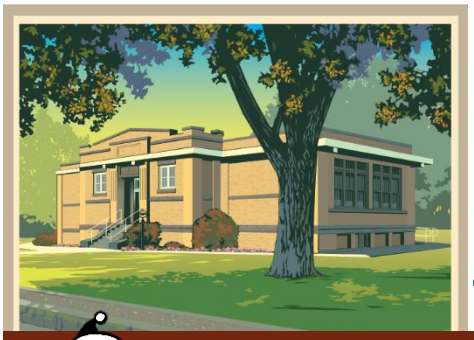

Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum

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The Official Newsletter of the Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum

December 2025

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Teresa Sept- Media & Treasurer
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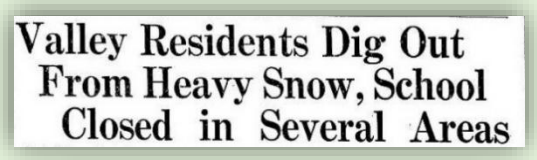
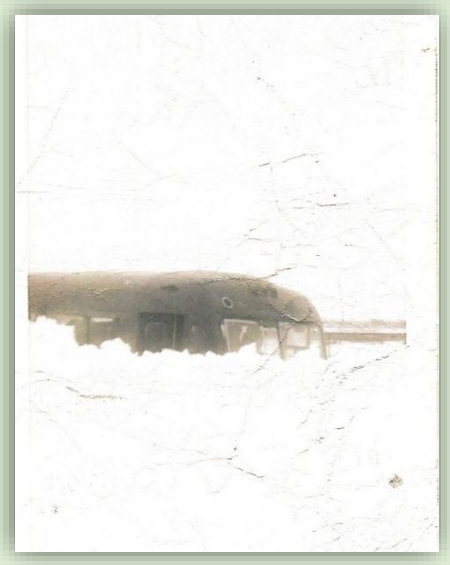

Valley Residents Dig Out From Heavy Snow, School Closed in Several Areas



This photo of the Union School bus shows how tall the drifted snow got in the winter of 1948/49.

Memories of a Cat Skinner

The following is a compilation of memories from Don Dean of his experiences plowing with a Caterpillar tractor in the winter of 1948/49.

Newspapers reported that the Magic Valley experienced "what old-timers termed possibly the worst storm since 1919" that winter.

Heavy snowfalls and high winds created drifts up to 10 feet tall. Many rural residences were completely snowed in, unable to reach town for days. Buses, motorists, and even railroads were closed.

The Twin Falls Highway District had ordered a new rotary snowplow, but ironically, its arrival was delayed five weeks due to the weather. Anyone in the area with the proper equipment was asked to help clear roads.

The stranded relied on the kindness of locals and neighbors in their time of need, as reflected in Dean's memories.

"The winter of 1948-49 as seen by a Cat Skinner.

I was a new father and the first outing with our new son, a blizzard stopped us from getting home.

We did make it to my parents' home. We stayed with them until the roads were opened. Some other people were stranded there, too.

We made skis out of barrel staves, and we used a horse or a car to pull the skiers. Using a lot of rope and a large field going in a circle with horses or car, we got up to a lot of speed. The skier took a pretty good fall when he or she let go of the ropes.

When the roads opened, we went home.

A few days later, the wind closed the roads again. The neighbors got to town by going on the canal banks and roads that were not closed. They brought back word that I was to get the Cat (Caterpillar tractor) that I operated for a living.

The County and other Government Agencies declared an emergency. Everyone with the right type of machinery was asked to help clear the roads.

It was six or seven miles to the Cat. The next morning, I started for the Cat. It seemed that everyone along the way knew I was coming. They met me with car, truck, or tractor, taking me as far as they could through the fields or roads. Then I walked to the next ride.

When I got to the Cat, someone had stolen the battery and the rope that we started the Cat with. The Cat was sitting out in the desert, three or four miles from any house. So, I cut some wire from the electrical system to start (the Cat) with, tying a knot in one end to hold it on the flywheel.

I wrapped the end around my hand. When I pulled the rope, it caught on the deck. The blood poured out of my glove. It was too cold to look. We made the knot smaller and started the Cat.

We finally got to the main road and were met by a neighbor telling us a lady down the road was having labor pains. Sometime in the middle of the night, we got her to town. No baby, and a few days later, we had to do it all over again, in the daytime. She didn't come home this time until the baby was born.

When I finally stopped after the first trip, I took off my glove. All the skin ad meat was torn from my knuckles.

I had left my wife and baby at home without a car or telephone. One of my sisters hiked a couple of miles to stay with them. It seemed as if everybody needed something more important than getting them to a safer place.

Record Depth

Topping all records of daily snowfall during the past 20 years was the eight-inch snowfall recorded here in the 24-hour period ending at 8 a.m. Monday.

Weather observers at the bureau of entomology said the previous record was seven inches on Jan. 15, 1937. Daily snowfall records have been kept since 1929.

When I had time to think about them stranded, I wasn't very happy, and I guess I said so. Finally, my dad and brother-in-law walked in and carried our baby in a bushel basket. They went to my parents' home.

That same day, I had to open the road to the airport. About twelve cars were stranded trying to get to the airport. When I got them to the airport, I plowed a road out through the sagebrush to get water for a band of sheep, then back to get the cars from the airport to town in a blizzard. Sometime that evening we got to the Highway Yard in Twin Falls. I parked the Cat in the shop.

The Cat had a canvas around it to keep me warm. Sometime that day, my feet had gotten so hot that I took my shoes off and put them in the toolbox outside of the canvas. Being damp, they froze.

I didn't get down from the Cat right away, so the men in the shop came to see if I was alright. The wind had blown on only one side of my face. I guess it looked like a piece of ice. They were trying to get me off the Cat. I hadn't had time to shave for some time. We figured the whiskers had insulated my face and kept it from freezing.

Guess what. My wife and baby were at my folks' home, and I was at her folks' home. I saw a thermometer that said -26 degrees that morning. The wind blew all morning.

At noon, we left town, plowing snow on the roads as we went. The drifts were very uneven; in some places, ten feet deep, five feet away, you could see the pavement.

Sometime that night, a Weasel passed us. A Weasel was an Army vehicle with tracks. It traveled fast over the top of the snow. Shortly after they passed us, we came to a house, and the door flung open just before I ran over the Weasel.

They had driven one track on the high drift of snow; the other one was on the pavement.
We hooked the Cat onto it and set it upright. The oil had run out of it, and they added some more oil and tried to start it. No Luck. So, I pulled it about a fourth of a mile before it started. They were trying to get some milk and baby food to someone.

My boss, W.T. Williams, followed me most of the time. At three or four that morning, he stopped. I plowed snow for some time, and he did not move. I became worried that the exhaust had gotten into his cab, so I went back as fast as the Cat could run.

Just as I got there, he woke up and started out. We were not far from my folks' home, so he parked his pickup and got on the Cat with me. We made a fast trip over the snow and through the fields to food and sleep.

The farther we got from town, the more pleased people were to see us. Most of them asked us in for coffee and cake or pie. If it was mealtime, we ate with them.

One place we stopped at hadn't been to town for a month. They had chickens that were laying eggs. Another had butchered a hog. They were not out of flour, salt, baking powder, or sugar. We had breakfast with them at four in the morning. Just as we were finishing, a neighbor came in and invited us to his place for cake. We had to pass it up.

One place we stopped at had the biggest dog that I have ever seen. I plowed their driveway out. I got off the Cat and started for the house. The dog got up in front of me. When I got stopped, I went way around him. They told me they had a pair of them. The dogs had hair or wool that they combed off them and wove into clothing.

Some nights we had three or four following us. I came to a very high drift. The onlookers got halfway up the drift. The blade of the Cat was set at an angle so we could roll the snow to the side of the road. I pushed as much as I could going one way, then turned around and did the same thing coming back.

After the weather turned warmer, the snow was full of water. One of the men went through the crust into the wet snow. He decided he had been with us long enough.

My brother-in-law was on the Cat with me when fairly well on top of the drift, the crust on the downhill side broke and let the wet snow run down the field. The Cat went slowly down to the roadbed. My brother-in-law never rode with me again.

One house about ten or twelve miles from town had lights on. When I came in sight of it, the lights went off. This usually didn't happen this far out. I learned later that the people who owned the house were in Arizona. The house had been robbed that winter.

When cleaning the streets in Hollister, I broke a rail. My dad spent some time getting the railroad on the phone to repair it. The train ran to Wells tri weekly. It went to Wells and tried to get back.

Winter finally gave up, I think by the end of January, however, my work went on for some time."

Item Highlight

Shiny Brite Ornaments

Early 1940s Shiny Brite ornament box

Being an American-made product was a selling point during World War II. Some post-war packaging features Uncle Sam shaking hands with Santa Claus.

Max Eckhardt was no stranger to glass Christmas ornaments.

After all, he was a native of Oberlind, Germany, a mere 20 miles from Lauscha, a town referred to as the "birthplace of glass ornaments."

Eckhardt and his brother, Ernest, opened an ornament factory in Oberlind in 1926 with an office in New York.

Sometime soon after, Eckhardt immigrated to America. He stayed in the ornament business, importing hand-painted glass baubles from Germany.

As World War II began, Eckhardt predicted that glass importation from Germany would eventually cease. With this in mind, he established the Shiny Brite Company in New York in 1937.

The company's name was inspired by the ornaments themselves. The glass balls were coated on the inside with silver nitrate, ensuring they stayed shiny and bright, thus the name.

Later that same year, he approached the Corning Glass Company with an interesting proposal. Eckhardt proposed a partnership with Corning to produce Christmas ornaments.

He explained that he anticipated some very large orders to be placed by Woolworths, and together, both companies could reap the benefits.

Enticed, Corning modified a glass ribbon machine used for lightbulb production to create the glass orbs.

The ornaments would then be coated with silver nitrate and ran through a lacquer bath before being sent to Eckhardt's factory to receive hand-painted embellishments.

As promised, an order for 235,000 ornaments came in from Woolworths. The first machine-made Shiny Brite ornaments were sent to Woolworths five and dime store being priced from two to ten cents an ornament.

Early Shiny Brites were simple orbs available in limited colors. As the company grew, they introduced new shapes, colors, and designs to keep up with trends.

Like most companies during World War II, Shiny Brite was forced to make some alterations to their products due to material rationing.

Silver nitrate became scarce from 1943 to 1945. Gold and silver-colored ornaments stopped being made and metal caps were replaced with cardboard versions.

Without silver nitrate, transparent colored ornaments were made, sometimes with a "branch" of tinsel inside to help it shine. Opaque painted ornaments were also seen during this time.

Shiny Brites reached peak popularity in the 1950's. Eckhardt was now operating four factories in New Jersey to keep up with demand.

In 1955, the Shiny Brite company was sold to the Thor company but continued to produce popular ornaments, at one point producing 75% of ornaments sold worldwide.

Popularity dropped off in the late 1960s and early '70s as plastics became more widely used.

Through the years, Shiny Brites became available in a wide array of colors, shapes, and designs.

Transparent ornaments with tinsel inside were made when silver nitrate became scarce due to the war.

Christmas "scenes and greetings" were introduced in the late 1940s/early '50s. They were a big hit, being produced well into the 1960s.

Swing by the museum to see more antique and vintage Christmas items from our collection! Our holiday items will be on display through January.

Donations

Twin Falls tray, Bisbee photo, etc. donated by Paul Smith

Buhl Business Items donated by Lauren Langdon

1870s Heebner & Sons Pennsylvania Threshing Machine donated by Mildred Jones in memory of Ora W. Jones

1960s Kenmore Tabletop Washing Machine donated by Susan Brown

Southern Idaho Country booklet donated by Douglas Prescott

Young's Dairy cream bottle and Filer Fidelity bank bag donated by Mike Blele

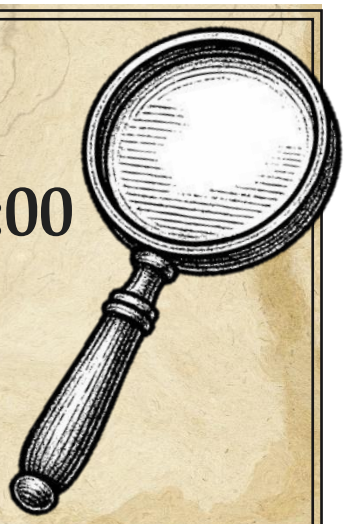
Want to Donate?

Give us a call or stop by the museum if you are interested in donating an item with county history. Keep in mind, we only accept permanent donations. Be sure to include the history of the item and relevant people if possible.

I Spy at the Museum!

Cabin Fever Day-January 3rd 1:00-5:00

Stop by the Museum on Cabin Fever Day for an I Spy challenge!
Explore displays of artifacts as you search for a list of items scattered throughout the Museum.
Complete your I Spy worksheet to earn your prize!



January Lectures!

• Saturday, Jan. 10th, 1:00
Outlaw Tap Duncan – Mike Youngman

Tap Duncan was the most successful horseback outlaw in the frontier era of the United States.
He never went anywhere without a pistol, and he became a law unto himself. Tap gathered 11 "notches" on his pistol and specialized in taking other people's money and property. Yet he died a millionaire. His story is definitely movie material.

• Saturday, January 24th
The Homeless Twenty – Jennifer Hills

The Homeless Twenty were a group of early Twin Falls settlers, mostly comprising of men who had traveled here without their families or were single.
Alice McCollum opened her home to the group, making the desert feel like home. Mrs. McCullom's generosity shaped an early community and would be remembered far beyond her death.

• Saturday, January 31st
Museum Textiles – Patti Hurley

Museum textile volunteers Patti Hurley and Sherry Wells will explain the process and methods of dating clothing and share some favorite pieces from the Museum's large collection.
More information on this lecture coming soon!

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