

Correcting History

The Annual Umatilla County Potato Show

By Trish Neal

As I was completing the application to apply for The Oregon Heritage Tradition designation for the annual Umatilla County Potato Show, one of the questions was to document the actual date of the first event. I had information that the first event was held in 1921, but I had never found anything in old newspapers to prove that date. So, I decided I had better dig deeper.

I have used newspapers online for several years for various research topics. I know that not all newspapers are online or not all of a specific newspaper's articles are online. But I keep returning periodically to run another search as more newspaper articles are uploaded. I had not done that for the potato show so it was time to go back and search.

I searched again for 1921. Nothing came up. I thought that was odd since there are three local newspapers that were published back then: Weston Leader, The Athena Press, and the East-Oregonian. When you are fortunate to have that many newspapers that report local news you know something is amiss when neither of the three newspapers has an article about the potato show in 1921.

I started searching in 1922 and hit paydirt! So now, the hunt is on for more information about this legacy event for more history of one of the longest running events in Umatilla County.

The Annual Umatilla County Potato Show was first organized in 1922 and held on October 28, 1922. Instead of the event being 104 years old this year, it is 103 years old! The potato show has continued to be held at the Memorial Hall every year since 1922 and around the same time of the year in late October. Although I have found some instances when it was early November. (I have lots of research to do!)

I also found that while the Pendleton Round-up was canceled one year during the war, the Potato Show was held during the war years.

While the Weston Leader covered the planning of the potato show, the other two local newspapers used those articles on their own pages or ran edited versions of the news. Other newspapers have also covered the event such as The Oregonian. In fact, potato shows were held around the state because spuds were King!

The potato show was organized by the Weston Mountain Seed Potato Growers Association. This organization was founded in 1922, as they were planning the first potato show. Their board of directors were elected, and they even had a trade mark that would be used on the bags used to ship the seed potatoes in.

The Weston Mountain Seed Potato Growers Association was launched at a meeting of the Weston Mountain Community club Monday evening.

The club will handle the seed and commercial potatoes grown in the upland districts tributary to Weston, build storage and transact whatever business comes within the province of such an organization. It has long been needed and is expected to prove of great benefit to the upland potato interests.

Constitution and by-laws were adopted and were signed by twenty-two Weston Mountain growers. The membership list is expected, will be increased to thirty or more when growers from the other mountain districts are signed up.

Control of the association is vested in a board of directors representing the potato districts on both sides of Pine Creek. The membership fee is \$5.00. Weston is the place of business.

Among those in attendance at the meeting and whose advice and assistance were greatly appreciated were Fred Bennion, county agent; E.R. Jackman of Oregon Agricultural College, and Lee M. Lampson, manager of the Blalock Fruit Co.'s office at Kennewick Wash. – Association is launched by seed potato growers The Weston Leader 09-29-1922

Wm. B. Hall was elected as the president of the association. Charles L. May served as the first vice-president with W.L. Rayborn elected secretary-treasurer. Carl Brutscher and E.E. Tucker rounded out the five board of directors. There were about 19 members of the new organization, but membership grew as more growers became members.

The Weston Commercial Club assisted in helping with the potato show. The city was abuzz with the plans for the show. Fred Bennion, the Umatilla County Agent, assisted the growers in selecting their produce to enter in the show. Colonel Weyrauch, president of the Blalock Fruit Co., Walla Walla, was to be the judge.

Premiums for the awards was set at \$100.00 for the first year. Prizes averaged \$5.00, \$7.00, and \$2.00. However, only the Weston Mountain Certified seed potatoes would be eligible for the cash prizes. Other local produce, wheat, and other agricultural products were eligible to enter the show as a display, they would not be awarded a cash prize. While cash prizes are not awarded today, everything is judged and ribbons awarded.

Exhibits of wheat, corn and other products of the land are invited by the management but prizes will be offered only for potatoes. The show will be held in Memorial Hall from 10 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening. The winning potatoes in the various classes will be entered in the Land Products show at Portland in November.

Committeemen Bruno Weber and James Smock are expected to look after securing exhibits from Reed and Hawley Mountain, and Carl G Brutscher was appointed to assist them in the work. Committeemen W.L. Rayborn and Jay V. Smith will perform a similar service on Weston Mountain. The Weston committeemen, J.H. Price and Clark Wood, will assist Mr. Bennion in receiving and placing the exhibits.

The ladies of the Weston Mountain Community Club will arrange to substantially regale the "Inner man" on the day of the show. – Potato Show Plans Are Perfected by Committee in Charge East Oregonian, Oct 9, 1922 pg 1

The ladies of the Weston Mountain Community club served a hot lunch. It was reported that their profit was \$25.00 after expenses. (\$480.73 today.) Another women's group sold doughnuts, coffee, and apple cider during the show.

King Spud will be crowned tomorrow at Weston at the biggest and best potato show ever held in Umatilla County. To be sure, it is the only potato show so far held in Umatilla County, so that our praise is well grounded. But even had there been other shows, this one would shine in comparison.

The exhibits are numerous and creditable and afford the most convincing evidence ever before presented of the unusual merits of upland soil in the Weston country for spud growing. Quantity and quality are both emphasized in this display. Certified netted gems of beautiful uniformity –

clean, smooth and handsome – the highest aristocracy of the potato kingdom, are contrasted with twelve-hill exhibits of rural type spuds containing all sizes and manner of spuds to show extraordinary yield. One of these twelve-hill exhibits contains more than three hundred potatoes and weighs 147 pounds.

The show is an earnest of the day when the hill country which takes the generic name of Weston Mountain but embraces several mountain districts shall have become famed far and wide for its potatoes, and more especially its certified netted gems already winning pleased recognition in Yakima Valley and other centers of irrigation. When this time comes, and the upland farmer will be privileged to haul his potatoes to market over the Blue Mountain Highway instead of the present hilly and rocky grade which masquerades as a road, he will have been repaid for years of patient struggling with untoward conditions that would discourage men of weaker fiber. –Hail to the King! Weston Leader October 27, 1922

That first year several of the Weston Mountain and Reed & Hawley Mountain growers were identified. (More research will be done in the future to learn more about the seed potato industry in Weston.)

Marvin Adkins	Grower
Baddeley & Fuller	Grower, 22 acres
J.W. Bowers	Grower
Carl G. Brutscher	Grower, 4 acres
H.V. Compton	Grower, 5 acres
R.E. English	Grower, 5 acres
Walter Farr	Grower
M.C. Ferguson	Grower
Will Hall	Grower, 7 acres
Mark Henderson	Grower, 10 acres
Cecil Hyatt	Grower, 5 acres
Roy Hyatt	Grower, 5 acres
V.S. Keikkalo	Grower, 15 acres
J.P. Lieuallen	Grower, 4 acres
V.L. Marr	Grower, 7 acres
Clyde & Roy May	Grower, 10 acres
Charles L. & Roy May	Grower, 15 acres
C.L. May	Grower
Alex McCorkell	Grower, 2 acres
C.W. Metz	Grower
L.I. O'Harra	Grower, 7 acres
W.L. Rayborn	Grower 65 acres; Largest grower of certified seed potatoes
J.V. Smith	Grower
W.L. Smock	Grower, 2 acres
E.E. Tucker	Grower
William E. Van Winkle	Grower
Wm. H. Warfield	Grower
Bruno Weber	Grower
Oscar Winn	Grower, 5 acres
Claude Winn	Grower, 6 acres
Joe Wurzer	Grower

The second year, the Weston-Elgin Highway project was being planned. A meeting planned for the project in conjunction with the potato show. Senator Robert N. Stanfield planned to attend. Representative J.W. Summers of the fourth Washinton district, Representative N.J. Sinnott of the second Oregon district also attended the meeting and potato show.

It was reported that Governor Walter M. Pierce and Senator Charles L. McNary would attend. However, Governor Pierce was unable to attend but did send a letter supporting the highway.

Fred Bennion, Umatilla County Agent discussed the proposed Weston-Elgin Highway from the standpoint of the agricultural development that would happen as a result of the highway being constructed.

The annual Potato Show was an important event over the years because it promoted the Weston Mountain Seed Potato Growers. The Umatilla County Potato Show is still a popular local event although it has gone through evolutions as the sponsors of the event have changed over the years. The Weston Commercial Club first helped with supporting the Potato Show. The Weston Chamber of Commerce took over around 1924. In more recent years it has been Tim and Linda Crampton leading the way after the Weston Chamber of Commerce dissolved. Today, the Weston Area Development Association (WADA) is proud to carry on this legacy.

As I continue to research the history of the Umatilla County Potato Show I will share bits of that history in our newsletter. People who entered their potatoes, produce, and crafts were identified so it is nice to see the names of the people who lived here at that time. School children and 4-H groups also entered the potato show. So, watch for more of "Looking Back..." in the coming months.