

Take a step through history

JACKSONVILLE

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Free Saturday morning walking tours are underway in Jacksonville

By Tony Boom

for the Mail Tribune

Guests will learn about the life of a Jacksonville billiard saloon owner during walking tours that tell the stories of people, places and events that made the town the commercial, government and social hub of Southern Oregon in the late 1800s.

Organized by Historic Jacksonville Inc., the free tours are offered each Saturday morning starting at 10 a.m. at the historic courthouse square on North Fifth Street between C and D streets. Tours continue through Aug. 31.

“We want to give people a chance to walk through history, to ask questions,” said Ellen Martin, a guide who helped put the tour together with two other guides. “We want it to be interactive. We want it to be alive.”

Participants will see the home of Herman von Helm, who owned Table Rock Billiard Saloon. They will hear about his wedding in an arranged marriage and sad stories from his personal life, Martin said.

Martin, Denise Cascino and Kristen Sullivan had been talking with Historic Jacksonville President Carolyn Kingsnorth for a couple years about creating a basic walking tour. All three have led other organization tours.

Last summer, Jackson County Clerk Chris Walker asked whether the group would provide a walking tour for the annual meeting of the Oregon Association of County Clerks. The trio got one together targeted toward the group, then used it as the basis for the new offering, incorporating refinements. Several walk-through rehearsals were conducted before the first tour was offered June 1. It was led by Sullivan and had 14 participants.

Tours are designed to augment the Chamber of Commerce historic trolley tours that have been offered for a number of years.

“The trolley goes places we can’t go. We stop at places it doesn’t stop and provide more in-depth information on each stop,” said Kingsnorth.

Tours proceed from the courthouse square through part of downtown up to the Peter Britt Garden, then take another route back through downtown to the square. There are about 20 spots where narration is provided on the one-hour journey, said Martin.

In addition to narration, guides have a notebook full of 8-by-10-inch black-and-white pictures featuring the people, buildings and locations on the tour.

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“We can show photos of almost everyone,” said Martin. “We can tell guests, ‘That’s what Cornelius Beekman looked like.’ ” The lives of lesser-known historical figures are revealed along with stories about Peter Britt and Cornelius Beekman, two men of prominence in early Jacksonville whose reputations live on.

Stops include a mix of businesses, government buildings, fraternal halls and homes. Included are the Masonic Lodge, McCully House, Old City Hall, the Chinese quarter and St. Andrew’s and St. Joseph’s churches. A stop is made at the Beekman Bank, but the tour doesn’t go to the Beekman House, which is farther east on California Street. History of the 1883 Jackson County Court House, now City Hall, will be detailed at the tour’s starting spot.

“Everybody puts a different slant on everything,” Martin said of the seven guides who will be conducting the tours this summer. Visitors will be encouraged to do more research on their own about sites and personalities that interest them, she said.

Historic Jacksonville Inc. has been doing tours since it was founded in 2014 with the goal of helping to maintain historic structures and to make them come alive through educational events, programs and activities.

“We are just happy that people come out, and we love to share the history with them,” said Martin.

Donations for the tours are welcome and help maintain historic buildings. More information is available at historicjacksonville.org or by calling 541 245-3650.

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