

## BACK IN TIME

## Logtown

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

Each spring some little yellow roses peak out from a spindly small bush, now 156 years old, located in a mediocre spot along Highway 238 between Jacksonville and Ruch, Oregon. The rose bush is the only evidence left of the village of Logtown, a flourishing settlement comprised of a store, hotel, livery stable, two meat markets, two blacksmith shops, three saloons, two Chinese stores, a school house and a church. Not only was this the center of a raucous gold-mining area, but a stage stop for an important supply road from Crescent City, California to Jacksonville, Oregon. There are some very interesting stories that have been handed down through the descendants of the miners who first scratched for gold along the banks of Forest Creek. But for now, this is the story of the Harrison rose, originally from England, which we now call the Logtown Rose.

It is not an outstandingly beautiful rose, supported on very thorny stems with tiny leaves. It survives because the deer can't stand it and the gophers don't stay long. The poor soil and lack of water doesn't seem to matter, either. Even an overdose of spray from the county roadside weed sprayer didn't entirely do it in, although it didn't look well for a few years. A tree planted behind the rose has roots now competing for water and nourishment. As though that is not enough, the dreaded star thistle showed up to add to the distress of the already constant vibration from traffic. If it survives all of this, I guess it may outlive most of us.

It is very special to me and my family because it was planted at Logtown by my great-grandmother, Maryum Bowen McKee. She had brought the little rose across the plains with her from Sullivan County, Missouri, to the Rogue Valley in 1853. My great-grandfather, John McKee, was a blacksmith who invented an improvement to a miner's pick, which he called a "strap-eye pick." This pick was in great demand. He built a large log house in Logtown for Maryum and their two little children. It was at the front gate to the yard where the tenderly cared for yellow rose found its new home.

My great-grandmother had twelve more children through the years. One died shortly after birth and a daughter, Martha Jane, died at age nine. She was buried behind their house next to the hillside. (Later moved to the Logtown Cemetery.)

When the gold mining petered out, my great grandparents moved to Little

Butte Creek near Butte Falls. Many years later when one of their daughters and her husband had purchased a new automobile, they took John and Maryum (her first ride in a car) to see their old place. They were heartbroken when they saw their old log house mostly gone. Only part of the front portion had remained standing, and looking out of one of the window openings was a range cow. Most of their life had been spent there and now to find Logtown almost completely gone was hard to bear. As they were leaving, Maryum glanced over to a broken-down gate and there she saw her little rose bush. Tears filled her eyes as she pointed it out to her family. "Look, my little rose is still alive."

There are a lot of descendants of this McKee family and they knew where the little rose was, but nothing was done to preserve it until the Jacksonville Garden club encircled it with some protective white posts during Oregon's Centennial year in 1959 and the Applegate Valley Garden Club planted 60 more Logtown roses across the front of the Logtown Cemetery. The Jacksonville Garden Club had a granite marker made for a dedication ceremony later that year for the little rose. The marker was unveiled by Miss Teri Lee Wolfe, a great-great granddaughter of John McKee. Two of John McKee's remaining children also attended and were introduced. They were Mary Thelma Higinbotham and John B. McKee. (It has been 50 years since that ceremony. Hard to believe.)

Sad to say, sometime later on an out-of-control car ran into the granite marker and it was destroyed. Rocks were then placed around the rose. The Applegate Valley Garden Club continued its care of the rose and the cemetery roses. In 1983 a member of the club, Myrtle Krouse, made a new wooden marker for the logtown rose. It was a beautiful hand-carved scene of Maryum watering her little rose. Another ceremony was held for the nice addition. Three of the McKee's remaining grandchildren were among the attendees; Clara Smith, Pearl Byrne and Dorothy Hackert. The marker is still there, but quite weathered and hard to see through the tree standing just behind the rose. *The rose and location of the cabin is only a few feet off of Highway 238, almost straight across what is known as Longnecker Road.*

In 1878 John McKee filed and was granted a 160-acre homestead adjacent to

the land his cabin was on. The graveyard where early Logtown miners and settlers were buried was just inside the south boundary of this land. Since this was a government land grant he became the first "legal" owner of the property. Over the years several owners of the land had legal ownership of the cemetery, and all allowed the continued use as a cemetery. In 1939 an association was formed to make improvements and facilitate the continued use of the cemetery. Landowners Paul E. and Mildred Pearce and Walter W. and Edith Bell donated two pieces of land that had been used since the 1850s as a cemetery into the keeping of the Logtown Cemetery Association on October 17, 1940.

To see the Logtown Rose you need to stop at the cemetery or at the rose marker on Highway 238 sometime in the spring. A beautiful gate to the Logtown Cemetery was made and donated by Carl Offenbacher in 2008 that has a rendition of the rose on it. Or you can visit the Ruch Library where an outstanding wall mural by Marvin and Lilli Ann Rosenberg graces the lobby and has the yellow rose in it.

Evelyn Byrne Williams

*Photos from the collection of Evelyn Byrne Williams. Some information from "Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley" by John and Marguerite Black.*

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Pat Gordon • 541-899-7655



Above: Maryum Bowen McKee.

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Above: Logtown marker with Clara McKee Smith, Pearl McKee Byrne, Dorothy McKee Hackert.



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