

Silverton Country Historical Society

Museum and Office 428 South Water Street



In recognition of Oregon's granting women the right to vote 100 years ago next year, we have been dedicating this year's newsletters to some of the noted women throughout Silverton's history. We began in February with a Geer...Florinda, Homer Davenport's mother....and will end the year with another Geer....Musa Geer, Flora's niece and Homer's cousin. This month we are shamelessly relying on a column that was written by former SCHS member, Linda Whitmore, for the November 2005 issue of Our Town..We really miss Linda (and her husband, Mike)...and her excellent stories about Silverton!

Musa Geer Uncommon Woman

We are fortunate that Linda Whitmore, in her November, 2005 story for *Our Town*, was able to access the Geer Family collection of letters and documents to chronicle the life and times of our final offering of noted Silverton Women. Musa Geer was born at Geercrest, the family farm on the outskirts of Silverton, on December 21, 1872. Her grandfather was Ralph C. Geer, who traveled with his family across the country by ox-drawn wagon in 1847 and started a nursery in the Waldo Hills and later raised livestock and grew flax and served in the Oregon House of Representatives.

Musa moved with her family to various places around Oregon and Idaho but returned to the Willamette Valley when she was 15. Destined to be an achiever, Musa was one of the few women of the area to obtain a university education, graduating from Willamette University in 1895 at the age of 22, one of a class of 12. She immediately began teaching at a Waldo Hills school called Coon Hollow and later at schools in Salem.

In 1897, Musa accompanied a group of climbers to the peak of Mt. Jefferson. (See the story on page 2)

It was in 1904 that her life took an even more adventurous turn when her favorite cousin, Homer Davenport, sent her a railroad ticket to visit him in New York City. Once there she found work at *The New York American*, the newspaper where Homer and her brother, Bert, worked. This was certainly an unusual achievement for a woman in those times. For the next 6 years, she worked in advertising and wrote an advice column. Linda, in an interview with Vesper Geer Rose, whose father Archie was Musa's brother, discovered that during

Musa's New York days, "she was a socialite.....she had a lot of admirers. A lot of the correspondence is from adoring men, men who were well-educated members of society." Musa was even briefly married.....but only briefly. The marriage was annulled the next day!

While in New York, the talented Musa was a model and artist, creating copy and drawings for advertisements and magazine covers and even drawing "Gibson Girl" style illustrations for a fashion publication.

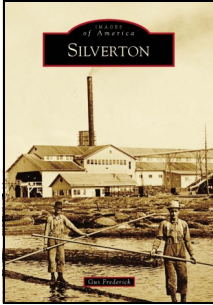
In 1926 she returned to the northwest to operate a store and post office near Goldendale, Washington with her widowed mother. Wearing "fashionable clothes and high heels," her arrival caused a minor sensation. She quickly adapted, however, and stayed for almost 50 years, becoming a good friend, translator and advisor to the Native American community in the region.

In 1961, when she was in her late 80's, she returned to Geercrest, now owned by her brother Archie and his daughters, Reba and Vesper. She lived at Geercrest until age took its toll, forcing her to move to a Salem nursing home. She died at Salem hospital in 1968 at the age of 95 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery.



Photo from Mt. Hope Pioneer Cemetery website

As Linda's story said, "Oregon's history and that of the Geer family are so interwoven, they create the same fabric." The Geer descendants are preserving this family's history to make it accessible for future generations....the stories of women like Florinda Geer Davenport and Musa Geer will be there for all to see.



Images of America—Silverton
By Gus Frederick

Copies still available at the Museum.

Get your copy of this definitive work on our hometown—Silverton
Great Christmas gift idea!

**Excerpts from a letter from Musa Geer to R. J. Hendricks,
Statesman “Bits for Breakfast” editor, dated 24 Sept. 1933**

The following was found on the Mt. Hope Pioneer Cemetery Website
http://www.marioncountycemetery.com/mthope/records/display_record.php?id=565

Under the heading “Items from one of the five who reached the top of Mount Jefferson in 1897 (July 14)” this communication, dated Sept. 20 reached the desk of the Bits man on Thursday, the 21st.

“Quite a bit has been told about the six early ascents of Mount Jefferson, emphasizing different features of the climbs. I want to emphasize the importance of ample preparations for the trip. We took warm clothing. My mother made regular Turkish bloomers and a knee length skirt of what is known as ladies’ cloth. It is like broadcloth but much heavier. Blackerby from his hardware store in Silverton brought each one a heavy hoe handle with a well tempered ferrule on the end to be used as an alpenstock. Pearl (Blackerby) also brought Hungarian nails to stud the soles and heels of our shoes. Added to these nails were medium sized screws to be driven into our shoe heels the morning of the ‘big climb.’ These screws, with the heads downward, made it impossible for us to slip backward as we walked over the snow.

All had short jackets or coats that could be donned when we stopped to rest. And, of course, we had the inevitable flannel outing shirts. I had full length leggings to match my skirt and bloomers. I am constrained to smile now when I recall how immodest a short skirt was in those days.

There were eight in our party: Major Roblin, Helen Hibbard, Mr. and Mrs. ‘Eph’ Moores, Pearl Blackerby, Lemuel Gates, young Foley and the writer..... sleeping on the snow was no discomfort as there was no wind in the little cove where we camped and the men cut wood (above the snow line) and built a fire... (ed: *when they reached to top, Major Roblin secured a rope and said “let Miss Geer go first.”*) I went up hand over hand. The Turkish bloomers puffed out like balloons and the short skirt went up to my elbows, for a strong stiff wind roars up that mountain side.....The experience was glorious, and I am very sure the writer was the first woman to reach the top of this recently much talked of mountain.”



Museum Closing for the Winter

The Museum will be closed from November 1, 2011 until February 1, 2012. The time will be used for cleaning the museum, working on special projects and training new volunteers.

Please contact us if you would be interested in participating (503-873-7070) or
silverton.museum@live.com.

Thank you.

**Mark Your Calendars!
November 21st at the
Silverton Museum
7:00 p.m.**

The annual "Whatzzit" Program, where you can bring your unusual historical items to hopefully be identified...or possibly to stump the "experts." Join us!



**The "Porter School Bell Garden"
Progress Report**

The area between the Museum and the Depot will be the site for the Porter School Bell and is now designated as the **Porter School Bell Garden**. A couple of weekends ago a group of volunteers (Kathy Hunter, Robin Anderson, and Kay LaLone) planted four flats of ground cover and two dwarf Andromeda plants (generously donated by Rufus and Kay LaLone). The area where the rain chain drains was dug out and filled with gravel (again, thank you to Rufus and Kay LaLone!) up to the level of the walkway in an effort to prevent soil from washing onto the concrete under the Depot ramp. There is a potentially bad drainage problem on that site and we would like advice and help for a solution. The water gathers under the ramp and will eventually cause the supports to rot.



Saturday found Kay and Robin with her long-suffering husband Wade again at work. Wade used his superior upper body strength and mechanical genius to dig and pull out the two remaining shrubs. With supervision and advice from Kay and Robin, Wade wrestled a historic dressed basalt stone into the east end of the garden wall. There are two more stones behind the museum that could be used in the garden if we could move them there.

We spread one cubic yard of bark dust, cost \$28.00, with gratis delivery from Envy Garden Supply and used a concrete post that we found under the depot stairs to block soil and bark dust from washing into the rain hole on the south west corner of the building.



We also put some gravel in that area to cover the soil—now it looks more tidy. Do come check it out!

From an e-mail by Kay LaLone

School Tours—Thanks Volunteers!!

Thank you to Carolyn Hutton, Dolores Blust, Gary Ohren, Norman English, Kathy Hunter, Pattie Lindquist, Kay LaLone, Ruth Kaser, Jack Hande, Robin Anderson and Chris Schwab for helping with this latest round of grade school tours. We love the enthusiasm of these students from area schools!



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Postcard sent to Cassie Blackerby in 1908.

Thank you to our new and renewing members—

Fred Parkinson
 Rufus and Kay LaLone
 Kelly Miller
 Andy and Rhonda Bellando

Nancy H. Rose
 Tom and Marsha Worthen
 Cleone Beutler
 Citizens Bank

Your S.C.H.S. Board

Ray Hunter	President
Larry Thomas	Past-Pres.
Norm English	Vice- Pres.
Chris Schwab	Secretary
Rufus LaLone	Treasurer
Vacant	Curator
Kathy Hunter	Membership
Molly Murphy	
Robin Anderson	
Marsha Worthen	
Kay LaLone	

If you received an overdue notice with your newsletter, we appreciate your prompt response.

Thank you!