



# Northwest Trails

Newsletter of the Northwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association

Volume 38, No. 1

Winter 2023

## 2023 NW OCTA Annual Meeting Saturday, March 18, 2023

The Northwest Chapter will meet in person on March 18 at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

We are planning a board meeting in the morning and speakers in the afternoon. We are asking you to bring your own lunch and a dessert to share with others (if you like).

If any of you would like to make an afternoon presentation, please let me know. We need to let the members know what we have been doing these last few years and what we would like to do in the future.

We will have more details for you closer to the event. In the meantime, take a look at the website for the Interpretive Center at [historicoregoncity.org](http://historicoregoncity.org). It has a lot of good information about the facility and good instructions about finding the center.

If you are planning to attend please let me know so we can be sure of how many are interested in attending. My email is [sallieriehl@comcast.net](mailto:sallieriehl@comcast.net). I will be happy to answer any questions that you have.

—Sallie Riehl, Chapter President



**End of the Oregon Trail  
Interpretive Center**

**1726 Washington Street  
Oregon City**



## NW Chapter Directory

### President

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### Vice President

TBA

### Treasurer

Glenn Harrison

### Secretary

Jenny Miller

### Directors

Andy Anderson

Polly Jackson

Dave Welch

### Chapter Website

Sharon Brown

### Communications Chair

Marley Shurtleff

### Mapping Chair

Robert Baker

### Membership Chair

TBA

### Preservation Officer

TBA



## President's Message

Welcome to the New Year, and I am very happy to announce that we will have an in-person meeting for the chapter on Saturday, March 18. Please take a look at the first announcement here in the newsletter.

Rich Herman has been a great help in finding a venue for our meeting. He is meeting with the personnel of the facility today. We are planning a full meeting with a board meeting, lunch, and afternoon speakers. I hope to see many of you at that time.

Many thanks to Dave Welch for his work on the B2H plan with the BLM. He is working with one of the Idaho OCTA members to review the impact of the project on the trail.

I will be asking for members to step up and fill some of our vacant positions. COVID put a stop to most of our meetings in the past few years, but now it is time to start working again to preserve the trail.

I hope many of you have enjoyed the ZOOM meetings of the last two years and plan to join in on the meetings this year. I hope to have the March meeting on Zoom as well as in person.

Stay well, and I hope to see you in March.

Sallie K Riehl,  
Chapter President

## NW OCTA Finances October 1 – December 31, 2022

By Glenn Harrison, Treasurer

On October 1, 2022, NW OCTA had **\$19,855.46**.

Between October 1 and December 31, we received two \$250 donation checks from chapter members.

Three expense checks totaling \$188.46 were paid in September but not processed until October. We paid \$1,515 for the storage facility rent and insurance, but the check wasn't processed until November 25. On January 4, 2023, the Northwest Chapter received a check for \$1,080 from OCTA for chapter dues collected from June 1 through Nov. 30, 2022.

So, at the end of the first quarter on December 31, we had \$18,697.06. But with the dues check included, we have **\$19,777.06**.

# Northwest Chapter Zoom Meetings 2023

**February 11 at 1:00 p.m. PST** is our annual “Family Stories of the Oregon Trail” day. Sherrill Beck will present “The Clark Family in the Willamette Valley: Tragedy, Murder, and Mayhem.” Also, Mark von Damm will give an overview of the Jedediah Smith Society, and Bob Zybach will describe their upcoming Rendezvous along Smith’s route through southwestern Oregon, which is open to OCTA members.

**March 11 at 1:00 p.m. PST.** Chapter member Richard Hunt has been producing new video content for the OCTA YouTube Channel. Check out the channel with this link <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5CyC-R68Izhwvw1f57V-yQ> to see some great trail stories. At this meeting, Richard will give us insight about how this idea was born during a NW OCTA trail mapping outing with Robin Baker and other NW Chapter members.

The Northwest Chapter is planning an in-person chapter meeting in Oregon City, OR on **March 18**. Details are available in this newsletter and at the chapter website.

**April 8 at 1:00 p.m. PST.** The Zoom meeting will focus on the Blue Mountains. Robin Baker will describe plans for spring and summer explorations in that area.

The topics for the **May** and **June** Zoom meetings have not been set. Please consider making a presentation. Contact Dave Welch ([welchdj@comcast.net](mailto:welchdj@comcast.net)) for additional information.

Each meeting will also include a short business meeting and an update on tours and explorations.



## Announcements

Robin Baker will lead Oregon Trail explorations in the Blue Mountains again this spring. The dates are May 18-21 (Thursday through Sunday), 2023. More information will be provided as we get closer. Those interested should email Robin at [robinbaker1927@gmail.com](mailto:robinbaker1927@gmail.com).

An important survey will be sent soon. You will receive an email with a brief survey about chapter Zoom meetings from Dave Welch. Please respond to his survey. Dave Welch has been coordinating the presentations and would appreciate your feedback as the chapter moves forward.

# A Connection to Ezra Meeker and Oregon Trail History

By Roger Blair

Reprinted from *News from the Plains*, Volume XII, No. 1, January 1998

*Ezra Meeker became one of the best-known Oregon Trail emigrants, not just because of his first trip in 1852, but because of a return trip by covered wagon in 1906 at the age of 76 in an effort to create national interest in marking and preserving the trail. Much of the preserved legacy of the Oregon Trail can be attributed to his work.*

Most overland trail history can only be studied through books and other written sources. Only rarely can one find a more tangible link to important events or people. OCTA recently lost one such link with the passing of Merrill Mattes, who had met William Henry Jackson and accompanied him in identifying the location at which he sketched his famous painting of Chimney Rock.

On October 4, 1997, Northwest Chapter members met another of these tangible links to our historic past. Mrs. Effie Ritchey addressed a chapter outing in Walla Walla, Washington, telling about the day Ezra Meeker came to address her school.

Mrs. Ritchey began her talk with the words, “I remember the day; I remember it well.” This is a remarkable feat itself, considering she was just a few days shy of her 99th birthday. Effie attended fifth grade at Grove School in Milton, Oregon, where on April 14, 1910, her teacher announced that the students would participate in an exciting historic event.

“A man who had ‘come West’ fifty-eight years ago with a huge wagon train was going to visit us and tell us stories of that journey, and he would be in a covered wagon driving two oxen!” Meeker was visiting Milton-Freewater, Oregon, on one of his treks over the Oregon Trail, locating the fast disappearing route and raising funds for monuments. Milton-Freewater lies on the cutoff to the Whitman Mission.

Effie recalled the students were marched to Central School, just a few blocks from where Meeker was. “A covered wagon was standing at the edge of the road where Main [Street] and ‘The Road’ [Elizabeth Street] joined, the oxen were chewing their cuds, the man was digging a hole in the earth. We saw him put a long pipe in the hole, then pack the earth around it, clean off his spade and put it in the wagon. Next he climbed to the high seat, flicked his whip and the oxen began their slow pace our way.”

Upon reaching the school children, “The man gave a flick of his whip and turned the oxen in before us and climbed down. Our superintendent hurried to greet him and present the great Ezra Meeker! How we clapped and cheered!”

After telling the group tales of his life and of crossing the plains, he then told them he had just “placed a lead pipe in the earth where the ‘Old Road’ [Elizabeth] and Main turned a bit to the right to the ‘Stage House’ and Little Walla Walla River on the way to Whitman Mission and Walla Walla [Washington].... This pipe was on ‘Shield’s Place.’ This area was not being used for any purpose—just a good quantity of rocks and weeds.

“Each child had the privilege of selecting one medium-size rock—not a huge one!—placing them carefully about the pipe in a pyramid, then standing back respectfully until all had participated in the



*Effie Ritchey by the Meeker monument in October 1997.  
Photo by Roger Blair.*



ceremony. It had a very quiet sort of reverence....The next day Meeker retraced his trail to Main Street and began the steep ascent of the old road to the East and our nation's capital."

Over the years Milton-Freewater development overspread the "rocks and weeds" and the location of the lead pipe was lost. That is, lost to all but Effie's memory. Prior to 1989 she had pointed out where she believed the pipe was located. That year, "Dr. Michael Garton, 139 S. Main St., was having some landscaping cared for. A large excavator ran against a lead pipe. Investigations proved it was not a water pipe nor a boundary line. It was within a few feet of the site I had indicated some time before. This was the site of the memorial monument placed by Ezra Meeker 79 years before on April 14, 1910. I was so excited and pleased. I'd missed by just a few feet—a bit of a miracle after 79 years."

It may seem miraculous to her, but not to those who know this very active 99-year-old lady who still volunteers as a docent, leading tours at the Frazier Homestead Museum in Milton-Freewater. In September 1993 Mrs. Ritchey was the special guest at the dedication of a new granite monument on the exact site where Meeker had placed the original lead pipe marker. She composed the text for the monument, and at the ceremony she recounted the day Ezra Meeker came to Milton-Freewater, Oregon.

## The Rest of Effie's Story

The NWOCTA Chapter held a meeting in October 1997 in Walla Walla, Washington. A special guest who spoke to our group was Effie Ritchey, a 96-year-old lifetime resident of Milton-Freewater, Oregon. Effie told of the recent dedication of an Oregon Trail memorial placed in Milton-Freewater, replacing a metal pipe marker set by Ezra Meeker in 1910. Effie was one of the school children attending Meeker's dedicatory installation. I recounted Effie's story of attending the Meeker ceremony in a *News from the Plains* article that is reprinted above.

Recently, while researching an entirely unrelated story, I learned the background of how the new Meeker trail memorial stone came about. This is "the rest of the story," as the saying goes. The background story is described in a clipping of a *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* newspaper article entitled "Remember the Oregon Trail." The exact date of the article is unknown, but the year is confirmed as 1993.

The article describes a local event observed as a component of the 1993 statewide sesquicentennial celebration of the first wagons to arrive in the Northwest via the overland route. The focus of the celebration was dedication of a stone monument as a replacement for a lead pipe marker placed in 1910, but its location was lost over the decades.



*The Meeker Monument dedicated in 1993.*

*Photo by Roger Blair.*

Somewhat surprisingly, the monument was the culmination of a three-year research and fundraising effort by six seventh grade Milton-Freewater students. The efforts of students Jill Bishop, David Webb, Candis Marshall, Jody Dohrmann, Heather Doherty, and Casey Richwine were organized and guided by their former fourth grade teacher, Nancy Doherty.

The students' project not only entailed installing a new stone marker at the site of Meeker's lost pipe but also placing an informational Oregon Trail sign on the front lawn of the Milton-Freewater City Hall. The sign faces Oregon Route 11 and is clearly visible to scores of highway users daily.

The students' efforts culminated in a ninety-minute dedication ceremony. Honoring the students' efforts at the ceremony was state representative Ray Baum who applauded the "awaking of some modern-day pioneers." Another speaker was Jim Renner who recalled the efforts of seventy-six-year-old Ezra Meeker's attempt to preserve the dwindling nature of the Oregon Trail both in mileage and in the conscience of the American public.

Renner was a long-time NW OCTA member, former chapter president, member of the national board of directors, and recipient of a chapter Meritorious Achievement Award. Renner praised the students' efforts and emphasized that Meeker recruited young people to further his trail preservation efforts. It is Renner's involvement in the dedication that suggests a 1993 date of the article. He was heavily involved in promoting the Oregon Trail sesquicentennial in 1993.

As recounted in the earlier NFP article, Effie Ritchey was a young girl attending Milton's Grove School when Meeker came through Milton-Freewater in 1910. Effie told of Meeker placing a pipe to mark the location of the trail. He encouraged each child present to add a stone around the base. Meeker then led them in a pledge of allegiance to the flag and led them in singing "*My Country 'Tis of Thee.*"

The new stone monument replaced the pipe installed by Meeker April 14, 1910, whose location was lost for decades. The original location of the pipe was pointed out by Effie Ritchey and today the monument is located in the front lawn of a chiropractor's office.

Despite the worthy intentions of the students, however, recent research into the route from the Blue Mountains to Whitman Mission reveals the trail did not actually go through Milton-Freewater. Meeker perhaps might have known this. He did confess to some confusion regarding the actual location of the route. He was a promoter and these marking events brought attention to the Oregon Trail. A trail marker within a population center, even if not precisely on the trail, would generate on-going interest. Being on the main travel route between Pendleton and Walla Walla, the marker would be seen by large numbers of travelers. As for the town, Milton and Freewater could perhaps generate business by claiming the famed Oregon Trail passed through their towns.

The inaccurate location of the marker does not detract from the fact that this effort was accomplished by school children. I think Meeker would have been elated by the efforts of these admirable young students in creating, installing, and dedicating a new Oregon Trail monument more than eighty years after his visit, whether the monument is precisely on the trail or not.

Effie Ritchey died in 2006 at the age of 107. And that is the rest of Effie's story.



*Ezra Meeker, seated in the covered wagon, and school children in Milton, Oregon, on April 14, 1910. Milton Eagle photograph.*

# In Memoriam

## **Burr Edwin Fancher (aka Doc Fancher)** **January 16, 1927 – October 29, 2022**

Burr Edwin Fancher (aka Doc Fancher), 95, of Albany, OR, passed away peacefully on October 29, 2022. He was born in Loy, AR to Grover and Tilda Fancher and grew up on his family's farm.

Burr was a life-long learner and fervent believer in both education and life experience. His educational pursuits spanned graduating from a tiny high school in Kingston, AR in the class of six, to a Ph.D. at Oregon State University. His life and work experience were just as varied, ranging from all manner of labor on farms and ranches in at least a half dozen states to education expert with an international consulting practice. Along the way, he enlisted in the army in spring 1945 and served in both Pacific and European Theaters.

On November 3, 1949, Burr married Melva Jean Beckford, and they had four children: Terrie, Mike, Connie, and Scott (deceased). They spent their early years in Arkansas near two large extended families. Burr's family lived in a remote rural area in Madison County, and Melva's family lived 50 miles away in the unique Italian community of Tonitown. In 1958 Burr and his young family left Arkansas and moved to the Willamette Valley.

Burr loved hunting, fishing, being outdoors with his family and pet donkeys, and gardening. He always had a very curious nature and loved travelling and seeing what was over the next hill. In addition to hiking and hunting every corner of Oregon's outback and wilderness areas, he was able to visit nearly every state, dozens of countries, and every continent except Antarctica. Burr was an avid student of western history and was the organizer and leader of the Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, which obtained National Monument designation for the Southern Utah site of the 1857 massacre of the Fancher Wagon Train.

Burr had a great sense of irony and folksy humor with a delivery style that fell somewhere between Will Rogers and Mark Twain. He loved visiting with family and friends and telling, hearing, and writing stories and folklore from his life experiences. Besides being a very tall man physically, Burr was a larger-than-life spirit and a person of uncommon decency. He was truly a gentle giant and only became gentler as he aged. Over the course of his long life, he left a lasting imprint on his large family and many, many friends, colleagues, and students.

On April 29, 1978, Burr married Ada Packard Lofts, his professional and life partner. They settled into their Albany home for 45 years where they hosted countless gatherings of friends and family. Burr and Ada worked, lived, and travelled extensively together and built a beautiful and bountiful garden from which they harvested, canned, froze, and dried prolific amounts of fruits and vegetables. Burr also became an accomplished maker of fruit wines and lemon zest, which he shared generously with family and friends. Ada's children Karen, Scott (deceased), David, and Cynthia and their children spent a lot of time with Burr and were a big part of his life.

Burr is predeceased by Ada, his youngest son, Scott, his first wife Melva, and Ada's son Scott. Burr is survived by his children Terrie McQuistan, Mike Fancher, and Connie Wahl; Ada's children Karen Jarboe, David Lofts, and Cynthia Lofts; a host of grandchildren and great grandchildren; and his beloved donkeys, Fritz and Hans. The burial service for Burr was held on Wednesday, November 9, at 12:30 p.m. at the Willamette National Cemetery in Portland. In lieu of sending flowers, the family requests that people make donations to their favorite charity in support of cancer research or treatment.

**GLENN HARRISON SHARES A MEMORY OF BURR:** In 1961-62 he was an intern teacher at Central Linn High School where I was in my first year of teaching. He went on to earn a doctorate and was very involved in agriculture in many countries.

## *Northwest Trails*

### **Editor**

Susan Badger Doyle  
524 NW 3rd St  
Pendleton, OR 97801  
541-969-7660  
*sdoyle@oregontrail.net*

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MASTHEAD: Replica of *The Old Oregon Trail* bronze relief sculpture created in 1924 by Avard Fairbanks for Oregon Trail monuments.



## **41st Annual Convention**

*"We Do Old in a  
New Way"*

**July 25-29, 2023**

**Gering, Nebraska**

***NW Trails Editor***  
**524 NW 3rd St.**  
**Pendleton, OR 97801**