

Julie McDonald Commentary:

Lewis County Roots of AAUW's Luana Graves Date Back to 1883

By Julie McDonald / For The Chronicle, February 14, 2023

Nearly 140 years ago, Jacob G. and Martha “Mattie” W. (Hill) Wymore packed up all their belongings and their children into a wagon to travel across the United States from Kansas to California, where they boarded a boat to Olympia in Washington Territory.

But they didn't stay there. Instead, the couple who had married in 1869 traveled south and, after living first at a home on Military Road, established a homestead on Newaukum Hill west of Chehalis off the Brown Road, with paperwork signed by President Grover Cleveland, and lived there the rest of their lives.

Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren thrived in the community, and today, 14 decades after their arrival, the Newaukum Hill homestead remains in the family, passing through females in the family.

Luana Graves, the great-granddaughter of Jacob and Mattie, is rightly proud of her deep roots in Lewis County. She never married, but she plans to pass the property on to a cousin in hopes it will remain in the family.

Jacob and Mattie Wymore's daughter, Jessie Alice, who was born July 27, 1885, lived most of her life on the homestead and died there in 1970. She married Walter Phillips in 1905, and they had two children, Eunice Mattie and Emerick, before divorcing. Then she married Blaine Presnell on Dec. 13, 1919, and they had one daughter, Ruby Jean.

Ruby, a 1940 graduate of Adna High School, married Louis Russell Frogner in 1941 and worked as a clerk typist at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton during World War II. They had one son, James Frogner, who died at birth. The couple later divorced.



She later married Charles “Chuck” Graves, an Idaho native who had graduated from Boistfort High School and served in the Army during World War II. He worked four decades as a jitney operator at American Crossarms Co. in Chehalis. He and his wife both enjoyed bowling and the American Legion Post 22 activities.

Together, they raised a daughter, Luana Graves, who was born in 1942. She grew up admiring her aunt, Eunice Mattie (Phillips) Leonard Raschke, a 1925 graduate of Napavine High School who became a teacher after studying in Ellensburg and Bellingham. She married John M. Leonard in 1931, and they had two children — a son, John, and a daughter, Janice. After her husband’s death, Eunice married Reuben P. Raschke. She taught most of her life in the Boistfort and Adna areas, retiring in 1966.

After graduating from Napavine High School as valedictorian in 1961, Luana planned to follow in her aunt’s footsteps and pursue a career as a teacher. She received a Soroptimist Club scholarship to Centralia College, where instructor Ralph Carlson influenced her decision later to pursue a career in guidance and counseling. She graduated from Centralia College in 1963 and earned her bachelor’s degree in history two years later at what was then called Western Washington State College, now Western Washington University in Bellingham.



Luana Graves is pictured in this photo from her high school yearbook.

She taught physical education for two years in Winlock, where a fellow teacher, Elizabeth (Nix) Wedin, introduced her to the American Association of University Women. When she joined the Lewis County AAUW branch in 1966, the membership chair was Priscilla Tiller, one of the three women in the branch today with more than 50 years of membership. Meetings took place in members’ homes, and dues were \$10 a year. Today, the club meets at The Gathering Place at Stillwater Estates in Centralia. Annual dues are \$87.

“I liked the education part, the monthly meetings and the different topics,” Luana said. Topics the year she joined included “Education: Antidote to Poverty,” “The Law and the Citizen,” “Science: A Creative Discipline,” and “Revolution in Modern China.”

But Carlson opened Luana’s eyes to a rewarding career as a guidance counselor, so after teaching for two years, she began working as an employment counselor for the Washington State Employment Security Department. In 1971, she earned her master’s in guidance and counseling from Pacific Lutheran University. She enjoyed helping her clients — many of them single mothers — find jobs or training. She often spoke about employment and guidance counseling throughout the community, including to AAUW and the Centralia-Chehalis Altrusa Club.

She retired in 2005 after working for the state for 37 years.

After her father died in 1995, she and her mother, Ruby, enjoyed traveling together. Her mother, a huge Mariners fan who enjoyed bowling, died in February 2014 at the age of 92.

During her 57 years with AAUW, Luana has held several leadership positions, including treasurer in 1969 and president twice — in 1979-80 and 1988-90, when she also was a delegate to the state convention at Ilwaco.

“As a member, I took on leadership roles, somewhat reluctantly, particularly as president twice and more willingly as program chair,” she wrote in the AAUW branch newsletter.

She has helped with the annual used book sale (this year March 23-25 at the Centralia Moose Lodge) and Expanding Your Horizons, which started locally in 1993 at Centralia College to introduce girls in sixth through ninth grades to career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, art and math. She has enjoyed participating in the travel group, Cinema Chicks and an early morning discussion group. She’s traveled to see exhibits such as King Tut in Seattle, the Sistine Chapel in Tacoma, and the Lady Washington in Aberdeen.

“Having been a native of the area since my great-grandparents were homesteaders during President Cleveland’s term of office, it has been great to be part of an important community group,” she said.

•••

Julie McDonald, a personal historian from Toledo, may be reached at memoirs@chaptersoflife.com.