

You Too Can Do Good by Getting Involved with Local History

by Randy Jaye & David Churchman

Looking for something interesting and rewarding to do in all that spare time whether due to semi-retirement or forced on you by pandemic precautions? Consider getting involved with, or if nonexistent, starting a local history society.

Throughout the country local historical societies have collected and preserved local business records, letters, diaries, journals, oral histories, articles, books, films, and maps as well as tools, clothing, art, and other objects, many quite unusual, all begging for you to help organize, study, and turn into thought-provoking stories. Wherever you live, there is fascinating and satisfying work to be done. As examples, consider the goals and activities of two such societies 2482 miles apart.

The Historical Society of Southern Oregon [HSSO] has over 5000 photographs on glass negatives (and more on film), hundreds of items connected to the fur trade, the pioneers who arrived via the Oregon Trail, and records on the Klamath, Modoc, and Takelma tribes and Chinese and Japanese communities. HSSO has saved over a dozen historical buildings from demolition and gotten them listed on the National Register of Historic Places and one town as the first ever National Historic Landmark, and preserved numerous architectural drawings. HSSO members write and publish books, pamphlets, and newsletters including biographies of famous, notorious, little known but intriguing people, maintains archives, and events such as the last great train robbery in the U.S. in 1923 near the top of Siskiyou Pass. It is digitizing much of its material for easier access, provides maps for interesting walks, and publishes *As It Was* stories for radio or YouTube. It maintains a museum and offers free monthly public programs such as *The Land Remembers* (the largely forgotten long and bloody Indian war in Southern Oregon), *The Old Wood House* (a family or an abundant local building material?), *Over Here* (the home front during WWI?), *Railway Scandals 1884-1923* (with luck may even be a little risqué), *The Hidden Demographic* (who could that be?) and *Making History Together*.

Further evidence of the vitality of local societies is provided by the Ormond Beach Historical Society [OBHS] in Florida. OBHS helped save and preserve the Ormond Indian Burial Mound (ca. 800 AD), Three Chimneys Sugar Mill (ca. 1765-1768), Pilgrim's Rest Primitive Baptist Church (ca. 1879), Hotel Ormond Cupola (ca. 1888), the Anderson-Price Memorial Building (ca. 1916), "The Casements (ca. 1913)," winter home and final residence of John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), and one of three surviving WWII Watchtowers (ca. 1942) of the 850 once along the coastline of Florida. There are also tours of historic cemeteries, plantations, and archaeological sites throughout the year. OBHS administers a

Welcome Center at the Victorian Style MacDonald House which also displays historic items and sells books, cards and gifts. OBHS uses the Anderson-Price Memorial Building, one of several local buildings on the National Register of Places, for live and virtual presentations, plays, and social events, as well as to display historic artifacts, paintings, photographs and furnishings. The Speaker Series are live and virtual presentations conducted throughout the year that feature a vast array of topics concentrating on Florida's long-lived history, and are presented by professionals from throughout the state.

Finally, OBHS maintains a website that provides considerable information about all of its activities, sponsored events, virtual exhibits and stories detailing the area's history and publishes a twice monthly informative newsletter, *History Happenings* for subscribers.

Activities such as these provide opportunities to enrich your own life by putting your creativity and skills to good use or to learn new ones and to make new friends. Local history societies often rely on volunteers who learn on the job often in partnership with other organizations such as libraries, service clubs, and universities. One does not need a college degree in history or anything for that matter to contribute. Many volunteers are without formal training but curious about the history of their own little part of the world, or concerned with preserving buildings and the like, or just want to help out. If you do not want to do historical research, you might enjoy and have skills needed to restore old photographs, tools, clothes, furniture, or buildings, or with administrative tasks such as raising funds, mobilizing others to get involved, digitizing documents, designing attractive or provocative exhibits to help people understand life was like years or centuries ago, guiding visitors, or clerking in the museum shop, to name a few among many possibilities depending on how your own local historical society operates and whether your own preferences are to stay behind the scenes or be part of the organization's public face.

About the Authors

Randy Jaye is an historian who has successfully researched and nominated four properties that have been added to the National Register of Historic Places. He has authored numerous articles for history journals and two history books of local interest: *Flagler County, Florida: A Centennial History* and *Perseverance: Episodes of Black History from the Rural South*. He earned both a Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree from the California State University. In 2020, he was elected to the Ormond Beach Historical Society's Board of Directors.

David Churchman is Professor Emeritus, California State University and three-time Fulbright Scholar who has authored some 200 articles and books, the latter including *Why We Fight: The Origins, Nature and Management of Human Conflict* and *Negotiation: Process, Tactics, Theory*. Currently, he lives in Oregon, where he continues to write and volunteer at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and with the Community Emergency Response Team.