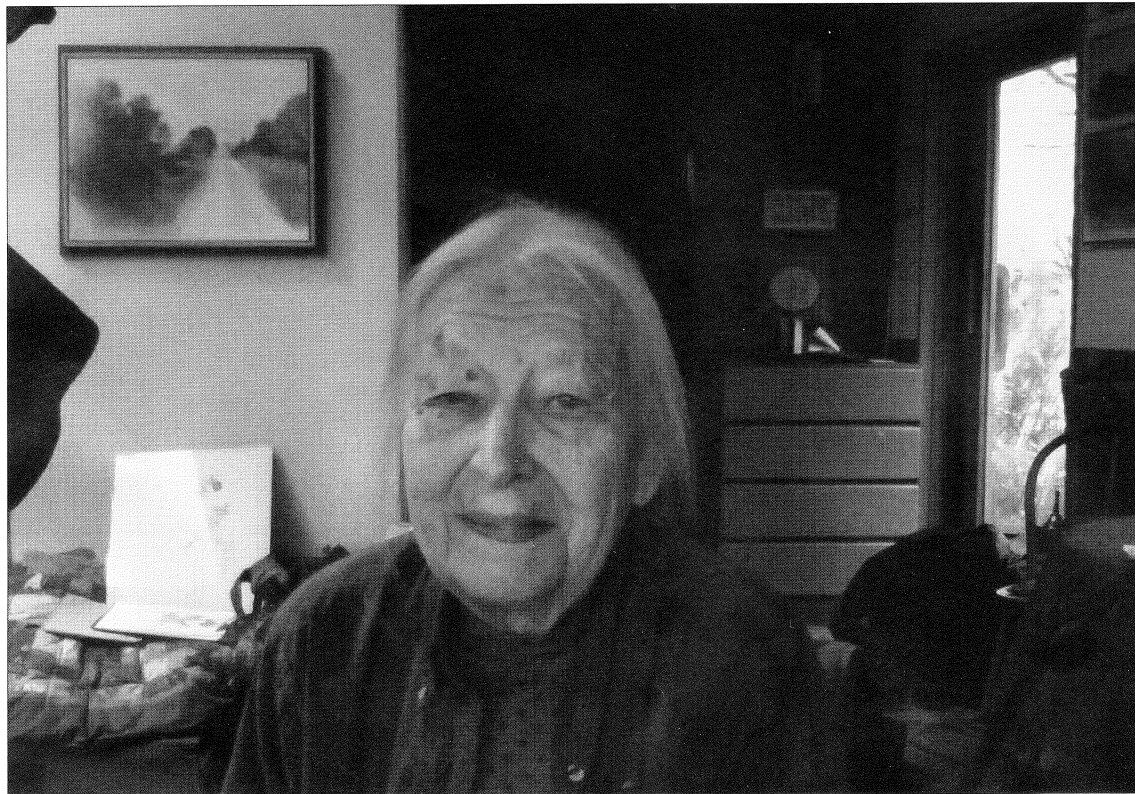


Mary Lou Goertzen hosts fifth Sunday prayer and meditation meetings at her home in Deadwood.



Living a Simple Life in Deadwood

Quakers, farmers, artists enjoy a quiet life in the country

By Chris Cunningham

Whenever a month has a fifth Sunday, as many as 20 people gather in Mary Lou Goertzen's home on Deadwood Creek Road for Quaker prayer and meditation.

The well-known artist, who lives in the old Deadwood schoolhouse, says she likes that her home has always been a place for people to assemble.

She and her husband, Ernie, moved with their three teenagers from Berkeley, California, to Deadwood in 1975, seeking a simpler life.

The couple learned about the west Lane County hamlet from Caroline Estes and five other friends from the Quaker community who, in 1972, established an intentional community here called Alpha Farm.

Karl Logan, who has lived in Deadwood since 1999, publishes the online Deadwood Trading Post much like an old-time gazette editor, posting

community news and upcoming events—and offering a taste of the town's energetic spirit.

Mary Lou, Caroline, Karl and other Deadwood residents perpetuate the spirit of camaraderie that began when the first settlers arrived around 1882.

Strangers and visitors alike receive convivial greetings when they walk through the door of the Deadwood Country Market & Tavern, the post office next door, or the Deadwood Community Center, a popular arts venue the Goertzens helped build.

Located 40 miles west of Junction City, deep in the coastal mountains on Highway 36, Deadwood—combined with the nearby community of Greenleaf—claims 476 residents, according to zip code statistics.

When Caroline, 86, first set foot on the Alpha Farm property in 1971, she says she walked up the hill, and sat and looked below at the farmhouse, barn, milk house, canning kitchen and firewood building and liked the energy of the site. She signed papers to buy the property that once belonged to pioneer Louis

Swanson, who operated a dairy farm and the Alpha post office, in the exact spot where the Alpha Farm community shares its communal meals.

Caroline, who became a Quaker at age 30, moved to Deadwood from Philadelphia. She intended to establishing an intentional community and use consensus-style decision-making, a process the Quakers have used for more than 300 years, and that remains central in day-to-day operations and strategic planning at Alpha Farm.

To make connections in this logging community, Caroline says she and others at Alpha Farm—named after the now extinct hamlet of Alpha that once occupied Deadwood Creek Road—had to work hard and mind their own business.

“We made our mark by reconditioning the fields and cleaning up the grounds,” says Caroline, who is 86 and became the last of the original Alpha Farm community when her husband, Jim, died in 2013.

Mary Lou and Ernie relocated to Deadwood from California, where they lived for 10 years and established themselves as peace activists and artists. Mary Lou works in ink and watercolor. Ernie, who died in 2004, worked in acrylics.

Each was raised in the Mennonite faith tradition, and each yearned for a pared-down, quieter lifestyle.

“I guess there is a vibe here for those who wanted to live on the edge,” says the 86-year-old Mary Lou, who later became a Quaker.

She says in Deadwood, they could live simply on income from their artwork.

“Growing up during the Depression, I grew up being frugal,” says Mary Lou.

Historians agree that few permanent residents settled in this remote territory before 1882. But by the late 1800s, the fertile bottomland along Nelson and Deadwood creeks enticed the Popes, Pottorfs, Swansons, Elnans and other pioneer families to settle. Deadwood Creek, after which the town is named, hugs the perimeter of town and flows into Lake Creek, which converges with the Siuslaw River.

Thomas Pope, the first postmaster when the Deadwood post office was established in 1884, settled at the mouth of Deadwood Creek with younger brothers Ed and Charles.

In 1890, the Alpha post office opened 5 miles north on Deadwood Creek Road. Charles Pottorf took over the role of postmaster from his sister, Flora Lundy, who had named the post office after her young daughter. The same year, a one-room schoolhouse with five students began operating on

the property.

Ever active, Charles served as local justice of the peace. He volunteered as weather observer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which set up a weather station in Alpha in 1899, one of two such sites in Lane County.

By 1890, more than 80 pioneers settled in the area. In 1898, 103 persons, 16 wagons, and 31 horses were in Deadwood, according to Dale Steinhauer in the Lane County Historian.

“By 1900, homesteaders had claimed almost all the bottom-land in Deadwood, Alpha and Greenleaf,” while their post offices and schools served 150 residents, wrote Dale, whose own ancestors settled near Greenleaf Creek.

Deadwood erected its first church in 1894 on the hill east of town. Residents of Alpha used the schoolhouse for church services.

In the spring of 1901, the county reduced the risky travel that was typical for the region when it “blasted enough rock off the bluff (near Lake Creek) ... to raise the roadway to a safe height,” and prevent reoccurring floodwaters from stalling wagons and stagecoaches, according to the Portland-based “Morning Oregonian.”

Medical care improved in 1908 when a nurse named Connie Williams Elnan moved to Deadwood with her husband, Olaf. Olaf started a shingle mill, farmed and ran a dairy on Deadwood Creek Road. Connie delivered babies and provided trauma care to injured loggers and sawyers.

New arrivals continue to find their way to Deadwood, craving the same solitude and esprit de corps the early pioneers cultivated.

Dimitri Avramidis owns and operates the Deadwood Country Market and Tavern on Highway 36, with his wife, Tina. The first Thanksgiving following their move from California, a resident of Alpha Farm invited them to have Thanksgiving dinner at the farmhouse, knowing the family had no relatives in the area.

“They are great folks,” Dimitri says. “They are really willing to help others.” ■



Caroline Estes is part of a group of Quakers who established the Alpha Farm community in Deadwood in 1972.