

CANBY HERALD 5/20/09

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*Bertha Lee's remains, long hidden away at the Oregon State Hospital, reunite with family*

BY PEGGY SAVAGE  
CANBY HERALD

**N**inety-one years after her death, Bertha Lee was finally laid to rest Saturday, alongside her father and brother at Baker Prairie Cemetery — Canby's pioneer cemetery.

Lee was born into one of Canby's founding families in 1880, the daughter of Albert and Martha Lee. Her father was the son of Philander and Anna Green Lee, who in 1848 were among the first settlers in the area. They are also buried at Baker Prairie Cemetery.

**Bertha Lee's remains are one of more than 3,500 deceased patients whose ashes remained unclaimed at the Oregon State Hospital.**

**Oregon State Insane Asylum in Salem.** On the day she was admitted, she was just a little over 4 feet tall and weighed 60 pounds.

In 1918, at age 37, she died at the institution, which had been renamed the Oregon State Hospital.

Her remains were cremated and her ashes placed in a copper canister.

Probably a Down Syndrome baby, she was born prematurely. At the age of 15, she was committed to the



Photos by Peggy Savage  
Ted Hall and Jeanine Younce Kersay, descendants of Canby's pioneer Lee family, visit the grave of Bertha Lee, buried Saturday, 91 years after her death at Oregon State Hospital.

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# Lee: Canister was locked away for many years

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The canister was locked away in a storage room, one of hundreds of canisters stacked on pine shelves like cans of paint, with only notations scrawled on scraps of paper as their memorials.

Bertha was one of 3,500 deceased patients whose ashes remained unclaimed at the moldering psychiatric institution. When news came out about the discovery of the canisters, Lee family descendants Jeanine Younce Kersey and Ted Hall, through the process of obtaining a death certificate, were able to claim the ashes of Bertha Lee.

Kersey then contacted Sharon Henry, a Canby Historical Society member,

to see if Bertha could be buried next to her family at Baker Prairie Cemetery. The cemetery is owned by the city of Canby and designated as a Historic Park. The city passed a resolution in 1984 prohibiting further burials at the cemetery, with exceptions.

Henry contacted Randy Carson, a former city councillor, and asked his assistance in pursuing the endeavor. Carson spoke with City Attorney John Kelly who confirmed that, yes, burials were closed. Since Bertha Lee's family is buried there, however, and there is room in the family plot, the city made an exception in Bertha's case. The burial was Saturday

with family members present.

A memorial service will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, May 23 with the Rev. Bill Taylor of the Canby United Methodist Church officiating.

"This has all come about from beginning to end with the help of so many people, from relatives to the Canby Historical Society and the City of Canby," said Sue Carson, president of the Canby Historical Society. "I'm very happy to see Bertha's long journey finally coming to an end and being laid to rest with her family."

The Canby Historical Society was grateful to have played a part in the process, Carson said.

