

History – “Ancient” and Otherwise

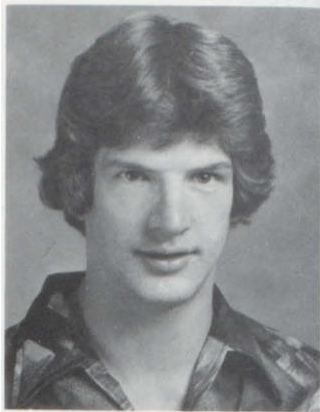
This week, our local historical museum took another step forward in making it relatively easy to explore local history. The Dept of Corrections in Oklahoma offered to scan our high school yearbook collection – for free – which allowed us to run what is known as “optical character recognition”, or OCR, on the resulting images. That’s technical talk for converting the images into actual text (letters, words, names, etc.), which then enables us to automatically search using words and names.

Testing the results is important. Just how much of the text in the books did the system detect? How much of it did it correctly translate into the correct letters and words? How quickly can the collection be searched? How much hair did museum Board member Tim Quillen have when he . . . oh, wait, that fun part comes later!

The results are not perfect, but very satisfying nonetheless. As yearbooks became more elegant, and printing techniques more advanced, there were a number of things done that put a challenge in the OCR work: 1) some pages have deeply colored backgrounds that fade from top to bottom – on those pages, the text is fairly easy for a human to decipher, but the machine misses some of the low contrast stuff near the top while it readily reads the higher contrast stuff near the bottom; 2) some type fonts are quite artsy-fartsy, but almost impossible for the text interpreter to decipher – words become jumbles of letters and special characters when the machine takes its best guess.

But even with the omissions, the overall results are close to spectacular, when you consider that the alternative might be to read every book!

Since I didn’t graduate from the local schools, I felt no fear in searching for Granite Falls friends. I typed in “Quillen”, and in 49 seconds our PC found 90 mentions of the name Quillen in 20 different yearbooks. It was tough to select a picture, but I chose the one from Tim’s senior year. But that



immediately begged the question, “What about Tim’s son, Lakin, who graduated just a few years ago?” It was easy to simply click on Lakin’s name (toward the end of the list of 90) to find another curly-headed Quillen! Like his Dad, Lakin has done lots of great volunteer work at the museum, but given Tim’s current hairstyle, I hope Lakin doesn’t read this and make any projections 😊

Tim ’79



Lakin ’12

But another museum Board member is Ron Chew, whose farm was recently recognized for being in the same family for over 100 years. So I had to search on “Chew”, and was rewarded with 217 hits in 47 different yearbooks. Some of them were labeled “**chewing** gum”, “pencil **chewing**”, or in later years “**Chewbacca**”, but it took only seconds to spot Ron Chew in the Class of ’64. It was also fun to go back at look at pictures in the 1923 and 1924 yearbooks that included Wesley Chew!



Ron ’64

Of course, It wouldn't be any fun at all without searching for the name "Bergan"! Tom Bergan has done much for the museum, including providing some incredible items for display. He claims that he



was actually a good-looking kid "back in the day" (now that really is ancient history), so I thought I'd take this opportunity to check his credibility. Not surprisingly, the search turned up 229 mentions of "Bergan" in 49 different yearbooks. Admittedly, some of them were advertisements, because Bergan Hardware was a sponsor of many yearbooks . . . but there were LOTS of BERGANS! Lila, Bob, George, Don, Jim, Glen, Steve, Jeff, Tom (my target), Julie, Clint, Bobby, Renae, Tom, Kyra, and Kasey . . . and looking at the picture from the Class of '65, I had to admit that Tom cleaned up pretty good as a kid!

Tom '65

Good judgment and simple fear prevent me from teasing any of the Granite Falls women who might appear in the yearbooks . . . well, maybe just one . . . Lynn (Moen) Hohenhaus is currently chairing the reunion plans for the Class of '66, celebrating their 50th during Railroad Days this coming October. The Museum is planning to host an open community dinner on Friday night of Railroad Days weekend, with special seating/recognition for the Class of '66, and to present each of them with a DVD that contains the yearbooks from '64 to '68, so that they can have the same type of fun we've had looking for old friends and admiring their old hairlines and hairstyles. So, let's take a peek at Lynn Moen "back in the day" . . . the "Moen" search yielded 91 entries in 24 different yearbooks, ranging



from 1924 to 1996. Lynn's Dad, Tommy, graduated with perfect attendance, was class president three times, and registered for the draft in Jan '43. The Historical Society looks forward to providing endless hours of fun for those of you who want to take a look back at history, most of it not-so-ancient, because there are details covered in these books that can be found nowhere else, and they take only 49 seconds to search!

Lynn '66



Tommy '43

I once thought that reading old newspapers could become addictive, but now I know that old yearbooks are even more dangerous. I just shot two hours picking out a few photos of people I know, but found myself even more interested in what they did during school, what they predicted, what their teachers thought, how their teams fared, etc., etc., etc.

Our thanks go out to the Oklahoma Dept of Corrections for their wonderful offer of free scanning, to give organizations like ours the possibility of preserving such wonderful documentation of local history. We'd like to encourage our counterparts across the county to take advantage of their offer. We'd also like to thank the Granite Falls High School for loaning us some of the latest yearbooks, which have not yet made it into our collection, and to thank Jackie Haverfield and Toni (Hjelle) Getchell for their help in locating the final two we were missing. Hmm . . . Haverfield . . . Hjelle . . . more names to search!