



Mildred Lykens and Don Brashers contemplate a display of vintage tools at the Twin Bridges Museum in Lyle. Don says he is pretty sure he has used them all.

Preserving, Sharing Local History

The Twin Bridges Museum houses artifacts and stories that helped shape Lyle

By Jeanie Senior

A military corner in Lyle's Twin Bridges Museum displays uniforms from multiple branches of the military, some dating back to World War I. Memorabilia includes a Civil War sword, newspapers and magazines from World War II, and a shadow box of medals and decorations from the Vietnam War.

There are many photos of residents of Lyle and High Prairie who served their country.

At an early spring tour of the museum, board members Don Brashers and Mildred Lykens pause by the display to point out family members and friends, and tell a few stories.

This is a museum with a personal feel. The military corner is one of several exhibits that have expanded since the museum relocated six years ago from the Lyle Activity Center to the former Lyle United Methodist Church.

Mildred and Don are among the self-described Lyle old-timers who started the museum in 2005. Their goal is to collect, save and display artifacts from the town's long and colorful history.

Museum displays initially were housed in what had been a classroom in the former grade-school building. When dwindling membership at the Methodist church prompted talk of closure, the museum board inquired about using the building.

Mildred, a member of the

congregation, said the board expected an arrangement to rent or lease the facility. Instead, the United Methodist Foundation gave the museum the property and the church building at 403 Klickitat, which is on a hillside about a block north of the former school.

From its front entry and side parking lot, the new museum boasts a sweeping view of Lyle and the Gorge. The building has more display space and includes bathrooms on the museum floor and in the basement, where there is a kitchen, a meeting room and storage space.

In addition to the military display, there is now space for a vintage kitchen, old school desks and historic items including a cheerleader's sweater from



Above, Don takes a close look at portraits in the military corner of the museum showcasing the area's veterans. Right, Wilbur Slockish, hereditary chief of the Klickitats, lent a Klickitat basket, beaded moccasins and tribal fan to the museum for display.

Lyle High School.

"We have almost all the yearbooks," Mildred says.

A display case holds an original Klickitat basket, beaded moccasins and a tribal fan, all on loan from Wilbur Slockish, hereditary chief of the Klickitats.

There are many historic photos, including pictures of the convict camp on the northeast side of town. The men housed there were brought to Lyle in 1910 to build the rocky, difficult stretch of Highway 8. Traces of the road and the camp still are visible, according to Don and Mildred.

A small room off the main exhibit area houses an extensive collection of hand tools.

"I believe I've used every one of these," says Don, 88.

"This is the oldest thing in the museum," Mildred jokes, pointing at a lump of dry clay in a display case, mounted on a piece of paper. The card says "Old Lyle dirt."

"It fell off one of the tools when they were putting this together," Mildred says, smiling.

There is an extensive display of shoes for horses and oxen, made by a local blacksmith. It includes a variety of corrective shoes.

The museum also houses archival materials from the close-by community of High Prairie.

"High Prairie's always been a part of Lyle," Don says.

Don is a lifelong resident of Lyle. Mildred was 6½ when she arrived with her family from Los Angeles. She attended grades one through nine at the Lyle School, when her family moved again. She moved back in 2001.

Mildred remembers when Lyle had a school for grades one to 12, a business district with two grocery stores, a barber shop, two cafes and taverns, three service stations, a machine shop, a farm equipment dealer, two churches, and a ferry that carried passengers and cars across the Columbia River.

In those years, there was a large sheep shed on Lyle Point, where sheep were brought from grazing lands to be sheared and shipped out.

"There was a train station where you could walk in and buy a ticket," says Mildred.

As a young girl, she took guitar lessons in The Dalles, which meant taking the



train from Lyle to North Dalles—now Dallesport—and then taking the ferry to The Dalles.

Don and Mildred have vivid memories of the winter of 1948-49, when the Columbia River froze.

The snow piled up to record levels, and stayed on the ground. Don, whose family lived in the High Prairie area, made it to town January 5 with a group of other students. They boarded with townspeople until April 1.

When his boots wore out, he took the train to The Dalles to buy a new pair at J.C. Penney Co. Don says he walked across the frozen river and on the way back, got a ride in the tugboat that pushed the ferry through the icy water, making it just in time to catch the west-bound train. It is yet another story that adds to Lyle history. ■