

Wallowa Heritage Tourism: The Legacy of Maxville

THEME: One woman with a personal story and a powerful vision built partnerships and allies that have willed the new Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center (MHIC) into existence. Through the Center, a unique, hidden aspect of Wallowa County's African American and Civilian Conservation Corps heritage is coming to life.

PROJECT IMPACT: Participation in RTS helped project champion Gwen Trice to build local support network that led to successful community fundraising, legislative changes and partnerships with other heritage attractions. Wallowa County now has a new heritage resource that showcases a nearly-forgotten multi-cultural community whose residents helped build the rail and timber economy. The Maxville story is conveyed through oral histories, events and historical inspired plays and an small interpretive center currently located in Joseph. MHIC has secured a permanent home base in the town of Wallowa. Eventually, the goal is to open a satellite interpretive center there in a Forest Service compound constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), as well as to have interpretive programs right on the privately owned Maxville site.

PLACE: Wallowa County is located in the northeast corner of Oregon, abutting the states of Idaho and Washington. Located in the ancestral territory of the Nez Perce Indians, Wallowa County was settled by non-Indian pioneers starting in 1871. The total population (2013) of this rural county is 6,821 people.

Wallowa County is remote. The county seat of Enterprise is 71 miles from the nearest Interstate. The closest major airports are in Spokane WA and Boise ID, each approximately 5 hours away. Limited commercial air service is available in Pendleton, OR, Lewiston, ID and Walla Walla, WA, each approximately 2.25 hours away.

Wallowa County's geographic remoteness is magnified by its rugged topography, which includes world-class recreational areas, including the Eagle Cap Wilderness, Wallowa Lake, and the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. These areas are managed through the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. The area's economy has long been dependent on natural resource-based activities: agriculture/ranching are the single largest source of export-dependent employment. The area was hard hit by the decline of the timber industry in the 1990s, and it still is more economically distressed than the state. Since the early 1990's, tourism-related employment has grown.


Maxville is located 15 miles north of the small town of Wallowa, Oregon.

STORY:

Growing up in La Grande, Oregon, Gwen Trice knew nothing about the multicultural rural community in Wallowa County to which her Arkansas-born father migrated as a teenager. He grew up and worked in Maxville, located 15 miles north of the small town of Wallowa. Maxville was an active railroad logging town until the early 1930s. Subsequently, logging continued in the area. The Maxville town -- including a hotel, post office, two schools, (segregated, one for black children, one for white), bunkhouse, and general store -- is now gone, save the building which was the hub of this lumber operation from that time.

After working in Seattle for years, Gwen returned home learn more about her family story, and as she interviewed former residents, she felt compelled to elevate Maxville's story as a critical element of Wallowa County's heritage. This vision is her personal legacy. She did not have a background in nonprofit organizations, nor did she have many partners to start out, especially in the local community. But over time, she built an incredible network of supporters in the Portland area and beyond, while also building local support and partnerships to advance the project.

Gwen started working formally on this project in 2007, and continued to spearhead it in a volunteer basis until 2013, when she began to draw a part-time salary. The timeline below shows key milestones, including securing 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, a listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and long term site stewardship of the Wallowa Ranger Station forest service compound.



In 1923, a Missouri lumber company built a town in northeastern Oregon named Maxville. Hundreds of loggers left Arkansas and Mississippi to live and work there. Many brought their families, and many were African Americans. While the town has long since disappeared, the Maxville story is still unfolding. *The Logger's Daughter* follows Gwen Trice, an African-American woman who was born and raised in Eastern Oregon, as she sets out to explore her family's past.

Photo courtesy of Anne Rodriguez

Airs May 07, 2009, 9:00 PM

on OPB TV

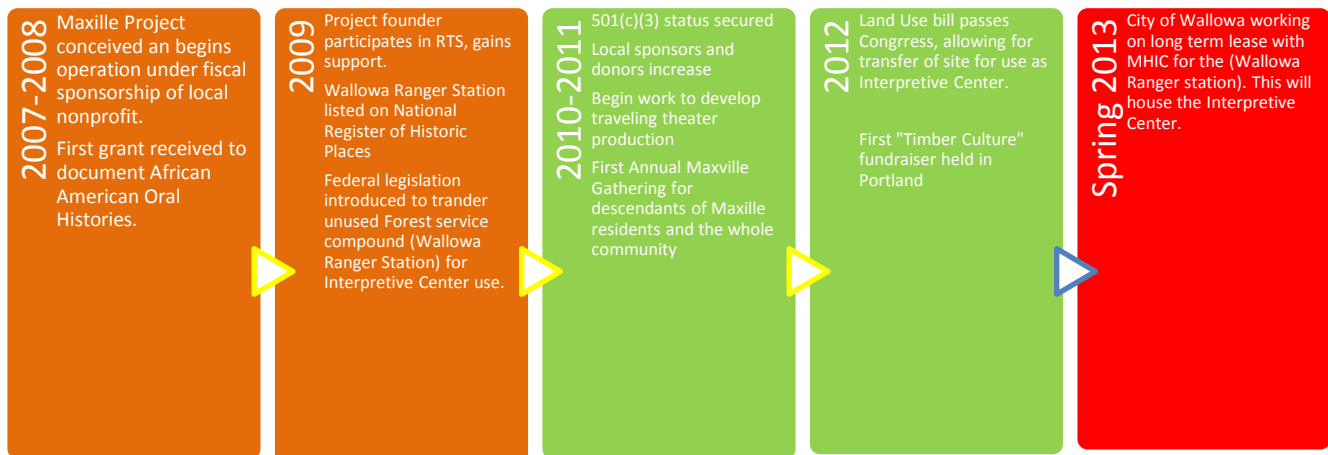
MHIC activities and partnerships have so far included:

- Collection of artifacts and oral histories from past residents and families
- Attracting Oregon Public Broadcasting to create "The Loggers Daughter" documentary about Gwen's work and Maxville. It was later featured at the Western Folklife Center in Elko Nevada.
- Writing, production and filming of "On To Higher Ground", a traveling mini-play about Maxville, now being expanded for performance, based on collected oral histories and records. Local board member helped to write, along with (commissioned) Portland-based playwright Marv Ross. Film and play contents under development are purposely tied with Oregon Standard school curriculum so that it can serve as an educational resource for schools. Partnership discussions with Portland Center Stage, Artists Repertory Theater to administer its delivery in schools and in other Portland area venues.
- An annual gathering of the descendants and friends of Maxville, most recently in June 2013. This gathering draws local volunteers and connects with other aspects of the area's heritage, through, for example, free mule wagon tours offered on site by a local mule tour operator.

- Partnership with World Forestry Center in Portland for successful Annual Timber Culture fundraiser. Event features traditional grass feed beef and traditional, regional foods that are sourced locally from Wallowa County.
- An Act of Congress to allow the Forest Service to first transfer ownership of the CCC built Wallowa Ranger Station to the city of Wallowa, for use as the home of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center. On June 18, 2013, the Station was transferred to the City. Now, the City is negotiating a long term lease with MHIC. The Economic Development District (NEOEDD) has helped the city conduct brownfields assessment work as part of the conveyance process.
- Continues to raise visibility of local civil rights heritage through partnership with nonprofit Fishtrap to bring “The Hillsboro Story”, another civil rights plays to Wallowa County. Coincidentally, the City of Wallowa is also home to the Wallowa Band Nez Perce Trail Interpretive Center/National Historic Park, which can help build Wallowa as a heritage and civil rights hub of Wallowa County.
- Success in leveraging philanthropic grants from such sources as Meyer Memorial Trust, Ford Family Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Wildhorse Foundation, and Pacificorp Foundation.

Gwen sees the Rural Tourism Studio as a critical element of the success so far. She met many local people who became supporters, partners and volunteers. She also felt encouraged by their reaction that she was definitely on the right track.

TIMELINE



LESSONS LEARNED:

- Wrestling a big vision into a feasible action plan takes trial and error. Initially, the project had too many moving elements. Now as various parts are being phased in, Gwen has been able to engage active partners and contract help to move forward. Still, need more volunteers or more phasing to avoid burning out the main players.
- Don't be put off by the prospect of having to get an Act of Congress to do what you want to do. It took over two years, but a novice can get federal legislation passed, with the help of elected officials who have first-hand experience and lend their support.

- As a rural attraction, try to make connections in urban areas early. Build communities of interest (not just communities of location) to bolster budget, network and audience. Portland connections, including World Forestry Center, Oregon Historical Society and Oregon Public Broadcasting, have been extremely valuable in generating funds, volunteers, new partners and media attention.
- Boards go through cycles and growing pains, especially with such an ambitious agenda. MHIC recently developed its first formal strategic plan, and recognize that while the original board was not recruited to do fundraising, that's now an important role for the board. Seeking other ways for founding board members to continue to contribute, while recruiting new board members who can fit the current pressing needs of the organization.

BUDGET

While the RTS participants supported using part of the 2009 Travel Oregon implementation grant for MHIC, the project champion withdrew her request, citing lack of organizational readiness. The overall budget for the entire project since inception is not available, but it started with a relatively small amount of funding and a volunteer executive director. In 2009, in its third year of operation, MHIC reported total income of \$7,730 on its IRS Form 990. 2013 is the first year in which Gwen has drawn any salary.

TOOLS/RESOURCES:

- Poster for Maxville Heritage Gathering event
- Project timeline: <http://www.maxvilleheritage.org/about-maxville-heritage-interpretive-center/mhic-milestones/>
- Historic photos: <http://www.maxvilleheritage.org/archives/historic-photos/>
- Many other resources and results are highlighted on the organizational website: www.maxvilleheritage.org

CONTACTS:

- Gwen Trice, Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, 541-426-3545: gwen@maxvilleheritage.org; trice.g@gmail.com
- Juanita or Larry Waters- Mule Tours, 541-432-7055: (they volunteer at Maxville Gathering), did not talk with them, but Gwen recommended and they look like characters!) article about them is at this link: http://wallowa.com/free/mule-days-picks-its-parade-gms/article_0db38832-b775-11e2-8821-0019bb2963f4.html INFO FOR VIDEOGRAPHERS- REMOVE FROM FINAL
- Gwen advises that we NOT interview someone from City of Wallowa- the long term lease negotiations have been tough and there is general political turmoil in the community from her perspective.