The O & C Railroad — seeds of prosperity and of future distress

The arrival of the Oregon & California Railroad in the Bear Creek Valley in the 1880’s allowed the Valley's farm and forest products to reach far-away markets, and stimulated much commercial activity. Talent experienced a major building boom around the turn of the Century, ultimately leading to the town’s incorporation as a city in 1910.

Derailed by Greed & Corruption

In 1896 the US Congress had established a Land Grant to promote settlement and the rapid completion of a railroad between Portland and San Francisco. The O & C Railroad earned the right to alternating square-miles of land in a strip 20 miles wide on each side of the rail line. The Railroad was required by Congress to offer the grant lands for sale, but only to “actual settlers,” in parcels no greater than 180 acres, and for prices not to exceed $2.50 per acre — terms intended to encourage settlement and development, while compensating the Railroad for construction costs.

Before the railroad was even finished, land fraud of many types sprang up. One scam had fraudulent “setters” rounded up from various saloons near Portland’s wharfs to sign forged applications to purchase 160 acre parcels of O&C lands, which were then transferred to corrupt middlemen and consolidated into large blocks held by corporate interests.

President Theodore Roosevelt vowed in 1903 to clean up the O&C land fraud mess. It took two years, but Roosevelt’s investigators got the evidence needed. Over 1,000 politicians, businessmen, railroad executives & others were indicted and many were tried and convicted for fraud, bribery and other corruption charges. The government took action to recover over 2 million acres that the Railroad still held. This untaxed federal property is today known as the O&C Lands.

Key pieces that fell into place for our Library to happen

• A location: City takes over old school as Town Hall designating one room for community use - 1914.
• An advocate for the library: Talent Community Club (later known as Federated Women’s Club) - 1912.
• A national “Free Public Library Movement” energized by the rising middle class and by the philanthropy of self-made steel mogul, Andrew Carnegie, who helped build half of the US public libraries, from 1889 - 1919.
• A town with a progressive tradition and a state and national period of progressive and reform politics.
• Women’s suffrage: Oregon women finally obtained a vote at the end of 1912.
• Establishment of the Ashland and Medford Carnegie libraries and the Woodville (Rogue River) Library.
• Changes in state library law in 1918 that allowed citizens to petition to form a Jackson County Library System, with the Medford Public Library contracted to operate the system.

Women’s Suffrage

It is a common misconception that ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 was necessary for women to gain the right to vote. Prior to passage, many states had on their own granted suffrage to women, with the right to vote in local, state, and federal elections.

A leading champion of women’s suffrage in the West was Abigail Scott Dunway. A genius in journalism, public speaking and grassroots organizing, Dunway provided the glue for a cohesive movement. Her extraordinary efforts led the region’s women helped propel each of the Pacific Northwest campaigns to victory: Idaho in 1896, Washington in 1910 and after five failed tries — her home state of Oregon in Nov. 1912. Dunway started her movement in 1870 and blamed her brother Harvey Scott, editor of The Oregonian and leading opponent of suffrage, for the many defeats over the years.

The same Women’s Clubs that were invaluable in starting local public libraries often were bastions of suffragette activities. We don’t know the sentiments of Talent’s Community buying and fraud that too easily took place in these all-male sanctuaries for the price of a few beers. Note the example at top of O & C railroad land fraud perpetrated in Portland’s saloons.

Progressive and Reform Politics

Talent had a long-standing reputation as a progressive community going back to the 1850’s with John Beeson’s Plea for the Indians written during the Indian Wars. The progressive thread continues in Eddie Robinson’s Talent News (1892-1894), the “anything-goes” lectures and debates held at the Universal Mental Liberty Hall in the 1890’s, Willy J. Dean’s Diaries (1912-1919), the 1912 election of socialist William Breese as Mayor and Miss Leta Luke as City Recorder — and the appointment of Mrs. Minnie Vogel, to the City Council in 1913.

Talent’s home-grown progressivism dovetailed with a state progressive movement led by William Uffen who successfully championed the 1902 adoption of the Oregon System of “Initiative, Referendum, and Recall”, which quickly spread to other states — and with a national Progressive Party lead by Theodore Roosevelt who declared in 1912: “Today we have an invisible Government, to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.”

Women’s Suffrage and oddly enough Prohibition were also associated with progressive agendas. Some felt that adding the woman’s vote would “purify” politics, while the Anti-Saloon League sought to break the vote-buying and fraud that too easily took place in these all-male sanctuaries for the price of a few beers. Note the example at top of O & C railroad land fraud perpetrated in Portland’s saloons.

Carnegie Libraries

The “Carnegie Formula” required matching contributions from the town that received the donation. It must:
• demonstrate the need for a public library;
• provide the building site;
• annually provide 10% of the cost of the library to support its operation;
• provide free service to all.

One of the requirements was the willingness of people and government to raise taxes to support the library. The standard Carnegie library interior had a centrally located librarian’s desk and innovative open stacks, unlike the locked stacks then typical of academic libraries. This design encouraged communication with the librarian and created an opportunity for people to browse & discover books on their own.

Women’s Clubs started 80% of US Public Libraries

Women’s clubs supported social welfare goals, such as building schools, public libraries and hospitals. They helped establish 80% of our nation’s public libraries. The clubs were an integral part of the building of cultural institutions that occurred in the years 1870-1930 throughout the United States. Talent’s Community Club changed its name when it joined the national General Federation of Women’s Clubs.

Woodville (Rogue River) Public Library

In 1919, when Jackson County contracted with Medford to operate libraries in smaller communities, the city of Rogue River (called Woodville until 1912) had already been operating a library for nine years. In 1910 the Woodville Women’s Civic Improvement Club organized a “book social” in the old opera house. The thirty-eight books collected became the nucleus of a public library which has been ardently supported by their women’s club and later the Friends of the Library ever since.

Rogue River’s women’s club and Talent’s women’s club both became members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. Perhaps because of this common link, there has been a “connection at a distance” between library supporters in Rogue River and those in Talent over the decades. Talent’s Federated Women were no doubt inspired by the Woodville women to open a provisional library in Talent Hall in 1919 in anticipation of establishment of the County System. And when the Friends of the Talent Library held its first meeting in 1973, Anna Classick of Rogue River was present to mentor and inspire the new group.

Ashland Library

Ashland started as a subscription library in 1891 by the Epworth League of the Methodist Church. In 1909 the name changed to the Ashland Free Public Library, when the City took over responsibility. The library moved from City Hall to a new Carnegie building Sept. 16, 1912. State library law allowed Ashland to remain separate from the County System. But in 1970 Ashland joined a newly reconstituted Jackson County Library System and became the regional headquarters of the south region that includes Talent and Phoenix.
The county library brings books to the boy on the farm. This slogan was responsible for the establishment of the Jackson County Library. With a side reference to Abraham Lincoln the slogan carried the day in the petition to the county court in the campaign of the county people for equality of library privileges.

Two petitions were circulated, one for taxpayers and one for non-taxpaying voters. Both were simple and advocated 0.2 mill tax for maintenance and included the actual amounts that the tax would raise on assessments of $1,000, $5,000, and $10,000, respectively. The county court voted the 0.2 mill tax, $2,000, and entered into a contract with the existing Medford Public Library to extend its service to rural people by the purchase of additional books, by opening its doors to county people, and by the establishment of rural branch and school station libraries.

RURAL LIBRARIES

The county has an area of 2,976 square miles and a population of 16,000. The county has one farm for every mile of rural land, and two. The community is served by a number of small towns and villages, each with its own library, and a few larger centers, including Medford, which has two libraries. All these libraries are members of the Jackson County Library System, which serves a population of 30,000. Each library is supported by a local tax, and the county has a library levy of 0.2 mill, which provides funding for new books, equipment, and operating expenses.

The Jackson County Library System has a central library in Medford and seven branch libraries in rural areas. The central library is located in an old school building and is open Monday through Friday from 10 am to 5 pm. The branches are located in the community centers of various towns and villages and are open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm.

The library system has a total collection of 60,000 books, including fiction, non-fiction, children's books, adult books, and reference materials. The library also provides a variety of services, including internet access, computer classes, and community events.

The library system is funded by a combination of local taxes, grants, and donations. The library system also receives funding from the Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and the State Library of Oregon.

The library system is governed by a board of trustees, which is elected by the county community. The board is responsible for setting policy, developing the budget, and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the library system.

The goal of the Jackson County Library System is to provide access to quality library resources and services for all residents of the county, regardless of age, income, or location. The library system strives to meet the information and cultural needs of the community through a commitment to excellence in service and by providing a wide range of resources and services.

This Talent Centennial Poster Display

"History of the Talent Library"

by

Jim Bradley & Patricia Remencuis

sponsored by the Friends of the Talent Library
During the Great Depression and the 1940's free or inexpensive movies were shown in the Library corner. Alta Estes have revived this.

Librarians
1919-1920  Mary Jacobs (Withrow)
1920-1928  unknown
1928-1932  Bell LeVander
1933-1941  Edith Cochran Coffman
1941-1949  Leolah Jones, et al.
1949-1969  Alta Estes
1969-1990  Hulda Sommer

What was the 1919 Library?
Changes in Oregon library law in 1919 made it possible for citizens to petition for the creation of a tax-supported Jackson County Library System, with branches in towns like Talent.

In anticipation of petition approval, the Federated Women's Club set up a provisional library in Town Hall, using make-shift bookshelves, donated books, and a rotating collection of 50 books borrowed from the State Library. They hired Mary Jacobs, age 16, as their librarian. Their initiative paid off: Talent was the 2nd branch to join the county library system --- on April 24, 1920.

1964 - 1975: The Basement Library
The move to the basement ostensibly was a great improvement for the library.

It had a bit more space, a gas heater for winter, and it was cool in the summer.

However, there was one big drawback: it was wet and moldy.

According to Hulda Sommer, water oozed through the walls when the lawn was watered; dripped through the ceiling when the floor above was mopped; and spurted through the west wall when it rained.

During one storm the sump pump failed and the librarian had to find books and magazines floating on water higher than her boot tops.

“it’s only 900 square feet — and it leaks!” was how in 1975 Robbie Miller, President of the newly formed Friends of the Talent Library, characterized the need to move out of the moldy basement into freshly built quarters ... above ground.

And by 1975 the Talent Library did move into its own new 2305 square foot building north of Community Hall.

1919 - 1957: Library located in northwest corner of Town Hall
When bookcases acquired locking doors, books didn’t have to be put away in a trunk when the library was closed and the Hall used for other purposes.

Town Hall originally retained an interior wall that had divided the 1899 School House into lower and upper grades. Major renovation in 1928 removed this wall, laid new flooring, and added a dining room on back of the Hall.

The 1949 Campfire Girls photo (above left) shows the locked bookshelves in the extreme right corner. A curtain used to split the room was visible at the top of the photo, as is the new wood floor.

1930’s to 1940’s: Movies at the Library
During the Great Depression and the 1940’s free or inexpensive movies were shown in Town Hall, adjacent to the Library corner, which is just out of sight to the right in the above photo. The Friends of the Talent Library have revived this Talent tradition with Free Movies in the Library Community Room most Fridays at 6 pm.

Addition of East Wing to Community Hall
Like the 1928 renovation of the Community Hall spear-headed by future Mayor Charles Estes and built with the unpaid labor of local carpenters, the addition of a new East Wing in 1957-58 was championed by Mayor Frank Christian and manned paid for by the Talent Lions Club.

The town Marshall and the Talent Library initially moved into the front room of the addition. But from 1959 to 1964 the Library finally had its own separate, lockable quarters in the rear of the addition – the area that is now the kitchen.

By 1964 both the Police Chief and the Library were again close neighbors, this time in the renovated basement of the East Wing addition. In 1971 the Police vacated the basement and moved to the newly-built City Hall to the west of the Community Center, and the Library had the basement to itself.

1958 Class Trip to new East Wing
We went to the City Hall and Mrs. Holdridge took our picture in front of the new part. There is a basement in the new part. People have meetings down there. Mr. Young, our Talent Marshall, has his office in the new part. The library is there, too.
We Need a Library Building

1973 The year it all comes together: the growing need for a larger library space; Jackson County willing and able to finance new library buildings; community support for a new library reaches critical mass.

In August, Talent Parks & Rec. Committee sends a letter to JCLS with City Council approval proposing a piece of land for a library building site. Two days later, the reply from the JCLS is positive though non-committal. By April 1974, only 8 months later, JCLS has approved a library building for Talent with the groundbreaking in December of that year.

Friends of the Library is formed
In the same month of August 1973, a group of local women established the Friends of the Talent Library. Their first meeting was held in early August with the main objective being a “New Library Building”.

They immediately began soliciting members and publicizing the need for community support. A fund was created to finance items for the new library building and children’s reading programs were promoted. In just two months they already had 65 members. The minutes of their October meeting highlighted the importance of building membership by noting that the Rogue River Friends of the Library had facilitated the speedy approval of their new library by turning out in large numbers at the County Commissioners meeting and would get a library building in one year.

Group wants Jackson County library to establish branch outlet in Talent

Talent Library

The meeting of the minds in Talent

In 1978, the Talent Library was established with the help of a number of community members who came together to support the idea of a local library. The library was located in the community center and was open to the public.

With the passing of time, the library continued to grow and expand its services. In 1982, the library moved to its current location in the old Talent High School building.

Computerization brings many changes
The Medford catalog went digital in 1991 and gradually the other branches were computerized — the card catalog was a thing of the past. Patrons were issued plastic cards and the librarians checked books in and out on computers. The change to computers was not without a down side. Staff found the transition difficult and many long time volunteers decided it was time to retire from library service. By the 1990’s, the configuration of our Talent Library had changed also. There was little space for library programs and it felt crowded when only a few patrons were present. The children’s area, once host to 40-60 children at storytime was filled to overflow with books. The west corner of the library became a teen section and eventually the adjacent wall housed 4 internet computers. By the late 1990’s the internet was well established and everyone was “surfing the web” as well as accessing the library catalog on-line and at home to order books to be delivered directly to their preferred branch library. Circulation was high but in Talent there was little sitting room to read a newspaper or magazine or peruse a book.

Looking towards a new Century and a new Library
As the 20th Century came to a close, the need for larger library buildings throughout the County became critical. Talent Branch Library was bursting at the seams as were all the other Branches. People were using the cramped facilities but it was harder and harder to provide the services the public wanted and needed. In 1999 the county commissioners authorized Board Measure 15-6 to place the ballot that would provide $38.9 million for new or remodeled libraries for all 15 branches in the system. The Measure passed May 16, 2000 with overwhelming voter support and turn-out.

Stories draw children, parents

Betty Smith, Talent Librarian 1990-2001
With the retirement of Hulda Sommer in 1990, the Talent Library got a seasoned veteran of library service as its new Head Librarian, Betty Smith. The profile to the left sums up her ideas about what library service is about – the people. Betty continued in her position as Head Librarian (now called Branch Supervisor) until 2001. Although retired, she continued to serve the library as the President of the Friends of the Library, guiding the organization through the Capital Campaign which raised one-third of a million dollars to enlarge the new library building completed in 2007. Ever faithful to her beloved Talent Library, Betty continues both on the Board of the Friends and as a volunteer for the library.

Talent’s Growing Population
The Census figures below show our town’s twenty-fold growth from our Library’s beginning in 1920 to the passage of Measure 15-6.

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Re-Build Our Libraries. It’s Time.
Eternal vigilance is the price of an open Library

Keeping the Doors Open – Then

The history of our library would not be complete without mention of the financial crises.

At its beginning in 1919, the system was supported by a property tax levy. But by 1970, when the Jackson County Library System was reconstituted, it depended on the County General Fund (GF). The GF fluctuated yearly based on the amount of O&C monies received from the Federal Government. Although O&C Land money originally derived from the productivity of O&C forest lands, eventually it became a Federal revenue sharing plan—compensating Western States for the huge blocks of untakable Federal lands in these states.

The amounts received by Oregon were unpredictable and unreliable, making budgetary planning a nightmare and pitting all programs funded from the GF against one another. Since the General Fund is allocated by the County Commissioners, the fate of the library was and remains at their discretion.

To alleviate these conditions, short-term dedicated library levies were passed during the period from 1970 until the 1990’s. Newspaper clippings (below) show the on-going uncertainty that library supporters have experienced from 1970 to the present day.

The passage of Measure 5 in 1991 and Measure 50 in 1997 eliminated local levies and made establishment of independent permanent funding for the library difficult to pass. Nevertheless in the two recent attempts to do so, measures did achieve majorities in Talent and Ashland precincts and only narrowly failed in Rogue River, though they were not successful countywide.

Editorials

Choice not clear-cut on library operating levy

In 1998, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners removed the city library (Talent, Ashland, Rogue River and Medford) from the county library system by consolidating them in one county library system. This allowed the county librarians to provide the county library system with a better service.

The county librarians have raised the county library and high school library fees, which the county library system is currently paying.

In Talent, a library support committee has raised approximately $1,400 in 1998, for the library, and they are discussing the possibility of raising more money. A library bond issue loses by 269 votes.

Library branches raise funds to remain open

In Talent, the library support committee has raised approximately $1,400 in 1998, for the library, and they are discussing the possibility of raising more money. A library bond issue loses by 269 votes.

Tidings 6-17-1972

Keeping the Doors Open – Now

What can we learn from our 90-year history about how to keep our library open? Three key elements are apparent.

1) A successful library needs a local Advocate. The Talent Federated Women’s Club was our first advocate, establishing a provisional Library in Town Hall in 1919, paying the librarian’s salary for the first 13 years, and funding for library needs and emergencies for over eight decades. Other Talent Library boosters have included the Lions Club and Garden Club. Finally in 1973 the Friends of the Talent Library took up the challenge. This group of dedicated volunteers worked to guarantee that the town got desperately needed new library buildings in both 1975 and 2007.

2) A progressive and civic-minded City Council that realizes the immense value a library brings to its community. Our City Council provided locations in Town Hall for our early library. They provided building sites for our two library buildings. When our library reopened in 2007 with only 16 hours per week paid by the County, they courageously authorized funding for 20 additional hours per week, giving Talent the second best hours in the system.

3) A citizenry that uses, appreciates, and supports its library. In city surveys, our library has consistently ranked as the most used public service in town. Community support allowed the Friends to raise one third of a million dollars to increase the public spaces in the new library building by 1400 sq feet. Talent library users consistently check out more books than all but three other libraries in the 15-branch Jackson County Library System.

Our library with its ample spaces, responsive and knowledgeable staff, extensive services and many open hours is a magnet for the town, bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds in a wonderful synergy of expectation and fulfillment. It is a joy to use and a lure to anyone desirous of living in a community that cares about its people.
FOTL prepares for major Capital Campaign for new Library

With the passage of Bond Measure 15-6 in May 2000, Talent knew that we would be getting a remodeled or new library building.

To make sure that Talent got a facility that would serve its growing population and library use, the Friends of the Talent Library (FOTL) re-organized in 2003 as 501(c)(3) all-volunteer, non-profit corporation, a move that would allow the solicitation and raising of “serious” amounts of money to cover any unmet needs of the new building.

By carefully studying the other branch libraries that had already been built with the Bond monies, and by comparing what was proposed for Talent with our current collection and the City’s growth prospects, the Friends decided that what the new library building mainly needed was more public space for meetings, patrons, computers, books, and sitting.

After over 8000 hours spent by FOTL volunteers and with the generous support of our Community, the Capital Campaign raised one-third of a million dollars, expanding our new building by 1420 square feet.

Early support from Talent Urban Renewal and two private donors allowed the Friends to solicit the local Capenter Foundation and Gordon Elwood Foundation for matching grants.

A continued outpouring of local donations, large and small, demonstrated to the statewide Ford Family Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust that Talent was a town that truly valued both community and its Library – which resulted in our receiving very sizeable matching grants from these foundations.

A special thanks goes to the Laursen and Thirkell families for their exceptional generosity.

It takes Community to Build a great Library

To build a great Library, a big push forward depends upon the number of individuals who take the time to share their thoughts about the Library's future with fellow citizens.

It takes a Community of neighbors, friends, business owners, and patrons to share their ideas about the new Library.

In order for the Library to achieve its vision, it must have the support of the community.

A Community of Citizens must build a great Library.

The community has a responsibility to ensure that the Library is a vibrant, viable institution for all.

Each member of the community can make a difference in the success of the Library.

The Friends of the Talent Library would like to extend special thanks to the Laursen and Thirkell families.

It's important to remember that the Library is for everyone and that everyone has a role to play in its success.

What the Capital Campaign Did

The shaded boxes in the floor plan (right) approximate the additional space that the Friends’ successful Capital Campaign added to the Talent Branch Library – an additional 1420 square feet.

The event capacity of the Community Meeting Room was more than doubled.

The Study Room was increased from 2 to 6 person capacity.

The Teen Area doubled its book capacity and acquired table seating.

The Children’s Area picked up 300 sq. ft. for additional table and computer seating and more shelf space for books.

Periodicals and Large Print picked up table seating and more shelf space.

The Adult Area doubled its table and armchair seating.

Even the rest rooms are larger.

February 25, 2007 – Grand Opening

Huge numbers of library lovers turn out for a joyous celebration. A “book parade” passes by hand the last volumes from our old library to the new. Librarian Laurel Prchal hands books to the great-grandchildren and the grand-daughter of former Librarian Hilda Sommer. Readers, young & old, pass books down the line to our new library.

A giant symbolic key opens the new library. The standing-room only crowd fills the lobby and community room to listen to dedicatory speeches and the music of the Rogue Valley Peace Choir.

Then it’s time to enjoy the wonders of the new Library that our community has built.

What the future holds for our Community and its Library

Our 50 Year History is complete. What does it teach us? Certainly the growth of the town and the growth of the library have been integral to one another. That at critical junctures, an advocate comes forward to express the need for more and better library services.

And that our community and city government have put forth effort to achieve goals set for the Library. In summary, since early in its establishment as a city, Talent has wanted and supported a library that support continues to this day.

What Does the Future Hold? Here is a list of six community needs that have been identified that our libraries can and should fulfill – and some of the ways the Talent Library is meeting these needs.

First is Early Literacy. Our Talent Library has an on-going pre-school storytime program. And our Librarian has created a special storytime for the local Head Start program. We have experimented with innovative programs focused on helping parents teach their infants: Babies in the Library and Wordbuilders.

Second is Adult, Teen, and Family Literacy. Adult beginner’s computer classes will start in 2010 at the Talent Library. Self-taught foreign language instruction is now available via a program called MANDO on JCLS.org website. Our library continues to host class visits from Talent Elementary and Middle schools. And our Friends group provides an after-school storytime on Thursdays at 3:30pm.

Third is Lifelong Learning. The Friends of the Talent Library sponsors programs by authors discussing their books – and by other community members with a special area of expertise. Programs have included The History of Talent, The Way of the Wolf, How to Grow Orchids without a Greenhouse, and a Tour of Japan. Currently being planned with Science Works is an interactive display, Outreach in Space.

Fourth is Reading for Pleasure. Talent has Book Discussion Group that meets at 5:30pm on the third Wednesday of each month. In addition, in the Library Reading Room we have an interesting selection of books and leave, there is a Winter Reads program for adults readers. Part of reading for pleasure is the ability to browse the shelves; the Capital Campaign for our new library greatly expanded the shelf space in the Talent Library – and the Friends are working to expand the base of our library collection.

Fifth is the Library as a Community Commons. When the Friends won grants to increase the size of the Community Meeting Room and the Study Room in the library, they were aware of the importance of our Library as a place where people of all ages and backgrounds and interests have a chance to come together. To mention just some activities – these rooms have been used for AARP Tax Preparation, free Friday Night Movies, Tai Chi and Yoga classes, Games for Teens, a Clown Class for kids, Origami lessons, Music programs, and tutoring and test-taking.

Sixth is Free Public Access to the Internet and to Technology. The need to get access information and communicate through the Internet is becoming more important as having use of a telephone. Talent’s library staff is always helpful in assisting patrons with using the Internet computers. Talent’s computers are used for job hunting, preparing resumes, filing unemployment claims, researching and writing class papers – and for recreational use. In today’s economy many who visit the Library are in no position to own a computer, or to pay for Internet service at home. Additionally, the library provides access to private databases, such as Chilton’s Automotive Repair and various business and newspaper databases, that would be prohibitively expensive for individuals to subscribe to.