

Discover Stories on the Land

The most recent excerpt from *Stories on the Land* was published in the spring 2024 *Applegater* (page 22). We pick up the story in the mid 1800s, in a section of the book titled, "Enterprises." (All quotes are from Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley: An Oregon Documentary, by John and Marguerite Black.)

Logtown, Union Town, and Ruch

Logtown, an early stopping place in the Applegate, was in full swing by the time the stage road was completed in 1858. Several saloons, a hotel, and a blacksmith's shop served not only travelers but the large mining population on Forest and Poormans creeks. Louis Herling opened a stopping place a mile east of Logtown in 1860. A German farmer, Henry Bauten, bought the Herling place for \$950 in an estate sale in 1882, applied for a liquor license, and opened for business. "Drinks were to be had from the customer's own bottle as late as 1910. The term 'gallon house' meant that liquor could only be sold by the gallon under county license."

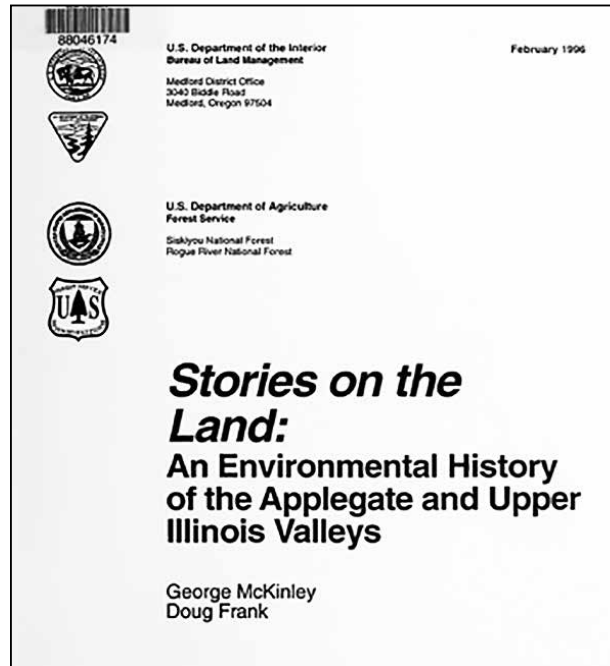
Logtown was also the home of John McKee, who came to mine but soon opened a blacksmith shop to serve the miners and farmers of the area. "He sharpened tools and plows, shod horses, mules and oxen," and invented his own miner's pick. Based in his log home, which was large enough for square dancing, the McKees functioned as informal social

directors to the community, holding card games and sporting contests and other communal events every summer. Somehow, John and his wife, Maryum, also had time to raise a houseful of children.

Logtown died as gold mining declined during this period. Only a few buildings were still standing by 1900.

Uniontown was located a couple of miles south of present-day Ruch on the Applegate River. The four Cameron brothers came from Iowa in the 1850s and, after mining on Sterling Creek, settled on homesteads along the river. Tod Cameron opened a store on their property, which they now called Uniontown. In time, a saloon and blacksmith shop were added. It was in their shop that an African American blacksmith known to locals as Negro Ben worked, whose name was later given to a prominent mountain peak in the region. [Editor's note: The name was changed in 2020 to Ben Johnson Mountain.] The saloonkeeper, Val Comstock, hauled freight by mule team from Crescent City and mined on the side.

Tod Cameron also owned one of the earliest sawmills in the region, at Wellsville, a mile up the Little Applegate River. "William and Robert operated the mill and sold lumber to miners and settlers for miles around. They drove team and wagon and delivered lumber to the mining camps when it was needed." In



later, Cap's grief-stricken mother drowned herself and the youngest child, four-year-old William, in a mining reservoir some 50 by 60 yards, five to six feet deep. Cap lived under Peter Britt's guardianship, went to school, learned to be a blacksmith, and built a blacksmith shop where the Upper Applegate Road diverges from the Crescent City Road near the confluence of Forest Creek and the Applegate River. Soon he began to sell food and supply items. He added a post office in 1897, then a new store building, smoke house, social hall, and residence. Around the time

of World War I, he added gas pumps. Cap Ruch died in 1930; his widow, Anna, ran the store until 1945, although the business declined rapidly after the community lost the post office in 1939.

Lower down along the Applegate River, Murphy thrived early as a center of commercial and social activity with a grist mill, a sawmill, and a post office, along with a way station operated by James Wimer. Both Williams (where Josephine County's first Grange was established in 1870) and Wilderville offered services for early settlers.

Both Logtown and Uniontown were gone by the turn of the century. In this area of the Applegate, the future was represented by a town founded by Casper (Cap) Ruch. As a child, Ruch had come from Switzerland with his parents, who settled on Humbug Creek to do some mining. His father committed suicide when Cap was 10 years old, a day after buying out his partner's share of their mining claim for \$1,600 in gold coins. Neighbors said he had not been acting "right." Two weeks

From pages 72-73 of *Stories on the Land: An Environmental History of the Applegate and Upper Illinois Valleys*, by Doug Frank and George McKinley. Excerpted by Diana Coogle.

■ FIRE AND EMERGENCY PLAN

Continued from page 1

Shipley and Sandy Shaffer, and edited by Diana Coogle. It amazes me and gives me great pride that the first CWPP in the US didn't come out of Washington, DC, or California, but instead from the talented and engaged folks right here in the Applegate. I'm sure many of you have the red three-ring binder that houses the old plan stashed somewhere on your bookshelf or in your closet. That binder is full of good stuff, but the Applegate has changed a lot over the past 22 years, and those changes need to be reflected in an updated plan that meets the needs of the residents now.

A CWPP is a community-driven plan that provides guidance on addressing community needs related to wildfire risk reduction, community preparedness, emergency response, and post-fire recovery. Mitigating the risk of an uncharacteristically severe wildfire is largely accomplished through forest

management practices, defensible space work around homes, and education programs. Community preparedness and emergency response can be enhanced by improving and protecting evacuation routes, documenting resources that can assist during a wildfire (everything from an available excavator to pastures that can board evacuated animals), creating or updating phone trees and other neighborhood networks, and far more activities than can be listed here. Finally, the CWPP should have a post-fire recovery plan. How do we, as a community, band together to help residents who may lose homes or businesses? These questions need to be asked and, hopefully, answered well before a fire is at our doorstep. The challenges posed by wildfire are many, but I've been continuously amazed by the wide range of skills and experience that Applegaters possess. We will need to draw on that deep pool of talent here, locally, to keep our community safe.

Some practical, concrete benefits of an up-to-date CWPP are directly related to fuels-reduction work. The prioritization of locations for fuels-reduction work (cutting brush, dead trees, and overstocked stands) is one of the main functions of a CWPP. Also, most grants that will fund this work require that the CWPP for the area be no more than ten years old, or five in some cases. Therefore, this CWPP update process will guide the next five to ten years of fuels reduction work in the Applegate. I have heard from many landowners that the recent tree mortality has been a concern. If you want to have a say in that process or just want to know why the work is being planned where it is, this is your opportunity to get involved.

The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) secured funding through a US Department of Agriculture Community Wildfire Defense Grant to fund the update of our CWPP. Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD) and the APWC will work collaboratively

on this project. AVFD Fire Marshal and Deputy Chief Brian Mulhollen brings connections and experience that will be invaluable in getting this update completed. We will be holding several meetings over the next two years at fire stations and smaller neighborhood locations throughout the valley to give residents as many opportunities as possible to have their voices heard. No one knows the valley better than you, the residents who live here. Please share that knowledge with us to make sure that the plan we develop is as comprehensive and accurate as possible. If you are interested in hosting a neighborhood chat, please let us know. For more information, visit applegatepartnership.org or contact us at 541-899-9982.

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*Happy holidays to
one and all
from the Applegater!*

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