

## HORATIO DAVIDSON

Kaelyn O'Brien

**H**ORATIO DAVIDSON, THE REMARKABLE MAN destined to build and occupy the home that would become Oak Street Hotel, was born in Knox County, Ohio in 1868. He came to the Columbia River Gorge in 1890, only about 35 years after the first families had braved the isolated area to settle. Surrounded by mountains on three sides, growth had been slow in the small town; but the coming of the railroad in 1884 caused a boom in industry. Particularly, with faster transport for their perishable goods, the farmers found their horizons broadening.

A young, educated man looking to make his fortune in the open West, Davidson arrived into this newly burgeoning economy. Though he started out shipping others' goods, he quickly established an orchard of his own, which eventually covered some 400 acres. For many years, this expansive orchard was the largest commercial concern in the area.

With his fruit production underway, Davidson then set to work on a number of projects that assisted Hood River's growth. He built and operated the county's first cannery, which, though eventually destroyed in a fire, helped local growers to preserve their crops for shipment and storage. He built his cozy home on Oak Street, The Oregon Hotel, a block of office buildings, a cold storage plant by the railroad, and the first unit of the electric light plant, which supplied light, water, and fire hydrants for the town.

Perhaps his most noteworthy accomplishment was his collaboration in the founding of the Farmers' Irrigating Company. In a mountainous region where arable ground was at a premium, Davidson helped to organize the first large-scale irrigation scheme in the county, which provided water canals to reclaim unused land for agriculture.



Hood River County Museum archives

## Running Fruit Ladders – Art At 65 Miles Per Hour

While most people see roadsides as places to change a tire, Mosier artist John Maher sees them as a way to bring art and agricultural issues to the public.

"I envisioned The Running Fruit Ladders Project as a way to bring our need for small farms and public art together in a fun, whimsical way," Maher said. Dozens of brightly painted fruit ladders (donated by local growers) will line Gorge highways summer 2011. Enjoy a smaller display of colorful fruit ladders in April in the front garden of the Oak Street Hotel.

"It's art at 65 miles per hour," he said. "Nationwide small farms are disappearing almost as fast as you will be driving by these ladders. Hopefully, this installation will focus our attention on the need to preserve our small farms."



...s on display at the Oak Street Hotel in April

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