

Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974

Over Forty-five Years of History in the Making



Museum and Office
428 South Water Street

Homer Davenport Community Festival
Aug. 4, 5, 6, 2023 – Coolidge McClaine Park

Volunteers and glassware needed for
SCHS Famous Dime Toss Booth
Give us a call: 503-873-7070

Silverton's Sidewalk Freight Doors

By Fred A. Parkinson

The sound of creaking metal wakes you up in the middle of the night. You stir groggily from your bed on an upper floor of one of Silverton's oldest buildings and stumble toward the window to see what's up. Bathed in the harsh glow of the streetlight below are several people emerging out of the sidewalk next to the building across the street. You rub your eyes as you can't believe what you're seeing. Why would anyone be out there at that time of night? Probably for nefarious purposes you assume.

This situation actually occurred many years ago in Silverton, but that's a story for another time.

There are many terms used to describe the heavy doors imbedded in sidewalks around downtown; freight door, access hatch, basement access doors, floor access panel, sidewalk trap door among others. Since Silverton did not have many back alleys for deliveries, it was not unusual for businesses in the downtown core area to have a means of delivering supplies down through the front sidewalk. This was especially obvious for the buildings on Water Street that backed up to the creek.

There are close to twenty freight doors embedded in the sidewalks in front of various businesses in Silverton's downtown. They are of different sizes and configurations. Many of the doors are still functional, although few are used on a regular basis. Although the size of the larger doors differs slightly, the average dimensions of the standard doors are around six feet long by three feet wide when they are a single door and six by five feet when they are double doors. In their heyday, the doors provided access to the basement to deliver merchandise or fuel. Some doors have stairs coming up to the sidewalk while others had some sort of hoist system installed to make transferring items easier.

The smallest door measures three feet by four feet and is located on the South Water Street side of the old Wolfard store building (now Oso restaurant) near the corner of east Main and South Water Streets. It has been said that these doors were opened to reveal a coal chute to supply a coal burning furnace. A former owner of Mac's Place related the sidewalk door in front was routinely opened to deliver kegs of beer to the basement.

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Curator's Corner

A very exciting donation to our Museum's collection has been added this month. Sandra Lemmon, a descendent of the King family, settlers in the Victor Point area, asked if we would be able to "find a home" for some of her family's items. We excitedly agreed.....but we needed to find a way to transport them from Springfield to Silverton. Fortunately, Jeff Marcoe and Jeff Brekas generously gave of their time and with Jeff Brekas' pickup, volunteered to transport them to the museum.



Sandra Lemmon with husband Jim

Sandra Lemmon's family dates back to the Oregon Trail when her ancestors crossed the plains in 1845. On their trek was a beautiful spinning wheel, completely intact after all these years, which is among the items she is donating to the museum. The cradle, as shown in the photo, was made by Clarence Jones, who married Christine King. It was made for their daughter Bernita Jones (Sharp) who was born July 24, 1909. Four years later it was used by their son, Carl R. Jones. The sewing rocker was given to Christine King Jones by her father, John Elliott King and her mother, Josephine White King on May 29, 1904 on the event of her 16th birthday.



Included with these very special items are several notebooks full of information about the King family and the many extended family members who share ties with the Victor Point and early Silverton area. We are so grateful to the Lemmon family for their donation and we are working on a display to feature the items in the near future so that they may be enjoyed by the family members and Museum visitors.



We hope that you will be able to take time to visit the Museum this summer— we have some new displays and other additions to the collection to share with you.

Pictured: Jeff Brekas, Jeff Marcoe and Fred Parkinson examining a fascinating scrapbook of Silverton and Oregon history articles which was a part of the Lemmon donation.

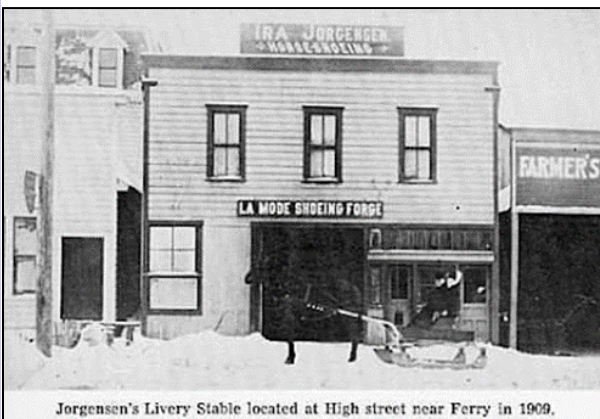
Judy Lowery

Silverton's Sidewalk Freight Doors (Continued from Page 1)

A couple of doors have what appear to be the manufacturer stamped on the door. "N.W. Tube & Metal, Portland, Ore., Watertite (sic) door", is stamped on the handle of double doors located on the east side of Citizen's Bank. These doors are also noteworthy because they have been fitted with non-skid squares to prevent falls. Unfortunately, no information has been found concerning this company.



On the other hand, information is available for a name, "Ira Jorgensen, Salem Ore", stamped on the frame of doors located in the sidewalk of the Masonic building. During his work as a blacksmith, Jorgensen manufactured the steel sidewalk doors on the Main Street side of the 1915 building. Ira Jorgensen was a notable member of the Salem business community for several decades. Born in 1881, he moved to Oregon with his family in 1891. He became a blacksmith under his father's tutelage and operated a blacksmith shop, specializing in horseshoeing, from 1903 to 1926. The business was located on the east side of High Street between State and Ferry streets on the site of the present-day Elsinore Theater. When the property was sold to build the theater, Jorgensen moved his shop to a new building he erected next door on the corner of Ferry and High Streets. This building still stands today. He concurrently established an automobile parts and accessories business in 1921 to capitalize on the emerging auto industry, later concentrating on the auto business full time. After he passed away in 1948, family members operated the business for many years. Earlier, his profile in the community had led to an entry in a three-volume set titled *History of the Willamette Valley Oregon* published in 1927. It featured small biographies of many prominent Valley citizens.



Jorgensen's Livery Stable located at High street near Ferry in 1909.

The enclosed photo shows the original blacksmith shop with a sign, "Ira Jorgensen Horse-shoeing" perched atop the building in 1909, located where the Elsinore Theater stands today.

In addition to providing basement access during their heyday, sometimes a freight door became part of a local news story. Two items stand out in this regard, both concerning downtown fires.

In March 1923, an alarm was turned in for a fire near two businesses, the Water Street Meat Market at 108 and Moser's Grocery at 110 North Water Street. Firemen opened the freight door in the sidewalk in front of the grocery in order to find the source of the fire. When the grocery owner was notified, he rushed to the scene. In an article headlined "**Groceryman Hurt at Fire,**" the March 23, 1923 *Silverton Appeal* reported:

"Carl R. Moser who owns a grocery in the block came rushing on the scene when he learned of the location and plunged head-long into the open trap. He was badly bruised in the fall. The opening was about half full of wood which probably saved him from a much worse fall."

The fire appeared to have started in the basement of the adjacent Water Street Meat Market. Both businesses survived the fire, but the building housing the meat market would ultimately be consumed by fire in 1986. The surviving storefront at 110 North Water Street is currently occupied by the I've Got Rocks in My Head jewelry and lapidary store. The sidewalk door is still there.

A sidewalk door also played a part when a major fire occurred in two adjacent buildings during the early morning hours of August 25, 1953 at what is now 105 North Water Street. George's Café and the Robbins Confexionery, as it was spelled at the time, were totally destroyed in the blaze. In detailing the fire, the August 28, 1953 *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* related:

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“Café owner Vic A. Holman had just closed his business and locked the door when he noticed a stream of smoke around a car at the curb owned by Jerry Hoyt, who was with him. Then they saw it was coming from the trap door in front of the confexionery.”

The two buildings were completely destroyed and weren't immediately rebuilt, resulting in an empty lot for the next 7 ½ years. During a recent complete renovation of the property, the sidewalk freight doors were removed and a long unused well was filled in when the front sidewalk was redone.



Doors at 105 N. Water before removal

Silverton's sidewalk freight doors could disappear in future years. Many are not currently used. While there is no City requirement that doors be removed during renovations, a few have been removed that could pose a potential liability for building owners. As one walks around the area, there are still enough doors visible to get a sense of our historic downtown during a typical day; alive with the hustle and bustle of commerce.

“Summer in Silverton” Display at the Library

Carrie Caster and Chris Schwab prepare the Historical Society's display of vintage photographs and memorabilia currently located at the Silver Falls Library. The exhibit illustrates that not much has really changed in small town summer life!



Museum Instagram Page

Please be sure to follow us on Instagram! Carrie does an amazing job of highlighting what we do at the Museum and choosing historical photos that beautifully tell Silverton's history. Shots like this one of the view of the Museum's living room, make me want to move in!



New Mural at Silver Falls Library

The most recent Mural Society mural will be unveiled at Silver Falls Library at 410 South Water Street, Saturday, August 5th at 2:00 pm. The mural will be located on the library's South Water Street exterior and will depict images of the flouring mill that once stood exactly on the site where the Silver Falls Library stands now.



Tonya Jo Smithburg, one of Silverton's most talented muralists, began work on the piece early this year.



The Library thanks you all for your generous support and enthusiasm about this upcoming beautiful mural depicting an important part of Silver-

ton's history and Tonya Jo's delightful artwork.

Also on the Library's schedule for Saturday, will be a presentation at 2:15 pm by Fred Parkinson on the history of Fischer Mill.



Light refreshments will be provided by the Friends of the Library.

And if all that wasn't exciting enough, Gus Frederick will be sharing **"Who the Heck is Homer Davenport"** at 12:30 and 3:30 pm. in the Library's program Room. Please join us!

Homer Davenport Community Festival Highlight



One of SCHS' favorite volunteers, Larry Thomas, will again have his very clever Mural jig-saw puzzles available for purchase. Many of the historic mural scenes are available in different sizes to provide you with a pleasant but "puzzling" experience. They also come with a handcrafted wooden box.

This year he is adding a collection of kinetic art sculptures that will totally mesmerize you. Be sure to check out his offerings.





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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!!

Kirk Hartman
Belinda Goody

Jack Hande
David Jockelson



Remember that SCHS is participating in Willamette Heritage Center's special exhibit 'To Your Health!' Area museums and organizations are invited to display artifacts that help piece together the story of what it has meant to be healthy in the past and how that has changed over time.

SCHS is sharing Dr. Keene's medical saddle bags that were recently donated to the museum by a family member. These unique saddle bags are still filled with vials of the medications that this highly distinguished and much loved doctor used as he ministered to the loggers and mill workers of the Silver Falls Timber Company.

The exhibit will be open to the public from June 2, 2023 until October 7, 2023 at the Willamette Heritage Center, 1313 Mill Street SE in Salem.

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