

Longtime friends share 70 years of history

Calvert, Vannice families were part of local business scene for many decades

By Susan Goracke
of the Daily Courier

Jesse Calvert and Charles Vannice met in 1937, the year Jesse was a sophomore at Grants Pass High School and he became a friend of Charles' younger sister, Marjorie.

"She was a marvelous dancer," Jesse remembered recently, over coffee at the Tee Time Coffee Shop in downtown Grants Pass.

Jesse, now 87, and Charles, 94, have been sharing stories and coffee with a regular group of pals most weekday mornings for close to 50 years. The two men figure their fathers knew each other, too.

Charles' father, Frank Vannice, moved to Grants Pass from Klamath Falls in 1915 to become a partner in the Golden Rule department store, which had opened in 1905. Since 1912, the store occupied a building on the east side of Sixth Street, in the middle of the block between H and I streets.

For 81 years, the Golden Rule operated out of that building, now home to Plaza Sewing Center and Savannah Faire.

In 1916, Frank's wife, the former Nellie Bly Morey, and their two children — 9-month old Charles and his older brother Lewis — joined Frank in Grants Pass. The family lived on Fifth Street, just north of A Street.

"When I went to the old Lincoln School — it was on Seventh Street, I think at about School Street — we just walked through vacant lots to get there," Charles said. "We made our own playgrounds in vacant lots, and we used to go down to city park (now known as Riverside Park) in the summer. It was a typical small town in those days — 4,000 or 5,000 people. We could ride our bikes all over. It was just fun."

During his years at Grants Pass High School, Charles worked odd jobs for his dad at the Golden Rule. After graduation in 1932, he headed to the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a bachelor's degree in economics.

He joined the Marines during World War II and was sent to the Pacific. After the war, he returned to San Francisco and



SUSAN GORACKE/Daily Courier

Jesse Calvert, left, and Charles Vannice relax with friends at the Tee Time Coffee Shop. Calvert and Vannice first met in 1937.

went back to Berkeley to earn a master's degree in mathematics. He married "a San Francisco girl" he met at college.

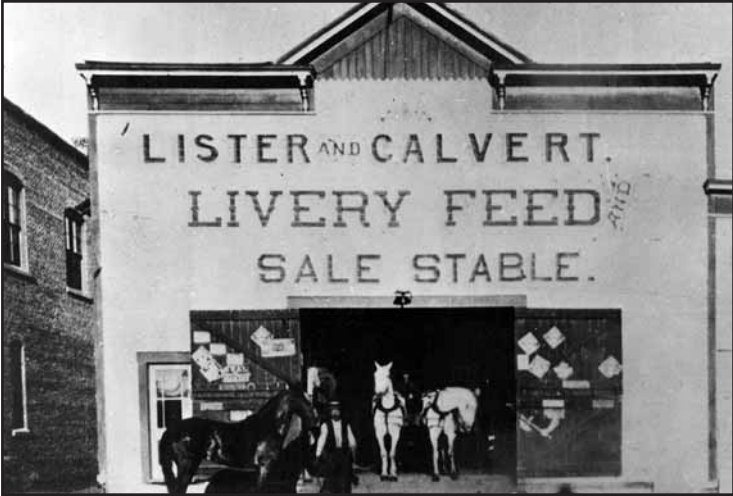
But in 1949, Charles returned to Grants Pass with his wife and two children. His father's health was declining, and Charles agreed to help out at the department store. He became office manager, while his brother managed the shoe department.

When Charles and his last co-owner, Bob Milledge, were ready to retire, they tried to sell the The Golden Rule. When no buyer stepped forward, the two closed the store in 1993.

For many years, Charles was a member of Barnstormers Theatre and performed in plays. Today, he lives in Grants Pass with his daughter.

Although he's younger than Charles, Jesse Calvert comes from a family with an even longer history in Grants Pass. Jesse's grandfather — Jesse Lee Calvert, for whom he is named — was born in Missouri in 1863. In 1885, he headed to California and tried lumbering in Humboldt County. In 1889, he arrived in Grants Pass with \$600 and purchased an interest in a livery business, which became Lister & Calvert.

Over the years, the partners did well and also conducted stage lines. In 1901, they went



Jesse Calvert's grandfather, Jesse Lee Calvert, owned Lister and Calvert Livery Feed with Ed Lister from 1889 to 1903 on the east side of Sixth Street between H and I streets. Today, that spot is home to Elegance.

into the cattle business, developing a large herd near Fort Klamath. Jesse Lee Calvert married Hattie Coleman, who grew up in the Phoenix area of Jackson County.

"He was the cowboy who married the school teacher," Jesse said of his grandparents. "She had gotten her credential and had started teaching at Foothills Creek. She had to row across the river to work."

Jesse's father, Jesse Rea Calvert, was the oldest of their

three children. He was born in 1895.

In 1903, Calvert and Ed Lister dissolved their livery partnership, and Jesse Lee Calvert built up a wholesale and retail feed business. He became a member of the Grants Pass Hardware Company, and he expanded his cattle holdings to include a large ranch in the Illinois Valley.

Later he became president of the Grants Pass and Josephine Bank and even served as a



This photo of the Golden Rule probably was taken in the 1930s, when Charles Vannice's father, Frank Vannice, was one of its owners. Charles Vannice later became one of the department store's last owners, closing it in 1993. Today, the building is home to Plaza Sewing Center and Savannah Faire.

member of the city council.

"My grandmother was very musical. She played piano and gave music lessons to practically everybody in town," Jesse remembered. "She did not believe in equality for women. She believed in superiority."

Jesse's father, who was called Rea, graduated from GP High School, then moved to Montana, where he met and married Lois Stevenson. After Jesse was born in Montana, the family returned to Grants Pass.

Rea Calvert joined his father in a road construction business, Calvert, Calvert & Schroeder, which paved about 50 percent of the roads in the southwest part of Grants Pass.

Jesse grew up attending Lincoln Elementary, Washington Junior High and in 1939, graduated from Grants Pass High. The family finally settling in a home on LawnrIDGE Avenue north of Manzanita Avenue. During the Great Depression, his family raised chickens, turkeys and sheep on three vacant lots behind that house.

To help out, Jesse worked in the local hop fields. He remembers family discussions of financial matters at the dinner table. His father took on commercial construction jobs and also got a job keeping books for C.A. Winetraut's Ford Garage. Rea Calvert also bought both an insurance and a real estate business.

During high school, Jesse was editor of the student newspaper and also covered softball games for the Daily Courier. He helped his father by digging

sidewalks along Seventh Street and took care of the family's ranch in the Illinois Valley.

Jesse remembers drinking a Coke with a friend in a drug store on Sixth Street — somewhere between the current Listen Here and Blue Moon Antiques — when in walked film star Clark Gable.

"I didn't know what to do," Jesse said. "I didn't want to bother him, but he was real friendly to everyone. He lived at Weasku Inn when he was here. He loved to fish and hunt."

After high school, Jesse attended Stanford University, graduating with a pre-law degree in 1943. He joined the Army as a second lieutenant and was an air observer for heavy artillery in Italy until the end of the war.

He returned to Stanford, earned a law degree and passed the Oregon Bar in 1948. Back in Grants Pass, he joined Bill Baldere's law firm, and later was made a partner. He practiced family and corporate law in Grants Pass until he retired in 1984. He continues to own and manage property in downtown Grants Pass.

He and his first wife, Annabelle, had five sons, Lee, Terry, Steven, Brian and William. Today, Jesse lives with his second wife, Jeanne.

Although he has traveled the world extensively, Jesse said he's always been happiest living in Grants Pass.

"When I was away, I just wanted to be back here," he said. "I was the most homesick guy at college."

Ku Klux Klan once burned crosses on Mount Baldy

By Howard Huntington
of the Daily Courier

Today it's cursed even in the South, but the so-called Invisible Empire once stepped high in Grants Pass.

"Proof that the Ku Klux Klan maintains a branch of the organization in the city was given Saturday and Sunday nights," the Daily Courier reported in May 1922. "Saturday night, eight hooded members of the Klan, dressed in white, marched to the corner where the Salvation Army was holding services and left a donation of \$32."

"Last night (Sunday) at about 9 o'clock, a huge red cross blazed out on the top of Mount Baldy, lasting about a half hour."

The paper went on to say many in the community saw the cross, estimated to be 150 feet tall and 100 feet across. Farther from town, it appeared to hang over the city.



The Ku Klux Klan once walked tall — or tried — right down the middle of Grants Pass. The group apparently got a cold reception then and when it re-emerged many years later.

The Klansmen hadn't breathed a word when they handed over the money to the Salvation Army, but they also presented a note saying the

money was for the families of W. J. Smith and John Eads, "who suffered as a result of the Medford accident."

The note was signed "K. K. K." The "accident" was not explained.

It was also evident from the Courier's account that the KKK had a known headquarters in town, but little or nothing more about the local Invisible Empire appeared in the paper for years.

Historical society records show the Klan suddenly stirring in Jackson County in 1915, after a 40-year hiatus. And the group was said to have marched — 278 strong, with members from as far away as Roseburg and Ashland falling in — through Grants Pass to a concert in Riverside Park.

They gave the band \$125.

But the way Jesse Calvert remembers it, the Klan wasn't well received in Josephine County. "It's just a bunch of people that think they're better than they are," his mother told

him when he was a small boy, gazing up at a burning cross.

Calvert also tells of a fed-up community rallying to save a man's son from the Klan, and to re-elect a school board member who had been menaced by the KKK. "That was like pouring gasoline on the fire. He wanted to quit, but he wasn't going to have the Klan tell him what to do."

Another time, Calvert says the town "laughed itself silly" at an attorney who marched with the Klan. "They said it was the biggest waste anybody ever had. He bought this disguise to hide his identity, but everybody knew him from his feet" — size 14.

By the 1930s, the Klan appeared to be fading away.

A brief revival in 1980 ended with the local organizer dropping off his robe and hood at the Courier and resigning. Sixteen years after that, similar-minded Aryan Nations got the bum's rush.

JAN. 2, 1902

"A man tried to make himself a Christmas present of a pair of boots from the R.L. Cook store. He was detected, pursued, caught and landed in jail."

FEB. 23, 1906

"On Wednesday, March 7th at the Opera House will be given a concert and comic Operetta, for the Benefit of the Southern Oregon General Hospital. The first half of the evening will be devoted to concert numbers,



consisting of music by the Grants Pass Orchestra, Recitation by Miss Ada Walker and vocal music by male quartet Messrs. Van Dyke, Coe, Andrews and Lucas."

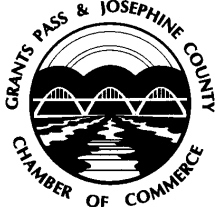
An advertisement for this performance of "Penelope" listed admission to the show as 35 cents, 50 cents for reserved seats, and with A.E.

Voorhies in the role of Chalks, the milkman.

SEPT. 18, 1910

"...Just remember this: It is the only daily paper in Grants Pass; it is the first time that the people of this city have had an opportunity to read today's news today, at their supper table every evening; it will be the liveliest boosting paper you ever saw and will print all the local news fully."

Grants Pass & Josephine County Chamber of Commerce



Celebrating 86 years of service to our local commerce and community.

www.grantspasschamber.org

1995 N.W. Vine St. • 541-476-7717

Store Keeps Poppin' Along

It's not hard to find Blind George's. Just follow your nose to the popcorn machine at 117 S.W. "G" St.

The aroma of fresh popped popcorn has filled the air downtown for decades, ever since George Spencer started the business 88 years ago.

The late George Spencer, blinded when his optic nerves were paralyzed, started selling popcorn, tobacco and newspapers in a tent near the Southern Pacific railroad tracks. Since then, people have followed the smell of Blind George's popcorn to four locations under five owners.

Thelma and Wesley Boothe bought the business from Spencer when he died in 1968 then sold it to their son, Dale. Jack and Brenda Smith currently own the business.

The store carries a large variety of newspapers, hundreds of magazines, paperback books, sunset books and tobacco products. Lottery tickets are available, both on line and scratchers and you can play Keno in the comfort of the Keno Parlor.

Of course, there's the popcorn. Loads of hot buttery popcorn. "We go through LOTS of popcorn a day," said Jack. In addition to buttered, Blind George's also offers a variety of candy and cheese flavors.

They offer a lunch menu including: hot dogs, Taylor's polish dogs, chili, nachos and soft drinks. Or treat yourself to a scoop or two of their delicious creamy ice cream.

Blind George's
117 SW "G" St., Grants Pass
541-476-3463



George Spencer at Blind George's Newsstand, 1930



Blind George's Newsstand under the "It's The Climate Sign," corner of 6th & G St. 1930