



THE BANDON LIGHT

A PUBLICATION OF THE BANDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

“New” 1936 Fire Letter Donated to the Museum

After these many years you would think the museum would have collected all the letters that people wrote about their experience with the 1936 Bandon fire but we recently received a new one from **Gary Topping**. His grandfather, **George P. Topping**, was a banker, fire insurance agent, lawyer, judge and politician who served in the Oregon legislature from 1898 to 1900. At the time of the fire, George Topping’s office in the Bank of Bandon building was the one just above the bank door. If you look closely at the photo you can see his hands as he is apparently standing at the window and looking out. The second photo shows the bank just after the fire. Excerpts from the October 19, 1936 letter to his nephew and niece are included below:



“Dear Nephew and Niece:

....I had quite a job on hand trying to look after what little we had left, establish some kind of an office and help the many unfortunates get their insurance money as soon as possible, and at the same time speed every activity to get the Bank open



again so people would have money.

I think nearly everyone has got their insurance, and the Bank is again open. Very much to our astonishment everybody shows very great confidence not only in the Bank but in the rebuilding of Bandon. More than \$116,000 was deposited the first day. Of course, some of this was insurance money, but on top of that was \$130,000 cash clearings above what we had paid out during the day.

Well, we got out alive, but I want to tell you we had to hurry. The fire would jump 10 to 12 blocks at one time. When the fire first started in the Southeast edge of town, more than 1/2 mile away from us, I realized that something terrible was going to happen so we talked it over and began to pack things in containers. Your Aunt Amy and Katherine and Paul’s wife were surely grand. They worked like Trojans and never lost their heads for a minute, although they had to work fast and the power lines burned down and left us in the dark. You can imagine how it was to try and get out the things we needed most in the dark two-story building with furniture and stuff thrown around for us to tumble over and each fellow doing the same thing. We were about

New Letter (Continued on page 6)

THE BANDON LIGHT

A publication of the
Bandon Historical Society

Bandon Historical Society Museum

Executive Director..... Gayle Propeck Nix
Native American Consultant... Reg Pullen

Board of Directors

President..... Jim Proehl
Vice President..... Mary Schamehorn
Secretary..... Faye Albertson
Treasurer..... Nancy Murphy

Board Members

Doreen Colbert Donna Mason
Kathy Dornath Reg Pullen
Brian Vick

Nominating Committee

Doreen Colbert Jim Proehl
Donna Mason

The Board meets the 4th Tuesday of each month, 4 pm at the Museum. All members and guests are welcome to attend.

Newsletter Layout

Bob Coraor



Bandon Historical Society
PO Box 737
Bandon, OR 97411
Phone/Fax 541-347-2164
E-mail:

bandonhistoricalmuseum@yahoo.com

Web: www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org

If you are interested in Bandon's history and would like to help preserve our past for future generations, call us—we need you. The Museum is OPEN Monday through Saturday 10-4 and 7 days a week June through September 11th. Volunteers are waiting to help you and answer your questions about Bandon's history. Enjoy Bandon's rich, wonderful history! Located on the corner of:

270 Fillmore Ave. & Hwy 101

© 2017 Bandon Historical Society



Gayle Nix

From the Desk of the Director

It's been very busy here at the museum this summer. Lots of visitors and activities.

The past few weeks, we have been getting ready for Cranberry weekend and our 81st fire anniversary program.

We had the pleasure of having the Class of 1967 here for the opening night of their 50th reunion. I was able to represent the museum that night; it was great to see lots of familiar faces of people I went to Bandon High School with. Our volunteers made up a few boards of old classmate pictures, grade school and high school. They also made a picture board of all the old businesses in town when the Class of 1967 were in school.

We had the 1966 and 1967 *Western World* bound editions on hand for them to browse through.

We had over 71 classmates, spouses and visitors in attendance that night.

The Bandon Historical Museum is the perfect place to have school reunions. We have tons of old pictures and stories that will complement your event and we are happy to share.

I would like to thank the Class of 1967 for thinking of the museum to host their Friday night social. I think everyone had a great time. I know I did!!

Gayle Nix
Executive Director



(see more reunion photos on p. 6)

Donations and New Members

New Members: Linda Baker, Ed and Kris Matheson, Erin Sutherland, Jim and Jane McLaughlin, Margaret Wichman.

New Life Members: Doug and Candy Stearns, Liz Scotti

Memorial Donations in Memory of: Lon Rycraft, Betty Hiley, Dolores Williams, Phyllis Moody, Ronny Haga, Forrest H. Norton, Frank Tucker, Debbie Llewellyn, Jackman Hutchens

Memorial Donors: Careen Pierce, Pete and Joan Goodbrod, Jim and Alyce Cawdrey, Carolyn Russell, Jeannette Todd, James and Barbara Gant, Bob and Susan Winnop, Kathy Dornath, Judy Knox, Harvey Hiley, Laurence and Jodi McDuff, Barbara Dodrill, Faye Albertson, Del and Ann Remy, Margaret Wichman, Nina McNeil

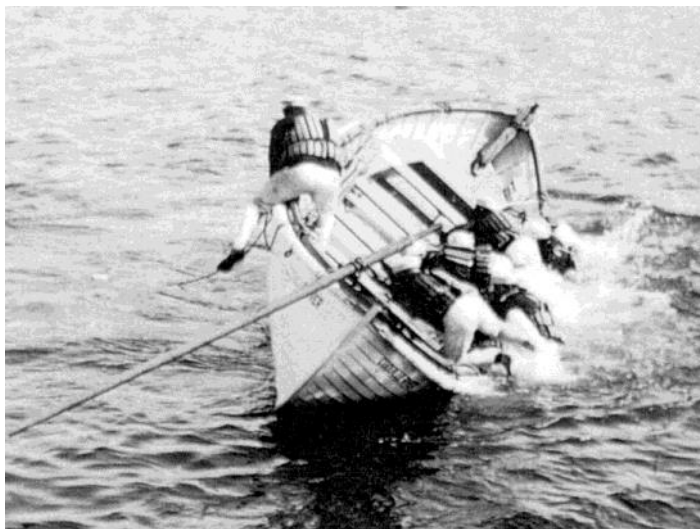
Coast Guard Memories

By Art Dobney (undated manuscript)

When the station was built, it was designed to fit over the old boathouse. When the [1936] fire burned, our station was on the hill, and the boathouse with three boats was right there. It burned, only the tracks and ramp were left. So they built the new station right over that place and incorporated the tracks and ramps.

We had three boats, a 36 footer life boat, our big boat. And we had an open motor surf boat, which was a 30 ft. boat; also we had a pulling boat which held 8 people.

Talk about drills! We'd take that boat and execute drills every day. There was not a day that went by that we didn't have some sort of a drill. Boat drills, sail drills, all kinds of drills. But there was one thing I had to do most, and that was taking a pulling boat, with 8 men and a coxswain, go on out, pulling oars and everything, and do capsize drill, 8 to 10 times: capsize, then bring it back up, lash it then bring it back home. We were young then! No, we weren't lashed in! It was an open boat, rowboat, eight people and me, the coxswain in the back, with the sweep or rudder. The sweep was 20 feet long. You



have seen the boats in Venice in the canals and the man in the back of the boat, that's me. Eight guys rowing, and I gave them the stroke, and they would pull away together, weigh the oars. That was one of our drills. The reason for this drill is, in case of emergency and the boat does capsize, you will know what to do, get out from under it, pull yourself up with the boat. The ways you do it is: eight men and one at the back, you ship all the oars, secure them, everything that is loose is lashed down. The boats righting lines are coiled by each man, fourteen-fifteen ft. line with a float on it, coiled right beside him on the floor. On the side of the boat are the lifelines; they are the lines that are looped out there. When they come back to the boat, you must get ahold of them.



A breeches buoy in action.

You capsize the boat, either starboard or portside, either one. You say: "Man the starboard side (or port side) and everyone steps to the starboard side, (it is the opposite righting line) and lean back and overturn the boat. And as that gunnel comes over, put yourself away from the boat; it comes over, belly up, coxswain sitting on top and the rest of the men in the water. Coxswain gives the order to right the boat and they walk right up the side of the boat and pull it up right over. I say "How do you feel, fellas, let's do it again," ... Another drill was the life boat drill, and then we had the Lyle drill, where we shoot the projectile over the top. ... We would shoot the projectile across the river, then we would bring the man in. That is the breeches buoy drill, the Lyle drill. You shoot the 12 pound projectile, [it] had a flat laid line about as wide as my finger; flat woven flax linen line, 500 yards of it in a box called a "faking box." The box had fingers in it, that that line is fixed in that box so it will run out. The box has a top on it. So—you put the faking box down here, make the projectile fast, it is stainless steel and looks like a rolling pin with a little neck on it with a ring. You make a line fast to that, put the powder in the gun; on the back of the gun is the cap. The gun is then capped. The I would say "Stand clear," "fire!" and that line would shoot straight across the river! That line goes out, a man goes up the mast. You must get to the yardarms or you have to do it all again, otherwise you couldn't get the lines. So, the man gets up on the crows nest and makes the hawser fast, pull it fast around the mast. We send the breeches buoy up to it; you try to do it in five minutes, four minutes; all stations did it.

The only time I used the breeches buoy was on the wreck of the Alvarado, off Horsfall beach when she wrecked up there. We used it to get the people off. That was in 1943, I think; the war with Japan was still going on. ...

This port was quite busy. I would say that we would have 20 calls a months, as high as forty calls in the summer months; calls for assistance of some type. Lots of sport fishing calls. I took quite a few commercial fishermen calls—can't tell you how many. We had a lot of urgent calls, like one time in October. We had our lookout on the beach (right where the restroom is now), we had a steel tower there. No road out there; there was a trestle walkway out to there. One night, the lookout called in the middle of the night. There were flares out to sea. It was a nasty night, an awful night. I lost the windshield off the boat getting out. We got out there just getting daylight, 40 miles out, soaking wet. It was a Chinese New Year celebration! We had other calls like that. We got back to the bar late that next afternoon, couldn't get in, went to Coos Bay, or Port Orford, couldn't get in anywhere, low on fuel. So I tied up at the "whistler" out there and rode her out. We were out there four days, and that was all for nothing. But—we had those kinds of calls....

(to read the full story of Art's memories with more pictures go to <http://www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org/dobney.html>)

Museum Helps Library Celebrate 100+ Years



Kathy Dornath ready to answer questions

The Bandon Public Library celebrated being a part of the community for more than 100 years last month with nine educational and fun exhibits and booths manned by various community organizations.

The Bandon Historical Society Museum participated with a display of photographs of the library over the years, as well as historical photos of the Bandon area.

Volunteers **Kathy Dornath**

and **Jim Proehl** were present at the Museum booth to answer questions. Children were able to handle a number of artifacts from the past and earn a History Detective badge at the booth.

Students from Bandon High's Community Arts class, taught by **Jen Ells**, were at the Museum assembling the panel display for the Library's historical photos. Thank you for your help in putting the display together and to the Coos Cultural Coalition for a grant to help with materials!



Bandon High Community Arts class students putting the display together

Volunteers Power Our Museum—Thank YOU!!

The Museum relies greatly on the many volunteers who help us. "The picnic is one small way we say thank you. The best part is sharing each other's company, but the food is pretty good," said board president Jim Proehl.

Kathy Dornath organized the event and about 40 people attended. **Donna Mason** did a lot of the set-up work. A highlight was a drawing for batches of Kathy's home-baked cookies.



Bandon Burns! By The Gaels

The local performing group, known as The Gaels, recreated the 1936 Bandon fire through readings from the Bandon Historical Society's book *Bandon Burns!*, a collection of first person accounts of the fire.

The first show, on Friday September 22, was a sold out performance and thoroughly enjoyed by the audience. Additional performances followed through the next week. **Gayle Nix** and **Kathy Dornath** represented the Museum by answering questions and manning the Museum table stocked with photos and information.

Photos depicting the period just before, during and after the fire were provided by the Museum as a slide show as well as display exhibits around the room.

Performers were **Corrie Grant** as 3rd grade teacher Lillian Farely; **Amy Moss Strong** as Marty, wife of Dentist Floyd Dodds; **Virginia Rice** as nine year old Idell Panter; **Heather Bouher** as Sparky's mother Alice Adams; **Richard Robinett** as Bob Howard, who was ten; and Donald Zealand as Lt. Commander J. H. Jensen, US Coast Guard. The performance was directed by **Michael Dempsey** with **Neal Davis** as Script Editor and **Michele Winchell** as Stage Manager.



15 or 20 minutes gathering up all we dared take out. In that time the fire had reached within 7 blocks of us. We then loaded the stuff into the car and trailer and just as we started out of the yard the roof of our neighbor's house across the street burst into flames; and everybody else was going through the same experience. In some instances the people loaded their cars and then the stuff got afire and they had to run for their lives. Some even got clear out of the burning area down on the Beach and the cars and stuff they



Remains of cars that were driven to the beach to escaped the fire.

had saved burned there.

I drove toward the fire due to past experience, finally getting through, and took the family up what is known as Riverside Drive toward what we call the Mud Flats where there is a good deal of water and not much timber, then I intended to drive back to the office to see if I could save something out of it, but the smoke got so thick I had to move them further East and was again forced to move a second time before they were safe, and by that time it was too late to go back and get anything.

...All we saved was bedding enough for all of us, some linen and clothing enough to keep us covered so we wont have to join the Nudist Colony for awhile yet. We lost the big residence and the two small ones...

I lost everything in the office and everything at the Beach, there was no chance to save anything. Our loss is roughly around \$25,000, but the people here expect to rebuild Bandon better and bigger than ever, but it is going to be a long hard pull....

Class of '67 Reunion Photos



Gift Shop and Donations Now Available Online



Now available on our website (www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org) is a button for making online donations through a secure Paypal portal with your credit card. You do not need a Paypal account. Similarly, if you go to the Gift Shop webpage you can make purchases of selected items. We hope this will be helpful to our members and supporters! Take a look!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, October 24, 2017 — Museum Board Meeting at 4:00PM at the Museum. All members and guests are welcome.

Saturday, November 11, 2017 — Veterans Day Program at the Museum. Stop by and see our special displays to honor our vets. Admission is free.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017 — Museum Board Meeting, 4PM at the Museum. All members and guests are welcome to attend.

Saturday, December 2, 2017 — **Meet the Author** H.S. Contino will discuss her new book *“Shipwrecks of Curry County”*. 1:00—4:00PM at the Museum, Free Admission; presentation begin at 2:00PM.

Tuesday, January 23, 2018—Museum Board Meeting, 4PM at the Museum.

Tuesday, February 26, 2018—Annual Meeting: Meeting details to follow.



81st Anniversary of the 1936 Fire Event

The Museum's annual event drew over 100 to hear Board Vice President **Mary Schamehorn** read George Topping's letter about the fire and hear from fire survivors who were in attendance.



Hamblock (Continued from page 5)

Time Fiddlers draw). The audience was split about fifty-fifty between people from town and park campers. Several Bullard descendants attended. Most of the group moved up to the cemetery as the sun went down.

When the Class of '67 was gathered during Cranberry Festival weekend for a reunion at the museum, **John Evans**, a Class of '67 member and Hamblock/Bullard descendant, gave director **Gayle Nix** a treasure: the land grant deed, issued in 1864, to the Hamblock property.

We were aware of the document, had a photocopy in our files, but never dreamed we would see the original.

Did Abraham Lincoln personally touch the deed or did a secretary sign in his place? It's a history mystery.

In mid-September, desk volunteer **Careen Pierce** asked if I'd talk to some visitors: four men named Hamblock, who wondered if I could tell them anything about their family. Could I ever. It was an electric moment when they saw the deed **John Evans** had just given us.

If they had come before Marjorie's visit, I might not even have known who they were asking about. What a stroke of luck they came at the end, rather than the beginning, of summer.

I wasn't there, but I understand that, through some intervention by **Careen Pierce**, the Hamblock men got together with **Marjorie Stephenson** and talked for several hours.



Dustin, Robert and Bric Hamblock visited the Museum

JOIN THE BANDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

YES! Please accept my membership in the Bandon Historical Society

Already a member? Please consider a donation to help support your museum.

(please check one)

I'm a Member _____ and would like to make a tax deductible donation in the amount of \$ _____

\$15 Individual _____ NAME: _____

\$25 Family _____ ADDRESS: _____

\$35 Business _____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

\$250 Life _____ PHONE: _____ E-MAIL: _____

Please make check payable to BHS and mail to:

Bandon Historical Society, PO Box 737, Bandon OR 97411

For more information on benefits of memberships go to

<http://www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org/membership.html>

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E B A N D O N H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Bandon, OR 97411
Permit NO. 61



Bandon Historical Society
PO Box 737
Bandon, OR 97411