

# In Their Own Words

*Goldendale library group publishes historical account of Klickitat County pioneers*

**By Jeanie Senior**

Reading “Stories Told By The Early Pioneers of Klickitat Valley” offers the same sort of experience as listening to a group of elderly friends talk about the old days.

But in the case of “Stories Told,” the oldsters are talking from 1930 and 1931 about Klickitat Valley life from about 1860 to 1890.

The book of reminiscences, set for publication this year, is the latest project for five members of the group that produced “Bluelight to Pucker Huddle: Discovering Klickitat County,” published in 2006.

Nancy Barron, Ruth Bruns, Teddy Cole, Naomi Fisher, Mary Jean Lord and Judy Thomas all worked on the new book. “Stories Told By The Early Pioneers of Klickitat Valley” is an edited and annotated second edition of a volume self-published in the mid-1990s by the late Homer Townsend. The small number of copies he printed, available only at the General Store in Goldendale, quickly sold out.

The Friends of the Goldendale Community Library will publish the second edition. It is a

memorial to Homer, a tireless and determined historian, who died at age 90 in February 2008.

Homer gleaned the history from the minutes of Klickitat Valley Pioneer Association meetings in 1930 and 1931. Related by persons who were middle-aged to elderly, the stories recalled early events and life in the valley, collected at a time when people were starting to be aware that the pioneers, and their stories, were dying out.

“First Flour Mill in Goldendale” is the title of one piece, which notes that it was “built by Toom Johnson in 1876. It was built where the old mill site was (1930) on the road to the fairgrounds. That mill burned and was rebuilt in 1878 by Joe Nesbitt, Stanton Jones and Mr. Barber.”

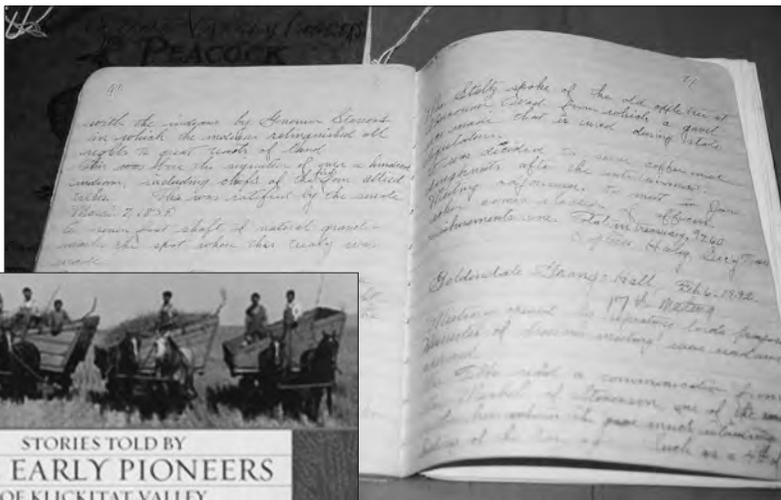
Another story relates the tragedy of the Linder family, which “lost six children at one time in a diphtheria epidemic in the early 1880s. At that time, the family was living in the No. 6 School District. Six graves can be seen there today (1930) in a little enclosure in the wheat field owned by Clay Thompson.”

“Goldendale’s Old Adobe House” offers a fascinating look at both pioneer days and the Depression, noting that one of the topics discussed at the November 1931 Pioneer Association meeting was “locating a permanent place to preserve items of early day living.”

Mrs. Stultz suggested “the old adobe house located just back of W.H. Wards harness shop might be a good place. She observed that the building itself was a relic of earlier times.

“This is the only adobe house in Goldendale and it has stood for many years. At present (1931) the building is being used by the town as sort of bunk house and restroom for the many unemployed men who are now so numerous.”

In the forward to the new book, Mary Jean writes, “The pioneer storytellers may have forgotten a detail here and there, but the happenings they described were still vivid in their minds. Townsend adhered closely to the minutes, and while remaining faithful to Townsend’s book and the original stories, the



Above, a notebook from Klickitat Valley Pioneer Association meetings in the 1930s. Left, a new book with meeting transcriptions by Homer Townsend.



**Teddy Cole, left, Nancy Barron, Naomi Fisher, Mary Jean Lord and Ruth Bruns examine archives used for the book "Stories Told By The Early Pioneers of Klickitat Valley" inside Presby Mansion in Goldendale.**

Friends have added illustrations, a map, and notes and information to assist the reader."

One of the most valuable additions is a map that identifies most of the landmarks. Putting it together took some hard work, Mary Jean says.

"Names change," Naomi says. "And we don't have atlases for every year."

The first edition had a construction paper cover and typed pages.

When Homer asked Teddy in 2005 to see that his book was reprinted, he gave her a \$400 check to pay for it.

Teddy, a retired Goldendale librarian, never cashed the check. She told Homer she would be happy to assist with the second edition, "but in a manner that complies with my standards."

The new book, printed as a quality paperback, will have historic photographs on the cover, and be illustrated with drawings by Ann Parker.

Nancy describes them as "evocative, warm, whimsical."

The women say it took them some time to recuperate from "Blue Light" before they were ready to launch into another book. "Stories Told" took about a year to produce. At a meeting in late

September, Ruth admitted, "I can hardly wait" to see the new book.

Homer, a former Navy officer, teacher and college administrator, retired to Goldendale in 1982. He was much involved in the community and an ardent historian. In 1985, the Klickitat County Board of Commissioners appointed him chairman of the Klickitat County Centennial Committee, anticipating the Washington state centennial in 1989.

Working on the centennial project, Homer discovered little Klickitat history had been written down. He discovered the long-neglected Pioneer Association minutes in 1993-1994 and transcribed them for his book.

Although pioneer associations were fairly common in the early 1930s, it's rare for the notes from the groups' meetings to survive, Naomi says. And if they do, they're usually in an attic "away from public access."

There once were four volumes of the Klickitat Valley Pioneers' minutes. Now, there are only three.

"Maybe it will turn up," Naomi says.

Meanwhile, Homer and the five women are keeping some history alive. ■