DEAR SOHS MEMBER:

Greetings from the staff and volunteers of the Southern Oregon Historical Society! When this special edition of Southern Oregon Heritage Today reaches your hands, we will be poised to hold a special All-American celebration at our historic Hanley Farm. Please join us for this second of four “First Weekends” at Hanley Farm.

On Saturday and Sunday, July 3-4, the farm will open and feature an exact replica of the Wright Brothers’ flying machine that first rose into the air at the North Carolina coast community of Kitty Hawk. “Orville Wright” actor Jim Spence will be there to tell us all about this first manned powered flight, which we’ve been celebrating for the past few months with our Celebrating Flight: A History of Aviation in Southern Oregon exhibit at the History Center in Medford. Fourth of July weekend offers families throughout the region and visitors alike an opportunity to celebrate flight, our national heritage and the pristine pleasures of life at a Century Farm just a few miles west of Medford. It should be a great weekend.

We are so pleased to be able to reopen Hanley Farm, and the Beekman House Living History program, to the public. We’ve done so with the support of individual donors and volunteers, corporate and community assistance. We thank our supporters.

Your Historical Society is building new bridges, forging new partnerships, making new friends and seeking new and broader sources of support. Can you help? If there are ways you think you might assist the Historical Society in fulfilling our ongoing mission of protecting and promoting our region’s heritage, please feel free to see, call or email me.

We forge ahead with plans to sell our downtown Medford headquarters. There was no news to report at press time regarding our proposal to turn the downtown Medford Carnegie building into a cultural center, but that should change soon.

We also have big plans for a major new Peter Britt exhibit to open later this year at the Jacksonville Museum, and other plans we will be announcing soon. Stay posted.

In the meantime, have a great summer. Come see us! We are your Historical Society.

[Signature]

John Enders
Executive Director

ON THE COVER

Painting by Peter Britt shows Jacksonville in 1856. Note the front cover shows the right half of the painting, while the back cover shows the left side with the original Jackson County Courthouse before it burned.

SOHS #B330 (DETAIL)
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Crater Lake: August 1874 and 2003

Above, Crater Lake today as seen through the lens of contemporary Jacksonville black-and-white photographer Ron Moore. Left, Crater Lake as seen through the lens for the first time in 1874 by pioneer photographer Peter Britt.
Nearly fifty years ago, the Southern Oregon Historical Society reached this conclusion after it was offered the bulk of Peter Britt’s estate. But the estate came with strings attached. If the Society were to accept Britt’s estate it was mandated to operate Peter Britt’s house as a museum. This was in the 1950s when SOHS was a fairly young organization in a quiet town of about 1,200 people. Jacksonville’s historic renaissance and the onslaught of tourists that followed was still a decade or so away.

The fate of Peter Britt’s estate first became a concern when his daughter Amalia passed away in October 1955. She was Peter Britt’s last surviving descendant. Her will stipulated that the family’s land, house, its contents and a trust account go to SOHS if it agreed to operate the house as a museum. For many years Amalia and her brother Emil offered tours of their home, displaying their famous father’s cameras and photographs.

Amalia must have sensed that the newly formed SOHS might not be able to take on the added responsibility of operating a new museum at the Britt home. (SOHS already operated the Jacksonville Courthouse museum). A proviso in her will stipulated that if SOHS were unable to operate the house as a museum, the trust fund would be added to the $50,000 scholarship fund her will created for Jacksonville High School graduates.

After detailing many other small gifts, Britt’s will stipulated that what remained of the estate go to the “State Board of Higher Education of the State of Oregon” to support Southern Oregon College of Education (now Southern Oregon University). Because SOHS was unable to accept the donation, ownership of the estate went to the state.

Fortunately, the state board of education recognized that the real worth of the Britt estate was its historic, not monetary, value. It had the foresight to loan SOHS whatever it deemed appropriate for its museum. Curator of Collections Mary Hanley selected hundreds of objects ranging from Peter Britt’s buggy to everyday household items. Pictured are a few seldom-seen items from the “Britt Collection.” The contents of Britt’s photo studio make up the largest and best known part of the collection.

SOHS has been caring for, storing, displaying and conserving artifacts from this collection since 1956. The loan agreement with the board of education stipulated that SOHS could keep these items as long as it carries out the “intent of the will of Amalia Britt in maintaining, using and displaying the items it received by it from the estate.”

What was not selected by SOHS was sold at auction by the board of education. In 1957 a fire swept through Britt’s home. Luckily, most of its contents were safe with SOHS. The future of the severely damaged house then became the subject of much debate, until 1960 when another fire made the Britt home uninhabitable.

Jacksonville and all of Southern Oregon are indeed fortunate this collection did not suffer the same fate as the house. Nearly fifty years after the death of Amalia Britt, the Britt Collection remains intact and accessible to the public.

Steve Wyatt is the curator of collections of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.
NUESTRA GENTE: OUR PEOPLE

SOHS's newest exhibit includes a travelling component created by the Oregon Historical Society's Folklife Program. It highlights many facets of the history and culture of Mexicans in Oregon over the past four centuries. The exhibit includes samples of Mexican art, such as mosaics, weaving, and beadwork, and illustrates how Mexicans in Oregon contributed to early invention and agriculture.

The Mexican presence in Oregon dates to the 1600s with the early Spanish explorers, who introduced mule pack trains and trained Oregon's early buckaroos. In 1821, the northern limit of Mexico's claim was established at the 42nd parallel, the present Oregon/California border. In the past century, Mexican workers helped alleviate the labor shortages brought on by World Wars I and II. Now, Latinos compose more than eight percent of the state's population, with people of Mexican heritage the largest segment.

The Society has supplemented the Oregon Historical Society's exhibit with traditional costumes and artwork from the local community. "Nuestra Gente" will be on display through August.

CELEBRATING FLIGHT: A HISTORY OF AVIATION IN SOUTHERN OREGON

The Society's major exhibit, "Celebrating Flight" opened in December to coincide with nationwide centennial celebrations of the Wright Brothers' first powered flight at Kitty Hawk. See airplanes and models, historic photographs and vintage film clips, a real flight-simulation trainer, oral histories of local aviation pioneers, and much more. Admission by donation; free to members.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS: THE ART AND LIFE OF DORLAND ROBINSON

Artist Dorland Robinson (1891-1917), a Jacksonville prodigy, produced an exceptional body of work. The diversity of media she worked in, from charcoal and pastel to oil and watercolor, is presented in this largest-ever exhibit of her work, which continues in the History Center mezzanine.

CRATER LAKE: PICTURE PERFECT

Can the majesty of Crater Lake be captured on film? In honor of park's 2003 centennial, the Jacksonville Museum presents an exhibit of attempts to capture the lake's essence. Peter Britt's 1874 photo of Crater Lake, the first recorded, marks the beginning of this exhibit. Other sections include early colorized photos, picture postcards, and park improvements. Of special interest is the most controversial Crater Lake image, believed by many to document a visit by President Theodore Roosevelt. See how the Crater Lake name and image have been used to sell products ranging from butter to a hospital.

MINER, BAKER, FURNITURE MAKER

Explore the development of the Rogue Valley and the impact of the industrial revolution on the settlement of Oregon.

Children's Museum

Everyone enjoys exploring home and work settings from the 1850s to the 1930s through "hands-on-history." Come see the Society's new exhibit, "The Celestials of Golden Mountain," focusing on the history of the Chinese in Southern Oregon.
New Exhibit!

**Peter Britt: The Man Beyond the Camera**

Many members, patrons and friends of the Society remember the Peter Britt exhibits we've had at the Jacksonville Museum. Photos, paintings, and furnishings from Britt’s studio and his home’s parlor all served to delight visitors to the museum. In recent years, however, the Society’s only Britt Exhibit was at the History Center in downtown Medford, part of a larger interpretation of the history of photography in Southern Oregon. SOHS is bringing Peter Britt back to Jacksonville!

Later this year, the Society will open a new Peter Britt Exhibit on the first floor of the Jacksonville Museum where the “Politics of Culture: Collecting the Southwest” exhibit was housed. The new Britt exhibit will feature the best of the pioneer photographer’s work, his cameras, glass plates and other tools-of-the-trade, his parlor and photo studio, and newly designed displays that show just how amazing the life and work of this “Renaissance man” really were. The exhibit will portray Britt as a genius well before his time in the fields of not just photography, but horticulture, viticulture, meteorology and others.

In the future, a new Native American exhibit will be developed to include more of the Native artifacts from this region that are part of the Society’s permanent collection. History Matters! and the Society’s quarterly Southern Oregon Heritage Today magazine will keep members and friends of the Society updated on progress toward this exciting new exhibit.

Much work goes into the construction, and deconstruction of exhibits. Here SOHS employees and volunteers remove false ceiling panels in the Jacksonville Museum in preparation for the Society’s major new Peter Britt exhibit, to open in the fall or winter.
Once described as "a most cultured and interesting gentleman, always courteous and entertaining," Peter Britt embodied a unique blend of rugged individualism and Old World graciousness. As a pioneer photographer he counts as a folk hero, partly for his rich photographic legacy, and partly for his strength of character. Nearly a century after his death, Britt is remembered as a man of honor, kindness, industry, and intellect. In the East, this ambitious Swiss immigrant learned the practical trade of photography, then headed for the goldfields of Jacksonville, Oregon where he tried his hand at prospecting and mule packing. As the town's first and most distinguished photographer, Britt captured with his camera the spirit of the muddy mining camp and documented its growth into a commercial center. From 1852 to 1900, he photographed the people, activities, and landscapes of his adopted Southern Oregon home. Once established, Britt married and raised a family. He pursued a range of additional interests including horticulture, beekeeping, and meteorology. He invested wisely and acquired large tracts of land where he managed ranches, orchards, and vineyards. When Britt died at 86 in 1905, he had endeared himself to his community as a man of accomplishment, wealth, and integrity.

Britt trained as an artist in his native Switzerland, where he traveled from hamlet to town as a portrait painter. In his home village of Obstalden, he courted Amalia Grob, the schoolmaster's daughter. The match, apparently, was disapproved by the young woman's father, so in 1845 the 26-year-old bachelor immigrated to America with other family members and neighbors, leaving behind his beloved. Setting in the Swiss community in Highland, Illinois, Britt continued his trade as an itinerant artist but faced competition from the newly invented daguerreian photograph. Setting his sights on the future, Britt embraced this new technology and quickly learned the chemistry and science of the photographic process from an eminent St. Louis daguerreian, J.H. Fitzgibbon.

In Fitzgibbon, Britt found a mentor who not only showed him how to operate a camera, but also taught him to achieve the best images through skilled workmanship and the use of top-quality equipment. With these first steps, Britt set a life-long pattern of continually seeking the latest technical and scientific information to help master his varied pursuits.

The town of Highland, where Britt worked as a photographer for about five years, was situated on a highly traveled westbound route. There Britt undoubtedly heard enticing stories of the western frontier. "I have always loved nature and when I heard of the beauty of Oregon I resolved to go West," Britt reminisced to journalist Fred Lockley years later. "I believed I could make a good living in the daguerreotype business in the Oregon Country, so in the spring of 1852, I loaded my equipment in a covered wagon and started West." 

**BRITT ARRIVES IN OREGON**

It was in early November of that year when 33-year-old Britt arrived in Jacksonville, then known as "Table Rock City." According to local lore, he had $5 in his pocket. He selected a site on a hill with a magnificent view where he built a small log cabin. Presumably, he began taking photographs immediately, though the oldest known surviving image of Jacksonville wasn't taken until 1854. Like almost everyone else, Britt was stricken with gold fever and took his turn in the "diggings," yet soon recognized that mule skinning was more of a sure thing, and potentially profitable. Britt purchased a string of pack mules and for several years made the rigorous ten-day trek hauling foodstuff and mining tools from the California seaport of Crescent City. By 1856, Britt had made a sizeable grubstake and gave up that arduous occupation. He bought a new state-of-the-art camera in San Francisco and turned his energy back to his photographic trade.
Gold had been discovered in Jacksonville just nine months before Britt arrived. It was a time when the population of the small mining camp, not much more than a scattering of tents and crudely constructed shacks, was beginning to swell. The promise of adventure and economic good fortune drew an assortment of people from many parts of the world, including the American states, Canada, the British Isles, Europe, Mexico, the Hawaiian Islands, and China. Within a few years immigrants from Austria, Germany, Prussia, and Switzerland made up a large enough German-speaking minority that Britt's guttural accent and foreign ways would not have been an oddity.10

Within this Germanic group, Britt formed life-long friendships and associations. Kaspar Kubli and Frederick Ruch hailed from Glarus Canton, the same region of Switzerland where Britt had lived, and they were known to the Britt family there. It was Kubli, Bavarian-born Viet Schutz and two others named Wolters and Hesse that Britt traveled with during his mule-packing days, and it is probable that Britt, Schutz and Kubli also held a joint mining claim known as "Dutch [a corruption of Deutsch] Gulch."11

Later, Schutz built an impressively large brewery at the foot of Britt's estate and Britt made numerous notations in his diary referring to money exchanges or the receipt of beer from "Viet."12 It was at Kubli's home in the Applegate that Britt chose to be married, and after Frederick Ruch and his wife Anna's tragic deaths, Kubli assumed guardianship of their girls and Britt did the same for the boys.13

The German-speaking citizens of Jacksonville and the surrounding area had a decided influence over the cultural and social development of the emerging frontier community. They engaged themselves in productive occupations, involved themselves in civic groups and government, and integrated a number of their institutions and customs into the mainstream society of their non-Germanic neighbors. Through Harmonie, a musical association, they sponsored the development of several musical groups, including a silver cornet band and a singing club. The Turnverein or "Turners" promoted gymnastics and daily exercise.14 In 1863, the Oregon Sentinel reported, "The Turn Vereins has become a thriving, permanent institution of our town."15

The German-Swiss citizens of Jacksonville also created institutions that were, by nature of their common language, more exclusive to their native heritage. They established a German-speaking chapter of the Independent Order of Redmen, known as the Stamm 149, which was separate from the English-speaking Improved Order of Redmen Pocahontas Tribe No. 1.16 Britt's name appears among the records of the Stamm, though not as often as some of his contemporaries.17 He may have taken a more active role in the Eintracht, a mutual-aid association that assisted new immigrants and also sponsored social events for the German-Swiss community such as picnics, field trips, and dinners. Correspondence indicates that Britt frequently provided information or assistance to other Swiss countrymen coming to Southern Oregon.18

Although Britt gained U.S. citizenship before coming to Oregon,19 and he must have mastered the English language to some degree, he continued to read and write in German throughout his life. While adopting many American methods and values, he maintained a strong connection to the "Old Country,"20 keeping ties to his homeland and the Swiss colony in Highland, Illinois through newspaper subscriptions and letters.

Botanical specimens like this blooming cactus made intriguing subjects for Britt's dramatic still-life images.

SOHS #10315
A FAMILY IS BORN

It was through such correspondence that he learned his former sweetheart, Amalia, had become a widow after immigrating to New Glarus, Wisconsin with her husband and young son. Britt sent some money and a choice. She could return to her people in Switzerland, or join him in Jacksonville. A brief entry in Britt’s diary tells the story, “May 11, 1861 Amalia arrived.” Three months later on their wedding day Britt wrote, “One wreath, one song, a blooming wife has shown you the way to happiness.”

Amalia and Peter had ten years together before she died in 1871. During that time Britt took Amalia’s seven-year-old son Jacob as his own. The couple had three more children, Emil, born in 1862, Arnold, who died in infancy in 1864, and Mollie, born in 1865. After Amalia’s death, Britt raised the children alone. The family was close-knit and none of the children married. As adults, Mollie took over the household management, Jacob tended much of his father’s agricultural affairs, and Emil joined his father in the photography business.

Prior to his marriage, Britt had converted his log cabin into a storage shed and built a simple but larger structure that served as house and studio. It started as a plain, one-story building similar to other early Jacksonville houses. Britt’s house differed with the innovation of a north-facing skylight that illuminated his studio. In the late 1850s, he added decorative “gingerbread” trim, introducing the fashionably new “cottage gothic” architectural style to the still primitive frontier setting.

This early house was too small for Britt’s expanding family, so in 1862 he enlarged the floor plan, built a second story and moved his studio to the top floor.

Progress on the house can be traced through Britt’s diary entries from that year. On November 21, he made the first picture in the new house and November 23, eight months and one day after Emil’s birth, the new family of four

During a photograph outing, Britt documented nationally renowned artist James Everett Stewart as he paints. Emil Britt leans against a tree while an unidentified friend looks on.

Below, promising young artist Dorland Robinson posed with three other girls around the lily pond in Britt’s elaborate garden. Like Britt, Dorland’s maternal grandfather, “Gunsmith Miller,” was part of Jacksonville’s early German-speaking community and the Britts, Millers, and Robinsons were close family friends.
moved into the house. Compared to other houses built in Jacksonville at that time, the structure was impressive. Situated on a hill overlooking the town, surrounded by unique landscaping, the Britt home became the “showpiece” of the Rogue Valley. Years later, in 1883, another two-story wing was added. By then, Britt’s home boasted spacious living quarters, a wine cellar, a solarium and two sky-lit studios on the second floor.\[24\]

**BRITT’S PHOTOGRAPHY MATURER**

While Amalia tended their small children, Britt expanded his photography business and made the technical transition from the outdated single-image plate process of the daguerreotype, ambrotype and tintype to the progressive–multiple image paper prints made from glass-plate negatives.\[25\] A wide assortment of Jacksonville residents and travelers passing through found their way to Britt’s studio. Little wonder everyone knew Britt. At one time or another, just about everyone crossed his threshold to have his or her picture taken. With his intuitive artist’s eye, Britt had a knack for posing his subjects in a relaxed manner. He used props that emphasized the sitter’s personal interests. The child posed with a toy, the musician with an instrument, the miner with a pick. Britt’s work was favorably compared to the famous Civil War photographer Mathew Brady. While doing business on the East Coast, Jacksonville resident Benjamin Dowell wrote to William Steel, who successfully lobbied to designate Crater Lake a national park, used Britt’s photographs to build his case, writing to the photographer: “During the past summer I enjoyed a trip to Crater Lake and since my return have started a movement to have the surrounding country withdrawn from the market and made a national park. ...When talking with Governor Thompson I expressed a desire to obtain photographs in duplicate of the lake and surroundings and stated that I could find none. He gave me your name and address and advised me to write to you at once.”\[26\]

Britt also photographed away from the studio, taking panoramic views of Jacksonville, documenting bridges and roads, shops and farms of nearby communities. He traveled to the Pacific coast, Eastern Oregon and Northern California. Britt sought the beauty and solitude of the natural landscape, often taking members of his family on photographic outings. In 1874, he successfully captured the first-ever images of Crater Lake.\[27\] The Crater Lake photographs became famous. National magazines published them and they were widely distributed as stereoscope views.

Passionate about his garden, Britt experimented with many semi-tropical botanical varieties including his renowned Abyssinian Banana tree. Among the surviving specimens planted by Britt is a giant sequoia redwood, planted in 1862 to mark the birth of his son, Emil.
Britt was acquainted with knowledgeable horticulturalists throughout the country and stayed well informed on the latest cultivation methods. In his orchards he used smudging techniques to protect his trees from frost and raised bees to improve pollination. Not one to miss an entrepreneurial opportunity, Britt marketed the honey from his bees as a sideline.

Notations in his diary indicate Britt planted many grapes in 1861. By the 1870s he was marketing wine under his Valley View Vineyard label. Because of his knowledge and experience, agriculturists frequently sought his advice as they established their own commercial fruit crops.

It is fitting that Britt, so keenly interested in plant life, would pay close attention to climate and weather conditions. He was already in the habit of recording weather observations in his personal diary when, after an official weather service was established within the Army Signal Corps in 1870, Britt agreed to be a volunteer civilian observer. The corps provided him with sophisticated instruments that were kept in a regulation weather shelter near the house. Britt made regular weather reports to the service until turning the duty over to Emil in 1891.

Photography, horticulture, and meteorology weren’t Britt’s only pursuits. He made personal loans and invested in real estate. He had a number of rental properties and ranches that were run by tenant farmers or hired hands. Britt was more willing to do business with the Chinese in Jacksonville than were many residents. He had a number of Chinese tenants and made loans to Chinese miners. In the late 1850s, he allowed a group of Chinese to mine gold on his property for a percentage of the profits.

Art and music also had a place in the Britt household. Peter Britt continued to paint Southern Oregon landscapes for his own pleasure and shared a mutual interest with the nationally renowned artist James Everett Stewart. The two traveled together on at least one occasion with camera and paints in the Cascade Mountains. A letter from Stewart to Britt indicates Stewart also used Britt’s photographs as subjects for his paintings.

Little is known about Britt’s musical abilities, but he did encourage the musical talents of his children. His sons spent summer evenings at a “singing school” when they were boys, and Mollie played the beautifully carved Steinway piano that her father bought for her when she was twelve. Musical instruments, phonograph records, and figurines of classical composers were among the Britt household possessions.

Britt’s children Mollie and Emil continued to live in the ornate Victorian house after Britt’s death in 1905. Jacob died earlier, in 1896. They kept their father’s studio as a museum—a tribute to an extraordinary photographer during extraordinary times. In the 1940s, Britt’s fame came to the attention of Universal Studios and a short subject film, “Picture Pioneer,” was made that featured Britt’s studio and camera equipment.

When Peter Britt died, the community where he had lived for 53 years felt the loss deeply. He was eulogized with the following words: “He was a gentleman of perfect honor, and perfect kindness of heart... he lives in the noble deeds of a well-spent life; in the forces which his intellect set in motion while here... His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that Nature might stand up and say: ‘This is a man!’”

Dawna Curler is a programs associate and volunteer coordinator for the Southern Oregon Historical Society.
ENDNOTES
5. Fred Lockley, “Peter Britt: Photographer,” Oregon Journal, 5 March 1939. In his article, Lockley quotes from a personal interview he conducted with Peter Britt some time before Britt's death.
7. The earliest known image of Jacksonville in the Southern Oregon Historical Society collection, SOHS #727, shows the Methodist Episcopal Church without its steeple. This structure was under construction in 1854.
9. Ibid., p. 52.
10. The 1860 U.S. Census indicates there were over 200 German-speaking immigrants in Jackson County at that time. Twelve on the list, including Peter Britt, were from Switzerland. United States Census of Jackson County, Oregon 1860.
12. Handwritten translations of Peter Britt’s diaries 1859-1890, SOHS MS 170, Box 1.
13. Although Britt assumed legal guardianship of the Ruch boys, they apparently did not live with Britt. Jackson County Wills, Probates, Guardianships, Estate Files, #1048 Ruch, Minors Guardianship, Kasper Ruch Oblinarty, Jacksonville Post, 13 June 1930; United States Census of Jackson County, Oregon 1880.
17. SOHS MS 293; and SOHS Acc. 1994.78.3, Independent Order of Redmen, Stannum 148 records.
20. Surviving Britt diaries from 1859 to 1905, the year of Britt's death, are written almost entirely in German and much correspondence in this collection to Peter Britt from Swiss relatives and associates are written in German. One letter written 6 October 1883 from Emil Britt to his father Peter is written in German, although it does not appear to be from Emil's own hand. SOHS MS 170.
22. Ibid., p. 32.
23. Two photographs, SOHS #11757 and SOHS #8249, show this first house before and after the addition of gingerbread trim; Peter Britt diary, 1859, SOHS MS 170.
24. Miller, op. cit., pp. 70, 84.
27. Peter Britt diary, 13 August 1874, SOHS MS 170.
28. Letter from W.G. Steel, 9 October, 1885, SOHS MS 170, Box 1.
29. Letter from F.M. Hexamer, editor of American Agriculturist, to Peter Britt, 18 January 1890, SOHS MS 170, Box 1.
30. Ibid., pp. 76-83.
31. Peter Britt diaries, 1861, SOHS MS 170.
32. Miller, op. cit., pp. 76-79.
33. Ibid., pp. 81-82.
34. Ibid., pp. 89-91, 94.
35. Letter from J.E. Stewart to Peter Britt, 20 March 1883, SOHS MS 170, Box 1.
36. Miller, op. cit., p. 43.

FIRE AT THE BRITT HOME

By Carol Harbison-Samuelson

On Monday night, January 27, 1941, Mollie and Emil Britt discovered fire issuing from the roof of their home. They watched as firemen cut a hole in the roof in an attempt to extinguish the flames burning near the chimney. Firefighters were successful in saving the residence as well as the Britts' priceless belongings. This was the first of a series of fires that would eventually consume the home built by their father, pioneer photographer Peter Britt.

In April 1957, a flu fire sparked a blaze that damaged about fifty percent of the historic Britt home. When the alarm was sounded, most of the roof was engulfed in flames. The upper story, including Peter Britt's photographic studio, was destroyed. Water and smoke damage was extensive on the lower floor. Jacksonville's Volunteer Fire Department, with the assistance of firefighters from Central Point and Medford, fought the fire for several hours before bringing it under control. High winds fanned the flames and firemen had difficulty getting hoses through the dense shrubbery and hedges. Coincidentally, Jacksonville’s Volunteer Fire Department had been conducting a business meeting in the fire hall at the time the alarm was received. If the firemen had not responded so quickly the building would have been a total loss. One volunteer fireman was seriously injured when he lost his footing on the slippery roof and fell through a second story skylight. Fortunately, under terms of Peter Britt's will, the Southern Oregon Historical Society had removed Britt's photographic equipment and many valuable antiques including the parlor furniture and the parlor carpet.

Disaster struck again, however, on Wednesday, March 16, 1960, when another fire swept through the Britt home. The blaze torched the first floor and roof of the residence. A faulty fuse box was believed to have caused the fire that finally ruined the Peter Britt home.

Carol Harbison-Samuelson is the Society's library manager and photo archivist.
Forty-two years ago,

conductor John Trudeau and several friends were visiting Southern Oregon and stumbled upon the former hillside estate of Jacksonville pioneer Peter Britt. Being musicians, they immediately noticed an amazing resonance to the hillside's acoustics. Combined with the gorgeous view of the valley in the distance, they decided the hillside would be the perfect site for concerts.

In the summer of 1963, volunteers erected a makeshift stage of plywood and strung tin-can lights above. A small chamber orchestra was assembled and the Northwest's first summer outdoor music festival was born. Britt offered classical music exclusively until the present pavilion was constructed in 1978. The new facility enabled expansion to the current multi-disciplinary format. Bench seats were added in 1987 and the handicapped access and restrooms were built in 1993. With a maximum capacity of 2,200, Britt is financially able to afford world-class artists while maintaining an intimate atmosphere. The Britt Park is publicly owned by Jackson County and maintained by the county parks department. The Britt Festivals Association is a non-profit performing arts organization which utilizes the Britt Park under a long-term lease with Jackson County.

Jacksonville artist Eugene Bennett captured the grand opening of the Britt Festivals in this 1963 oil painting. The same painting helped to celebrate the Festivals' 30th anniversary in a 1992 collectors poster.

Courtesy of Eugene Bennett
Societies celebrate vineyard harvests and grape crushings with festivals around the globe: Vino, vin, wine, nectar of the gods.

Today, Southern Oregon boasts and toasts its own historic vineyard in the bucolic Applegate Valley, its wine internationally acclaimed. In 1971 near Ruch, Ann and Frank Wisnovsky planted what is now one of Southern Oregon's oldest operating vineyards "as a cottage industry of sorts," recalls family friend Terri Gieg, manager of the winery's Anna Maria Tasting Room in Jacksonville. "They were a couple with four children trying to establish a cottage industry without the initial cost of high-tech. It was a family undertaking. Frank raised the old barn that was on the property, put blocks under it, and it became the winery. Very pastoral and rustic."

A civil engineer, Frank Wisnovsky came west with his family as superintendent for construction of Oregon's Astoria Bridge across the Columbia River as well as for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system in San Francisco. But the couple's dream was to have a farm, which led them to purchase a seventy-six-acre ranch from Mr. and Mrs. Edgar M. Bush on Upper Applegate Road.

The vineyard's winery debuted in 1976 with the release of Valley View's 1976 cabernet sauvignon. The much-expanded list of wines offered today by Valley View also includes chardonnay, merlot, fume blanc, pinot gris, and syrah.

The Wisnovskys selected the name for their vineyard from another, much earlier vineyard in Jacksonville that was planted in 1854 by pioneer photographer Peter Britt, one of Jacksonville's most famous residents. A Jacksonville newspaper reported in 1866:

"Mr. Britt has successfully demonstrated the problem that a first quality of wine can be manufactured here and if we may be allowed to prophesy, this will be no unimportant branch of agricultural industry in our valley ere long."

Britt's Jacksonville vineyard prospered, and he found additional markets for his grapes outside the valley. Early accounts point out that Britt was able to sell all the wine he produced, which may have led to the government's acceptance of its economic benefit to the region. In its annual report for 1890, the Oregon State Board of Agriculture noted that "Jackson County is specially adapted to the raising of grapes." The Medford Mail Tribune of June 3, 1983, reported that Britt's winery "was what appears to be Oregon's first commercial winery" and became one of the largest on the West Coast.

Early vineyards also flourished in Ashland, Central Point, and in various locations in Josephine County. However, Britt's vineyard ceased production with his death in 1905 and fell into ruin. Prohibition would follow a few years later. One hundred forty-five years after its namesake was planted, the second Valley View Vineyard produces award-winning wines today. "One of our wines won a double gold a few years ago in competition in Slovenia, Yugoslavia," says Mark Wisnovsky. His mother, Ann, has operated the vineyard and winery since Frank Wisnovsky's accidental death in 1980. Left with four children to raise along with running the fledgling vineyard, she was committed to keeping the dream alive for her children. In 1992, her sons honored their mother's determination by choosing her name, Anna Maria, for the winery's premium label.

"It was Dad's dream, but Mom kept the dream alive," Mark Wisnovsky says.

The vineyard's location at the 1,500-foot elevation in what locals call "Sunshine Valley" - free from the fog that plagues other areas of the Rogue Valley - allows the grapes to ripen to their greatest potential. That feature, along with the courage and commitment of Ann Wisnovsky and the assistance of her family, would seem to assure the winery's success into the new millennium.

To visit Valley View Vineyard, take Highway 238 through Jacksonville to Ruch, then turn left at Upper Applegate Road and proceed for one mile. The vineyard, at 1000 Upper Applegate Road, is on the right. Winery hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except for major holidays. Call the vineyard at (541)899-8468 for information and directions.

By Patricia Parish Kuhn

Preserving the Past:
Jacksonville's Chinese Heritage

The American Immigration Committee

officially recorded the first Chinese immigrant to arrive in the
United States in 1820.1 By 1860, thirty-five thousand Chinese had
arrived via the ports of San Francisco — by 1880 there were over one
hundred thousand Chinese living in the United States.2

For the Chinese of this time and place — honor and a pursuit of
a better life motivated them to leave the Canton province, an area
riddled with political unrest and civil war, for the Americas. Their
goal was to find the “hills of gold” where prosperity could be found.

By the early 1850s, the Gold Rush that had struck California in
1849 began to move north, and with it the Chinese. By 1864, there
were two thousand five hundred Chinese miners working the Upper
Jackson Creek southwest of Jacksonville. The average Chinese man
worked alone. They often wore simple traditional clothing such as a
skullcap, a long blue coat, trousers, and white stockings. In later years
some incorporated American styles such as boots and hats. The
Chinese also kept their heads shaved except for a long queue, which
hung down their back or was wrapped carefully around their head.
The queue was of great personal importance to a Chinese man and
also helped ensure his acceptance back into China.3

They ate a traditional diet and depended on items such as rice,
tea, dried oysters, pork, poultry, and dried seaweed, which was
imported from San Francisco and sold locally. The Chinese
worked as miners, took in laundry and worked as cooks and
housekeepers in private residences and businesses such as the U.S.
Hotel. They were known for their hard work and patience. The
historic record, artifacts found, and recent archaeological
investigations continue to illuminate these people and their
culture and continue to give us new and fascinating perspectives.

In March 2004, archaeologists with the Oregon Department
of Transportation (ODOT) watched over construction on California
and Oregon streets in Jacksonville. They were already aware of the
Chinese occupation and the location of Chinatown and knew
there was a good chance that artifacts and other clues from the
past would turn up.

Joined by archaeologists from the University of Oregon's
State Museum of Anthropology and the Southern Oregon
Historical Society, the ODOT team was given the unique
opportunity to learn more about the Chinese and their
community by conducting an excavation in Jacksonville's
Chinatown. They created “excavation units” that were dug a few
centimeters down at a time, with special attention paid to layers,
features and artifacts. The collaborative effort uncovered broken
pottery, buttons, coin fragments, cut animal bone, opium tin
fragments and other cultural material. The artifacts found at the
location were well documented and then sent to the State
Museum of Anthropology in Eugene to be washed, cataloged and
further analyzed.

Preservation of an artifact is vital to its longevity. Careful
study of these artifacts along with historical research will be
used to further our understanding of the Chinese occupation in
Jacksonville.4

Eris Peters is a museums assistant and Jayme Neil is a programs
associate for the Southern Oregon Historical Society. Both have
professional archaeological training.

ENDNOTES

1. Jeff LaLande, Sojourners in the Oregon Siskiyou: Adaptation and Acculturation
of the Chinese Miners in the Applegate Valley, California 1855-1900, a thesis
submitted to Oregon State University, June 1981.
2. Catherine Noah, “Land of Hope and Heartache,” Table Rock Sentinel,
January/February 1993.
6. Atwood, op. cit.
7. Richard H. Engeman, The
Jacksonville Story, Southern

Above, Chinese coin was unearthed during the March
2004 excavation in Jacksonville's Chinatown.
PHOTO BY BARBARA FINNIS

Peter Britt took this and most of the extant photographs of
the Chinese and Chinatown. Few Chinese women came to
Jacksonville, and even fewer were photographed. Britt's
documentation is critical to understanding the Chinese
presence in Jacksonville.

SOHS #13222
Majority sentiment towards the Chinese is expressed in a 1878 newspaper article: "Jacksonville has its China row, and it possesses all the disgusting features of the Mongolian quarters in Portland and San Francisco, save the mission schools, where good white people strive to instruct the Joss worshippers in the principles of Christianity. During all hours of the night the Chinese of the place hold their orgies, drinking, villainous, red brandy, gambling, and indulging in all manner of vice peculiar to their race..."

DEMOCRATIC TIMES
NOVEMBER, 1878
SOHS #1505

Above, archaeologists in March 2004 worked hard to uncover part of Jacksonville's Chinatown. Right, photograph taken after the fire of 1888. Many buildings, including Chinese quarters, burned in the fire. At right is the Haines Brothers Building, which housed the town's first post office, a butcher shop, and other businesses. The building survived three fires and still stands today on the southwest corner of California and Oregon streets.

PHOTO BY DANA L. JACKSON
SOHS #1290

Peter Britt photograph shows the Chinatown buildings that faced California Street before 1888, (right side). The men in the photo are standing where the March 2004 excavation took place.

SOHS #5538
At left, Jacksonville’s “Chinatown” has been of archaeological and historical interest for many years. In February 1974, an area of Chinatown, located in Jacksonville between Oregon and First streets was excavated. Local resident Marshall Lango, and Allan Lester, then curator of collections at the Jacksonville Museum, conducted the excavation. Approximately 500 Chinese and Euro-American objects ranging from glass bottles and rice bowls to leather objects and animal bones were found. Many of these artifacts are part of the Southern Oregon Historical Society’s collection and can be viewed at the Jacksonville Museum.

SOHS Acc #78.106.7, #78.106.8, #78.106.20, #78.106.6A

Right, artifacts found in the 2004 excavation included this animal bone. Below, the archaeological crew stands in March 2004 at the site of old Chinatown. The crew was comprised of staff from the State Museum of Anthropology, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Southern Oregon Historical Society. SOHS staff included Eric Peters (back row far left) and Jayme Neil (front row far left).
Preservation of the Jacksonville Woodlands

By The Jacksonville Woodlands Association

"There are few places where history and modern life are so linked as Jacksonville."

George Kramer, 2001

In the spring of 1989, as Jacksonville emerged from beneath two decades of state imposed building moratoriums, "for sale" signs began to sprout up on empty land around town. A potential building boom was threatening to destroy the town's historic open spaces! Alarmed by what was about to happen, a group of Jacksonville citizens founded the Jacksonville Woodlands Association. The newly formed association opened negotiations with the University of Oregon, which resulted in the purchase of the Beekman Woods. The dream of preserving a "woodlands necklace" of open space surrounding Jacksonville gained momentum with the purchase of the 80-acre Peter Britt Estate three years later. Twenty other contiguous properties have since been added to the Woodlands system.

A cooperative partnership has been established among the Jacksonville Woodlands Association, the City of Jacksonville, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Jackson County Parks, the Southern Oregon Historical Society, the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land and several private and public foundations.

Nine miles of recreational and interpretive trails have been built. The Jacksonville Woodlands Association has set the standard for community land preservation in Oregon by protecting the natural and cultural heritage of historic Jacksonville.

THE BLM'S ROLE

Although the BLM is known for managing the wildest of wild public spaces, on December 4, 1990 the Medford District of the BLM and the City of Jacksonville joined in a special partnership. The original 70 acres that the BLM managed within Jacksonville's urban boundary presented the opportunity to help preserve the rural flavor of the Jacksonville area and to work with the City of Jacksonville to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Medford District of the BLM is responsible for managing five parcels of public land within the Jacksonville Woodlands, totaling 105 acres. Three parcels, one 40 acres, one 20 acres, and one 10 acres, have been in federal ownership for over 100 years. Two parcels, the Frontino parcel and the Knoll property, recently have been acquired by the BLM.

The 40- and 20-acre BLM parcels are lands that were originally given to the Oregon & California Railroad in 1896 and 1901. After the O&C Railroad failed, these parcels were revested to the United States in 1916, and have been under the jurisdiction of the BLM or its predecessors since that time.

The 10-acre BLM parcel (Chinese Diggings) is public domain land that was at one time included in the Bernard Lorraine placer mining claim, which was located in 1884. The claim originally covered 20 acres. The presence of the Lorraine claim made this land unavailable for conveyance to the O&C Railroad. An 1884 mineral survey of the claim indicates the majority of the east half was in vineyards and the excavated area was mostly in the western half, which is now the 10-acre site. The claim was later abandoned and the eastern half was successfully homesteaded with title conveyed to the homesteader in 1896.

ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL PROPERTIES

The 27-acre Frontino property, along Jackson Creek, was previously owned by Frank and Helen Frontino and used for recreational purposes with a dream of someday building a home on the property. In 1999, the BLM purchased the property for inclusion in the Jacksonville Woodlands. The Frontino property contains a portion of the 1860 mining ditch that carried water from Jackson Creek to the hydraulic mining operation in Rich Gulch.

In 2001, BLM acquired an additional 7.5 acres known as the Knoll parcel. The property was purchased from Mark Burkhalter, Thomas Parks, and Michael and Victoria Korpa by the Trust for Public Land and subsequently sold to the BLM for protection and inclusion in the Jacksonville Woodlands. This parcel provides additional public access for trails and offers one of the best scenic vistas in the entire trail system.

The Jacksonville Woodlands Association signed the original cooperative agreement with the BLM in 1990. BLM helped to acquire two additional parcels, develop a General Management Plan and cooperates in the maintenance of the trail system.

Call The Jacksonville Woodlands Association for more information (541) 899-1231.
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Continued on page 21.
Dear Friends,

Your membership dollars are hard at work this summer at the Southern Oregon Historical Society. They are helping to fund the reopening of Beekman House, special events on the first weekend of each month at Hanley Farm, and the creation of a new exhibit on Peter Britt at the Jacksonville Museum. Meanwhile, the Society’s ongoing work of collecting artifacts and documents, offering educational programs, operating our museums and preserving our Research Library all continue apace. Thank you for making such important activities possible with your memberships and generous donations.

Speaking of generous donations, we are happy to announce that several grants were awarded to SOHS this spring. The PGE Foundation contributed $500 to support the “Nuestra Gente” exhibit at the History Center. The Oregon Heritage Commission’s Preserving Oregon program granted $17,000 for repairs to the Hanley Farmhouse foundation. Zoe Dell Nutter contributed $5,000, and Medford Air donated $1,500 to help sponsor the visit of the Wright Flyer and “Orville Wright” to Hanley Farm over the Fourth of July weekend. Eastman Kodak in White City gave $1,500, and the City of Jacksonville’s Lodging Tax Grants program awarded $1,000 to help create the new Peter Britt exhibit. Erickson Air-Crane also gave $1,500 to sponsor a lecture this fall by Sergei Sikorsky, son of the inventor of the helicopter. SOHS is grateful for the support these grants and sponsorships provide.

Sincerely,

Richard Seidman
Development/Membership Coordinator

Continued from page 20.

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• 10% discount at the History Store in Jacksonville.
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• Reciprocal benefits through “Time Travelers,” a network of more than 100 historical societies and museums around the country.
• Discounts on workshops, programs, and special events.
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Summer 2004

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1000 Upper Applegate Road, Jacksonville, Oregon 97530
8 mi. west of Jacksonville on Hwy. 238, left on Upper Applegate Rd. (Touch)

Brothers
Michael & Mark Wehmsvky, Owners,
Valley View Winery

**Valley View Winery**

(800) 781-9463

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Southern Oregon Historical Society
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MUSEUMS AND SITES

HISTORY CENTER
RESEARCH LIBRARY
106 N. Central, Medford

JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM
HISTORY STORE
CHILDREN’S MUSEUM
5th and C, Jacksonville

HANLEY FARM
1053 Hanley Rd., Hwy 238, Central Point
AVAILABLE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

C.C. BEEKMAN HOUSE
California & Laurelwood, Jacksonville

C.C. BEEKMAN BANK
3rd & California, Jacksonville

U.S. HOTEL
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AVAILABLE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

CATHOLIC RECTORY
4th & C, Jacksonville

Southern Oregon Historical Society Mission: to collect, preserve, research, and interpret the artifacts and documents that connect us to the past. Through exhibitions, historic sites, a research library, educational programs, publications, and outreach, the Society creates opportunities to explore the history that has shaped Southern Oregon.