

# West Klickitat County Historical Society

# Newsletter

Published Quarterly by Gorge Heritage Museum Issue 13 Jan/Feb/Mar 2011



Gorge Heritage Museum 202 East Humboldt, Bingen, WA.

[ghm@gorge.net](mailto:ghm@gorge.net)

The Open Season for the Museum is from May 8th to September 30th. The Museum hours are from noon to 5:00 PM, Fri-Sun. Tours may be scheduled during the off-season by calling 509-493-3228 or 509-493-1349 and requesting a visit.

## *Newsletter Staff*

*Webmaster/Publisher – Jim Farrell*

## Heir Apparent

Family historians face internal conflicts when tasked with sorting an entire lifetime's worth of inherited belongings. We're eager to tackle the mountain as quickly as possible and it's tempting to select items we want to keep and get rid of what's left. On the other hand, we're wary of discarding clues to our ancestor's lives. Is anything really trash? If we could, we'd keep every family-related item, carefully examine it and store it.

Trash or treasure?

Genealogist look for information that will identify ancestors and confirm theories about their lives. We also seek personal anecdotes and small details that bring relatives to life.

Much of this information is in documents, photographs, letters and sometimes in artifacts. Before you rent a dumpster or hire an estate sale agent, pause and examine your inheritance for genealogical clues.

If you're the family historian, make it your job to sift and save important items along the paper trail.

## Operation Donation

Genealogy libraries and historical societies are always on the lookout for some items, particularly paper ephemera (which was so often discarded). Give your local society a call before throwing away these possible treasures.

- high school and college yearbooks, particularly those more than 25 years old
- published histories of families, local organizations or the community.
- old directories or phone books (you might have a year that is missing from the organizations collection)
- community cookbooks
- items related to a local landmark, such as theater playbills or ticket stubs
- scrapbooks
- albums with photos of local scenes and buildings
- locally made crafts, such as pottery, china or baskets
- artwork featuring local scenes

### *Heir Apparent cont.*

Give away guidance:

If your family decides to donate antiques, papers or photographs to a historical society, you may be surprised to discover that such a gift must be approved and accepted. Donations may be politely declined if they don't fit the society's collections policy. "First and foremost, we look for items related to our town". As you look for a new home for your inheritances, consider the following:

- Do you have a record of provenance for the item, or know how it came into your family? If an item is valued for its connection to an owner, you'll need proof of this relationship such as a letter, sales slip or photograph.
- Why is this item worthy of preservation? An antique clock can be worth money, but if it's a fairly common design, it may not interest the historical society. A clock that once sat on the mayor's desk, however, may be a welcomed contribution.
- What was the owner's position in the community? If your relative was the town's first mayor, the local historical society will be much more interested in your items than if he was an average resident. On the other hand, if this average resident was an active volunteer, perhaps the organization where he volunteered could suggest an appreciative home for your donation

Reprinted with permission from Family Tree magazine

continued in next newsletter

### **What's The Secret?**

#### **Discover the Secrets of Columbia Gorge Arts & Culture in May 2011**

The Gorge Heritage Museum is pleased to be a member of the newly formed Columbia

Gorge Arts and Culture Alliance, and the first Arts and Culture Discovery Month that will be held in May 2011. The Alliance has received grants in support of the month from both the Washington and Oregon State Arts Commissions. The goal is to attract visitors and residents to our arts and culture and to benefit the local economy.

The theme for the month-long arts and culture celebration is "What's The Secret?" as the area presents to the public the individual artists, historic museums and programs, arts & presenting organizations and activities, and other cultural purveyors. Also, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "Ask Me My Secret" buttons will be available for residents and visitors to encourage the dialogue of favorite Gorge Artistic and Cultural gems!!

The Gorge Heritage Museum will begin its season with regular hours in May 2011, and in addition to the more permanent exhibitions there will be one or more new annual exhibits, a focus on children's activities, and a quarterly speaker series. Also, our annual Plant and Garden Art Sale will be held on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Other May 2011 activities in the area include the Artists Studio Weekend Tours in WA and OR (May 14 & 15), a Running Fruit Ladders art installation (brightly painted 14 foot tall wooden orchard ladders) by Mosier, OR, artist John Maher, the River Peoples' Cultural Exchange (May 14), numerous art & performance activities in a variety of venues including Maryhill Museum of Art, The Dalles Art Center, Columbia Center for the Arts, the Gorge Fiddle Contest (May 6-8), and the White Salmon Spring Festival in late May.

So, mark your calendars for May 2011, and help to make the local arts and culture a magnet in the Columbia Gorge. And, don't forget to wear your button!!

# HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Sally M. Stillman

This is another in a series of vignettes based on archival materials in the collection of the Gorge Heritage Museum. We hope this historical vignette featuring original inhabitants and settlers of this vibrant geographical region provides insights into early life along the Columbia River.



**Pictures L. to R.: Taswatha Ellen (Chen-O-Wuth Lear) Underwood, Amos Underwood, Edward Underwood, and Isabella (Lear) Underwood...**

The family that gave its name to Underwood, WA – the mountain, the community, the legacy – is an ongoing source of great fascination. Who are these remarkable people and where did they come from?

Originally the Underwood family is of Scotch & English descent with subsequent Pennsylvania Dutch derivation on both sides. Amos Underwood (1833 -1917) was born in Ohio. At age 17 he began his westward journey from Missouri driving stock with a wagon train of settlers heading for the Oregon Territory. In May 1852 he arrived in The Dalles. A veteran of early Indian wars, he served as corporal in Company B of the Oregon Mounted Volunteers. He was also a member of the party that captured the famous Cayuse Chief, Pepe Mux Mux – and his personal journal of these wars is an important part of the GHM Archives. Later, when an Indian uprising threatened the settlement of Hood River, Amos rendered valuable assistance to troops sent from The Dalles to protect this small community. Land Management records seem to indicate he first homesteaded in Hood River County (then Wasco County) in 1859 in a place known as Polally-Ilahee – “sand land” – later known as Ruthton. Thus his land adjoined the favorite camping site for years of Chief Chen-O-Wuth and his family. On 1 June 1861, in an Indian ceremony, Amos Underwood married Taswatha Ellen Chen-O-Wuth Lear, whose father had been hanged in 1856 for his role in the Cascades Massacre. At the time

of the hanging, it is reported that the chief gave all of his possessions and all of his family to Amos Underwood for safekeeping!

Taswatha Ellen Chen-O-Wuth Lear Underwood (1841 -1907) was born at Wy-yac-eck, Cascade Falls, Oregon, and was a member of the Royal Columbia River Indian family (Cascade Tribe). Ellen was the name given by the local missionaries. Following the execution of her father, her mother “sold” Ellen to Lt. William King Lear of Virginia (a common Indian practice at the time) who was stationed with the U.S. Army. The marriage was short lived as a consequence of Lt. Lear’s posting to Fort Dalles and Ellen’s refusal to relocate. However, a daughter – Isabella, named after Lt. Lear’s mother, who was French – was born to the couple. Amos Underwood had been attracted to Ellen, and subsequently bought her and her daughter from the tribe to become his own family.

In 1864, Amos Underwood and family moved to what is now Skamania County, Washington, where he homesteaded with a soldier’s warrant west of the White Salmon River. Gradually he purchased 320 acres, and eventually he claimed ten gold mines along the river, operated a ferry between White Salmon and Hood River, and owned the saloon named for him at the foot of what is now Cook-Underwood Road. He also owned and ran a hotel and ferry at John Day and operated three freighting scows between Cascade Locks and The Dalles before there were steamers on the Columbia River.

Edward Underwood had joined his brother in the Oregon Territories in 1860 and subsequently homesteaded in Washington with Amos, helping to develop the family fortunes. The two brothers controlled the land at the junction of the White Salmon River and the Columbia River as well as the fertile land along the bluff, the highway and railroad accesses, and abundant timber stands which, once harvested, became the orchards for which the Underwood region would become famous.

In addition to Isabella Lear (1857-1936), Amos and Ellen had three other children: Jefferson (1862 - 1871), Mary Virginia (1864 -1950), and John (1868 - 1883). Jefferson died at age 19 following a wagon accident on the family farm. John died at age 15 as a result of a shooting during a heated argument about politics during Grover Cleveland’s election campaign. Mary Virginia died at age 86 with no cause of death listed.

Isabella Lear Underwood (1857 - 1936) was sent to the Sisters of Providence Girls School in Vancouver with the expressed purpose of “taking the injun out of her” – and when she returned it is said that her clothes, her manners, and her education made her a standout. In 1871, she married Edward Underwood (younger brother of Amos), who had fallen in love at first sight. In fact, the Reverend Condon performed a double ceremony for Isabella and Edward and Ellen and Amos.

Edward and Isabella had eight to ten children. Though subdivided, the Edward Underwood estate remains as farmland on Orchard Lane.

Not only were Ellen and her daughter Isabella outstanding wives and mothers and active members of the community, they both produced a great many Indian craft items of excellent bead and buckskin work. Unfortunately a tragic house fire destroyed much of their work, though some items are on view in the Gorge Heritage Museum as well as the Maryhill Museum of Art.

Building their community in the early 1900s, the Underwood family established the school, the post office, and the cemetery, along with many other services. Today one can visit the Underwood family plot in the Chris-Zada Cemetery. Although the town of Underwood was platted in 1904, most incoming orchardists built homes on apple orchard lands and not on the planned sites on the bluff. Perhaps it can be said that the bustling success of Underwood was the result of the fact that it was in a "wet" county unlike their neighbors of the "dry" Klickitat and Hood River counties. In 1979 the US Board of Geographic Names made "Underwood" the official name for this quietly thriving community.

Information in this "Historical Vignette" was drawn from not only the Gorge Heritage Museum Archives, but also from Federal Census records, Tax Survey Records, Bureau of Land Management Records, Hood River News, bits of Oral History, and the Internet.

*It's that time of year, once again,  
to pay your membership dues....*

**(See Application on back page)**

*We'd like to thank all of the  
Members for their membership  
and other contributions which  
help in keeping our local heritage  
alive for future generations.*

*We hope to see you at our next  
meeting on Wednesday,  
January 26, 2011  
at the Gorge Heritage Museum  
at 1:30 PM*

## 2011 Museum Board Members

Barbara Sexton - President  
Mary Kapp - Vice President  
Janet Holen - Secretary  
Etta Hepner - Treasurer  
Gail Logan  
Betty Schmid  
Mildred Lykens  
Doug Charters  
Karalee Chabotte

# Gorge Heritage Museum

**Print and mail this form with a check to:**

West Klickitat County Historical Society  
Gorge Heritage Museum  
PO Box 394  
Bingen, WA 98605

**Web Site:**

<http://community.gorge.net/ghmuseum/>

## Museum Admission

Sixteen & older	\$5.00
Fifteen & under w/Adult	Free
WKCHS members	Free

## Museum memberships are available as follows:

Individual	\$20
Family	\$35
Supporting	\$100
Business	\$100
Life Member	\$1000

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Gift/Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

West Klickitat County Historical Society  
Gorge Heritage Museum  
P.O. Box 394, 202 East Humboldt St.  
Bingen, WA 98605