

# A. R. Bowman Memorial Museum

*By Kelly Cannon-Miller*

The A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum, operated by the Crook County Historical Society, is located on the corner of Third and Main Streets in Prineville, Oregon. The museum actively collects, preserves, and maintains artifact and archival collections focused on the history of Crook County. It also offers museum exhibits and programs and houses a research center.

The museum is named for Arthur Ray Bowman (1882-1970), who arrived in Prineville in 1910 at the age of twenty-eight, fresh from the University of Washington law school. Bowman married, raised two daughters, started multiple business ventures, and engaged in the promotion and development of Crook County. He promoted civic improvement projects such as the Ochoco Irrigation District, the Prineville Airport, and Highway 26. The dam that created the Prineville Reservoir, critical to local irrigation and a high-use recreation area, bears his name for his commitment and dedication to the Crooked River irrigation project. From 1936 to 1942, Bowman served as Crook County judge, a position that left him with the honorary title "Judge" for the rest of his life.

The A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum is located in a two-story Romanesque-style building constructed from locally quarried volcanic basalt honed into large rectangular blocks. Built in 1911 as the Crook County Bank, its architectural style was intended to reflect Prineville's sophistication and impending growth and the prosperity brought to central Oregon through the expansion of railroad and irrigation systems. Ceramic tile flooring, plastered ceilings, marble counters, bronze teller cages, art glass counter screens, carved mahogany paneling, and alabaster chandeliers continue to grace the lobby today. The *Crook County Journal* boasted on June 13, 1912, that the interior was "finer than any city in the United States that was not on a railroad."

The Crook County Bank ceased operations in 1921, and the bank was sold to the newly formed Bank of Prineville, which opened in 1921. The Bank of Prineville grew steadily and was renamed the Prineville National Bank in 1925, but it could not survive the banking crisis during the Depression when general withdrawals outpaced new deposits. Its assets were seized and the bank closed on September 3, 1931.

Bowman purchased the building in 1935 and opened a new business, Central Oregon Title and Loan. In later years, he added insurance sales to the business, which he operated until his death in 1970. The Bowman Family deeded the building to Crook County for a county historical museum in his honor, with a reversionary clause to ensure that it would be maintained as such. The A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum opened in 1972.

The exhibits and collections for the museum began with pioneer families who donated records and heirlooms and provided funding for exhibit cases dedicated to individual families. The purchase of memorial cases did not sustain the museum for long, however, and in 1976 the Crook County Historical Society sought tax support from county residents. Voters approved the levy, and they continued to approve tax support measures by large margins, most recently in 2010. The A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

In 2010, the museum launched a major expansion and purchased a neighboring building on Main Street. The \$1.6 million fundraising campaign created the Crook County Historical Center, opened in 2012, expanded collections storage and research areas, opened new exhibits on the timber heritage of Crook County, and added programming space.

## Sources

National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Crook County Band Building, April 1991

*Crook County Journal*, 1911-1931.

*Central Oregonian*, March 12, 1925.

Lent, Steve. *Images of America: Prineville*. Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Arcadia Press, 2007.

Lent, Steven. *Central Oregon Place Names, Vol 1: Crook County*. Crook County Historical Society, 2001.

---

The Oregon Encyclopedia

[https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/a.\\_r.\\_bowman\\_museum/](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/a._r._bowman_museum/)