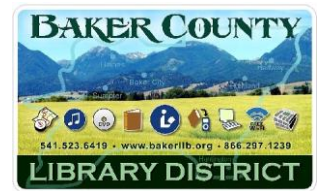


Baker County Library District
 Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Agenda
 Monday, May 13, 2019, 6:00 – 8:00 pm
 Riverside Meeting Room, Baker County Public Library
 2400 Resort St, Baker City
 Gary Dielman, President



- | | | |
|--------------|---|---------|
| I. | CALL TO ORDER | Dielman |
| II. | Consent agenda (ACTION) | Dielman |
| | a. Additions/deletions from the agenda | |
| | b. Minutes of previous meetings | |
| III. | Conflicts or potential conflicts of interest | Dielman |
| IV. | Open forum for general public, comments & communications | Dielman |
| | In the interests of time and to allow as many members of the public an opportunity to speak, the board asks guests to limit remarks to five (5) minutes if speaking on behalf of an individual, or ten (10) minutes if speaking on behalf of a group or organization. | |
| V. | NEW BUSINESS | |
| | a. Review of donations process | Stokes |
| | b. FY18-19 Supplemental Budget review (ACTION) | Stokes |
| | c. FY19-20 Budget Proposal review (ACTION) | Stokes |
| VI. | OLD BUSINESS | |
| | a. None | |
| VII. | REPORTS | |
| | a. Director | Stokes |
| | b. Finance | Hawes |
| VIII. | Agenda items for next regular meeting: June 10, 2019 | Dielman |
| IX. | ADJOURNMENT | Dielman |

The times of all agenda items except open forum are approximate and are subject to change. Other matters may be discussed as deemed appropriate by the Board. If necessary, Executive Session may be held in accordance with the following. Topics marked with an asterisk* are scheduled for the current meeting's executive session.

ORS 192.660 (2) (d) Labor Negotiations
 ORS 192.660 (2) (h) Legal Rights

ORS 192.660 (2) (e, j) Property
 ORS 192.660 (2) (a, b, i) Personnel

Library Board Meeting – Annotated Agenda

Monday, May 13, 2019, 6:00 pm

Notes prepared by Library Director Perry Stokes

Annotated Agenda

I. **CALL TO ORDER** Dielman

II. **Consent agenda (ACTION)** Dielman
a. Additions/deletions from the agenda
b. Minutes of previous meetings

Attachments:

- II.b.i. Board meeting minutes, Apr 8 2019

III. **Conflicts or potential conflicts of interest** Dielman

IV. **Open forum for general public, comments & communications** Dielman
In the interests of time and to allow as many members of the public an opportunity to speak, the board asks guests to limit remarks to five (5) minutes if speaking on behalf of an individual, or ten (10) minutes if speaking on behalf of a group or organization.

Attachments:

- IV.a.i. City of Huntington letter of thanks for water fountain, 4/9/19

V. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **Review of donations process** Stokes

As requested by Gary Dielman, I will provide an overview of how donated materials are handled.

b. **FY18-19 Supplemental Budget review (ACTION)** Stokes

Attachments:

- V.b.i. Materials are a work in progress. To be presented at the meeting.

I will review current year budget expenses and revenue projections and provide a draft of the Supplemental Budget to be proposed for adoption at the June meeting. Budget documents are work in progress, but I will post regular updates to the district's Google Drive. See links on the Budget page of the library website at <https://www.bakerlib.org/about/budget.html#section-0>

c. **FY19-20 Budget Proposal review (ACTION)**

Attachments:

- V.c.i. Materials are a work in progress. To be presented at the meeting.

I will review the latest draft of my FY2019-2020 budget proposal to be approved at the May 22 Budget Committee meeting. Budget documents are work in progress, but I will post regular updates to the district's Google Drive. See links on the Budget page of the library website at <https://www.bakerlib.org/about/budget.html#section-0>

Library Board Meeting – Annotated Agenda

Monday, May 13, 2019, 6:00 pm

Notes prepared by Library Director Perry Stokes

Thanks to an unanticipated large revenue surplus projected this year, the budget outlook is favorable despite our facing another significant PERS rate increase. This should allow us to accomplish several important objectives.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

None

VII. REPORTS

a. Director

Stokes

Friends & Foundation

No report

Facilities & vehicles

Thirteen new “mid-century modern” style barrel chairs were acquired and are now installed in the Reading Room at the Baker branch. They are in bold colors which complement the carpet and exterior. These chairs replace purple fabric wingback chairs which had suffered sun damage after nearly 20 years in the room. We did explore a re-upholstery option, but it was cost-prohibitive at \$600 per chair. The new chairs were only around \$250 each. The update was initiated by a memorial gift of \$1,500 by the Frech Family for their son Kevin John Frech. The Friends group

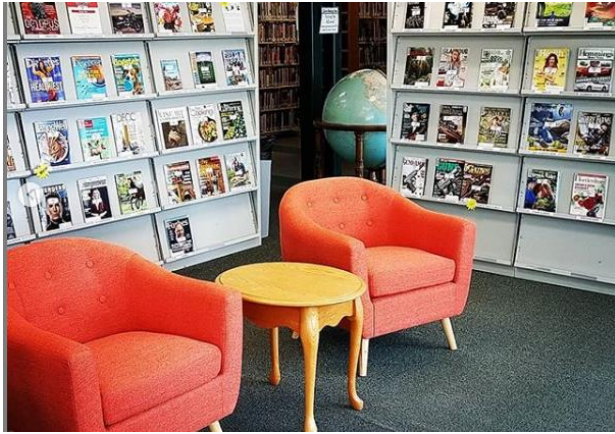


matched that amount, and we used some memorial funds to complete the purchase of around \$4,000. A new accent chair and table lamp for the corner in the Oversize collection were also included in the buy. Since deployment, I’ve received many compliments from the public and staff both verbally and on our social media pages. The sun-damaged old chairs were sold as surplus furniture in the library front lobby. The floral print chairs are still in good condition and will be used at our branch sites.

Library Board Meeting – Annotated Agenda

Monday, May 13, 2019, 6:00 pm

Notes prepared by Library Director Perry Stokes



The Bookmobile has been out-of-service and in repair for a couple of weeks now, due to a reported leaking head gasket. The repair is anticipated to cost around \$3,000-\$4,000. I'll be increasing that maintenance budget line in the supplemental budget for FY18-19. The vehicle does now have a couple of decades of service and high mileage, so we will need to add replacement of it to our long-range Capital Improvement Plan. I would recommend a smaller cargo-van type vehicle equipped with 4WD so service could continue uninterrupted through the winter season.

A new entry-code/key lock was installed on the staff entrance door. The keyless entry will enable access to authorized personnel without having to carry a key that is seldom used, such as branch staff. The code may also be provided remotely to emergency responders in urgent after-hours situations.

Installation of the new bottle-fill fountain is in progress but about a week out due to parts on order and a stainless steel backsplash panel being constructed. Ed found that additional parts are needed to configure the units properly in the desired location. The old model fountain will be gifted as surplus property to City of Huntington.

Ed has determined that problems with a faulty door in the meeting room, that doesn't close easily, are due to improper construction of the frame. The frame is not well secured so is able to flex and become out of square. He is having supporting frame materials custom built to retrofit the doorway.

A 3-month extension to the current janitorial service contract was provided so we can properly put the contract up for public bid.

Grants & gifts

While in Vancouver, WA for the OLA/WLA 2019 library conference, I arranged to pick up several boxes of photo negatives, prints, and other materials from a family descended from John Gambbs, who owned a photography studio in Baker City in the 1930s-40s. The Baker City Herald featured the acquisition in a [lead story](#) in its April 29 issue and



Library Board Meeting – Annotated Agenda

Monday, May 13, 2019, 6:00 pm

Notes prepared by Library Director Perry Stokes

followed with an [editorial](#) on May 1 commending the preservation and “rescue”.

A grant proposal for the [EBSCO Solar](#) program was submitted by Ed at the end of April. The award announcement is due in late June. Whether the proposal is successful or not, the project has initiated discussions with Baker County Emergency Management staff about partnership benefits and potential utilization of library as emergency headquarters. Jason Yencopal provided a letter of support for our grant. The district has been invited to be a partner with Baker County in crafting a Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan. Ed’s experience and skills are a perfect fit to be our designate to that endeavor. Other partners include representatives from cities, police and fire agencies, water resources department, the airport, BLM, forest service, soil and water conservation district, school districts, telecom and internet service providers.

Marketing

For [National Library Week](#) (Apr 7-13), BCLD participated in the Oregon Puppet Wars contest, against Crook County, Coquille, St. Helens, Oregon Trail Library District, Oregon City, and Deschutes. The winner was declared MVP (Most Valuable Puppet). Our puppet, Errol the Lopsided Bunny, got a late start on the campaign but finished in 2nd to last place. Oregon City’s Octavian the Octopus was the winner. The race was featured by the [Oregonian](#) on their online edition.

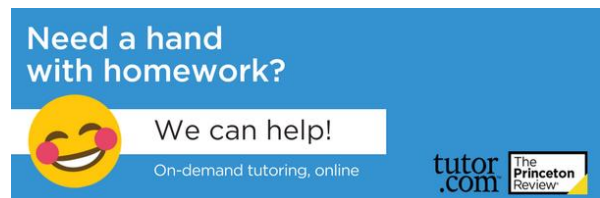


BCLD now has an Instagram social media page, [@bakercountylibrary](#). This was set up to facilitate marketing of the Summer Reading Program at the request of our Children’s Specialist staff. The number of followers to our page is already nearing two dozen.

Programs & services

I have applied to participate in the *Libros for Oregon Program* for 2020. If our participation is approved, we will allocate \$1,200 towards refreshing our Spanish language collection. LfO sends book purchasers to a book sales event in Guadajara, Mexico and coordinates the import for them. Data from the 2010 Census showed Baker County Hispanic or Latino population at 3.3%. The number of Spanish-language materials in our collection is 0.5%.

Service hours for our online tutor.com service were expanded at no additional subscription cost. BCLD cardholders can now access tutors from noon to midnight PST, which is a 4-hour increase from the previous 2pm – 10pm. This next fiscal year I will be



Library Board Meeting – Annotated Agenda

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Notes prepared by Library Director Perry Stokes

focusing on heavy promotion of this service since usage has dropped.

Staff report functionality issues with our PayPal credit card processing method. It is unknown whether it is due to equipment or software. I will be exploring alternative Point of Sale terminal options this next fiscal year. A more professional cash register system may help reduce the error rate on logging payments received.

Personnel

Three staff including myself attended the OLA/WLA conference in Vancouver, WA in mid-April. I felt most workshops were beneficial as refreshers, and also obtained some new ideas.

Safety & Security

A recent software update to our camera system has resulted in technical difficulties with remotely accessing branch sites. The cameras are still running and recording, but footage currently can only be accessed on site. IT staff are focusing efforts on resolving the issues.

Technology

See Safety & Security.

b. Finance

Hawes

Financial reports to be distributed at the meeting.

VIII. Agenda items for upcoming regular meetings. Next: Jun 10, 2019

Dielman

- Janitorial Services bids / contract approval
- Discuss prorated staff benefits
- Fee schedule – revise Non-resident card fee
- Review of weeding procedure

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Dielman



Baker County Library District

Board of Directors

Regular Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2019

<p>Call To Order</p>	<p>The meeting was held in the Riverside Meeting Room. Gary Dielman, President called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Present at the meeting were Directors Gary Dielman, Frances Vaughan, and Kyra Rohner; also present were Perry Stokes, Library Director and Christine Hawes, Business Manager. Dielman noted that a quorum was present. Guest Kevin Bell of Clarke & Clarke Insurance was acknowledged as in attendance to present the group insurance renewal information.</p>
<p>Consent Agenda</p>	<p>Dielman asked for any changes to the consent agenda. There were no changes. Kyra said that she was not here for the prior meeting, so she would make the motion to approve the January minutes only. Kyra made a motion to approve the January minutes and agenda; Vaughan seconded; motion passed unanimous.</p> <p>Vaughan made a motion to approve the March minutes; Kyra seconded the motion; motion passed unanimous.</p>
<p>Conflicts or Potential Conflicts of Interest</p>	<p>Dielman asked for any potential conflicts of interest. There were none.</p>
<p>Open Forum for general public</p>	<p>Dielman noted there were no other members of the public present with the exception of Kevin Bell, who is on the agenda. Stokes had no correspondence to share.</p>
<p>NEW BUSINESS: Health Insurance Coverage Review</p>	<p>Dielman thanked Kevin Bell for coming tonight and asked “why the increase?”, in reference to the reported 7.5% rate change for the next fiscal year. Bell started with background information on Special Districts. He said that five years ago Special Districts moved to being self-insured. SDIS contracts with Regence Blue Cross as the third party administrator, which pays all of the claims and then sends Special Districts a bill each month. Special Districts is also in what he called the “re-insurance market” which means they carry liability insurance to cover the possibility that claims go over a large dollar amount in a year. This helps keep the rates down.</p> <p>Since that time rate increases have been either zero or low. As a group, Special Districts uses the overall loss ratio for the pool; he explained how that works. In the years that they save money, they reserve those funds for when it is necessary to buy down the rate for years when the loss ratio is higher. In year 5 they incurred higher losses of 10.4% rate increase, and used some of the savings to buy the rate down to the 7.5% increase that the Library District is seeing this renewal year. He feels the rates are very good compared to the general insurance market.</p> <p>Bell asked the group to reference the packet he handed out. He reviewed the District insurance coverage starting on the last page. One of the ACA changes was the Out-Of-Pocket Maximum. The Library District Plan is the PPO K Red Plan with an individual deductible of \$3,000, of which the Library pays 50% (or up to \$1,500) to an employee who meets all or part of the annual deductible. Moving down the page to the</p>



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	<p>Calendar-year-out-of-pocket maximum of \$6,350. The insurance pays 100% after this amount. He explained what goes into the out-of-pocket pool including all co-pays. He went through each of the areas of coverage and the packet information. Adding that insurance has a “one-bucket” concept now.</p> <p>Bell said that by going self-insured, Special Districts has done well so far. There are other options that he touched on briefly. However, he suggests the Library “hold tight”, meaning to stay with the plan we have, and see what happens next year. Medical costs have been increasing 8-10% annually. There was discussion on current coverage market and health care system. With no further discussion, Bell thanked the board for having him make the presentation. He left the meeting.</p>
<p>FY2019-2020 Budget Committee & Calendar</p>	<p>Stokes said the Budget Committee Membership roster and Budget Calendar are included in the board packets. There are two individuals of the Budget Committee that need to be re-appointed, namely Aletha Bonebrake and Linda Collier.</p> <p>Rohner made a motion to appoint both Bonebrake and Collier to the budget committee for two year terms, and to approve the committee member roster and the budget calendar as presented; Vaughan seconded the motion; with no discussion, the motion passed unanimous.</p>
<p>FY2018-19 Budget Projection & FY2019-20 First Look</p>	<p>Stokes handed out a summary report titled FY2019-2020 General Fund, Budget Overview – Highlights. The large cost driver this year is the PERS increase. PERS is on bi-annual rates, the new rates effective July 1, 2019 will increase the District costs by 23% or \$24,000. This is equivalent to one staff position. The good news is that the projected revenue increases will not only cover the PERS increase and allow us to keep the staff at current levels, but provide for a Cost of Living Increase (COLI) to keep wages at pace with inflation.</p> <p>Another goal is to grow the Operations Reserve carryover to \$300,000. The initial operations reserve goal was \$200,000 which we have maintained for several years. However, costs have increased and the reserve must be increased to avoid using short-term debt. Stokes provided more detail on the goal of giving the staff a 2.0-2.5% cost of living increase. Stokes pointed out that in Oregon the minimum wage is increasing by \$0.50 cents annually for our region, driving wages up for the lowest ranking positions. This creates pressure for wages of higher ranked staff to be increased, or else they effectively become “low wage” positions.</p> <p>Stokes continued on his list of goals, including the addition of a fourth student Library Page position to supplement weekend staff at peak times and budgeting for critical building maintenance projects. The next large project will be putting a new roof on the Baker building. That is projected to cost about \$50M. The Leo Adler Foundation</p>



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April 8, 2019

has already provided \$10,000 toward this task and the library needs to secure the rest. For now, we will continue to patching as needed until a Capital Improvement Reserve fund can be grown enough to cover it. The last item under goals is to remodel the workroom for efficiency and to declutter. A staff committee has worked on ideas for reorganization. We will continue to re-work plans until a plan for common agreement is developed. He has budgeted new furnishing costs for the staff workroom in General Fund Capital Outlay.

Dielman said he is concerned about the clutter in the workroom. He asked about decluttering along with the workroom remodel. Stokes said creating a sustainably tidy and organized workspace is one of the primary motivations and objectives of the remodel. Donations processing is a chronic and growing challenge. When donations are received, it takes a trained staff to assess what needs to be kept and what direction the books will go. Large donations can negatively impact library operations and service capacity by hijacking staff work time for a good portion of their day. The flood of donations backs up into growing piles. He explained that most patrons want new books. Very few of the donation books make it into the collection. Most of them are sold at the book sales or in the Friends bookshop and many are sold through Amazon which supports the book budget.

Stokes moved to the Proposed Budget Items of Note – under Income. The good news is that we are seeing a large surplus, possibly due to the Lime area wind farm assessment. This year he anticipates receiving about \$60,000 more than projected. With the Lime project assessment being disputed in court, projection for the coming year is challenging. The County growth rate is anticipated at 4%; Stokes will budget based on 3% for next year to be conservative. Stokes wants to establish a Capital Improvement Reserve Fund for building maintenance in the coming year. **Personnel Services** is projected just under the 70% goal and that does include a 2% COLI for staff. The IT Manager has stated a plan to reduce hours in the fall due to health reasons, which will help offset the PERS and insurance rate increases. Overall, salaries increase by about \$5,900 whereas benefits increase by about \$31,600. Most of that is PERS with a small increase in health insurance. **Materials & Services** is projected at 31% of budget. The book budget will start at 8.8%, facilities will increase \$30,000 to allow for deferred maintenance projects. The current projects include replacing the board walk with trek decking and a section of siding. Under Utilities, he has increased the Baker water budget as it appears usage has increased. Telecommunications increase is due to the increased cost of Huntington Library Internet which is 80% covered by the E-Rate program. Overall, M&S remains flat.

Other items of interest, he has budgeted for \$10,000 for potential workroom remodel expenses. The cash carryover is anticipated at \$317,000 (up from \$261,500). The district's financial position is great, Stokes said. He expects to be able to



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	<p>accommodate all the goals he presented. There was some discussion.</p>
<p>OLD BUSINESS: Policy Revision</p>	<p>Stokes said this policy was last revised in November 2012. He has worked on the ideas that were discussed last month. He wants to re-brand the name of the patron card levels. The Full Privileges “regular card” would become the <i>Premium</i> card for Baker County residents with a checkout limit of 50. The Limited Privileges cards will become the <i>Regular or Advanced</i> card types with a checkout limit of 6 or 12 and the <i>Basic</i> card would have a checkout limit of 2. The <i>Juvenile</i> card would be re-branded as a Youth Access Card. The term juvenile is generally perceived as negative. We also need to add the ability for emancipated minors to obtain a card at ages 16-17 as independents. The <i>Independent Youth Access</i> card would be limited to 2 checkout items to mitigate risk while providing access. Independent Youth would also remain responsible for any fines when then turn 18 and their account is updated to adult status. The Dependent Youth Access card remains the same with the parent responsible for fines. He will create a reference sheet condensing the information to one page. The management staff liked the changes. He added the couple suggestions he received in this draft. The board read through the policy changes. There was discussion primarily on the new level for Independent minors. Stokes made note of the suggested changes. Rohner made a motion to approve the Library Card Eligibility policy as it was revised today; Vaughan seconded; motion passed unanimous.</p>
<p>REPORTS: Director Report</p>	<p>Stokes gave the Director’s report.</p> <p>Friends & Foundation – The Friends have approved funding for several projects. He went over the list of project including replacing blinds, replacing chairs in the reading room, and upgrade the primary drinking fountain. Several chairs in the reading room are worn out. They are 20 years old. With prolonged sun exposure, the purple fabric has deteriorated and faded. A donation of \$1,500 will be matched by the Friends group for purchase of new chairs. The new drinking fountain will have bottle-filling ability. A Volunteer Appreciation reception is being held this month in honor of our generous volunteer. He invited the board to the event.</p> <p>Facilities & Vehicles – The light switches in the restrooms have been updated to motion-activated units. These may result in a small decrease in electricity use. Carpenter ants have been a problem, again found crawling in the Meeting Room. Ed has placed pesticides in potential entry points.</p> <p>Grants & Gifts – A memorial gift of \$1,500 was received in honor of a frequent library user. As mentioned, the gift will match the Friends group for the purchase of new chairs.</p>



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Marketing – Radio announcements for various library services will be featured on Elkhorn Media radio stations. The local Lion’s Club is coordinating the public service announcements.

Programs & Services – Staff person, Courtney Snyder, organized the Oregon Battle of the Books regional tournament, with assistance from various staff. OBOB is run in partnership with the school district, and the tournament was held at Baker High School. The teens did well, but didn’t make the finals. Dielman suggested giving Snyder a letter of appreciation from the board to recognize her efforts. He asked Stokes to write the letter on behalf of the board.

Stokes purchased a variety of magnetic and acrylic sign holders to improve collection identification. He has often overheard patrons confused about the organization scheme in the movie collection, and with new signage those comments have already decreased.

The Xerox copier unit was recently updated to a newer model on a monthly service contract. We are looking at the use of wireless printing feature for patrons. The staff say the new machine is “prettier but dumber” than the previous copier, meaning the prior unit had better functionality.

Stokes said we are pleased to be a partner with the US Census 2020 by providing space for representatives to recruit workers and provide public information.

Personnel – Managing Librarian, Nola Huey has returned to work as of April 1. Managing Librarian, John Brockman, traveled to Salem in early March to serve on the Oregon State Library’s LSTA Grants Council. He is also currently serving on the Sage Cataloging Committee. Stokes stated Brockman has been a tremendous asset to the district. He has outstanding skills and is well liked by staff.

Three staff, including Stokes, will attend the OLA/WLA conference in Vancouver, Washington mid-April.

Safety & Security – Stokes described a minor theft incident of a timer device that controlled the LED Open signs. It was recently discovered and replaced.

Technology – Jim has added a packet inspection module to the Baker server that will assist with analyzing trends. It has the ability to show what an individual user is accessing.

Stokes said he has an addendum to his written report. As part of this year’s National Library Week, the district has acquired a puppet mascot, which has been named Errol



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	<p>the Lopsided Bunny. Baker is competing with several other Oregon libraries in an MVP (Most Valuable Puppet) contest. Folks can vote for the best puppet mascot online. In looking at our photos, this building will have a 50 year anniversary in 2021, around the time the Foundation/Friends will also be working on the campaign to renew the 5 year option levy. Dielman remembered how in the move from the Carnegie Library building, the National Guard helped transfer books. There were many volunteers and High School teens that volunteered to put books on the shelves. Stokes said he will encourage the Friends to do a 50 year celebration.</p> <p>The State Library has hired a new State Librarian, Jennifer Patterson. She is from the Washington area.</p>
<p>Finance Report</p>	<p>Hawes handed out check packets for signatures. The financial reports had already been distributed.</p> <p>The General Fund received tax turnovers totaling \$8,662.84. Noteworthy checks include a medical deductible reimbursement of \$1,500 and Ingram books for \$2,080.30 which is a relatively small monthly statement. The Oregonian annual subscription is now \$1,097.12. Stokes commented that this is nearly double last year's price. Building Maintenance included Whelan Electric \$491.72 to install bathroom motion sensors, Restroom Strategic on Visa of \$1,304.00 for the water cooler with a bottle filler, and Cool Rite also on visa of \$409.95 an add on bottle filler for a drinking fountain that will likely be placed in one of the branches. Bookkeeping Supplies included Intuit QuickBooks \$650 on Visa for the annual payroll subscription and Intuit \$442.96 for a General Fund check order. Captain Comics for the Free Comic Book Day program was paid on Visa \$410.75 and will be reimbursed by the Friends. The total Visa paid by the General Fund is \$5,908.65. And the Ed Staub & Sons billing included the annual propane tank rent at two branch locations, \$40 and \$45. The current cash balance was noted on the last page.</p> <p>Other Funds had minimal activity writing two checks. One to Visa for Amazon book postage \$58.47 and Vroom expense reimbursement of \$48.77.</p> <p>Sage Fund wrote 4 checks to courier vendors totaling \$736.57 plus postage on Visa of \$384.75. The Sage Visa also included airfare of \$316.00 for Beth to travel to the Evergreen conference. Other noteworthy checks were Library Technologies \$2,000 for Sage record maintenance, and the monthly contract \$5,000 sent electronically.</p> <p>With no further questions. The Directors signed the checks and initialed the check list approving the bills paid since the last meeting.</p>
<p>Next Meeting Date</p>	<p>The next regular Board meeting will be May 13, 2019.</p>



Baker County Library District
Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Minutes
April 8, 2019

Adjourn	The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 pm. Respectfully submitted, Perry Stokes, Secretary to the Board PS/ch
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DRAFT

Treasure On Film

Robert N. Gambs owned photography studio here in 1930s and 40s



Gary Dielman finds that Robert Gambs often photographed with a view camera that produced an 8-inch by 10-inch negative. This one is of a wrecked car that Gambs photographed after he moved from Baker City in 1950. (S. John Collins / Baker City Herald)

[Buy photo](#)

A treasure trove of Baker County history lies in tidy piles on a table in Gary Dielman's home, stacks of black-and-white photographs with curling corners betraying their age.

But this unique collection of several dozen crisply rendered prints, most of them made between 1936 and 1949, constitutes only one chapter of a much longer tale, one that grows more vivid the deeper Dielman digs.

Wedged against the wall are five other fruit boxes crammed with photos and negatives and film reels and.... well, as of Tuesday, April 23, Dielman wasn't sure what those containers might reveal.

He had to that point delved into one box and part of another.

"I haven't even opened four boxes," Dielman, a longtime Baker County historian, said as he began to investigate the accumulated collection of photographer Robert N. Gambs, who operated a studio at 2110 Main St. in two stints separated by his service in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

A few days later Dielman, who spent much of last week poring over the boxes' contents in a manner not so different from a child enthralled by a stack of Christmas gifts, had a much better sense of the scope of this donation.

And a much greater appreciation for its historic value.

“I feel like someone who gave me a big box of chocolates and I’ve been eating them all day,” Dielman wrote in an email to the Herald on Thursday.

Some of these photographs will eventually be added to the Baker County Library’s Historic Photo Collection, and likely designated as the Gambs Studio Collection, said Perry Stokes, director of the Library District.

Stokes picked up the boxes about two weeks ago from Vancouver, Washington, where they had been stored for many years in the garage of Robert Gambs’ son, Jon Gambs.

Jon, who was born at the old St. Elizabeth Hospital in Baker in 1945 (it’s now St. Elizabeth Towers condominiums, at 2365 Fourth St.), was just a boy of 4 when his parents moved from Baker City to Eugene in 1950.

Jon’s mother, Beth MacFarlane, grew up in Baker City and graduated from Baker High School in 1936, two years after Robert Gambs. Beth Gambs, who’s 99, lives with Jon Gambs and his wife, Karen, in their Vancouver home.

Jon Gambs, who inherited the collection of photos and other items when his father died in 1996, said this irreplaceable catalog of Baker County history might well have ended up in a landfill.

But he said his son-in-law, Ryan Kruse, who also lives in Vancouver, decided to phone the Baker County Library to ask whether there was any interest in preserving some of the photos.

Stokes, who fielded the inquiry in early March, hardly needed to consider the matter before answering yes.

Stokes said Kruse is a “hero for rescuing those items.”

“It’s an invaluable archive that adds to our insight into that era, and a significant period in Baker history,” Stokes said.

Jon Gambs is also gratified that his father's legacy will be preserved.

"I'm pleased," he said on Wednesday. "It was one step from really being dumped. I'm hoping there's something of value there that future generations can enjoy about their history."

Stokes picked up the collection while he was attending a library conference in Vancouver in mid April.

He then turned over the boxes to Dielman, who has been a curator for the Library's Historic Photo Collection for many years.

Dielman, even before he had a chance to thoroughly investigate the contents of the boxes, was also thrilled.

"This is huge," he said. "We rarely get a collection of this size."

Both Dielman and Stokes said the Gambs Studio Collection is noteworthy not only for its quantity, but also for the quality of its contents.

This is quite different from, say, an envelope of slightly blurry snapshots, taken by an amateur, that ended up forgotten in the dusty recesses of somebody's attic or cellar.

The Gambs Collection chronicles the work of a professional who was hired not only to take portraits of local residents but also to showcase Baker County businesses, natural scenery, youth athletic events, rodeos and much else besides.

It is, in effect, a depiction, in sharp black-and-white, of life here immediately before, and after, World War II.

By contrast, a significant number of the photos in the existing Historic Photo Collection are from the late 19th or early 20th centuries.

Stokes said he had only to examine a handful of the Gambs' photos to recognize this was a special collection.

“The skill — the composition of the photos — you can just tell they’re above average,” he said.

As for why these hundreds of prints and negatives survived for so many decades, Jon Gambs has a simple explanation:

“Dad kept everything.”

“He was raised in the time of the Depression when you apparently didn’t throw anything away,” Jon said.

Jon said his father attended Eastern Oregon State College for a couple of years after graduating from BHS. Robert Gambs then took over an existing photography studio.

Dielman said his research in city directories shows that Reginald Wagner preceded Robert Gambs at the 2110 Main St. location.

Jon Gambs said his father did commercial and portrait photography, in addition to developing film for other photographers. Among the items in the boxes Dielman sifted through are many orange envelopes that Gambs used in his film-developing business.

Robert Gambs enlisted in the Navy during World War II. Not surprisingly, he was an aerial photographer, flying on PBY “flying boats” out of Pensacola, Florida.

After the war he returned to Baker City and reopened his studio.

Jon Gambs said his father sold the business in part because he developed an allergy to chemicals used to develop film, an affliction that affected his hands.

(Dielman found city directory entries showing Holman’s photography store at the Main Street address in the 1950s.)

See more in the April 29, 2019, issue of the Baker City Herald.

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Saving a treasure of Baker's history

The boxes that hold a significant part of Baker County's and Baker City's history have made quite a journey since they left here almost 70 years ago.

But after decades stored in one garage or another, in Eugene and Portland and finally in Vancouver, Washington, the boxes and their precious contents returned to Baker City about two weeks ago.

They might well have ended up buried beneath tons of dirt in a landfill.

The boxes contain hundreds of photographs, negatives and other materials amassed by Robert N. Gambs, a professional photographer who owned a studio on Main Street in Baker City during the 1930s and 1940s. Selected items will eventually become part of the Baker County Library District's Historic Photo Collection.

That the boxes ended up back in Baker City, where Gambs filled them in 1950 before moving to Eugene, rather than rotting among layers of trash, is a testament to several people.

First is Gambs himself, although it seems we must also thank the Great Depression. Gambs' son, Jon Gambs, who was born in Baker City in 1945 and now lives in Vancouver, said his father, who grew up during the Depression, was so accustomed to frugality that, in Jon's words, "Dad kept everything."

Jon Gambs inherited the boxes after his father died in 1996. And although Jon admits he was at times close to throwing the boxes away, he never did.

The boxes traveled from Jon's home to that of his daughter and son-in-law, Ryan and Nicole Kruse, who also live in Vancouver. Ryan had the foresight to call the Baker County Library to see if there was interest locally in the boxes.

Perry Stokes, the library district director, not only said yes, but he arranged to pick up the boxes from the Kruses while he was attending a library conference in Vancouver in mid April.

Since Stokes returned with the treasure, Baker City historian Gary Dielman has been sorting through the contents, a preliminary step in deciding which of Robert Gambs' photos will be added to the library district's collection.

Dielman said the Gambs photos are invaluable because they cover an era that isn't well-represented in the current collection. That the photos were taken by a professional and are of high quality, and that Gambs photographed a wide variety of people, places and scenes, are added bonuses.

Ultimately, everyone who is interested in our area's history, or just enjoys seeing what Baker City looked like in the World War II era, should be grateful to Robert Gambs for his thriftiness, and to him and his descendants for keeping those irreplaceable boxes for so long.

Because they did, Gambs' legacy will last far longer than he probably would have expected.

— *Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor*