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## Local historian Lionel Youst counts his accomplishments

Lionel Youst on following his bliss

JILLIAN WARD The World Jul 31, 2017



Historian Lionel Youst looks at old printing press letters at the Marshfield Sun Museum.

JILLIAN WARD Bandon Western World

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COOS COUNTY — Because one man followed his dreams, parts of Coos County history will be remembered.

Local historian Lionel Youst not only grew up in the area, but returned after traveling the world only to do his best to preserve what should never be lost. Of course, the interest in history began when he was as young as 6 years old, listening to stories told to him by his father about old loggers.

“It was fascinating, those stories,” Youst said as he sat upstairs at the Marshfield Sun Museum, surrounded by work. “I recognized it even then that this is what I would fall in love with.”

By the time he was 16, he began working in the logging camps. In 1950, those camps were already starting to close because of the Portal to Portal Act which allowed companies to refuse to pay

employees travel time. While he worked at one of the logging camps, it was there that he heard about how they were shutting down and he was filled with a sudden need to record it before they vanished.

Throughout the next three years, Youst traveled to as many of the logging camps as he could between British Colombia and into California.

His budding passion was put on hold when he enlisted in the Air Force, but though he couldn't pursue projects, he still admired history.

“Motion pictures and aviation came into being at the same time, so the whole history of aviation is on film and I could watch it there in the Air Force,” Youst said.

Then in 1961 he was told that he was being shipped off to Tirpoli, Libya for three years.

“That was the turning point in my life,” he remembered. “At first I didn't even know where Tripoli was, but once I got there I saw the history. There is tangible stuff you could touch that went back to the paleolithic era, through the Romans and Byzantines and Islamic conquests and the Ottoman Empire, WWII, all of it right there. It was stupendous. It was overwhelming to think how American history is simple, shallow, just barely started, but here you have whole cities in ruins that are still preserved that trace very far back.”

After 22 years of service, he retired as a major and returned with his wife to Coos Bay. As his retirement began, so did his title as historian.

### **Above the Falls**

Youst published his first book, “Above the Falls,” in 1992 after getting a phone call from an old classmate. Youst had been one of the few remaining locals who attended school above Golden and Silver Falls near Allegany. One of his old classmates had seen his name in town and was curious to know if it was the same Lionel Youst from that old schoolhouse.

“We ended up with 25 people who had attended that building above the falls and held a reunion,” Youst said. “I had trouble even finding where the building had been, but took a tape recorder and taped as much history that I could from everyone. I transcribed it and had them all look at it, then one thing led to another and soon I had about 275 pages of pictures and information.”

The book remains in publication, available at the local libraries, Books by the Bay, and in the gift shop at the Coos History Museum.

### **She's Tricky Like Coyote**

Youst ran across the name Annie Miner Peterson while studying at the University of Nebraska in a book about Coos County. Peterson had worked with anthropologists to record the Hanis Coos and Miluk Coos languages, though people later accused her of making it up.

“I read that book very carefully and when I returned to the area, I found out no one knew about her,” Youst said. “So I started collecting everything I could find on her and eventually had enough to do a biography. The only thing I had left to do was speak to someone who had actually known her.”

Through his logging connections, he discovered that Peterson's granddaughter was living in Bandon at the time. She agreed to help Youst uncover more information for the book.

“The Confederated Tribes would have stopped the publication if they could because they were against it,” Youst said. “There had been some animosity between them and Annie, something she had done or something they thought she had done.”

“She's Tricky Like Coyote” was Annie's Native American name, and the book went on to be published by the Oklahoma Press.

The information was so complete, the publishing house had no vetoes come back from the peer review. Youst received a phone call from its executive editor, who delivered the good news.

“He said, 'It is Dr. Youst, correct?'" Youst laughed. “I said, 'No, just plain old Lionel.'”

### **Coquille Thompson, Athabaskan Witness**

Professor William R. Seaburg called Youst after reading a review of “She's Tricky Like Coyote” asking if he would be interested in collaborating on Coquille Thompson, another great informant to anthropologists about local Native Americans.

“I didn't want to,” Youst said. “But then I got to thinking about it and no one was going to ask me to do something like this ever again, so I wrote to the Coquille Tribe on what they thought and got a reply from the tribal counsel that they believed it would be worthwhile.”

Though these are just a few of his written works, Youst also dabbled as an activist when he discovered that chemicals found in Agent Orange were being sprayed by the forest service.

“This was in 1975 and these chemicals were being sprayed right up against people's property to get rid of alder, which was considered a weed then,” he said.

While he was still with the Air Force, he spent one year in Vietnam and had been there when the message came in after the Pentagon banned the use of Agent Orange. He saw the message that came in the middle of the night, and later saw Johnston Island in Hawaii where the remaining cartons of the defoliating agent is being stored.

“Then I come back to find that they are spraying the damn stuff here, that the chemical companies were pushing it on the forestry because it was a way to get rid of it,” Youst said.

He spent a year fighting its usage here at home and eventually got the satisfaction that the public would be notified of what chemicals were being used.

Of course, Youst's latest project was to rescue 100 years worth of newspapers, published first as the Coos Bay Times and then later The World.

“It's the first draft of history,” he said in a previous interview,

after finding a home for it in an abandoned classroom at the Harding Building, owned by the Coos Bay School District.

As for future projects, he is sure there will be more.

“I would go crazy if I didn't have anything to do,” he laughed. “It's like what Joseph Campbell said, 'Follow your bliss.' What else can you do?”

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Reporter

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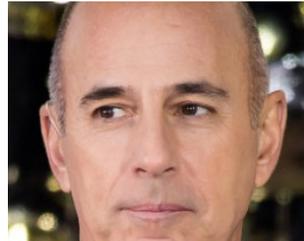
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