

From the pages of the  
**Courier**

# Donation Land Act brought settlers to valley

By Patti Richter  
of the Daily Courier

Oregon was the promised land for adventurous souls of the 1850s. Settlers usually came west for two reasons: to prospect for gold or to find a piece of land to call their own. President Millard Fillmore signed the Donation Land Act in 1850 that permitted settlers on unsurveyed lands. Each settler could have 320 acres of land and married couples could claim 640 acres. If settlers worked the land for four consecutive years, they would own it.



PATTI RICHTER/Daily Courier

The Kerbyville Museum houses much of the history of the community from the settlers who made their way west to the miners who came looking for gold. The house pictured in the background was built in 1879 by William Naucke, a Prussian candy maker who decided to open a general store in Kerby to supply miners.



PATTI RICHTER/Daily Courier

Dennis Strayer, Kerbyville Museum president, shows off some of the items people used during the late 1800s and early 1900s from shaving blades to an apple corer and peeler at the museum's general store display. The display is modeled after the store William Naucke opened in 1879, Strayer said.

In 1879, William Naucke moved to the community and built his family a house, Strayer said. The house still stands, next to the Kerbyville Museum. He was a Prussian candy maker who had immigrated to

the San Francisco area. He later decided to take a chance on the Oregon Territory.

Soon after arriving, Strayer said Naucke realized he could make more money selling mining supplies than candy. Originally,

he set up his store across the street, not realizing it was in a flood plain. After his first summer, he lost the shop when it was destroyed by floodwaters.

The next spring, he rebuilt

the store on the other side of the street just a few hundred feet from his front door.

Life was difficult in the mining community. There were rural schools and some families making their lives as farmers, but it was during winter that Kerbyville came alive. Miners left their claims and spent the coldest months of the year in town.

"They would run up their tabs, enjoying the saloons and women. There were a couple of saloons in the area and probably a brothel or two," Strayer said. "People had different celebrations. They looked for a reason to get together."

Kerbyville shortened its name sometime between 1880 and 1890 as more people moved to the area. Strayer believes the population reached more than 1,500 at the height of its popularity. But as Grants Pass, the community to the northeast began to grow, Kerby began to lose more people as miners moved away and others moved on. Kerby became a more rural community, just like it is today.

"Miners stayed behind and became farmers, creating the community that it has become today," he added.

**MAY 29, 1885**  
"In regard to business prospects, C.P. Huntington, of the Central Pacific says, 'I feel sure the business situation is generally improving. I have been talking lately with prominent business men from the West and they tell me confidence is steadily but surely returning. The people are now quiet, but the movement of prices is toward improvement.'"

**MAY 29, 1885**  
"As proof that there will be no disappointment, we take pleasure in saying that the fine costumes for the grand historical drama, has been received. This drama, alone, will be well worth twice the price of admission." (An early theater preview?)

**FEB. 19, 1886**  
"Senator Dolph has introduced a bill in the Senate to pay Kay Hatton of Lake county, Oregon, \$4,200 for property destroyed in the Modoc war of 1872."

**JUNE 4, 1886**  
"This week we take pleasure in placing the Rogue River Courier before our readers, with the confidence to believe that its enlarged space and better improved appearance will merit a continuance of the very liberal patronage which has greeted it since its inception."

...Our readers will notice that we have dispensed with the "patent outside" and otherwise greatly improved its typographical appearance. As we have laid out a large sum for presses, printing material, etc., we feel it a privilege to ask those in arrears to the Courier to assist us at their earliest convenience."

(The above item was published when paper's name changed from Grant's Pass Courier to Rogue River Courier)

# Getting to know the woman for whom county was named

By Patti Richter  
of the Daily Courier

Many people know that Josephine County was named after the first white woman who came to the area, but that's about all they know.

Virginia Josephine Rollins was 17 years old when she arrived in Oregon in 1850. Her parents were natives of Kentucky but had moved to Missouri in 1834, according to a letter she wrote in 1909 when she was in her 70s. The letter was reprinted in the 1988 book, "A History of Josephine County Oregon" by the Josephine County Historical Society.

She made the journey west with her father, Lloyd Rollins, headed for Sacramento and mining country as part of a company. But due to weakened ox teams, they spent the winter in Oregon City. Her mother had died of cholera earlier that year.

The following spring they started for California. They changed their minds and headed east toward the Illinois Valley after Rogue River Indians told them about the rich mines located there.

"At this time, the United States had just formed a treaty with Chief Joseph of the Rogue River Indians, and it was considered perfectly safe to travel among them," she wrote.

After a week of making their own roads, the Rollinses



"I was honored by having the county named for me, but by whom I know not."

**Virginia Josephine Rollins**  
in a letter written in 1909

left their team and with a smaller group, hiked three miles to the mines.

"We found good surface mining there on what was supposed to be Illinois Creek," she wrote.

"We remained there until about the middle of August, when Indians plotted to capture us all."

The miners learned of the attack through a young Indian boy who played with others in the Rogue River tribe. The miners quickly left camp and went back to the wagons to prepare for the attack.

"The attack occurred next morning, just before day break, when our company killed three of the Indians and they withdrew without any of our company being killed or

injured," she wrote.

A mounted company of volunteers from Yreka, Calif., arrived soon after and helped the miners leave the area.

"I was the only woman in the entire company," Rollins wrote.

"It must be remembered there were no roads, towns or counties there in these early times, and I was the first white woman in that section of Oregon."

"I was honored by having the county named for me but by whom I know not," she added.

A few years later, she married Julius Ort in Colusa County, Calif.

She never returned to Josephine County, living out her days in California.

# First library in Grants Pass was created by group of women in 1893

Books were among the precious items pioneers brought with them from their homes and lives in the Midwest and East Coast when they made the journey west to Oregon.

There were early reports of women in the community meeting and sharing their books from the 1880s to 1899.

In August 1893, the first library in Grants Pass was created and organized by Mrs. C.M. Stone who also served as its president,

according to "A History of Josephine County" by the Josephine County Historical Society.

In 1899, a group of women persuaded city officials to lease them a room at City Hall for their books. The women agreed to pay \$2 a year in rent.

The agreement lasted for five years.

In 1903, Grants Pass voters approved an annual \$1,000 tax levy to support the library and

to use the money to apply for a \$10,000 gift, what we would call a grant these days, from Andrew Carnegie to build a library building.

The women's hopes were shattered five months later when the Grants Pass City Council voted 5-to-2 against accepting the grant. They stated a hospital was needed more than a library.

Eventually, however, Josephine County pursued and obtained the Carnegie grant.

## Celebrating 130 Years of Service 1880 - 2010

In 1880 when Grants Pass had but a token population, Mr. Keller Gabbert opened a drugstore, one of the very few in pioneer populated Southern Oregon. It was a small room on Front Street, now 'G' Street, the main thoroughfare paralleling the tracks of the Southern Pacific... truly a one street town.

Dr. W.F. Flanagan, the first Grants Pass physician, purchased the store and a few years later sold it to the late George Sabin. Remodeling being done by the early Josephine Bank caused the drugstore to be moved to a modern location adjoining the bank property on the west. In 1921 the business was purchased by Harry E. Couch. Soon after the store was

*Interior view of McLain's store in 1936*

*McLain's looks much the same today as it did in this 1985 photo.*

moved to Sixth Street, in the location now occupied by King Jewelers. In 1936 the pioneer hardware firm of Cramer Brothers was discontinued; that year Mr. Couch moved to the Odd Fellow building, the site that the store now occupies. In 1940, upon the retirement of Mr. Couch, the store was purchased by Mr. Ernest E. Vehrs who in turn sold the store to Howard J. "Mac" McLain on December 4, 1944. In January, 1981, Gary McLain purchased the store from his father. Then Garvin Hamilton purchased McLain's in July, 2004, keeping the same name and maintaining the tradition of excellence that has made McLain's Drug Centre "the outstanding drugstore in Grants Pass" since 1880.

**Garvin Hamilton**

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