

Idaho Chapter Newsletter

May 1995



May Meeting Scheduled

Saturday, May 20th
Carol MacGregor's home
1109 Warm Springs, Boise
3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

The spring Chapter meeting will be held on Saturday, May 20 at Carol MacGregor's beautiful and historic residence in Boise.

Ron Laycock from Benson, Minnesota will present his program entitled "The Role of Women in the Lewis and Clark Expedition". Ron is currently serving the Foundation as Chapter Liaison and also serves on the Bicentennial Committee.

There will also be a short business meeting. On the agenda is the election of officers, and the nominating committee has submitted a list of candidates. The Chapter has also been asked if it would like to host another national meeting, possibly in 1999. If any members have other business to bring up, please let Steve Lee know (208-336-5066).

If you are able to attend this meeting, please contact Steve (number above) or our secretary, Ruthann Caylor at

1995 Dates:

May 20 - Meeting, Boise

May 20-21 - Idaho Trails Symposium, Boise

July 15-17 - Chapter Camp Out, Lolo Trail

July 30 - Aug. 2 - National Meeting, Charlottesville, VA

TBA (Sept.) - Salmon area meeting and field trip

208-344-7075 prior to the meeting. We would like to give Carol a count of how many folks will be attending.

1994 GOOD YEAR FOR CHAPTER

This past year was a productive year for the Idaho Chapter. At the annual meeting in Missoula, the fund-raising quilt was raffled off. The proceeds from the quilt provided enough funds to purchase a Lewis and Clark videotape for the 112 Idaho school districts. Other copies will be distributed to neighboring districts in Asotin County, Washington and several libraries. Thanks to everyone who helped on this project.

The Chapter also held met in Salmon on National Trails Day and assisted the BLM in working on the trail in Lemhi County. In October, a campout was held in the Lolo Creek area which included following the trail

via automobile and on foot. The final meeting of the year was held in Lewiston at Lewis-Clark State College during the dedication of the centennial statues. There was a fine ceremony and a great program on Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis. The Chapter also purchased a brick with the name of the chapter for the College's "Wall of History", a part of the Centennial Mall along with the statues.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

At the November meeting, President Steve Lee appointed a nominating committee consisting of Jim Fazio, Dee Coons and Lydia Justice Edwards. The committee has submitted the following nominees: President, Steve Lee; Vice-president, Roy Toyama; Secretary-treasurer, Ruthann Caylor. Directors: J. Wilmer Rigby of Salmon; Pete Sozzi of Salmon; Ken Swanson of Boise; Dee Coons of Clarkston; and Barb Opdahl of Pierce.

The election will be held at the May 20th meeting. Those unable to attend will be mailed a ballot.

COLT KILLED CREEK NAME CHANGE

Jim Fazio, on behalf of the Chapter, has followed up with the Clearwater National Forest on the name change which was approved in 1988. At that time, the U.S. Geological Survey's Board on Geographic Names agreed that White Sand Creek would be changed to its original designation by Lewis and Clark of Colt Killed Creek. Jim discovered last year that

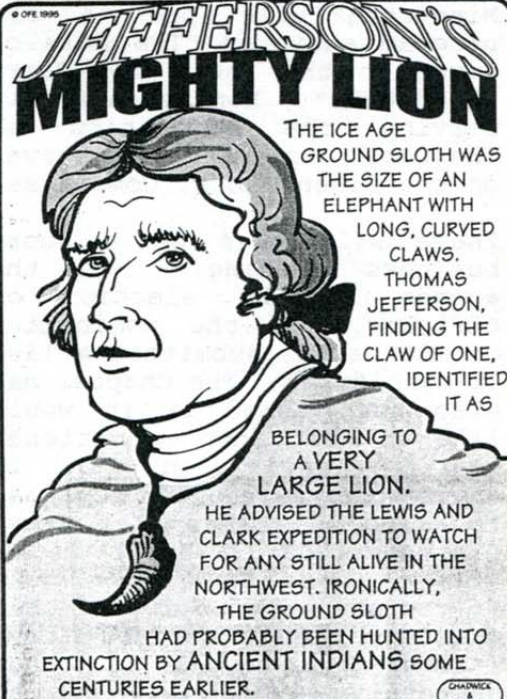
the Forest Service was still using the White Sand name. As of this date, there has been no response from the Forest Service.

LEWIS & CLARK SLIDE SHOW

Michael Crosby of Salmon presented a slide show "Across the Divide: The Lewis and Clark Expedition in Eastern Idaho" on January 22nd at the Boise Public Library. It was a good presentation and Chapter president Steve Lee took the opportunity to make a pitch for the Foundation and Chapter at the event. He hopes to have Mr. Crosby make the presentation at a future chapter meeting.

The Idaho State Journal 3/7/95

Our Fascinating Earth



JEFFERSON'S MIGHTY LION

THE ICE AGE GROUND SLOTH WAS THE SIZE OF AN ELEPHANT WITH LONG, CURVED CLAWS. THOMAS JEFFERSON, FINDING THE CLAW OF ONE, IDENTIFIED IT AS BELONGING TO A VERY LARGE LION. HE ADVISED THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION TO WATCH FOR ANY STILL ALIVE IN THE NORTHWEST. IRONICALLY, THE GROUND SLOTH HAD PROBABLY BEEN HUNTED INTO EXTINCTION BY ANCIENT INDIANS SOME CENTURIES EARLIER.

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CHADWICK & WELLS

DEC. 4, 1994

WHEN IT COMES TO IDAHO HISTORY,

All is Wells

At 76, Merle Wells is the last word on Idaho's past, world travel and pink bicycles.

By Tim Woodward
The Idaho Statesman

With wispy white hair, dreamy blue eyes and a shirt pocket overflowing with pencils and papers, Merle Wells could have posed for the stereotype of the absent-minded professor.

He is a retired professor, but no one who knows him would rate his mind as anything less than encyclopedic.

"He is a superb historian," says Judith Austin, coordinator of publications at the Idaho Historical Library and Archives.

"His professional qualifications equal anyone's in the Northwest. He's also the 'goddest' person I know."

Idaho's state historian emeritus, Wells has written historical books considered the best on their subjects. He has written texts for historical markers, articles for scholarly journals and magazines, and entries for encyclopedias.

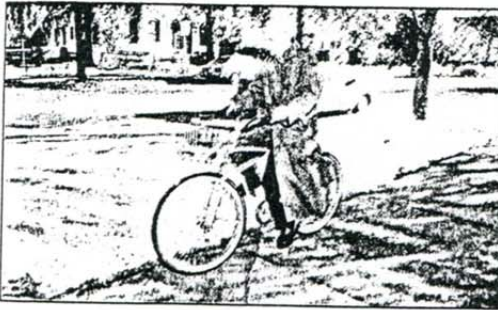
Encyclopedias call him when they don't know the answers.

When he isn't traveling (these days he's nursing a black eye from a fall on broken pavement

See Wells/Back page



Photos by Katherine Jones/The Idaho Statesman



Above: Dr. Merle Wells is retired — but you can't take history out of the historian. He works full-time writing books and working at the archives. Left: Wells rides his bike everywhere.

Wells/From ID

outside the British Museum in London), Wells is a familiar sight in Boise, navigating East End streets on a pink bicycle with a basket.

"The bike works out pretty well for me," he said. "In 1970, I had an ankle fracture, and it's been a hazard for walking."

Unsaid is how he broke his ankle — moving a stone from the historic Pinney Theater, demolished to make way for a parking lot.

At 76, officially retired since 1986, Wells continues to work full time writing historical books and doing research and consultation at the state archives he helped create.

A desk in his high-rise apartment appears to be held up by files for one of his current projects, an academic history of Idaho he hopes to see published "within the millennium." Scholarly books fill shelves, line countertops. A tower of boxes filled with historical materials from a university library teeters in the apartment's entryway.

Historians consider his the final word on questions of Idaho history — and don't ask unless they want definitive answers. Even a basic question on the origins of Idaho's name — it's not an Indian word meaning sun comes down the mountains — rates a scrupulously detailed answer.

"That's an interesting question," he begins. "And the real story is even more interesting than the made-up one."

Half an hour later, the questioner knows the name was invented by a politician, rejected by Colorado when its Indian origins were disproved and given to Idaho after another politician's wife objected to the name that was almost adopted.

"On the last night of the session, his wife got him to change it from Montana," Wells says, his eyes twinkling. "So we ended up Idaho, gem of the mountains."

He laughs. Minute details of events that happened over a century ago fall from his lips as if he witnessed them personally.

Wells wrote the legislation creating the state archives. He was head of the National Register of Historic Places program in Idaho and serves on the Western States Geographic Names Council. He has taught in six college departments, from history to economics, but didn't set out to become a historian. He wanted to be a lawyer.

He was born in Lethbridge, Alberta, the son of Idahoans recruited to farm an area promoted by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. His early years were spent

on a horse-and-wagon farm with no electricity or indoor plumbing. When he was in fifth grade, his family moved to Boise. It was 16 below zero when they left Lethbridge and 80 above when they arrived in Boise two days later.

An "occupations course" at Boise High School sparked an interest in the law, but a history course at Boise Junior College turned him toward historical research. Two history degrees later, he was still planning to go to law school when a professor died at the College of Idaho.

"They asked me to bail them out for the rest of the semester, and that was how I got into college teaching," he said. "Until then, I hadn't really considered it."

Four years at the C of I led to a doctoral stint at the University of California. At the Berkeley train station, he handed his suitcase to a porter who could hardly lift it. The suitcase contained 10,000 note cards — roughly a tenth of his collection.

Since then, he has taught at colleges in Pennsylvania and Idaho and authored enough books and articles to fill an eight-page bibliography. One of the West's leading historians, he also is a colorful character in the best Idaho traditions.

"He's been to every continent except Antarctica," Austin said. "If I'm not mistaken, he went to Australia once for three days."

"It's always an adventure to travel with him. He has the ability from 35,000 feet to know what he's looking at on the ground. But you never want to drive with him. He gets distracted from the road because he's so interested in everything else. He's apt to just take off and cut across the countryside. He'll go anywhere and is absolutely fearless."

When he isn't doing research, flying around the world or cutting across the countryside, Wells serves as a director of the Idaho Zoological Society and a volunteer for the World Council of Churches migrant program. He also has been a Sunday school superintendent for the First Presbyterian Church — and is something of a sports buff.

"He'll call at five minutes after the tip-off and say 'you want to go to a basketball game?'" Austin says. "People are stunned to learn he even knows there is a basketball game."

The man who seems to know everything downplays his achievements.

"I'm fortunate," he says. "In all the professional jobs I've done, I've done only what I'm interested in. I've been able to do what I want and nothing else."



PEOPLE

Burns to document Lewis and Clark ^{3/17}

ASTORIA, Ore. — He's done baseball and the Civil War. Now Ken Burns is reaching back even further into American history.

The documentary filmmaker plans to trace the Meriwether Lewis and William Clark expedition of 1804-06 that opened the West. The explorers were commissioned by Thomas Jefferson to find a land route to the Pacific.

The 90-minute documentary is expected to air on PBS in 1997.

"All of my work comes down to one question: What are we as a people?" said Burns, producer of the documentaries "The Civil War" and "Baseball."

For Burns, the greatest challenge is to find visual images to tell the story, because there are no photographs.

"It's a monumental task finding the live, cinematic equivalent," he said. "How will we make this story come alive? By showing the magnificent terrain that these men covered."