

# the ARTIFACT

LANE  
COUNTY  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM



SUMMER 2020

NO. 236

• LOOKING FORWARD • DIRECTOR'S CORNER •  
• WORD FROM THE BOARD • A HISTORY OF EPIDEMICS •  
• THANKS TO OUR DONORS • DIGITAL DIARIES: ELIJAH BRISTOW •

## LANE COUNTY HISTORY MUSEUM

740 West 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Eugene, OR

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Office (541) 682-4242

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### MUSEUM PRESS:

Historical Society Publications are available for purchase at the Museum.

### THE ARTIFACT IS PRODUCED BY:

Editor: Nick Chase  
Design: Stephen O'Brien  
LCHM staff members, and  
guest contributors.

*Front cover: JN24, Two cyclists wearing berets pose with their bicycles under a tree near Bailey Hill, just west of Eugene. 1904*

# LOOKING FORWARD



**The Museum remains closed to the public through the ongoing Health Crisis. Remote and online services continue.**

Stay informed by joining our email list:

**[lchm.org/join-our-mailing-list/](http://lchm.org/join-our-mailing-list/)**

Our website, facebook and instagram contain a wealth of information easily accessed during this time. View our online collections at

**[lchm.pastperfectonline.com](http://lchm.pastperfectonline.com)** to catch a glimpse or dive deep into local history.

# UPCOMING EXHIBIT

**TBD**

**Upstream Movements:**

*Counterculture in Lane County*

### Remote research services are available!

The Museum is glad to continue offering research possibilities to the public throughout building closure.

While the doors are closed, Lane County History Museum has not gone dark. Museum staff are safely at work continuing our commitment to collect, preserve, research, publish and exhibit Our Stories. As things continue to change for our community, we are making Museum resources available to you in new ways that will serve you now, and into the future.

### Virtual Exhibit: Scenes from 1892

Visit **[lchm.org/story-maps/](http://lchm.org/story-maps/)** for a virtual tour of downtown Eugene circa 1892.

### Share your Story

Do you have a story to share? As history unfolds around us, we are asking for community submissions to our digital archive. Eye-witness accounts, personal stories and insights will help inform future interpretation of our local story. Contact Digital Archivist Nick Chase with questions at **[digital@lchm.org](mailto:digital@lchm.org)**. Visit **[lchm.org/share-your-story/](http://lchm.org/share-your-story/)** to submit. Share the link with family, friends, and acquaintances—add your voice to history.



## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

*by Bob Hart, Executive Director*

The Lane County History Museum began 2020 opening our "Equality and Nothing Less" suffrage exhibit, a collaboration with the League of Women Voters, as well as welcoming our new research librarian and archivist. Oregon Historical Society then published its trailblazing winter issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly detailing Oregon's history of white supremacy. In February the Lane County Historical Society gave out well-deserved awards, distributed grant monies for county-wide history projects and said goodbye to veteran board members. In March the world changed.

The conjunction of a pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and an election year have certainly brought home to all of us that we are, indeed, living in the midst of a historic moment. In the midst of all that uncertainty, serious discussion about renaming our county has begun.

Members of the Lane County Historical Society should remain assured that the organization remains healthy, even with the collapse of the county's transient room tax subsidy. The Museum however, remains closed with no definite date to reopen. We have suspended most active collecting due to Covid 19 concerns, but our Archive departments will release information soon on new policies for both physical and digital items. We are accepting both photo orders and research requests. Our Hard Times Kitchen videos are on YouTube. Important original research continues for a diversity exhibit for our as-yet-unscheduled reopening. Museum Facebook and Instagram posts have uncovered Oregon Trail myths and our graphic artist has produced two coloring books. Our Oregon Trail traveling trunk is now available digitally. This is the work of committed Museum staff, who continue to work remotely and on site in rotating shifts.

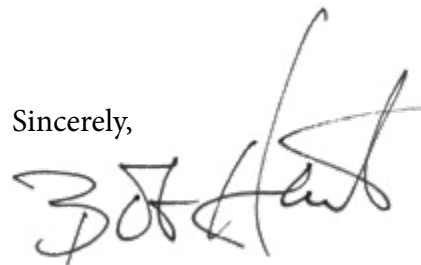
Lane County Historical Society has an obligation to be a community resource for the dialogue and narrative concerning the parts of Oregon history that have been suppressed, ignored, or never before formally investigated. This is no time to hide behind our closed doors. Our common history, if accurately portrayed, is like a tapestry with intersecting narratives. Our organization is dedicated

to accurately representing the diversity of those narratives. One perceptive commentator has accurately spoken of America's "original sin" of slavery. African American historian Bill Gwaltney has spoken of "the history which both unites and divides us." It is my hope and expectation that you, our members, will applaud our honesty and courage in stepping up to the difficult and uncomfortable tasks in front of us all.

In the last issue of The Artifact I reported that we would furlough staff at the end of March. With the receipt of Federal Payroll Protection Plan funds however, we were able to hold off staff reductions until now. In order to shepherd remaining LCHS monies, the board has adopted a modified furlough plan where almost all staff will be retained, but only through October. Then further determinations will be made depending on the evolution of the pandemic and the economic consequences in the coming months.

The Museum cannot currently continue to operate indefinitely without transient room tax monies and remain financially viable. Times are tough, but if you donate, your support will help bridge the gap while we develop an alternate funding strategy.

Sincerely,



Bob Hart



## Word from the Board

*By Rose Sleanbeck, Board Member, Chair Strategic Planning*

I came to the board of Lane County Historical Society in October 2019, as part of my master's work in the Nonprofit Management program at the University of Oregon. The first thing I wanted to work on was a Strategic Plan. I feel strongly that crafting and adopting a comprehensive 5-year strategic plan will go far toward organizing the board's actions, appeal to potential funders, and help the Lane County History Museum move forward into the next phase of growth and development.

In February the LCHS board formalized a Strategic Planning Committee. Unfortunately, our group only met in person twice before the Shelter in Place order. However, we have continued work through virtual meetings. The committee has utilized data collected by the Nonprofit Management student group who wrote a strategic plan for LCHM in 2019. That plan was never adopted by the board of LCHS, but the current Strategic Planning Committee has been able to utilize much of the group's field data to inform our new work. Eventually a first-draft plan will be circulated among LCHM staff, and then among board members to gather feedback. Once that feedback is applied, the board will vote to adopt the plan into policy.

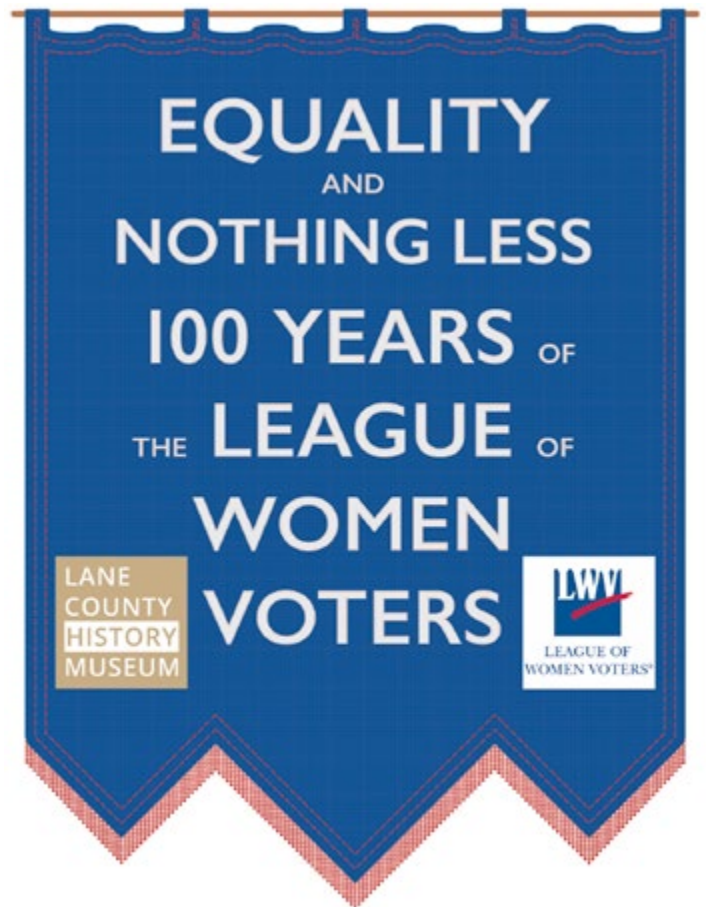
For me, a key element to building this plan will be a comprehensive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy. Enlivened work in this area began inside the museum late in February with the specific goals of spotlighting existing departmental policies, and reaching to our diverse local communities for their input and inclusion in the Museum. At the administrative level, this policy will guide the board in the way it attracts and recruits board members and staff. At the museum level, the policy will support growing diversity, equity and inclusion of cultural narratives in exhibits and outreach.

This is a moment of growth in terms of the Museum's relevance and impact within our community. Besides being a museum of history, LCHM is a museum of Place. The stories of this Place have been told through a single lens, cleaned of painful and brutal detail for the sake of gentility. Yet, these details paint the full picture of the lived experiences of all culture-groups who have resided in

this place prior to, and along-side white settlers who have thus far been the heralds of their own history. How we tell our stories, and how we preserve meaningful events must fundamentally shift to include all voices and points of view. The future of LCHM actively includes stories meaningful to a broad spectrum of peoples who inhabit this Place.

I believe that future generations will look on this time as a watershed moment, when the conversation shifted from a monologue to a chorus of voices, stories and perspectives. I'm glad that LCHM Membership, board and staff are with me in striving to facilitate these changes.

Rose Sleanbeck, She/Her/Hers  
Former Student on Board member &  
current LCHM board member  
Masters of Nonprofit Management student  
Graduate Certificate of Museum Studies student  
University of Oregon



## A Brief History of Epidemics in Lane County

by Faith Kreskey, Exhibits Curator

Disease colors the history of Oregon from its inception as a territory. Diseases including smallpox and malaria introduced to Oregon in the late 18th century devastated local Native American communities, with current research estimating a loss of sixty to eighty percent of their population by the 1840s. Malaria was endemic in the Eugene area by the 1850s, with annual outbreaks during the summer months. Influenza would reappear each winter, hitting the very young and the very old the hardest. In the 19th century up to seventy-five percent of Americans suffered from some form of malnutrition, so most people did not fare well during these cyclical outbreaks. Since disease was more present, very few preventive measures were taken against them since they were accepted as an unchangeable part of life.

While endemic diseases were viewed with a general sense of resignation, epidemics had a significant impact on social and political policies during the late 19th century. Though endemic diseases cause illness overall, the sudden onset of unfamiliar and highly transmittable diseases can have devastating social effects. Smallpox and cholera were feared the most, and they received huge amounts of media attention. In the 1850s Lane County built a “pest house,” a continuation of an English tradition from the 17th century that isolated infected individuals in a building away from the rest of the population. As the local population grew during the 1880s and 1890s, worry over new disease outbreaks led to public health initiatives, including vaccination campaigns and public sanitation reforms.

Public sanitation was one of the biggest social issues. Repeated cholera outbreaks brought to public attention that it was the impoverished who suffered the most. It was thought that squalor was the source of the disease, creating an ill-smelling cloud that spread throughout the general population. While this reasoning about what caused disease was slightly off-base, it led to behavior that saved lives. Prominent local Dr. Thomas Shelton (1844-1893) was a major proponent of the sanitation movement, and he even installed a sink with running water in upstairs hallway of his home to show his dedication to hygiene.

Starting in the 1870s, the government began a public education campaign, targeting homemakers with educational pamphlets about the link between the “bad air” created by dirty homes with bad water supplies, and contracting infectious diseases. These pamphlets also promoted the regular use of new chemical disinfectants around the home along with

observing proper cleaning procedures during and after an infection. The idea that good hygiene could prevent disease caught on, and it let the American public feel in control over the scourge of epidemics.

By the 1880s, most doctors agreed that germs were the source of most infectious diseases and the idea began to catch on with the general public. Improved microscope technology allowed individual microorganisms to be identified, and focused research showed a direct correlation between the presence of specific bacteria and diseases. Though some members of the public may have had a hard time believe in germs, behaviors that controlled the spread of infectious diseases were becoming part of common practice.

Prior to 1903, there were no rules regarding the disposal of corpses, death certificates were not necessary for burial, and there were continual tuberculosis infections caused by diseased cattle. A smallpox outbreak infected 1,500 people after a doctor in Shaniko misdiagnosed a case as poison ivy.



GN2321, Portrait of Dr. T.W. Harris holding his dog, Tuffy. This photo dates to around 1901, when Dr. Harris was mayor of Eugene.

<Article continues on next page>



## A Brief History of Epidemics in Lane County (continued)

by Faith Kreskey, Exhibits Curator



GN6721, A photo postcard of Rodney Mathers pulling Lorraine Stout in a wagon at Wendling in October 1918 sent by Mrs. Staub, Lorraine's mother. Mrs. Staub thanks Rodney for the visit, and notes that school in Wendling has been canceled due to influenza.



This incident, along with other fears about health and safety conditions across the state, led the state of Oregon to set up a State Board of Health in 1903 in the face of major disease outbreaks caused by a growing state population. The board also instated county health officers to oversee these issues locally. Their first major success was in 1903 when they prevented the spread of a bubonic plague outbreak into Oregon from Washington through an early form of contact tracing. Ongoing anti-plague efforts continued into the 1910s, as the disease was often contracted in lumber camps via exposure to infected wild rodents and bats.

Typhoid was endemic in Eugene from 1888 onwards. In 1905, there were three hundred cases with at least fourteen deaths in what became the worst typhoid outbreak in the history of the state. Notices were issued by Dr. T.W. Harris, the Lane County Health Officer, warning the public to boil all water until the source was found. County investigations the next spring found that most of the

sewage lines in town, including the one that serviced the hospital, emptied eighty feet above the well in the river bank that served as the main water supply for Eugene and the surrounding area. The Baltimore based company that ran the well was censured by the state and forced to put in proper water filters. By 1907 the number of infections was cut down to twelve.

T.W. Harris also began keeping a register of infectious diseases to track outbreaks and better plan Lane County's response to future epidemics. Two large ledger books in the LCHM collection titled *Lane County Register of Infectious Diseases* track all reported cases of infectious disease with detailed information about the patient and the source of their infection. It tracks cases of malaria, scarlet fever, cholera, smallpox, measles and influenza. It is worth noting that this register only contains tracking information that was reported by doctors and does not show an active attempt to quantify case data or trace outbreak patterns.

*Epidemics and How to Meet Them* is a book of pamphlets and fliers published by the Illinois Board of Health in 1919. The fliers are meant to educate the public about various topics related to disease and sanitation, and this book may have belonged to a local doctor or hospital. This poster shows an allegorical image of a woman representing sanitation using an incense burner to keep disease away from a sleeping soldier. The use of incense to keep disease away was a holdover from the miasma theory of disease that thought infectious disease spread via clouds of bad smelling air, so anything that smelled nicely was thought to dispel these clouds.







"Happiness, first of all, in health."—Phillips Brooks.

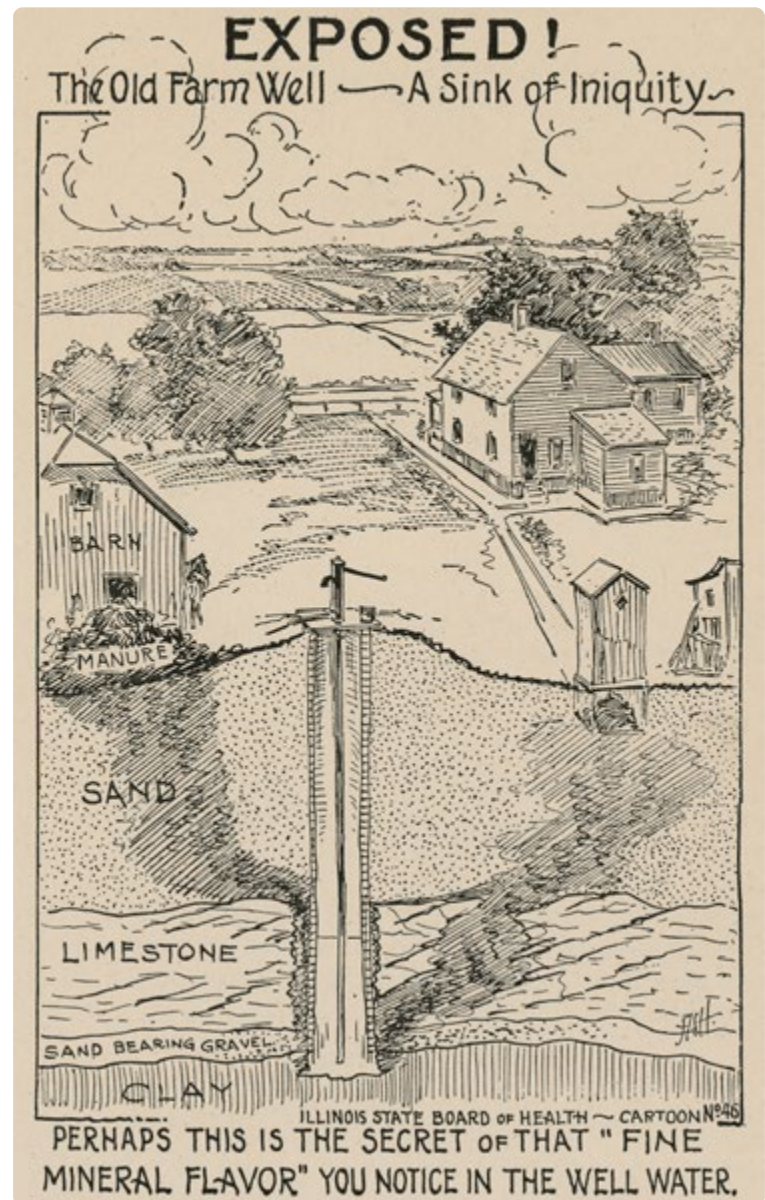
Another image from *Epidemics and How to Meet Them*, 1919, that shows a young man sitting next to an outdoor hospital bed. Sleeping outdoors in fresh air was thought to be helpful in curing influenza and tuberculosis. None of the pamphlets in this book explicitly mention the H1N1 (Spanish Flu) epidemic.

Lane County's first cases of H1N1 virus, colloquially known the "Spanish Flu," were documented around September 1918. The first documented victim was Mrs. A. E. Brigham, who passed away on October 11, 1918. These dates may not be accurate as reporting on the epidemic was likely suppressed over fears that it would have a negative effect on national morale. There were some national public education campaigns with general health advice, often focusing on the effectiveness regular cleaning and fresh air had on lowering infection rates. The link between hand washing and slowing the spread of disease was known as a general principle, but the specific study of the mechanics of viral transmission was only beginning.

Once it was clear that this epidemic posed a major threat to public health, certain measures were recommended by health officials, including quarantining those who became infected, wearing masks in public, and limiting public gatherings. Enforcement of these policies was left up to individual health departments, and often had little support from local government. In Eugene, theaters and churches were closed, public dances were banned, and public schools were closed in mid-October 1918.

The scope and speed of the H1N1 epidemic was beyond the tracking methods used by Lane County in the 1910s. Between the two extant volumes of the *Lane County Register of Infectious Diseases*, only 27 pages are dedicated to tracking the epidemic. It was widely agreed that

people who became infected should be quarantined to limit the spread of the disease, and health officials made recommendations, but there are no existing records of follow up or enforcement. There are also no extant records in the LCHM collection that show data aggregation or analysis to try to understand the epidemic at the local level. Based on anecdotal evidence, Eugene made the decision to lift restrictions on gatherings in December 1918, which led to a second wave of infections in 1919. There were few attempts made to control the spread of H1N1 through restrictions on public behavior, and small waves of outbreaks continued until 1920. Oregon's response flattened the curve after the initial outbreak in 1918, but extended the length of the epidemic.



A diagram from *Epidemics and How to Meet Them*, 1919, that explains how improperly siting a well can cause disease. Contamination of the city water supply through a similar problem led to endemic cholera in Eugene from 1888-1907.

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Some donations or membership dues are likely still in the mail. We thank you in advance and will share those in a future newsletter. We appreciate the support and positive messages we have been receiving.

## DIGITAL DIARIES: Elijah Bristow

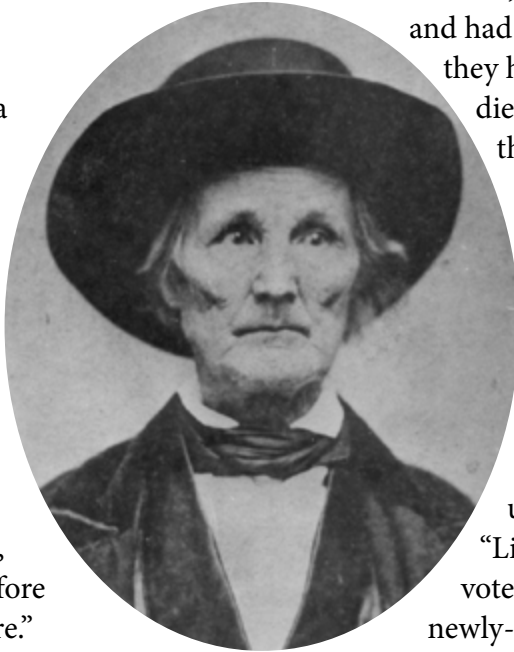
by Lee Harrison, Receptionist

Elijah Bristow arrived in Oregon's Willamette Valley in the spring of 1846, with Eugene Skinner and two others, and claimed the land on a rise near the southern end of the valley as his Donation Land Claim. His petition to name the property "Pleasant Hill" was granted by an act of the House of Representatives of Oregon Territory in December, 1847. In 1848, Elijah's family joined him from Illinois.

The first two of the *Elijah Lafayette Bristow Letters, 1857 – 1864* were written by Elijah Bristow's father, Elijah Sr., en route to the California gold fields in 1845. These letters provide insights into the lives and personalities of both men.

Elijah Sr. considered himself a skillful hunter ("we killed 17 Buffloes by ten o'clock"), and other men were attracted to him as a leader. In his letter of June 18, 1845, he told his wife "I have made myself Somewhat Conspicuous, Some by Argument, Some by Integrity, and some by the gun." He offered her reassurances about his health, and advice to "think twice before you speak once, take good care." His advice to his children, after "Keep out of Debt" and "live on your own Resources," was the admonishment to "keep out of Office."

Elijah Sr.'s second letter spoke of illness and death on the train he was traveling with, before requesting that his children care for their 55-year old mother, saying, "Remember your mother who gave you birth, she is now in the evening of life & have none to sooth her sorrows but you... We have spent the prime of our lives for your sakes and you are our all...I think to myself that the Fields are whitening for Harvest...remember that you are Ripening for the Grave in the same proportions."



GN4980, Elijah Bristow.  
Date unknown.

Elijah Lafayette was farming in Pleasant Hill when he married Minerva Jane Jones at 21, but left farming in 1859 to accept a clerk position with the Surveyor General's office. Two years later he opened a mercantile business on the northwest corner of Ninth and Willamette in Eugene City.

E.L. Bristow's letters were usually to family and his business partner, Tom Hendricks, and were typically about health, politics, and requests for everyone to write him more often. One bit of health news involved "old lady Parsons, whas thrown from her horse while riding alone and had her thigh broken the doctors went to cut it off they held a consultation and concluded that she would die any how so they didn't cut if off that was about three weeks ago and she is living yet."

In March of 1857 he wrote to G.G. Bristow of the coming elections to form a state government. This whetted his appetite for politics, and he wrote to a friend about Oregon's Democratic party's effort to form a State Constitution, saying "The Slavery question is being interduced. And will perhaps be the only question at issue among us." Elijah bragged about his 3-year old son, saying "Little Jim... says he is a Democrat and is going to vote for Jo-Lane, by jing." Elijah also offered advice to newly-elected State Representative, Lansing Stout, after saying "as it is generally Supposed, that a representative acts out the will of the people. then the people Should Keep Said Agent posted. with there views."

His wife died in March 1862, devastating Elijah, while also paving the way for a life change. He traveled to the Salmon River gold mines Washington Territory as a packer the following month, leaving his children with his sister.

During a stagecoach trip, the driver lost control when the coach tongue broke. While the men were escaping the wild ride, one man refused to exit. Elijah "jerked His gun from Him, and pitched it out, then I Shoved Him after it" before jumping from the coach himself, with a child in his arms. He relates how one mother "ripped a hole in the



cover behind, and rolled her child out over the boot, then followed it herSelf Head foremost." The other women and children still in the runaway coach followed suit, and everyone escaped safely.



GN8605, *Elijah Lafayette Bristow.*  
Date unknown.

Outlaws were numerous and dangerous, but Elijah related to Tom how an Auburn mob had tried and convicted a Spaniard who had killed two residents. The killer was "then draged through the Streets till he was dead & then Hanged."

In 1863, Tom and Elijah "cleared Nine-thousand Dollars" from their shares in mining claims, running pack trains, and operating a store in Boise for the summer.

As busy as he kept himself, Elijah was still lonely. He was a family man, and his letters usually ended with pleas for his readers to write him more. Elijah's loneliness was so extreme that when some miners dropped off a package from Tom, Elijah was certain that there must also be a letter and he took off running for the Express office. "It was dark and Snowing, *rite* down, I had about a ¼ of a Mile to go, and in my haste I ran off the trail, at almost evry crook, into the Snow up to my armpits, and finaly, ran over a log, and fell, pitching My Head in- to a Snow-bank, clean up to my Shoulders, but finally got through and on arriving there, got *No letter*, Tom - I *almost* cussed."

There is much, much more to Elijah's story. If you would like to read more about his mining time, 1850s politics, or other quotable moments in a future *Artifact*, please email [Reception@lchm.org](mailto:Reception@lchm.org).

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# the ARTIFACT

EXHIBITS, EVENTS, AND HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

SUMMER 2020 NO. 236

*The Artifact is produced quarterly and distributed to members of the Lane County History Museum*

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