

March 18, 2013

Testimony before the Ways and Means Subcommittee on HB 5022

Susan N. Bell
4874 Song Sparrow St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

I'd like to present a different aspect for you to consider in your deliberations on HB 5022: as a library user.

The Past is My Passion. For the past 40+ years I've been an independent researcher into historic subjects that piqued my interest. If you don't recognize my name, that's understandable: history isn't everyone's cup of tea. The topics I've written on are usually items that have been missed in published histories, either glossed over in a few words or ignored altogether; you might call them footnotes to history. To me, they add flesh to the bare bones of history.

In the course of all this researching over the years, I've visited libraries in many states of the U.S. and parts of Canada. As the years have crept up on me, traveling has become more difficult, but that's all right, because I have a marvelous research resource close to home: the Oregon State Library. Its vast collection of Oregon material, the books and films in the Reference Room covering every state in the Union as well as a number of foreign countries, and access to the enhanced version of Ancestry.com (available nowhere else) make this an essential resource for people like me or any historian. Many authors, public figures, and private citizens have entrusted their writings, pictures and documents to the library for safe-keeping because no other facility is capable of housing them or is unwilling to accept them. These unique documents contain a wealth of information on the early years of our state (I know, as for the twelve years of my serving as a library volunteer, I worked with them.)

Partnerships over the years have developed between the library and other organizations and societies. Some years ago, the Willamette Heritage Center requested help with their Teen Interpretive Summer Program. The library was asked to provide profiles of a list of Oregon people who were involved in the early years with the Mission Mill complex. The teens were supplied with the details collected to help them portray specific characters during their guided tours of the complex. Several of the young people returned to the library for further details on

the characters they were depicting. Here's another whole generation of historians coming up to become library customers.

The library's partnership with the Willamette Valley Genealogical Society spans a quarter century of cooperation. Besides staffing the Reference Desk during library hours and providing volunteers for other duties, the Society has greatly expanded the library's collection of books, films and other materials. It was through this partnership that the Ancestry.com system became available to Oregon residents. A very expensive proposition few libraries could afford, its acquisition FREE was entirely as a result of the library/W.V.G.S. collaboration. The Poet's Society and Talking Books will have spokespersons to testify on their behalf so I won't address those partnerships here.

In conclusion, the possibility that HB 5022 will severely curtail library services or close the facility to the public altogether is particularly troubling. I am aware that governments, both local and state, are in dire financial difficulties: so are the citizens. Reading is one of the few entertainments left that don't cost an arm and a leg. Some may say that in this era of electronic information storage and retrieval, books are irrelevant. I strongly disagree: nothing can rival that "A HA" moment when paging through a real book and finding the answer to a question that has long puzzled you. And, by relinquishing the state library's availability as a research resource, it could lose its status as a library. Libraries are for browsing and study, not fortresses erected to guard historic treasures. Cornelia Marvin, the first state librarian, had as her mission reaching out to every Oregonian—whether in urban or rural areas—to share the library's collection of books. If she were to visit the facility today, I truly believe she would be delighted to see the outreach efforts currently in place at the State Library to serve ALL the citizens of Oregon.

March 18, 2013

Testimony before the Ways & Means Subcommittee on HB 5022

Susan N. Bell

4874 Song Sparrow St. NE

Salem, OR 97301

I. The Past Is My Passion

A. My life as an independent researcher

1. 40+ years writing & research
2. In OR & HI

B. "Footnotes to History"

1. David Douglas' death 1834
2. OR First: Labor Day 1884
3. "Merci America" boxcar 1949
4. First non-native settler buried in OR 1811
5. Valley Vigilantes 1866

II. The State Library

A. A Primary Resource

1. Reference collections
2. Donated materials

B. Partnerships

1. Willamette Heritage Center
2. Willamette Valley Genealogical Society
3. Ancestry.com
4. Poet's Society
5. Talking Books

III. Statement of Stand

A. HB 5022 – could lose status as a library

B. Cornelia (Marvin) Pierce's mission