

The Prospector

Portland Gold Prospectors, Inc.

GPA Portland, Oregon Chapter



September, 2023

President's Corner

September 2023

JACKSONVILLE, JACKSON COUNTY; 1850s:

In Gold-Rush Jacksonville The Bank 'Robbed' You

THE CONCEPT OF interest payments is old and universal. Since its earliest beginnings, the banking industry has followed this simple precept: When you deposit money, you earn interest on it.

But there was once a bank in which that was not how it worked: the town bank in Jacksonville, Oregon, in the early 1850s.

Jacksonville was a gold-mining boom town. It was situated in the middle of some of the richest gold diggings in history, and the town was awash in the yellow stuff. There was so much gold sloshing around Jacksonville in the early years that the local bank soon realized there was no need to pay anyone interest on it.

Instead, they charged.



A postcard image of Table Rock, the mesa after which Table Rock City — now known as Jacksonville — was named. (Image: Postcard)

That's right: in exchange for having one's gold tucked away safe from marauding bandits and night-stalking thieves, the bank actually charged a percentage of all deposits. It was like a negative interest rate. Or, you might think of it as the town where the bank "robs" you.

But if ever there was a town that was truly blasé about gold, it was Jacksonville — or Table Rock City, as it was

Friends,

Well, say it ain't so, but summer is coming to an end. Let's enjoy the last warm days together at a club picnic!

You're Invited: **End of Summer Club Picnic**

September 23, 10am - 2pm (That's the Saturday following our September meeting.)

Barton Park (About 20 minutes east of I-205/ Clackamas)

We will have panning troughs and pay dirt available for purchase.

Old timers will be on hand to teach you methods of cleaning and concentrating material.

We'll also have a raffle to pay our costs, so bring your cash and snag a prize.

Please bring your own food and drinks (no alcohol). Parking is \$8 per car.

Let's follow the rules and be friendly to everyone out there, so they want to join our club.

I hope everyone had a great summer. The creeks are still low so there's still time to get out there!

See you at the meeting on 9/17. And, at the picnic!

John Mink



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Visitors at our August meeting.

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**Portland Gold Prospectors, Inc.
Secretary's Report August 20, 2023**

**Eastridge Church
14100 SE Sunnyside Rd.
Clackamas, Oregon 97015**

Meeting was called to order at 1:30 P.M. by President John Mink who also led the Pledge of Allegiance

Attendees - 33 attendees and 3 guests were present.

Treasury Report - A motion was made and seconded to accept the Treasury Report that Jessyca read for the month of August.

Meeting Minutes - There was no meeting minutes for the month of June and July because we didn't have meetings.

John's Alaska trip - Our President John told us about his recent trip to Alaska unfortunately the weather was really rainy so he didn't do too much mining. He did have a great trip though and is looking forward to finding gold next year when he goes.

Molalla River Outing - On September 23rd. Dan Rouse is going to be having an outing on the Molalla River so we are thinking about having a club picnic with him and doing some prospecting. This will be discussed more at our September meeting and we will have a sign up sheet for anybody that is interested in attending.

Possible Guest Speakers - Dan Rouse wanted to know if we would like to have some guest speakers like Freddy Dodge and Chad M. This would be really great for our club. Hopefully this can happen soon.

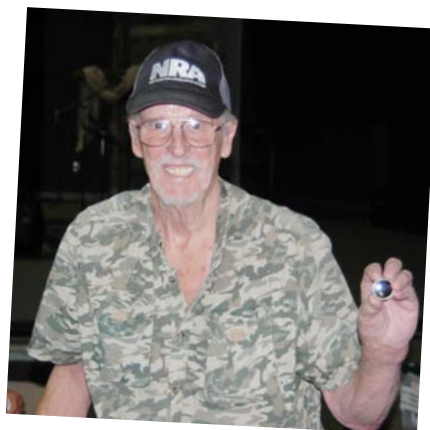
2024 Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show - The 2024 Sportsmen's Show will be February 14th to the 18th. We aren't sure if we will be participating in it. We will have to weigh the pros and cons and determine if it will be profitable for us again.

Gold Bags for Sale - We are still selling our Gold Bags. We have three different sizes. The prices are \$7, \$12 and \$20. The more expensive the bag the more Gold you will get. Buy your's today and practice your panning skills.

Raffle - The Raffle was held with \$1 and \$5 tickets. Jeff was the lucky winner of the Gold Bag. Jerry was the lucky winner of the Gold Nugget.

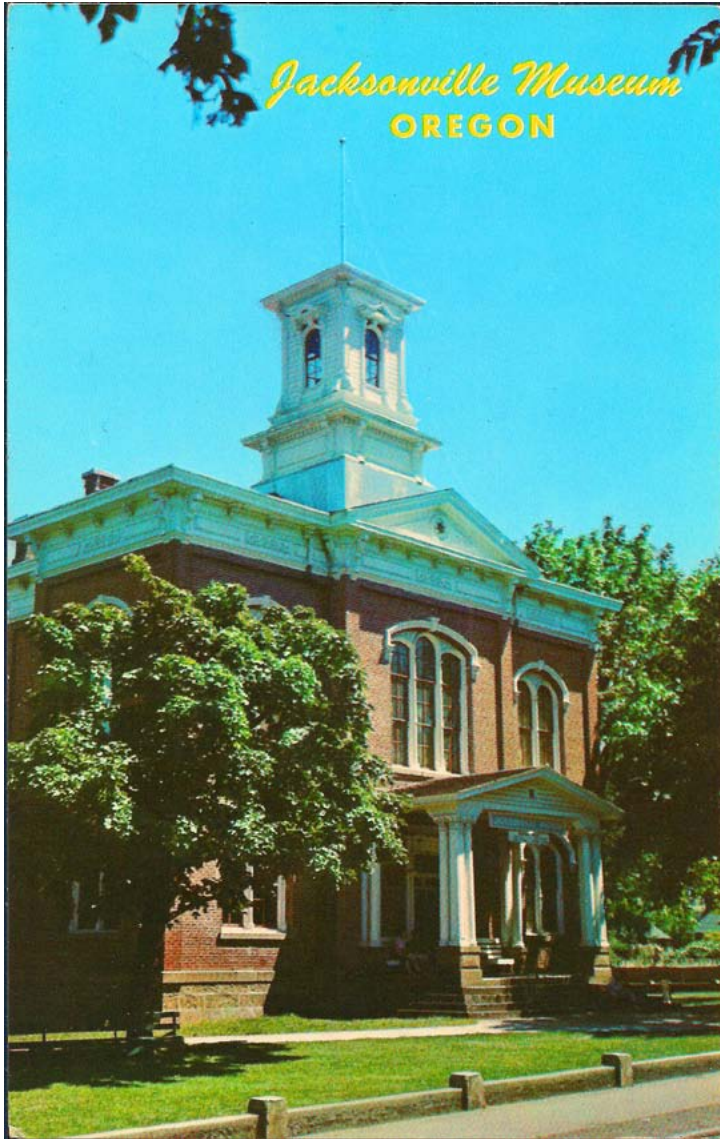
The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Yolande Kragerud, Secretary.



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then called. There was gold everywhere in the little frontier town. Gold was to Jacksonville what lumber would later be to Cottage Grove or Valsetz, and salmon to Astoria: the most important product, the driver of the local economy, but nothing much out of the ordinary or special.



A postcard image of the restored Jacksonville courthouse building, which was, until 1927, the Jackson County Courthouse. The Southern Oregon Historical Society was formed in 1946 specifically to save this building, which dates from the 1880s. (Image: Postcard)

So, what was out of the ordinary and special in Table Rock City? Food. In the early months there, flour was selling for \$1 a pound. And ordinary table salt was trading straight across, pound for pound, with gold dust.

Those prices did come down as time went by and outside merchants realized the opportunity there, but they stayed plenty high. Thomas Frazier, arriving in 1852, was only able to get 60 cents a pound for his wagonload of flour — a big discount off of a dollar a pound, but still a 500-percent markup from the 12 cents a pound flour was fetching in Portland at the

time. **TABLE ROCK CITY** sprang up almost overnight in 1851 after a freight packer named George Frazier (no relation to Thomas Frazier) and an unnamed assistant stopped by the shores of Jackson Creek to camp for the night. Frazier was on a run from Scottsburg — then a burgeoning seaport situated at the head of navigation on the Umpqua River, the entry point for oceangoing freight coming into southern Oregon — to the gold fields of Yreka. The California Gold Rush was just a few years old; it had started in 1848 and then exploded the following year. Now, in 1851, miners were spreading northward into southern Oregon, and still finding good color seemingly everywhere.

Of course, Frazier and his sidekick took a moment before settling down for their evening meal to dip a pan in Jackson Creek and sling some muddy gravel around. After all, why not?

Why not, indeed? Chances are those freighters got no sleep at all that night. By the time the sun went down, they knew their fortunes were made. Jackson Creek was loaded with gold.

The packers promptly dubbed the creek “Rich Gulch,” settled down, staked a claim and got to work.

That first half-season, an estimated \$30,000 worth of gold came out of Frazier’s claim — at 1851 prices, remember, or roughly \$900,000 in modern money; not bad for a few months’ work for two guys. It was mostly in the form of coarse gold nuggets worth \$1 to \$20 each.

Word soon got out, and within a month or two a town had sprung into being there by that golden creek, and gold was pouring into pockets for miles around.

THE PROBLEM WAS, one couldn’t eat gold. Nobody wanted to go into business growing crops when fortunes were being washed out of the creek. Nobody wanted to run a bank, either — guarding the deposits, helping customers, and all those boring things that took up the time one could be spending going after the next \$30,000 gold mine.

So it was no big surprise that the people who did those things — spent their time hauling foodstuffs in from Sacramento and Scottsburg, keeping watch over other people’s gold for them, pouring drinks in the local saloon, stuff like that — valued their time and efforts a little differently than they might have in another town. A week spent dragging a wagonload of flour over the pass was a week not spent raking in coarse gold by the pint. That lost opportunity would have to be made up in the form of high prices.

And oh yes, it was.

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The J-Ville Tavern in downtown Jacksonville, occupying one of the town's historic buildings, as seen in 1961 before restoration. (Image: Ben Maxwell/ Salem Public Library)

BY THE END of 1852, Table Rock City was the biggest town in Jackson County, boasting a population of about 2,000. Of course, as with all boomtowns, the good times couldn't last forever; but by now, it was the county seat, meaning that even after the gold petered out it would remain an important place. So unlike places like Auburn and Cornucopia, the town's residents built its houses and buildings with a future in mind.

Soon a colony of Chinese miners moved in from California, and Jacksonville had the first Chinatown in Oregon. The future looked bright, and the town prospered even as the gold mines started their inevitable petering-out. Then, in 1884, disaster struck — disaster in a sort of miraculous form, from a modern historical standpoint. The Oregon & California Railroad was built running through Medford, bypassing Jacksonville completely. After that, the stagecoaches that had regularly thundered through the town's streets no longer came.

Jacksonville businesses started moving away, cozying up to the railroad line. The town faded, and its decline was made official in 1927 when the county seat was moved to Medford as well.

By the time the Second World War was over, Jacksonville resembled a ghost town from a movie set — full of gorgeous old empty buildings surmounted by one of the finest old county courthouse buildings in the state.

Moreover, possibly because so few people now lived there, it had never experienced a real fire. The town

stood as it had in the late 1800s, frozen in time and preserved by the climate.

The recovery started just after the war, when the Southern Oregon Historical Society was founded specifically to preserve that beautiful old county courthouse from the wrecking ball; they subsequently opened a museum in it, in 1950 (it closed for lack of funds several years ago, and the courthouse is now, as of the time of this writing, unoccupied). Recovery got a huge boost in 1963, when John Trudeau, an orchestra conductor from Portland, launched the Britt Festival on pioneer Peter Britt's old estate — a sort of natural hillside amphitheater with a gorgeous view of the valley spilling out behind the stage.

Then in 1966 the entire town was declared a national historic district. By that time, Jacksonville's recovery was well under way.

Today, Jacksonville is a popular destination for folks who want to see some vintage Oregon gold country history in person. It's also a popular place in which to retire.

Its population isn't much above its Gold Rush peak, just shy of 3,000. And although plenty of gold miners (recreational, for the most part) still call it home, Jacksonville's glory days of gold production are gone now.

Or are they? In a remarkably striking statistical anomaly, this tiny town of 2,800 or so has, over the past 15 years, been the home of three multi-million-dollar Oregon Lottery jackpot winners, including a massive \$340 million Powerball win in 2005. On a per-capita basis, no other town comes close to Jacksonville's performance; a resident of Jacksonville in 2001 had a 1 in 800 chance of finishing the decade a millionaire.

So, maybe the old Midas Touch hasn't left Jacksonville after all.

Editor's Note:

I was recently introduced to the Offbeat Oregon podcast narrated by Finn J.D. John. It is a very informative and entertaining series of stories of Oregon's History. This article was published in November of 2016.

I highly recommend giving him a listen!

Classified Ads?

We've had a few requests to bring back classified ads in the newsletter. I'll be glad to include them. Please send them to my email:

wrshpmzshn@gmail.com

The new **Washington Gold and Fish** pamphlet is now available. You must have it with you whenever you prospect in the state of Washington.

Download a copy to print here: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/hpa/types/prospecting>



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