

# Deep Roots

NEWSLETTER OF THE TRAVEL INFORMATION COUNCIL HERITAGE PROGRAMS — VOLUME 11, APRIL 2022



## Beaver Hill Mine



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOS HISTORY MUSEUM, CHM 959.69.105

By Pamela Filbert, Research Volunteer with Oregon Black Pioneers

When I was a fourth grader studying Oregon history, I learned about Lewis and Clark, Sacagawea, the Oregon Trail, Chief Joseph, and statehood in 1859. I probably learned some other details that I've since forgotten, but I'm certain that I never learned about the Beaver Hill miners of Coos County, or that many of them were African Americans.

Thankfully a new historical marker off Highway 42, just south of Coos Bay, is ready to help Oregonians and visitors alike learn about this

lesser-known part of our state's history.

First, a little background. Oregon was the only state admitted to the Union with a constitution excluding Black people from living in the state, unless they had arrived prior to the constitution's adoption in November 1857. Though the exclusion provision was hardly ever enforced, it was also not repealed until 1926.

Coal was first discovered in Coos County in 1853, and several mines opened before R. A. Graham and J. D. Spreckels and Brothers Co. of San Francisco decided to run a spur of their railroad — the Coos Bay, Roseburg and Eastern — to a hill near Beaver Slough. It was here that they opened the Beaver Hill mine. The railroad reached Beaver Hill on August 22, 1894, and construction of houses and a store got underway by October.

Soon White miners arrived, but it did not take long before a plan was hatched to recruit Black miners from the coal fields of West Virginia. They arrived — many with families — in late December 1894; at the same time wages were reduced, whereupon the White miners all quit.

The newly-arrived miners from the East found that the terms of their employment had been grossly misrepresented by the agent who'd recruited them, and all but a handful elected to return to West Virginia.

Beaver Hill's owners then began recruiting miners from collieries throughout the country. Many of them came from the coal mines around Seattle, where Black miners were first recruited to break a strike in 1889. Over the ensuing years, hundreds more Black miners arrived in Washington, and many traveled back and forth between the collieries in Black Diamond,



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOS HISTORY MUSEUM, CHM 961.21

Beaver Hill Miners posed for a studio photo.

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## Smith Farm Walnut

The walnut tree at the entrance to the historic George W. Smith Farm on S. Coos River Lane in Coos Bay, Oregon, was originally planted by William D.L.F. Smith in 1865. Smith included the walnut in a grouping of four trees along with Chinese Chestnuts when the farmhouse was built.

This tree has been an important community landmark for generations. Before electricity, the tree was used as a marker to signal boats to stop. These boats brought mail, milk, and groceries



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOS HISTORY MUSEUM, CHM 992.8.2433

to serve the communities upriver. After electricity was brought to the area, the tree hosted a milk stand at the base. In the 1920s, Coos County built S. Coos River Road and the communities upriver weren't as dependent on the river for travel. The walnut tree and the grove surrounding, however, still served as a marker for the farm and dairy along the road.

Roger Ott, whose family has

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# Beaver Hill Mine

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Franklin and Roslyn, and the mine at Beaver Hill. Newspapers — both local and national — recorded details of life in Beaver Hill. Only a few months after they'd arrived, the Black miners had put together a baseball team and a quartet of Jubilee minstrel singers. In November 1895, one of the town aldermen elected was a Black man, and in August 1896 the miners celebrated Emancipation Day with a grand barbecue. In January 1897, papers throughout the nation carried news that, "The colored miners at Beaver

Hill, in Coos County, are organizing a lodge, supposedly of Masonry."

Of course, life in a mining town was not glamorous; the work was hard and dangerous, and the living conditions were rough. Like many towns, there was a company store where the miners were expected to shop, paying top dollar for their purchases.

The Beaver Hill mine closed in February 1898 and didn't reopen until the summer of 1900, shortly after the census was taken. Beaver Hill village did not report any Black residents in the census that year, but at the nearby Newport mine in the town of Libby, there were five single Black coal miners and three Black coal-mining families.

Four other Black men were listed as day laborers for the Coos Bay, Roseburg & Eastern Railroad associated with the Beaver Hill mine. Evidence proves that at least three of the four worked at other times in the mines near Seattle, and one of them was Preston Jeter — the maternal grandfather of rock guitar legend Jimi Hendrix.

In the years following 1900, the number of references to Black miners at Beaver Hill diminished dramatically. This was very likely connected to the only recorded lynching in Oregon, which occurred in Marshfield (the current city of Coos Bay) in September 1902. Some area old-timers interviewed in 1974 — who were boys when the lynching occurred — recalled that many African-Americans left the area following that event. By the time the census was taken in 1910, there were no Black miners in Coos County.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOS HISTORY MUSEUM, CHM 992.8.0688

*The company town prospered between 1894 and 1926.*

# Smith Farm Walnut

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lived upriver for generations said, "Regarding the Walnut Tree, I don't know much about it other than I remember it being there always. It seems like there was another one there also, but it blew down or the county road department took it down because of the narrow road. My Grandfather, Fred Weaver (my mom's dad), had a farm in the valley behind Geo. Smith's. He was waiting for the boat a few hundred yards upriver during a storm sheltering under a tree and was killed by lightning in 1925. I believe he was the first recorded lightning death in Coos County."

The Smith Farm was designated as an Oregon Sesquicentennial Farm in 2015, for remaining in the same family for over 150 years. The farm's walnut tree was designated an Oregon Heritage Tree in 2022.

# A Witness to 100+ Years of Urban Change

When you walk down the campus of Portland State University (PSU), it's hard not to notice the lone beech tree surrounded by the sides of the Millar Library. The PSU Copper Beech was planted in the early 1890s at the home of industrialist and banker Joseph Franklin Watson when Portland's South Park Blocks were a prestigious residential neighborhood with many Italianate mansions and exotic foliage. Despite standing out from its surroundings today, the PSU Copper Beech does not appear to have become a remarkable feature of the area until the early 1970s after university officials purchased and demolished the former Watson home to make space for a library.

The home's maintained landscaping was a factor in PSU's decision to sink the initial phase of the library into the western half of the block rather than abutting it to the Park Blocks like the rest of PSU's then current structures. That decision proved vital to preserving the beech.

In 1988, funding for a new \$11 million expansion of the library threatened the tree. If you were to go on a campus tour today, you may very likely hear a story of how students and faculty protesters chained

themselves around the tree, thereby preventing its imminent destruction and forcing the designers to build around it instead. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that demonstration ever occurred, and the reality is the decision to build around the tree was made almost two years prior to breaking ground. The Park Blocks and its trees have witnessed many different demonstrations over the years,

which may have led to the story of the student protest to save the beech.

The PSU Copper Beech offers a long chronological connection through Oregon's history. The tree has become a focal point for Portland State's identity and increasingly, a mainstay of tours exploring local and regional history, the South Park Blocks, and the city's commitment to maintaining and

accommodating greenspace. As David-Paul Hedberg states in his book *From Stumptown to Tree Town* regarding the PSU Copper Beech, "although this is an impressive tree botanically, the history of this tree is a fine example of how trees are some of our best long-term architectural investments."

The PSU Copper Beech was designated an Oregon Heritage Tree in the class of 2022.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

*Miller Library with Beech Tree, 2017.*

# Heritage Tree Award Winners

**The Oregon Heritage Tree Committee recognizes exceptional efforts of Oregon citizens for promoting the appreciation of trees in Oregon and educating the public about the value of heritage trees through two award programs.**

## Maynard Drawson Award

The Maynard Drawson Award was created to honor a native of Oregon and a veteran of World War II who was best known as a tree advocate. Drawson led a campaign in the 1970s to preserve the Valley of the Giants, and in 1995 helped launch the Oregon Heritage Tree Program, the first state-sponsored heritage tree program in the country. This award recognizes exceptional, meritorious, and extraordinary work promoting the appreciation of trees over an extended period.

**Frank Callahan** (2021 Winner) is a scientist, botanist and seedsman, and devotes much of his time to managing his western North American native tree and shrub seed business, Callahan Seeds, that he started in 1977. As a close friend of Maynard Drawson, Frank spent years with Maynard in Oregon's forests identifying Champion Trees, the largest tree of each species reported to American Forests by the public. Frank reminisced, "Whenever I traveled to Salem, Maynard and I would get together and discuss big trees, and when he came through the Rogue Valley things went likewise. He had a fine-tuned sense of humor and was always excited to wrap the tape around the trunk — so to speak." Frank's exceptional efforts in promoting the appreciation of trees in Oregon include discovering locations in Oregon for 35 species of native plants not formerly known in the state, being a leading nominator of National Champion Trees, appearing in botanical documentaries on cable and PBS, and these days focusing on growing, collecting, and distributing tree seeds worldwide. Offerings from Frank's seed collections grow in major arboreta in the western United States and around the world.



*Frank Callahan of Central Point, 2021 Maynard Drawson Award Winner*



*Dorothy Dahlsrud of Oregon City, 2021 Heritage Tree Hero Award Winner*

## Heritage Tree Hero Award

In 2021, the Oregon Heritage Tree Committee launched the Heritage Tree Hero Award to recognize individuals and groups that are engaging communities through education about the importance of trees and raising awareness about Oregon's history told through trees and forests.

**Dorothy Dahlsrud** (2021 Winner) is an enthusiastic advocate for the promotion and protection of heritage trees. She is a long-time member of Oregon City's Natural Resource Committee and was instrumental in advocating for new city code that made it easier for homeowners to apply for heritage tree status. Dorothy has organized groups of citizens, city staff, and arborists to survey trees on public lands for the purpose of identifying trees for nomination, and she also takes the time to discuss the program with residents when she sees trees on private properties that are potential candidates. Since 2018, six more trees and an additional heritage stand have been listed, every one of them nominated by Dorothy.

**Jim Gersbach** (2021 Winner) educates the public about trees and history through his roles as a volunteer with Friends of the Trees, a director with Oregon Community Trees, and staff at the Oregon Department of Forestry. Recently, Jim stands out for his work with Oregon's Green Legacy Hiroshima



*Jim Gersbach of Portland, 2021 Heritage Tree Hero Award Winner*



*Dara Kramer of Oregon City, 2022 Heritage Tree Hero Award Winner*

Peace Tree Project that distributed 45 ginkgo and persimmon trees grown from seeds that survived the bombing of Hiroshima to Oregon cities, schools, and churches. These seedlings, representing hope for world peace, were an important symbol in 2020 during the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. Jim played an instrumental role in the project by creating a Peace Tree FAQ and application for prospective Peace Tree recipients, conducting outreach, and facilitating the transport of seedlings from southern Oregon to Corvallis. The project facilitated the sharing of stories by Japanese Oregonians and helped raise awareness for finding better forms of conflict resolution worldwide.

**Dara Kramer** (2022 Winner), a teacher at Gardiner Middle School in Oregon City, has

merged her passion for trees and education. When a 300-year-old, 60-foot native White Oak on the school's property was threatened by construction, students rallied and saved the tree. While Dara worked to nominate the tree as an Oregon City heritage tree, she also used the tree to give the students of Gardiner exposure to and lessons in Tomography, arborist education, math, biology, public fundraising, and public speaking. Dara recruited the school's science and wood working classes to use the fallen limbs from an ice storm in 2021 to make interpretive signage that will not only continue to educate future students, but the public as well.

The Oregon Heritage Tree Committee congratulates Frank, Dorothy, Jim, and Dara and thanks them for their service to Oregon!

# Full Circle: Remembering Apollo 14, a Smokejumper Astronaut, and Some Trees with an Unusual History

“My introduction to Moon Trees started nearly two decades ago when I was working on a student project sponsored by NASA and encountered a unique plaque in the Coos Bay City Hall,” writes Becky Soules, now a public historian with a passion for connecting people with history. “Inscribed ‘From Stuart Roosa to my hometown,’ the plaque jump-started my exploration of the Apollo 14 mission, of why Coos Bay was Roosa’s ‘adopted’ hometown, and of the Moon Trees story.”

As a young man, Roosa worked as a smokejumper in the Pacific Northwest for the USDA Forest Service and developed close ties to Coos Bay. Later in the 1960s, he became a NASA astronaut and a crew member on Apollo 14. Alongside Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell, Roosa took approximately 600 seeds from five tree species (loblolly pine, sycamore, sweetgum, redwood, and Douglas-fir) to test the effects of zero gravity on them.

Upon return, seeds were sent to Forest Service labs to attempt germination. Despite initial setbacks, seeds from each species grew into healthy seedlings and were subsequently given away to federal and state agencies, universities, state capitols, and other countries.

In 1976, President Ford sent a telegram to be read at each Moon tree planting ceremony that stated: “[*This tree*] is a living symbol of our spectacular human and scientific achievements. It is a fitting tribute to our national space program which has brought out the best of American patriotism, dedication, and determination to succeed. Planted in this community in our bicentennial year, may this young tree renew our deep-rooted faith in the ideals of our Founding Fathers.” [Note: many of these seedlings were planted nearby their “earthbound” counterparts to compare any eventual space-attributable differences. However, virtually no differences have been recorded over the past 45 years.]

In 2019, NASA launched its “Back-to-the-Moon” initiative. Inspired by this and the Moon Trees’ connection with Roosa, whose official NASA Apollo 14 parade in 1971 was the largest parade ever in Coos Bay, the *Apollo 14: Coos Bay Connection* was born. It is Soules’ goal to reacquaint her coastal community with the history of Apollo 14, Roosa, and these trees through local museum exhibits and lectures, and to plant grafted Moon Tree seedlings in and around the Coos Bay area.

In 2020, Soules contacted the OSU Extension service in Coos Bay, and later worked with Oregon State Parks, and Oregon State University to obtain healthy scion wood (cuttings) from the mature Moon Trees to graft onto healthy Douglas-fir rootstock. These cuttings were grafted at the Bureau of Land Management Horning Seed Orchard and then cared for by the Oregon Department of Forestry Seed Orchard. From this effort, nine grafted Moon Tree seedlings have survived. They will be planted in local parks and gardens when they are larger.

“I was intrigued by the historical aspects of the story and the Coos Bay connection,” writes OSU Extension Forester Norma Kline, to whom Soules initially shared her vision for the trees. “But I was particularly interested in how these trees can catalyze a retelling of the historical narrative as well as help spark an interest in science and astronomy. I look forward to seeing them grow and thrive!”

To find out more about this project and help spread the word, please contact Becky Soules at [apollo14.cbconnection@gmail.com](mailto:apollo14.cbconnection@gmail.com) or 541-435-1177.



Planting the Oregon State University Moon Tree in 1976.

**Two of the original handful of Douglas-fir Moon Trees planted in Oregon can be visited at the State Capitol grounds in Salem (a designated Oregon Heritage Tree) and Oregon State University in Corvallis.**

# Salemtowne Volunteers Crucial to Saving Oregon’s Historical Markers

The Oregon Historical Marker Program is Oregon’s official roadside historical interpretation program. Its mission is to maintain and restore Oregon’s Historical Markers, many of which were originally created by Oregon Highway Administration (now ODOT) employees during the 1950s. In 1991, when Travel Information Council assumed administration of the program, a core group of Salemtowne volunteers formed to contribute their woodworking and construction skills to the maintenance of these markers. Without the generous support of Salemtowne’s time and

workshop space, most of the historical markers around the state would have disappeared.

In 2021, the crew worked on over 40 markers located around the Willamette Valley, the length of the Oregon Coast, and parts of Southern Oregon. This year, they plan to visit the rest of the state to make sure all the markers are in good shape for visitors.

Many thanks to all members of the Salemtowne Oregon Historical Marker Volunteers.

Find “Salemtowne Volunteers” in the sidebar for a list of our current maintenance team members.

## Heritage Committees

### Historical Marker Members:

- Gwenn Baldwin
- Chris Bell
- Barbara Bonnem
- Kelly Cannon-Miller
- Eliza Canty-Jones
- Nancy DeSouza
- Robert Garcia (Chair)
- Robert Keeler
- David Porter
- Ed Washington

### Heritage Tree Members:

- Nancy Appling
- Scott Brown
- David-Paul B. Hedberg
- Jennifer Karpis
- Craig Leech
- Charlotte Lehan
- Molly McKnight
- Arne Nyberg
- Kristin Ramstad (Chair)
- Al Tocchini
- Ed Washington
- Samantha Wolf

### Salemtowne Volunteers

(Historical Marker Maintenance)

- Alan Avery
- Jack Carroll (foreman)
- Kenn Carter
- James Childers
- Donald Conrad Jr.
- Pete Gottschalk
- John Mangini
- Herman Mitzel
- Howard Palmer
- Leonard Schultz
- Owen Stockard

### TIC Heritage Program Staff

- Beth Dehn, Heritage and Community Assets Manager
- Jessica Carbone, Executive Assistant

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The Oregon Historical Marker and Oregon Heritage Tree Programs are administered by the Travel Information Council.

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