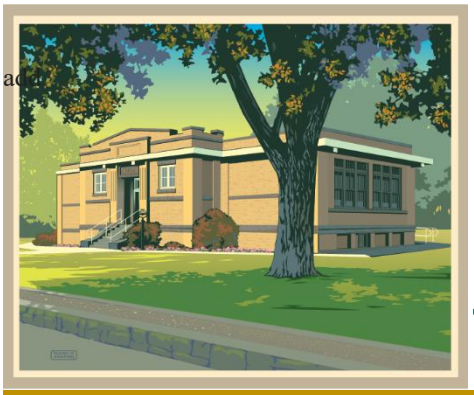

Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum

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The Official Newsletter of the Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum

October 2026

Board and Staff

Steve Westphal – President
Jane Anderson- Vice President
Gary Sipe – Projects
Diana Hadley – Secretary
Pegan Cook – Board Member
Carol Dumas – Board Member
Carolyn White – Board Member
Alfred Herrin – Board Member
Ashley Haycock – Administrator/Editor

A Warm Welcome

The Twin Falls County Historical Society Museum is excited to announce the addition of four new members to our board of directors. We extend a warm welcome to Al Herrin, Carol Dumas, Pegan Cook, and Carolyn White.

Our newest board members all have experience in local organizations, and their insights will be invaluable in furthering and progressing the museum.

It's always good to add new perspectives and ideas to a group. We are excited to share how this addition shapes our organization in the months to come.

Stop by the Historical Society's All Members Meeting on November 14th for a chance to meet our new members and stay informed on the museum's itineraries.

The Museum looks forward to a bright and prosperous future alongside our new board members.

Twin Falls County Historical Society
2026 All Members' Meeting

November 14th, 1:00

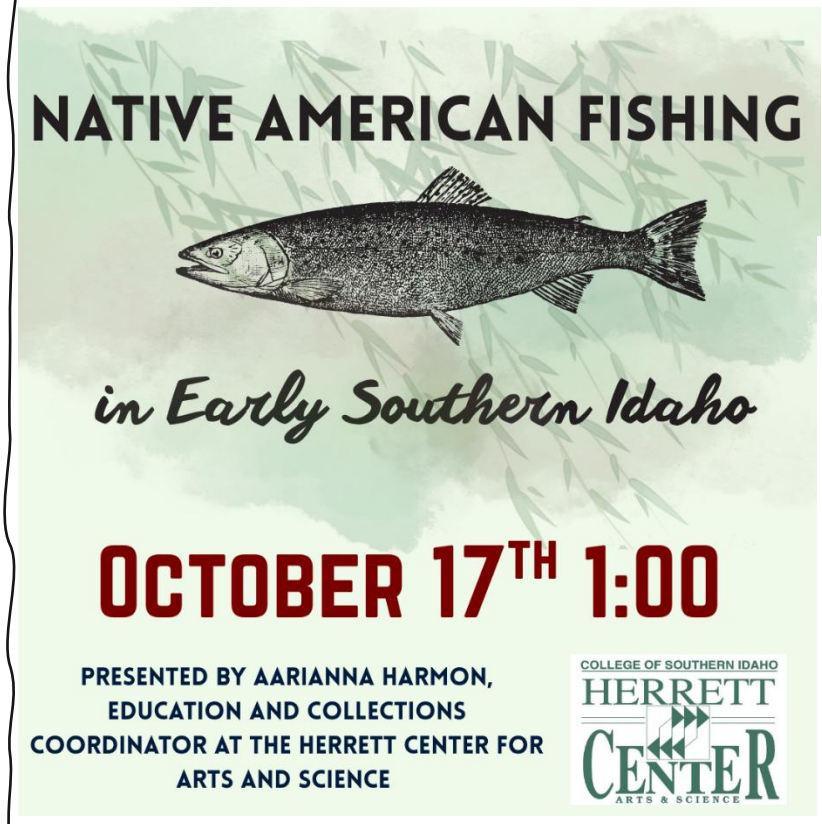
All current Twin Falls County Historical Society members and anyone curious about becoming a member are welcome to attend. Light refreshments will be available, and a report of the museum's progress over the past year will be given.

Don't forget to renew your membership!

All yearly memberships are due for renewal in November.

Individual Membership $15
Family Membership $25
Senior Individual Membership $10
Senior Couple Membership $20
Supporting Membership $50

October Lecture!



Native American Fishing in Early Southern Idaho

October 17th at 1:00 pm

Presented by Aarianna Harmon, Education and Collections Coordinator at the Herrett Center for Arts & Science, this fascinating program will explore fishing tools and techniques implemented by Native Americans in Southern Idaho.

Observe pieces from the Herrett Center's collection and uncover the individual purposes of early fishing tools and the discoveries of many fishing artifacts found here in Idaho.

All Museum lectures are free and open to the public. For more information on upcoming lectures and events, visit the events page on our website: twinfallsmuseum.org.

Item Highlight

The Tail of Sagebrush Hair Tonic

First seen as just an enemy to be obliterated, some wondered whether sagebrush had a useful purpose beyond fire fuel.

One idea from the Magic Valley's early years was to graft fruit and berry plants to sage root, seeking to produce fruit without labor and irrigation costs. At least initially, an Emmett farmer finally succeeded in grafting gooseberry and currant shrubs to sagebrush roots.

Others, wondered about greater potential for sage – perhaps in paper making or as a source of chemical compounds for sophisticated medicines. Native Americans had made potions from sage which they used to treat typhoid fever. Based on Native American practices, settlers then derived substances reputed to have medicinal powers and tonic qualities, like sage tea.

After 1905, chemists analyzed sage, finding "a large percentage of tannic acid, several alkaloids and a considerable portion of quinine." Four years later, a chemistry professor at Northwestern University developed a process for economically distilling several useful compounds from sagebrush.

Chicago entrepreneurs subsequently formed a company announcing plans to raise at least $100,000 and establish "somewhere in the Twin Falls country a plant for the utilization of sagebrush."

Among their future potential products, they listed wood alcohol, acetic acid, acetone, wood oil, creosote oil, pitch, carbonate of calcium and potash, and charcoal. They announced a potential profit of $15 per cord of sagebrush.

Imagine for a moment what this news to early settlers meant. Their daily tick-bearing nemesis could possibly be a side revenue – enough to purchase seed and cultivation equipment for the ground. They must have been excited or at least hopeful.

"… the sage brush flourishes and bids defiance to all the gods of the desert to destroy it or prevent it unsurping the land. Growing as it does in soil rich in Sulphur and other mineral salts, the sage brush possesses many medical properties gathered from this peculiar volcanic ash soil."
-Sagebrush Hair Tonic pamphlet

Sagebrush Hair Tonic bottles donated by Alex Kunkel

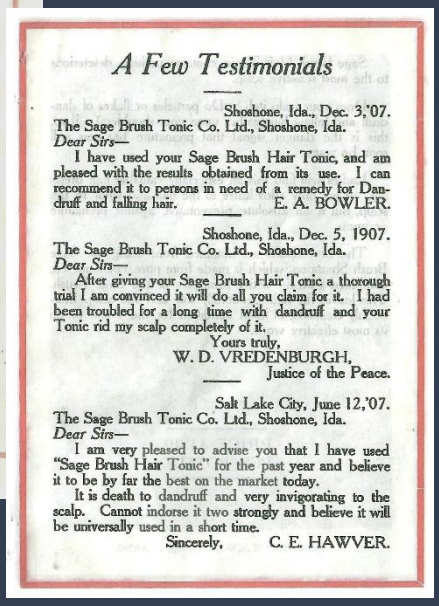
Whatever excitement it generated was, however, short lived. Twin Falls settlers were disappointed to find that the company making these promises had been quickly lured to Reno, Nevada, whose commissioners heard about the proposal and promptly donated 275,000 acres to the company to locate there instead.

The company declined in 1909 and 1910, as apparently one of the owners (not the Gooding brothers) ran off with the secretary and the money. When the bank who held the note took the assets (the building), Frank Gooding owned a merchant building in Shoshone and the materials and bottles that hadn't been filled, were stored in the basement of his merchant building.

The original building still exists, and today it stands a couple blocks west of the stoplight in Shoshone. Even though the company was bankrupt, the owners didn't want the recipe released at least until all the original owners were dead. The *Gooding Leader* was finally able to publish the recipe in 2001.

So, what happened to the unfilled bottles and wooden crates? In the 1960s, a dentist started buying the boxes and selling them in other states at antique bottle shows. Because "Shoshone Idaho" was not stamped on the bottle or included in the logo, most antique dealers today aren't aware of the bottles' origin, and they have scattered to the winds. It's exceedingly rare to find the larger sizes – quarter, half-gallon or gallon sizes. The bottles had King Crown stoppers in them, made from cork with a zinc pipe coming up through the cork. When the crown was turned, the pipe provided tonic sprinkling.

Many of the Sagebrush Hair Tonic items currently on display at the Museum were donated by Alex Kunkel, who has been collecting paraphernalia from the company for nearly 50 years.



A Few Testimonials

Shoshone, Ida., Dec. 3,'07.
The Sage Brush Tonic Co. Ltd., Shoshone, Ida.
Dear Sirs—
I have used your Sage Brush Hair Tonic, and am pleased with the results obtained from its use. I can recommend it to persons in need of a remedy for Dandruff and falling hair. E. A. BOWLER.

Shoshone, Ida., Dec. 5, 1907.
The Sage Brush Tonic Co. Ltd., Shoshone, Ida.
Dear Sirs—
After giving your Sage Brush Hair Tonic a thorough trial I am convinced it will do all you claim for it. I had been troubled for a long time with dandruff and your Tonic rid my scalp completely of it.
Yours truly,
W. D. VREDENBURGH,
Justice of the Peace.

Salt Lake City, June 12,'07.
The Sage Brush Tonic Co. Ltd., Shoshone, Ida.
Dear Sirs—
I am very pleased to advise you that I have used "Sage Brush Hair Tonic" for the past year and believe it to be by far the best on the market today.
It is death to dandruff and very invigorating to the scalp. Cannot indorse it two strongly and believe it will be universally used in a short time.
Sincerely, C. E. HAWVER.

Each bottle of hair tonic included a pamphlet containing information and testimonials from product users. The company claimed that the mixture would treat dandruff, prevent hair loss, and forestall graying.

The formula for Sagebrush Hair Tonic remained secret for decades after the company went bankrupt. In 2001, the recipe and directions were finally revealed: A batch of 100 gallons of Sagebrush Hair Tonic required 75 gallons of water, 25 gallons of alcohol, 50 ounces of resorcin, 8 ounces of Tr. Cantharides, 3 gallons of Salvia Lanceolata (sagebrush), 45 ounces of Perfume Oila (Eau D Quinine), and 100 egg whites.

Donations

Antique tools, insulators, and World War II items donated by Betty Slifer

Bowling pins found in the walls of a Main Street business donated by Sequoia Schimdt

Antique glasses donated by the Virgin Valley Heritage Museum

Want to Donate?

Give us a call or stop by the museum if you are interested in donating an item with county history.

Did you Know?

The tradition of vegetable carving for Halloween is believed to have started with the Irish myth of "Stingy Jack". According to legend, Jack, the town drunk, tricked the devil into paying for his drinks one fateful night and, as punishment, was sentenced to wander the earth eternally. Some stories say Jack received one piece of coal to light his way, placing it into a carved-out vegetable as a makeshift lantern. Others say that Jack's only guiding light would be from the carved turnips (and later pumpkins) set out at Halloween. Still others believe that supernatural beings and spirits roam the earth on Halloween night and the carved vegetables are set out on doorsteps to deter Jack and any other spirits from entering.

Twin Falls County Historical Society

208-736-4675 www.twinfallsmuseum.org

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