun only this year we are starting early. Mark your calendar for Friday October 13 and Saturday, October 14 for family fun at its best!

Bring a flashlight, comfortable walking shoes and plenty of nerve as tour guides lead you along the streets of downtown Bend, sharing stories from the past mixed with some current paranormal.

Each evening twelve one-hour tours will be offered; the first tour leaving the museum at 4:00 p.m. The ticket price is $10 per person, museum members $5 per person. Museum admission is included with your tour price.

Visit deschuteshistory.org or follow our Facebook page for updates.
My cousins, Ron and Dale Hall grew up in Bend in the 1930s and 40s. Ron, who passed away in 2012, was the first person to ask me if I remembered the swimming pool that used to be near Pioneer Park. I had no idea what he was talking about. I thought he meant a swimming hole along the river. Recently, Dale brought up the subject of the pool and told me more about it. He said that he and his friend Lloyd Kimsey used to go there all the time and spend the whole day. That got me curious, so I walked along the river trail that borders Pioneer Park, and sure enough there is a plaque right where the pool was. The picture on the plaque shows a regular swimming pool, not just a swimming hole.

With the help of Tor Hanson at the Deschutes Historical Museum, I found quite a bit of information.

The pool was built in 1927 by the Kirtsis brothers, A.C. and Cyrus who were immigrants from Greece. Before the pool, they homesteaded east of town, and then A.C. (Angel) moved to Tumalo where he had a strawberry farm. He also raised lambs, and according to *The Bulletin*, he took the lambs to Portland and sold them for a “good price.” In early 1927, A.C. Kirtsis traded his Tumalo property to George Cooley for land in Bend.

From what I have read, Angel Kirtsis must have been a

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The following story, “Echoes from the Sage Brush Hills,” was discovered by Nate Pedersen, current board president with Deschutes County Historical Society (DCHS), in the archives of Pacific University in Forest Grove. The story, a reminiscence of homesteading life near Ashwood in the high desert of Oregon, was written by Lillian Chestnut, who arrived with her husband in 1913.

Chestnut later became a close friend of Klondike Kate Rockwell. Chestnut wrote her reminiscence of life in the high desert and submitted it for publication at Readers Digest magazine for their “True Stories” section. Unfortunately, the magazine rejected the story, so, as far as we are aware, DCHS has the honor of publishing for the first time. Chestnut later donated the story to Portland journalist and author Ellis Lucia, biographer of Klondike Kate, when he was working on his manuscript in the late 1950s. While Kate does not feature in the story, she would certainly recognize the life described here by her friend Lillian. (Kate homesteaded herself near Brothers, Oregon around the same time that Lillian homesteaded near Ashwood). Today, Ashwood, about 32 miles northeast of Madras, is considered a ghost town. We hope you enjoy Lillian’s story, which brings the empty region around Ashwood back to life.

Echoes from the Sage Brush Hills

My husband Joe, and I were married, very happily, one year and a half, when he got the idea to homestead in Eastern Oregon. At the time, we were living in Seattle, Washington. He left by train, where his ticket would take him to Eastern Oregon, near Madras. He met a gentleman on the train who was looking for a homestead also. They hired a team and hack, and after driving many hot miles each found a suitable piece of land. They quickly went to the nearest U.S. Land Office, and each filed on their claim. The aroma of the sage brush, and the open country, captivated his whole being.

Joe made arrangements with another homesteader to build a one room shack and barn. The barn was four times larger than the house. In a few weeks we were in Portland, Oregon, shopping around the livery stables, for a team. This was in the year of nineteen hundred and thirteen (1913). We purchased a team, bought a new wagon with a double

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box, a little bit more shopping, and we had the wagon box filled. A little wood cook stove, couple mattresses, a kerosene lamp, just what we had to have to get along with. My brother George came to Portland and accompanied us on this adventurous trip, which started on a beautiful warm June morning, when we boarded a little steam boat here in Portland, for the most beautiful trip, up the Columbia River, to The Dalles. Taking this part of the trip by boat, eliminated the “Old Moshier Hill” grade, pioneers will never forget that. In loading the team and wagon, the deck hands, unhitched the team, and the horses were taken off the boat at The Dalles, and the wagon taken off separately.

Neither Joe or my brother George had ever hitched up a team to a wagon. Some cow boys stood watching them, and laughing, finally the cow boy said, “Hi farmer, if you just switch those horses around, it will work better.” With red faces, they took his advice, and soon we were all perched up on the loaded wagon, leaving The Dalles, looking for a place to camp for the night, on the side of the hi-way. The first little hill we encountered, one of the horses began to heave. George said that old “Nag” was blown up, just to fool us. We stopped at the eight mile ranch, camped on side of the hi-way, the farmer there sold us some hay and eggs. The Indians kept riding by all night, on horseback, and would shoot a gun off, as they passed our camp. Joe and George, took turns, patrolling in front of our camp, with a gun on their shoulder. No one got any sleep that nite. We were on our way the next morning at break of day. Three terrified, would be farmers.

As we traveled along thru the sage brush hills, every one we contacted warned us of the rattlesnakes, mad coyotes, also told us that many prospective homesteaders, had perished, and load and all had gone over mountain sides. We saw many wrecked loads in the deep canyons, and knew many of these yarns were true.

We stopped at the little village of Bakeoven, at noon, where we bought eggs for fifteen cents a dozen. We rested our team and my brother said, “I bet the sun is hot enough to cook an egg.” It did just that.

We saw many an old deserted homestead shacks, as we drove along, mile after mile. We were young in heart, even the bleached bones of the wild horses and cattle, did not phase us.

We crossed the Deschutes River at Shears Bridge, on either
side was a treacherous mountain drive. Many times we thought we heard rattlers, but found out later, there is a weed, when dry, with just a little breeze, sounds exactly as a rattler.

One thing that intrigued us immensely, was the numerous “Quick Sand Spots,” not far off the hi-way, which was fenced securely, by barb wire. We would throw large boulders into the quick sand, and watch the rapidity of the suction, it was frightening.

On the sixth day of our trip, we drove into the little town of Ashwood, six miles from our homestead. Joe asked a man who was riding a horse, and he said he was going right by our place, and he would pilot us up there. How good that little shack looked to all of us, even if we have to sleep on the floor until our things came by rail, which was thirty miles away.

Such a view we had, standing in the door of our little shack, you could see Three Sisters, Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, Broken Top, all in the Cascade Range.

With our vitality, plus hard work, we soon had many scores of wheat, we were rewarded financially, and also had wonderful neighbors, tho miles apart.

We had to haul all of our water for the house, from a spring, a mile away. We had a water hole by the barn, for the stock, which was mostly seepage. One day an old hen hatched out some duck eggs, behold the whole flock of ducklings were down in this water hole. Joe grabbed a ladder and lowered it into the hole of water, and got them all out. We did not know little ducks like that could swim. In a few minutes they were all back in the water hole. It was then we realized the ducklings could not drown.

We had to drive thirty miles, to the timber, for lumber. Joe left early one morning, thinking he would be back by night, he did not get home so I tried milking the cow. Had never milked a cow in my life. Well I sat down on the stool and the first pull for milk, the cow kicked me thru the side of the barn, it did not hurt me, and from then on, I milked the cow standing up.

Our first trip to the grocery store, thirty miles away, was amusing. The grocer, his wife and four year old son, lived back of the store. As we walked into the store, we noticed the grocer’s little boy, standing by the egg case, he would pick up an egg, and shake it by his ear, he went thru this process, until he had three good eggs. He said his mama was going to make him a cake. However we did not buy any of those eggs that day.

One real hot summer day, I was out by the barn, I noticed our dog running in circles, I got up on top of the barn, the men folks were all away, I stayed there till Joe got home. Sure enough our little dog was mad, and had to be disposed of.

Life was varied, never dull. In the fall we would see great flocks of geese flying south. It was understood, if a flock flew overhead, when Joe was in the field working, I should run out with the shot gun, to him. There was our big flock of geese, I grabbed the shot gun, ran to the field, where Joe was ploughing with three horses. Joe dropped the lines, grabbed the gun and shot. We got no geese, but away the

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Echoes from the Sage Brush Hills...

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busy man during the rest of 1927. In April he purchased a tract of land next to where Pioneer Park is now located. His plan was to build a campground, cottages, a swimming pool, and a bath house. He offered to buy the city land that adjoined his, but this was bitterly opposed by local citizens who petitioned to keep the property for a park. The city council finally allowed him to lease the land for a year as a campground. Angel proceeded with his building plans, and by June he had five cottages ready, and by October, he had ten more. The Bend Auto Court complex he designed was located in the spot now owned by the Riverside Motel.

Meanwhile, work began on construction of the pool in 1927, but it wasn’t opened until July of 1928. Built next to the rock wall at the edge of the complex, it consisted of a 50 x 150 foot steel tank which is why the locals called it the swim tank instead of a pool. Barbara Buxton, longtime Bend resident, remembers swimming there, and she told me that you can still see the blackened rocks where they built bonfires next to the big boulders. The pool held 330,000 gallons of water that came directly from the Deschutes River and was cleaned twice a week. The used water drained from the other end of the pool. At first the water was not heated, but in later years, Kirtsis built a boiler to heat the water, fueled with sawdust from Bend sawmills. There was a chute up above the pool where the sawdust poured down into the boiler. Cousin Dale has a story about that chute. He said that one time when the tank

EDGAR ALLAN POE: CRIME WRITER?

Edgar Allan Poe, America’s master of the macabre and original literary bad boy was also a great innovator in the fields of science fiction and mystery writing. Never one to keep life and art separate, in 1842 Poe took it upon himself to investigate the brutal murder of a beautiful woman, an unsolved case that had outraged the public and baffled police.

In addition to offering up some of his better known, bone chilling tales and poems of horror and the supernatural, this year Poe will discuss his foray into real life criminal investigation and share his experiences with the dark side of American culture and American history.

This year’s event takes place Sunday, October 29 at Liberty, a new arts and culture performance space inside the Liberty Theater, 849 NW Wall Street. There will be showings at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., tickets are $20 per person. Tickets are limited, pick them up at the Deschutes Historical Museum or call us at 541.389.1813.

Correction:
We received an email from Owen Mitz who donated “green” products to the summer cookout. Unfortunately we managed to misspell his name in the article. It should be Mitz not Mintz. Our apologies!

Kirtsis Tank...
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Kirtsis claimed the pool was the largest outdoor pool in the state, possibly second to the one at Jantzen Beach in Portland. It was also noted to be one of the purest outdoor pools. An article in *The Bulletin* from August of 1929 reported that tests had been completed, and the Oregon State Board of Health gave it the highest rating of Class A. The cost for swimming there was ten cents a day, and you could purchase a season pass. Though it was built for the auto court, it was open to Bend residents. The shallow end of the pool was partitioned off for younger kids, and the deep end went to eight feet. At the deep end of the pool, there was a bath-house with dressing rooms, and on top of it was a deck with a diving board. Barbara Buxton told me that Kirtsis used to throw nickels into the deep end, and the older kids would dive down for them. (He sold candy at the check-in counter, so he usually got his money back.)

From the time the pool opened in 1928 until it closed during the war years, when I was born, it was a popular recreational spot. The other swimming pool in Bend was in the lower floor of what is now the Boys and Girls Club. At that time it was part of the high school gymnasium. The school board felt it was too expensive to keep it open in the summer for swim lessons, so the Red Cross began offering swim lessons at the Kirtsis pool. The swim team also practiced there and even held swim meets. During the Fourth of July celebrations, Kirtsis promoted a carnival at the pool, including fire-works across the river from it. In the winter of 1928-29 the pool was converted to an ice rink and the Bend hockey team was formed.

Searching for information about the pool and the auto court was an interesting experience. It led me to people who actually remember the Kirtsis brothers. Bob Wegener’s parents owned the Park Grocery across the street from Pioneer Park, and he told me that when he was ten years old, he worked at the auto court pulling weeds for Cyrus Kirtsis who had taken over ownership. He provided a great deal of information, and suggested that I call Frank Wilson who managed the Riverside Motel for forty-two years.

Frank provided the answer to my biggest question: Where was the pool exactly? Did it stick out into the river or what? Looking at the photo that is on the plaque, I could not envision where it had been. Frank’s answer was that it had been filled in, and four rental units were built on top of it. The pool ran parallel to the river.

He offered to show me where, and he allowed me to go down in the basement of one unit, which is actually the deep end of the pool. I was very excited, thinking that I would be able to touch that famous steel tank, but once we got down there, it pretty much looked like a basement with concrete walls. Frank pointed out that the floor was still the pool floor, and as we walked farther in, I could see that it began to slope up to where the rest of it had been filled in. Standing in what had actually been the deep end of that pool was a fitting end to my research, and I am grateful to everyone who gave me information. From my generation on, it has been a forgotten chapter in Bend history.

– Sue Fountain
ECHOES FROM THE SAGE BRUSH HILLS...
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Mark Your Calendars

OCTOBER

13-14  HISTORICAL HAUNTS OF DOWNTOWN BEND
For more information, please see page 1 in this month’s Homesteader.

29  AN EVENING WITH EDGAR ALLEN POE
For more information, please see page 6

Presented by Chelsea Rose, Historical Archaeologist.

McMenamins Old St. Francis
Father Luke Room, 7 p.m., doors at 5:30 p.m.
We are requiring reservations for the monthly History Pubs at McMenamins. Reservations can be made on the museum’s website, deschuteshistory.org or by calling 541.389.1813.

The one treacherous thing that happens in the Madras country, occasionally, is the water spout. You will see a dark funnel shaped cloud approaching, and as the water or cloudburst takes place, there is such a deafening roar of the raging water flowing down every canyon and ravine, taking everything in its path. A few years ago, in Hepner, Eastern Oregon, most of the town was lost by a flash flood.

Before ending this real true experience, I want to tell you of my worst experience while homesteading. My husband received word his sister had passed away, and to come immediately. Well we drove into the railroad depot, with the team, one of the horses, was just a young colt, had never been off the ranch before. Joe tied the team to a post right by the grocery store. The train pulled into the depot, giving a shrill whistle, Joe boarded the train, saw the team got scared, saw it break loose and running away.

The grocer happened to be standing in the door, when the train pulled out, taking my husband away, and he was quick enough to run and get into the wagon, from the back, and got hold of the reins, and stopped the run away team. The grocer loaded my supplies into the wagon, and I had to drive that team back thirty miles to the homestead, on my arrival home, I turned that colt to pasture, where it staid until Joe got back.

Summing up all the joys and sorrows, the happy days far outnumbered the dark days. Would we do the same thing again? Yes of course, with pleasure.

– True Life Story by Lillian Chesnut