

# BHS Newsletter

April 2022

<http://www.oregonpioneers.com/marion/BrooksHistoricalSociety.htm>

## Mission Statement

The objective of the Brooks Historical Society and Depot Museum is to educate and stimulate an interest in and knowledge of the history of Brooks, Oregon, *and the surrounding areas.*

North Howell, Fairfield, Gervais, Quinaby, Waconda, Parkersville, St. Louis, Lake Labish

Check out the BHS Facebook page.



## Our Focus

Does our Newsletter look different? We are changing our masthead (above) to reflect our focus on Brooks *and the surrounding areas*. This has always been part of the Brooks Historical Society mission statement, but sometimes that meaning gets lost in our official name.

The “surrounding areas” are roughly equal to the area covered by Gervais School District; from the edges of Woodburn to the edges of Keizer, and from the Willamette River to the edge of Mt Angel. There will be a map in the re-opened museum to reflect these areas. As we work with more accurately reflecting our focus, you may see future changes in our masthead.

## Changes in the Museum

We are making exciting changes in our Brooks Depot Museum freight room. In addition to improved flooring, lighting and ventilation, you will see some totally new exhibits and a few familiar items arranged in new ways. Featured exhibits will be on Parkersville, Lake Labish and the Japanese Farmers, and the Sacred Heart Cemetery in Gervais. We hope to be open by the end of April, with more exhibits being added during the next few months. Plan to visit! We would love to see you!



*Japanese Farmers Exhibit on loan from Willamette Heritage Museum*

## June 18 Presentation—Aftermath of the Great Willamette Flood of 1861

The theme of 2022 BHS Celebration Day will be the *Aftermath of the Great Willamette Flood of 1861*. Featured will be living history portrayers Mark and Donna Hinds and Richard Cassidy. Reading a book excerpt about the flood will be Roger Shipman, who edited his great great grandmother’s book, “Into the Eye of the Setting Sun.” Gates open at 9 am, coffee will be available at 9:30, and the program will start at 10 am and again at 12 pm. Lunch will be available. Admission is free for this event.

## Fairfield—A River Landing Community

*Reprint of a 2016 article by Vicki Cunningham*

On the East side of the Willamette River, on a high bluff overlooking where its channel is split by Grand Island was the location of Fairfield, Oregon. Consisting of landings on the lower level and eventually a town on the bluff, Fairfield was one of the first of many landings built along the banks of the Willamette to take the grain from French Prairie north to markets. The other landings were more temporary, were easily washed out by the floodwaters, and offered no storage. Champoeg was the next most convenient spot to French Prairie but it was far to the north.

As early as 1836, retired employees of Dr. John McLoughlin, Hudson's Bay factor, built a rough log church on a site that at least one authority asserts was the site of Fairfield in later times. The church was used only briefly, and then the center for worship transferred to St. Paul. Another rough church was built in 1872 but dismantled in the 1940's.



*Site of Pioneer Catholic Church at Fairfield— \* Pictures Courtesy of the Salem Public Library Historic Photographs Collections (SPLHPC)*

The tall firs and spruce trees sheltered the

spot. Ben Simpson built a small steamship, the *Oregon*, in a small slough just south of the landing. Then he built a warehouse, which opened in spring of 1853. His advertisement in the *Statesman* said that he “kept on hand a supply of drygoods and groceries for sale cheap”. In his ad he reminded the public that “The main body of French Prairie (the Granary of Oregon) laying contiguous to this point renders it a desirable place to purchase and forward produce from.”

A competing warehouse by J. C. Waldo and Company opened in July 1853, with storage for grain, and groceries and drygoods for trade. At that time there was no mention of homes in the area, as workers from local ranches provided the labor. Swine and steers were kept in pens near the warehouses. In addition to foodstuffs and crops, the boats also brought new settlers. By 1852 it was on the twice-weekly mail route from Oregon City to Salem, which was provided by Nathaniel Coe of the boat *Canemah*. A post office was established in 1852. The office was withdrawn in December 1902.



*Fairfield Store built in 1865. Photo by Ben Maxwell.*



*Fairfield School 1857-1948. It was located right across River Road from the junction with Marthaler Rd. Photo by Ben Maxwell.*

By 1865 there were eight blocks platted by S. D. Snowden, each block with eight lots each. Fairfield had three stores, a saloon, a blacksmith shop and a cooperage. A store built in 1856 later served as the Fairfield Grange hall. Eventually the building was moved and used as storage on the farm of D. B. DuRette. There was a hotel, but it failed for lack of patronage. In 1860 the population was 822.

A school was built in 1858 but use was suspended in 1948 because the building was considered to have been unsafe. The Schoolhouse occupied three different sites during its 90 year life.

As Oregon City and Salem grew, and the roads were improved and some corduroyed, people relied more on roads to take them to the more populous cities. The railroads had come through French Prairie on the east in the 1870s, allowing other small towns to sprout up, such as Gervais. By the 1880's Fairfield's population lagged to 50. By 1910, the census reported 26 people in Fairfield.

Wheat was beginning to be replaced with orchards, and sheep grazed where wheat fields had stood. The Oregon Electric Railroad was constructed, and more good roads

for truck transportation were created. On March 5, 1939, the town of Fairfield petitioned for vacation of the plat, ending the story of Fairfield. Many of the buildings had already been moved for other uses, or torn down for use of their materials, or simply decayed on the spot.

Today there is nothing left on the site but a sign placed by Brooks Historical Society marking the spot where the town once stood. There is also a Fairfield Grange 2 miles south of the site on River Road, and Fairfield Cemetery on a gated dirt road surrounded by farmers fields about one mile south of the town site.

*Information from Oregon Historical Society publications, and the book Willamette Landings*



## BHS Collects Bottles & Cans

If you have recyclable bottles and cans with Oregon deposit value, we would love to add them to our collection. Contact a member, or just drop the cans off inside the south wall of the "Loafer's Lounge" .



## Upcoming Events

**May 14—S.T.E.A.M.'d Up for Kids**—hands on family activities.

**June 11—** Datsun Swap meet

**June 18** Brooks Historical Celebration Day

**June 18** Left Coast Mustang Show.

**June 19** Fire Museum Father's day Fire-house Fun

**June 23, 24, 25, 26**—Branch 15 Swap Meet

**June 30-July 5**—Civil War Re-enactment and Vintage Trailer Show

**July 30-31 and August 6-7**— Great Oregon Steam-Up

*Continued next edition or see the APMA website: <https://www.antiquepowerland.com/>*



## Welcome New Members!

- ◇ Bob and Wendy Riggi
- ◇ Larry (Sig) Siegnar

**Brooks Historical Society**

1 (503) 390-0698

3995 Brooklake Rd. NE  
Brooks, OR 97303

Mailing Address:  
PO Box 9265  
Brooks, OR 97305



**Brooks Historical Society**

**Membership**

- Adult Member ----- \$15.00
- Student Membership ----- \$ 5.00  
(Elementary and High School )
- Business Membership ----- \$35.00
- Donation ----- -\$\_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Address:

City/State/zip:

Phone

E-mail

*Checks should be written to:*

**Brooks Historical Society**

*Mail to:*

PO Box 9265

Brooks, OR 97305

Videos, Books, & Research Collections for sale:

Visit our website at [http://](http://www.oregonpioneers.com/marion/BrooksHistoricalSociety.htm)

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**BHS Officers and Board**

President - Frank Cunningham

Vice-President - Dan Groah

Treasurer - Dorene Standish

Recording Secretary - Vicki Cunningham

Correspondence Secretary - Marilyn Barner

Board - Position 1- Louis Sowa

Position 2- Leah Duda

Position 3- Sharon Shelton

Position 4 - Carl Barner

**Meetings**

The Brooks Historical Society meets at the Brooks Depot Museum at 10 am the first Saturday of the month.

**Directions to the museum at Powerland Heritage Park:** From I-5 - take Exit 263 -- go west approx. 1/4 mile to: Powerland Heritage Park, 3995 Brooklake Road NE, Brooks, OR 97303. We are in Building 6.

**Interested in Powerland Heritage Park?**  
Visit [antiquepowerland.com](http://antiquepowerland.com)