



THE BANDON LIGHT

Sponsored by Sweet Insurance Agency

A PUBLICATION OF THE BANDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EXTRA! EXTRA! BANDON BURNS!

By Jim Curran

This is an excerpt from an article in the September 18, 2019 *The Sentinel*, Coquille.

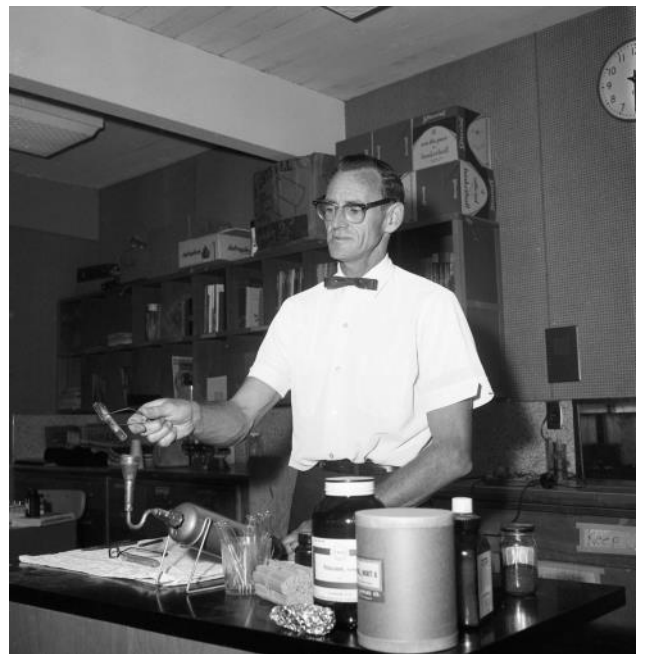
On Saturday, September 26, 1936, Bandon burned, right down to the shore. And there were other fires all over Southern Oregon.

I was 11-years-old, and had a paper route (*The Coos Bay Times*) and early Sunday morning the circulation called and wanted me to come and sell “EXTRAS” on my route. I got 20 papers, and had sold out by the time I got to Tenth and Central. Downtown was covered in smoke, and you could look at the rising sun, a dull red ball in the haze. I’d had breakfast when Uncle George called me to accompany him to Sitkum for tents. He and Oscar had trucks, two open, large boxes on Dodge chassis.

At Sitkum, CCC boys loaded the tents on the trucks and we left for Bandon, never out of a smokey haze. Just east of Bear Creek, I walked down the road so the trucks could follow me. We delivered the tents and left for Marshfield, I to get ready for school and Uncle George to get groceries to take to people on Monday. My sister and Mom were home. Dad wasn’t.

He’d gone hunting with Mr. Yeager on the North Bank Road, where they watched the fire encroaching on Bandon. Dad decided to go help, crossed on the ferry, and drove into downtown Bandon, already on fire. He drove to the beach, let two women use the car for shelter, and crossed to the North Shore. He walked to Merchants Valley where he spent the night fighting fires along with George and Dan McDonald. Sunday, he got rides to North Bend, and walked home about sundown. Mr. Yeager had spent the night in a pond, ducking under often to keep his hair from catching fire. He was accompanied by a menagerie of all sorts, from bears to skunks.

Today, the most apparent relic of that weekend is the foundation of “Silver Spray Gardens,” the final testimony to a time when Bandon disappeared in fire and Marshfield in a cloak of acrid smoke.



Jim Curran taught science at Harbor Lights Middle School for many years. He currently lives in Coquille.

A publication of the

**Bandon Historical Society
Museum**

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

Board of Directors

President.....	Doreen Colbert
Vice President.....	Elaine Stohler
Secretary.....	Faye Albertson
Treasurer.....	Jim Proehl

Board Members

Kathy Dornath	Donna Mason
Rick Hinojosa	Mary Schamehorn
Mary Stewart	Nancy Murphy
Reg Pullen	Brian Vick

Nominating Committee

Doreen Colbert	Mary Schamehorn
Donna Mason	Carolyn Russell

The Board meets the 4th Tuesday of each month, 4:00 pm at the Museum. All members and guests are welcome to attend.

Newsletter Layout

Jim Proehl

[illegible]

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

bandonhistoricalmuseum@yahoo.com

Web: www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org

a 501(c)(3) organization

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.

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

© 2020 Bandon Historical Society



Gayle Nix

From the Desk of the Director

What? Another Newsletter?? So Soon???

Since we are not able to have in-person programs this year, we decided to do a special 84th *Fire Anniversary* newsletter edition. It's a way to continue the tradition of sharing stories on the anniversary of the 1936 fire.

My mother's family was here at the time of the fire. My Uncle Bob Howard's story is in this edition and also in the *Bandon Burns* booklet. I remember my mom talking about the night of the fire—being on the beach and having to go in the ocean to escape the cinders. Like everyone else, I wish I would have paid more attention, especially since my mom died when I was seventeen.

We would love to hear any stories you have of your family during the Bandon fire. I'm sure there are lots of stories that we have not heard yet.

We hope you enjoy this special edition of *The Bandon Light*.

Gayle Nix
Executive Director



My mother, Faye, and her brother, Jim, on the Howard farm.

Memorial Donations

A Donation Has Been Made in Memory of:

Jerry Quillen
Maxine and Sheridan Quillen
Hank and Rose Strain
Jill Chappell Sumerlin

Memorial Donations Have Been Made by:

Darrin Quillen
Andrea and Richard Hofmann

Mayor Schamehorn Shares the Fire Stories of Her Two Families

By Mary Schamehorn

I can still vividly picture the story my late father, Bill Dufort, told about how he learned that a fire had destroyed the community when he was a young man of 26 years old in 1936. He and his father, H.H. Dufort, lived on their Cranberry Bog off Rosa Road in the Southeast part of town. The day of the fire, things got so bad that my grandfather ended up sheltering in the cranberry watering hole with frightened animals who had joined him.

For some reason, my father and my grandfather got separated and my dad ended up lying on the floor of an asbestos packing shed, which did not burn, breathing through the floor to stay alive as fire swirled all around.

The next morning, my grandfather sent my dad to town to get some supplies as they had no idea how widespread the fire had been. When dad arrived at the top of Elmira Avenue and looked toward town, he realized that most of the business district was gone.

It was a couple of months later that my dad met my mother, Martha Virginia Felsheim, who had

come home from Eugene, where she was just starting her sophomore year at the University of Oregon, to help my grandparents, L.D. and Grace Felsheim, with putting out the *Western World*.

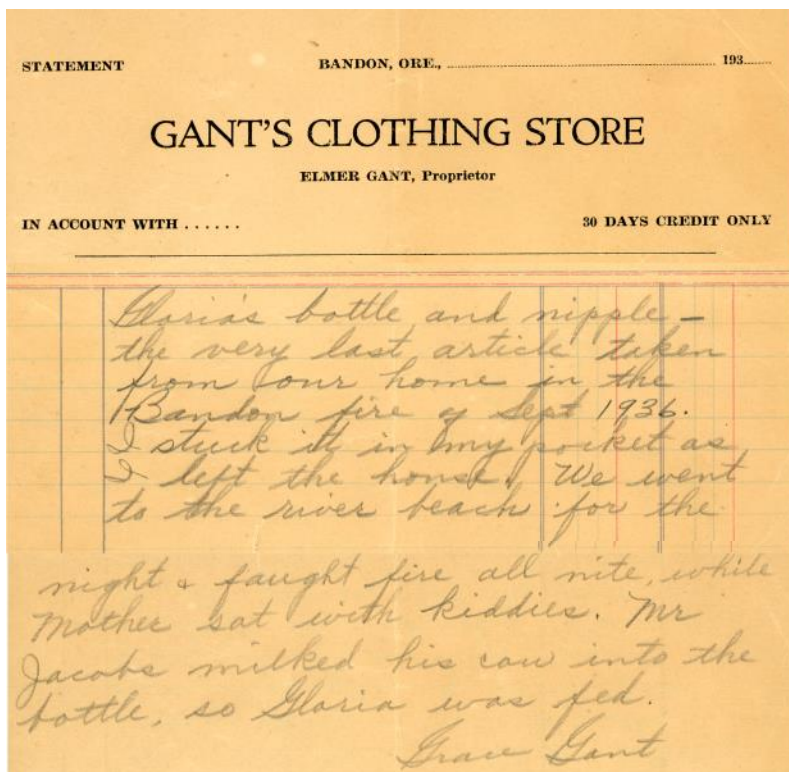
(Continued on page 7)



The Western World and the US National Bank building both survived the 1936 fire.

1936 Fire Artifact Includes a Message in a Bottle

Gloria (Gant) Haga recently loaned the museum a baby bottle. Inside is a note written by her mother, Grace (Thorn) Gant, telling the story of why the Stork brand nursing bottle survived the 1936 Bandon fire.



Memories of the Bandon Fire: A Survivor's Account

By Bob Howard

Bob Howard was a 10-year-old boy the day Bandon burned. His memoir follows:

I lived about four miles out of town, on Rosa Road, on a small 40-acre farm with my mother, father and two brothers, Buster and Jim. Also living at home at the time were my two sisters, Faye and Velma. Three of my sisters, Margie (Snead), Mildred (Knox) and Mary (Sandstrom), were married and living with their families in the Bandon area.

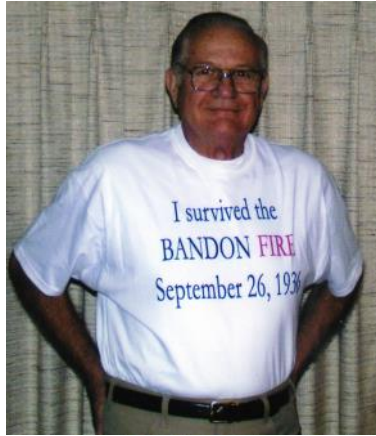
My father always planted a big garden and many flowers around the house. We raised our own beef, pork, chickens, turkeys and geese. Since we didn't have electricity, we did not own a freezer. Before the fire, my mother had canned hundreds of quarts of vegetables, fruits and meat. We had just built a new storeroom and all the shelves were full, from the floor to the ceiling.

We had a wood cooking stove and a wood heater to keep us warm in the winter. The boys in the family had the responsibility of supplying all the wood for the winter months. That summer, Jim and I had split and stacked over eight cords of wood.

My father was working for the county at the time, repairing and building roads. He would be gone for several days at a time while working on a job. To help with the family income, my mother played the piano for dances every Saturday night. She played at the Dew Valley Clubhouse for many years. Even though we worked hard, we also had lots of fun. Our entire family was musical and we all played musical instruments. Dad played the fiddle, Mom played the piano and we had guitars, mandolins, drums, harmonicas and accordions.

I loved to hunt and fish with my father and brothers. My life was happy and secure—until that morning of September 26, 1936.

On September 24, my father was called to help fight the big forest fire at the Lampa Creek and Bear Creek divide. My other brother, Buster, was working with the Civilian Conservation Corps in the



Grants Pass area.

On the morning of September 26, my mother and sister Velma had gone into Bandon. My brother, Jim, who was about 15-years-old, and I were home alone. It was a very hot day and Jim and I had been cutting and stacking wood into the woodshed. About 2:00 PM we noticed that there was a lot of smoke in the air. Our neighbors, Ed and Louie Barnekoff, drove to where they could get a better look at the fire. When they drove up to our place in their 1930 Dodge, they told us that there was a big fire and it was coming our way. They drove us up to the road and we could see the fire was moving very fast and heading in our direction. At that time, they said we should get back to our house to see if we could save anything. It was about 4:00 PM.

We all tried to set backfires, but it was too late. The fire was crowning the tops of the trees close to the house. We then got busy and carried as many jars of fruit and vegetables that we could out to the garden, which was in an open area. We were hoping that they would be spared. We went back into the



The Howard farm on Rosa Road before the 1936 fire.

house and the first thing we thought of was to try and save mother's piano. We knew that the house was going to burn, so we thought that if we moved it outside and away from the house that it might not burn. By the time we got the piano outside, the house was already engulfed in flames. We did manage to grab our father's single-shot .22-caliber rifle. He brought the gun with him when he came west from Iowa as a young man.

It was about 5:30 PM when we left, and the house was completely burned to the ground. We didn't want to leave our three little dogs. We found Little Joe and Rascal, but we couldn't find the other

(Continued on Page 5)

“The first thing we saw was the dog that was left behind.”

(Continued from Page 4)

dog, Cricket. We had to leave her behind, along with all the chickens, turkeys and the rest of the farm animals.

We then went out to Rosa Road and turned north toward Bandon.

We got about a fourth of a mile down the road, where Tom Gant's house is now. The fire was already across the road at that point, so we had to turn around and try to make it to Two Mile Road and then head out to US Highway 101. At Highway 101, we turned north and headed for Bandon again. All the time we

could see the smoke and fire east of us. By the time we got to where the airport is now, the fire was coming close to the highway in places. The smoke was so thick that we had a hard time seeing the road. Ed and Louie said that we had to keep going; when we looked back, the fire was already across the highway. There was only one way to go, that was straight ahead and hope that we could make it. We finally arrived in Bandon about 7:00 PM. Ed and Louie took us over to our sister Margie's house which was located on Ninth and Grand Street. Ed and Louie left us then and went on to Ed's parents' home on the South Jetty. I credit them with saving our lives. If it hadn't been for the Barnekoffs, it is doubtful that Jim and I could have escaped the fire.

We left the house and then headed to the South Jetty next to the Coquille River. There were hundreds of people already there. Some of them tried to drive their cars down to the jetty and got stuck in the sand. Their cars had to be abandoned. There were cars burning and exploding all along the road. The fire was so hot that the Coast Guard boat had to evacuate the people to a large boat named the *Rose* that was docked at Moore Mill. My mother, grandmother, the two dogs and I took our first boat ride over to *The Rose*. While standing on the deck, we could see the fire sweep through Bandon, leveling everything in its path. We stayed on the *Rose* for

two days.

The Red Cross set up a tent city where the Shell station is now. We moved into one of the tents and stayed for a couple of days before my dad was able to find us. Slowly, the family was all accounted for.

They all had their own stories to tell of the horrible experience.

The next day, my father, Jim and I walked out to the ranch not knowing what we would find. The first thing we saw was the dog that was left behind. She was still alive but her feet

were burned and her hair was scorched. She was very glad to see us. The house was burned to the ground and we lost everything, including all the canned food that we had tried to save. The only thing that was saved was

(Continued on Page 6)



Bob Howard and his brother Buster with Rascal and Little Joe after the fire.



Bob Howard with his mother, Mabel, on the porch of their new house after the fire.

Rebuilding: The NEW Bandon Theatre Helped the Town Rebound

By Mary Schamehorn

We have grown so accustomed to other forms of entertainment that we forget what it was like for a small community, when suddenly there was no theatre.

My grandfather, L. D. Felsheim, wrote, in the Sept. 16, 1937, *Western World*: "All Bandon and community joins in the congratulatory ceremony that marks the dedication of Dick Fisk's New Bandon Theatre, which is to take place next Tuesday and Wednesday, when the 20-30 Club will officiate in the presentation of a musical review, humorously entitled, 'Debris of 1937.'"

"For seven months after the fire of last September Bandon was without a theatre. Hurried construction was necessary to care for the more urgent commercial buildings and to provide shelter for the populace. A place of amusement was secondary under the circumstances and it seemed inevitable that the erection of a suitable place of amusement must wait until permanent building was undertaken.

"Along came Dick Fisk, who already had theatres in Waldport, Florence and Gold Beach. Realizing the uncertainty of plans for a new city he likewise saw the necessity of a theater as a place for relaxation and enjoyment midst the somber struggle of reconstruction that faced a hapless people."

The theatre had seating for 500 people ... and continued to be a gathering place for a lot of us until it was torn down, I think sometime in the 1980s. I lived in the apartment upstairs from 1969 until 1976 ... in a two-bedroom apartment, for which my rent was \$75 a month. (And Jack and Shirley Ward never raised my rent during the six years I lived there.) Oh to have rents like that again ...



The New Bandon Theatre sat on a now-vacant lot between the Broken Anchor restaurant and the Bandon Coffee Café.

Memories of the Bandon Fire: A Survivor's Account by Bob Howard

(Continued from Page 5)

the old piano that we pushed outside. Even though it was severely scorched on one side, it stayed in the family for the next 50 years. We recently heard that it was donated to Heritage Place Assisted Living Facility (currently *Pacific View Senior Living Community*), where Margie lived the last two years of her life.

The Red Cross gave our family food and clothing to help get us on our feet. We were lucky, because in less than a week, Ed and Louie Barnekoff, who helped us on the day of the fire, said that our family could move into their brother's furnished house that hadn't burned. We stayed there for about two years until we could rebuild.

It was a struggle for everyone in and around Bandon, but they all rallied around to help each other. Bandon was slowly rebuilt and the people did their best to put their lives back in order.

My father died on July 4, 1938. Mom sold the ranch and we moved into town in 1939. I started to work at the Bandon Cheese Factory in 1941, and was drafted into the US Army in 1944 where I served 2 ½ years in the South Pacific. I returned home after I was discharged in 1946. Upon returning home, I went to see my sister, Margie, and her husband, Lawrence. They were living up Bear Creek at the time. I asked if they knew what happened to Dad's rifle. Lawrence said that he still had the gun but that the ejection bolt was broken. He gave me the gun and later I sent away for a new ejection bolt. The gun works well to this day. It has been passed down through five generations of Howards.

This article first appeared in the Bandon *Western World* September 25, 2008.

Robert Howard died in March of 2016.

Museum Board Member Faye Albertson Shares Her Fire Story

By Faye Albertson

Faye Albertson's account is a good reminder that for people living outside of town, the 1936 fire was more than a one-day event.

The humidity was very low, and an east wind, which is not common, made conditions perfect for fire.

I lived where I live today (east of Bear Creek on Highway 42) with my parents, Conrad and Mildred Borgard, along with my older brother, Melvin, who was six, and my younger brother, Dale, who was only two and a half months old. I was almost five.

The fire was on the hills behind our property, but the smoke was so thick and the roar so loud, that we couldn't tell exactly where it was, and couldn't even tell if it might also be across the river on the North Bank side.

My folks were very nervous, and it was hard to know what to do, there was no place to go, and besides my dad had cows to milk and an exposed hay stack to worry about. A neighbor watched the hay stack and my dad tried to build fire trails with a shovel and put out sparks. He said that the humidity was so low that if he saw a spark on a tree, and was to hit it with the shovel, the spark would just expand to a larger fire from the strike.

My mother and Melvin wet "gunny" sacks and climbed to the roof to try to keep the cedar shingles free from sparks. We had no electricity for a pump, and our gravity water system was too weak to allow a hose on the roof, even if we had a hose! My job was to watch Dale so that he wouldn't roll off the day bed.

I remember one day, my folks loaded up some things and decided to go to the river. Melvin and I were told that we could take one toy. Didn't stay long and went back to the house. All our bedrooms were upstairs and my folks stayed up to be alert, while watching the stumps glow so red at night from their bedroom overlooking the hill behind the Nevin's ranch.

The hills behind our ranch had been logged not long before the fire, so there were lots of stumps, and some of the logs that were too big to get out had been left.

My dad did drive to Lampa Creek, only a mile and a half away, to check on his sister and husband, Mac and Gertrude Monson. They were OK, but it was hard to tell where the fire was, because of the smoke.

There was no way to know what was going on in other parts of the county, because no telephone or electricity. Not sure if we had a radio at that time. I know we had a nice battery-operated radio from Sears Roebuck during World War II, because we were able to listen to the news every evening. Not sure when my folks found out that Bandon had burned.

Mayor Schamehorn Shares the Fire Stories of Her Two Families

(Continued from Page 3)

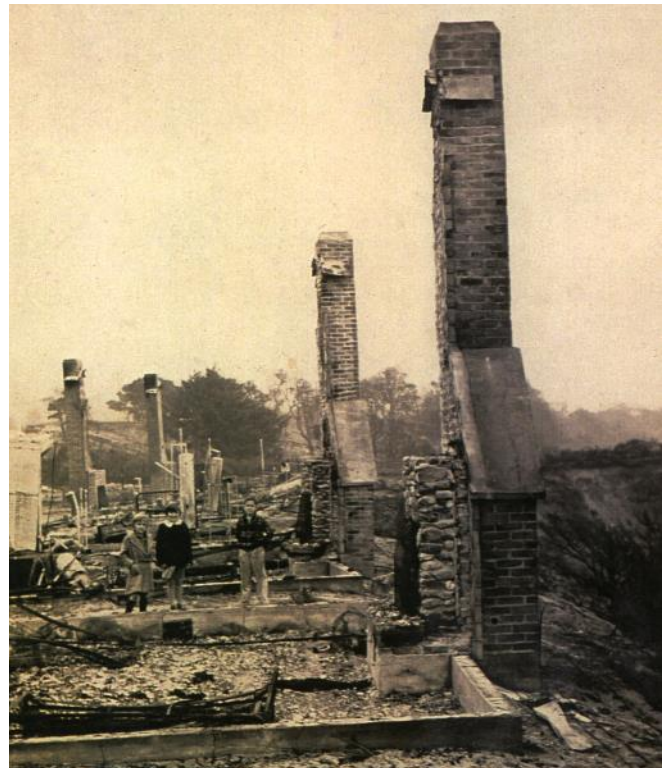
Both sides of my family lost their homes.

My grandfather Felsheim often talked about missing the biggest story of his long newspaper career as he and my grandmother, and their son, Louis, were spending the weekend visiting friends in Florence. After learning that the town had burned, it took several days to get home because of the number of fires that were burning in this end of the state.

They found their home in ruins, and because they weren't here, they were not able to save anything.

The *Western World*, which was in the First National Bank building, did survive even though all the newsprint that was stored for future use crumbled into a pile of ash when touched. But it wasn't long before the presses were humming again.

My grandfather made a trip by train back to Washington, D.C. to plead Bandon's case for financial relief. But in the end, it was the pioneer spirit of the town's leaders, like my grandfather and Mayor Ed Capps, who helped Bandon rebuild.



Mary Jo Smiley, Anne Sweet and Don Sweet, at the ruins of the Sweet home. Anne married Louis Felsheim.

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)

\$15 Individual _____ NAME: _____
\$25 Family _____ ADDRESS: _____
\$35 Business _____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
\$250 Life _____ PHONE: _____ E-MAIL: _____
I'm a Member _____ and would like to make a tax deductible donation in the amount of \$ _____

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

Return Service Requested