

A busy summer for McKee Bridge Historical Society

BY LAURA AHEARN

Although the pandemic derailed plans for McKee Bridge Day 2020, McKee Bridge Historical Society kept busy throughout the summer pursuing opportunities to achieve our chartered objectives: to maintain the structural integrity of McKee Bridge *and* to preserve and share historic resources about the Upper Applegate.

Volunteers frequently cut weeds, blew debris off the bridge, restocked the rack cards and visitors log, and addressed the graffiti, which has been a real problem recently. We replaced defaced “message planks” and worked with Jackson County to erect a more official warning sign.

McKee Bridge is due for an engineering inspection in 2021, which will cost at least \$6,000—about as much as the \$6,522 Jackson County paid J. Hartman & Sons in 1917 to build the bridge in the first place (\$144,000 in today’s dollars). We are working on a grant application to the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) to help cover this obligation and have appointed a committee to work with the county Roads Department.

After Jackson County moved into COVID-19 Phase II, volunteers started setting up a booth and bringing the Museum Trailer to the bridge on selected weekends from noon to 4 pm. Check the MBHS Facebook page for the schedule: facebook.com/McKeeBridgeHistoricalSociety/.

The Creativity Contest attracted insightful entries, including a model of Dutchman’s Peak Fire Lookout by Ruch student Thomas Grier, on display at the museum trailer.

We are scanning and printing newly discovered photos and sharing stories about the Upper Applegate in the 1850s-1920s on the MBHS Facebook page. We now have over 330 followers. Is there a person, place or event you would like to see covered? Let us know!

We are installing displays of vintage photos, timelines, and maps at Ruch Library. These will change each month. The topic for July was “Baseball in Big Applegate.” Right now you can learn about the fascinating Collings family.

We are developing permanent interpretive signs for the bridge and will seek a SHPO grant in April 2021 to help pay for installation. We are also working

on an Upper Applegate History Trail brochure and have prepared grant applications to the Jackson County Cultural Coalition and Oregon Historic Trails Fund.

Two MBHS volunteers have received training on cleaning historic grave makers. The markers of the McKee pioneer parties and descendants at Logtown Cemetery need work. We are securing funding from A Greater Applegate to purchase specialized supplies and will train other community members and students to help with this important project.

Do you think some or all of these activities are interesting or important? Please become a MBHS member and get involved! Membership for 2021 is now open.

Dues are still only \$20 per year for your entire household. To sign up, contact mckeebridge1917@gmail.com or attend the MBHS Annual Meeting at 10 am Saturday, September 12, on the bridge. All COVID-19 safety measures will be followed. MBHS merchandise and vintage photo and postcard reproductions will be on sale.

Attendees will be automatically entered in a drawing for a *free* tasting for seven at Cowhorn Winery & Gardens. Take a look at the McKee Bridge quilt, the Dutchman’s Peak model, “Baseball in Big Applegate,” and a new installation of vintage photographs at the museum trailer.

Oregon once had an estimated 600 covered bridges. Only 51 remain. Please help keep McKee Bridge standing and open to the public.

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Currently on display is an exhibit about the fascinating Collings family. Photo: Vern Arnold collection.



“Baseball in Big Applegate” was the subject of the inaugural MBHS exhibit at Ruch Library in July. Photo: Evelyn Byrne Williams collection.

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