

business & agriculture

Two Union County farms reach century-old status

Imbler farmland yields century's worth of Bingaman family memories



Observer/Travis Paulson

Jean Massie, left, helps operate the 160-acre farm owned by her mother Pauline Howard, right. The farm was recently designated a Century Farm. Howard has owned the farm since

1963 when she inherited from her father James Duncan Woodell. The farm was founded in 1868 by her grandfather James Lorenzo Woodell.

Woodell family farm honored

By Michael Kane
Observer Staff Writer

Back in 1868, James Lorenzo Woodell purchased 160 acres of property located south of La Grande. He later bought 320 more acres and grew grain and hay. A few years later, he built a farmhouse and barn on his property.

Today, 125 years later, the original 160 acres remains in the family and the farmhouse and barn are still in use. Woodell's granddaughter Pauline Howard now owns the farm located on Woodell Lane, named after her grandfather.

erating the farm since she inherited it when her father James Duncan Woodell died in 1963. Her daughter Jean Massie moved onto the farm two years ago to assist.

Massie said the Century Farm status means a lot to her and her mother. And this is a special year for the designation.

"Our family came out here on the Oregon Trail," she said. "So this being the sesquicentennial, it's kind of nice to receive the selection this year."

Massie said her family came to Oregon on a wagon train

ther built the first log cabin in the valley.

Six years later, her great-grandfather, James Lorenzo Woodell, bought his first 160 acres of land at the age of 19. He later married his wife Isabell, built the farmhouse and raised his family.

When it was all said and done, James Lorenzo Woodell had amassed 480 acres of farmland. About 300 acres were set aside for grain and hay. The rest was pasture. A total of 320 acres have been sold over the years, but the original 160

By Barry Espenson
Observer Staff Writer

J.L. McKinnis headed west from Iowa, single and a hired hand, in search of his fortune.

He found it on the warm slopes of Pumpkin Ridge, where his crops, and family, flourished.

The first farmland he called his own, 2½ miles north of Imbler, was among those honored this summer with the designation of Century Farm.

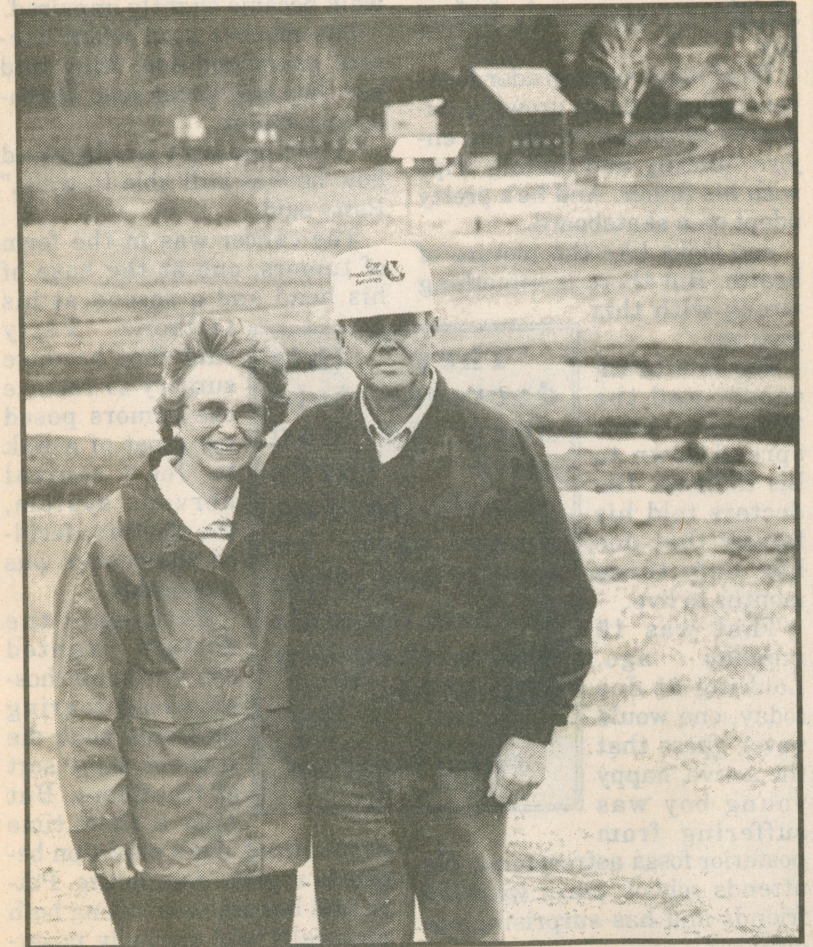
The honor is bestowed by the Oregon Historical Society to farms that have been owned and operated continuously for 100 years or more by the same family.

McKinnis' great-grandson, Howard Bingaman, now lives on the farm. He, his wife Arla, and other relatives and friends will take part in a special ceremony at 7 tonight at the Union County Museum in Union honoring the selection of the McKinnis farm and the Woodell farm south of La Grande to the state's Century Farm list.

McKinnis came west in 1863, driving a team of horses for a man named H.W. Oliver. He worked at a variety of jobs during his first few years in Union County, including teaching school at Indian Creek School and another school north of Elgin, according to Howard Bingaman.

McKinnis married Rachel Harris, daughter of Joseph Harris who farmed at the foot of the mountain that now bears his family name.

McKinnis was a man of many occupations. He once bought a sawmill near Elgin and later, in 1882, with



Observer/Barry Espenson

Howard and Arla Bingaman's farm is one of two in Union County to be selected as a Century Farm by the Oregon Historical Society. They will be honored tonight at a ceremony held at the Union County Museum. The Bingaman's farm was founded by Howard's great-grandfather J.L. McKinnis in 1872.

"It does real well," Howard said of the soil on those south-facing slopes. He bought the original farmstead in 1972 from his great-uncle, Jim McKinnis. He was the brother of Bingaman's grandmother, Ina, who had married Isaac Bingaman.

Bingaman theorized that the original homestead was select-

were grown on the land 100 years ago. Howard, 70, added bluegrass and barley to that list during his time tilling the soil. He retired four years ago.

That fertile Century Farm soil is now farmed by Howard's 25-year-old grandson Shawn, who added mint to the crop list. His father, one of Arla and Howard's two sons,

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Today, 125 years later, the original 160 acres remains in the family and the farmhouse and barn are still in use. Woodell's granddaughter Pauline Howard now owns the farm located on Woodell Lane, named after her grandfather.

Tonight, she will be honored as her place was recently designated a Century Farm by the Oregon Historical Society. She and Howard and Arla Bingham, two other Century Farm owners, will be the guests of honor at the Union County Museum where a ceremony will be held to recognize the achievement.

Pauline Howard has been op-

erating the farm since she inherited it when her father James Duncan Woodell died in 1963. Her daughter Jean Massie moved onto the farm two years ago to assist.

Massie said the Century Farm status means a lot to her and her mother. And this is a special year for the designation.

"Our family came out here on the Oregon Trail," she said. "So this being the sesquicentennial, it's kind of nice to receive the selection this year."

Massie said her family came to Oregon on a wagon train from Bladensburg, Iowa, in 1862. They arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley late in the year.

"They were planning to go to the Willamette Valley," Massie said. "They decided to stay here for the winter but they never left."

James E. Woodell arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley with his sons and daughters. Massie said her great-great-grandfa-

ther built the first log cabin in the valley.

Six years later, her great-grandfather, James Lorenzo Woodell, bought his first 160 acres of land at the age of 19. He later married his wife Isabell, built the farmhouse and raised his family.

When it was all said and done, James Lorenzo Woodell had amassed 480 acres of farmland. About 300 acres were set aside for grain and hay. The rest was pasture. A total of 320 acres have been sold over the years, but the original 160 acres remains in the family with his granddaughter Pauline.

Today, Howard and Massie farm mainly grass seed on the property with a few acres of alfalfa.

Massie said she and her mother had been considering applying for Century Farm status for years.

"It's something I've thought about for a long, long time," Massie said.

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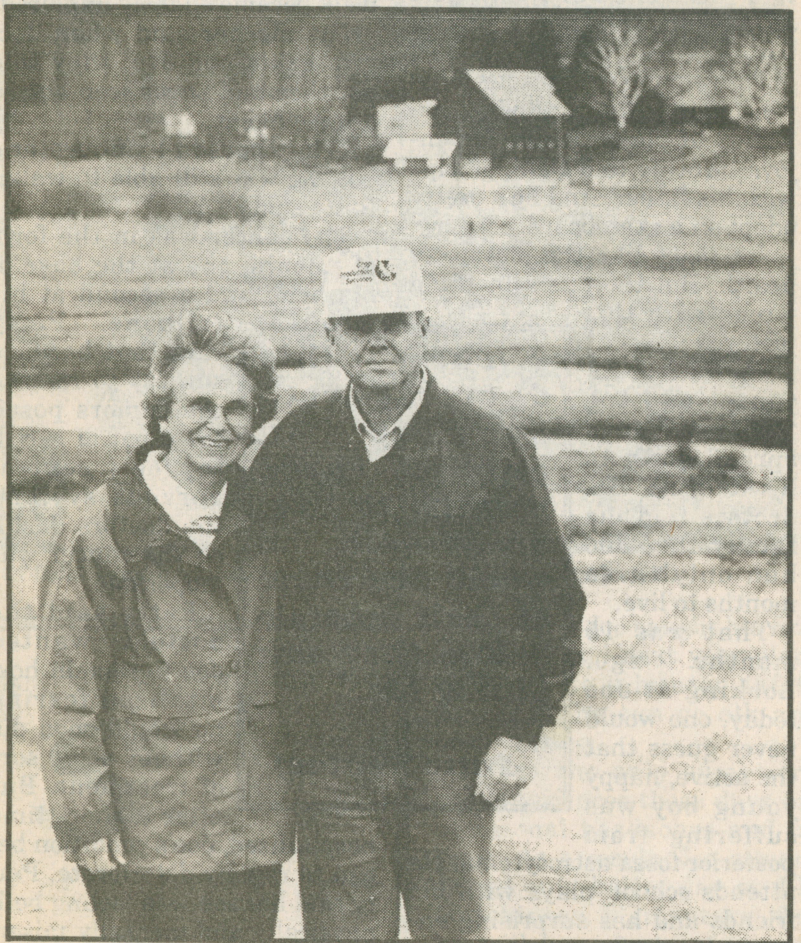
McKinnis married Rachel Harris, daughter of Joseph Harris who farmed at the foot of the mountain that now bears his family name.

McKinnis was a man of many occupations. He once bought a sawmill near Elgin and later, in 1903 with Jesse Hindman, built the flour mill that was to operate at Imbler for many years.

Somehow, he also found time to farm.

The family bought 240 acres on Pumpkin Ridge from the state in 1872.

Additional acreage was added to the family farm in 1873 and 1889, all of which qualifies for the Century Farm designation.



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Bingaman theorized that the original homestead was selected because of the springs at both building sites, roughly 100 yards apart.

One home site is situated on property owned by Dean McKinnis, another great-grandson of J.L. McKinnis.

The Bingamans own and live in the home of the other home site. Willow Creek flows parallel to the ridge in front of both houses.

Hay, wheat, oats and cattle

were grown on the land 100 years ago. Howard, 70, added bluegrass and barley to that list during his time tilling the soil. He retired four years ago.

That fertile Century Farm soil is now farmed by Howard's 25-year-old grandson Shawn, who added mint to the crop list. His father, one of Arla and Howard's two sons, farms east of the Grande Ronde River near Imbler. The Bingaman's other son, Ross, farms north of Imbler.

"We have a lot of relatives around here," said Arla, when you count the McKinnis', Bingamans' and Harris' ancestry.

That comes from spending more than a century tied, quite willingly, to the same, productive piece of land.