



### Sharing History

Meet tour guide and front desk volunteer Marge Trayser. See p. 4

### Hard Rocker

Learn about the man behind Petersen's Rock Garden. See p. 2



# The Homesteader

## Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter—AUGUST 2023



## SECOND ANNUAL ANTIQUE FAIR AUGUST 12, 2023

9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

Explore even more vendors than last year, including a huge members' booth of contributed antiques that helps fund the Museum, Madison's baked goods (these sold out early last year), food vendors, and the music of Loren Irving and Jay Bowerman. Buy a raffle ticket for the custom-made Hope Chest by our very own Greg Fulton; bring one item for appraiser Karen Stockton from 12-3 (a \$5 donation is asked for your appraisal); and work with the Bend Genealogy Society to start a search for your roots.

There is still time to contribute to the members' booth! Check your closets, attics, and garages for items (*pre 1970 is an antique!*). Call Jane Williamson 541-390-4351 to arrange delivery or pick-up.

**Volunteers are needed to set up and take down as well as help with the booth, call Jane Williamson to sign-up for a time slot.**

# Rasmus Petersen and His Rockery

By Tracy Alexander

Summertime in Central Oregon brings sun, fun, and tourists! Ever since Americans fell in love with their cars and the open road, they've packed up the family to explore the world around them. The Deschutes Historical Museum's exhibit "Cruisin' 97" explores the growth of the auto tourism industry and roadside attractions along Highway 97 as it passes through Deschutes County. The shining gem of this stretch of road is the one and only Petersen's Rock Garden. Mention of this attraction conjures images of miniature castles, swans in a lily pond, peacocks, and every kind of rock imaginable. During its heyday, hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world flocked to the famous rock garden each year. In the past decade, however, it fell into disrepair. Thankfully, in 2013 the Petersen's Rock Garden was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as an "exceptional work of art that combines architecture, landscape, art, and sculpture in a unified whole."

The recent purchase of the garden has stirred renewed interest in its history, purpose, and future potential. Most importantly, it sparked in me curiosity about its creator, Rasmus Christian Petersen. Thankfully, I am not the only one interested in this Danish farmer; a detailed history of Mr. Petersen's life is included in the National Register of Historic Places registration background literature written by Michael Hall. This documentation, along with research into the *Bend Bulletin* archives, paint a picture of a man with a passion for making the most of the land available to him in Central Oregon.

Rasmus Petersen was born on July 21, 1883 in Glamsbjerg, a farming region on the island of Fyn, in Denmark. He left for the United States with his older brother Lars in 1901 at the age of 18. They traveled to Nysted, Nebraska to attend the Nysted Folk High School there. Traditionally, boys in rural communities in Denmark would leave school at 14 or 15 to work on the family farm, then would enter the folk high school at age 18 to obtain 'cultural training' before entering the local agricultural high school to study technical subjects. In

the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Danish folk high schools were an integral part of life for those immigrants who began settling in the United States. Nysted was one of the longest running of five such folk schools in the U.S. The People's High Schools, as they were known in Denmark, strove to inspire young men "to return to their work, but with a greater inner joy, greater desire to work, greater love for country, and greater appreciation for a

higher, more ideal conception of work and life." The Petersen brothers made their way to Oregon after about four years at the Nysted school to put this philosophy into action. From Nebraska, Lars and Rasmus traveled with another student, Jacob W. Petersen (no relation), to Junction City, Oregon where a Danish colony existed, arriving in 1905. Sadly, soon after their arrival, Lars died in a logging camp south of Portland. Jacob, however, remained a lifelong friend and neighbor.

In 1901 Oregon adopted the provisions of the federal Carey Act of 1894, also known as the Desert Land Act, making it State policy that Oregon's arid lands were to be reclaimed and settled. This was also a homestead act, implementing federal land policy to encourage settlement of the West. Settlers could receive a patent on 160 acres of Carey Act land if they lived on the land and, within ten years, converted at least twenty acres to irrigated agriculture. According to a 1925



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Deschutes  
Historical Museum

129 NW Idaho Avenue  
Bend, OR 97703  
Open Tuesdays-Saturdays  
10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
541.389.1813

## Museum Staff:

Kelly Cannon-Miller, Executive Director  
Vanessa Ivey, Museum Manager  
Rebekah Averette, Collections Manager  
Tracy Alexander, Membership Officer  
Michelle Patrick, Visitor Services



## 2023 DCHS Board of Directors:

Adrian Bennett, President  
Jane Williamson, Vice President

## Board Members:

Mike Berry, Paul Claeysens, Tony DeBone,  
Terry Foley, Greg Fulton, Karen Green,  
Heidi Kennedy, Erik King, Susie Penhollow, Liz  
Rink, and Scott Stuemke.



Complete minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors are on file with the Museum office.



[www.deschuteshistory.org](http://www.deschuteshistory.org)  
[info@deschuteshistory.org](mailto:info@deschuteshistory.org)

## Continued from P. 2— Rasmus Petersen and his Rockery

interview with Rasmus Petersen, he read an article in a Portland newspaper that quoted then Governor George E. Chamberlain as saying, "If I were a young man I would acquire an irrigable tract of land in Central Oregon." Petersen visited the area and secured a few tracts of land with four friends. They traveled to Central Oregon in a "wagon pulled by a four-horse team," and first camped in the snow on the eighty-acre homestead under a juniper tree in December 1906. Petersen first appears on the 1910 US Census on his property in Redmond at the age of 26.

Petersen, Rasmus	Male	W	26	1906	Washington	Homestead	Bellevue
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### 1910 Census

Homesteading in the area, then known as Pleasant Ridge, required additional income in the early years. The group worked for themselves and others, clearing land for farming, removing vegetation for the irrigation company, and in logging camps in Washington. His hard work paid off and Rasmus received title to his eighty-acre homestead. Over the next several years he continued to buy land until he had 256 acres, of which 208 were under irrigation. He focused on raising livestock including sheep, cattle, and hogs. He also grew wheat, corn, oats, and alfalfa. By the 1920s, Rasmus Petersen had a diverse farm, working with the Oregon Extension Service to plant new strains of Deschutes Netted Gem potatoes. He became a progressive farmer, experimenting with new crops, seeking new markets, and participating in new methods of management.

Although he was still single, he was not alone. The *Bend Bulletin's* Pleasant Ridge column often mentioned Petersen's accomplishments, social visits, support for neighbors, and his leadership role in the community. In 1919 he lead buying and selling in an organization designed to cooperate with the Deschutes County Farm Bureau. He later served on the board of directors for the Deschutes Reclamation and Irrigation Company; he served on an election board and was instrumental in planning the new Community Hall in 1921. In November of that year Petersen and two others filed the articles of incorporation for "Pleasant Ridge Community Hall Association." Finally, he was elected to the Pleasant Ridge Grange's highest position of Master in the spring of 1924.

In the 1925 Bend Bulletin article, the author stated that, "...it is the opinion of virtually every person who visits the Petersen property that the place is one of the most attractive in the Deschutes country." In 1927, after the destruction of his former house by fire, he built the "modern" Craftsman bungalow that remains on the property. In order to accommodate those who wanted to see his new home, Petersen held two separate house-warming parties. His prosperity continued even after the stock market crash in 1929 which marked the beginning of the Great Depression. His potato crops sustained Petersen and his fellow potato farmers in Redmond even though farm prices were at an all-time low in 1933.

Petersen began developing his first stone garden in 1935,



which was quickly recognized in the *Bend Bulletin's* Pleasant Ridge column. He worked winters, outside of the farming season. This sculpture garden, located to the immediate west and east of the house, began modestly with simple forms and indigenous materials. By building close to the residence, visitors to his home could easily see his creations. He collected semi-precious rocks from around Central Oregon and incorporated them in his earliest gardens. Agates and jasper, obsidian and thunder eggs, chalcedony and iridescent lava became the most common materials seen in his work. Along with his extensive rock collection, an assortment of over sixty varieties of flowers and mosses complimented the sculptures. According to the *Bend Bulletin*, Petersen started a registry in June of 1939 to record the many visitors drawn to his new hobby. By the end of the year a fishpond was dug and 20,000 people from 19 states visited the property. In August of 1940, a gathering of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce and the Redmond Gardener's club, along with a "small delegation from Bend," celebrated the illumination of the gardens.

**Rasmus Petersen has completed a new rockery at the north end of his house. It is well worth while to drive past his home and view his hobby.**

Bend Bulletin 3/17/1938

Over the next several years, Petersen continued to develop his "Rockery" on the property, acquiring a large collection of rare minerals referred to as "the Guy Compton collection." He built a museum building in 1941 to showcase the collection. Meanwhile, Petersen kept his farm running, and even sold 100 tons of hay to Cavalry Troop F, who rented his baler so the hay could "be put into more convenient forms of bales."

**Rasmus Petersen reports that the new museum at the rock gardens is completed and ready for visitors.**

Bend Bulletin 7/12/1945

As Petersen's flourishing rock sculptures grew, so did auto tourism around the state of Oregon. By the end of the 1930s Oregon had several state parks, and by 1940 Highway 97 was a paved road. Along with attractions like Crater Lake, Lava Butte, and Lava River Cave, Petersen's Rock Garden was located conveniently on the route between Bend and Redmond. As popularity in his gardens grew, Petersen's focus

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# VOLUNTEER CORNER

## Marge

### Trayser

By Vanessa Ivey

It's a busy Tuesday afternoon at the front desk of the Deschutes Historical Museum, but everything is under control with volunteer Marge Trayser on the job, greeting guests, answering inquiries, and directing phone calls. "I like the people, making them feel welcome, answering their questions, and helping."

Marge joined the museum's team in 2018, soon after she moved to Bend. She heard about the historical haunt walks and wanted to be a part of the fun. Five years later she still likes being on the front lines of this popular event, checking in participants and orienting them to the evening festivities. Recently she added visitor services and school tour guide to her volunteer repertoire.

Her passion for sharing knowledge was planted at an early age, growing up in the small town of Aurora, Illinois where her father was the high school principal and her mother did statistical typing for an accounting firm.

As an 11-year old Marge liked to walk after school to the downtown Y.W.C.A (Young Women's Christian Association) to teach swimming at the basement pool. Through high school she nurtured her dream to become an educator as a member of Future Educators Club, then attended Illinois State University and received her degree in education. Marge started teaching kindergarten before the ink had dried on her diploma. "Teaching's in my blood. Is and always will be," she shares, smiling broadly.

Even as she was raising her three sons the need to teach was never abandoned. After her youngest son was born in 1987, her background in early education came in handy as she started her own preschool and coached prenatal and postnatal exercise classes.

In 1993 Marge accepted a full-time teaching position at her sons' school, Wild Rose Elementary, as a first grade teacher. Marge is fond of saying, "That year I started first grade, teaching for 20 years, as my youngest son also started first grade, finishing college before I retired."

After some forty-years teaching, Marge was ready for a change. When her boys grew to start families of their own, Marge decided to leave the suburbs of Illinois. "My two youngest sons live in Montana, and my oldest son wanted to know if I'd consider moving to Montana or Oregon. We ended up in Bend, Oregon."

Today, Marge spends a majority of her time being grandma, spending lots of time with her granddaughters and her two kitties from Brightside Humane Society. She's even taken time with her other love, Yellowstone National Park with a "Helping Hands" program, where "I prepped and served food, bussed tables, washed dishes, and made beds. Lived in the dorms and ate in the employee cafeteria. I got paid very little but had lots of time to be with my Montana sons and explore the park. My three sons weren't sure their old mom wasn't losing it- but I have wonderful memories from those six weeks!!"

The love for teaching still boils in her blood and although retired, she has new ways to channel that passion. She volunteers at Silver Rail Elementary, and after years of being a SMART (Start Making A Reader Today) reader, Marge is now coordinating the SMART reading program out of Bear Creek Elementary. Combining that with the volunteer work she does for both the Deschutes Historical Museum and the High Desert Museum, she is one very busy lady. "What you love never leaves you, it's always there in some form or another. I came to a new place, open to new things and new history. It's all a learning curve."

This year the Deschutes Historical Museum recognized Marge's five-years of outstanding excellence and commitment as a volunteer. We are excited to have her as part of our museum family.



### Continued from P. 3— Rasmus Petersen and his Rockery

eventually shifted away from farming. In order to support the cost of expanding his popular sculptures, Petersen sold several tracts of his property. According to an article in the *Bend Bulletin*, “Through the years, Mr. Petersen never charged admission to the ground, but left it to the visitors to drop coins in a tin receptacle on the grounds.” Petersen supported other tourist destinations by selling peacocks to other “attractions” such as auto parks. In the year of Rasmus Petersen’s death in 1952, his famous “rockery” attracted 120,000 visitors.

Rasmus Petersen married late in life, around 1950. His wife, Frankie Nyleta Harris from Montana, had two children by a previous marriage. Just two years later Rasmus died unexpectedly on August 3, 1952, at the age of 69, sitting in the museum next to his stone fireplace. At the time of his death, in addition to the attractions of the rock sculptures, the site boasted a museum, a restaurant, swan-shaped paddle boats, and a large picnic area. Mrs. Petersen operated the rock garden until her death in 1987. The two are buried in the Redmond Memorial Cemetery.

Marci Neilsen-Wayman, whose father lived in Salem and visited the gardens as a child, purchased the property in 2022 and renamed it the “World Famous Petersen Rock Garden and Museum and Peacock Sanctuary.” Neilsen-Wayman has ancestors who also immigrated from Denmark. This historical and cultural connection drew her to the rock garden. “I really do believe this is the community’s it’s not mine...It’s that spirit of welcome. Where you really do feel held in that community space.” The rock garden is being restored and is once again open to the public.



*Michael Hall’s National Register of Historic Places documentation includes extensive descriptions of Petersen’s process for each sculpture, detailed maps of the gardens, and information about where Petersen sourced his rocks.*

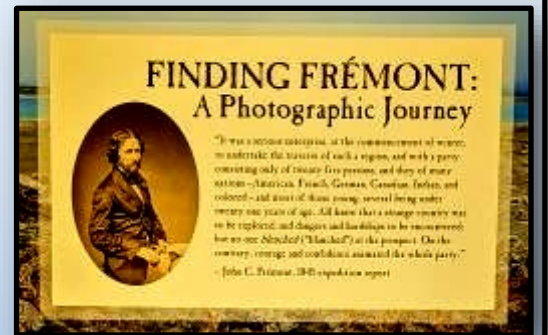
For more information online: <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/01f7b85c-20b3-4226-bb58-b2a4388309a2>

## “Finding Frémont” Photographic Exhibit Returns

A selection of objects and photographs from the 2014 exhibit “Finding Frémont: A Photographic Journey” has returned from the Nevada State Museum in Reno and are now on display on the second floor of the Deschutes Historical Museum.

The stunning landscape photos are the work of Loren Irving who, in 2009, loaded his cameras, lenses, GPS, and copies of John C. Frémont’s 1843-44 expedition report, Charles Preuss’s diary, and the Frémont-Preuss expedition map into his truck. He intended to photograph the campsites of the 1843 expedition of John C. Frémont, the first to map and describe large portions of Central Oregon and Northern Nevada.

Invited to this research project by the Deschutes County Historical Society, Irving targeted campsites close to Central Oregon. Before long, he had traveled the length of the state of Oregon and passed into Northern Nevada. His work links present day landscapes to the expedition’s experiences. We hope you have the opportunity to experience them for yourself!





# Landmarks Commissioners Needed!



The Historic Landmarks Commission is part of a nationwide network dedicated to the preservation and celebration of our architectural heritage. Established in 1980, the commission serves as a citizen advisory body to the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners and the Sisters City Council. Their role is to assist property owners in the preservation of landmarks with historical or architectural significance. With input from the public, the commission establishes a strategic plan which provides a framework for shaping the rural county and Sisters' preservation programs, while creating a blueprint for allocating Certified Local Government (CLG) grant funding.

How and why we save, or more importantly *don't* save, historic properties stirs many emotions. In order to save more than we destroy, we need landmarks commissioners dedicated to giving historic spaces new life to serve on our community's landmarks commission. Currently, Deschutes County is seeks to fill three positions on the landmarks commission. This is your chance to have a hands on role in preserving our local heritage. **Application deadline has been extended to August 15.**



To learn more, you can read the volunteer position description here: <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/deschutes/jobs/4024072/historic-landmarks-commission-volunteer-board?pagetype=transferJobs>

You can also check out the Deschutes County Historic Preservation Plan here: [https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community\\_development/page/796/2022-08-16\\_hlc\\_strategic\\_plan\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/796/2022-08-16_hlc_strategic_plan_-_final.pdf)

For general questions about the landmarks process, please contact Tanya Saltzman at [tanya.saltzman@deschutes.org](mailto:tanya.saltzman@deschutes.org) or 541-388-6528.

## Mark Your Calendars

### AUGUST

- 4, 11, 18, 25 **BEND NIGHT MARKET**  
5-9:00 p.m. Deschutes Historical Museum
- 5, 19 **HERITAGE WALKING TOUR: Early Days of Bend**  
10:30 a.m. Deschutes Historical Museum
- 12 **SECOND ANNUAL ANTIQUE FAIR**  
9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m. Deschutes Historical Museum
- 12, 26 **HERITAGE WALKING TOUR: Architectural Tour**  
10:30 a.m. Deschutes Historical Museum

WORTHY HISTORY PUB will be on hiatus until Fall 2023

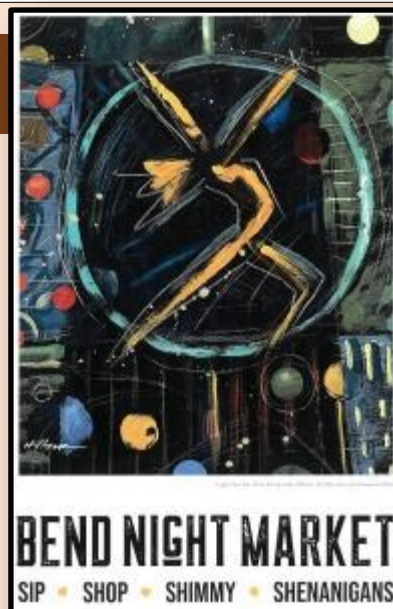


**SAVE THE DATE!**

September 1-2: *The Little Woody*



September 16: *The Oregon Festival of Cars*





August 12, 2023



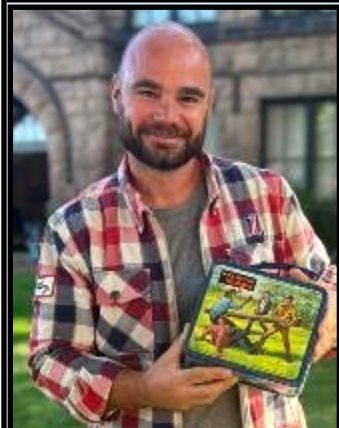
## Deschutes Historical Museum

*Presents*

# The Second Annual Antique Fair

9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

- *Over 15 Antique Vendors*
- *Food Vendors*
- *Live Music by Jay Bowerman and Loren Irving*
- *Members' Booth featuring donated items, all sales benefitting the Deschutes Historical Museum*
- *Raffle Drawing for a custom-made oak and cherrywood cedar-lined hope chest*
- *Appraisals from 12-3:00 p.m. by Karen Stockton (\$5 donation requested for appraisals)*
- *Research support from the Bend Genealogy Society*



THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF  
BARREL-AGED BEER, WINE,  
WHISKEY AND CIDER RETURNS  
TO THE DESCHUTES HISTORICAL  
MUSEUM

SEPT 1 & 2, 2023!

Visit [thelittlewoody.com](http://thelittlewoody.com)

for more information and to purchase tickets



# Deschutes Historical Museum

Volunteers wanted, please contact Vanessa Ivey at (541)389-1813 or [info@deschuteshistory.org](mailto:info@deschuteshistory.org)

Saturday,  
September 16, 2023

## Schedule of Events:

- 8:30-9:30: Placement of Cars
- 10:00: Festival Opens
  - Music by Dan Balmer Trio
  - Ballots for People's Choice Award available to all spectators
- 2:30: On-field awards presentation
- 3:00: Festival Closes

For More Information:

[oregonfestivalofcars.com](http://oregonfestivalofcars.com)

## Deschutes Historical Museum

129 NW Idaho Ave • Bend, OR 97701

Save the Date!

Saturday, September 16, 2023

10:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

