

Baker County Fair-Halfway Had Start as Pine Valley Fair

by Gail Kimberling
of the Hells Canyon Journal

The Baker County Fair - Halfway and Panhandle Rodeo is celebrating its 100th year in 2021. As part of the preparations for the centennial event, the *Hells Canyon Journal* is pleased to offer this series highlighting the history of the fair with information gleaned from fair board minutes, premium books, newspaper stories, personal recollections from the *Pine Valley Vignettes* and other sources.

The Baker County Fair - Halfway and Panhandle Rodeo had humble beginnings "The first two fairs, in 1921 and 1922, were held in the streets of Halfway," recalled Earl Thompson in the first edition of *Pine Valley Vignettes*.

Earl, a life-long cowboy and long-time Forest Service employee, said he attended the annual event for more than six straight decades and was honored to be chosen as Grand Marshal for the 1981 fair and rodeo.

Estella Summers had a slightly different recollection in a beautifully handwritten missive shared by Pine Valley Fair Association secretary Lynda Bird.

Estella wrote, "The Pine Valley Fair was started in early years, maybe 1920 or 1921, on the Chet Maley farm. A large tent was put up to hold the exhibits ... Later, a large building was built and is still used for the exhibits."

Estella expounded on the first fair events in *Pine Valley Vignettes Volume III*, where she recalled, "In those early years, families brought food for a picnic and some years families were given barbecued meat that Fred Makinson had cooked. It was truly a big event."

Races and bucking horses were always a big part of the fair, and Estella said before an arena was available the equine events were held in other places, including land near Pine Town.

"Later, Chet Maley sold the land to the fair board (for a reported \$3,000), and an arena and race track were built. Not only at fair time were races held at this arena - many times on Sundays and holidays there were races and sometimes there were fist fights afterwards," Estella wrote in *Vignettes*.

Grace Ritter gave credit to her husband Percy (Perk) Ritter for being one of the originators of the Pine Valley Fair. "Many times he quit his own work in the fields and went to town to do whatever needed to be done," Grace said in *Vignettes Volume III*.

Grace also recalled the popularity of the horse races and bucking events, the fair's move to Chet Maley's ground and how, as crowds increased, a hat was passed for donations to split among the top contenders.

"Perk rode at the fairs for many years, even after we were married. The year I came here, in 1926, he won first prize



Photo by Gail Kimberling

FAIR MEMORABILIA - A few of the items in Lynda Bird's formidable collection of material from fairs of yesteryear.

of \$75 and bought the Hamley saddle," Grace said, adding the saddle was later given to their granddaughter, Melody, who still uses it to this day.

The local fair started out as a one-day event in mid-September. While horse racing and bucking were the main draw, exhibitors came from throughout the Panhandle including Eagle Valley, Robinette, Homestead and Pine Valley.

Gussie Mehlhorn, who came to Oregon from Idaho in 1922 with two small daughters and who married Ed Mehlhorn in 1931 (she was 39, he was 59), said of the fair in the first edition of *Vignettes*, "Ed and the girls and I always exhibited at the fairs. Ed said, 'If we don't participate in the fairs, we will lose them.' [Daughters] Helen and Mardelle baked and canned all summer and took home lots of prizes. Ed was such a good farmer - his

alfalfa, wheat grass and barley sheaves always took prizes."

A premium book from the 1927 Pine Valley Fair, held September 23-24, called for entries of all types of fruit, vegetables, grain, hay and grasses and "domestic science" (canned goods and cakes) along with the biggest watermelon, pumpkin, potato and squash and the "best school display from any district."

Premiums for exhibits ranged from \$1.50 for second place vegetables to \$5.00 for first place in canned goods. Premiums were much more generous for the racing program, starting at \$2.00 for second place in the Shetland pony race and going all the way to \$100 for the first finisher in the three-quarter-mile Free For All. The Best Rider was awarded \$50.

Becoming the County Fair

Estella Summers said at

first, a County Agent oversaw the local fair; later, the Pine Valley Fair Association was established.

Around 1932, the Baker Fair Board approached the Pine Valley Fair Association about making the Halfway event a county fair in order to draw more state money.

Estella recalled, "The Baker board also wanted our fair board to deed the land to the Baker County Fair, saying they would build a beautiful large exhibit hall if the Baker County Fair owned the land. But our board members refused. Since the land had been acquired from Chet Maley, they felt it wouldn't be right to do this."

However, the fair itself did become affiliated with the county and Estella said, "The Baker board insisted that a sign 'Baker County Fair' be printed on top of our buildings in large letters, and it is still

there."

She went on to say, "After our local fair became a county fair, the fair was held on Labor Day weekend, a two-day fair at first. A few years later another day was added, and Labor Day was known as Baker Day. Many Baker businessmen could be seen at our fair that day."

In spite of heavy attendance from visitors outside the Panhandle the fair struggled financially as the cost of overhead and premiums increased, and in early 1939 the Pine Valley Fair Association held a series of special meetings to discuss the sale of countywide memberships to help bring in additional revenue.

The association board reasoned, "... we have been furnishing a \$1 entertainment for only 75 cents [admission] so this outside patronage cannot be considered a pure profit Continued on page 7

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Phoenix Dawn Checks in from Her Adventures on the Road

by Sherrie Kvamme
of the Hells Canyon Journal

Where in the world is Phoenix? A better question might be where in the United States is Phoenix.

In May, Phoenix Marlow Dawn officially began her two-year adventure in her tiny-home-on-wheels with her kitty companions, Noot and Babe. As agreed upon, she will share updates as she travels; however they will not be particularly current. Updates will be published after she has been gone from an area for a period of time and where she is headed will not be shared.

When Phoenix left Eagle Valley she headed to the west side of Oregon to visit with friends she had not seen for a while, taking time to stop in different areas she had always wanted to visit but hadn't taken the time before.

"Things are going great! The cats are taking the trip very well. I am using a hotspot off of my phone and work is going great. I think I will invest in a booster that will help when I am in low signal areas," she said.

"I have been traveling around seeing different friends and spending time with people. It's been busier with the visiting, but it is something that was important to me and I really wanted to do that."

Phoenix parked on a city street while visiting Portland. She was in Corvallis and drove up to Seattle then traveled east through central Washington, and she spent a little time looking around. When she was parked in Umatilla, another van-dweller stopped her and said she had been following Phoenix on Instagram.

"She told me that she had been watching my building project for months and she recognized 'Blue-Oxi.' It was so much fun to talk to her! She said that I had been an inspiration and was so excited to actually see me out on the road. Those kinds of meetings are so much fun!"

Phoenix said she enjoyed a stopover in the Blue Mountains immensely. "That was



Photo courtesy of Phoenix Marlow Dawn

VAN DWELLER PHOENIX MARLOW DAWN has been acclimating herself (and her two kitties) to life on the road these past few months as she has traveled through several western states.

amazing. I went hiking around with the kitties."

She also met a mother with three kids who have been on the road van-dwelling for the last six months who is caravanning with another van-dweller who has been on the road for two years.

"They invited me to meet them in Colorado where I am planning on going to anyway. There are a couple of tiny house festivals where people open their doors so people can see how you have designed yours and get ideas, or if they are trying to make a decision about van life, it gives them opportunities for more information. I plan to hang out in Colorado for a few weeks. There's a lot to see there." (Keeping in mind that this all happened several weeks ago.)

While the trip to the West Coast started her two-year adventure, Phoenix also used it as a longer trial run to fully test her van's components and make sure Blue Oxi was really ready. Before heading to Utah, Phoenix traveled back to her mother's home to make some minor adjustments and to remove her stove.

"It's more than I needed, even as compact as it is," she noted. "I just don't need it, and if I am not going to use it that space can be redesignated for

something more useful, and for the time being, it will make more counter space. I found that a single, butane burner works great for me." Phoenix was only home overnight as she had an event to get to in Utah.

After the event, Phoenix is heading to Colorado to relax and with no immediate destination plan in mind. She wants to do some exploring and settling into a pace without specific goals or departure and arrival schedules though her work hours will take priority. She is considering finding a place where she would like to park for a week or two.

"That will also help with gas costs. It's been the biggest expenditure from all of the traveling I was doing to see friends. And it's a state I have always wanted to see more of, and I do not want to be driving every day."

Phoenix said some of her "van plants" flourished and some did not fare so well, so she is going to experiment with new varieties as she travels. So far, the only power she has needed has been solar which has taken care of all of her electrical needs including her computer, power tools and the litter box which operates with electricity.

The only things that have

required trips to town, are fresh water, groceries and to dump sewage.

"I do have a water filter, but so far I haven't used that," said Phoenix.

If there has been anything so far that has surprised Phoenix, it is her swing chair. It was not intended to be more than a supplemental chair but as it turned out, she has used it far more than she expected.

"I meant it as a happy thing to use, or leisurely, but it has been one of the most practical and useful pieces. I use it for

work, for reading and to climb in and out of my bed. I can just toss it up out of the way!"

In another few weeks, Phoenix will check in with another update. She will be able to share more details about her adventures and pictures as well of the time she has spent in Colorado. There were some very special events and people that crossed her path. It will be exciting to hear about them and also check in on Noot, Babe and Blue-Oxi. In the meantime we'll wish Phoenix safe travels and exciting adventures.

Fair Started as Pine Valley Fair

Continued from page 6
item. In fact, it might easily be argued that the past efforts of our Association to make the Fair attractive to Baker people has resulted in a loss.

"In short," minutes from the February 6, 1939 Ways and Means Committee meeting stated, "we are no longer a Pine Valley Fair. We are in truth a Baker COUNTY Fair but paid for by Pine Valley!"

Later that year the association rolled out a new letterhead with the slogans: "Bigger-Better-More Successful" and "An Educational Enterprise Supported by a Splendid Community" and "When Better Fairs Are Possible Baker County Will Promote Them."

But in the fall of 1939 the fair association minutes reflected yet another "very large loss in revenue" mainly due to people "rushing gates, climbing fences, etc." and not paying the proper admission. So many people entered without paying, in fact, the board estimated "the average price of admission actually received and retained by the Fair Association was approximately thirty cents per admission" and they declared that "in future Fairs this loss could and would positively be guarded against."

Another financial hit for the 1939 fair involved compensating Queen Norma Wright for a lost saddle, although details of the incident were not divulged in the minutes.

At the end of 1939, the Pine Valley Fair Association board voted to increase the number of directors from nine to 12, with prospective new members to be revealed at the association's next annual meeting in January 1940.

Early Headlines

"New Stalls for Horse Exhibits Finished At Fair - 60 More Feet Of Sheds For Cows Being Built This Week" (*Baker*

Democrat-Herald August 29, 1935)

"Additional Prize Money Allotted To 4-H Exhibits - Sheep, Hogs, Sewing, Boys Handicraft Work To Be Shown" (*Baker Democrat-Herald* August 29, 1935)

"New Features Are Added To Fair Program - Parade Includes Floats and Queen and Court - Tug-Of-War To Be Held Tuesday - Loud-Speaking Equipment Added for Arena Events" (*Baker Democrat-Herald* September 2, 1938)

"Rider Injured In Bull Riding - Willis Leep's Team Wins

Heavy Pulling Contest" (*Baker Democrat-Herald* September 2, 1938)

"Attendance At Baker Co. Fair Hits New Mark - Jess Lawrence, Baker, Wins Bucking Contest 2nd Time - Cowboy Races Results Given - Mrs. Bessie Greener Wins Best-Reined Horse Contest" (September 2, 1938)

"Fine Weather Helps County Fair Opening - Streets Lined By Spectators For Monday Parade - Cooper Garage Float Winner - Junior Drum Corps Of Baker Plays; Bucking, Racing Good" (September 5, 1939)

Facilities Improved at Pittsburg Landing

Potable drinking water is once again available to the public at Pittsburg Landing Campground on the Snake River, near Riggins, Idaho. Thanks to a grant from Idaho State Parks and Recreation and a partnership between the Forest Service and Hells Canyon Recreation Collaborative (HCRC), the water system has been repaired and is now available for public use.

The RV dump station located above the campground has also been repaired and is fully operational. Next to the dump stations, visitors can find a newly restored red water hose for washing vehicles (not potable) and a blue water hose for another potable water source.

In recent years, Forest Service staff, contractors, the State of Idaho, Idaho County, and HCRC have worked together to maintain and improve several other facilities at Pittsburg Landing. Bathroom facilities recently received new roofing, new paint, new risers, and new signage. The large bathroom facility

now sports a new changing room. Also, overhead picnic shelters at each campsite were re-boarded and painted.

Last fall, the partners improved the main parking lot near the Pittsburg Landing boat ramp by chip-sealing and repainting the parking stripes. Earlier this year, they submitted another successful grant proposal to resurface the campground loop road, trailer parking pads, and access road to the boat launch. Included in this proposal is the refurbishing or replacing of interior surfaces in restrooms to make them easier to clean.

"Pittsburg Landing is a very special place, and I am grateful for all the partners, funders, volunteers, and employees who continue to help us improve these facilities and improve the visitor experience," beamed Mike Ball, River Manager for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. "During this hot and dry summer, it is especially good to have cold drinking water flowing once again at Pittsburg Landing."

Fresh and Tasty

Mini Peppers 2/\$5 | Fuji, Juici, Pink Lady Apples \$1²⁹/lb

Org Seedless Grapes \$2⁶⁹/lb | Peaches, Nectarines \$1⁹⁹/lb

Raspberries, Blackberries, Organic Blueberries 2/\$5

St Louis Pork Ribs \$5⁹⁹/lb | T-Bone Steaks \$11⁹⁹/lb

Brands You Love

Aidell's Sausage \$4⁷⁹ | Ball Park Franks \$2⁹⁹ | Hormel Turkey, Ham 99¢

Spring Tree Maple Syrup \$5⁹⁹ | Tillamook Ice Cream \$3⁹⁹ | Yoplait 60¢

Planters Trail Mix \$1⁹⁹ | Pompeian Olive Oil \$7⁹⁹ | Totino's Pizzas 3/\$4

Gain Pods, Liquid Tide Detergents \$12⁹⁹ | Downy Unstoppables \$6⁴⁹

Stock-Up for Summer!

Food Club Apple Juice \$1⁶⁹ | Tomatoes 69¢ | Veggies 69¢

Refried, Variety Beans 79¢ | Chunk Tuna 79¢ | Popcorn 4/\$5

Peanut Butter \$1¹⁹ | Preserves \$1⁹⁹ | Bagged Cereal \$3⁹⁹

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