

# Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974  
Over Forty Years of History in the Making



Museum and Office  
428 South Water Street

## Abiqua Carbon By Gus Frederick

In the summer of 1972 when our family moved to Silverton, my parents purchased a bit over seven acres of land along the Abiqua Creek. As the largest lot in the El Romar sub-development—adjacent to what is now known as The Concrete Bridge—it was the only one to include creek frontage. My first couple of years living in the Silverton Country included a large amount of time along the Abiqua Creek, with our land as a focus.

Summers spent along the creek in one of the finer old swimming holes turned this stretch of water into somewhat of a counter-cultural recreational area. The local Hippies of the early 1970s flocked to these often “clothing optional” swimming holes. As a part of that demographic, it imparted to me a bit of an old-fashioned vibe that this Abiqua culture radiated. It also rubbed my nose in the local geology with a natural rock bed running with the water along the Abiqua. As a native Oregonian, I grew up along similar water-ways, and at first glance, it looked much the same. Then I found a chunk of coal.



One of many pieces of coal still commonly found along the Abiqua Creek, several hundred yards upstream of the “coal mine.”

I had always assumed that our state was pretty much an igneous one: Volcanic stuff from sandy ash to hard basalt. Yet here was a chunk of burnable coal. To this day, it is easy to find chunks of coal up and down certain areas along the creek. Areas that just happened to be on the property my parents purchased in 1972.



David Newsome (1805-1882), from the frontispiece of “David Newsome: The Western Observer.” Oregon Historical Society, 1972.

Craig Clark, from *The Home Seekers* real estate firm that sold us the Abiqua property, mentioned to my parents that years before, there was an exploratory oil well drilled there, and the resulting dry hole was capped. After I had found the coal, the oil well started to make sense. I didn’t think further about the topic until several years ago, when I read a collection of Oregon pioneer dispatches, sent “back home” to a settler’s hometown newspaper *The Illinois Journal*, about various aspects of 1850s Oregon pioneer life.

The book, *David Newsom: The Western Observer*, a collection of these short dispatches written by Mr. Newsom. He and his family had a land claim near where the Abiqua joins the Pudding River. He built a mill, grew crops, raised a family and wrote about his life, warts and all. “Nusom Road” which runs through the old claim is named for him, despite the misspelling. One passage in particular dated July 4, 1852 grabbed my attention:

“An immense coal mine was found two weeks ago, 12 miles from our mill, up the stream (Abiqua) ... This coal has been tried and proved of superior quality. It is called Diamond Coal.”

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### Abiqua Carbon—Continued from Page 1

He also wrote a separate dispatch to the Oregonian, which was published July 17, 1852:

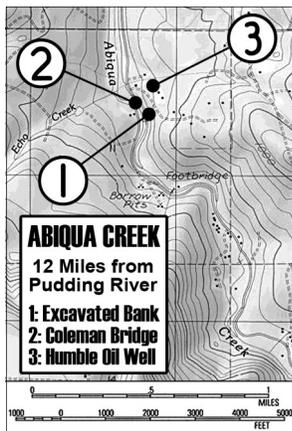
"Mr. Editor—I would inform your readers that a valuable discovery has recently been made by Messrs. Morrison and Markham of a most extensive bed of diamond coal on the bluffs of Abiqua creek, 12 miles from its mouth, in Marion county..."



A large excavated area dug out from the ancient pyroclastic mud flow. It is a little over a four feet above the summer water level, about 16 inches high and deep, running along the bank for twelve feet or so. This appears to be the most likely location of Newsome's "coal mine."

Using the National Geographic *Topo* application on my computer, it was an easy task to quickly run a twelve mile route starting from the Pudding River up the Abiqua. The end of the line was at El Romar. Most likely the "immense coal mine" was the large excavated space on the North side of the bank, dug into the ancient pyroclastic sandstone cliff along a discontinuity between flows. I had noticed this years before, and assumed it to be some natural depression. However, the fact that it was quite a bit above the current winter water line, seemed counter intuitive to a natural explanation.

Still, pure conjecture. But there is the coal. Several years before I read Newsom's account, I ran into Oregon Geologist William Orr at a Rock & Gem Show in Portland. He lives in Scotts Mills, so I asked him about the Abiqua Coal. He said that there was a very thin seam—less than a foot thick—of relatively "young" coal, formed during the late Eocene and early Oligocene epochs—around 34 million years ago—from plant material covered by ash flows. It was high in sulfur, and the pioneers burned through most of it in a decade or so.



U.S.G.S. topographic map of the "El Romar" neighborhood of the upper Abiqua. Measured as twelve miles from the confluence of the Abiqua and Pudding Rivers. Locations of the three images are indicated in the key.



Coleman Covered Bridge over the Abiqua Creek. The wooden construction was built in 1925 and costs totaled \$2,600. This Howe Truss was 16 feet wide and 70 feet long and had a 6-ton-load capacity for traffic. The Coleman Bridge was replaced prior to 1960.

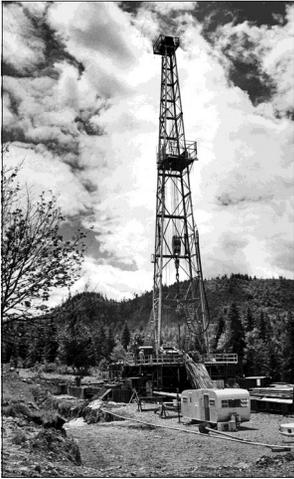
The El Romar neighborhood has another possible place-name clue. Prior to the current Concrete Bridge, this crossing was spanned by what would be Marion County's second-to-last covered bridge. Like its twin *Gallon House* downstream, it had a name: *The Coleman Bridge*. It was located literally several hundred feet from the cliff-side pit. Most local place names are initially verbal, then only becoming "official" once written down. Was this bridge named because it was next to the Abiqua "Coal Man?" Maybe "Messrs. Morrison or Markham" that David Newsom mentioned? Short-lived enterprises can make long-lasting impacts on place names, even if the original context and spelling is lost.

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## Abiqua Carbon—Continued from Page 2

Then there is the Abiqua oil well. I happened upon an old photograph on eBay labeled simply “Oil Derrick near Silverton, OR.” No other location was given except for “East of Silverton.” It was reasonably priced, so I purchased it. Once scanned, I noted that the background hill profile look familiar, so I once again used the *Topo* program and this time created a terrain profile of the hills South of El Romar. It matched the photo, which is the same oil derrick Mr. Clark told my parents about.

I posted the photo on the SCHS Facebook page and several old-timers recalled visiting the site when it was briefly in operation, and they confirmed the location. Thankfully, it was indeed a dry hole. To this day however, we still find coal along the creek, and sometimes observe a rainbow sheen in the mud near our hillside spring.



Largest oil drilling rig ever brought into Oregon has begun work east of Silverton. The Humble Oil & Gas Co., contract-operated rig is capable of drilling down 20,000 feet, costs \$900,000. It is 136 feet high and is driven by four 400-hp diesel engines. Humble expects to drill elsewhere in Willamette Valley, even if Silverton effort fails. Photo by David Falconer, Staff Photographer, The Oregonian. June 27, 1962

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## Old Mill Park Amphitheater Update



Something very exciting is brewing for the amphitheater in Old Mill Park! While all the details haven't yet been completely finalized, Victor Madge recently met with Corey Emil of Soundstream Music in Silverton. He has volunteered to put together musical talent for a one-day musical extravaganza on Saturday, June 10th at the amphitheater in the Park. So far, there are rock, folk & bluegrass bands slated. We are thankful he is stepping up to the plate for our little town. (One band he has put together with local high school students! How cool is that?) We will keep you posted.....and you can also follow the activities on Facebook at Silverton Creekside Amphitheater.

Thank you to Larry Meyer of Meyer Ag, formerly Meyer Construction, for the donation of a beautiful 4 drawer, legal-sized file cabinet! Just what we needed, as our others were bursting at the “seams”. Myer Ag also gave us some of their extra file folder holders.....we are so good to go! (Pictured here is Fred Parkinson, who actually brokered the deal!)



### Curator's Corner

I started to write about the recently donated newspapers from the last seven or eight decades that I have been trying to collate for our collection, and then this amazing event happened. Leah Laughton, from Scotts Mills School, arranged for the second and third graders to tour our museum. Carolyn Hutton and Chris Schwab helped to guide the students through the museum and I was part of that whole procedure. What I found was that these students taught me more than I already knew. Through their questions on the little things that we have, the history of Silverton came alive. As I was guiding part of the group through the upstairs bedroom, one of the students said: My grandmother has a sewing machine just like that but she had to disconnect it because she was afraid that one of us would get our hands sewn up. Yes, I became a believer.



Taking these students into the past really does make a connection to the present. What we do for the public is so very important; we really do give the public a look at what was past and give it to those who look to the present and beyond. These school tours give us a reason to exist—as does aiding in the research that so many of our patrons come to partake in. As we do what we do, hopefully we continue to insure that the museum is part of what makes Silverton the special place that it is.

As I mentioned, I have also been working on collating the many newspaper editions of the Silverton Appeal that we were fortunate to get from the Statesman-Journal. While buried in these newspapers I often get side-tracked just reading about the town and the people back ‘in the day’. The ‘new’ high school dedication, the Red Sox baseball team, the ‘new’ lodge at Silver Falls State Park, and the list goes on. The one thing that I have been so glad to have been able to do is to bring all of those stories alive--in other words to save them for those who follow, by making them available to those who care to sort through these editions. If you have a chance or a need to look up information, come by and we may be able to help you.

In the months ahead we are going to be adding to our school tours by having Central Howell and Robert Frost classes come during the month of May. Again, I believe that it is by giving students a look at the past that they will understand the present and be able to look forward to the future--for it is in knowing the past that we will know the future. I am very grateful to Chris Schwab and Carolyn Hutton for helping with our April school tour from Scotts Mills. Where would we be without our knowledgeable volunteers?

*Judy Lowery*

We are sad to report the passing of Eleanor Hento, longtime Silverton resident, teacher, and SCHS member. She taught fifth grade at Robert Frost School in the 1970's and '80's and shared her musical talents with the Silverton United Methodist Church Choir and the Salem Chapter of Sweet Adelines. While she and husband Ernie moved away in her later years (to Portland and then Keizer), we still fondly remembered them both and offer our condolences to their family.



We want to welcome new Board Member,  
Russ Gould.

Remember—the museum is now open on  
Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm.  
Come see us!!



## SCHS Dime Toss—Homer Davenport Community Festival!!



The Historical Society will again be running the ever-popular Dime Toss concession at the Homer Davenport Community Festival this summer, so that means we're looking for donations of containers. We need everybody's help in order to have a generous supply for the event, so hurry, hurry, start cleaning out cupboards, basements and garages and combing garage sales looking for items you can donate. We'll need all sorts of containers that a dime will land in—glasses, vases, coffee or tea cups, ceramic bowls, even punch bowls.

You can drop off your donations at the museum on most Tuesday mornings or on Saturdays and Sundays when we're open. Or give us a call at 503-873-7070 or Chris at 503-551-3120 and we'll pick them up.

Thank you in advance for your generosity and support!

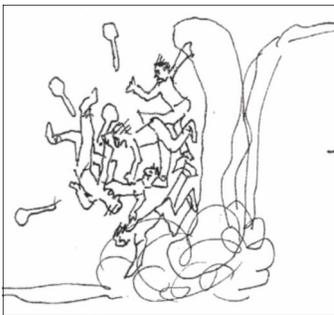
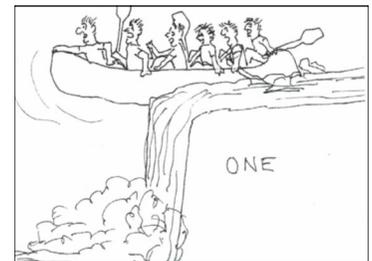
### More Silver Creek.....

(Drawings by Jack Hande)

Remember last issue's story by June Drake as he told how Silver Creek was a highlight of every day life in Silverton's early years? He told how people would gather to watch the rushing water in the wintertime and how newly logged timber was dangerously floated down Silver Creek to the area lumber mills. Well, here, from Volume III of Jack Hande's *Silverton Stories from the 1920's, '30's and '40's*, is an excerpt from a contribution by Ron Kallis as he recollects one of the many adventures he and his friends had on that same Silver Creek.

This particular time it was winter and Silver Creek was in flood stage...and quite swift. Ron and five of his buddies had a 12-man raft and were ready to challenge the creek's winter fury. They had done trips down the creek before in a smaller raft and felt prepared. They had temporarily tied the raft to a tree with a rope as they situated themselves.

“At the appropriate time, when all five of us were secure in the raft, we let loose of the rope. Then came a wild ride! We were off! Down the stream we went! Things were happening too fast. At this rate we would be quickly nearing downtown Silverton (about a mile away). To our surprise, we were already approaching the man-made falls (a 10-foot drop). We were almost there! Before we knew it, we were going over the falls and had a major problem. The raft was too long and too big. The front end of the raft actually extended over the drop in the falls and then the whole raft tipped upside down, front first. We were all in the churning undertow of the falls and separated from one another. It was scary! I remember hitting the water—then it becoming very dark and I could feel myself being churned in the falls undertow. My head was hitting the gavel on the bottom of the falls. Finally, I was released from the falls and came to the surface.”



All the boys made it to the bank.....except for Duane, who was stranded in the middle of the swollen and raging creek—hanging on to some willow trees.

“We needed to rescue Duane! About this time a farmer saw our plight. He had viewed the episode and already had a long rope to be used for the rescue. He decided it would be best to walk back up to a private bridge over Silver Creek and float the rope down the creek from both sides of the stream with two of us holding the rope from each bank. The rope quickly floated down to Duane. He then tied the rope around his waist and, as the two of us held onto the rope, he jumped into the flooded creek. In an instant he was under water and swept quickly to the bank of the creek! He had only made one mistake: he had tied a “slip” knot in the rope and his waist was about 12 inches around! Finally, we were safely back on land. We were a little rattled and very wet.....”



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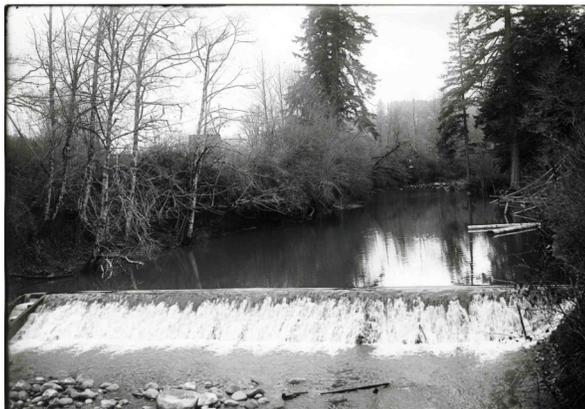
*Celebrating Over 40 Years in the Community*

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**Thank you to our new and renewing members and generous donors and to anyone who has given anonymously to the Museum or any of its projects—**

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Truly the heart  
of our city!*

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**If you received an overdue notice with your newsletter, we appreciate your prompt response.  
Thank you!**