From the Oregon Trail to Heceta Head

The region held its 2016 meeting in Springfield, Oregon September 21 through 24. This was hosted by the Willamalane Park and Recreation District who operate Dorris Ranch living history farm. This conference was several years in the making and did not disappoint us in respect.

We were fortunate to have as attendees Pete and Mary Watson from Howell Living History Farm in the wilds of New Jersey. Slipping across the international border to join us was Crystal Hanson from Chemainus, British Columbia. Also supporting the conference was Associated Foundations with a generous grant of $1000 to help offset conference costs.

Wednesday evening’s opening reception was held at Camas Country Mill and Schoolhouse. It was hosted by the Hunton family who own the mill and schoolhouse as well as a local third generation farm that specializes in organic and transitional cereals and legumes. The program was presented by Richard Scheuerman who has done substantial research into the original varieties of grain grown in the Pacific Northwest by its early settlers.

Thursday featured an all day field trip to Florence, Oregon, a coast town with a nice historic district. First stop was Heceta Head Lighthouse. This is a working lighthouse built in 1893 that features a first-order Fresnel lens manufactured in England that revolves to produce the flashes that are its beacon signature. Lunch was on our own as well as a self guided tour of the town and a visit to the Siuslaw Pioneer Museum, the keepers of local history.

Friday was a day spent in sessions at the Willamalane Recreation Center. Local presenters as well as those from around the region provided subject matter that ranged from the importance of spices to early trading to crowd funding for special projects. In the evening we traveled to Dorris Ranch for a fine feed, the traditional auction and a program by William Sullivan on 14,000 years of Oregon history in one hour.

Saturday morning found us back at the Ranch for the wrap up exercise which turned out to be a tour of the Ranch including farm buildings and the filbert orchards which are

(Continued on page 2)
Western Regional Conference

(Continued from page 1)

the reason the site exists. We then broke up into teams and participated in “The Amazing Race to Oregon”. ALHFAMers were allowed to be first time participants in this event which will be a component in the Dorris Ranch education program at some point. Teams raced through ten stations, participating in activities that tested both luck and skill. Developed by Jen Marsh, one of the conference organizers and the head of the Ranch’s educational program, this was an idea well worth importing throughout the region.

The final activity was a tour of the living history village where education programs take place. Hands on participation is stressed in this area where students can climb into a wagon, explore a settler’s cabin, visit the pioneer living area on the Oregon Trail, visit with a trapper at his cabin and then end the visit at the cedar plank long house.

As with all regional meetings, this was a whirlwind of activity with a lot packed into a short amount of time. Our thanks to Jen Marsh and Jana Weaver who were the boots on the ground organizers as well as their workers and the staff of Travel Lane County who provided help with the conference.

Images of Heceta Head lighthouse, the Lighthouse keepers residence, views from the lighthouse, and the winning team from the “The Amazing Race to Oregon” courtesy of Mick Woodcock.
Baton Rouge: Where the Western Region Struck Gold

Others will report on the International meeting of ALHFAM in Baton Rouge this year, but it is my duty to report on how well Westerners did in the plowing match which is the only way you can get a ribbon for your efforts. Having participated in a number of plowing matches over the years and having never won a ribbon, I can tell you that the competition is pretty stiff, no matter whether you are a first timer or an apprentice level plowman.

Thus it is with great pleasure and pride that I announce the following winners from the Western Region and one person who is still a Westerner at heart and continues to put together our newsletter even though she has relocated to Virginia.

Jim Lauderdale, Fort Nisqually – First Place Apprentice Plowing Class

Jessica Maria Alicea-Covarrubias, Western Region newsletter publisher – First place Novice Plowing Class

Mike Smola, Mission Houses – Third Place Novice Plowing Class

Linda Evans, High Desert Museum just missed getting a ribbon.

It is with great sadness that I bring you the news that Barry Herlihy, a long time ALHFAM member, passed away on October 11, 2016 in Pasadena, California.

Barry had been active in the Western Region for over twenty years. He was a driving force in organizing four regional meetings in Southern California during that time period as well as providing help during the Western Region’s formative years. An Air Force veteran, his primary career was as a lawyer for estate planning. However, he was ever devoted to our field of interpretation and had a genuine love of history. He served as the executive director of Heritage Square Museum for 11 years, was an overseer and donor to the Huntington Memorial Library in San Marino, and recently served as the training director for the USS Iowa Museum in San Pedro. He and his wife, Marie were seen often at regional and national meetings and were financial contributors to the organization for years. Barry had also just completed a three year term on the ALHFAM Board where his knowledge was used at the national and international level. His presence and activity in the region will be sorely missed by those of us that knew and worked with him.
Running an Antique Sawmill in the 21st Century

The High Desert Museum covers the landscape between the Cascades and the Rocky Mountains and is defined by areas with less than 13” of precipitation per year. Nineteenth century explorers, trappers and overland travelers made frequent notes of the forest resources in this vast desert. By the middle of the 19th century, the discovery of gold and silver deposits expanded mining beyond California into the High Desert region and brought miners and settlers to the region. As the population grew, so too did the demand for timber and sawmills. These mills came west via ships around Cape Horn and were vital to the Euro-American settlement and industrial development of the west.

With rapid settlement coming to the High Desert, unrest among the dispossessed native people increased. During this era the federal government established a network of forts to provide security for travelers and settlers. The army established on-site steam-powered mills to build barracks, stables and warehouses.

Railroads moving west brought their own specialized demands for timber. Workers cut and shaped ties and trestles with hand saws and broad axes. Later local small mills cut timber used for the regional “short lines”. Each mile of track required hundreds of railroad ties, not to mention trestles, bridges, maintenance facilities and depots.

As homesteading and ranching move into the landscape, small steam and water powered mills provided materials for ranch houses and framed out buildings. Mail order firms, such as Sears and Roebuck, enabled those in rural communities to purchase efficient and affordable boilers and engines. Steam-powered mills, as compared to water-powered mills, had the advantages of not being reliant on access to water and being easily moved to a new stand of timber. A major disadvantage of steam mills was the frequency they burned down.

In the early 1990’s the High Desert Museum obtained the Lazinka Sawmill from Eastern Oregon. The exact age of the mill is unknown, as the Lazinka family got the mill from the neighbor “up the creek”.

The estimated age is from 1886 – 1910. As the mill was being reconstructed at the Museum, a team of volunteers decided to see if the mill could still run. They attached an air compressor fueled by diesel generator in a faraway shed to the steam engine and an electric motor positioned under the blade.

The mill worked, and proceeded to cut wood for visitors, a new barn and outbuildings for almost 20 years.

A reproduction roof was placed over this portable sawmill, and the boiler has never been tested due to safety concerns.

In 2008 the mill structure was showing signs of deterioration and insurance liabilities were becoming a concern in the 21st century. After two years of meeting with OSHA, insurance carriers and replacing some structural supports, the mill is back in operation. During this process the Museum made great connections with several organizations. One organization was Antique Powerland outside of Salem, OR. They are a community of heritage museum organizations working together, and greatly assisted us with hands on experience and protocols.

The sawmill sits on the reconstructed 1904 homestead ranch and the family uses the mill to cut timber for various demonstrations and outbuildings. The main income for the family was ranching cattle, and when the Miller family proved up on the homestead claim, the sawmill was a great addition to their success and ranching lifestyle.
New Blacksmith Shop Features Safety

Few things draw a crowd at a museum more than smoke and fire. If your site has a blacksmith shop, then you have a draw of which some historic places are envious of. What is more living history like than the “Village Blacksmith”?

At one time Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona had a blacksmith shop. Tucked into a tight space and with a forge that never drew quite right, it nevertheless was a draw for young and old alike. That is until progress came along and caused not only the shop to be closed, but the building to be torn down. That progress was a new building and grounds maintenance facility.

This turned out to be an opportunity to have a larger blacksmith area in the now vacated grounds equipment storage room. Much research was done, including trips to Living History Farms in Des Moines, Iowa and Missouri Town 1855 outside Kansas City, Missouri. These provided ideas on how other living history sites treated the heating and bending of iron for the public.

Photographs of local historic blacksmith shops were also examined for details as to what was going on locally. From all of these it was evident that the 19th Century blacksmith was set up in a wood building that did not fit the pattern of our concrete floor and slump block wall room. We decided to sheath the walls in pine boards. That was after getting rid of the sheet rock ceiling that exposed the underside of the wood roof.

Volunteers went to work designing the forge itself after viewing slides taken during the research phases and visiting Pioneer Arizona north of Phoenix. We had decided to go with a brick flue at the back of the forge that closely resembled the originals. At this point we decided to talk with the City of Prescott building department and see if they had any thoughts on the matter.

Several months later, we were mired down in submitting forge and flue designs to the Prescott Fire Department who had inherited the job of overseeing this project from the City’s perspective. This was such a long process that a volunteer was able to totally rebuild a blacksmith shop bellows from the collections to use in the shop.

By April 2016 we had installed a ventilating fan that would suck the shoes off of a horse, installed a sprinkler system to manually activate in case we did have a fire, and had double thickness sheet rocked areas around the actual forge itself. The forge was constructed and equipment installed.

Our first firing was during a ranching event where we had a guest farrier demonstrating making horse shoes from scratch. We also used in our June Folk Arts Fair with another farrier demonstrating horse shoeing. We finally had our inaugural living history program in September with interpreter Dean Mast bending hot iron and talking to the public.

While the whole time we were without a forge was nearly eight years, we now have a bigger and better interpretive area. It is also safe beyond our wildest imaginations. This is at a level we had not anticipated, but it will insure the safety of the museum for the future.
Change is in the wind. As I write this article, we are approaching the 2016 Presidential election. This will usher in change of some sort, no matter which side of the fence you are on. ALHFAM has experienced major change as well with the adoption of a new logo and the election of a new secretary/treasurer. We are grappling with a declining membership and a general drop in attendance at our sites in general.

More effort is being expected of a workforce that has experienced some lean years with no lessening of the workload. People who have been leaders in ALHFAM as well as in the field of living history are beginning to retire from the museum business and those that are taking their place are not necessarily interested in putting life into what they may view as a “dead” subject.

In the West we are fortunate that a number of these “old timers” who have retired from museum work have not retired from ALHFAM. Rather, they are continuing to contribute time, effort, writing, editing and organizational skills to the region and are mentors to the younger members who are coming along to take up the work up making history relevant to the coming generations.

The reason for having regions is to bring ALHFAM to those who are not able to attend the international meeting on a regular basis. Meetings move around the region to facilitate attendance for those who might have difficulty in traveling to a meeting that is at a distance from their site.

With that in mind, there were a couple of “after hours” social sessions at the regional meeting that helped us focus on getting regional meetings distributed around the region. By this time you will have already have had the opportunity to take the survey created by Linda Evans to help us figure out what your desires are for future sites and meeting content.

As an ALHFAM member, the Western Region is your “local” connection to the living history community. We hope that you will take an interest in the direction we are headed and join us at a future meeting, whether regional or international. We also welcome articles for the newsletter and other help as you are able to give.

Mick Woodcock