

# Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974

Forty Years of History in the Making



Museum and Office  
428 South Water Street

## Silverton's Community Cannery

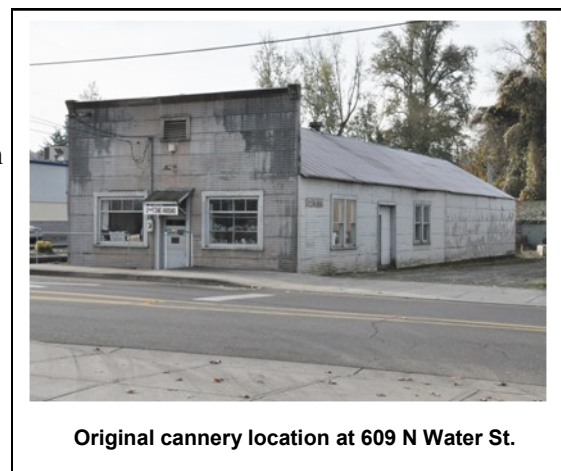
By Fred A. Parkinson

"I'm going out to the cannery to sing....." These seemingly contradictory words could have been uttered by any one of hundreds of music students attending Silverton Union High School during the 1950s and 1960s. During those years the small non-descript building contained the high school music program, with the choral department occupying the north end and the band department the south end of a 30 x 60 foot space. The room was small for its intended use, but fortunately the choir and band never had to rehearse simultaneously. This building was situated to the southeast of the original Schlador Street high school building, which meant students going to class there would have to brave the elements when it rained.

Most students knew the building simply as "the cannery," but few knew the history of the building itself. It had apparently been some sort of cannery in the past as the structure had a somewhat industrial look to it, but with the massive Kolstad Cannery situated across a large field to the southeast, the little building seemed much too small to contain a cannery.

The community canning program was inspired by the numerous home gardens established during the Great Depression and continuing on during WWII. During the war, many American families had "Victory" gardens that would lessen the need to use precious food rationing points. The Federal government set up a program to establish community canneries as a way to preserve perishable food and also divert food resources to the war effort.

First notice of a planned community cannery was published in the *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* on June 11, 1943 announcing the intent to "sponsor a cannery school here for the purpose of conserving more home-grown food for next winter's use." The school was a government funded program sponsored by Silverton School District 4 and the State division of vocational education. The paper reported the government would provide a canning expert and a food preparation supervisor, as well as the canning equipment. Leonard Hudson was in charge of the project, Mrs. Charles Davis was the food preparation supervisor, and Ed Nelson was the canner. The cannery was located at 609 North Water Street in a building erected in 1920 that once housed the Silver Creek Creamery. This building still exists today. The current owners were aware of the building's use as a creamery but were unaware of its past as a cannery.



Original cannery location at 609 N Water St.

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*From the President...*

## **War Memorial Plaza – Silverton’s Fallen Heroes**

**Thank you to all the donors who have contributed to the  
War Memorial Plaza – Silverton’s Fallen Heroes  
We appreciate your contribution to help us honor the 60+ Silverton-area  
servicemen who gave their lives so that we might enjoy our freedom  
in this country**

**Please keep us in mind for your end-of-year giving  
Help our project to become fully funded by early 2015  
Anticipated ground-breaking by April  
Projected dedication by October**

*War Memorial Plaza – Silverton’s Fallen Heroes Committee*



*Silverton Country Museum - History in the Making*



***Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from  
the Silverton Country Historical Society!***

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The cannery opened for business on Tuesday, July 6, 1943. H. E. Roop was the first of nineteen people arriving on the first day to can. Each family was allowed a total of 100 tin cans of either #2 cans, which held 2½ cups of product or #2½ cans, which contained 3½ cups of product, per person. The family was assigned a unique number to mark their cans that was then used for the entire season. The only charge to use the cannery was 6¢ for each #2 can and 7¢ for each #2½ can.

With limited exceptions, all produce had to be prepared on site at the cannery to insure the highest quality and sanitation standards. Produce prepared at the cannery could not be legally sold to others. The original processing equipment included two large retorts (cookers), each capable of holding 175 #2 cans, three washing units, three blanchers, and three exhausts, in addition to preparation tables and lid cappers.

At first, daily capacity was limited to 400 cans, with the primary emphasis placed on canning non-acidic vegetables such as peas, beets, corn, string beans, and pumpkin, which were difficult to can safely in the home without a pressure cooker. Accordingly, patrons were required to phone in for appointments, indicating the amount and type of food to be prepared to enable the most efficient use of cannery resources. Additionally, families dealing with smaller quantities were encouraged to combine their efforts with those of other families to allow the cannery to run more efficiently. People were encouraged to use glass jars at home to put up the more acidic types of produce, which were easier to can at home. As the packing season progressed, additional equipment was installed, including a 30 gallon steam jacket kettle and an electric range and hotplate. These additions facilitated the canning of corn, tomatoes, and poultry.

By October 8, 1943, with approximately one month left in the packing season, the *Appeal* reported that 500 families had packed 55,000 cans of vegetables, fruit, and meat. The Silverton community cannery was an unqualified success that ended its first packing season around November 1.

The 1944 packing season had one important change in operations. In order to keep the cannery operating, the State required patrons to take classes including "Planting and Growing the Garden," "Refrigeration," "Dehydration," "Salting and Brining," and "Storing and Processing Foods." In addition, equipment was added to the cannery that increased capacity to a maximum of 500 cans per hour.

Silverton apparently gained a reputation for establishing a premier community cannery and that fact, combined with the close proximity to Salem, allowed the Silverton cannery to host a series of training sessions for those operating community canneries around the state. Participants came from towns all over Oregon including LaGrande, Halfway, Lakeview, Salem, Heppner and Woodburn. Additional classes involved those from Albany, Canby, Corvallis, Cottage Grove, Molalla, Myrtle Point, and Grants Pass. The May 12, 1944 *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* reported that the gatherings covered "all phases of cannery operation and management from the operation and maintenance of equipment to actual canning of typical acid and non-acid vegetables and meats." The course was conducted by State supervisor of vocational agriculture Earl Cooley and State supervisor of vocational home economics Bertha Kohlhagen.

Successful as the community cannery was, production for the 1944 season was down 60% from the previous year. This may be attributed to the unusually hot summer that vastly reduced yields.

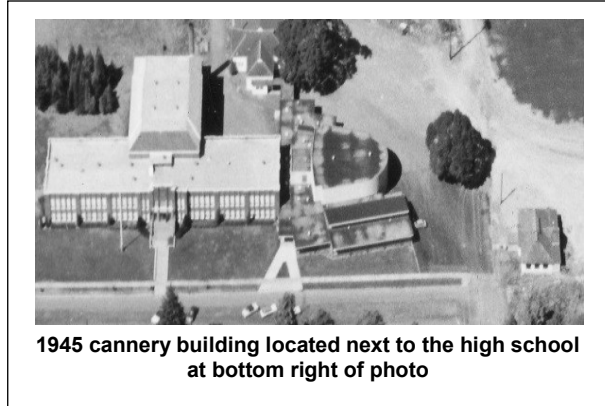
On April 6, 1945 the *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* displayed a large page-wide headline: "**Community Cannery Building Plans Made**" The old Silver Creek Creamery building, which had housed the cannery for two years, had been sold, necessitating the search for a new location. The old Washington Irving School building on the northeast corner of North First and Park Streets was briefly considered but soon rejected for a variety of reasons.

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Ultimately, a decision was made to erect a new building on city owned property adjacent to the high school. The \$3000 needed to build the new facility was raised through a public fund raising drive held during the spring of 1945.

Construction for the new facility began on June 14, 1945. Plans called for a 30 x 60 ft. building of hollow-tile construction. In addition to the primary prep and canning space, the building had a separate boiler room and two restrooms. It was electrically powered and gas fueled. Ventilation was provided by large outward opening, steel sashed windows as well as a large 6 x 16 ft. ventilator built into the ceiling. Equipment from the North Water Street location, complete with some upgrades, was transferred to the new facility.



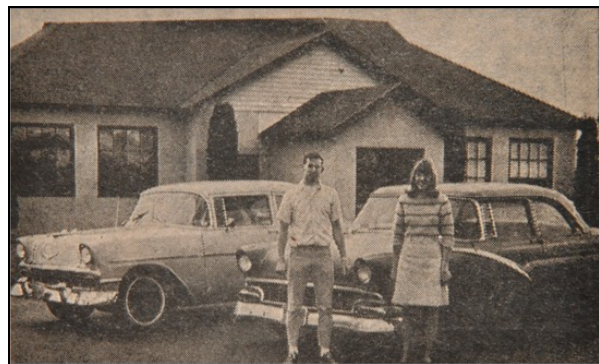
1945 cannery building located next to the high school at bottom right of photo

The project stalled somewhat during the course of the summer due to a shortage of labor and building materials. The new cannery finally opened for business during the last week of August, 1945. With the end of WWII imminent, continued funding for the facility was not necessarily assured. However, the cannery would continue to be run on a non-profit basis, charging the 6¢ or 7¢ per can, as had been charged the previous two years.

The cannery operated for several more years and by the 1948 packing season the price per can had increased to 7¢ or 8¢ for the two sized cans. By the 1949 summer packing season, participation at the cannery had dwindled to unprofitable levels. To perhaps mitigate this situation, in early June, 1950 the cannery board met with the district school board to obtain approval to lease the cannery operations to an outside person. The June 9, *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* reported "the community cannery will be leased to an operator from LaGrande this summer it was announced this week." The "operator" was not identified and no reason was offered for leasing out the facility.

It's not entirely clear whether or not the lease was ever signed. An article in the August 25, 1950 *Appeal-Tribune* seemed to indicate a different future for the building. The story stated "The community cannery building on the district's property near the high school, since it has not been put into use as a custom cannery this year, is being considered by the board for use as a band practice room."

This seems to indicate that the lease announced in June had apparently not been signed, thus making the building available for other uses by the school district. Use as a rehearsal facility by the band seemed like a good fit as space in the main school building was at a premium. The paper reported that "The school band, a growing organization, now uses much needed classroom space and space (sic) and practice sessions are said to be diverting to other classroom work nearby." In other words, the sounds of rehearsal were distracting to other students. The cannery and school boards finalized the arrangement on October 4. The cannery equipment would be housed in a partitioned area of the building, allowing the band to use the rest of the building, with the stipulation that upon thirty days notice from the cannery board, the school district would return the building to cannery use.



Cannery/Music building around 1966

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**SCHS Annual Meeting!**  
**Saturday January 24, 2015**  
**Silverton Senior Center — 115 Westfield St.**  
**2:00 p.m.**

We're Forty! Join us as we celebrate four decades of honoring Silverton's heritage. Our special presentation will be on the history of the Silverton Country Historical Society! A good display of scrapbooks from those early years to peruse, memorabilia to examine and maybe some surprises. Also election of two board members and introduction of our new Curator.



And of course, REFRESHMENTS!

This event at the Senior Center is open to members of the community of **ALL** ages.

**See you there!**

**Watch for “good stuff” for Dime Toss**

The Dime Toss booth is planning another round next August at the Homer Davenport Community Festival. Our concession at this annual event has been fun and lucrative as well for the Society. So, heads up everyone, as you go through the coming winter, spring and summer, be on the lookout for appealing, colorful, attractive containers someone will want to throw a dime in and take home!



We appreciate all of your contributions, and thank you for them.

*Kathy Hunter, Chair*

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The 1953-54 school year saw the school choir move into the other end of the cannery building. The 1954 Silverton yearbook, *Silvertonia*, stated “The voices of your members are not heard in practice session as in years past. The reason is moving the chorus classes from the main building to the band room. Now your members can sing as loud as they please without disturbing the other classes.”

For the next fifteen years, hundreds of music students would traipse out to the small building, sometimes braving the rainy Oregon weather, to rehearse. By the mid-1960s the building was starting to show its age, although it was only slightly more than twenty years old. But it had been built as a cannery, not a rehearsal room, and the deficiencies in the space had made themselves known over time.

On May 26, 1969 Silverton residents approved a bond measure that included funds to construct a new music building. This sealed the fate for the old cannery/music building. The beautiful new music facility was completed in late Spring 1970 and went into service for the 1970-71 school year. The old cannery building, that had served the needs of the community for twenty five years, was torn down; the space ultimately becoming part of a parking lot just south of the new music building.

Born of necessity during a most brutal war, the Silverton Community Cannery existed for less than ten years. Located in two separate locations, the cannery brought out the best in people who struggled under challenging conditions. In later years, the cannery contained the sounds of the band and choir as the groups steadily improved. In the end, all that is left of the high school cannery building are the memories of those who worked and rehearsed within its walls. However, the original cannery building at 609 North Water Street still stands as a reminder of the continuing community spirit that made the cannery a reality.



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**WWW.SILVERTONMUSEUM.ORG**

**Thank you** to our new and renewing members—  
Your support is what keeps us going!

Mark English	Diane Hill	Bill Kleeman
Vern and Pat Wolfard	Andy and Rhonda Bellando	
Fred and Nola Parkinson	Susan Dillon and Michael Milhausen	
Nicole Parkinson Winnen	Kate Schwab and Paul Groendes	

**Thank you** to these generous donors:  
**War Memorial Plaza—Silverton Fallen Heroes**

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Greg and Jenifer Schmidt	Silverton Fitness	Rene' Alvarez
Ron and Judith Bertolami	Bruce and Lisa Dennis	Thomas Stewart
Dave and Diane Paul	Bud and Jean Steuart	Becky Ludden

And thank you to all who have given anonymously or contributed via the collection containers through out town! We apologize if we have omitted anyone.



**Your S.C.H.S. Board**

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Ray Hunter	Past-Pres.
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Tracy Duerst	Treasurer
<b>Your Name Here</b>	Curator
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**If you received an  
overdue notice with your  
newsletter, we appreciate  
your prompt response.  
Thank you!**