



JOURNEY *Through* TIME

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PATTI MURPHY

ON A CORNER of Highway 101, in the middle of Bandon, sits an unassuming building that one might easily drive past without noticing. But, the lucky visitor who takes the time to stop and go inside will be rewarded with a fascinating journey through the entire history of this small port city on the southern Oregon coast.

At just 4,000 square feet, the Bandon Historical Society Museum takes up a modest space but packs a lot of history. Housed here is everything from delicate antiques and early Native American artifacts to timeworn military uniforms, historic clothing and furniture, and thousands of photographs depicting important milestones of the city and its people.

There is a very simple and personal nature to the exhibits. Most of these historical items are not set behind glass cases but are instead out in the open, within reach. They are bits of Bandon history that have been lovingly pieced together to tell the greater story of life in this town of about 3,000 people.

"We literally take you right back in time," says executive director Judy Knox. "We're a small, local, hometown museum and we try to stay connected to that every day. When a donor brings in an artifact we catalog it and display it with their family name on it so that down the road people know who it belonged to."

The exhibits are arranged by themes and set in different

The Bandon Historical Society Museum offers a rewarding look at the rich history, from mining to maritime to two devastating fires, of this South Coast town.

rooms that are easy to navigate and gratifying to linger in. "There is plenty of space for people to walk

around and read the displays, study the photos, and ask questions," Knox says. "People can easily spend 2 to 3 hours in our facility if they like museums."

THE FIRE THAT DEFINED A TOWN

Perhaps the most poignant exhibit visitors encounter is of the devastation suffered by Bandon in both 1914 and 1936 when fire destroyed the city. Photographs, original newspaper clippings, and a timeline of events tell the story of how this little town, which was named after a city in County Cork, Ireland, lost everything to fire and yet rebuilt itself out of the ashes.

"The fire section is without a doubt one of the most popular displays," Knox notes. "It's the one we get the most questions about."

In 1914, a fire burned several buildings in the Bandon business sector to the ground. However, it was the big fire of 1936 that left the entire town of Bandon a charred wasteland. Residents, many of whom still live in the area, fled to the shores of the ocean trying to escape the flames. Several people were killed. The city was completely destroyed.

The culprit? An ornamental shrub called gorse that

Oliver Oxon Runs Aground On Submerged Bandon Jetty



Popular exhibits at the Bandon Historical Society Museum include the Bandon Fire display and the maritime room. There is also a pioneer room and various memorabilia.



had been brought from Ireland 63 years earlier by Bandon founder and Irish transplant George Bennett. With its dark waxy leaves and high oil content, the shrub was extremely flammable and spread in wild thickets at the edge of town. On September 26, some slash burning in a nearby logging operation got out of hand and set afire the gorse that surrounded the edge of town. The flames spread quickly to gorse hedges in alleyways and vacant lots inside town limits, burning everything in its path. The tragic fire and the subsequent rebuilding of Bandon remains an important historical timeline.

DISPLAYS HIGHLIGHT BANDON'S HERITAGE

In the museum's large maritime room, visitors can learn more about the sailing vessels, riverboats, and tugboats that were so much a part of Bandon's past. Photos and memorabilia illustrate the many shipwrecks along that area of the coast and the town's delicate and sometimes dangerous relationship

with the mighty sea. The room also features a large military display with photographs, uniforms, and memorabilia from various wars plus an unusual display of glass floats and rocks that have washed up on the surrounding shores.

There are displays on the history of Bandon's fishing, mining, timber, and cranberry industries, and visitors can enjoy close-up views of historic school memorabilia, a replica of an old doctor's office, old weapons and tools, and period clothing from the 1800s–1960s.

HISTORY—A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE

The museum continues to find ways to reach out to the younger generation. "We have a new program where we give students a little book and they can go through the museum and find the answers to questions in the book," she says. "Then, after they complete it we give them a little badge as a remembrance. We're trying to connect and keep those kids interested in coming in."

Take a long walk on the beach.

Relax,
Rejuvenate,
Reconnect ...
in Bandon by the Sea.

Photo by Wood Sabold

For a complete list of activities, events, lodging, and restaurants go to www.bandon.com 541-347-9616



WHEN YOU GO
Bandon Historical Society Museum
 270 Fillmore Avenue SE, Bandon
 Hours: 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
 Monday–Saturday
 Admission: Adults, \$2; children under 12 years of age, free.
 (541-347-2164; www.bandonhistoricalmuseum.org)



The small museum gift store packs a big punch with its collection of local history books, many of which are published in-house and include the museum's historical photographs, watercolors, pen-and-ink drawings, historical calendars, maps of local shipwrecks, and other unique items.

"We hope when people visit Bandon one of the first

things they'll do is consider a visit to the museum," Knox says. "When people come in they are amazed at how much room we have and how many artifacts we have on exhibit.

"History, like a child's mind, is a terrible thing to waste," she adds. "Our little town of Bandon may be a small community but we are very fortunate to have such a wonderful museum. It's well worth the \$2 admission." □

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