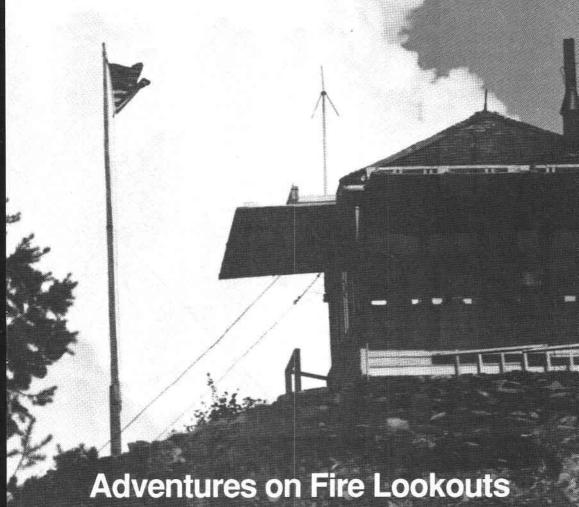
Historian

The Lane County Historical Society Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 Summer 1992



The Lane County Historical Society

E	than Newman, President, 2161 University Street, Eugene, OR 97403 Membership Secretary: PO BOX 11532, Eugene, OR 97440
1	Lane County Historian, Vol. XXXVII, Number 2, Summer 1992
	Ken Metzler, Editor, 2051 East 26th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97403 (Phone 343-4496)
	Janet Burg, Assistant Editor; Lois Barton, Contributing Editor
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i p	Er Storm clouds form at Castle Rock Lookout which in the early days had a reputation of being one of the most remote lookouts in the Willamette National Forest. Though it overlooked the populated McKenzie River Valley, it had few visitors. Then suddenly it had too many visitors, the result of a new road.

Good-bye lookout. Story Page 36. (Photo by Doug Newman.)

Footnotes to history

A compendium of items, historic or otherwise, about Lane County and vicinity. Philosophical comments by Eugene F. Skinner, for example. Joaquin Miller discusses what's wrong with Eugene City. An Oregon love story. Be sure to take our history trivia quiz.

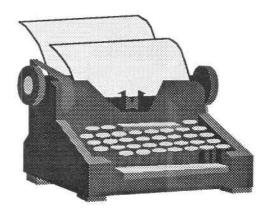
Our readers comment on the Spring issue

Editors—ever the subscribers to the theory of robust and wide-ranging debate on matters of public interest—are always pleased to receive responses from readers. So we acknowledge with gratitude the receipt of three letters commenting on the Spring 1992 issue, two of them more or less congratulatory, the other less so.

In the latter case, the problem is bad language.

Our oral history interview with the pioneer log truck driver was, according to one reader, "so full of dirty, filthy words it is repulsive." That was the article titled "Driving Oregon's Pioneer Off-Road Logging Trucks," by Roxie Metzler (who, incidentally, is not related to the editor of the Historian though they bear the same surname). She taped interviews with her father, who drove one of Oregon's first off-road log trucks for the Westfir Lumber Company in 1938-39. The letter writer suggests that if we plan to use any further foul language, the space for those words should be left blank.

Another reader writes that the Spring issue "bodes well for a journal that may make a real contribution toward local historical scholarship and



popularizing knowledge about our past." This writer, Jerold Williams, of Eugene, also suggests that the textured paper the *Historian* has used over the years seems more suitable for novelty printing than for a historical journal.

Having independently reached the same conclusion, we can only admire Jerold Williams for his insight in matters of paper quality.

Finally, we have a note from Robert D. Clark, former president of the University of Oregon, who comments favorably on a "beautifully executed" issue. Ironically, though, we made another mistake. We published an earlier letter from Dr. Clark that a former U.O. president and his wife had received a European tour as a wedding gift. He writes: "Anyone who read the item with an eye that does not

trust any writer will know, at once, that Hiram and Alice Chapman made the *Grand* Tour of Europe, not the Grant!"

One further response to the Spring issue seems to be noteworthy: *The Dead Mountain Echo*, the weekly newspaper covering the Westfir-Oakridge area, has, with the author's permission, reprinted the article on the log truck driver.

Trivia: how well do you know your local history?

So you think you know Lane County history? Try our trivia quiz and find out. Lois Barton, former editor of the Historian, prepared this quiz for a public event years ago, and left it in her files for posterity. It never occurred to her, she said, to run it in the Historian. We, the new editorial staff, thought it was a splendid way to keep readers on their toes. We'd even encourage you to submit your own list of trivia questions (with answers, please!) for future publication. When you've given your responses to these questions, please check the answers given by Lois Barton on page 48.

- Give the present-day names for Mount Faith, Mount Hope, and Mount Charity.
- 2. What President of the United States was partial to fly fishing on the McKenzie River?
- 3. What Lane County Post Office established in 1890 has a name from the Greek alphabet?
- 4. Who was Willy Knickerbocker and why is he worthy of recognition?
- 5. What payment did Cal Young give

- the Indian to clear title to his homestead?
- 6. When and where did the first airplane land in Eugene?
- 7. What was the amount of the contract let for building the first courthouse in Lane County, a two-story building 40 by 60 feet built in 1855?
- 8. What was Skinner's Mudhole?
- 9. It's a Sunday afternoon in Eugene in 1920 and you want to see a movie. Where would you go?
- 10. Now why would anyone want to cut back the weeping willow trees along Eugene's Millrace back in the 1920s and 30s?

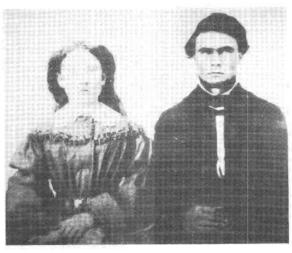
Love, Oregon style

Amanda Walker and Jedediah Wheeler both immigrated from the Midwest to the West Coast in 1853, she to Oregon, he to California. Disappointed in his quest for California gold, Jedediah walked 350 miles to Eugene City where eventually he met Amanda.

In April, 1859, he took a trip to Portland via the steamer that plied the Willamette River, and when he arrived he wrote a letter to Amanda. Jedediah was 27 then. Amanda 15.

Portland Oregon April the 5 59 Dear Amanda,

I take this time to let you no that i have landed safe here. the boat left there between the hours of 4 & 5 in the morning and we got to salem at eight that nite and stade there untill three o'clock a tuesday morning then left there and got to Oregon city at nine o clock and got abord of the Jenny Clark to come here and we landed here at noon today. If you want to no how I like this part of the



Amanda and Jedediah, 1859.

world here it is not the best that i ever seen so fare but i have no rite to complane now for i don't no anything about it yet so i wont say much a bout it at present.

I can not tell now when i will come back exzactly but i will be there by the first of August if nothing happens me more than I no of at present... I was in hopes that the boat would not start as soon as it did for i wanted to see you a gain before i left there but it was so that i could not so i will wate untill i see you to tell you what i wanted to see you for. you can show this leter to any one that you like to for what i care... yours in hast

Jedediah Wheeler

Jedediah penned a second note, dated the same day.

Dear Miss Amanda I am not Just now inn the best mood for riting to you as i would like to be when i rite to one that is as dear to me as you are for i can not express my love in words that i have for you for no words can express my love for you and if i ever proof falce to you the fire shal freeze the Sea shal burn the rocks shal melt and may my God be my judge iff i do ever brake one of the promises that i have maid to you. you have my love and best wishes all ways. . . . Oh, I liked to forgot send me a lock of your hare to remember you by in my absence if you pileas.

Amanda replied on April 14, added another note on the 15th, and enclosed both in the same envelope:

Dear Friend

not more welcome is the Appearance of an inn to a weary Traveller than your kind Letter to me. I received it the 12. it gave me great pleasure to hear from you that you landed there safe. . . . the Boat was up here last Wednesday. it got here about one o clock in the morning and left at seven in the Morning Thursday. wee all went down Wednesday to see it, there was several ladies down there, wee was at a sewing party at Mr. Gays yesterday, a House full of young and old Ladies. . . .

I do not expect what I have written will be very interesting to you. but you know you told me to write. Just what I thought of at the time whatever come into my head first.... it has not rained for several days here. pretty wether now and plenty of drunk men in Town and some that wee could do without.... I had forgotten to tell you I am about as

well as common now. I am yours for-

Amanda E. Walker

April 15, 1859

I have not started to School yet. if you cant Read this let me know it and i will write something more like it. Please write soon and bring it your self. I told you I would show you the next letter i wrote and this is it. I have kept my promice any how. excuse me for writing such an uninteresting Letter.

I send you what you colled for. it isn't fixed verry nice you see.

Amanda Emeline Walker. please do not show this letter

To anyone who reads between the lines, it will come as no surprise that Jedediah and Amanda became married soon after—on May 12, 1859. They settled in the Pleasant Hill area and had eight children, though two of them died at birth. Amanda Wheeler died in 1880. Jedediah Wheeler died in 1920, having remarried (to Elizabeth David) in the meantime. Descendants of the Wheelers still live in Lane County.

(Source: Lane County Historical Museum collection.)

Eugene Skinner on the subject of enchantment

Eugene F. Skinner was not only Eugene's founding father but he became one of the Willamette Valley's most ardent promoters and resident philosophers. The spirit of Oregon—that is, the view of Oregon as a kind of Eden—received early support here in a letter Skinner wrote to his sister, living in Canada, on March 18, 1860.

"...Could you but see our land of enchantment-if we could be once more together in this country, we would try to live our childhood days over again. . . . the trip is not a long one nor very expensive. . . . The country is new, we have no aristocracy and no high style of living. still we enjoy life full as well as those who roll in luxuries. . . . I have some 100 h of cows and stock cattle and they have no feed this winter except what nature provides upon the whole. Will candidly say that was I offered all the ... [word unclear] and be compelled to live there or live in Oregon on a bare subsistance I would take Oregon as it is nothing more than a bare subsistance that we have in any country, tis not wealth but contentment and a consence void of offence that make the sum total of this life."—Eugene Skinner

(Source: Lane County Historical Museum collection.)

Joaquin Miller on the problems of Eugene City

Joaquin Miller, an alumnus of Eugene's short-lived Columbia College, gained fame as the "Poet of the Sierras." As one of the 19th Century's most colorful characters, he hobnobbed with royalty and with the leading artists of the day. Here he discusses Eugene around 1870.

"... Here, on the river, at the head of navigation, is Eugene City—a dear, delightful town among the oaks, but slow and badly 'hide-bound.' It needs a good shaking up; wants some one who had the courage, and is enough its friend, to tell it of its sins. Here are six great church-buildings—never half filled—and hardly two decent schoolhouses. Here is a great army of boys

growing up, proficient chiefly in the mysteries of 'kissing-bees' and country dances. No trades, no professions, no education to speak of; nothing but helpless independence on the 'old man.' This is a representative interior town. After awhile, the keen, cultivated Yankee will come along, and push these young men off the track, out of their homes, back into the mountains; and they will murmur some, and wonder how it is, but should not complain."

—Joaquin Miller

(Source: "A Ride Through Oregon," in *Overland Monthly*, April, 1872.)

The Oregon advantage

Harrison R. Kincaid immigrated to Oregon with his parents and siblings in 1853. He published the Oregon State Journal for 45 years, starting in 1864. In 1915 he began to write his recollections of pioneer life, which he called "Sunshine and Shadow." Here he summarizes the experience of immigrating westward via the Oregon Trail.

(Source: "Thumbpapers: Sketches of Pioneer Life," by Leonore Gale Barette (who was Mr. Kincaid's niece), 1950.)

"I do not believe any other people ever suffered such hardships and privations in settling any new country as did the early pioneers of the Willamette Valley. It required the savings of almost a lifetime for an ordinary family to accumulate enough to fit out for the journey across the plains. It then took six months from the states in the Mississippi Valley to the Willamette Valley, traveling through a wilderness across the 'Great American Desert.' Lazy, improvident, indolent people, who

lacked the ability to look ahead and accumulate something for a rainy day, could not come to Oregon in those early days. They were barred by the distance. the expense, and the almost Herculean difficulties and hardships of the journey. It took wonderful perseverance, energy, and endurance of untold hardships to come to Oregon. All others were excluded. Now all kinds of people can jump on a palace car or a brakebeam and ride into Oregon in five days for a few dollars. It is a mere pleasure trip instead of being the most terrible and dangerous event of a whole lifetime, as it was to the early pioneers. These pleasure car excursionists sometimes assume an air of superiority and say: 'Land is cheaper in Nebraska.' They do not stop to think that the Willamette Valley was settled long before Nebraska was; that it cost a great deal more money, energy, hardships and sacrifices to get land here than it did in Nebraska; that for climate, comfort and the pleasure of living, one acre here is far more desirable than ten in Nebraska or any other of the bleak prairie states east of the Rocky Mountains."

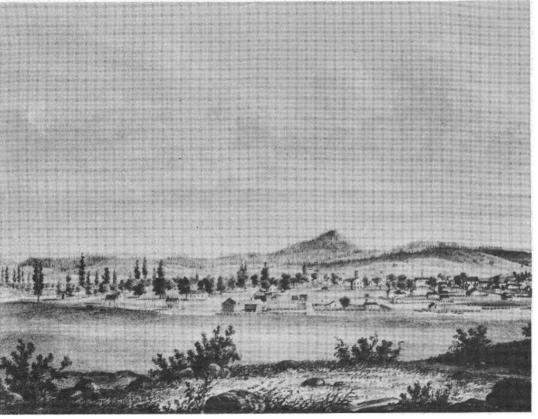
What's in a name?

Along the South Fork of the McKenzie River a burro, packing supplies for a fishing party, fell over a cliff. The animal died in the fall, but a demijohn of whiskey somehow survived. Everything else was ruined, including a big iron dutch oven. It lay there for years, and the site became known as Dutch Oven Camp.

(Source: Oregon Geographic Names, by Lewis A. McArthur, 1982.)

The Eugene City that Henry Cummins knew and wrote about in his diary was hardly more than a frontier outpost, as this sketch (ca. 1859) suggests. The Willamette River flooded severely in 1861, and Henry was particularly impressed by the floating sidewalks. Right: Henry as a young man about town. (Lane County Historical Museum collection.)





Young man about town: Views of frontier Eugene

The diaries that Henry Cummins kept from 1857 to 1863 are special to students of early Eugene precisely because they are the views of a keen observer with wide intellectual interests.

By Lucile McKenzie

ctober 17, 1857 was Henry
Cummins' 17th birthday,
and on that auspicious day
he began keeping a series
of diaries which give a
delightful and intimate portrayal of
pioneer life in the muddy little frontier
village called Eugene City.

These diaries that Henry kept for the six years he lived in the Eugene City area have proved to be an invaluable research source for local historians, sociologists, and anyone interested in the history of pioneer Eugene City and the surrounding area. Bingham, emeritus professor of history at the University of Oregon, recommended the Cummins diaries to students in his bibliography class. That is how I became acquainted with them, and I now use them extensively when teaching my classes on local and regional history for Lane Community College's Community Outreach pro-Michael Weiss, another of Bingham's students, eventually used the diaries to write his master's thesis, and author Shannon Applegate has read them as part of a state project that focuses on Oregon literature.

Henry Cummins arrived in Eugene City with his parents and their large family on the 1853 wagon train, migrating from Indiana. They took out a 320-acre Donation Land Claim about 11 miles north of town on what was then known as Grand Prairie.

Henry was a complex young man. Often prudish and self-centered, he was articulate and intelligent. An avid reader, in one year he read 179 books and pamphlets, an amazing accomplishment. His reading included such weighty tomes as *Immortality Triumphant, The Principles of Nature*, and *The Infidel's Textbook*.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Henry found farm life boring, decreed it "servile labor," and stayed in Eugene City whenever he could afford board and room. Reading his account of dayby-day events is almost like standing at his shoulders watching life in early-day Eugene City unfold.

With Henry we feel the enthusiasm that greeted publication of *The Pacific Journal*, the first newspaper in Eugene City.

June 26, 1858: Perused the Pacific Journal, the first newspaper ever printed in Eugene City, and am happy to say that of all the papers published in Oregon, I consider it by far the best. It is devoted to physical, intellectual and moral improvement, and the articles that graced this first sheet are certainly calculated to accomplish the desired end.

Unfortunately, not enough of *The Pacific Journal*'s other readers agreed with Henry's evaluation, and the paper ceased publication after seven months, a fate typical of many early frontier newspapers.

It is easy to see why a paper, "...devoted to physical, intellectual, and moral improvement" would appeal to Henry, who, in his diary of August 18, 1858 noted:

I am practicing regularity and very absteminousness of diet, it being a well selected vegetable diet taken in small quantities at regularly desposed intervals. I also practice sitting and walking erect with my shoulders thrown backward and my chest forward in order that my lungs may be strengthened and enlarged.

While local citizens may not have entirely agreed with his assessment of The Pacific Journal, his approval of the first Lane County Fair apparently was justified. On October 12, 1859 he wrote:

Attended the agriculture fair of this County. Some excellent things exhib-

ited. Lane County done well for the first time.

At this first fair, \$18.75 was given as prize money in twelve different classes, which included butter, fruit, cheese, and horses. The occasion was enhanced by an address by Governor Whiteaker.

Interested not only in daily life in Eugene City, Henry was especially fascinated by those folk who were just passing through. In spite of bad roads and somewhat primitive methods of travel, the pioneers were surprisingly mobile, and many of these travelers stopped over in Eugene City. Henry usually managed to meet them and hold lengthy conversations with them about their lives, their professions, and whatever it was that had brought them to town.

These wanderers were an odd assortment. They included traveling circus folk, magicians, and mediums. Since frontier towns were small, there were also various itinerant doctors and dentists, such as Dr. De Ross, who advertised: Teeth, rubber, \$12.00; celluloid, \$10.00; gold fillings, \$2.00; silverfillings, \$1.00; extractions with gas, \$1.00; without gas, \$.50, or Dr. David Campbell, who in a fine burst of selfconfidence, proclaimed, "I am prepared to remove all tumors, cancers, and diseased bone, to reduce dislocated joints of long standing, straighten wry neck, club foot, and to correct all deformity of the face and eyelids."

But the visitors to Eugene City who attracted Henry the most were travel-

Lucile McKenzie lives in Eugene and writes about local history. She conducts oral history projects and teaches classes on local history at Lane Community College.

ing lecturers. Entertainment was scarce, and lectures on everything from hydropathy (the use of water as a cure for disease) to phrenology (the study of the conformations of the skull to determine character traits) were popular throughout the Willamette Valley.

It is small wonder, therefore, that when a gentleman named Dr. Charles De Wolf arrived in town to give a series of lectures on Phrenology, Henry had De Wolf examine the configurations of his head. De Wolf's specialty was marriage counseling and matchmaking by comparing the various protuberances of the heads of the two parties romantically involved. Henry eventually took his then fiance, Miss Elizabeth Gale, to De Wolf for a reading. Apparently this was not too favorable, for later, when Henry and Lizzie's engagement was broken, De Wolf commented that it was obvious that phrenologically they were not compatible. De Wolf was a popular and frequent lecturer in Eugene City, even after he kissed a married women in Salem and was denounced up and down the Valley as an "itinerant libertine" and a "licentious profligate."

Temperance, hypnotism, and spiritualism were other lecture topics that Eugeneans greeted with enthusiasm. Traveling mediums were especially welcome and seances or "circles" were a popular pastime on the frontier. Very often the participants in these circles did not really believe in spiritualism, but it was something to do on an otherwise empty Saturday night.

Henry Cummins, however, for some time was an ardent believer in spiritualism and attended many circles. He noted that on one occasion there appeared "a hundred bright spirits and no dark ones," including such diverse notables as Paul the Apostle, Montezuma, and Thomas Jefferson.

Aside from pursuing his various intellectual interests, Henry unfortunately was faced with the task of dayby-day survival. Although not particularly fond of physical labor. Henry worked at whatever job he could find. which included everything from splitting rails to managing the local print shop. An accomplished violinist, he often played for the many square dances and social gatherings, noting that for one New Years' dance he "began fiddling and dancing at 5:00 p.m. which continued without stop until 7:00 in the morning," an indication, perhaps, that Eugene City was a party town even then!

Sometimes he worked at his father's sawmill at Mt. Pisgah. Henry's father and two other men owned the mill, which was an important lumber supplier for Lane County residents. Henry didn't care much for working there:

May 31, 1859: Came up to the Pisga [sic] sawmill, 12 miles above Eugene City and prepared to commence work at the same place. A very lonesome place in the mountains and woods.

And somewhat bitterly,

June 12, 1859: Left Eugene City and walked up here (Mt. Pisca), 12 miles over the mountain.

It wasn't all bad, however:

June 5, 1859: Went strawberry picking on Mt. Pisca. Sat down under the

shade of a tree and meditated on the works of nature. The scene before me presenting a delightful view of a beautiful valley with evergreen trees and snowcapped mountains before me.

The direct impact of national events on Eugene City were duly noted in Henry's diary, especially those of 1860 which was, of course, an election year:

Nov. 18, 1860: Received the news that Honest Old Abe Lincoln was elected, and took a regular rejoicing over it.

Many Eugeneans agreed with Henry and, in typical Eugene fashion, the event was celebrated:

Nov. 19, 1860: Went to Eugene City in the morning to attend a Republican torchlight procession on the strength of the news that Abe Lincoln had carried all the free states... Had a magnificent torchlight parade with all illumination of the town and considerable speaking at the Courthouse and singing by the Lancaster Choir.

The People's Press, another early Eugene paper, added that, "Never have we witnessed such a display of genuine enthusiasm as was exhibited on this occasion. The torchlight procession formed at an early hour and marched through the principal streets presenting an appearance more imposing than anything of the kind witnessed in our town. The ladies partook of the spirit of the occasion and signified their approval of the proceedings by the waving of handkerchiefs and delicate, charming and appropriate hurrahs for Abe Lincoln."

The paper also noted that the news had arrived by Pony Express from St. Louis in six days, "the quickest time ever made on the route." Henry commented that the time of travel for the news was ten days from St. Louis which seems more plausible.

In 1861 the Civil War began, and Eugeneans followed detailed accounts of each battle printed in the local papers as closely as possible, given the problems of time and distance. Henry Cummins, however, was only mildly interested in the war. To him, one of the most exciting events of the year was December 1 when the Willamette River overflowed its banks and ran down the streets of Eugene City causing the wooden side walks to tear loose and float away.

Dec. 1, 1861: Heard the Willamette had overflowed its banks and innundated the whole town of Eugene City. . . . I hastened to the scene of destruction and found that the water in most of the business streets was from three to ten feet high and the wooden sidewalks all afloat, a piece of which I obtained and in company with a young friend, navigated the streets of the burg.

Later in the day, Henry climbed Skinner Butte for a panoramic view and added:

The waters were considerably higher than ever seen before by white men.

One week later, on December 8, the river rose again to almost the same height.

Eighteen sixty-two started on a note of excitement when there was a fire in

the Lane County Courthouse, a charming, two-story building located in the public square (today's park blocks).

Henry was on hand to help carry furniture out of the building and his somewhat laconic comments provide an interesting contrast to the hyperbole of 19th century newspaper reporting. In his diary of January 24, 1862, Henry says that he "came near to being choked with smoke several times," but adds diffidently, "the fire was extinguished with moderate damage."

The Eugene City State Republican was more excited, however, "Our citizens instantly rushed to the public square and by rigorous exertions, succeeded in subduing the fire."

Unable to find steady employment in Eugene City, Henry moved to the Salem area where he worked at various occupations, such as assistant clerk in the State Legislature. He gave an occasional lecture on such topics as "The History of the World's Philosophies and their Influence on the Advancement of Civilization."

None of his endeavors provided permanent employment, however, and in early 1863 Henry decided to leave the frontier for "the Atlantic States." He moved back to Eugene City to prepare his departure.

The employment situation in Eugene City had not improved and, desperate to raise money, Henry worked for a few days at what he described as "that treason-grinding Register, a reference to the *Democratic Register* edited by Joaquin Miller, who was politically Henry's opposite. A loyal Democrat, Miller denounced both abolitionism and Republicans. Needless to say, Miller

and Henry were not close friends.

In May, 1863 Henry stored his diaries, correspondence and over 100 books at his parent' house, and sold everything else that he did not need to take:

May 10, 1863: My outfit will consist of two horses, one to ride and one to pack, with accounterments for a journal, with a few light books and a revolver. I am going to travel through the States to see the country, civilization, and to learn the ways of the world, and to make money. Am preparing a series of lectures on Oregon which I expect to deliver for pay and expect to correspond for newspapers.

In true pioneer spirit he added:

I am not certain where I shall go or exactly what I shall do, only that I will do the best that I can. I will start tomorrow morning.

On the East Coast Henry Cummins found suitable employment and eventual financial security. He never married. He died on West 55th Street in Manhattan, New York, at age 60.

The Cummins diaries are in the library of Yale University, but copies are on microfilm in the Knight Library at the University of Oregon in the Oregon Collection. Also available in this collection are Henry's personal papers and correspondence.

Little did he know that over a century later the diaries he so carefully kept as a young man would fascinate, inform, and delight all who read them, for through these diaries we have a first-hand account from "one of the folk" of early day life in Eugene City.

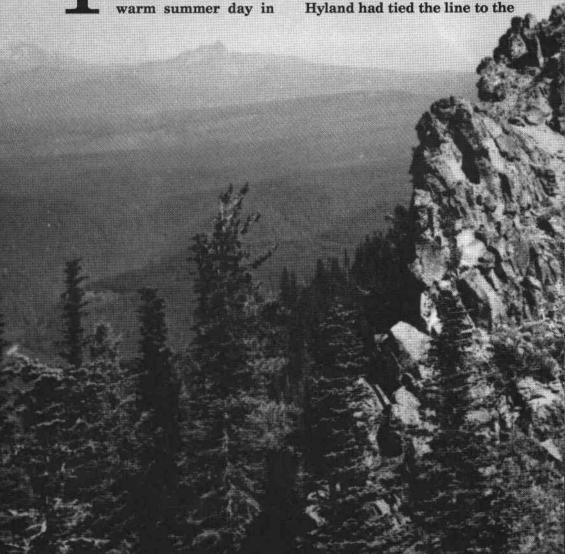
Solo adventures atop Lane County's fire lookouts

From lofty peaks (like this one, Lane County's Horsepasture Mountain) lookouts provided early warning for forest fires. They also battled storms and loneliness.

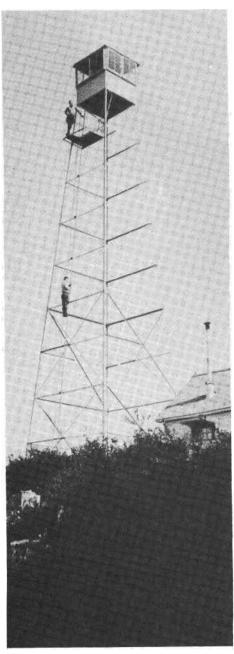
By Doug Newman

he string dangled 85 feet down from the open window atop Saddleblanket Lookout on a warm summer day in

1936. The smoke-spotter, 26-yearold Emery Hyland, watched the line like an angler waiting to set the hook.







Saddleblanket Mountain, scene of Emery Hyland's 1936 meal-catching adventure. (Rose Briem photo.)

handle of the open door leading into a small cabin that served as his living quarters at the lookout tower's base.

A plump ruffed grouse stepped from a nearby chinquapin bush. The bird pecked intently at a trail of corn kernels leading to the open cabin door, dutifully following the trail right into the cabin. Wham! Hyland yanked the string taut and the door slammed shut.

Tonight's dinner.

To be sure, living off the land was not official government policy for fire lookouts in those days. But most supervising rangers tended to look the other way, especially during the 1930s when the Great Depression reigned. Grouse appeared on the menu often.

"They used to fly into the windows and kill themselves," recalled fellow firelookout Jim Drury who later became a U.S. Forest Service fire control officer. "It would have been a waste to leave them. By the end of summer, canned goods were getting pretty tiresome."

Almost as delicious as the meal was the story itself, an anecdote to add to my collection of fire lookout memorabilia. For the last dozen years I've researched fire lookouts in the Pacific Northwest, conducting taped interviews with men and women who have served on lookouts.

My personal association with lookouts began the summer of 1967 when I staffed Fairview Peak Lookout in the Umpqua National Forest, east of Cottage Grove. The summer represented

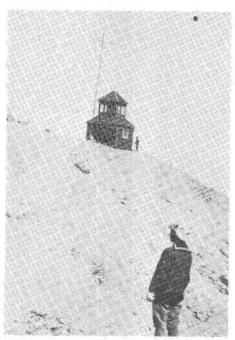
Doug Newman, a freelance writer in Eugene, writes about lookouts and other outdoor topics for newspapers and magazines. one of the worst fire seasons on record. I worked 76 days without relief. Lightning storms in early August lit up the sky. One lightning burst alone started more than 90 forest fires. When thunder rolled and lightning flashed, I had a ring-side seat to pyrotechnics that would put any Fourth of July fireworks to shame. I later served at other lookouts, including remote Castle Rock Lookout near Blue River.

But the heyday of lookouts came before my time. Those never-to-return days arrived in the late 1930s and continued through the 1950s. Dozens of lookouts had been built in the 1920s, but the system really burgeoned in the 1930s when Civilian Conservation Corps workers arrived in the backcountry. CCC crews built outposts that ranged from 100-foot-tall observation towers to tiny 8' x 8' emergency lookout houses.

These units served as the first link in a fire detection network that sent hundreds of men and women to the tops of countless buttes, peaks, rocks, mountains, and ridges. There they lived in romantic solitude, scanning forests for the first wisps of smoke that heralded the origins of forest fires.

Most primary lookouts were 14'x 14' in size and were built from prefabricated kits manufactured by the Aladdin Company in Portland. At the factory, materials were sized and bundled to fit packs addles and were transported to the mountaintops on the backs of horses and mules.

Oregon's first lookout was built atop Mt. Hood in 1915 by Lige Coalman, an early day mountain guide who packed 4,000 pounds of lumber and supplies to the summit with the help of a small



Oregon's first fire lookout, Mt. Hood, 1915. (Photo by Hans K. Hoerlein.)

crew of dedicated workers. At first they lived in a tent on the 11,245-foot summit, often fighting severe winds and snowstorms that threatened to blow them from their hard-won perch.

Eventually they completed the building, and during its first season of operation, Coalman reported 131 fires. Stations soon adorned five other major peaks: Mount Bachelor, Mount Bailey, and Mount McLoughlin in Oregon, and Mount St. Helens and Mount Adams in Washington.

But after these stations served for several years, authorities began to realize that high-altitude mountain tops were not ideal locations for fire lookouts, despite their commanding view. Bad weather frequently fogged in the summits, dropping visibility to zero



Earliest lookouts were outdoors such as this one on Fuji Mountain (Oakridge Ranger District) around 1919. (Photo courtesy Willamette National Forest.)

and leaving the lowlands unprotected.

The solution was to select lowerelevation peaks and establish a network of observation outposts with overlapping views. The stations were linked by miles of No. 9 telephone line connected to ranger stations and work centers where fire crews could be dispatched once a blaze was sighted.

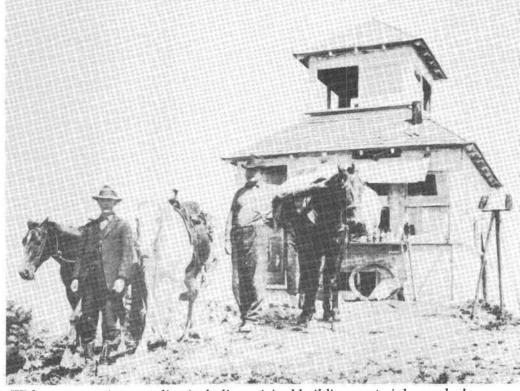
Whenever old-time fire lookouts gather, the talk often goes beyond the fires they spotted. They also talk endlessly of lightning storms and of the cantankerous hand-cranked telephone systems used by early day lookouts.

Jim Drury told of an experience during his summer of 1938 on Indian Ridge in the Blue River Ranger District east of Eugene.

"I know all about getting hit by hightning in a lookout 'cause I was in Indian Ridge when it got hit," he recalled. "We had this big lightning storm—in fact there were three storms—that came in and centered over Indian Ridge. About the time they were getting there I was on the telephone—I says to the other two guys I was talkin' to, 'it's getting too hot here for me—I'm going outside and throw the [disconnection] switch.'

"They figured I was outside when the lightning hit the lookout house. Well, I wasn't. I didn't stay out there very long. I got back in the house and got up on my insulated-glass stool. There was this bolt of hightning come down, and a spur of it run off and hit the lookout house. It felt hike someone hit me in the head—a pretty good jolt!"

The other lookouts called the ranger station and reported Indian Ridge



With rare exception, supplies, including original building materials, reached lookouts by pack animals. This is Huckleberry Mountain in 1920s.

Lookout had been hit. They assumed Drury had been outside as the bolt struck. Meanwhile, he couldn't call in to report he was okay, because the lightning strike had burned up the telephone's fuses and wiring.

Finally, about 4:30 a.m. he got the telephone repaired and called with the news that he was still alive.

Another observer, Walter Wentz, remembers his run-in with an electrical storm while working at Little Cowhorn Lookout in the Willamette's Lowell Ranger District:

"Little Cowhorn is the one lookout in which I had the experience of actually being inside a thunderstorm. Rain was blowing in horizontally through the cracks around the windows, the exterior was completely grayed-out, and lightning struck about 200 yards farther down the ridge."

On Wolf Mountain, southeast of Oakridge, Harold McKenzie braved thunderbolts alone in a tent that served as his temporary residence:

"I was in a horrible lightning storm," McKenzie said. "What'd I do? I just laid there in that tent and it just lit things up and that old ground wire just looked like a snake goin' down across there.... I'm tellin' ya she was just agoin' and a-snappin' and all at once a puff of wind come up and a bolt of lightning hit with a boom of thunder and down come my tent pole right on top of me! I said, 'man—that's it'—I stayed right there—I never got up—just pourin' rain.... that old tent right on top of me!"

Though the strike was close, McKenzie lived to tell the tale.



Lamb Butte Lookout in Blue River Ranger District, was built in 1933. Like so many lookouts, it was a casualty of the move to terminate unused structures.

While McKenzie worked under primitive conditions on Wolf Mountain in the 1920s, the 1930s and '40s saw standardization and upgrading of lookout quarters. By 1950—the high point of the lookout era—some 5,000 lookouts were in operation nationwide. Oregon had about 800 stations, Lane County about 50.

What kinds of people staffed these lookouts? The job has attracted individuals who are independent and self-reliant. The calling has especially appealed to writers, hermits, newlyweds, prospectors, school teachers, divinity students, and aspiring foresters—men and women content with their own company and who savor the rigors of outdoor living.

As recalled nostalgically by such people, life on a lookout offered an

idyllic experience seldom savored by city-dwelling recreationists. The view alone was spectacular. From your lofty perch you could often see 50 miles in all directions. For many, the biggest attraction was the chance to experience the natural world close at hand.

Each day began with red streaks highlighting the eastern horizon just before dawn. Early rising humming-birds would flit like giant insects from one wildflower to the next. With careful observation, you might glimpse a greathorned owl gliding home to roost on silent wings, following a night's hunt.

As the day grew older, gentle breezes caressed the mountaintop, cooling your brow in the noon-hour heat. Later, around 4 p.m., the wind picked up and warm thermals sent a shiver through the tower's shutters. Above the roof.



Remnants of winter snows cling to Prairie Peak in the Western Lane Fire District. Lookout is on the Lane-Benton County line. (Doug Newman photo.)

hawks wheeled about lazily, riding updrafts like airborne surfers, searching for prey.

If you were lucky, anvil-shaped thunderheads on the horizon might heat up, treating you to an electrifying storm. You were safe in your glasswalled house: Lightning rods and ground wires protected occupants from electrical strikes.

Once the storm passed, cotton-like wisps of mist often shrouded lower canyons and ridges. As the day ended, long shadows raced east, engulfing forested valleys as the sun finally winked out, bathing clouds in scarlet hues along the western skyline.

Night was one of the best times to savor life on a lookout. Without the competition of city lights, a thousand stars you never knew existed beamed down from the heavens. In the northern latitudes, celestial displays sometimes included the aurora borealis, or northern lights, which reflect from the clouds like rays from giant search lights.

That's how it was in the early days. Andithasn't changed much in 80 years. In 1968 during my summer at Castle Rock Lookout, I recorded some diary notes that recall the scene:

"Life on Castle Rock Lookout is much like lookout life in the early days...a return to basics. The place still has a crank-telephone, which works. Water is packed in on my back from the spring. Refrigeration is provided by a cardboard box in a cool corner. There's a kerosene lamp, a wash tub, and a scrub board. Wood stove, with oven. The usual fire pack, swede-saw, shovels, and pulaskis. It could be 30 years earlier..."



Spirit of the fire lookout lives on in the scale models of lookout fancier Richard Miller of Pleasant Hill. Miller has about a dozen models in his collection, more lookouts than most modern-day ranger districts. (Photo by Doug Newman.)

Even today at the few surviving lookouts, the simplicity remains. Observers still watch for forest fires, the sun still sets in the west, and water and supplies still come up on your back as you tread trails paved with fir needles.

Sometimes, admittedly, life on a lookout seemed less than inspiring. The isolation, solitude, and force of nature's power could be intimidating. More notes from a lookout's diary:

August 24, 1969: Right now it is windy (20-30 mph gusts) and trying to rain. Blacker than the Ace of Spades. There was supposed to be a chance of wet lightning tonight but it hasn't happened yet. Weather this morning was also strange—haze-like smog shrouded the west until around noon. . . . Damn lantern fell and broke the glass in it

today—nail pulled out of the ceiling. Consequently—am now writing by candlelight. It's a stormy, spooky night out and I think I'll go to bed. Wish to heck I could have someone here on nights like this. Company would be great.

August 25, 1969: Last night was the worst I've spent up here. Wind blew like hell and was intermittent gusts all through the night, centering on the southeast corner of the lookout—the bed corner. Two props blew loose (thanks to not enough nuts) and I was really afraid they'd come crashing through the windows. Consequently, was thereby sent out into the fray, nylon cord clenched in my teeth, to batten the flailing shutters. Shades of Cape Horn!

Looking back on those diary entries more than 20 years later brings sweet memories. Even now, just setting foot in a still-standing lookout can transport me back to those long-ago adventures.

Among the adventures was a friendly but intense competition to be first to spot a fire. Some say women were the most fiercely competitive lookouts. Women served from the earliest days of lookout history, often as part of a husband-wife team.

Before World War II, most newspaper and magazine accounts about women as lookouts (usually written by the women themselves) seemed to portray them as delicate, timid creatures who could hardly believe their own courage and daring in something as rough and tumble as running a fire lookout. They saw themselves as tenderfeet—always glad to have a handy fellow around, be he the district ranger or some snoose-spitting, cantankerous old packer.

For a time the Forest Service fostered the notion that hiking and packing were too rigorous for women. Official policies actively discouraged women's participation. That changed dramatically during World War II. Women's own stories in newspapers and magazines changed, too. By all accounts they thrived on solitude, often better than men, and they loved the responsibility and the wilderness adventure. And they could spot fires as well as any man, maybe better. I recall discussing women lookouts with the late Carl DeMoy, who for 25 seasons served on the look out at Black Butte near Sisters in the Deschutes National Forest.

"A tip of the hat to the lady lookouts," he said. "If they are good, they are as good or better than any man."

But even Carl found one bothersome trait among them.

"My one objection to them is that they are thieves. Among lookouts there is a kind of joyous larceny whereby one of them—by way of vigilance or pure luck—will spot a fire before any of the others have seen it. And more fires have been stolen from me by women than by men."

If we're charting master criminals in the stolen-fires category, however, Carl topped the list. I remember the time I substituted on Trout Creek Butte Lookout, 11 miles south of Carl's tower on Black Butte.

"Dispatcher, Black Butte—Fire-flash!"

That always-dreaded radio transmission sent me and neighboring lookouts scurrying for our binoculars. I remember thinking, where the heck is that fire?

"East slope, Trout Creek Butte," radioed Carl. "Below the summit, a couple of white puffs."

"Damn!" I thought. Trout Creek Butte is *my* mountain. Carl's stealing one from my own back yard.

Radio dispatch wasted no time confronting me. "Trout Creek, do you have anything to report?"

"Negative," I said. "I don't see any smoke. Do you want me to take my rig and check it out?"

"Affirmative. You head on down there."

I did, and I discovered an abandoned but still-smoldering campfire. It had crept away from its bed, flared up momentarily in a pine thicket (accounting for the few puffs of smoke that Carl had seen), and then subsided.

From then on I always looked twice as hard in Carl's direction, but was never able to pull one from under him in return.

The image of Carl and dozens of other peak-dwellers staffing tall towers remains firmly entrenched in the minds of most visitors to the outdoors. But summer work as a fire lookout is a vanishing vocation. Today only ten lookouts remain in Lane County of the original 50. Only three of those still serve regularly for fire detection.

What caused the decline?

Following World War II, increased timber harvesting in both public and private forests created a network of woodland roads that continues to grow each year. Improved access means faster response times to forest fires; it also allows the backcountry to be monitored by motorized fire patrol crews. And aircraft have been used increasingly for fire detection. As a result, dozens of towers were phased out and burned—an ironic ending for structures originally built to aid in fire suppression.

Numerous lookout cabins were destroyed in the late 1960s. But later the agency's viewpoint turned 180 degrees. Many ranger districts fortunate enough to have standing lookouts now recognize their appeal to visitors as well as their cultural and historical significance. Result: Efforts are underway throughout the nation to save and refurbish many of the few remaining summit outposts that have eluded destruction.

As often happens with U.S. Forest Service endeavors in recent years, the watchwords on lookout rehabilitation are "partnerships" and "volunteerism."

With expenses skyrocketing and budgets diminishing, Forest Service administrators are scrambling to make ends meet. Enter the volunteers.

A classic illustration of volunteer dedication came last summer at Huckleberry Mountain Lookout in the Willamette National Forest near Oakridge. Built in 1938, the current Huckleberry Mountain Lookout replaced a cupola-topped structure that dated to 1918. After 53 years of use, Huckleberry Mountain's present structure was beginning to show signs of age. But Roxie Metzler, a high school teacher from Springfield who staffed the lookout each summer since 1985. initiated a drive to refurbish it to its former glory. She started in Washington, D.C. researching appropriate lookout paint hues at the National Archives.

Next came slide programs at Springfield's Thurston Grange to publicize the project and mobilize volunteers. Twenty volunteers visited the lookout in June 1991, and weekend work parties commenced shortly thereafter. By October, portions of the building's floor and the west and north walls-all of which contained dry rothad been replaced, windows had been rehung, and new sidewalls installed When restoration is and painted. complete, the station will be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Fate was less kind to other lookouts such as my old station on Castle Rock, above Blue River. Reached originally by a steep four-and-a-half-mile trail, it was one of the most isolated stations in the Willamette National Forest. Few people came to visit; you could go for

weeks without company. Yet it overlooked a heavily populated area. If you craved the sight of people, dozens appeared every day hooking and slicing their way around the golf course at the foot of the mountain.

Today the golf course remains, but the lookout began a slow decline after workers punched a road to within 3/4 mile of the top in the late 1960s. Then came clear-cuts, turning the once-uniform flanks of the mountain into a ragged patchwork. Finally, with the nine-mile roundtrip hike cut to a mere mile and a half, the quality of visitors dropped markedly. The rip-off, vandalism crowd arrived. Good-bye lookout. The Forest Service ultimately removed the station's remnants.

Though Castle Rock Lookout has been snuffed out, the lookout era has not ended completely. Forest Service officials say they plan to continue staffing the few primary outposts that remain, and preservationists like Roxie Metzler and her friends are bringing new life to aging stations such as Huckleberry Mountain, thus opening yet another chapter in the continuing saga of Northwest fire lookouts.

Things to do about fire lookouts.

Learn more about them. Write Stephen J. Cummings, Chairman, Forest Fire Lookout Association, Box 217, Conestoga, PA 17516. The organization has annual conferences and publishes a quarterly newsletter.

Visit one. East of Eugene are three good lookouts to visit in the Willamette National Forest.

Huckleberry Mountain Lookout, reached by a 14-mile road northeast from Oakridge, plus a 1/8-mile hike. Still staffed, undergoing restoration. The 9,000-acre Warner Fire of 1991 is visible from here.

Waldo Mountain Lookout looms high above Waldo Lake north of Willamette Pass. Staffed during high fire danger or after lightning storms. Eight-mile hike, roundtrip.

Warner Ridge Lookout, west of Diamond Peak. Overlooks the Middle Fork of the Willamette River above Hills Creek Reservoir. Uniquely designed belfry-topped cabin atop 40-foot tower. A 23-mile drive from Oakridge plus a short walk up a gated spur road. Staffed fulltime in fire season.

Help restore one. Volunteers may contact Oregon Lookout Association, PO Box 11501, Eugene, OR 97440.

Live in one. You can rent a fire lookout. Oregon has six Forest Service structures available for rental at \$25 to \$30 a night. Four of them are lookouts (in Mt. Hood, Umpqua, and Siskiyou National Forests). About 50 structures are available in Idaho and Montana. Still others will soon become available after refurbishing. For information, contact Willamette National Forest, 211 East 7th, Eugene, OR 97401 (503) 465-6521.

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Trivia quiz answers

Wait! Don't peek at these answers until you have taken our first semiannual Lane County history trivia quiz, prepared by Lois Barton, former editor of the *Historian*. You'll find that quiz on Page 26. Only after you have answered the questions should you look at the following.

- 1. Faith, Hope, and Charity were the names given to the Three Sisters mountains by members of the Methodist Mission at Salem in the early 1840s.
- President Herbert Hoover fished the McKenzie in the 1930s. Local guides say he rode the McKenzie drift boats wearing suit and tie, but eventually relaxed and graduated to informal western garb with wool shirt.
- 3. The community of Alpha, on Deadwood Creek, is named for the first letter of the Greek alphabet.
- 4. Willy Knickerbocker was a bicycle enthusiast about 40 years ahead of his time. He gained a reputation as something of a character riding his bike around Eugene, and so when the bicycle bridge was built across the Willamette at Judkins Point, it was named in his honor, the Willy Knickerbocker Bridge.
- 5. Cal Young gave the Indian a sack of cow peas to clear title to his land.
- 6. The first airplane eased to a landing in Mrs. Conger's cow pasture along West 11th Avenue, just about where Conger Street is located today. The year: 1918. Former Eugene postmaster Ethan Newman witnessed the event and recalls that it drew a huge group of spectators and that the National Guard was on hand for crowd control.
- 7. Bid for the first Lane County courthouse in 1855: \$8,400.
- 8. "Skinner's Mudhole" was the irreverent name attached to early Eugene, the community founded by Eugene Skinner. The combination of heavy winter rains and the splendidly rich soil of the Willamette flood plain made Eugene mud especially noteworthy.
- 9. You would not go to a movie anyplace in Eugene. In 1920, Eugene banned movies on Sunday so folks went to Springfield, usually by streetcar.
- 10. Branches of the weeping willows swept low over the waters of the Millrace, a popular spot for couples in canoes. Behind those branches amorous couples found splendid hiding spots. It is said that Hazel Schwering, the dean of women at the University of Oregon, had the trees barbered to discourage "necking."

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Photo of Mt. Hagan Lookout by Doug Newman



In this issue: History and lore of fire lookouts in Lane County.
See story, Page 36.