

# Museum Musings

Merna DeBolt

January is here – the month named for Janus, the Roman god who looked forward and backward simultaneously. Perhaps January is the month of museums. Museums and Janus are much alike.

The Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center looks forward to displaying more items that help us look back and remember what the past was like.

The Japanese love celebrating New Year; it is their favorite holiday. We have a special spot in the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center that honors the common man in Japanese culture. There you can see a wedding dress, musical instruments, dishes, tools and even an ancient fire alarm.

When I was a senior at White Salmon's Columbia High School, two Japanese-American girls returned after having spent five years in various internment camps. They were quiet and shy, unsure of their reception. It was not an easy adjustment for them or their classmates.

Their name was Tsutsumi. Their father had died before the war. They were from a family of seven children. The family had worked on the Egan farm and later on the Dickey farms.

Bob Dickey told me that before Bonneville Dam was built there were several truck farms along this area of the Columbia River. Here the soil was extremely fertile raising potatoes so large they were carried

from the fields like cordwood. Asparagus was so huge that once three spears weighed in at a pound; he has an article from *The Oregonian* to prove it.

There were farms operated by the Hearn brothers, the Wyers family, the Bartholomews, J.R. Warner, The Egans and the Henderson-Dickey families.

The Tsutsumi children and the three Dickey boys became childhood friends, but the war was soon to change their lives dramatically. Three of the Tsutsumi boys joined the Army, as did the oldest Dicky boy, Jim. The Tsutsumi family was sent to various internment camps and Jim was killed in the Battle of the Bulge.

When internment appeared inevitable, four Japanese-American families from Dallesport, Wash., came to John Dickey with an unusual request. The Toda, Makino, Magaki and Akitas asked him to take care of their farms until they would be allowed to return. Mr. Dickey agreed.

Soon these families, young and old, were loaded onto trains and taken to the stockyards in Vancouver. Their first of several internment locations would be at Hart Mountain in southeastern Oregon.

John Dickey now had approximately 80 acres to care for in addition to his fields in Bingen. He immediately went to work improving the Dallesport farms. Using modern machinery, he pushed aside the sand

dunes and made the land more productive. For five years he raised tomatoes, beans, peppers, cabbage, eggplant, green onion<sup>3</sup> and Danish squash.

I remember working in those fields. A bus carried workers from Bingen to Dallesport. The heat was often extreme and those long rows of beans seemed to stretch for miles; but at 3 cents a pound one could earn over \$5 a day, and that was a pretty good wage for a teenager in those war years.

When the Japanese owners of the land returned they expressed their gratitude for his stewardship and John Dickey was grateful for having been allowed to farm the land.

For years after the war feelings of hatred ran deep in many, especially those who had lost loved ones in the Pacific Theater. It was a sad time for the gentle farmers and a difficult adjustment for the Tsutsumi girls who had returned to high school. Yet many, like John Dickey, were generous and kind.

We need to be reminded of those who demonstrated wisdom and courage, for the Dickey family and others did this at the risk of being ostracized in their communities.

So in January we look back and remember. At the same time we look forward to a new millennium in which we will learn from the past and fill our world with random acts of kindness in the future.

January 13, 2000

Dear Keith and Lucy,

Here is a copy of "Museum Musings". I appreciate your help in giving me the correct spellings and the Tharner input.

I am enjoying the snow fall. I pulled back the curtains and put my chair in front of the window to watch the "snow-show". It is so relaxing.

The phone has been quiet and the schedule easier, so it's been a restful day. I am to give the sermon on Sunday. I did it last week, too. I am glad this is my last one for awhile. I'm not cut out for this! John Brewer is to send us fill-in speakers until he can find a replacement. This seems to be a difficult task - 'the laborers are indeed few'.

My title last week was, "Here's Looking at You, Kid." This next Sunday it's "Who's on First?" I enjoy thinking up titles, it's the message itself that takes hours. (O-sigh)