

NONPROFIT NEWS AND UPDATES



The Lee and Helen Black family: The babe in arms, John Black, became a leading local historian in team with his wife, Marguerite, (authors of Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley, 1989), and their daughter Annice continues that tradition. Photo: Courtesy of McKee Bridge Historical Society.

# A hike into history

BY LAURA AHEARN

McKee Bridge Historical Society (MBHS) has received an Innovation Grant from A Greater Applegate (AGA) to research, and create new multimedia interpretive resources about, historical trails in the Applegate watershed. This project will implement 21 Strategies and Ideas for Action in the AGA Applegate Vision Plan. It was motivated by the numerous visions of Applegate residents to see our heritage, and in particular our historical trails, preserved and shared, ideally in some form of museum. MBHS has already developed a virtual museum on [mckeebridge.org](http://mckeebridge.org).



The Middle Fork trail crew, circa 1909. Seated from left are David Dorn (1878-1956), "Frenchie," Bill Fruit (1872-1951), and Ernest Dorn (1893-1982). Standing, from left: Ervin Lewis (1887-1952) and Floyd McKee (1891-1975). Postcard from Evelyn Byrne Williams collection.

MBHS members include diligent researchers, talented photographers, and some true experts on hiking in the Applegate. Building on this foundation, the historical trails project will draw on the expertise of other groups such as the Applegate Trails Association, the Siskiyou Upland Trails Association, and former Forest Service employees who spent decades identifying and protecting the cultural resources of the area.

The project offers something for everyone, whether outdoors enthusiast, armchair reader, or commuter to and from Medford or Grants Pass. For example, did you know that when you're driving on Highway 238, in many stretches you are following an 1850s pack trail? Imagine the train of mules bringing goods from Crescent City to the first prospectors' store in a tent on the Applegate River, somewhere near today's Hamilton Road. Ambushes and skirmishes during the Rogue Indian Wars. Runaway-buggy accidents, gunfights, stagecoach stops. We'll tell you where these things happened and who was involved.

How about a trail that you can still hike? The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail is popular. Brochures and websites tell a bit about its history, but not about the guy actually responsible for running the ditch. Meet ditch tender Antone Rose from Portugal. He fell into the ditch in early January 1880 and nearly froze to death. When the ditch was completed, the miners rejoiced that they would now be able to work practically year-round. Well, it didn't turn out that way—not when there was so much snow that slides clogged the ditch. After a lot of work, the slides were cleared, and the mine could resume operations...except there was still too much snow and frozen water. The ditch wouldn't run! The miners stood idle, waiting for sunny days when, perhaps by noon, the sun would melt a trickle of water to support a couple of hours of work, "making the dirt fly" with the "giant," the hydraulic nozzle.



Antone Rose (1849-1922), ditch tender for the Sterling Mine. Photo: Peter Britt portrait (1891) from SOU Hannon Library digital archives.

The historical trails project will tell stories, present fun facts, fact-check existing materials, and bust myths. You'll see vintage photos from the initial construction of trails like Middle Fork, rare maps, and 100-year-old reports. No matter how many times you've hiked a trail like Cook and Green, the project will present new features to look for, tales to recount, and pioneers to remember.

If you would like to help research historical trails in the Applegate and plan reconnaissance hikes later this spring, please contact MBHS at [mckeebridge1917@gmail.com](mailto:mckeebridge1917@gmail.com).

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 Note: MBHS has a "Southern Oregon Experience" clip about the hamlet of Watkins, aka Applegate Lake, now airing on SOPBS. You can stream it at [sopbs.org/programs/southern-oregon-experience](http://sopbs.org/programs/southern-oregon-experience).

# AGA working groups celebrate local history and so much more

BY SETH KAPLAN

The *Applegate Valley Vision*, with its five focus areas, 25 goals, 90 strategies, and more than 500 ideas for action, continues to bear fruit! With support from A Greater Applegate, dozens of Applegate Valley residents and organizations supporting the community have organized to form nine working groups as of this writing, with more forming every month.

Current working groups include Artists, Climate, Destination Applegate, Education, Food and Farm, Forest and Fire, History, Outdoor Recreation, and Village Hubs/Innovative Economy. (Go to [agreaterapplegate.org/working-groups](http://agreaterapplegate.org/working-groups) to learn more.)

The History Working Group is particularly pertinent to this issue of the *Applegater*. The Applegate Valley History Working Group formed to conserve the cultural heritage and recognize the local history of the Applegate Valley. Members represent local historical societies and libraries and include educators and descendants of early settlers to this area. The History Working Group has several projects already in the works.

Using an AGA Innovation Grant, working group member McKee Bridge Historical Society (MBHS, [mckeebridge.org](http://mckeebridge.org)) is identifying historical trails in the area. MBHS will be spotlighting these trails in print and on their website with interesting and significant stories, highlighting our colorful history for residents and visitors alike. (See complete story on this page.)

Using "rural placemaking funds" (a federal grant program for rural communities) given to it by AGA as starting points, the History Working Group has identified two other projects to take on in 2023. One is the publication of *Stories on the Land: An Environmental History of the Applegate and Upper Illinois Valley*, by George McKinley and Doug Frank. A project of the *Applegater* Newsmagazine, *Stories on the Land* is a reprinting of this historically significant book, originally prepared in 1995 for the Bureau of Land Management. The book focuses on human interactions on the land that have affected

the environmental history of our area.

The second project is an Applegate Valley Historical Families event. Many Applegate families can trace their local history back to the early 1900s and some even as early as the 1850s, although the number of these families with connections to the area is shrinking over time. The History Working Group wants to celebrate the remaining families through a community gathering at a time and place to be determined.

Planning is still in the early stages, and your ideas and volunteer support are welcome. Key to the event is to recognize the long-time families and give us all an opportunity to hear the stories, see the early photos, and gain a better understanding of what the Applegate was like back in the day. Expect some informative and entertaining stories, good old-timey music, food, demonstrations, and a fun and educational day for the whole family.

If you are a descendent of an old-time local family, or if you just want to help, reach out to us at [info@agreaterapplegate.org](mailto:info@agreaterapplegate.org) and we will get you connected. All are welcome to participate and attend.

Over time, the History Working Group will take on the four strategies in the Vision to conserve the cultural heritage and recognize the local history of the Applegate Valley. These include:

- Preserve the historic infrastructure in the Applegate Valley
- Develop an Applegate Valley History Museum
- Collect and curate local history through events and activities
- Develop collaboration between stakeholders

To learn more about the local history section of the Applegate Valley Vision, go to [ggle.io/5Xqc](http://ggle.io/5Xqc).

If you are interested in joining this or any of the working groups, contact Megan Fehrman ([megan@agreaterapplegate.org](mailto:megan@agreaterapplegate.org) or 541-702-2108).

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Nonprofit organizations in the Applegate Valley are welcome to submit news and event information to the *Applegater*. Email [gater@applegater.org](mailto:gater@applegater.org).



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