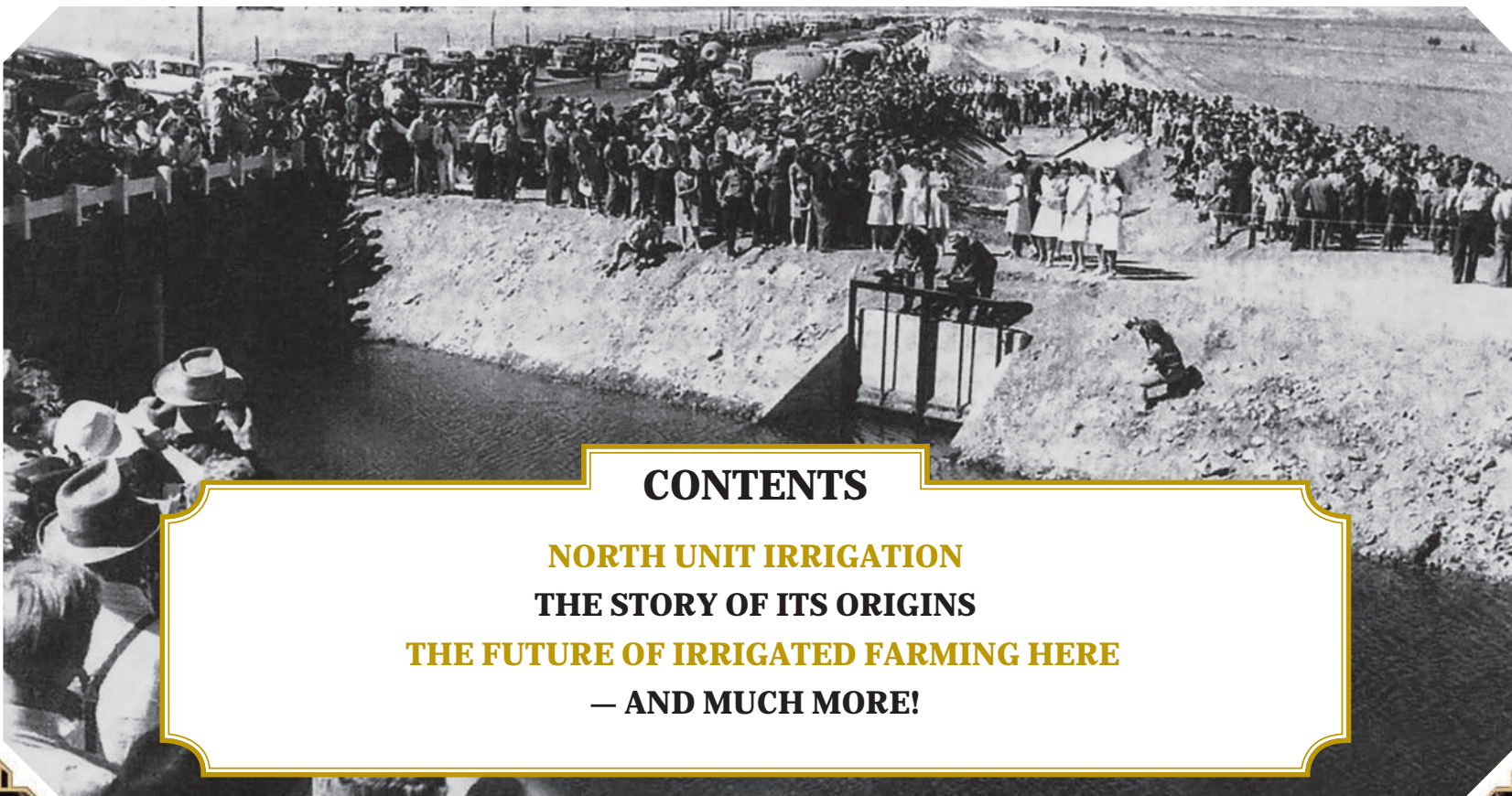


— FALL 2019 —

# THE AGGATE

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## CONTENTS

**NORTH UNIT IRRIGATION  
THE STORY OF ITS ORIGINS  
THE FUTURE OF IRRIGATED FARMING HERE  
— AND MUCH MORE!**

**N.S. 12**

## Dear Readers,

Welcome to our special issue on irrigation—on the origins and convoluted history of irrigated farming here, the prime economic engine of Jefferson County since 1946, and on what its future may be.

The recorded history of our spacious country here in north central Oregon has been marked by several truly transformative episodes—after the turn of the last century, the influx of homesteaders and the coming of the railroads, then the advent of irrigation, and in the '50s and '60s the building of the Pelton and Round Butte dams. Of these intervals of dramatic change, none has transformed the area more profoundly than irrigation. The “coming of the water” brought with it not only an entirely new basis of farming, but also legions of newcomers from western Idaho and the California borderlands and social and way-of-life changes, new economic foundations, and even alterations of the local climate that still haven’t been fully documented.

The changes in the way the country from the Crooked River north to Gateway *looks* have been so drastic that it’s hard for oldtimers in the North Unit country to remember what the land actually looked like before 1946. But most of them would agree that, in the main, the changes the water brought to this land have been positive, as early “reclamationist” visionaries like Harry Gard and Dick Anderson confidently expected.

The year 2019 is not an “anniversary year” for the North Unit—unless you want to celebrate an unsuccessful 1919 mission by local advocates to Washington D.C. to seek Bureau of Reclamation support. But with challenges looming for farming here—climate change, reduction of water supply, controversial new crops, market and economic uncertainties, to name a few—it seems timely to us to review the history of the North Unit.

Obviously, we’ve taken up a subject much too broad and multi-faceted to cover in one 24-page issue of this journal. Our hope is that by delving into carefully selected parts of the subject, those parts will stand for and illuminate the whole. If our selective coverage omits topics that in your view simply aren’t omittable, please let us know about it, and we’ll try to address them in future issues.

Many generous people have contributed to this issue, and it’s a pleasure to thank them:

- Tom Kirsch
- Mike Weber, Gary Harris, Richard Macy, Seth Klann, and Mike Britton—for farmers and ag-businessmen to agree to write for THE AGATE in their busiest season of the year is, as the saying goes, Above and Beyond. Thanks!
- Luke Birky of Goshen, Indiana and once upon a time, Wickiup, LaPine, and Redmond—his generous recollections and photos of a crucial time in the North Unit’s creation has been a true historical inspiration.
- Mike Britton and Sue Light, of the North Unit administration—for their indispensable “inside” help on preparing this issue.
- Chris Horting-Jones, Kelsey Doncaster, and Bill A. Hall—worthy (and generous) historians of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the federal agency that built the “Fabulous Furrow” and all its subsidiary ditches and owned the North Unit until 1955.
- Kevin Eidemiller and Peggy Eidemiller Clark, for timely help in getting the facts straight about their great-uncle Harold Eidemiller, the NUID’s first historian.
- Jeri Fine for sharing her vivid memories of the early days of irrigation on the Agency Plains.



### Jefferson County Historical Society Officers, Directors

- President:** Lottie Holcomb • 541-475-7488
- V. President:** Betty Fretheim • 541-475-0583
- Secretary:** Jennie Smith • 541-475-1159
- Treasurer:** Elaine Henderson • 541-475-2306
- David Campbell • 541-475-7327
- Jim Carroll • 541-475-6709
- Bill Robinson • 541-325-2538
- Charlene McKelvy Lochrie • 541-475-2049
- Dr. Tom Manning • 541-475-6241
- Margee O’Brien • 541-475-3533
- Jerry Ramsey • 541-475-5390
- Becky Roberts • 541-475-4525

.....

### Jefferson County Historical Society Advisory Council

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| Tony Ahern   | Doug Macy   |
| Garry Boyd   | Pete McCabe |
| Joyce Edgmon | Don Reeder  |
| Lola Hagman  | Bob Rufener |
| Carol Leone  |             |

.....

The mission of the Society is to research, gather and preserve the history of Jefferson County and Central Oregon for public education through the display of artifacts and archives.

.....

- Editor:** Jane Ahern
- Graphic Designer:** Jamie Wood
- Publisher:** Jerry Ramsey

Cover: North Unit Water arrival site, 1946 & 2019

# “Irrigation of Jefferson County”

## Harold Eidemiller

**[Editor’s note: when Jefferson County Reminiscences was being planned in the 1950s by members of the Pioneer Association, with support from the County Library Association, Harold Eidemiller (the first administrator of the North Unit Irrigation District, until 1955, and one of the founders of the local Farm Bureau) was asked to contribute a history of the North Unit Irrigation District from its uncertain beginnings early in the century through its struggles during the ‘20s, ‘30s, and ‘40s. Eidemiller’s account, carefully researched and written, remains the most complete history of “the coming of water” to this area, but it is not as well known as it deserves to be (even the Bureau of Reclamation’s official history of the NUID, Sagebrush to Clover [USBR, 2013] fails to reference it or its author correctly). So in this special “Irrigation” issue of THE AGATE, we offer a condensed text of Eidemiller’s essay. Interested readers are encouraged to read the full text in Jefferson County Reminiscences, Portland: Binford and Mort, 1957, 1999, pp. 329-349.]**

...The first concerted effort to bring irrigation water to the present North Unit Irrigation District was during the year 1898, when a meeting was held to discuss the idea. A.P. Clark, George Gould, and Frank Elkins were some of the landowners present at that meeting. About 1902, interest in North Unit land began to increase, and in the next few years most of the desirable acreage was homesteaded, and dry farming was practiced with varying success. The greatest hardship encountered by these pioneers was the lack of water for household and livestock use... At harvest time it was necessary that each farmer employ someone who spent his full time hauling water for the stock used in the operation. Small wonder that irrigation was ever present in the mind of everyone.

Dick Anderson tells of meetings as early as 1904 to study the possibilities, and in 1913 an application for a permit to take 400,000 acre feet of Deschutes River water for the irrigation of 100,000 acres of land was filed with the state engineer and subsequently set aside for North Unit use. There being no surplus river flow during the irrigation season, this water was all to be stored during the winter

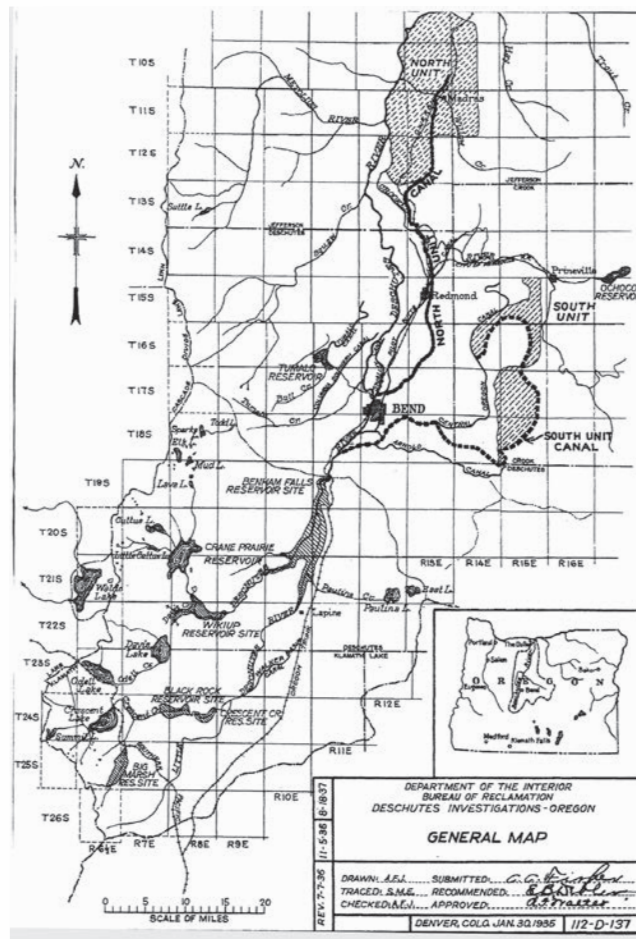
months.

At about this time, the State of Oregon and the federal government entered into a cooperative agreement to survey and study the possibility of irrigation in the Deschutes Valley watershed. In the course of the next few years, a very comprehensive report was issued as a result of this survey, with a storage dam to be built at Benham Falls, and diversion from the river at Awbrey Falls below Tumalo. The feasibility of the irrigation of four units was explored, with the units being designated South, East, West, and North. The South Unit is located east of Bend and around the Powell Butte area, the West Unit being west of Redmond on the west side of the river centering around Cline Falls, and the East Unit east of the river from Bend north to Crooked River. Apparently the North Unit was considered the best, or had more persuasive landowners, since it was chosen for construction.

### 1916: Irrigation District Organized—and Challenged

Efforts were being put forth towards the organization of an irrigation district embracing the North Unit lands. After considerable discussion and several meetings, an election was called and, with a favorable vote, the North Unit Irrigation District became a reality. The first board meeting was held March 27, 1916, in the office of County Judge William Boegli at Culver, then the county seat. The district contained a total area of about 133,000 acres. The irrigable acreage within the boundaries was slightly over 100,000, with the expectation that lands east of Willow Creek and on Round Butte would be watered. The board was composed of Harry Gard, President; A.D. (Dick) Anderson, Secretary; John Henderson, Fred Fisher, and P.N. Vibbert, Directors. Harry W. Andrew was named Treasurer, and the official place of meeting was to be in Madras...

Since the infant district had no money and the board must operate on a warrant basis, O.A. Pearce of the Madras State Bank agreed to take any warrants offered at not to exceed five percent discount. In April [1916] a group of landowners contested the legality of the formation of the district, the Notice of Contest



Bur. of Recl. map of “Deschutes Irrigation Project” 1936

naming Hiram Links, George Rodman, Perry Henderson, George A. White, Claude G. Ramsey, Walter S. Williams, J.H. Horney, and B. Dombrowe as contestants. L.H. Irving was retained by the board to defend the organization, with I.T. Hinkle hired to assist. Money for the defense was obtained by the expedient of the board issuing warrants to whoever would accept them. The recipient would then endorse the instrument and return it to the board, which was then able to convert them into cash. The bank thus had double security, that of the district, and of the endorser. During the period that the legality of the district was under contest, a great number of landowners' names appeared on the records as endorsing these warrants, all of which were issued in \$25 amounts. The treasurer on October 3, 1916 reported a balance on hand of 74 cents.

**[Editor's note:** *the quick opposition to the 1916 formation of the "North Unit Irrigation District" seems to have been based at least as much on concerns about hasty tactics and skepticism regarding the financing plans of the irrigationists as on fundamental opposition to trying to bring irrigation to Jefferson County. Some of the leading opponents named in the lawsuit—Hiram Links, Cecil Porter, and Perry Henderson, for example—later came around to support the NUID campaign.*

*On June 1, 1916, the Pioneer reported the establishment of "the North Unit Dry Farming Association," with W.H. Ramsey as President and Cecil Porter as Vice President. Its aims were to "procure and disseminate knowledge concerning the problem of irrigation to the end that the farmers of the Unit be saved from harmful organizations and the levying of ruinous assessments; to foster better methods of dry farming; and in summary "to save farmers from possible blunders, either for or against irrigation."*

*The record is unclear as to how active the "Dry Farming Association" in fact was; but later in 1916 the Pioneer noted the existence of what was probably meant to be a counter to the dry farmers group: a "Jefferson County Irrigation Club," with Harry Gard as its president, and enlisting non-farmers and businessmen in the county for its membership. From the outset the Pioneer itself—increasingly caught up in the county seat battle then current between Madras and Culver—strongly supported the irrigationists' cause.*

*The lawsuit filed in April 1916 was ultimately settled that December by Circuit Court Judge T.E.J. Duffy, who emphatically confirmed the legality of the North Unit Irrigation District's foundation, and ordered the plaintiffs to pay court costs. Judge Duffy's decision was appealed, and as Eidemiller notes, in 1919 the Oregon Supreme Court upheld it, although the High Court did invalidate the initial plan to*

*issue bonds. So the legitimacy of the District was finally and firmly established—but the NUID Board was, if legally validated, left with the overwhelming challenge of financing its dream of water for county farmers. Where to turn: private funding? State? Federal?]*

A group of men composed of C.M. Wickham of Boise, D.C. McGilvery of Pocatello, and Charles Berryman presented a plan whereby they would construct the irrigation system for the district at a cost not to exceed \$55 an acre for the full 100,000 acres. Approval of this plan was expressed by about 40 people present at a board meeting, who requested an opportunity to vote on the proposition. In March 1917 the board agreed to sign a contract with these men, and in September petitions with 176 signatures were filed with the board asking that an election be called on the question of bonding the district for \$5,000,000.

The election was held on October 29, 1917, with 385 voters present, and a favorable majority of 87. Interest in district affairs is evident from the fact of ten candidates for director at the first annual election. But the original board was returned to office.

Early in 1918, negotiations were started toward the purchase of the Central Oregon Irrigation Company rights, culminating in the purchase of these rights for \$703,100. The object in buying was to obviate the building of a storage reservoir... In September 1919, the contract was voided by mutual agreement, and the deal called off. Also in 1918, a contract was entered into between the district and John H. Lewis (the state engineer) and Barr and Cunningham for engineering services in connection with project construction, the rate of compensation to be \$450 a month. Pursuant to the bond election, bids were called for to be opened October 22, 1918, but no bids were received.

#### 1919: U.S. Reclamation Says No

Beginning with the year 1919 the board was reduced from five to three members by state law. The first mention of the United States Reclamation Service shows in the records that A.D. Anderson was sent to Washington D.C. to present the district plea for federal aid. (We can picture Dick in the effete East wearing his plaid mackinaw.) It subsequently developed that the Reclamation Service found the project too costly for the settlers to pay for, and nothing came of this first attempt.

At the same time the state supreme court invalidated the bond election, but upheld the formation of the district, and thereby [against the 1916 landowners' challenge] opened the way for the board to levy and collect assessments. A second bond election was held with 336 votes cast, and a favorable majority of 136. Validation proceedings were instituted and approval given early in 1920.

Bids were to be received in March, with no response again. It must be remembered that



A.D. "Dick" Anderson and Harry Gard, 1939

at this time irrigation securities were in very poor repute generally, with a great majority of projects in default.

The first assessments made by the board were for the fiscal year 1919-1920. The rate was 17 cents per acre. The warrant indebtedness outstanding amounted to \$10,000; the board did remarkably well in holding the indebtedness down to this figure. This money had all to be procured by the warrant-endorser method.

### **Squabbles Over Expense Accounts and Suitcases**

In November 1919, the board voted to pay the expenses of Harry Gard to travel to Salt Lake City as Oregon delegate to an irrigation conference. This meeting was the beginning of the National Reclamation Association, and was called by [Idaho] Gov. D.W. Davies. Irrigation opponents of the district seized upon this trip to censure the board for needless expenditure, a story being prevalent that Harry Gard ran up an expense account of \$400, with more to be paid later. A published statement by friends of the board states that Gard received \$103.17, of which \$66 was for railroad fare. The board was also accused of buying a suitcase for A.D. Anderson; the answer was that the controversial suitcase was Anderson's "office," and that "whatever information had been required, the minutes and papers of the district have been easily available right in Mr. Anderson's suitcase." Further, Mr. Anderson had worn out his own suitcase in the service of the district. At the election of directors, the incumbent, John Henderson, received 235 votes to his opponent's 89, proving that the board had the confidence of the great majority of landowners.

In 1920, C.M. Redfield, irrigation engineer, presented an "Estimate of the Joint North Unit Canal and North Canal Dam to Crooked River." The diversion dam at Bend, now used by the North Unit, was built in 1912 by the Central Oregon District. The proposed canal was to be 25 miles long, and would be built to serve the lands of Bend, and with a surplus to reach the North Unit lands sufficient for their irrigation. In the same year an agreement was entered into wherein the state agreed to pay the interest on the district bonds for a period of five years, and John K. Kollock was appointed to represent the board in the matter. With no bids for bonds, the board made a deal with Ralph Schneeloch and Company of Portland to



Mired tractor in Wickiup mud 1943

act as "underwriter" in the organization of a syndicate to purchase the bonds. Schneeloch was immediately to buy \$50,000 worth of the bonds for 90 percent of par value, the bonds to bear 6 percent interest. Upon receipt of the report of the engineers, the district was to give Schneeloch a 90-day period to purchase the balance of the bond issue, and to put the district's affairs under the jurisdiction of the underwriting company. On June 8, 1920, the board formally authorized the sale of the \$50,000 bonds to Schneeloch.

[About this time] Lewis H. Irving resigned as attorney for the board, much to their regret. He had been

of inestimable help with their problems, and was still to be so in succeeding years until the project was completed. Director P.N. Vibbert died on June 20, 1920, making the first break in the board personnel . . .

### **1921: Wiley and Hermann Issue Crucial NUID Survey Report**

A.J. Wiley and F.C. Hermann were employed as engineers to head the planning program. Wiley was from Boise and Hermann from San Francisco. A contract was made between the district and the state and the United States to purchase for the sum of \$35,000 the original field notes of the cooperative survey for the use of the district. In the event the material was returned by January 1, 1925, no payment was to be made. At the present time no trace of this material can be found nor any record of its disposition, and neither was the payment ever made or a request for the payment. We do find in the minutes of June 5, 1923, a resolution to write to Dwight P. Robinson Company, Pos and Allen and John L. Etheridge for the return of such engineering and other data which they might have which belongs to the district. Records show that a surveying crew was in the field for a considerable period of time making reconnaissance surveys with much materials assembled, the work continuing until the available funds were spent. Hermann and Wiley compiled and issued a comprehensive report on the North Unit in April 1921, containing a study and estimate of the cost of this project, including the Benham Falls Reservoir, and also a detailed study of the water supply. This report was used along with others in a later report compiled by C.C.

**Madras Pioneer**  
 345 SE 5TH STREET • MADRAS, OREGON 97741 • 541.475.2275 • WWW.MADRASPIONEER.COM  
 Chronicling Jefferson County History since 1904

**Fisher in the employ of the U.S. Reclamation Service.**

Upon receipt of the Hermann-Wiley Report, a meeting was held in Madras by the landowners and the Director of the Reclamation Service to discuss the required terms of the contemplated contract. On being advised by the Director that the landowners must dispose of their excess holdings over 160 acres, at an appraised value set by the government board, the Reclamation Plan was informally rejected. This decision was encouraged by the promises of the parties who had purchased part of the district bonds that if the Reclamation offer was rejected, the project would be funded by private funds with no restriction on land holdings. An appropriation of \$500,000 was available at this time to start the project, but the coolness of the landowners at this meeting toward Reclamation law resulted in the appropriation being withdrawn. Schneeloch and Company, due to financial reverses or other causes, withdrew their offer to finance the project.

Some consideration was given to the possibility of securing water from Crooked River, with a diversion of about 20 miles above Prineville, and a long siphon across the Ochoco Valley to irrigate the Ochoco bench lands, and then down to irrigate some 46,000 acres of North Unit lands, but it was seen that the lands could be more cheaply served from other sources... N.G. Wallace and John K. Kollock were authorized to do certain work relative to water rights in connection with adjudication proceedings then being carried on for the determination of rights to Deschutes River water...

F.S. Bramwell was appointed appraiser for the North Unit by the Certification Commission of the State in May, 1921, it being necessary that the state certify as to the worth of any irrigation bonds to be sold. Concern was expressed as to how to attract settlers to the project, and a committee was formed to work along this line with the following members: J.O. Youngstrom, Perry Henderson, Andrew Morrow, C.C. Berkley, H. Ward Farrell, W.G. Moore, Ira P. Holcomb, James Lee, and Frank P. Bacon. Judge N.G. Wallace and Attorney L.H. Irving were to advise the committee.

**1922: Appeals for Construction Bids Again Unsuccessful**

An election was held on January 11, 1921, for the purpose of changing the name of the district to Jefferson Water Conservancy District, with a favorable vote cast. Irrigation district bonds being in disrepute at the time, it was thought that the change in name would make the bond issue more attractive. In December 1921 the board advertised for bids to construct the project facilities, with no bids submitted. Again advertised for bids to be opened January 31, 1922, and again no bids received. On April 15 the board agreed to sell the \$4,930,000 balance of bonds to Ryne and Company of San Francisco, and to employ Shattuck Construction Company as general superintendent of construction, with the object of constructing project facilities with labor hired directly by the district. However, the following board meeting voted not to complete this deal, and the board again dickered with Schneeloch. Apparently the Oregon Irrigation Securities Commission refused to approve the contract with Shattuck. On May 24, 1922, the board agreed to pay Schneeloch 1 ¼ percent of the five millions if the bonds were purchased by anyone other than Schneeloch, or if the project was constructed by

other than private capital. This agreement raised a storm of protest from the landowners and Schneeloch and Company voided the deal.

Shortly after, J.H. Pos and F.W. Allen of Portland requested to finance the sale of the bonds. The minutes of the meeting say "they were cordially received," but apparently nothing came of this try. January 1923 saw an economy move by the board when the secretary's salary was reduced from \$5 to \$4 a day. Harry Gard was delegated to attend legislative sessions when necessary to protect irrigation interests. Another \$20,000 in bonds were delivered to Schneeloch at this time. In March 1923, John L. Etheridge proposed to sell the bonds and an agreement was concluded extending to May 16, when it was terminated. In June, Harry Gard resigned the office of president of the board and was replaced by John Henderson. A.D. Anderson quit the post of secretary to be replaced by Gard. Bids for bonds were again requested with the usual [negative] results, and in October J.C. Sothman was elected to the board, replacing A.H. Parkey, and, upon taking office, was elected president.

In December 1923, it is recorded that Howard Turner, as treasurer of the Deschutes Project Association, was soliciting funds to defray the expenses of sending a delegate to Washington D.C. to interest the United States Reclamation Service in the building of the project. This association embraced the entire Deschutes watershed, and \$150 was contributed by the board at this time, with \$350 in April 1924, and \$500 in January 1925, to send a delegate to Washington to secure authorization. Apparently, the interest of the Reclamation Service was revived, since on July 8, 1925, the board, with L.H. Irving, Howard Turner, Earl Bone, and Ira Holcomb, met with the Secretary of the Interior, Dr. Hubert Work, and the Director of the United States Reclamation Service, in Portland to present the needs of the project.

**1927: NUID Funds Lost in Madras Bank Failure**

January 1927 brought a delegation of landowners to meet with the board, requesting that the board reduce the salaries and per diem expenses and establish a sinking fund for the retirement of the outstanding bonds now totaling \$90,000. This was the extent of the bond sales, since no further attempt was made to sell the entire issue, and the efforts of the board were directed towards the construction of the project by the Reclamation Service. Somewhere about this time the Madras State Bank became insolvent, with the district having \$5000 on deposit, and giving the board a bad time in meeting obligations.

Harry Gard ended 12 years of service on the board in January 1928, being replaced by Cecil Porter. Gard had put the advancement of irrigation above everything else, even to the neglect of his own affairs, and had spent much of his own money for the welfare of the project. Cecil Porter was given the post of secretary. Progress was at a standstill during the years 1928 and 1929. Hiram Links replaced Johnnie Henderson in January 1929, with a majority of four votes, ending 12 years [on the board] for Johnnie. The election in the fall of 1929 was a quiet affair, with only 60 votes cast and with incumbent J.C. Sothman re-elected. Robert W. Sawyer [of Bend] was given \$100 to help defray the expense of a trip to Washington D.C. in the interest of the project in February 1931. Refunding bonds were issued in the

amount of \$80,000 with none of the original \$90,000 being retired.

During 1933 a lot of work was done in an effort to secure construction money from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and in 1935 application was made to the Public Works Administration. C.C. Fisher was investigating the project for the Reclamation Service, with a dam to be located just below the confluence of the Metolius [and Deschutes Rivers]. Feasibility of such a proposition depended upon a market for the incidental power developed, and the idea was abandoned on account of there being no market for the power. Bonneville Dam was being built at the same time, and was ridiculed for the same reason. Howard Turner replaced J.C. Sothman in January 1936, ending 12 years of board service for him.

On October 23, 1937, an election was held to determine whether to sign a contract with the federal government whereby the project would be built by the Bureau of Reclamation. The vote was 179 yes, and 10 no, to agree to repay up to \$8,000,000 in 40 years after construction was completed, thus ending 20 years of heartbreaking disappointments and efforts by the board of directors and friends of irrigation for the North Unit... Much delay was still to be encountered before the dreams of the pioneers were to be realized, with World War II delaying the work for a considerable time... Actual construction of the project began on July 21, 1938, with crews working on Wickiup Dam and Reservoir...

At the December 1938 board meeting Cecil Porter presented his resignation as director... His health failed rapidly until his death in August. Cecil Porter had devoted 12 years of his life to the promotion of the North Unit, and unquestionably undermined his health in the process... H. Ward and Allie Farrell signed the first contract for the sale of excess lands on August 20, 1938... Harry Gard died in 1941, ending his long years of unceasing service to the cause of irrigation ...

**1942: 11<sup>th</sup>-hour Opposition from C.O.I.D.**

[In September 1942] Hans Kjar, director of the Central Oregon Irrigation District, sought the support of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce in a move to force abandonment of the North Unit Irrigation Project on the grounds that it would ruin the upper projects by taking water needed by them. The Madras Chamber of Commerce resolved at their next meeting that the Central Oregon Irrigation District “investigate the possibility and urge action on the part of the directors in eliminating admitted heavy loss of water in



Carlos Randolph, NUID Mgr. and Denver Law, 1950s

their canal system,” [and urged them to] “classify lands under the COID and other projects in terms of duty of water required to the end that all lands requiring nine to fifteen acre feet be [classified] as submarginal land.” . . . In spite of the fact that the upriver districts were offered first chance at storage rights to be developed and had refused, there remains a feeling even yet that the North Unit deprived them of some of their water. Many were skeptical that the North Unit would ever deliver any water, due to see page in the main canal.

Percy A. Cupper...[had been] retained by the board as adviser in April 1933, and served continuously until his death on June 20, 1943, while en route home from Washington D.C. where he had been on district

business. His services to the district were of inestimable value; considering his ability both as a lawyer and as an engineer, the board could not have made a better choice. State engineer from 1918 to 1922, prior to that state water superintendent... Cupper drew up Oregon’s Water Code.

The last of the \$90,000 of bonds were retired in 1944, and the authorization for the balance of the \$5,000,000 was voided. The first water was delivered to project lands on May 20, 1946, with thousands of people here for the celebration. Of the board of directors who took office in 1916, two, Johnnie Henderson and Dick Anderson, were left to be present at the successful termination of their many years of struggle and disappointment...

**Sources and Suggested Readings:**

Harold Eidemiller, “Irrigation of Jefferson County,” in *Jefferson County Reminiscences*. Portland: Binford and Mort, 1957, 1999.

Kelsey Doncaster and Chris Horting-Jones, *Sagebrush to Clover: the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s North Unit of the Deschutes Project*. Butte: USBR and Renewable Technologies Inc., 2013.

“The North Unit Story,” special issue of the *Madras Pioneer*, July 10, 1996. Excellent coverage of the North Unit and local farming in general, in the NUID’s 50<sup>th</sup> year.

Robert Autobee, “Mirror Pond” website of the Deschutes Project: <https://mirrorpond.info>. Well-informed narrative of the history of the use of the Deschutes River and its sources for irrigation.

# Harry Gard And The Dream Of Irrigation

By Jerry Ramsey

**W**hen a small group of elderly Jefferson County dry-farmers joined throngs of Central Oregon well-wishers and dignitaries at the northern foot of Juniper Butte on May 20, 1946 for the official opening of the North Unit Irrigation Project, one early champion of the project was, sadly, not on hand for the dramatic opening of a headgate and the running of water from Wickiup Reservoir into an actual field.

The absentee that day—he had died in 1941—was Harry Gard, who had homesteaded on Agency Plains back in 1904; and though his absence on that day of celebration was noted and regretted by some, awareness of his indispensable role in the creation of the North Unit has faded since then, and never been fully recognized historically. It's probable that most North Unit farmers in 2019 would not recognize his name. Yet the evidence is compelling that if Harry Gard hadn't pursued the dream of irrigation with single-minded determination in its early years, it would not have been realized in May 1946.

Political and civic activism was a tradition in Harry Gard's family, with local and statewide consequences. His grandfather, Timothy Gard, emigrated in 1851 over the Oregon Trail with his family, including two young sons, Milo and John Jay, taking up a farm in what is now Clackamas County. As an adult, Milo was elected to serve in the Oregon State House of Representatives for two terms. In 1902, already in his fifties, he crossed the mountains with his wife Caroline and took up a homestead at the west end of what is now Fir Lane on Agency Plains. Apparently he took this drastic step in part because of his wife's health—but in any event she died in 1903, and because there was no designated burial grounds on

the Plains, he donated some of his land for what became the "Milo Gard Cemetery." He passed away in 1907 and is buried beside his wife and other family members.



Harry Gard

A few years later, one of his sons, Bern Gard, moved to the Madras area, and served for many years as Jefferson County Deputy Sheriff and eventually, in the 1950s, was elected to several terms as County Sheriff. It appears that Milo's brother John Jay remained in the Willamette Valley, but two of his sons also followed their uncle to take up Agency Plains homesteads. One

was Roscoe ("Bob"), who after the creation of Jefferson County in 1914 was appointed County Commissioner by Gov. Oz West, and after fighting unsuccessfully to make Madras the county seat (Culver got the prize), he was elected Commissioner in 1916, and participated in the famous forced removal of the county government from Culver to Madras on New Year's Day 1917. Despite his prominence in local affairs, Roscoe sold his homestead here in 1920 and spent the rest of his life in the Valley.

Roscoe Gard's younger brother was Harry Wendell Gard. He seems to have moved from Clackamas County about the same time as his uncle and brother, filing on a homestead claim on Agency Plains at the head of what is now known as John Brown Canyon. Whether the already-glimmering prospect of irrigating this dry country drew Harry and his relatives over the mountains, as it apparently did other early homesteaders, is unknown—but by 1916 he had whole-heartedly taken up the cause of irrigation, and for much of the rest of his life devoted himself to it.

I grew up in the house that Harry Gard built in 1917 on his homestead, which my parents bought in 1938 from the Federal Land Bank, a decade after he lost the place to foreclosure. My family had neighborly and family connections with the Gards—my Aunt Lela, married

to my father's oldest brother Leslie, was Harry's oldest daughter. I never knew him, but the way my folks talked about him made me think that he must have been an important person. I remember asking my mother once, as a teenager, what he was like. She reflected, and then said, "He was unlike anybody I ever knew."—"How so?"—"Well, he was a visionary—when he looked at things, he didn't see what the rest of us



saw, he saw *possibilities*, and that's why he took up the idea of somehow bringing water all the way from the mountains down here for irrigation, and why he never gave up on it."

The details of Gard's efforts on behalf of the North Unit Project are spelled out in Harold Eidemiller's historical narrative elsewhere in this issue. Suffice it to say here that—often at the expense of his farming and his financial situation-- from 1916 on, he carried the fight for the project wherever it could be carried—to meetings and hearings in Central Oregon, Salem, Portland, and throughout the West. He was mocked and sniped at by local opponents of the project, but as Chairman of the North Unit Board and later as Treasurer, he was undeterred, even after repeated failures to find funding for it from private, state, and federal sources. It's sad to reflect on how he did not live long enough to see for himself the arrival of the water and the subsequent "greening" of Jefferson County—but by the time he died, in 1941, he knew at least that the North Unit was going to come to pass under the Bureau of Reclamation, and in fact that excavations and construction were well underway at Wickiup and Crane Prairie.

When the Water Festival came in May 1946, one of the dignitaries on hand (along with Oregon Governor Snell, former Governor Pierce, Secretary of State Farrell, State Treasurer Scott, the mayor of Portland, the editor of *The Oregonian*, and others) was Marshall Dana, veteran *Oregon Journal* Editorial Page Editor. Dana's official and personal connection with the North Unit and with Harry Gard was extensive. As a long-time advocate of reclamation projects, he had visited and written about Jefferson County for *The Journal* in 1917, with Gard as his guide,



Harry Gard's grave in Milo Gard Cemetery on Agency Plains



Marshall Dana, *Oregon Journal* editor and long-time supporter of the North Unit

and in 1924 he wrote a remarkable series of *Journal* articles (re-published at the time in the *Pioneer*, and more recently excerpted in THE AGATE, Vol. II) in which he interviewed local farmers and businessmen, and emphasized the desperate condition of farming here because of the ongoing drought and the lack of irrigation.

On the day after Water Day in 1946, he wrote this heartfelt tribute to Harry Gard and his stubborn comrades: "[In 1917], we climbed Juniper Butte. It was one of the most discouraging scenes I had ever looked upon. But I was in company with the most enthusiastic man I ever met. They say Harry Gard would even borrow a suit in order to be dressed properly for reclamation meetings to plead the cause of what is now known as the Jefferson County Water Conservancy.

"The piece I wrote for the *Oregon Journal* nearly 30 years ago [in 1917] ended with this paragraph: 'Some day I want to go back to the North Unit and help the people celebrate the realization of their dream.' Saturday May 18 was the day of celebration. The dream was fulfilled. I heard the water ripple and splash as for the first time it ran from the Cascade Mountains by way of the Deschutes River and the big main-line canal . . . ."

**Sources and additional reading:**

Harold Eidemiller, "Irrigation of Jefferson County," in *Jefferson County Reminiscences*. Portland: Binford and Mort, 1957, 1999, pp. 329-349.

Marshall Dana, "Farmers Driven Out by Lack of Water," THE AGATE, II (Fall 2014), pp.10-17— excerpted from articles in the *Oregon Journal*, July 1924.




**541-475-7204**  
1733 S.W. Hwy. 97 • Madras, Oregon  
[www.tsandsfordmadras.com](http://www.tsandsfordmadras.com)

— Celebrating Over 82 years of serving Central Oregon, since 1937 —



# The Mennonites And The Building Of The North Unit

When work began on the North Unit Project at Wickiup and Crane Prairie in July 1938, there was no shortage of manpower, and no prospect of any such problem. The Depression was ending, but jobs were still less than plentiful, and the Bureau of Reclamation shrewdly saw fit to tap into one of the New Deal's popular successes—the Civilian Conservation Corps, “CCC” for short. From CCC work camps all over the West, CCC “boys” were recruited to begin construction of the big reservoirs in the Cascade foothills southwest of Bend that would store the snowmelt to eventually irrigate the croplands of Jefferson County.

For the first few years of the project, the CCC connection (with workers encamped near LaPine) served it well, although there were complaints that the “boys” (many of them at-loose-ends city kids from the Midwest and East) weren't as industrious or disciplined as the job required. But with the outbreak of World War Two in early December 1941 came a major labor crisis. After Pearl Harbor, CCC workers left the project en masse, either to enlist in the military or because they were being drafted. And with the nation at war, how would a civilian project like the North Unit be able to replace them? The future of the “Fabulous Furrow” (as it was later called) seemed to be in serious jeopardy.

The immediate solution was bureaucratically elegant. Along with running the military draft, the Selective Service Administration under Gen. Lewis B. Hershey was in charge of registering and assigning “alternative service” to “conscientious objectors”—men who refused military service for moral, political, or religious reasons. The Bureau of Reclamation apparently negotiated with the Selective Service late in 1942, and was allowed to contract with the Central Committee of the American Mennonite Church to bring Mennonite COs to Central Oregon to pick up where the CCC had left off. It was, as long as it lasted, a brilliant stroke across



Luke and Verna Birky, 2014

bureaucratic boundaries, and it basically rescued the North Unit endeavor at a perilous moment.

By early 1943, over 150 Mennonites were working out of the LaPine camp, at Wickiup, finishing the job of clearing trees (maximum stump-height: 14”), moving snow, and building the dam and massive relief gates. What was unusual about their situation was that they were entirely provided for by the Mennonite Church through its Central Committee—fed, bedded, cared for, given a small stipend, all out of church funds.

Their work, of course, was supervised by the engineers of the Bureau of Reclamation, under its chief project engineer, Clyde Spencer. Spencer and his staff soon found that their new recruits were a much more capable, disciplined crew than their CCC predecessors. Whereas the CCC tended to draw untrained youngsters from all over, their replacements at Wickiup were mostly northwest natives, quite a few with farm experience or otherwise capable of operating heavy machinery and taking orders. Together, they apparently brought a work-ethic and self-reliance to the project that got it back on track in 1943, and actually advanced its time-line.



Luke as a mechanic at Wickiup 1943

One of the Wickiup workmen was Luke Birky, 21, from a Mennonite family in the Albany area. His older brother Elden preceded him in being assigned to a CO work camp in Cascade Locks. It was from Elden's son Rob Birky, Agency Plains contractor and founder with his wife Fay of Eagle Bakery in Madras, that THE AGATE learned about Luke and was able to make contact with him, now in his nineties and retired in Goshen, Indiana. By email, he has graciously (and vividly) recalled his experiences working on the North Unit Project seventy-five years ago.

On the Wickiup worksite in January 1943, Luke initially worked clearing the abundant snows and cutting trees (with a two-man “misery-whip” saw), but was eventually assigned in January 1943 to

the equipment maintenance shop, servicing and repairing heavy machinery—bulldozers, power-shovels, draglines, dump trucks, and so on. With construction at Wickiup and Crane Prairie approaching completion, in fall 1943 the Bureau of Reclamation moved some of its heavy equipment to Redmond, to begin work on the very challenging stretch of the Main Canal running across Crooked River and around and through the Smith Rock formation (requiring two bored hard-rock tunnels almost two miles long) and contouring north along the river past Trail Crossing Flats.

Luke Birky was involved in this transfer of equipment and personnel to the Redmond Work Camp, where he had more contacts with local people than he'd had in LaPine and Wickiup. "I was one of about four COs and two government employees, and then in Redmond they hired a few ranchers to help with setting up the equipment. We worked well together. And then after a week or so several of the ranchers took my boss aside and asked him if it was true that we were COs. He said, 'Yes.' And they said, 'Well, we don't understand. They don't object to anything and they work harder than we do.' And then my boss had a long talk with them about what this was all about. And they said, 'Well, we've got a lot of explaining to do with our neighbors.'"

Despite a request from the supervisor of the government maintenance shop in Redmond that he be allowed to stay on there (the "super" even offered to board him with his family), Luke was ordered back to LaPine. And in early January 1944 the Selective Service Administration abruptly decreed that the Central Oregon Mennonite contingent would be re-assigned, in effect dispersed individually to other CO work-centers elsewhere in the West. Bureau of Reclamation officials were very distressed by this move, and for good reason, given the contributions the Mennonites had made to the North Unit project in their year on the job, and serious uncertainties about future labor for the project and availability of materials in wartime. According to the *Bend Bulletin*, North Unit Project Chief Engineer Clyde Spencer publicly regretted the decision, and was emphatic in his praise of their work on the job, estimating that it had been worth much more to the project than expected, probably in excess of a quarter-million dollars (in 1944 terms, a lot more than that now!). (*Bulletin*, January 8, 1944)

*The Bulletin* followed with an editorial, which is valuable historically for reminding us now, three quarters of a century later, about how conscientious objectors were widely viewed with very mixed feelings in America during the war: "They had . . . Mennonite industry, and they had something more—an effective

desire to establish that they, in the light of their own beliefs, were living up to the obligations of citizenship. We are glad that objectors to military service are few, but for such as those now leaving Camp Wickiup, who, by their endeavors in other service have sought to compensate for whatever detriment may have come from adherence to their religious faith, we have respect." (Jan. 13, 1944)

On what basis did Selective Service decide to move the Mennonites out of the North Unit Project, where they had contributed so much already, in only a little more than a year? The official announcement that new workers at Camp Wickiup would henceforth be COs "not supported or cared for by any religion or sect" suggests an answer to the question. The North

Unit Mennonites were essentially an autonomous group provided for by their church—a splendid bargain,

one would think, for the hard-pressed Bureau of Reclamation. But maybe, in the strict over-view of Selective Service, their situation was

a little too independent, and maybe their contributions to the project were becoming a little too notable? From the beginning of its administration of "alternative service," Selective Service had taken a very hard, sometimes grudging line on the status of their COs, never far removed, in fact, from the popular prejudice that they were draft-dodgers, shirkers of their patriotic duty. So—clearly over the protests of the Bureau of Reclamation—the Selective Service Administration may well have seen fit to disperse Luke Birky and his comrades, lest their collective success at Wickiup become "too much of a good thing" and thus a challenge to SS policy and control. Luke was dispatched to a clearly non-critical assignment in Glacier National Park, where he spent the remaining eighteen months of the war.

One wonders if other Mennonite units (and for that matter Amish, Quaker, and United Brethren groups) were re-shuffled along these lines in 1944, even if they were making important contributions to civilian projects in their locations? Looking back on his Central Oregon experience with the perspective of a long, productive life, Luke Birky's summary of the predicament of conscientious objectors in WWII is illuminating to read. "The fever of war during that time was very high as the whole USA was allied with much of Europe to stop the evils of Nazism. There were very strong feelings against conscientious objectors. Most viewed us as cowards and slackers—and even as enemies of the State. But our camp was about 20 miles from any homes and our government supervisors treated us well and fairly. . . The general population of Central Oregon tolerated us, while enthusiastically supporting the military base near Bend." (He means Camp Abbot, the engineering training camp at what is

*"We are glad that objectors to military service are few, but for such as those now leaving Camp Wickiup, who, by their endeavors in other service have sought to compensate for whatever detriment may have come from adherence to their religious faith, we have respect."*

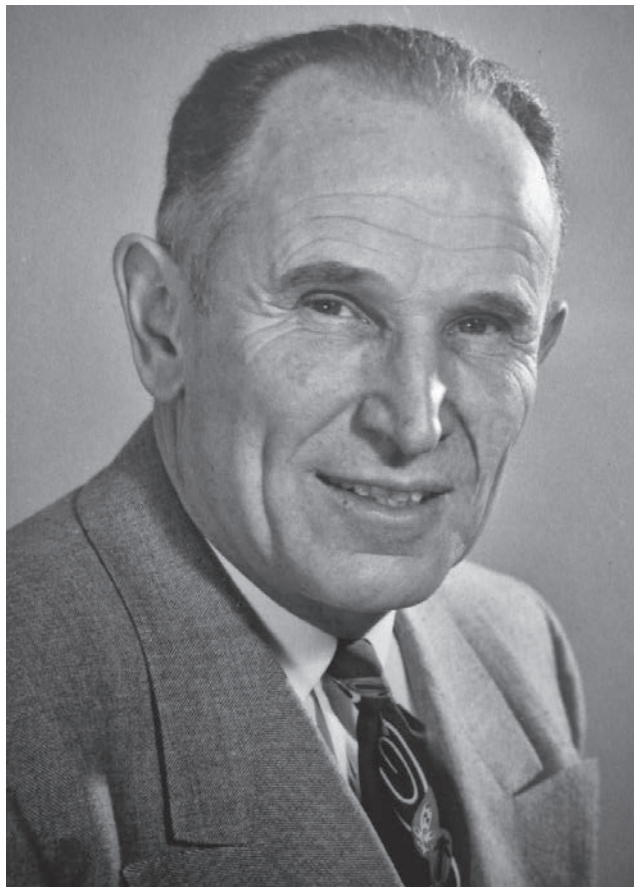
now Sunriver. Overlapping his time in Central Oregon, the “Oregon Maneuver” war-games were being set up and conducted in the High Desert southeast of Bend; and of course the Army Air fields at Madras and Redmond were at their peak of activity in late 1943 and through 1944.)

With the abrupt departure of the Mennonites, newly-arrived non-religious COs and civilians working out of Redmond built the still-visible “Burma Road” up and over the big hill east of Smith Rock, and other access roads; and after several bureaucratic interruptions, the big siphon over Crooked River and the two tunnels just north of Smith Rock were built by independent contractors using civilian workers—prohibited during the first years of the war. So the loss of the Mennonite crew to the project in January 1944 was not, as it turned out, the calamity it might well have been.

On his way out of Central Oregon in mid-January 1944, Luke Birky was assigned by the Mennonite Central Committee to deliver a truck loaded with leftover camp gear and supplies to his new CO camp near Belton, Montana. On his way to Madras, he and a co-worker had three flat tires—but only two spares. Hitch-hiking to town after the last blowout, he remembers being dropped off at what appears to have been “Turk” Irving’s filling-station on 5<sup>th</sup> and B Streets in Madras. The proprietor (probably Turk Irving himself) told Luke that he had just acquired two hard-to-get heavy duty truck tires of the right size after much difficulty with the wartime OPA Rationing Board—but that if the local OPA office OK’d it, they could have the tires. So after the two COs spent an unaccustomed night in a local hotel (probably the Jefferson Hotel nearby), the deal was approved the next morning, and the boys were on their way to Montana. He recalls that “we thanked those who helped us, and praised God for a real miracle . . . I will always be grateful to those who were so helpful, even though we disagreed on the war issue. And I have special feelings for those in the Redmond/Madras communities for their openness and kindness.”



Luke and fellow CO cutting trees at Wickiup 1943



Clyde Spencer, Bur. of Recl. Head Engineer for “Deschutes Project” B. of R. photo)

In the spring of 1945, Luke Birky volunteered for the pioneer US Forest Service smoke-jumping program in Missoula, and ended up making seven forest-fire jumps and two rescue jumps with his unit. In 1947, just married, he and his wife Verna (a registered nurse) went to work for the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico, where they lived for 5 ½ years before taking up careers in medical administration and health care for the church in the Midwest.

It’s fair to say that every mile of the North Unit Main Canal, the “Fabulous Furrow,” from the reservoir at Wickiup to the tail-end Milepost 64 near Gateway, has its own bundle of stories, about surveyors, engineers, catskinners and construction workers with heavy gloves, and ponderous machinery; about breakdowns and blowouts, accidents, and breakthroughs. Somehow, the water came through, in May 1946, and is still coming through after nearly three-quarters of a century. And in their brief, busy time on the job, the Mennonites clearly gave the project their best, at a crucial moment.

.....  
**SOURCES AND SUGGESTED READING:**

Bend *Bulletin*, Jan. 8 and 13, 1944

Luke Birky, email letters, 2016-17

William Stafford, *Down in My Heart*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1947, 1985 (autobiographical account by Stafford—Oregon’s most distinguished poet—of his time as a CO during World War Two.)

*The North Unit Story*, special issue of the *Madras Pioneer*. July 10, 1996

Kelsey Doncaster and Chris Horting-Jones, *Sagebrush to Clover: The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s North Unit of the Deschutes Project*, Vol. 1. Butte: US Bureau of Reclamation, 2013

Harold J. Eidemiller, “Irrigation of Jefferson County,” in *Jefferson County Reminiscences* (Portland: Binford and Mort, 1957, 1998

# A VERY SHORT PRIMER ON HOW TO CONVERT DRY-FARM ACRES TO IRRIGATED

The work of transforming the big dry wheat fields of Jefferson County to irrigable fields, starting in 1946, was complicated and multi-faceted—more so, probably, than either the newcomers from established irrigation projects in Idaho and elsewhere initially understood, or the old-timers who opted to learn irrigation. Both sets of farmers were as brave and persevering in their efforts to make it work as their forebears on the land, the homesteaders, had been in their era.

What follows is a highly-simplified sketch of what had to happen, field by field, season by season, to take advantage of the amazing gift of North Unit water. Experienced farmers and soil scientists would say that the transformation is still, after 75 years, ongoing. Dirt, under irrigation, is more than just “dirt.”

• **Initial “land reform.”** Under Bureau of Reclamation regulations, owners of land under water had to sell or lease property in excess of 160 acres. (Early on, in 1941, the Bureau’s opinion was that 80 acres was about right for a family farm on the Project!) Understandably, a contentious issue: when the Bureau first considered taking on the project in the late 1920s, discussions with local advocates broke down as soon as the idea of acreage-limits came up. But by 1937, when the Project contract was actually formulated, farmers here (there were a few notable and vocal exceptions) willingly signed on. By 1947, the re-distribution of land was mostly complete. In its 1947 *Annual Report*, the Bureau noted that “excess land agreements have been executed with all landowners except a few who were naturally dilatory or whose addresses were unknown.”

• **Sub-dividing fields.** Typically, big dry-farmed fields—many were 180 acres or even more—had to be divided into smaller farming units. Henceforth, of course, there would be no more “summer-fallowing,” setting half of one’s cropland aside each year to replenish itself for next year’s crop. Obviously this meant many more acres available for cropping each year.

• **Fences.** Along roads and between farms, fences were mostly eliminated to facilitate access to fields. For a time, cattle and horses running loose were a serious problem.



Land-leveling at C.W. Van Cleef farm on Agency Plains (B. of R. photo)

• **“Picking Rocks.”** To prepare for irrigation, at least the bigger rocks had to be removed before land-leveling, then during, and afterward, endlessly. Dry-farmers were astonished at the small size of the rocks that their irrigated successors were determined to pick up and remove—“as small as oranges!” The reason, of course, was that the new crops—especially seed crops, like clover—demanded much lower cutting levels on combines, and so there was always a risk of picking up a rock and running it right through the innards of the machine, “knocking the concaves down” or worse, in the middle of harvest.

• **Land-leveling.** At best this was an inexact technology, entirely

new to this area, with varying degrees of competence in the ranks of the operators who did it. There were law-suits, do-overs, and so on—and on every job, more dust in the air than old-timers here had seen since the drought of the early 1930s. But the work was crucial, as anybody knows who has ever tried to flood-irrigate a badly-leveled field: water puddling or ponding in the middle of the field, or running down corrugations obediently—and then veering sideways across the field because of an invisible uncorrected tilt in the land.

• **Ditches and ditching.** There was endless digging and adjusting of supply and drain ditches—subdividing the flow of water into individual farms, then into fields, and finally (before sprinklers and pivots), into individual sets of corrugations—an endless challenge involving metal or rubber “siphons” that had to be filled with water and then adroitly plopped over, one end into the supply ditch, the other end feeding (hopefully) the ditch for the set of corrugations to be watered. A few ultra-fussy farmers even tried “spiles”—little tubes feeding into individual corrugations. As for corrugating a field: a whole uncertain technology unto itself!

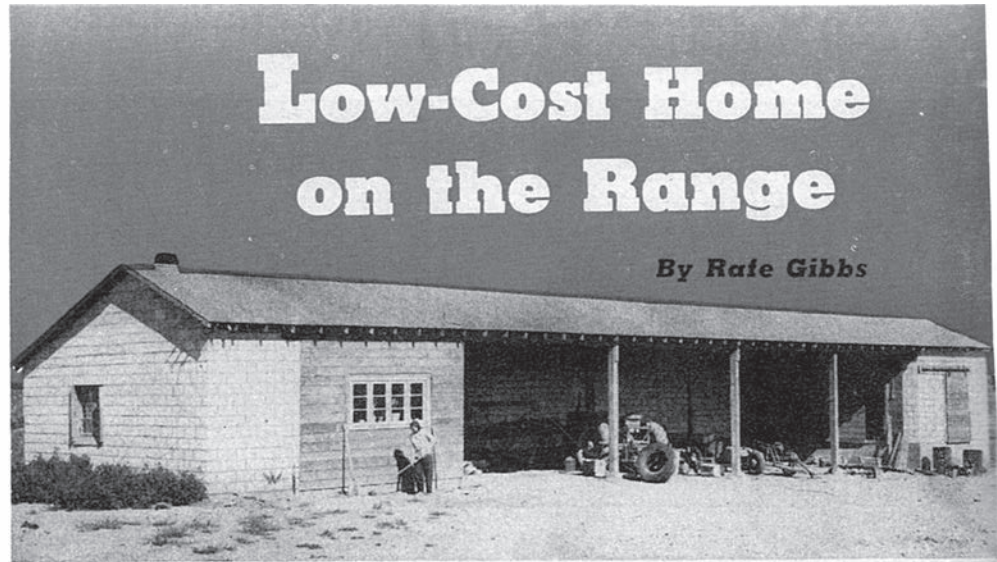
• **Educating the soil.** Ultimately, underneath it all, there was the slow, invisible, mysterious process of “educating” our mineral-rich but humus-poor soil, so that after four or five years, it would accept irrigation. Meaning that it slowly absorbed organic ingredients—humus—so that it would hold moisture and transmit it to crops, when it came horizontally and on time courtesy of the North Unit ditchrider, rather than vertically and unpredictably, out of a rainy sky.

# THE AGENCY PLAINS SPECIAL: OUR CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL ARCHITECTURE

Under the drastic land reforms and mandatory acreage reductions required by federal sponsorship of the North Unit Project, starting in 1946, a much bigger farming population would occupy the designated NUID farm-lands than in the days of dry-farming. Where one or two farmsteads sufficed when family farms ran to half or full sections or more, now there would need to be houses and farm buildings on plots of 160, 80, or even 40 acres. Where would all the newcomers live, many of them WWII veterans and their young families, drawn by special incentives for veterans?

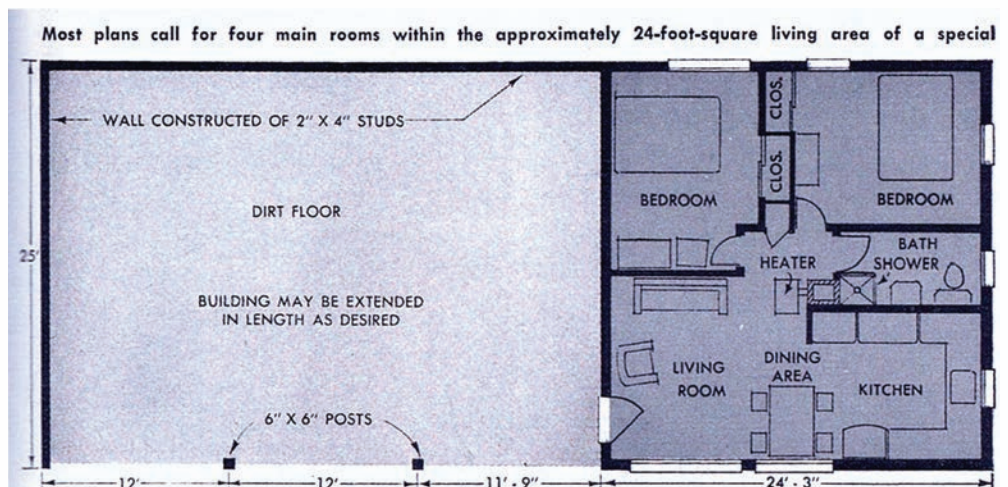
Some landowners in the district undertook to build modest dwellings on their properties for tenants who would be renting their land. A few old homestead houses were refurbished and occupied by newly-arrived families. There were (briefly) tent-houses, and one or two log cabins, and several families set up housekeeping in subterranean quarters that they planned would become the basements of conventional above-ground dwellings.

But around 1947, as newcomers arrived in large numbers in both the Agency Plains and Culver areas, attention focused on a novel solution to what was becoming an acute housing problem. This was a house-plan that contained, under one roof, a compact four-room family dwelling on one end and a storage/garage/shop unit on the other end, and in between, a machine shed. Who created this inexpensive and functional design (local county agents, maybe? farm experts at Oregon State College?), and how it came to be widely known as "The Agency Plains Special" is now forgotten. Probably the name followed from its quick popularity on Agency Plains, where Kenneth Harris built two in 1947, one to house his family



Made of cinder block, this Oregon "special" will eventually provide two granaries as well as a machine shed

Popular Mechanics feature on Agency Plains Specials, April 1953



Floor plan

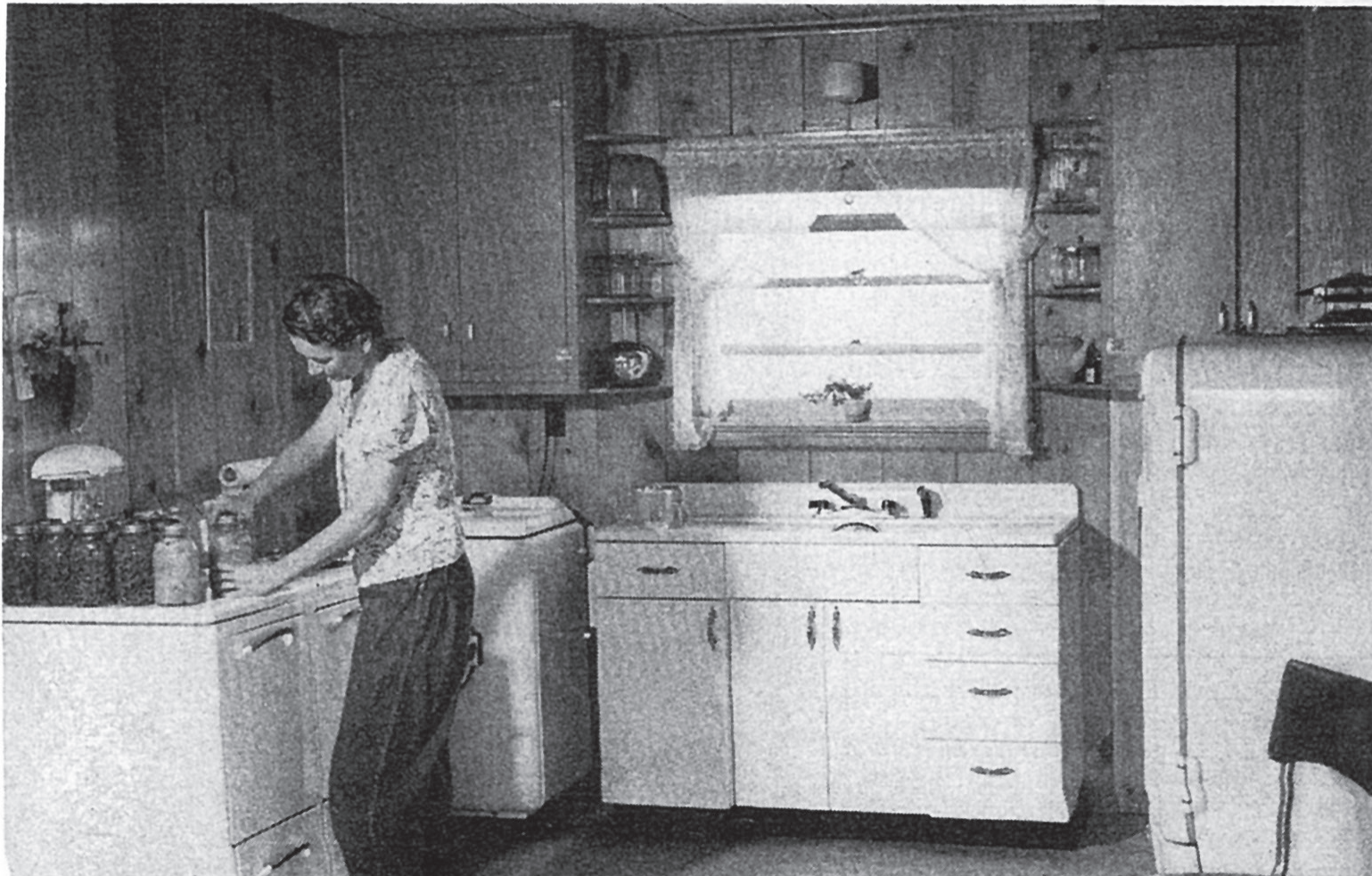


The North Unit Irrigation District is located in the Deschutes River Basin and supplies irrigation water to nearly 59,000 acres of farmland in Jefferson County.



2024 N.W. Beech Street • Madras, Oregon 97741  
(541) 475-3625 (24hrs) • (541) 475-3652 • [www.northunitid.com](http://www.northunitid.com)

Knotty pine such as this furnishes an attractive interior finish for \$2000 to \$3000 convertible building



Mrs. Melvin Waldemar in her new knotty pine kitchen

temporarily, another for his hired man, and Pete and Ken Bicart and numerous others followed suit. But variations on the basic “Special” plan were built all over the North Unit, mostly of wood, a few of concrete blocks, and many are still standing, mostly used now as utility buildings rather than as dwellings.

The North Unit communities have advanced in housing as well as in agricultural standards since 1947, but the Agency Plains Specials are still with us, reminders of how it was here back in those days, when innovation and a “can-do” spirit were prime necessities. However the basic design came about, it attained a measure of fame in 1949 when it was featured in the Bend *Bulletin* and in the Bureau of Reclamation’s official magazine, *Reclamation Era*, which showed a “Special” built by Melvin Waldemar of Culver, with a photo of Mrs. Waldemar in her “all-modern” kitchen. And the design went “national” if not viral when it was featured in the April 1953 issue of *Popular Mechanics*.

*PM* told its readers that “the Special was developed to provide the farmer with a temporary home, plus machine shed. Later it can be converted to all shed, or part shed and part garage. But the

Special has been intriguing the city man, too, with its possibilities for providing both low-cost home and garage, either permanent or temporary. If built on the back of a lot the unit can become a garage or workshop when a new house is constructed on the front of the lot.” (p. 166)

Could it be that our home-grown farmhouse design became part of the postwar home-building boom in cities like Denver, Chicago, Omaha? An “Agency Plains Special” in the suburbs of New York City?

.....  
**Sources:**

Merle Tillery, “The Agency Plains Special: Streamlined Convertible Houses in Oregon,” *Reclamation Today*, June 1949, p. 121.

Bend *Bulletin*, “New Type of House Popular,” August 24, 1949.

Nate Gibbs, “Low-Cost Home on the Range,” *Popular Mechanics*, April 1953, pp. 166-7.

# A Second Wave of Pioneering Families

by Jane Ahern

Most of this issue of THE AGATE deals with how irrigation came to Jefferson County—the locals like Harry Gard who worked for years to figure out the financing and get the project started, the men who built the infrastructure, and the work required once the water was here. What's left to tell is what it was like for the families who came with the water.

Most of the young wives and mothers who moved to newly irrigated farms of Jefferson County in the late 1940s and early 1950s are gone now, but their children are still here to recount their experiences. That perspective is provided below by Jeri Olson Fine, who moved with her family to the Agency Plains from Idaho around 1950, when she was just five years old.

The Olsons bought their 160 acres around 1948 or '49 from an Idaho neighbor who had bought it as an investment. At that time, they were living on the Collins Fruit Ranch established by Jeri's maternal great-grandparents in Sunny Slope, Idaho around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jeri's mother, Marguerite, had grown up on the fruit ranch as one of seven kids.

Marguerite and her husband, Louis Olson, helped keep the ranch going throughout World War II while Marguerite's brothers were serving in the military, with the understanding that one of her brothers would take over the farm after the war.

So the availability of newly irrigated land in Central Oregon provided an opportunity for Louis, Marguerite, and their children—Ron, Jodi, Steve, and Jeri—to leave the fruit ranch to Marguerite's brothers and establish themselves on their own farm.

## Adjusting to a new home

Before the family moved onto their new land, Louis spent many months traveling back and forth from Idaho to the Agency Plains to get a home built for his wife and children.

According to Fine, the new house was a far cry from the big, two-story home with well-established yard around it that they had



The Olson family surveying their new farm on Agency Plains, 1949. Jodi, Marguerite, Louis, Steve, Jeri & Ron

lived in back in Idaho. "It had been there long enough to have huge trees and of course all the outbuildings, the corrals and the barns and the chickens," Jeri said of the Idaho home.

For their new home, her father had excavated a patch of land about 30 x 40 feet, with three walls of pumice brick and one side glassed in to eventually make a daylight basement. "Where the kitchen was to be there was a pile of lumber and [there was] a big puddle of water where the living room would be because it had been cold and of course the cement was green. Dad had kind of nailed the windows in but the snow had come in around the windows. I remember Mom just frantically stuffing anything she could find to keep the snow and the cold out," Jeri said.

There was no running water, no phone, meager electricity, and only one light bulb in the middle of where the living room would eventually be. The wall studs were up, but there were no finished interior walls yet.

The house was heated with two sheepherder stoves, upon which Jeri's mother also did

the cooking. "I don't know how she did it," said Jeri. "She didn't have a whole lot to cook with. Before we left Idaho, she had canned like 700 quarts of different kinds of fruit and that made a lot of difference in what we had to eat."

"It must have been horrible for Mom, bless her heart," Jeri said. But she doesn't remember her mother complaining. "She was the oldest of seven kids. She had worked hard all her life."

"I look back at the starkness. The only trees that were around were where the homesteads had been. The Links homestead, the Luelling homestead, the Klann homestead. Anyplace that had been homesteaded had either cottonwood or poplar trees, but there were no trees where we were. Nothing. And the wind—oh my God, the wind was awful. That hasn't changed," said Jeri.

At times, the wind hampered the family's ability to carry out their work, as when it almost thwarted Louis' efforts to build a shed. He got the shed partially built before they had to go somewhere. By the time they got



back, the wind had blown it down. He started to build it a second time and the same thing happened. The third time, he didn't walk away from the shed until it was finished.

Jeri also remembers she and her sister Jodi having to hold a tarp over the combine auger during harvest so the wind didn't blow away all the grass seed.

### Unpaved roads

Another inconvenience was the lack of paved roads. Jeri remembers that on their first visit to the property the road was a narrow strip through a wheat field with the heads of wheat thumping the sides of the car as they passed.

That first winter was particularly tough because the property was buried in snow and Jeri says that the road grader probably didn't know that her family was there. "You couldn't really see the house. Most of it was underground and it was just a tin roof," Jeri said. Consequently, the grader did not clear the roads around their place. "We were totally isolated," she said.

To get the three school-aged kids to school, Louis would drive them on his tractor to their neighbors, the Lydys, and from there they could catch the school bus. Because they didn't have running water in the house, her father would bring two milk cans along to fill up with water in the morning and again in the afternoon when he picked the kids up at the Lydys'.

Similarly, when the family wanted to drive to town, they left their car at the Lydys' and



Digging a lateral ditch on Agency Plains, 1948

walked to and from it across the fields.

When the snow melted, it left behind deep, grasping mud that captured both shoes and cars. "The farmers that had tractors would leave their tractor at every deep mud hole and you'd come to the mudhole and you'd try to drive through it, knowing that you were going to get stuck. And you'd get the tractor, pull your car out, put the tractor back, go on to the next one," Jeri said.

The Olsons' first out-of-town visitors were unexpectedly delivered to them on a platform attached to the back of a neighbor's tractor. "The family stood on the back of the tractor and the farmer drove them through all the mudholes," Jeri said.

The roads remained challenging enough for long enough that the Olsons' youngest children, Steve and Jeri, boarded in town with the Ridgeway family during the school year.

### Mud becomes dust

In the summer months, the mud turned

into dust, which was stirred up when farmers worked to level and slope the land for irrigation and was blown around by the ever-present wind.

"We have movie pictures of Dad out on a tractor moving dirt and you can't even see him," said Jeri, because he was enveloped in dust.

The combination of copious amounts of mud and dust with lack of running water posed a challenge for Jeri's mother. "Mom couldn't keep anything clean and that frustrated her," Jeri said.

"Mom did what laundry she could on a tub on one of the stoves," Jeri said. Marguerite managed to keep them in clean underwear but resorted to spot cleaning their other clothes between washings.

One casualty of the difficult living conditions was Jeri's long curls. "I had long, curly hair. I mean long ringlets. But because of the lack of water and the dust and the dirt, Mom finally had to give up and cut my hair. It was just too hard for her to keep. She couldn't keep it clean, she couldn't keep it combed," Jeri said. "I've never had curls since then," she added.

### Financial ups and downs

The first few years were challenging economically too. Their first crop of Ladino clover, grown in 1951 or '52, was not very successful. Jeri said some of the crop was ravaged by birds.

To put food on the table, Louis and Marguerite taught square-dancing all over



**COLDWELL  
BANKER**

**DICK DODSON  
REALTY**

*Call the People Who  
Know Real Estate*

**541.475.6137**

[www.coldwellbankermadras.com](http://www.coldwellbankermadras.com)

83 SW 'K' Street • Madras, Oregon 97741



Oregon. Louis was a caller and Marguerite was a teacher. Jeri remembers her mother talking about having to walk across the fields to get to the car with her long square-dancing skirts hiked up under her armpits to keep them from dragging in the mud, trying to keep her boots on.

In 1953, the Olsons grew a good crop of Merion bluegrass seed that put them on a better footing financially. "I don't know if we've had a crop since that made that much money on 25 acres," says Jeri. "That was the tipping point for the Olsons on the Agency Plains."

After that, her parents had enough money to complete the house. They built another story on top of the daylight basement. "The boys stayed in the basement and then Mom and Dad had a room and Jodi and I had a room together upstairs," Jeri said.

It must have been a good year for other local families because, according to Jeri, other families who had basement houses were able to build their upper stories that same year.

Jeri and her husband still live in the house today. One of their granddaughters plans on living in the house with her family eventually and her children will be the fifth generation to live there.

In about 1958, the Olsons grew a bumper crop of potatoes, which Jeri remembers because her dad celebrated by buying himself a new leather coat.

There were always economic ups and downs. While older brother Ron was in college, the family earned the extra money needed for college expenses by taking jobs in town. Louis farmed during the day and worked nights at the mill and Marguerite worked days in the office at the mill. Jodi had jobs in town.

### Social life

Because she was a young child when the family moved to the Agency Plains, Jeri did not perceive any hardship. "As long as you're with your family and you're fed and you're loved, everything is a lark," she said.

Instead, Jeri remembers the enjoyment she had playing with the neighbor children, particularly the Lydys and the Clowers. "When you're isolated like that, your friends are your neighbors and you all depended on

each other," she said.

"Like other kids of the era and of earlier eras, we made our own fun," Jeri said. "And the canyon was absolutely our playground. I don't know why we didn't get in an avalanche, why we didn't get bit by a rattlesnake."

There was a trail, previously made by Native Americans, leading down to the river. They found lots of arrow heads and the remnants of the first New Era schoolhouse, which had been dumped over the rim when no longer needed. "We found books and we found all kinds of stuff," said Jeri.

One year, her father had a huge pile of wheat straw left over from the harvest. "The Clowers boys and the Lydy boys and Ron and Steve, and there was another boy out there named Jimmy at the time, and they made a huge maze of tunnels and rooms and we played in that forever. We played tag in that; we had meetings in that, because we had one room that was big enough it would have held all us kids. And then of course there were tunnels going out. Gosh we had a lot of fun," Jeri said.

Steve and Jeri also loved to play in the seed storage area of the machine shed when it was not in use. There were catwalks overhead "and much to our mother's horror, us kids used to play on that all the time," Jeri said.

In the evenings, the family would play card games together. "The six of us would play canasta night after night after night and it was so great, so fun," she said.

Once their house was more civilized, the Olsons often had friends over and the family was often invited to other homes. These affairs were usually potlucks at which families pooled their sometimes-sparse rations. "Times were tough, so everybody brought what they had. You'd go to the neighbors' house and you'd eat and play cards and the kids would play. It might not have been a very balanced meal, but everybody got full."

"If it hadn't been for the neighbors, I don't think any of us would have made it. We all took such good care of each other," Jeri said.

Though the Olsons were close with their neighbors, they felt some hostility from the families who had dryfarmed the area before they came. After all, those farmers had been forced to sell their irrigated land in excess

of 160 acres, at prices set by the federal government. The Olsons paid \$100 an acre to someone who had bought the land from a homesteader who had been forced to sell it for \$25 an acre.

So many people from Idaho moved to the county around that time that they formed an Idaho club, as well as other clubs. "I went to 'Go and Sew' forever with Mom," Jeri said.

Larger gatherings were often held at The Cove. "They had a big park down there and we played baseball and had picnics. There was an orchard down there. It was a great community place. Any kind of organization that was going to have a picnic, that's where everybody headed was The Cove," Jeri said.

### Growing into the work

In the summers, the three older kids and their mother worked on the farm. "I was too little and there was nobody to keep me, so they shipped me off to Idaho to stay with my grandma and my aunt two or three weeks a month during the summer, which I loved. I loved my grandma," Jeri said.

Eventually Jeri started helping on the farm too. One of her and Steve's earliest jobs was clearing the floating pumice rocks out of the irrigation ditches. As she grew, she graduated into the harder jobs.

"I was too little to pick rock, but as soon as I could jump hard enough to make the tractor go in neutral, I drove the tractor and everybody else picked rocks." And then, when she was a little older, "All of us kids picked rocks," she said. "And picked rocks. And picked rocks. We were really good at it."

### Second wave of pioneers

Though this is the story of one particular family, the basic elements were the same for many other families that came with the water—starting out in rudimentary housing; combating the dirt, mud, dust, and wind; struggling to prepare the land for irrigation; and riding the roller coaster of good years and bad years. It is striking how much their experiences echoed those of the homesteaders who came to dryfarm the plains a half-century before them.

As Jeri aptly put it, "We didn't come in a covered wagon, but we were pioneers of a sort."

# THE FUTURE OF IRRIGATION HERE— A SYMPOSIUM OF PREDICTIONS

**K**eeping track of local history can sometimes enable making useful predictions about what's to come for the locale. In that spirit, THE AGATE has asked some canny Jefferson County farmers and agricultural administrators to venture predictions about the future of farming in the North Unit Irrigation District, which is now almost three-quarters of a century old. We're very grateful for their willingness to briefly turn prophets: what they foresee and recommend is thought-provoking, and as for the validity of their diverse prophecies—well, only time will tell!

## Tom Kirsch

My name is Tom Kirsch. I have been farming here since 1973 as Madras Farms Co. It has been my privilege to be mentored by Paul Barnes, Willis Freeman, and others over the years. Currently, my son Michael Kirsch manages the farm.

The single biggest issue facing irrigated farming in the NUID will be the availability of consistent annual irrigation water. Demands from urban growth and environmental pressure such as the spotted frog will compete for the water. Climate change in the future may limit supply. Since the general public is responsible for the increased demand, they should be expected to help fund future infrastructure projects such as canal piping. Dialogue with the general public through the Deschutes River Conservancy and Coalition for the Deschutes to spread NUID's irrigated agriculture's story is essential. On farm adaptation of the latest affordable technology to save water such as center pivot, drip irrigation, and any future innovation will be necessary.

Due to NUID's small isolated area, seed crops will continue to be the crops of the future. Specialty crops like hemp may continue. Hay crops will depend on water availability.

Societal issues such as the aging farm population and general work ethic will become bigger problems. A workable guest worker program such as H2A will be required.

I am an optimist. A well-managed farm in NUID will survive and continue to be a positive contributor to the Madras community.



A wheel line north of Juniper Butte

## MIKE BRITTON

(General Manager of the North Unit Irrigation District; President, Oregon Water Resources Congress)

I see several factors in the future of Jefferson County agriculture. First and foremost is water scarcity. Supplies of water will continue to be affected into the future as non-agricultural demands on the resource increase. Competing demands including urbanization, regulatory and political demands, environmental requirements, and climate change—just to name a few—will factor into how water is shared and managed in the future.

Urbanization has been and will be one of the significant threats to water supply. As the population continues to increase and lands (particularly ag land) are consumed, the water that once served those lands becomes a commodity that many interests compete for. That competition includes agriculture, cities and municipalities, industry, and the environment. Unfortunately, many times the deepest pockets win out over real need.

Ongoing regulation and politics strain existing resources—whether on the farm or on the river. Regulations (Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Emissions control, etc.) that tie the hands of those that rely on water will continue far into the future as our lives become more regulated and politicized. It will be important for the agricultural community to be engaged in regulatory and political affairs in the future. Farmers and ranchers will need to account for such affairs in their business plans in order to keep regulation and politics in check.

Regional collaboration is a must. As junior water right holders in the Deschutes Basin, NUID must be a collaborative participant in Basin water discussions and decisions. The future of NUID farmers and ranchers lies within this collaborative effort in response to ongoing efforts to move water and water rights from one district to another or to uses other than agriculture—cities need water also.

Climate change—real or fabricated. Farmers and ranchers should have a Plan B in their back pockets should climate change be for real. Prognosticators predict climate change will affect agriculture in several ways, including changes in average temperatures, changes in precipitation, climate extremes and

unusual weather patterns. Taking this into account, farmers and ranchers will need to consider the types of crops that can be grown in changed conditions, related cropping patterns, irrigation scheduling and efficiencies, potential for new pests and diseases, and loss of cultivated lands—just to name a few.

Technology will play an ever-increasing and important role in the future of agriculture. Farmers and ranchers will need to rely on state-of-the-art technology to increase production, minimize costs and inputs, while ensuring limited resources are used in the most efficient and economical manner. Young farmers returning to the farm today are tech savvy and better educated, and bring with them different philosophies—which may go against conventional farming practices, but will change the technology of agriculture.

Farmers and ranchers have long been known as innovators, as well as for their uncanny ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Looking out into the next 30 to 50 years, those innovation and adaptation skills will be the lifeline of survival. As strains on our natural resources continue, diversification will be key to ongoing productivity in Jefferson County. New cropping patterns, new crops and plant varieties, new irrigation technology that will counter potential water shortages—whether created through regulatory causes or natural causes—will be key to survival of the agricultural heritage of Jefferson County.

**RICHARD MACY**

(Macy’s family have farmed lands in the North Unit for four generations. He is a current and long-time member of the NUID Board of Directors)

Water is one of the key factors to the future of farming in the North Unit Irrigation District. The Deschutes Basin is blessed with enough water, if used properly, to meet many needs. Even though we live in the High Desert of Oregon, the natural flow of the Deschutes River is dependable year after year for storage and irrigation, and can still supply the needs of the river ecosystems.

Because of the earlier dated water rights other Central Oregon irrigation districts have, State of Oregon water laws, recreational and esthetic demands, endangered species, and environmental demands, a challenge has been created for NUID patrons to have adequate amounts of water to produce crops every year to their fullest potential. NUID patrons are very efficient with the use of the water allotted to them. The Basin water users and communities are coming together to solve this problem.

If further conservation efforts continue within the NUID and especially in the older irrigation districts in the area which hold senior water rights, we will survive with adequate water. It will take time, money, and education. With the completion of the **Habitat Conservation Plan, and ongoing federal, state, and local capital** being invested in conservation in the Deschutes Basin, the agricultural industry in NUID will survive. Future conserved and saved water will have to be shared by and reallocated to all.

**SETH KLANN**

(Founder, with his father Brad, of Mecca Grade Estate Malt, specializing in new strains of barley malt for craft beer brewing. Their farm lands were originally homesteaded in 1906 and dryfarmed by their ancestors, Seth and Cora Luelling.)

When asked about the water outlook, I often tell the same story: “As long as we aren’t carving any additional farm ground out of the High Desert, we become more efficient irrigators, and we fix the leaks in the whole system . . . we should be fine.” It’s been stated that there is enough water in the entire system to meet everyone’s needs, albeit with certain provisions. The delivery system requires modernization, which ultimately requires time and money. The reality is that there are so many new people flooding into Central Oregon who have money . . . and plenty of opinions . . . but apparently not enough time to let us get the job done.

One of the frustrating trends I’m now witnessing is the vilification of irrigators by other farmers. Of note are new food products being marketed as “dry-farmed.” I’m sure it’s fantastic if your dryland farm is blessed with sufficient rainfall throughout the year, but I often remind malthouse visitors that barley requires 20 inches of rainfall

during the growing season. In 2018 we received 2 inches. That was all our rainfall for the entire year. Fortunately, when non-farmers start connecting the dots and realize that our highly-specialized crops are completely dependent on sufficient irrigation, they begin to sympathize with our plight.



Wickiup Reservoir, nearly empty, Sept. 2018

Most young farmers know that in order to survive, they’ll not only have to make all the right decisions on-farm but will also be required to engage with non-farmers in the broader community. If not, these people will form their own opinions based on fear, marketing, or simply not having enough time to become educated. It’s more work, but I think we should see this as an opportunity to bridge the ever-widening urban-rural divide.

**GARY HARRIS**

(Lifelong Agency Plains farmer; his father, Kenneth, came from Idaho as one of the North Unit “pioneers.” Long-time champion of preserving farm-land for farming; Oregon Farm Bureau Hall of Fame inductee.)

North Unit Irrigation District and its 59,000 acres, the heartland of Central Oregon agriculture, has the best climate and elevation (2400’) for many seed crops. Warm days and cool nights enable strong bee pollination for high germination seeds. NUID



Hemp: the new “ladino clover”?

is the second largest irrigation district in Oregon.

What is this Jefferson County zone’s future? It has always had specialty crops: ladino clover, bluegrasses, vegetable seeds of garlic, sugar beet, onion seed, carrot seed. Peppermint was a mainstay for many years. Will hemp for CBD survive as a

new crop? These crops usually have a potential for higher profit margins. They benefit from NUID’s isolation, which mitigates disease, weeds, and pests. Crops like wheat, corn, and soybeans are raised in many other regions of America and have large markets, but with slimmer profit margins.

Several keys are necessary for long-term survival of farming in Jefferson County:

- Ag business infrastructure. It is mandatory that local equipment dealers and seed and fertilizer dealers remain viable. In the early ‘50’s Jasa Ag and Jefferson County Co-op sold over 60 combines in one year at an average price of \$1500 each. Today, the cost is over \$450,000 for a combine and \$165,000 for a windrower. The new hemp balers cost \$500,000. Seed processors must go outside Jefferson County to maintain a large farm-client base, including trips to Post, Paulina, and even Christmas Valley. The area is blessed to have global crop marketing for carrot and grass seed. Central Oregon Seeds has 45 employees and a \$12 million facility with new carrot cold storage. Their global seed sales for 2018 were \$35-40 million. Pratum/Madras has 35 employees, a \$10 million plant, and just completed a new fertilizer plant and a grass seed storage addition. [Other local ag businesses include Ag West, Pape’ Tractors, Helena Chemical, and Wilbur-Ellis.]
- Sufficient water. The Deschutes Basin has enough water for the NUID but sharing and conservation projects must be reallocated to accommodate for drought, the spotted frog,

and instream flow augmentation for fish. Up-stream senior irrigation districts (in Deschutes County) must become more efficient and share their excess water. Environmental concerns must refrain from forcing expensive litigation on area farms.

- Land use protection. The future population surge in Central Oregon must resist the notion that farmland serves as a rural open space housing zone. All irrigated farmland must stay in production to maintain the NUID critical mass. Legislators must not allow accessory dwellings on exclusive farm-use zones, or destination resorts. Farmers today are removing houses to allow for pivot irrigation to minimize labor needs and conserve water. Economies of scale necessitate larger farms. In 2019, there are 13 family farms in the North Unit farming over 1000 acres each to help spread operating and equipment costs, where early farmers here could make a living on 80 acres, each with a home.

Times have changed, but we have been blessed by being able to raise high profit-margin crops.

**MIKE WEBER**

(Partner and GM of Central Oregon Seeds Inc. [“COSI”]; former County Extension agent; Oregon Farm Bureau “Distinguished Service” honoree.)

My predictions at 5- year intervals are:

- 2020-2025: Most farms should maintain with present cropping rotation including carrot seeds. Hemp production is up in the air as to amount of acres being grown. Drought still looms large as to farming all acres in the Project. Farmers will continue to become more efficient and mechanized as farm labor becomes tighter. There could be some consolidation of smaller farms due to retirements and farm sales.
- 2026-2030: Carrot seed acres should be stable. Again, hemp is a big question. Grass and alfalfa acres should maintain. The execution of the HCP (habitat conservation plan for spotted frog and salmon) will loom large for NUID. The plan for canal piping of the irrigation districts to the south of NUID should be in full swing, which should allow NUID to maintain almost full allotment from Wickiup. That is the hope. This is a huge effort on behalf of all of Central Oregon to be pulling in the same direction for all users of water (farms, fish, river, and tourism).
- 2031-2035. Obviously, land use laws will play a significant part as to (hopefully) continued protection of farm land.

**Madras Medical Group**

Caring for the whole family since 1973

*Se habla español*

76 N.E. 12th Street, Madras

Visit us online at  
madrasmedicalgroup.com

- Kristine Delamarter, MD
- Nicholas Blake, MD
- Katie Volk, PA-C
- Gary Plant, MD
- Thomas Manning, MD
- Joanne Boisvert, MD
- Molly Nichols, PA-C

**541.475.3874**



**MMG**

Owned & Operated by the  
Physicians of MMG

# AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF EARLY NORTH UNIT STAKEHOLDERS

**W**e thought it would be historically noteworthy to include here a roster of the earliest stakeholders in the NUID, say 1946-7. Oddly enough, the North Unit files don't seem to contain such a list, but by combing through their massive "Water Users" account ledgers, we're able to offer the following as an

incomplete indication of the farmers who signed up early for irrigation here. Some family names here were on hand before irrigation came; others "came with the water" and have persisted to this day; many others apparently came, tried their luck, and left. A question for old-timers: how many names do you recognize?

**List "A":** from the "Water Users" ledgers—entries dated May 1945, a year before the water actually arrived in the Culver area, so these names are mainly of Culver "early-birds:"

- William Barber
- William Urbach
- Dorothy Keeney
- Kenneth Ditmars
- Samuel Rodman
- Morris Beckworth
- Roy Newport
- Isaac & Edna Law
- J.L. & Eva Nicholes
- David Law
- Thomas Harris
- Earl Bone
- William A. Argain
- Robert L. Griffin
- Roy Griffin
- Dayton Grant
- Claud & Irene Hinton
- Nancy & Earl Noble
- Virgil Messinger
- Leda Hodges
- E.R. Trayle
- D.L. Hynes
- Frederick Clark
- Raymond & Ila Brown

- Ralph & Maureen Friesen
- J.L. & Bessie Harrington
- Isaac & Rose Bergin
- Fred Rodman
- J.B. & Farrah Klatt
- Boyd & Helena Overhulse
- L.E. Bebb
- S.B. & Beulah Smith
- G.B. & Dora Petty
- George Rodman
- Harry & Bernice Dinkel
- Albert Yocum
- Paul & Margaret Yocum
- Millard Rodman
- James Read
- W.S. & Margaret MacRostie
- Fern Lundy
- Clark Lundy
- Joseph & C.B. Lundy
- F.J. & Nelda Douglas
- Alex & Irene Barklow
- Jonas and Ida Rowan
- Fred Lyons
- Richard Tate
- E.G. Sanders

- Roy & Florena Linney
- Arnold Finkbeiner
- Nick & Maria Friesen
- T.W. & Elinor Combs
- Edward
- Alvin
- & Oscar Bebb
- Lloyd & Rhoda Landreth
- L.A. Bean
- F.N. & Hilma Graham
- Irvin & Myrtle Shutt
- Norbert Buck
- Kenneth Buck
- Delvin Buck
- F.J. & Margaret Carpenter
- Myron Knapp
- John Ross
- W.J. & Zena Rose
- Henry Jullum
- Marion Carter
- Ezra Carter

**List "B":** from the Bureau of Reclamation's *Annual Report for the North Unit in 1948*, by which time water had reached Agency Plains. This list names farmers who had construction contracts with the North Unit District that year for on-site work—turnouts,

culverts, division boxes, weirs, use of the district's big land-levelling planes, and so on:

- Dave Frost
- E.E. Tate
- Paul Law
- Everett McIntosh
- Alex Barklow
- Dwight Macy
- Martin Burkhart
- Earl Miller
- Ralph Friesen
- Fritz Nance
- A.W. Ryun
- Marvin Flood
- T.A. Taylor
- Max Mendenhall
- L.L. Hirtzell
- Bernice Coad
- W.L. Kinkade
- C.B. Lundy
- M.G. Ames
- W.C. Osborn
- E. W. Miller
- Ruth Killingbeck
- Lee Williams
- R.L. Griffin Jr.
- Bob Wah
- E.R. Tingle
- W.S. Gibson
- G. Ray Obendorf

- Ronald Bergen
- J. P. Brooks
- G.C. Birtwhistle
- Claude Butler
- F.E. Stangland
- Tom Leach
- Jim Vibbert
- W.M. Tate
- Floyd Evick
- Harry Johnson
- Peter Ulam
- V.S. Howard
- Elmer Miller
- Elton Bollenbaugh
- David Snavelly
- E.A. Sproat
- Glen DeShazer
- Roscoe Links
- Arthur Johnson
- J.A. Youngs
- Carl Chase
- Ralph Snyder
- Warren Smith
- Jonas Rowan
- W.J. Stebbins
- J.H. Tompkins
- Warren Smith
- Ray Cunningham
- Charles Landreth

# THE HISTORY OF ONE NORTH UNIT FIELD'S CROPS 1948-2019

**Editor's note:** Gary Harris contributed the following record of crops grown on one 32-acre field on Harris Farms (Agency Plains) from the first year of irrigation on the Plains, 1948 (when his father Kenneth Harris, a North Unit pioneer, was in charge) to 2019. The record illustrates the evolution of crop selections in the NUID, and also the distinctive diversity of the selections, for which this area is well-known. One reason for this remarkable range of crops is the relative isolation of Central Oregon, meaning that a wide range of possible plantings won't be affected by insects, weeds, fungi, and so on. The recent success of carrot seeds here owes much to the fact that Queen Anne's Lace, which readily cross-fertilizes with carrots (and thus has frustrated carrot-seed growers in the Willamette Valley) does not prosper here.

But there is a more basic factor in our diverse harvest as it has evolved. From the beginning, North Unit farmers have been, individually and collectively, remarkably innovative and inventive in what they decide to try growing on their land, and opportunistic when something seems to be working. And it certainly helps that the "culture" of the North Unit has been, since early on, sociable and interactive. . . farmers here tend to be mutually supportive in their farming.

Harris's record for "Field 12" is certainly diversified, but similar long-term crop records for other long-time North Unit farms would include many other crops: Alsike clover, alfalfa, meadow grass, malting barley, oats, flower-seeds (sunflowers, cosmos, etc.), hazelnuts, strawberries, market vegetables: radish, carrots, squash, pumpkins, watermelon, beans, etc; lavender, and (latest on the local crop Hit Parade) hemp.



1946 - Harvesting netted gem potatoes on Harold Tompkins' farm at end of the first irrigation season.

Spud harvest (Bureau of Reclamation photo)

"The following are the crops rotated in Field 12 of Harris Farms on NW Boise Drive since 1948. This is a 32-acre field that took the first irrigation water on the Agency Plains

in the first week of June 1948. I have no records of the ladino clover crops in the first ten years:

1948-58: wheat, potatoes, and ladino clover; 1958: potatoes; 1959: wheat with barley on north 3 acres; 1960-2: blue grass (Merion); 1963: potatoes; 1964: wheat; 1965-8: bluegrass (S-2); 1963: potatoes; 1964: wheat; 1965-8: blue grass (S-2); 1969: wheat; 1970: potatoes; 1971: wheat (Gaines); 1972-6: peppermint; 1977-83: blue grass (Baron); 1982: wheat (Stephens Foundation); 1983: garlic seed; 1984: wheat (Stephens); 1985: carrot seed (Fanci-Pak, north half); 1986: peppermint, north half/carrot seed (Fanci-Pak), south half; 1987-9: peppermint.

1990: wheat (Stephens), north half/peppermint, south half; 1991: wheat (Stephens); 1992: fallow, drought; 1993-6: blue grass (Gnome); 1997: wheat (Stephens); 1998: fallow; 1999: fallow (north)/ onion seeds (south); 2000: fallow; 2001: fallow, north; onion seed, south; 2002: carrot seed, north/ onion seed, middle/ fallow, south; 2003-6: rough blue grass (Cypress); 2007 (fallow); 2008: fallow, lost carrot crop; 2009: carrot (Bejo 21-1); 2010-12: rough blue grass (Saber III); 2013: fallow; 2014: wheat (Ovation), lost carrots Fall '13 (969); 2015: fallow, failed rough blue grass (Sun Up); 2016: carrot (Bejo 49-1); 2017-9: rough blue grass (Darkhorse)."

### New JCHS Members since April 2019:

FRANCES DAVIS	BARBARA LOKTING
DIANE NUNLEY	KEVIN TOOL
DEBORAH JORGENSEN	MICHAEL AND HOLLY MARCOTTE
BRIAN AND YVONNE STEVENSON	

### Donations to the Society since April 2019:

ALPHA OMICRON	MIKE LOKTING
DEBORAH JORGENSEN	TOM CREELMAN
JUDITH BOYCE	RICH MADDEN
BRAD AND DEBBIE KLANN	TED AND EVA FREEMAN
DIXIE BUSCH	JERRY AND DOROTHY RAMSEY

## Congratulations

to the Nartz family of Ashwood and the Klann family of Agency Plains, for receiving "Oregon Centennial Farm" awards from the Oregon Farm Bureau!

# THE AGATE

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Box 647, Madras, Oregon 97741

## THE AGATE • JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### **PLEASE JOIN US!**

**Jefferson County Historical Society**

Box 647, Madras, Oregon 97741

541-475-5390 • Website: [www.jeffcohistorical.org](http://www.jeffcohistorical.org)

#### **MEMBERSHIP DUES 2019:**

(Individual: \$25 Family: \$50 Patron: \$150 Benefactor: \$500)

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

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Membership (please check box):

New     Renewal     Individual

Family     Patron     Benefactor

*(Make check out to JCHS; mail to address at left)*

Yes, I'm interested in becoming a History Volunteer

Yes, I would like to make a donation to the JCHS (the Society is a registered non-profit organization; donations and gifts to it are tax-deductible)

I have artifacts, photos, written material I would like to donate to the JCHS Museum