

The

ARCHIVE

QUARTERLY OF THE GRESHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2026



410 N Main Ave ✦ PO Box 65 ✦ Gresham, OR 97030 ✦ (503) 661-0347 ✦ info@greshamhistorical.org

Horse plowing demonstration or competition in Pleasant Valley, 1970s.
35mm slide, Vye Hodges. GHS Photo 2017.001.0006



See pg. 6-7



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AT THE MUSEUM

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Apr. 13, 7pm** **History Pub: Memories of the Multnomah County Fair (Troutdale Historical Society event)**
Anne Endicott and Len Otto present at Edgefield Blackberry Hall—free!
- Apr. 25, 5-6pm** **History Talk: The February 1996 Floods**
Bobby Corser, KATU meteorologist, explores the floods that devastated the Portland area 30 years ago. Learn more about the floods in Gresham on pg. 6-7!
- May 2, 11am** **Preservation Week Walking Tour of Downtown Gresham**
Learn about the history all around us on this 1.5-hour tour of significant buildings.
- May 8-9, 8am-4pm** **Plant Sale Fundraiser**
Get your hanging baskets, annuals, perennials, and herbs at this annual outdoor sale. This year's event will feature a flower arranging workshop! See p. 4 for details.
- May 23, 12pm** **Cemetery Tour**
Join us for a 1-hour walking tour of three historic burial grounds. Meet at West Gresham Elementary.
- May 28, 5-6pm** **History Talk: History of Oregon Amusement Parks**
Darrell Jabin, Oregon's Traveling Historian, compiles the state's greatest amusement parks.
- June 12-20** **Gresham History Week**
A festival of events and programs for all ages. See next page for the current schedule.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Visitor Records Broken in 2025

The museum welcomed a total of 6,318 people in 2025, breaking the previous annual record of 5,939 set in 2018. The months of April (485), July (794), October (792), and December (1,358) all broke monthly records.

Like all museums, GHS closed in 2020 due to the pandemic and has been slowly recovering ever since. Increased programming and regular open hours have contributed to the rebound.

2026 is off to a strong start with a record-breaking 327 visitors in February (typically a slow month). Help us continue the record-breaking trend by visiting and bringing your friends!

Grants Awarded for History Week

GHS's 50-year celebration is coming up in June, and we are proud to announce three grants that will bolster the week-long event.

\$1,500 from the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition will support artist stipends at the Arts & Culture Fair (June 14) and Living History Day (June 20).

\$3,000 from the America 250 Oregon Commission will support the creation of five pop-up exhibits featuring Black history, Gresham's libraries, and migration stories.

A Cultural Events Grant from the City of Gresham adds an additional \$6,000 in funding for History Week. This grant will support further artist stipends and other costs.

GHS is seeking other grants and sponsorships to cover additional festival costs. See pg. 3 for a schedule of events.

Gresham VFW Displays Historic Militaria

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 180 hall has become a makeshift exhibit gallery for the belongings of local veterans and their families.

GHS is excited to be working with the VFW on bringing veterans' stories to light through these displays, which include uniforms, medals, insignia, scale models, flags, and other historic and educational materials.

The VFW hall has no public hours, but the displays can be seen by appointment by calling (503) 491-1091.

Voices of Gresham Funded!

Thanks to a \$10,000 contract from the City of Gresham and several generous private donations, the *Voices of Gresham* podcast is on track to return later this year. Episodes will explore themes in local history through recorded firsthand accounts. Stay tuned for a launch date!



Gresham VFW Hall with historic displays

HISTORY WEEK

GRESHAM
FURNITURE



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS—JUNE 12-20, 2026

What is History Week? It's a festival commemorating the Gresham Historical Society's 50th anniversary and the US 250. It's also a chance to have fun while learning about the place we call home. All events are free unless noted otherwise.

Schedule is subject to change. For more info, check the event page at greshamhistorical.org/history-week.

All Week

City-Wide Scavenger Hunt

Find historic sites and complete tasks to win prizes! This is an all-ages event that can be done in groups or individually. Pay what you can!

Pop-Up Exhibits

Located around Gresham—five exhibits featuring Black history, migration stories, Indigenous history, and more.

Crafting History—Gresham Historical Society

On weekday mornings at 10:30, join us for kid-friendly craft activities at the museum.

June 12, 5pm

Opening Reception—Gresham Historical Society

Open to members and volunteers, past and present; honoring those who founded GHS in 1976!

June 13, 10am

Scavenger Hunt Kickoff—Gresham Historical Society

Get the edge on the competition, and pick up your limited-edition History Week t-shirt!

June 13, 11am

Downtown Gresham Walking Tour

Learn about the history all around us on this walking tour of historic buildings.

June 13, 2pm

Northwest Neighborhood Biking Tour—Bella Vista Park

Explore a historic neighborhood on this 1.5-hr biking tour.

June 14, 11-4

Arts & Culture Fair—Gresham Historical Society

See traditional art forms in action, and learn how to get involved with history and culture organizations at this day-long street fair. There will be live performances at Spinellas outdoor stage next door from 11am to 2:30pm.

June 14, 6pm

History Talk: "Old Glory Unfolded"—Gresham Historical Society

Chris Garza reveals the history of the American Flag—just in time for flag day!

June 15, 6pm

Historic Bike Ride: Power and Transportation—Main City Park

Learn about Rails-to-Trails and the history of electric power in Gresham on this 6-mile loop.

June 16, 5pm

Trivia Night and Historic Costume Contest—Location TBD

Test your history knowledge and compete for prizes.

June 17, 10:30am

Crafting History: Bookbinding—Gresham Historical Society

A craft activity for ages 12 and up. Learn how to make and bind your own notebook!

June 17, 6pm

Civic Night—East County Library (tentative)

Talk to local elected officials in this youth town hall.

June 18, 4-8pm

Third Thursday Street Fair—Historic Downtown Gresham

Enjoy this throwback to the Multnomah County Fair with themed activities including a pie baking contest, craft fair, and a history talk.

June 19

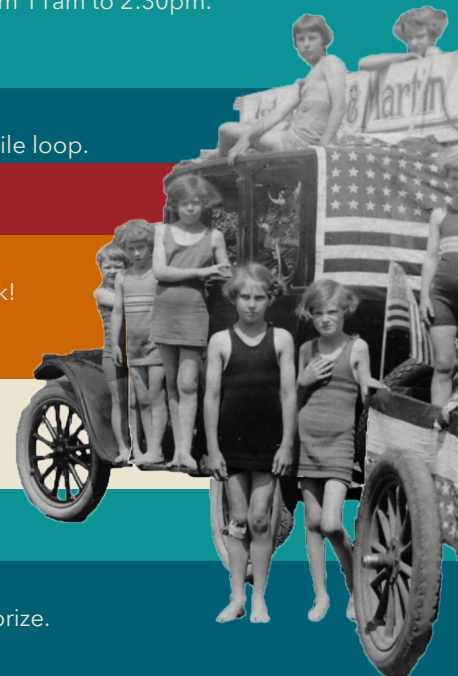
Juneteenth Festival by Play Grow Learn—Vance Park

Head over to Rockwood for this family-friendly event celebrating Black history.

June 20, 10-4

Living History Day—Downtown Gresham

Find figures from Gresham's history and learn their stories for the chance to win a prize.



AT THE MUSEUM

THE FEBRUARY 1996 FLOOD

MUSEUM LECTURE SERIES

Bobby Corser



History Talk: April 25, 5pm at the Museum

Guest speaker Bobby Corser presents a look back at the historic February 1996 flood and the lessons learned.

Bobby Corser is a digital meteorologist with KATU-TV in Portland. He has worked in radio and TV in the Portland market since 2000. He holds a BS in Geosciences with an emphasis in Broadcast and Operational Meteorology from Mississippi State University.

\$5 per person (members free)

Free Tours in 2026

Cemetery and Historic Downtown tours are coming back in May. Cemetery tours meet in the east lot of West Gresham Elementary, and Downtown tours meet at the museum. Here are the dates through July:

May 2, 11am—Historic Downtown Tour

May 23, 12pm—Cemetery Tour

June 13, 11am—Historic Downtown Tour

June 20, 12pm—Cemetery Tour

July 11, 11am—Historic Downtown Tour

July 18, 12pm—Cemetery Tour



THE MOTHER'S DAY PLANT SALE IS BACK!



Get your spring annuals, flower baskets, trees, shrubs, house plants, herbs, and more at our 3rd annual plant sale! Presented in collaboration with Gresham Japanese Garden. Workshop is sponsored by Foraged Blooms.

May 8th-9th (Friday & Saturday), 8am-4pm in the Gresham Historical Society parking lot

Flower Centerpiece Workshop: May 8th, 6:30pm, \$50 per person (includes all materials for a finished centerpiece)

Visit greshamhistorical.org/events for details, updates, and workshop tickets.

OUTLOOKing

Volunteer **Mike Andrews** spends hours each week sifting through bound volumes of the Gresham Outlook, which we received from the Outlook's closed print shop in 2024. While looking for damaged or missing pages, he also finds forgotten and unusual stories from Gresham's past. He shares a few of them in this recurring section.

Quick-Draw Ojala

Long before Finnish-American Arvo Ojala moved to Gresham in 1971 to escape the Los Angeles smog, he was already famous as a Hollywood quick-draw expert and gun coach. As advisor to the likes of James Arness, James Garner, Dale Robertson and Kirk Douglas in the 1950s and 1960s, Ojala was mostly a behind-the-scenes presence, although he did appear onscreen in minor roles.

But it was his quick-draw duel with Arness' Sheriff Matt Dillon during the opening credits to TV's *Guns Smoke* that secured him a degree of television immortality. "You may have noticed that two shots are fired in that sequence. I still got off the first shot," Ojala told the *Outlook* in January 1976. Despite Dillon's scripted victory over the black-hatted gunslinger in the opening, Ojala earned high praise from the show's star. "There's no one faster with a gun," Arness said in a 1959 *Los Angeles Times* story.

Perhaps his biggest influence in Hollywood westerns, however, was his invention of a quick-draw gun holster. In the same 1976 *Outlook* article, Ojala stated, "The holsters used in Westerns in the 50's were old floppy things. It took five minutes to get the gun out. I invented a gun holster with a metal-lining that permits a faster draw. That's what started the fast draw craze." Which means quick-draw duels first appeared onscreen in the 1950s and never happened in real life in the wild, wild West. Say it ain't so!

Although Hollywood Westerns were becoming increasingly scarce by 1976, Ojala still served as a gun coach on such films as *Silverado*, *The Three Amigos*, and *Back to the Future III*. Among his latter-day students were Kevin Kline, Kevin Costner, Michael J. Fox, Paul Newman, and Robert Redford.

Ojala died in Gresham on July 1, 2005 at the age of 85.



Arvo Ojala (left) and James Garner on the set of *Maverick*. *Outlook*, 1/12/1976

CURRENT EXHIBITS—JAN.-NOV. 2026

Have you seen the 2026 exhibits yet? We're celebrating 50 years with *History and Memory*, a spotlight on how we got to be where we are today (and some of the most interesting objects we've collected along the way). *Gresham: An Architectural Journey* is a photo essay featuring some beautiful images by Josh Kulla, showcasing local historic buildings.

GRESHAM AN ARCHITECTURAL JOURNEY



History & Memory

50 Years of Preservation at the
Gresham Historical Society



THE FEBRUARY 1996 FLOOD

A 30-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

By Judy Miller

It rains in Oregon. Sometimes a lot, and sometimes for a long stretch of days. In February 1996, though, a series of circumstances took the normal "it's the PNW" situation to an entirely different level. That was the year of the biggest flood the area had seen in decades. It became known as a "100-year flood," an event that has a one-in-100 chance of happening in any given year. In total the flood took eight lives and resulted in over \$500 million in damages in the greater Portland area.

In the ten days before the flooding began, the weather in the region was much colder than normal. The high temperatures in Portland stayed below freezing, and repeated storms covered the region in six inches of snow mixed with layers of ice. And then came February 3rd.

Over 36 hours, the temperature at PDX rose from 24 degrees to the mid 50s, with a warm rain pouring

The Willamette River crested at 28.6 feet, about 10.6 feet above flood stage. The river reached near the top of its seawall and came close to flooding a large part of Tom McCall Waterfront Park. Officials called for volunteers to take part in a major sandbagging effort throughout downtown Portland. They kept this up until the floodwaters began to fall on February 9. At least five rivers in Oregon crested at all-time highs during the floods.

Massive flooding devastated cities on the Willamette River, but Gresham residents faced serious conditions as well. The rain and snowmelt had an impact beyond the rise in river levels. The resulting landslides and standing water left people stranded, property damaged, and lives impacted.

Businesses and homes along the Sandy River were affected by the flood waters, and roads closed due to flooding and mudslides, including major arteries. Tad's Chicken 'N Dumplings on the Historic Highway was impacted by mudslides, as were other businesses in the area. Schools closed, homes slid into the river, and life took a turn for many in the affected areas.



Aerial photo of farmland inundated by Willamette River flood waters in February 1996. National Weather Service Portland



A Corbett resident's car after being crushed by a fallen tree on the Columbia River Highway. Steve Kasserman for the Outlook

down. Over the next few days, the highs were in the 60s with over seven inches of rain in the Willamette Valley.

According to KOIN 6 meteorologist Steve Pierce:

More than a foot of rain fell over the same period of time at higher elevations in the Cascades, melting a large amount of snowpack that was on the ground. All of that melted snow water was headed for the lowlands.

Douglas Weberg of Corbett was driving on the Historic Columbia River Highway near the Stark Street Bridge in Troutdale when a tree fell from a 65-foot cliff onto his Volvo, crushing it. Road closures forced rescue vehicles to navigate the winding Historic Highway from Corbett, causing a delayed response time. Weberg survived with a broken back and arm.

Want to learn more about the 1996 Flood? Join us on April 25 at 5pm for a history talk by KATU Digital Meteorologist Bobby Corser (details on pg. 4).

HISTORY FEATURE

Not so fortunate was 62 year old Jacqueline Jank, who lived with her husband Harold Jank on the Sandy River. The couple's home was in the path of a mud flow which pushed it into the river. Harold recalled that Jacqueline opened the door and saw the water at their doorstep; he heard a loud noise, and she disappeared from view. Searchers spent two days looking for her but could not recover her body.

As the KATU story relates,

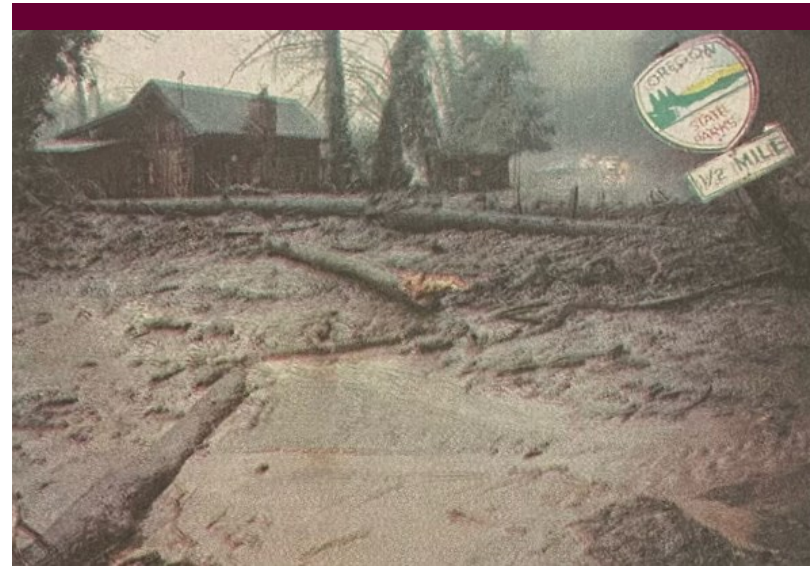
The next thing he knew, Jank was floating down the Sandy River -- inside his home. The home reportedly slammed into several bridges, knocking chunks off it along the way. At some point, Jank passed out. When he woke up, he said he saw a light through the hole of his ceiling and managed to get up on the roof and wave a pillowcase to signal for help... People aboard a passing tugboat rescued him near the mouth of the Sandy River. During the harrowing experience Jank suffered a heart attack...

The flooding of 1996 was catastrophic for many living in Gresham.

many living in Gresham and the surrounding communities. Time has a way of softening our realities, but the 30th anniversary is an opportunity to commemorate this tragic event. Since 1996, advancements in meteorology have improved our ability to predict weather events, affording residents crucial time to prepare. Also improved

Seven other individuals lost their lives in the areas affected by flooding and mudslides.

The flooding of 1996 was catastrophic for



Jank home in the path of the mudslide that swept into the Sandy River. Steve Kasserman for the Outlook

are our transportation and communication infrastructure. Still, natural disasters can happen anywhere. The people who lived through these events will not forget, and the rest of us can honor the victims by applying lessons of the past towards a more resilient future.

Sources

The Gresham Outlook

"30 Years Later: Remembering the Deadly PNW Flood of 1996," Josh Cozart & Steve Pierce for KOIN

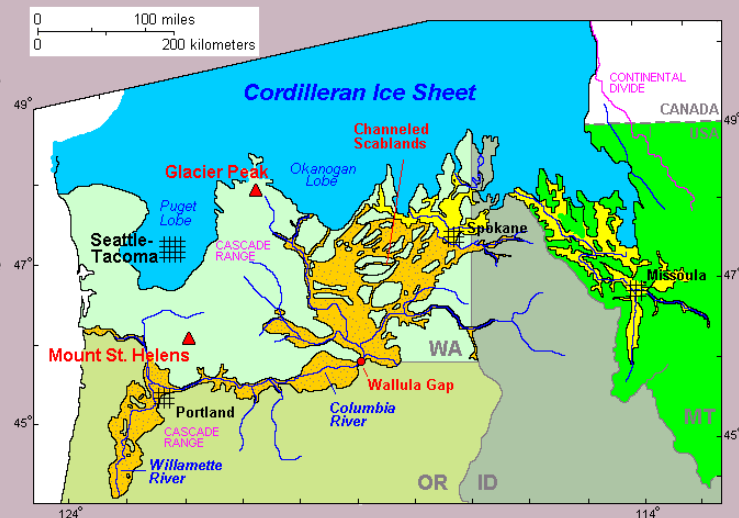
"Weather 101: Looking Back at the Historical and Deadly Floods of 1996," YouTube video by KATU News

A PREHISTORIC PERSPECTIVE: THE MISSOULA FLOODS

By Kayte Williamson for the 2023 exhibit "Rockwood Stories"

Around 15,000 years ago, during the Earth's most recent ice age, the waters in Lake Missoula breached an ice dam. These events occurred every decade or so for several hundred years as the lake refilled and are collectively referred to as the Missoula Floods. The floodwaters tore rock from cliff faces in the Columbia Gorge and Willamette River Valley, shaping our landscape and leaving behind rocks that had been embedded in the ice, ranging in size from pebbles to boulders. As the floodwaters spread out from the confines of the Gorge, many of these rocks came to rest in the Gresham and Rockwood area, which settlers many thousands of years later named as such for its abundance of rocks and trees.

Image: Map of Missoula Floods, with flood path shown in goldenrod. Courtesy USGS.



LET'S GET ACQUAINTED

We love our volunteers! Our staff of about 50 volunteers helps out with everything from photographs to textiles and oral histories. They greet visitors to the museum, lead historical tours and lectures, and provide the heavy lift with property maintenance and repair.

An 11-member board of directors oversees the financial side of GHS and the museum, conducting fundraisers to support upkeep on GHS buildings and day-to-day expenses. The board also works closely with Executive Director Silvie Andrews to aid with grant funding, collections acquisitions, and marketing.

The generous donation of our volunteers' time ensures Gresham's history will continue to unfold and be available to future generations.

So let's get acquainted!

HANNAH JENSVOLD, ARCHIVES & EXHIBITS VOLUNTEER

Hannah Jensvold is among an impressive line of volunteers who have chosen to spend time at the Gresham History Museum while completing their postgraduate college education.

"I'm currently working on my Master of Library and Information Science [degree] in order to pursue a career in archiving or museum work," Hannah explains. "History has always been something I love, so I was really enthusiastic to have a new way to immerse myself in it."

Since arriving at the museum in February 2025, Hannah has been part of the team that catalogs, digitizes, and stores objects in the archives collection. Most recently, she has been processing photographs and documents from large donation of Meadowland Dairy materials. Hannah also co-curated the museum's current exhibit, "History and Memory."

"That was a really exciting opportunity to learn new skills and work alongside some absolutely awesome people," she says.

Hannah believes it's easy for communities to lose their identity as times passes. Museums remind residents what makes our hometown unique and how we got where we are.

"Connecting the stories and people of the past and present, and making sure they are there to be heard in the future, makes our community stronger," Hannah says.



SUE PIAZZA, GHS BOARD VICE PRESIDENT

Living your entire life in the same community affords a unique view on how your hometown grows with you.

That's why Sue says she's always been one of Gresham's biggest cheerleaders.

"I am enthusiastic about Gresham," she says. "It has always been a great place to live, work and play."

Born and raised in Damascus, Sue moved to Gresham after graduating from Sam Barlow High School. She then launched what has become a 40-year commitment to Gresham, through civic involvement and volunteering with a variety of local nonprofits and fraternal organizations. She has served on the Gresham City Council since 2021, as both councilor and council president, and turned her love of travel into a thriving business, Bucket List Travel Tours.

Sue joined the GHS board six years ago. She says her love for both Gresham and history is what led to her involvement, adding that the historical society is at the heart of the community.

"[GHS] protects the memories and stories of the people who built this city," she says, "so that families of today and in the future can feel connected."



PHOTO ESSAY

OLD GRESHAM LIBRARIES

This year marks over 125 years of Gresham libraries. As we look forward to the opening of the new East County Library on May 16, let's revisit the libraries that came before.



★ The Earliest Libraries

Above: Children gather at the library reading room in downtown Gresham, 1904. It was located on the top floor of one of the buildings on Main Street. Librarian Alida Culy can be seen in back.

Left: Jeff (sitting), Susan, and Michael Townsend reading at the Carnegie Library (now GHS), 1960.

★ Gresham Regional Library

Right: Before the opening of the Gresham Regional Library, the community hosted a "book brigade," forming a line to move all books by hand from the Carnegie Library. In the decades since, the library has been the setting for countless events and programs. Its final day of operation is March 26, 2026. The new library is slated to open on May 16.



MEMBERSHIP

JOIN US ON A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME!

MARCH 1ST - APRIL 30TH

JOIN AND REFER NEW MEMBERS
TO ENTER THE RAFFLE FOR A
**GIFT BASKET WORTH
OVER \$250!**



GRESHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Before April 30, you can join, renew, refer new members, or gift a membership to get entered in the drawing!
Membership at the Gresham Historical Society supports our mission to preserve and share local history.

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT/RENEWAL FORM

Member or Family Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

CHOOSE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Each membership level includes 10% off museum store purchases, a subscription to the quarterly newsletter, free & reduced admission to events, and invitations to members-only events throughout the year.

- Individual** \$25 membership for one adult
- Dual** \$35 membership for two adults
- Family** \$50 benefits for two adults and all family members under 18
- Business** \$150 two membership cards for any employee
- Business Plus** \$500 two membership cards for any employee and your business logo in the Quarterly of the Gresham Historical Society
- Patron** \$1,000

I wish to make an additional donation in the amount of \$ _____

How do you prefer to receive your newsletter? Email Print

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Payment method (circle one): Cash Check (payable to Gresham Historical Society)

Please charge my credit/debit card \$ _____

Card number _____ Expiration date _____ CVV _____

Signature _____

MEMBERSHIP

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE JOINED, RENEWED, OR DONATED SINCE NOVEMBER:

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Silvie Andrews
April Avery
David Baumann
Charlotte Becker & Howard Huntley
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Lanea Teeny
Linda Wagner
Diane Whitney
Sandra Wilson

Podcast Sponsorship

Mike & Claudia Andrews
Silvie Andrews for East Metro
Community Music Association

Polar King Sign Restoration Fund

Mike & Claudia Andrews
Laurinda Bateman

Gifts in Honor

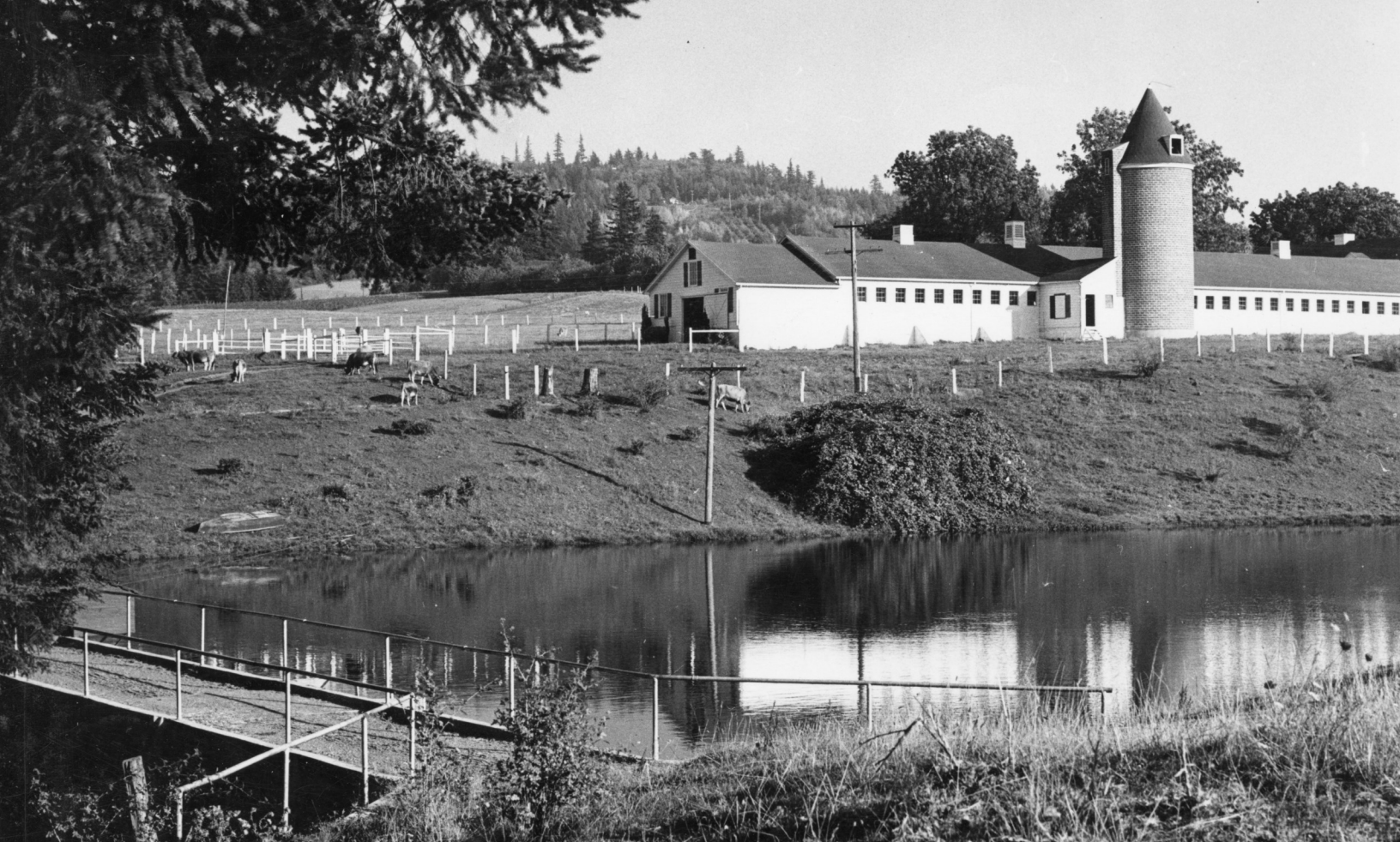
Elizabeth Morse for Mike & Claudia
Andrews

In-Kind Donations

Minuteman Press Gresham—printing
Portland Security Alarm—maintenance

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR BUSINESS PLUS MEMBERS:





Lawbrook Dairy Farm, located in the Butler Creek area, 1943.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

1976 - GRESHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY - 2026

HOURS

Wednesday-Saturday..... 10am-4pm
Sunday..... 12pm-4pm
Monday-Tuesday..... Closed

CONTACT

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Phone: (503) 661-0347

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