

Researching St. Boniface

History of Sublimity parish a spiritual undertaking

By Mary Owen

Engineer, computer designer, violin-maker, author, publisher and now historian - Henry Strobel's work is never done. Strobel runs his violin shop and mail-order publishing business in his home, just outside of Stayton. In his "spare time," he runs a Web site - www.henrystrobel.com - that has "footnotes" for each of his interests, but it is the latest that has "caught me up," he said.

Strobel was recently nominated to the Portland Archdiocesan Historical Committee for his work that has evolved over several years on the history of St. Boniface Catholic Church in Sublimity. It's an honor he modestly shrugs off.

"Many of the parishes want to show the sacrifices that their parishioners made to build their churches," he said of his appointment. Strobel is available to pass along a little "how to," a commitment to his faith that has produced several fruits, from the history of Sublimity to the first

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50 years of the Salem Youth Symphony, an outlet he and his musical family have been involved with over the years. Strobel's interest in Sublimity catapulted when he found the town to be filled with a rich history of German Catholicism.

"I was struck by the little parish and choir," he said of St. Boniface, where he and his wife, Susan, have worshipped for the last two decades. "Susan likes to sing," he said, smiling.

Strobel grew up in St. Mainrad, a small Indiana town where his father helped construct the abbey church. St. Boniface, the patron saint of Germans, was the name given to the tiny church in Fulda, Indiana - the church in which his parents

married. And he found a St. Boniface in Fulda, Germany, upon researching his roots. So when he discovered St. Boniface in Sublimity, he said, "I just felt at home there."

Initially, Strobel agreed to construct a parish Web site, but he said, "It grew far beyond that."

Today the chronology of the tiny church and its community has a few historical holes he still hopes to fill in by talking to various oral historians, but the overview, with an array of photos, would satisfy any budding historian, he believes.

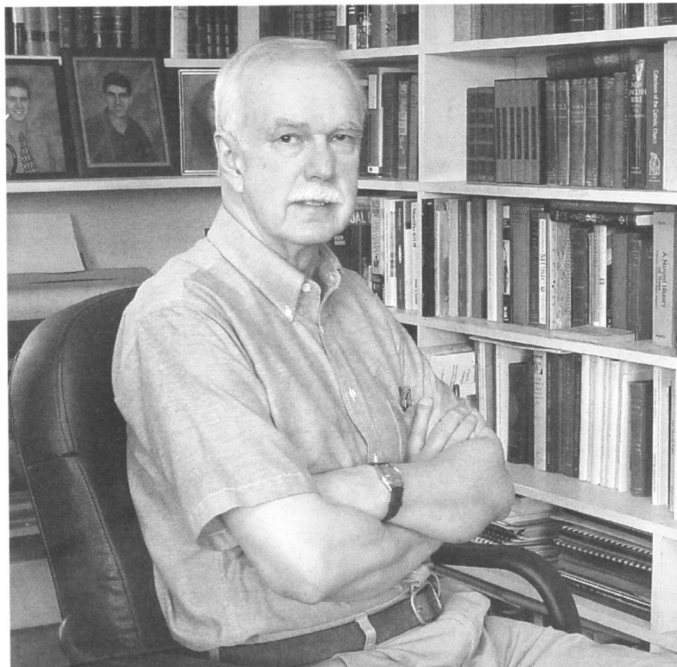
"I must be a Protestant at heart," Strobel said jokingly of his urge to "be doing." On

a more serious note, he added, "I always felt the need to be producing something, and if that something should last long after me, that's great."

Strobel calls his work a "no once upon a time fairy tale." It's about real folks with real lives spilling out of the pages on his Web site, he said.

Readers are often enthralled by such information as: "Sublimity, originally named 'Hobson Corner' after Hadley Hobson, a brick contractor from North Carolina, who came to the area in 1848 after inadvertently ending up in California instead of Oregon.

"Mr. Hobson made the best of the situation by gold mining until the fall of 1848 when he boarded a sailing vessel in San Francisco and arrived in the Columbia River after five weeks of seasickness. He took up a claim on Mill Creek north of Stayton, building his home on what has since become known as the Miller place, where he settled with sheep and cattle and raised a family of ten."



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From the mid-1800s when the Mennonites first settled the town, a roost they ruled for a few decades before the German Catholics arrived, to the 125th celebration of St. Boniface Church in Sublimity, Strobel's accounts help keep Sublimity's history alive.

"St. Boniface's 125th anniversary coincided with the 1,250th anniversary of the saint's death," he said, his eyebrow lifting at the timeliness of the two dates.

It's little known facts like these Strobel loves to share with others, he said.

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community," he writes in his discourse. "But more important are the good things that remain the same - the principles, purpose, and moral fiber that have so closely bound family and church and town."

Presenting this history has fascinated and inspired him as he continues to learn and share, he said.

"God knows I'm not a historian," he said of his efforts. "But with a background in seminary, I feel like what I'm doing is very spiritual." *
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