

Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974

Over Forty-five Years of History in the Making



Museum and Office
428 South Water Street

“What Hole in the Ground?”

By Fred A. Parkinson

In 1961 there was an immense hole in the ground where two buildings once stood. By that time, the undeveloped space between Weisner’s Appliance and Silverton Bakery on North Water Street had been there for 7 ½ years. As a safety measure, a wooden fence had been erected at street level to keep curious citizens from injuring themselves. The open space between the two brick buildings is easily seen in a 1957 aerial photo taken of downtown Silverton.

When Silverton was founded, most of the commercial development slowly occurred along the two principal streets, Water Street and East Main Street, with an emphasis on the intersection of Main and Water Streets near the covered bridge. Most buildings erected in the early days were built using wood-frame construction, which made them vulnerable to the ravages of fire. One of Silverton’s most deadly fires occurred in September 1885. It destroyed all the buildings on the creek-side of North Water Street from the bridge to the building now housing Mac’s Place.

Two buildings were constructed after the 1885 fire on the site of what would become 105 North Water Street today. They remained standing in various remodeled forms until 1953.



“Hole in the ground” (1953-1961) seen in center of photo

Frank Simeral constructed his boot and shoe repair shop in the early 1880s that was destroyed in the 1885 fire. Reconstructed after the fire, half of the building housed Simeral’s shop and the other half contained several businesses during the ensuing twenty-five years, including one of the first locations of the Hubb’s Real Estate, later Insurance, Company.

The adjacent building to the north, also reconstructed after the 1885 fire, housed a pool hall and then a series of grocery stores and ultimately a delicatessen and confectionery.

These two buildings were noteworthy because they each housed long-term businesses beginning in the mid-1920s.

Cliff Dickerson bought Blair’s Delicatessen at 107 North Water in May 1924 and incorporated the inventory from his prior newsstand on East Main Street into his new venture. His business ultimately became best known for its ice cream treats, necessitating a name change to Dickerson’s Confectionery. The business was the first in Silverton to feature electrically refrigerated ice cream cabinets. After operating his business for close to twenty-two years, he sold the confectionery to Fred Cavender in February 1946 after buying the T. M. Lukins Variety Store on North First Street. He operated Dickerson’s Variety Store there until he retired in 1965. Cavender ran the confectionery for a little over a year before selling to Gifford Smith. Two and a half years later an article ran in the December 9, 1949, *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* reporting “Smiths do a ‘Switcheroo’ Business Deal.” In an odd turn of events, Mr. and Mrs. Gifford Smith sold the business to another Smith, this time to Clayton Smith, who would operate the confectionery with his sister. One year later, in December 1950, Smith sold the business to Al Johnson, who, in turn, sold it to William Robbins in 1953.

Curator's Corner

I am always amazed at the dedication to our museum that so many of you have and the support that comes with that dedication. It is because of the many gifts that we have received over the last few years that we have been able to complete two major projects this winter. I must add a huge shout out to our treasurer, Tracy Duerst, and her financial expertise that we find our finances able to support these projects.

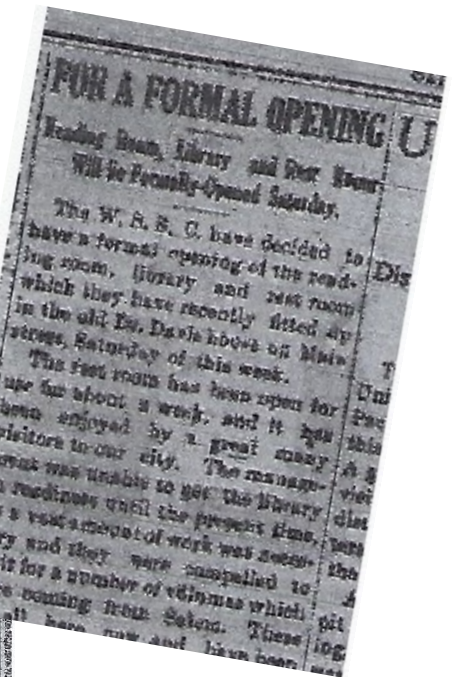


Many times, our donors never fully realize the benefit that their donations give to the museum and I want to focus on those benefits. The remodel of the bathroom is at the top of the list. The 'old' and antiquated plumbing has been replaced with new fixtures. Our super volunteer Larry Thomas has done a beautiful job removing the old fixtures and replacing them as well putting down new flooring and painting. While he was working with the new sink he found some issues with the drain and we had to call for help before that job could be finished. The cost was unexpected, but that is where your kind gifts have been so valuable. Larry has also given the 'new' bathroom a touch of art as he painted some very complimentary stenciled flowers about the room.

Rod Wanker was asked to help with the lighting in the Homer room and those added lights have made such a huge difference in viewing our collection of original Homer cartoons. We have also been able to frame an additional eight original Homer prints and both of these projects are a direct impact that your gifts have given to our museum. Visitors are always expressing their delight in how well the museum is able to display artifacts and how well kept and inviting it is, and that is also because of the work of our volunteers. Little things really do matter and this year with all of the remodeling and electrical work the museum needed more heavy-duty cleaning than usual and because of our donors' generosity we are able to have a cleaning crew come in to help with that issue.

Your museum thanks you!

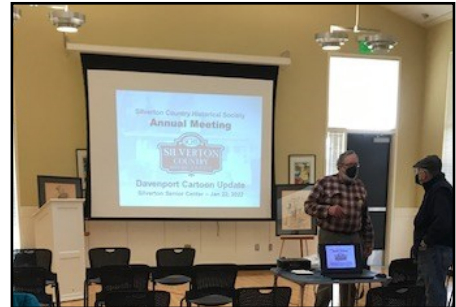
Judy Lowery



We aren't the only ones excited about our new bathroom as these stories about the Library's "rest room" in the November 1913 Appeal illustrate!

SCHS Annual Meeting January 22, 2022

We were pleased to see a very good turnout for our annual meeting, which was again held at the Silverton Senior Center. It was so gratifying to have some semblance of normalcy as we talked about our efforts over the last year and discussed our plans for the coming year. Gus gave a great presentation on our current collection of Davenport cartoons and the status of the plan for framing the Davenport cartoons currently on display at City Hall. We are truly looking forward to the upcoming year!



New SCHS Board Member, Linda McKay

Joining our Board last year, was longtime volunteer Linda McKay. Linda has served as a Museum hostess for several years, sharing her monthly Sunday afternoons with Kathy Hunter. Linda was born in Bellingham, Washington, and attended Western Washington State University before graduating from the Oregon College of Education in Monmouth. She is married to Dennis McKay and they have three children and six grandchildren, which makes for a very busy home life. And to our advantage, Linda is a Master Gardener and loves antiques and sewing.

Linda is outgoing and friendly and always willing to help out with Museum projects. We're big fans!



SCHS Donation to Silver Falls Library

The Silverton Historical Society, thanks to a generous donation by uber historian, Gus Frederick, was able, in turn, to give this amazing four volume dictionary of the Kalapuya language to Librarian Christy Davis of the Silver Falls Library. With no living speakers of the language, it has been very challenging to bring this language back to life. A dictionary of this size and detail will make a tremendous difference in the ability to study and share the language and history with others. Copies are available to universities, tribes and any native group trying to learn about Northwest native languages and culture. Needless to say, the Library is very grateful to Gus and the Historical Society for this wonderful work.



New SCHS Board Member



Carrie Alexandria Caster joins our board with a wealth of experience in archives, libraries, museums, and the book world. Carrie holds a Bachelor of Arts in Art History (minor in French) from University of Oregon and a Masters degree in Library and Information Science (with a concentration in archival studies) from the University of Arizona iSchool. She has over 15 years of professional library and archives experience (including academic and public libraries, as well as special libraries, museums, and archives). She was Collections Librarian/Photo Archivist at Arizona Historical Society in Tucson for three years and spent another two years as Archivist/Curator for the January 8th Memorial Foundation, which collected and preserved spontaneous memorial materials following the shooting of U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords and 18 others in 2011. During her varied archival career, Carrie wrote and was awarded grants to develop and digitize cultural collections, and in a professional highpoint, was invited to present at the Cultural Archives Symposium at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. in 2014. Moving back to Oregon,

Carrie most recently spent three wonderful years as Library Director at Mt. Angel Public Library, before reluctantly stepping away from the library and archives field in 2018 to assist in the management of her family’s real estate holdings.

Carrie is a native of the Silverton area and a 1988 graduate of Silverton Union High School (valedictorian), and has had a lifelong interest in the history and culture of the Silverton area. Longtime Silverton residents will also recall that for 4 years in the mid 1990s Carrie was the proprietress of The Three Graces, her bookstore/art gallery in the Odd Fellows’ building at 106 First Street (where Daylight Vintage is currently located). Carrie is delighted to join the board and to volunteer to lend her expertise and passion for local history archival collections in multiple projects at the museum, including photo preservation and access, collections care and development, digitization projects, grant research, exhibit creation, and more. In her spare time, Carrie is an avid art photographer and a collector of vintage clothes and antique postcards and photographs.



Rod Wanker installs new lighting in the Homer Room, a much needed improvement.



*Continued from Page 1***“What” Hole in the Ground—continued**

Immediately to the south, at 105 North Water, stood the structure known as the Simeral Building. Over the next several decades, in addition to Frank Simeral’s shoe and boot repair shop that he had operated since 1880, it housed a meat market, a women’s hat shop, a couple of barbershops, and the aforementioned Hubbs Company. In 1924, when Simeral retired, a shoeshine parlor had set up next to his shop. By about 1926 George Manolis had taken over and expanded the shine parlor that became known as George’s Place, also including, as part of the service, cleaning and blocking hats, as well as providing sundries for sale.

The business ultimately morphed into a café and tavern with innovative things to come. In September 1939 Manolis announced plans to open a “new club type restaurant.” The September 22, 1939 newspaper reported “A banquet room is being constructed on the basement floor to accommodate 50 persons, while the upstairs will be altered to take the space now occupied by the shine parlors and the number of booths doubled.”

The exterior was remodeled to a more modern motif including the use of tile glass and a prominent neon sign advertising the new business name:

George’s Café. The inside was redone in a modern style. As detailed in the October 27, 1939, *Silverton Appeal-Tribune*, “The long handsome bar with its chromium-plated seats, the mahogany booths, the soundproof ceilings upstairs and down, the novel wood panelings,make a striking first impression under the new lights.” The new George’s Café opened to rave reviews on October 21, 1939. It became the premier nightspot in Silverton. The new basement banquet facility was designated the “Leprechaun Room” and featured dancing and other entertainment. As time went on, the downstairs room became affectionately known as the “Snake Pit” to local residents.



George’s Café after remodel

After operating his various businesses on the site since about 1926, culminating in George’s Café, George Manolis sold his café to Eugene Hart and Frank Vlasic, in February 1946. The sale coincidentally occurred during the same month that Dickerson’s Confectionery next door was sold. Like Dickerson’s, George’s Café would have a series of owners including partners John Werline and Pat Grogan in 1947 and then Vic Holman in 1953.

Why does the narrative of both buildings end in 1953?

Well....., In the early morning hours of Tuesday, August 25, 1953, smoke was discovered coming out of the sidewalk trap door in front of George’s Café by owner Vic Holman and his friend, Jeff Hoyt. Flames were emanating from the back of Robbins Confectionary, as seen from both the street and creek-side. Because the fire spread so quickly, Holman was able to save only his cash register and a cigarette vending machine from the flames. A massive fire department call-out resulted in the use of 3,000 feet of fire hose connected to seven hydrants. With no hope of saving both structures, efforts turned to protect nearby buildings. Water was trained on the blaze from the rooftops of the adjacent Olsen’s Pharmacy and Fish buildings, then the home of the Western Auto store. The total loss of the fire was estimated at \$35,000. We have been unable to document where or how the blaze started. Despite their earlier efforts, the Fire Department was called to the scene again the next day to deal with the smoldering ruins.

William Robbins, who had recently taken over ownership of the confectionery, indicated he would not continue in business while Vic Holman, owner of George’s Café, said he would like to continue in the restaurant business in a different location.

The two buildings were owned by different people. A month later, the October 9 *Silverton Appeal Tribune* reported the confectionery property at 107 North Water, owned by Mrs. Bertha Morely, had been sold to the Arthur Nelson family, owners of the adjacent café, thus unifying the address at 105 North Water Street. At the time, the lot was being cleared of debris by C. L. Estes.

And there the hole in the ground sat for 7 ½ years until Chuck Leonard bought the property to build his sporting goods store in 1961. This long period in between buildings gave people a chance to reflect on the good times they had enjoyed at both businesses, especially down in the labyrinth of the affectionately remembered and sometimes notorious “Snake Pit.”



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Celebrating Over 45 Years in the Community

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

You're the best!!

Thomas Stewart	Carrie Caster	Jack Hande
Andrew Ulven	Eva Beale	Norm English
Tavis Bettoli-Lotten	Mary Rose Brandt	Bob and Dona Eberle
Fred Parkinson	Judy Lowery	Linda McKay
Mary Ellen McCleary Fleck		



The card reads:
Friend Trixie Silverton
Received your 2/14/09 postal and
was certainly suprised to get it.
Well how are you getting a long.
I am just as mean as ever. I am
attending school again this winter.
Ans. Soon.
I remain your Friend
Pearl Davenport
Please ans.
Do you remember the water fight
we had.
When are you coming to Silverton.

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