



100 Years of Bend Water

Read about Bend's Wet and Wild water history.

See page 2

Catch the Fever

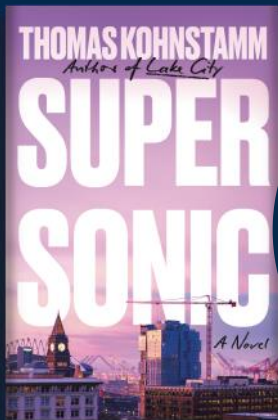
The April History Pub revisits gold mining in Oregon.

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The Homesteader

Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter—APRIL 2026



April 11– June 13, 2026

This year's Novel Idea: Read/Create exhibit features artwork inspired by the 2026 titles *Super Sonic* by Thomas Kohnstamm and the youth edition, *Hope in The Valley* by Mitali Perkins.

Super Sonic launches readers into a kaleidoscopic tale of the generations of interrelated families who breathed life into a small, hilltop community near Seattle. The story cuts in time from the arrival of white settlers' ships to the last indigenous landowner fighting to hold on to scraps of his ancestral home. It interweaves an opioid-addicted nineteenth-century con man-cum-civic booster, a disgraced Navy seaman building an airplane that travels faster than sound, a stay-at-home dad hustling to open the city's first legal weed shop, and a Japanese internment survivor.

Hope in The Valley follows twelve-year-old Indian-American Pandita Paul, who doesn't like change. She's not ready to start middle school and leave the comforts of childhood behind. Most of all, Pandita doesn't want to feel like she's leaving her mother, who died a few years ago, behind. Pandita is planning to spend most of her summer break reading in her favorite place, the abandoned but majestic mansion across the street. When the town announces that the old home will be bulldozed in favor of new, maybe affordable, housing, Pandita must find her voice and the strength to move on in order to give her community hope.



A Century of Bend Water

How a 1920s water crisis reshaped Bend's future and led to a resilient, publicly owned system

By Julie Lowy



Bridge Creek Water Intake, ca 1945

Bend's water system didn't become a cornerstone of the City of Bend by accident. It became one through a deliberate shift from private ownership to public stewardship 100 years ago. Over the decades since, the community built a dual source network designed for reliability, resilience and the shared responsibility of managing a vital resource.

Up until 1926, the water supply for the burgeoning community of Bend came directly from the Deschutes River via ditches or vessels filled on the riverbank and conveyed to residents. Early histories document water delivery by horse-drawn wagon for 25 cents per barrel. Lace Reed, Barney Lewis and Lucky Baldwin were all involved in such an enterprise.

In 1905, the Bend Water, Light & Power Company and John Steidl built and extended a pipe system to supply residents with water for domestic purposes and fire protection. The company — the same one that built the dam that created Mirror Pond and supplied Bend with electricity — operated the water system as a private utility for nearly 20 years.

The big 'stink'

But in the early 1920s, the residents of Bend discovered that the lifeblood of their High Desert community had curdled — the water flowing from the Deschutes River had become a literal "stink," according to newspapers at the time.

In 1922, dams were built at Crane Prairie and at Crescent Lake in the

Upper Deschutes. The resulting reservoirs flooded many thousands of acres of wooded and meadow land. Under the hot summer sun, the Upper Deschutes became a breeding ground for massive algae blooms, which tainted the water all the way to Bend with an unpleasant taste and smell.

After an investigation by the State Board of Health, the Deschutes River water was condemned, according to a 1924 civil engineer's report.

The impact on public trust was visceral. Many residents started making daily trips west of town on Shevlin Park Road to a well that produced pure water, longtime water system superintendent Percy Drost told a Bend Bulletin reporter in 1972. Drost recalled a constant "cloud of dust" on the road as citizens hauled milk cans, jars and buckets in a desperate pilgrimage for drinkable water.

Bend Water, Light and Power Company, attempted to manage the crisis with a \$100,000 filtering plant, but the odor remained.

1924 Election

The water crisis ignited a fierce media war in Bend over a singular issue: should the City of Bend buy the water system and take over its management

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Lace Reed dipping water from the Deschutes River (later the location of Pioneer Park), adding to the barrel on his water wagon.

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

www.deschuteshistory.org
info@deschuteshistory.org

Museum Staff:

Kelly Cannon-Miller, Executive Director
Vanessa Ivey, Museum Manager
Rebekah Averette-Zaback, Collections Manager
Donna Burklo, Development Director
Tracy Alexander, Membership Officer
Rashelle Maplethorpe, Support Staff



2026 DCHS Board of Directors:

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Karen Green, Vice President
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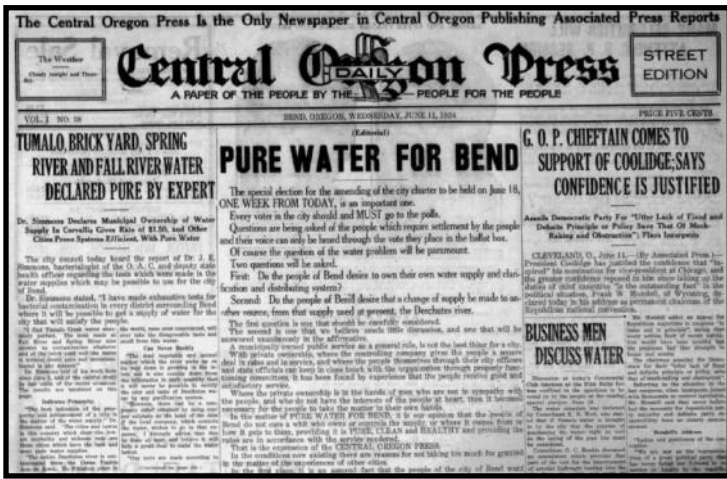
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Tony DeBone, Greg Fulton,
Brad Lemmon, Julie Lowy,
Liz Rink, Glenn Voelz,
Deb Zitella



Complete minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors are on file with the Museum office.
Tax ID# 51-0186079

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Central Oregon Press, June 11, 1924

with a new water source?

On one side stood Robert W. Sawyer, the editor of *The Bulletin*. Sawyer's position was ethically fraught; he was simultaneously a director of Bend Water, Light & Power, the company he was supposed to be covering. *The Bend Bulletin* ran "smaller, less conspicuous" reports on the water quality issues, attempting to downplay the crisis to protect the company's private interests.

Meanwhile the rival *Central Oregon Press* championed municipal ownership, launching an aggressive campaign that labeled Sawyer's obfuscation as "clear as mud," historical reports show. This wasn't just a disagreement over pipes; it was a battle over whether a vital resource should be a private profit center or a public right.

The tension culminated in the landmark election of June 28, 1924. The results revealed a public that had reached its limit. Four-fifths of the town's voters turned out, delivering an overwhelming mandate for change. The proposition for the City to purchase the system passed 1,362 to 172, while the proposal to change the water source saw an even more staggering margin of 1,468 to 84.

The City sought a report on alternative water sources and weighed options including Green Lakes, Fall River, Spring River and Tumalo Creek. Ultimately, Tumalo Creek's waters were the most efficient to convey to Bend — located only 10 miles away and 1,160 feet in elevation higher than Bend, the source water could be distributed using a gravity system, which cost less than other alternatives.

Bend was officially taking its water security into its own hands.

Early Infrastructure

When the City finally took over operations in 1926, the strategic focus shifted to long-term civic sustainability. However, the system the City inherited was a crumbling, neglected patchwork. A 1924 appraisal by Stevens & Koon

Consulting Engineers revealed a staggering "regression of service." Although the population more than doubled over the previous decade, the City was actually "better served in 1914 than in 1924."

The financial terms were clear: \$15,000 for the water rights to Tumalo Creek and \$64,195 for the physical assets of the Bend Water, Light and Power Company. What the City bought was a logistical mess:

Total infrastructure: Roughly 34 miles of pipe.

Wire-wound wood pipe: 100,858 feet, accounting for 55.9% of the entire system

Cheaply built expansions: Early water system expansion was heavily influenced by real estate speculation. Developers extended cheaply built, undersized water lines into new areas primarily to boost land sales, not to ensure reliable service, according to engineers. Although these lines weren't initially part of the Water Company system, they were eventually absorbed into it, compounding infrastructure problems.

The City moved quickly to abandon the river source that had caused the 1924 "stink." In 1926, the Bend Municipal Watershed was established, securing the pristine mountain waters of Bridge Creek, a tributary to Tumalo Creek, as the City's new water source. This protected watershed is still the backbone of the City's water services.

Evolution of the Modern System: Surface and Groundwater

Today, Bend operates a sophisticated dual-source system that balances environmental stewardship with the necessity of a backup for a growing population. But it wasn't until 1972 that the City tapped into the Deschutes Regional Aquifer.

Surface water: This remains the majority of Bend's supply, providing roughly 60% of the City's water. This water from Prowell Springs (a previously unnamed spring renamed in 2020 in honor of longtime Bend water supervisor Roger Prowell) and Bridge Creek is prized for its gravity-fed delivery, which requires less energy than pumping groundwater, according to City staff. Modern infrastructure, such as the Heidi Lansdowne Water Intake Facility, ensures this mountain source remains the primary driver of the system.

A second pipeline was completed in 1957 to run parallel to the 1926 pipeline, increasing capacity of the water delivered to Bend. The entire 10-mile pipeline was replaced in 2014-15, when the Outback Water Filtration Facility was built, adding membrane filtration to the City's water system for the first time to meet a federal requirement to treat water for cryptosporidium.

After filtration, the source water is disinfected with a small

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Section of wooden water line and coupling wrapped in metal wire from Bend City Water, George A. Jones ranch, later owned by Dean Hollinshead. DCHS collection # 1980.050.0027.029



Lobby Improvements are Underway!

Last month the museum closed for a week in order to begin a multi-phase project to refresh our interior visitor spaces. It's been 25+ years since a capital campaign renovated the museum, a project that expanded the lobby and added the elevator among many other improvements. With a fresh coat of paint, museum staff are now working on updating orientation and exhibit signage for installation this summer.

This fall, painting will continue on the second floor and mezzanine spaces with an eye on early next year to repaint the gallery rooms. A huge thank you to the Deschutes Cultural Coalition, the T.J. Bowerman Educational Fund, and the Roundhouse Foundation for generously supporting this work.

An especially big thanks to Webfoot Home Improvements for an exceptional job taking care of our historic building and its contents while also providing a substantial discount.



Who Are Those Mystery Men?

Author and historian Tor Hanson is working on a new book, and needs your help identifying the two men in the center of this photo.

The known figures are Phil Peoples on the far left and Gene Gillis on the far right.

Take a good look at the two gents holding trophies. Do they look familiar to you?

If you think you recognize the two central figures, please email us at:

info@deschuteshistory.org

Thank you for your help!

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amount of chlorine. The groundwater supply is also disinfected using a small amount of chlorine at each of eight wellfield sites.

Groundwater (Deschutes Regional Aquifer): To meet peak summer irrigation demands and provide resilience, the City utilizes 20 wells tapping deep into the Deschutes Regional Aquifer, which supply the remaining 40 percent of water.

Bend provides water to roughly 75% of the city. Private water companies account for the rest.

The Future of Bend’s Water: Planning and Conservation

A century after the algae bloom of 1924, the challenges have shifted toward climate change, the pressures of urban growth and protecting water quality.

Despite the service area population swelling to 79,000, water conservation efforts have been remarkably successful: Gallons used per capita per day have dropped from 196 in 2013 to 161 in 2025, according to City records.

The City has a goal to reduce water use community-wide by 7.9 billion gallons by 2040 and reduce per capita water use by 17 gallons per day.

The City of Bend’s “One Water” approach looks at all parts of the water system — drinking water, wastewater, stormwater and natural waterways — as connected, rather than managing each one separately. This approach is meant to help the City plan more efficiently by coordinating projects, reducing water use where possible and protecting water sources.

Next for Bend is a series of proposed changes that aim to address capacity limits and projected growth over the coming decades. The proposed expansion of the Outback Water Filtration Facility would add a pretreatment system to address sediment, new reservoirs and groundwater wells, enhanced site security to meet federal requirements, and in-conduit hydropower equipment to offset energy use. Plans also include a wildfire water fill station intended to support emergency response. City officials say the proposed improvements are intended to support drinking water reliability, system maintenance, and emergency preparedness over the next 20 years and beyond.



Prowell Springs, deep in the Deschutes National Forest, flows into Bridge Creek above the City of Bend’s water intake. (City of Bend photo)



If you would like to learn more about the history of water use in Deschutes County, join us at the 2026 **Oregon Archaeology Road Show on June 6, 2026 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** Julie Lowy will be on hand to share more about the City of Bend’s 100 years of water, as well as archaeologist Paul Claeysens, Central Oregon Irrigation District retiree Lisa Lee, DCHS board member Brad Lemmon, and DCHS executive director Kelly Cannon-Miller. The event is free and family friendly, and will feature exhibits by tribal, governmental, and educational partners from around the state to discuss the archaeology of fire and water.



Map and Document of the Quarter

The next time you visit the Deschutes Historical Museum, carve out some time to explore the Map and Document of The Quarter. Volunteer researcher and board member, Brad Lemmon, encounters many interesting maps and documents while working in the DHM archive. “As I spend more and more time at the museum, I become aware of the amount of interesting things that are in the drawers and boxes. I want people to see more of those things than they get to see in the permanent or rotating exhibits.”

The April-June Map of the Quarter shows Oregon roads in 1935. One of the most interesting things it depicts is the current roads that didn’t exist then or that were still dirt.

The document of the quarter is the basketball section of the 1955-1956 Central Oregon College yearbook. Come in and see which friend of the museum is prominently featured.



Remembering Harriet Langmas

March 21, 1932-February 19, 2026

The community of Deschutes County recently lost a truly remarkable woman. Harriet Langmas was a long-time member, volunteer, and friend to the Deschutes County Historical Society.

Harriet was born in Portland, Oregon, where she spent her early days with piano lessons, picking strawberries, and sewing. After graduating from the University of Oregon, she and her husband Samuel Langmas moved to Bend. She taught at the grade, high school and college levels. After she and Sam adopted their children Susan and David, Harriet began teaching piano and started a fashion business.

Harriet appeared on *What's My Line* ([December 7, 1972](#)), where her "secret" was that she designed clothes made of patchwork, which would inspire a future movement of sustainable clothing design in the "Rubbish Renewed Eco Fashion Show." She sold her patterns to McCall and Virtue Magazine. She gave fashion shows in four western states and lectured on cruise ships for seventeen years. Her love for fashion and upcycled clothing led Harriet to be one of the original founders of a free clothing resource for college students back in the 1960s. What began as a resource for women to find affordable, professional clothes was revived in 2022 through the COCC and OSU Cascades partnership "The Clothing Connection." Harriet donated much of her collection to the new store.

Among her many accolades, Harriet was a past president of the Oregon State P.E.O. Sisterhood and served on the state boards of Oregon Symphony, Oregon Literary Society, and SMART. She was a 70 year member of First Presbyterian Church where she served as elder and deacon. In 2017 Harriet was selected as the Oregon State SMART Reader of The Year. She was also selected by the Deschutes Pioneer Association as the 2017 Pioneer Queen, a distinction that Harriet proudly held when featured in community parades throughout the year.

Many visitors to the annual Chili Feed will remember Harriet for "setting a festive mood" with her beautiful piano playing, often accompanied by museum manager Vanessa Ivey on spoons, or Kelly Cannon-Miller's children on vocals. We were delighted to include a basket of Harriet's original creations as a prize in the 2025 raffle, which included one of her famous doorstep chickens. However, readers may not remember that Harriet was one of the first History Pub presenters, featuring a fashion show of her patchwork designs!

Harriet lived her life with the objectives: Something to do, something to love, and something to look forward to. Perhaps she discovered the secret to a long, happy life!

A celebration of life will be held at the First Presbyterian Church, 230 NE 9th St., on Saturday, June 13, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.





About Oregon Gold

A History of Mining from the Civil War into the Progressive Era

Gold mining was an important aspect of Oregon's history, far greater than what is generally understood. Historian and author William Willingham presents extensive research from his book, *Oregon Gold*, and offers a comprehensive view of Oregon's precious metal mining between 1862-1910. From the economic expansion of Portland to the role that Chinese miners played in eastern Oregon, discover how Oregon's gold rush fits into the larger story of the American West.

William F. Willingham, PhD, taught at the college level and served as historian for the Corps of Engineers. He specializes in the fields of water resources development, architectural history, historic preservation, cultural resources management, community history, and early American and Pacific Northwest history. He is the author of six publications, including his new book, *Oregon Gold: A History of Mining from the Civil War into the Progressive Era*.



Doors open at 6:00 p.m., Presentation at 7:00 p.m.

Reservations required; \$5 per person www.mcmenamins.com/events/

Recipe of the Month: Pine Tavern Burnt Sugar Cake

“Good Beating Makes Good Eating!”

The Bend Bulletin often featured “expert” tested recipes such as this cake recipe provided by Sarah H. Wertz, a Deschutes County home demonstration agent. Following the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, which provided federal funding for the establishment of Cooperative Extension Services, Home Demonstration Agents were deployed to rural counties under the auspices of the USDA. Mostly women, these agents aided rural men, women, and children in adapting to the “ever-changing problems of the farm, the home, and the community and developing for themselves a more satisfying country life.” (*The U.S. Extension Agent*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Misc. Publication, No. 602, April 1946). Agents such as Wertz were tasked with offering communities the most up-to-date information about agriculture, gardening, food preservation, and other home economics techniques.

Pine Tavern Burnt Sugar Cake, 1940

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 ½ C. white sugar | To this mixture add: |
| ½ C. butter | 1 C. water |
| 3 Tbsp. brown sugar syrup | 2 ½ C. flour |
| 3 egg yolks | 2 tsp. baking powder |
| 1 tsp. vanilla | Beat three egg whites |
| | and add them last. |



As was common at the time, the recipe did not include baking temperatures or times, however, Mrs. Wertz reminds us that “the successful production of this or any other cake... is the beating. Good beating makes good eating.”

Volunteer Meeting:

**April 8, 2026
1-2:00 p.m.**



Like many museums around the country, the Deschutes Historical Museum uses Past Perfect museum software to help catalog our artifacts. In 2025, the museum migrated our data to a new web-based version of Past Perfect. This version has many features that make cataloging easier, including a more streamlined way to make our extensive photo catalog accessible to the public.

At present, we have nearly 37,000 photos in our collection, but only 3,500 of those are visible on the DHM website. Our goal is to have at least 10,000 of our images available to view on our website by the end of 2026. This goal will only be possible with the help of volunteers.

At this month’s volunteer meeting, collections manager Rebekah Averette-Zaback will share how to navigate the DHM online catalog portal, discuss how the public can use it to help us improve our catalog records, and illustrate how volunteers can help reach our “10,000 digitized photos” goal.

Bring a lunch and join us for a fun and educational volunteer meeting!

Heritage Walking Tours of Downtown Bend

May 2– August 29, 2026

Mark your calendars for the 2026 heritage walking tours around Bend's historic downtown district and neighborhoods. Saturdays May through August, all tours leave from the Deschutes Historical Museum at 10:30 a.m. **\$15 per person, FREE to museum members; Space is limited, registration is required.**

The Early Days of Bend

May 2, 16, 30, June 20, July 11 & 25, August 15 & 29

Travel back to when the river ran wild, Ponderosa pines were plentiful and Bend the Beautiful was a town in the making. Learn about early Bend through the stories of six "Bendites" and how these residents helped transform a young hamlet into a booming town. Plan to walk less than a mile traveling through old neighborhoods and parkways. The sidewalks can be uneven at times.

Tour begins at the Deschutes Historical Museum and ends at Lone Crow Bungalow on Wall St.

Reflections of History: An Architectural Tour

May 9 & 23, June 13 & 27, July 18, August 1 & 22

Stroll through the Drake Park Neighborhood Historic District and take a step back in time when walking was the thing to do and neighborhoods were all about proximity.

Participants will be introduced to the architectural styles represented in the neighborhood, hearing stories of a changing community. Plan to walk one (1) mile through historic neighborhood. The sidewalks can be uneven.

Tour begins and ends at the Deschutes Historical Museum.

We recommend the following: wear comfortable walking shoes, dress for the weather, bring water, bring a sun hat, and remember your camera!
Tours are lead by knowledgeable museum volunteers

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. SIGN-UP MUST BE BY 4:00 p.m. THE DAY BEFORE THE TOUR.

Register by calling 541-389-1813, email info@deschuteshistory.org or visit our [website events calendar](#)
Tours are subject to change and cancellation.

Mark Your Calendars

APRIL

- 8 VOLUNTEER MEETING: Collections Updates
- 11 NOVEL IDEA EXHIBIT OPENS
- 28 HISTORY PUB: ABOUT OREGON GOLD: A history of mining from the Civil War into the Progressive Era
Presented by William F. Willingham, PhD
McMenamins Old St. Francis; 700 NW Bond St., Bend
Father Luke Room, 7:00 p.m., doors open at 6:00 p.m.
[Reservations required, \\$5 per person](#)



SAVE THE DATE!

May is National Historic Preservation Month! Stay tuned for a list of programs
June 6: Oregon Archaeology Roadshow- "The Archaeology of Fire and Water"

