



# Museum Preserves the Past

*By Jeanie Senior*

**L**yle, a small Columbia River town with a whole lot of history, now has a museum aimed at preserving its rich past.

“This museum has been a dream for a small core group of people in Lyle for years and years and years,” says Barbara Sexton, a member of the Twin Bridges Historical Museum’s six-person board. The longtime Lyle resident has a great interest in regional history.

The museum, incorporated in 2006, is in the former Lyle Elementary School. The building sat empty and unused for several years before Terry Mills, the museum board chairman, went to the Lyle school board and asked if the fledgling historical museum could use the space.

“We’ve always had the dream, but he’s the power behind getting it going,” Barbara says of Terry.

## *Lyle once competed with Goldendale for the county seat*

After the school board said yes, the work began.

“We cleaned and painted and threw away,” says board member Joy Collins. “We got it ready, then we just started bringing stuff in.”

Joy is the museum board secretary. Barbara is treasurer. Other members are Don and Darla Brashers and Mildred Lykens.

One of the prize exhibits in the museum is a small oak roll-top desk that Barbara got from her father.

When she had the desk restored, a receipt was found that indicated the desk originally belonged to George Lyle—a member of the family of early settlers from whom the town got its name.

Barbara’s ancestors bought a link

to history when they moved to the area, purchasing land homesteaded by the Whitcomb family, the early Oregon settlers lent their name to the side-wheeler steamboat *Lot Whitcomb*, the first steamboat built on the Willamette River.

The museum’s development has been aided by two federal economic development grants. One paid for a computer system, the other for a program called Past Perfect, which is designed to help museums manage their collections.

Barbara and Joy usually spend two mornings a week entering information into the system, rewarding themselves for their labors by walking downtown for a hamburger. Joy jokes that they are also improving the local economy that way.

“Eight years ago, I was asked to be on the board of the Bingen museum and I jumped at it, so I could learn,” Barbara says. “I have



*Above, a roll-top desk that once belonged to George Lyle. **Opposite page,** Barbara Sexton, left, and Joy Collins work on a display of ribbons from the Lyle Pioneer Days.*

learned so much.”

Now, she says, her loyalties are to both museums.

Because it is strictly a volunteer operation, the museum has limited but flexible hours.

“We’ll open it any time anybody wants to look,” Joy says.

Last summer, the museum was open a couple of nights each week, in part so visitors could see a display on loan from the Maryhill Museum of Art.

The exhibit, which included a number of large photographs, dealt with the convict road—a never-completed road above Lyle built by prisoners early in the 1900s. Remnants of the road still are visible above the tunnels east of town.

The exhibit drew “more than we dreamed it would ever get,” Barbara says.

This summer, plans call for the museum to be open one night a week in July. The schedule is not yet set.

At this point, the museum’s collection is what might be called eclectic, with displays that cover a lot of ground, ranging from a pair of vintage silk stockings and several World War II military uniforms to old tools, kitchen gadgets, documents, maps and photographs.

Many of the photographs have

small notes attached, asking for identification of the people pictured, or for the year the photo was taken.

Another puzzle is a pair of ribbons, complete with gilt fringe, that indicate their original wearers were members of “Lyle Camp 9456 M.W.A.” A Google search offered no immediate clues. The ribbons were a donation from a Hood River man.

Joy and Barbara say Jimmy Curl has volunteered hours looking at museum photos, and listing identities of the subjects.

The historic photos on the wall make it clear that Lyle—originally called Klickitat Landing and developed on what’s now called Lyle Point—played a considerable role in the development of the region.

The town grew so rapidly it even competed unsuccessfully with Goldendale to be the county seat.

Lyle was the south terminus for the Columbia River and Northern Railroad, which connected Goldendale and Lyle, and also a major landing for steamboats.

An immense amount of freight—sacks of wheat, fruit and cord wood—was shipped down the Columbia River out of Lyle.

Barbara points to a photograph that depicts modes of transportation

## 13 Miles of Yard Sale

Besides the Lyle museum, Joy Collins devotes much of her energy to the “13 Miles of Yard Sales” event that started five years ago.

It now has grown to involve much of Klickitat County and has had national exposure.

The miles and miles of yard sales this year are on June 14 and 15, from White Salmon to Lyle to Goldendale.

The museum will be in on the yard sale earnings this year. It will get the proceeds from one of the sales held in the Lyle park. Donations already are filling a hallway and a storage room at the museum.

“We’ve got a ton of stuff this year,” Joy says. ■

coming together. It shows a train, a barge and a steamboat, all close together.

Other photos show a sawmill that once occupied a large area of Klickitat Landing, the huge sheep sheds built on another part of the point, a railroad turntable and the Lyle Bank building.

Lyle’s early history even has a link to English royalty. One of Lord Balfour’s sons once owned a vast ranch west of town, growing plums, ranching and planting wine grapes. One of the museum’s recent acquisitions is a 1902 lease between Balfour and a man named Galbreth, who agreed to pay \$15 a year to lease land and promised to build a \$300 improvement on the property. Barbara speculates it could be a reference to a hotel that later burned, along with the rest of the town. ■

*Visitors can call Terry Hall at (509) 365-3903, Joy Collins at (509) 365-5102 or Barbara Sexton at (509) 365-5374. All of them would be happy to open the museum for viewing.*