



The Incredible O’Kane

A DHM volunteer digs deep for the truth

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History in the Making

Proactively collecting as history is being made

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The Homesteader

Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter—JANUARY 2024

Reid School Take Two: Celebrating 75 Years of J. Alton Thompson School

By Vanessa Ivey

Seventy-five years ago, on January 3, 1949, “New” Reid School opened its doors to a new era of education in Bend. Later renamed J. Alton Thompson School, the school today is known as Amity Creek Magnet School and is located across the street from the original Reid School, home to the Deschutes Historical Museum.

By 1948, the student population was on the rise across the county, with a foreseeable "boom" in new students. The Second World War had ended three years prior and cities like Bend and Redmond were considering new construction to keep classroom crowding to a minimum.

In January 1948, the school district proposed a \$600,000 school bond to the people of Bend for the construction of a new gymnasium for Kenwood school, a new music department for the high school, and a new elementary school. The bond did not pass, however, and in the spring a direct tax levy alternative was approved for a budget of \$272,558, allowing the new Kenwood gym and a new elementary school to be built.

The site selected for the new school was across the street from Reid School, off Wall Street, on the rear side of Trinity Episcopal Church. Thirteen structures, both homes and businesses, were relocated before construction could begin.

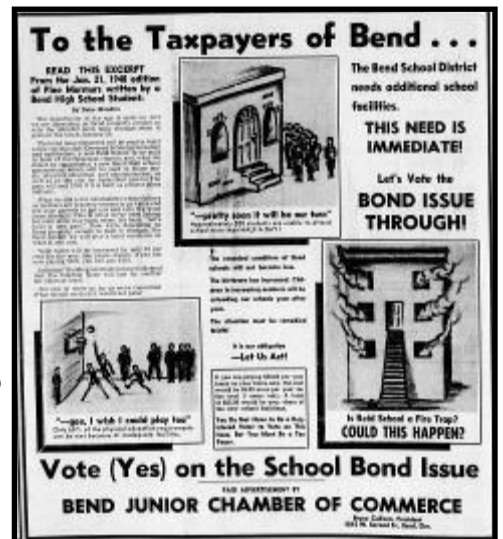
With a completion date set for November 15, the building’s foundation spread across an entire neighborhood block and the walls of pumice and cement finished with stucco quickly went up. The six-room school, with plans for another additional six rooms to be added later, included an auditorium, gymnasium, and cafeteria.

The Bend Bulletin reported, "Use of the new structure will make it possible to remove all students from the third story of the old Reid school and two grades from the second floor. However, even with the new building in use, five rooms will still be taught in the old building."

Second grade teacher, Miss Jean Webster, was one of seven elementary teachers from Reid School who made the move across the street to the new facility. Albert Nelson, principal of the



Students enter “New Reid School” on its first day. The Bend Bulletin January 3, 1949



Ad in The Bend Bulletin January 24, 1948, promoting school bond

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Hugh O’Kane: The Man of Many Myths

By Brad Lemmon



The O’Kane building (right) and entrance (left)

I’ve always admired the beautiful, historic O’Kane Building on the corner of Bond Street and Oregon Avenue in downtown Bend. But, as of Spring 2023, I knew very little about the man behind it, Hugh O’Kane. One day, while I was at the Deschutes Historical Museum, Kelly Cannon-Miller mentioned a mural of Hugh’s exploits that is painted on a wall inside the Hugh O’Kane’s Bar at McMenamin’s Old Saint Francis School Hotel in Bend. So, I moseyed over there and took some photos.



The list was so incredible, I had to investigate. Over a few months of research, I found approximately 85 newspaper articles, three census records, Hugh’s will and probate records from Multnomah County (78 pages!), wife Helen’s probate records from Deschutes County (~50 pages, she died intestate), 15 property records, a death certificate, a gravestone, and plenty of photos. The vast majority of the documents I found were for events that occurred in the United States in 1884 or later.



Hugh O’Kane lived from about 1855 to 1930 (1904 to 1929 in Bend). As far as I have found, there have been two “biographies” published for Hugh. The first was a *The Bend Bulletin* article from November 22, 1916 written when the O’Kane Building was completed. The second was a *Portland Morning Oregonian* obituary from February 18, 1930 (*The Bend Bulletin* also ran an obituary, but it was mostly a repeat of their 1916 article). It appears that nearly everything that has been written about Hugh O’Kane since 1930 is a repeat of things that were in those two “biographies.” The *Morning Oregonian* article was the main source for the McMenamin’s mural. There were very few “incredible exploits” listed in the 1916 *Bend Bulletin* article. The lists below summarize the evidence I did or didn’t find. I chose not to include footnotes for each item in this article, but a paper printout of many of

“The Amazing Life of Hugh O’Kane” mural in Hugh O’Kane’s Bar at the McMenamins Old St. Francis School

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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, Visitor Services



2024 DCHS Board of Directors:

Adrian Bennett, President
Jane Williamson, Vice President

Board Members:

Mike Berry, Paul Claeysens, Tony DeBone,
Terry Foley, Greg Fulton, Karen Green,
Heidi Kennedy, Erik King, Susie Penhollow, and Liz Rink.



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



www.deschuteshistory.org
info@deschuteshistory.org

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the documents can be found at DHM in the Hugh O’Kane “family file.”

Archived evidence exists that verifies:

- Born and baptized in County Antrim, Ireland
- Boxed, sprinted
- Owned a tailor shop in Phillipsburg, Montana in 1889
- Disappeared from his Phillipsburg tailor shop in 1891 while owing hundreds of dollars; also stole \$125 from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows there
- Bought property in Grangeville, Idaho and opened a tailor shop in 1896
- Bought one-third-interest in a quartz claim in Idaho in 1899, but forfeited the claim in 1905 after not contributing to its development along with his partners
- Lived in Grangeville, Idaho in 1900, tailor
- Bred and trained horses in Grangeville, Idaho, 1902-1904
- Supplied entire town of Bend with ice from Arnold Cave, 1904
- Opened Bend Hotel/Saloon in 1905, it burned
- Rebuilt Bend Hotel, it burned in 1915
- Built current O’Kane Building in 1916
- Invested in the Tex-Ore Gas and Oil Company, 1927
- His will suggested that \$2500 of his estate be given to the Bend Roman Catholic Church (probably never happened, because the O’Kane Building appeared to be highly mortgaged at the time of Hugh’s death)

I have found no archived evidence for these: (*) items that only appeared in the *Morning Oregonian* obituary)**

- Ran away from Ireland to London
- Stowed away on a ship from Liverpool to New York City
- Visited London and Paris as a tailor in the 1870s
- Knew Doc Holliday, Calamity Jane, Quantrill, Sitting Bull, Gall
- Packed equipment for Generals Reno and Custer
- Managed famous wrestler Tom Cannon in Europe
- Managed famous sprinters Ed Skinner and Marley Kettleman in Australia
- Visited the West Coast of Africa ***
- Boxed in Cape Town South Africa ***
- Smuggled arms into Cuba ***
- Held prisoner in Moro Castle, Cuba ***
- Mined gold in the Black Hills – amassed and lost \$50,000 ***

- Wrestled in Turkey ***
- Joined camel caravan in Iran ***
- Operated a donkey train in Egypt ***
- Wrestled with British troops in Gibraltar ***
- Sold water in Chile ***
- Trained 1889 Kentucky Derby winning horse Spokane ***

The *Morning Oregonian* obituary contained this clip:

So many and remarkable were the experiences of Hugh O’Kane in the days when the west was wild and in distant places, that many doubted them, but he was always prepared to give dates and locations and prove his statements. From his store of

My hypothesis is that Hugh liked to tell “tall-tales,” and that he chose familiar subjects so as to increase his credibility (e.g. he trained horses, but he almost certainly didn’t train a Kentucky Derby winner). I also find it telling that none of the most “incredible exploits” were published in the 1916 and 1930 *Bend Bulletin* articles. Maybe George Putnam and Robert Sawyer had a higher standard of evidence than the publisher of the *Morning Oregonian*. That being said, lack of documentation for things that may have happened in the 1860s and 1870s isn’t proof that they didn’t occur. I looked in the National Archives, via their on-line search tool, for items related to Generals Reno and Custer, but didn’t find anything. I suspect only a small percentage of the National Archives holdings are digitized and indexed. Other than Irish birth and baptism records, I didn’t attempt to find any documents outside of the United States.

To end on a positive note, based on various articles and a few interviews I did, it is likely that Hugh O’Kane helped get the first St Charles Hospital built (1917), helped get St Francis Church built (1920), and that he was in the audience supporting Father Luke when he took on the KKK in the Liberty Theater (1922) (see Tor Hanson’s May 2017 *Homesteader* article, available at the Deschutes Historical Museum).



Hugh O’Kane in the lobby of his hotel, circa 1912

DCHS NEWS: Proactive Collecting

To be proactive is to act in anticipation of future needs or changes. Although the museum houses tens of thousands of artifacts, both physical and digital, we don't always recognize where the "holes" in our collection are until we are trying to put together an exhibit or research a specific topic.

DCHS is the keeper of the stories of our county, and that story is being told every day. Over the last few years, we have, on occasion, chosen to take a proactive approach to collecting and preserving the history of Deschutes County as it is happening. For instance, during the pandemic, we proactively collected photographs of the county during lockdown, graduation yard signs, and protective masks created by local businesses. We have also acquired ephemera from the Bend Blockbuster store, recognizing that they represent our own unique cultural phenomenon. While these items might not seem significant now, in fifty years they will help provide context and substance to the story of Deschutes County in the early 2020's.

While we still acquire the bulk of our collection from community members who have thoughtfully preserved and donated artifacts encapsulating local history, we do actively look to acquire images or pieces that fill gaps in our collection.

Outdoor recreation, whether summer and winter, is an important part of our regional culture, economy, and history. Artifacts representing winter sports, Skyliner's Ski Club, Mt. Bachelor, Hoodoo, and other local recreation areas, help us tell that story. People wouldn't often consider an item less than ten or even twenty years old an "artifact", but these objects represent the history we are living in and making right now. We have found that while we have many photographs, paper ephemera, and ski gear that is over fifty years old, we don't have an abundance of artifacts that represent more recent years. Last year, we were thrilled to acquire a Mt. Bachelor ski patrol vest worn in the 1990s. Last month we welcomed a blue Mammut puffer jacket featuring a Mt. Bachelor logo and a chest pocket for a pass or badge. At the same time, we acquired an awesome Hoodoo hoodie.

We don't know the direct provenance or source of the jacket and hoodie, so we will do some sleuthing to find out when they were manufactured and sold. We are always happy to have some of our "in-the-know" readership help us out with some of that information. Have something stashed in your closets or garages? Reach out to us!



Continued from P. 1— "New Reid School"

"original" Reid School, now had a second Reid School to watch over.

The transition was completed over Christmas vacation. When it officially opened its doors to 180 students on January 3, 1949, like its predecessor Reid School, New Reid School was considered "Bend's finest school building." It had spacious halls, large, well-ventilated rooms, and modern lighting. In fact, the school board originally planned to have incandescent lamps, but changed their mind and went instead with new technology: modern slim-line fluorescent lighting.



J. Alton Thompson, Deschutes county superintendent

The only thing that remained was naming the school. New Reid School had always been a temporary place-holder for the project. What to call this modern education building? On August 9, 1949, the school became known as J. Alton Thompson School by a unanimous vote of the school board.

Two days earlier, Joseph Alton Thompson passed away at age 83. A teacher in both the communities of Tumalo and Redmond during the early 1900s, Thompson was appointed county superintendent in 1916, the year Deschutes County was created, and was later made Dean of Superintendents in Oregon. Retiring in 1947 he continued to assist the school district whenever possible. He would be missed but his legacy would live on.

Eventually considered rather out of date but still serviceable, the original Reid School would be available for overflow enrollment until it became evident that there would be no further need for its reserve classroom space. But the future of Reid School is a story for another day.



The Bend Bulletin October 28, 1948



Current day Amity Creek Magnet School

Thanks to the generosity of our members and community, we have almost reached our goal for Annual Giving. Once again we are overwhelmed by the support for our mission to preserve, promote and celebrate our local history. On behalf of the staff, volunteers, and board of directors of the Deschutes County Historical Society, Thank You!

Patti Adair	Bob and Fran Greenlee	Anonymous
Janet and John Alexander	Patrick Griffiths	Linda and Philip Meurer
Susan Amacher	Maggie and Tom Gunn	Kathryn Miller
Bette Andrew	Dennis Hanson	Anonymous
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Richard and Christine Frey	Derek and Jane Loeb	Nanda Webb
Kim Gammond	Kae Loverink	Sally J Wilson
Nunzie Gould and Jim Guild	Gayle Lowe	Evelyn Yaw
Karen Green	Michael Maier	Andrea Zell
	Elouise and Charles Mattox	

List of Annual Giving Campaign donors as of December 28, 2023



Your charitable donation goes even farther with the Cultural Tax Credit!

When you donate to any arts, heritage or humanities nonprofits in Oregon this year, you are eligible to direct a greater portion of your taxes—taxes you're going to pay anyway— to support cultural projects in the state with the Cultural Tax Credit. Here is how it works:

1. Total all charitable donations to eligible nonprofits throughout the year (this includes DCHS)
2. Match that amount with a gift to the Cultural Trust online or by mail by December 31
3. On your State Tax Form, report your donation to the Oregon Cultural Trust. You'll get 100% of it back! (*limits apply*)

Visit culturaltrust.org for more information

Memorials

Maxine Michie
Robin Lovato

Tributes

Ralph C. Curtis
Jean Rotter

Marie-Louise Sandine
Ken Sandine

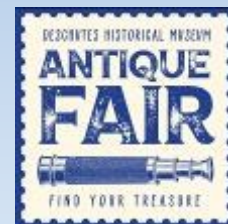
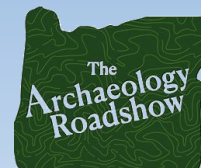
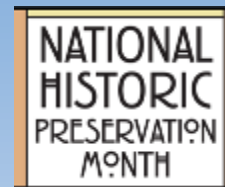
Marsha Stout
Sally Wilson

Deschutes Historical Museum

Put Some History in Your Future!

2024 is shaping up to be full of fun events, exciting exhibits, and opportunities to explore the history of Deschutes County. Look for details about these events and more in your Homesteader newsletter throughout the year!

February 24	Deschutes County Historical Society Members' Luncheon
May	Historic Preservation Month
May 4	"A Novel Idea Celebration" exhibit opening
May 18	Oregon Archaeology Roadshow
June 1	International Gaming Day Event
June 19	Juneteenth Free Day
June 23	Volunteer Picnic
July 4	4th of July Free Day
August 10	Antique Fair
August 30-31	The Little Woody
September 20	Festival of Cars
October 11-12	Historical Haunts of Downtown Bend
November 8-9	Annual Chili Feed & Raffle



deschuteshistory.org

Mark Your Calendars

JANUARY

1 DESCHUTES HISTORICAL MUSEUM CLOSED FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY

SAVE THE DATE FOR FEBRUARY:

FEBRUARY 24: ANNUAL MEMBERS' LUNCHEON

