



History Lover

Meet featured
volunteer Deb Zitella
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Camp Kid

Take a look at what
life was like on a CCC
Camp See p. 2



The Homesteader

Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter—March 2022

Celebrating Women's History Month *By Vanessa Ivey*

March brings new snow in the mountains, winter trails to be explored and thermoses filled with warm beverages to chase the chill away. March is also Women's History Month and what better way to celebrate than spotlighting one of Central Oregon's ambassadors of outdoor recreation, Virginia Meissner.

Mention her name and instantly someone relates their own "Virginia Moment," having been her student, volunteering alongside her, or encountering her on a trail in Central Oregon's back country. Virginia Meissner loved the outdoors and loved sharing her passion with others.

Born in 1925, Virginia Irene Tompkins grew up in Salem, Oregon, often spending her days with her dad fishing and exploring the countryside around their home. Out of these excursions with her father grew her love of the outdoors. George Tompkins had an interest in the natural history of Oregon, often invited to share his knowledge through speaking engagements at grange halls and country fairs where he would speak. Virginia often accompanied him, planting the importance of sharing what you love with others in his young daughter.

The passage of the 19th Amendment brought new rights, independence, and opportunities to the women of the 1920s and 30s. Around

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Virginia Meissner as a member of the Obsidians at Willamette Pass circa 1944

Memories of a Little Girl in a CCC Camp

by Suzanne Wenndorf, DHM Member and former volunteer

On Highway 20 East, near the town of Riley on the way to Burns, there was a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. The camp was called the Squaw Butte Experimental Station Range Unit (1935-1969) and was part of a larger federal program called the Northern Great Basin Experimental Range designated to aid in range management and livestock grazing. It was a cooperative endeavor between the University of Oregon and several Federal agencies. My father, Robert Byam, was a foreman for over 4 years there, starting in 1935 during the Great Depression. Though quite young at the time, I have many memories, plus written stories and pictures of our family's "camp adventure".

My mother, Helen Byam, and I were the only women in the camp so there wasn't any suitable housing for us at first. A rancher who lived about 10 miles away fixed up 2 sheep wagons next to their house for us to stay. The second year, they set up 2 big tents until a house could be built at the camp. My father would visit us when the job and weather permitted, but we were alone a lot of the time. The winters were very cold and my mother would often have to brush the ice out of my hair in the morning when I woke up. At night, coyotes would come close to



CCC Camp "Squaw Butte Experimental Station Range Unit"

the ranch and howl their spine-tingling cries. The horses would huddle near the tent when the weather was bad. Their company was not appreciated when they pushed against the tents, making them leak. I had many interesting times at the ranch. Most of the time I was alone with my dogs and cat. I had a sheep dog, Tippy, that would not let anyone near me when I was walking around the camp. In the winter, we hooked him up to my sled and he pulled me around in the snow. Even though there weren't other children to play with, I

had a busy and happy time in those days. One day, however, I did have quite a fright when I found a rattlesnake by the steps to our tent. My father was away at the camp and our gun was in the tent. My mother jumped over the snake to get to the gun. She shot that snake so many times we never did find the rattles, thereby depriving us of a trophy.

There was a pet deer that had the run of the camp. He liked to go to the barracks where the men would



Suzanne with her mother and her dog "Tippy"

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**Deschutes
Historical Museum**

129 NW Idaho Avenue
Bend, OR 97703
Open Tuesdays-Saturdays
10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
541.389.1813

Museum Staff:

Kelly Cannon-Miller, Executive Director
Vanessa Ivey, Museum Manager
Rebekah Averette, Collections Manager
Tracy Alexander, Membership Officer
Michelle Patrick, Museum Docent



2022 DCHS Board of Directors:

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Heidi Kennedy, and Susie Penhollow.

Complete minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors are on file with the Museum office.



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give him cigarettes that he chewed with relish. I wondered if anyone shot him in a future deer season what his meat would taste like. My mother did not like the deer because he would eat the clothes off the line when she hung out the washing. She did all the washing by hand using a washboard. Then she ironed the clothes with an iron heated on a stove.

The spring when I was 4 years old we finally moved into the new little house at the camp. It was a very modern upgrade for us with plumbing and a coal stove for heat. At this time, the main camp was relocated about 60 miles toward Bend. My father was left in charge of about 40 young men who stayed there for the next two years to complete the buildings, barn, roads, and 60 miles of fence lines. They were mostly from New York City and it must have been quite a change for them from crowded city streets to desert country with no stores or amusements for 40 miles. At first, we could hardly understand their accent and street slang. But once we understood they were mostly homesick boys in a strange land, mother would help the cooks make pies and doughnuts for them. They would, in turn, invite us for Sunday dinner at the barracks when there was ice cream delivered from Bend. My folks often had to doctor some of the men as the camp doctor was in the main camp miles away and winter travel was difficult.

On weekends, the young men looked forward to going into the town of Burns for a change of scenery and maybe a movie. They matched coins to see which of them would ride in our car. My father would load the rest of them into the back of a truck for a dusty ride to town.

When I was 5 years old, my parents decided it was time to move on and I needed to go to a proper school. Before we left, the men of the camp pitched in and presented me with a small necklace - a tiny diamond set in a gold cross. It is still a treasured keepsake of mine.

In 2018, my youngest son and I returned to see if there was anything left of the CCC days. It is still there remaining under the direction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Oregon State University but now called the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center - EOARC. I shared my memories and pictures of the early CCC days with the station crew working there. Much of the work done by the CCC boys from New York still stands, including the little white house built for me and my mother. It was a wonderful day of memories.



Suzanne and her father, Robert Byam



Suzanne revisiting the camp in 1981

Tributes

Ralph C. Curtis

Jean Rotter



CCC workers in trucks getting ready to head into Burns

VOLUNTEER CORNER

Deb

Zitella

By Rebekah Averette

This month's Volunteer Corner highlights the wonderful Deb Zitella. Although she has been volunteering at the museum for a relatively short time, Deb is already an integral and indispensable part of both the collections and front desk volunteer teams.

As a collections volunteer, Deb has spent many hours on a wide variety of projects, generally in the realm of cataloging and research. On Wednesday mornings, Deb can be found on the third floor cataloging artifacts, scanning photos, and working on a variety of other collections related projects. Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings, Deb works at the front desk greeting museum visitors, answering phone calls, and ringing up gift shop sales.

While many of our volunteers are longtime Central Oregon residents, Deb has only resided in Bend for a short time. She was born in Youngstown, Ohio, an old steel community in the northeast of the state. Her father was a steel worker until the mills closed in the 1970's. Her mother worked at a local department store. Deb spent most of her life in the suburbs of Youngstown, namely Austintown.

As an adult, Deb began a career in education, working for many years as both a high school reading teacher and a kindergarten teacher, and later as 4-6th grade TAG (talented and gifted) teacher. She eventually left to earn an administrative license and held a variety of positions, including principal, curriculum specialist, "gifted" coordinator, and literacy supervisor for second language programs.

Deb also raised two children, Danny and Leslie, and is now a grandmother of six. Leslie resides in Cleveland. Danny and his wife are doctors in Bend, OR, which is what brought Deb to this side of the country.

If she could live life over again, Deb says she would have been a history teacher, so volunteering at the Deschutes Historical Society is a natural fit for her. In Ohio she was a board member at the Austintown Historical Society. She also volunteered there, leading tours and planning fundraising events, such as a yearly 4th of July celebration and "Ox Roasts". She now lends her planning expertise to DCHS as a member of the Antiques Fair planning committee.

Living in Oregon has proved a positive experience for Deb; she says that living in Oregon has given her a whole new perspective. She loves the "pioneer" feel of Central Oregon, and has enjoyed learning about Bend and its history. Deb is very active, spending copious amounts of time walking the area trails and reading about local history. She has also loved meeting other volunteers and feels that a whole new world has opened up to her. The Deschutes Historical Society is extremely lucky to have Deb on board as a new member of our volunteer family!



Deb with her daughter Leslie



Continued from P. 1— Virginia Meissner

this time, the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A) started the Girls Reserve for girls between the ages of 12-18. Virginia joined as soon as she was old enough. As a teenager, she became an active member. Emphasizing character building through community service, the Girls Reserve taught young women to become responsible, caring members of society. Virginia took this to heart, budding into the leader she would be through the rest of her life.

In 1943, the United States was at war when Virginia began her coed years at the University of Oregon. A student of arts, Virginia continued to be active in the Girl Reserves as a mentor, joined the Red Cross, and became a member of the Obsidians, a mountaineering club similar to Bend's Skyliners. As a member, Virginia climbed all the major peaks in Oregon and became an avid skier, competing in both alpine and cross-country ski races at Willamette Pass ski area.

After graduating from U of O, Virginia continued her time at Willamette Pass both as a skier and on ski patrol. Here she meet Jack Meissner, famous for his 1948 300-mile trek from Mt. Hood to Crater Lake. They married in 1949.



Capital Journal
January 28, 1949

"The wedding has promised to keep so many skiers in Eugene that the Santiam bus has been cancelled for this Sunday. Jack and Virginia will honeymoon at Anthony Lakes, and will attend Olaf Rodegard's G.I. ski school, seeking certification as ski instructors, then will return to Cascade Summit to make their home and teach in the ski school at Willamette."

~The Eugene Guard January 15, 1949.

For many years, Virginia and Jack taught skiing during the winters, first at Willamette Pass and later at Mt.

Bachelor. During the summers, they lived at Odell Lake, all the while raising a young family- Julie, Jane, and Ernest. Between the ski school and raising a family, Virginia lifeguarded for the Red Cross's free swimming lessons at Crescent Lake. She accompanied young women on mountaineering weekends during her 35 years with the Girl Scouts as troop leader and



Herald and News Klamath Falls Sept 11, 1960

advisor, passing her knowledge and skills on to others, as her father had done with her.

Virginia preferred cross-country skiing and explored much of the backcountry around Mt. Bachelor. In 1965, when approached by Central Oregon Community College to teach cross-country classes, it was to those locations she took her students.

Envisioning a broader trail system everyone could use, she reached out to the Forest Service. Under her guidance, the best trails were cleared and marked. Then with support from her students both past and present, Virginia contacted the Oregon Nordic Club in Portland to propose the formation of a new chapter, the Central Oregon Nordic Club. Today Central Oregon Nordic Club continues to develop and care for the trails Virginia proposed.

Sadly, Virginia never saw her vision come to fruition. During the early development of the sno-park, Virginia passed away. A year after her death in 1989, the Forest Service, with permission from the family, named the park [Virginia Meissner Sno-Park](#), in her honor.

Through her writings, lessons, and friendships she encouraged people to explore the world around them and be the best they could be. The ripples she made are still touching people, a legacy that lives on.



“Did You Know?” Videos for Elementary School Teachers



Working with local teachers to get local history back in the classroom, Museum Manager Vanessa Ivey recently did a video presentation with High Lakes Elementary School’s first graders, giving students a streaming version of her local history talk. In addition, Vanessa created three short videos titled “Did You Know? Show and Tell from The Deschutes Historical Museum’s Archives” which we have uploaded as one video to the Museum’s YouTube and Vimeo channels. They are available to all elementary teachers and homeschoolers via the Museum’s Vimeo channel. Please contact Vanessa at the museum if you have a school group that you would like to bring to the museum this spring. The video is available here: <https://vimeo.com/682030939>

Save the Date

May is **National Heritage Month**, and we are celebrating with a month-long virtual “Oregon Archaeology Roadshow,” stay tuned for more details.

July 4 The **July 4th Open House** is back! Join us for icecream on the lawn, and share the history of Deschutes County with the whole family for free!

August 20 The **First Annual Antiques Fair** at the Deschutes Historical Museum! There will be vendors from around the region, food trucks, and a festive atmosphere.

Deschutes Historical Museum Annual Meeting of the Membership Update

After two years of COVID-19 and multiple ups and downs for masking, gathering sizes, etc. it won’t come as a shock to our members that planning for the annual meeting of the membership, usually held in February, coincided with the Omicron surge of January. Once again, the DCHS board put safety first and decided to not hold an in person membership gathering and help stop the surge. Instead, watch your mail boxes for another written Annual Report of the Membership this March. As we go to press, the news of mask mandates lifting in March gives us hope for a summer time membership gathering when we can catch up in person on two years of history in the making.