City Hall Comes Under Fire

City officials often come under fire, so to speak, regarding controversial issues. On July 4, 1949 City Hall literally came under fire when Barney’s Home and Auto Supply store in the Oswego Lumber Company building adjacent to the 1929 City Hall building on State Street went up in flames. Firemen from seven nearby towns helped fight the blaze. In the end, well over $100,000 of damage was done; one quarter-block of the downtown business district was leveled, two city trucks were destroyed, and three firemen were injured. It was reported that no city records were lost, but the library that was housed in City Hall at the time suffered heavy smoke and water damage. Harold Jackson, owner of the lumberyard, recalled “Youngsters throwing firecrackers into the lumber yard driveway for the added effect of an echo were chased away several times during the day.” Cecelia Beckner said, “I do recall a fire on A Avenue. Jacksons had a large lumberyard and there was also a hardware store there. About five-thirty in the evening it was set on fire, I think by firecrackers. We were living on A Avenue at the time and I have pictures of it. One of the fire trucks turned right over there on A Avenue that had come from somewhere else. It was a terrible fire with all the lumber going.”

SATAN WAS A BLONDE

One of Richard Sundeleaf’s architectural drawings for the Lake Theatre shows two films on the marquee: “Satan Was a Blonde” and “March of Time.” It appears that these film titles were fictional. The theatre actually opened in 1940 with “Another Thin Man” starring William Powell and Myrna Loy as the feature film. Admission was 25 cents.

The intent to build an English Cottage style theatre was initiated in 1930 and architect J. W. DeYoung’s architectural rendering was published in the newspaper. DeYoung also designed Portland’s Paramount Theatre and he did the complete set of working drawings for the Hollywood Theatre although the latter was not published in the newspaper. The Great Depression may have interfered with the original plans.

During World War II the Lake Theatre screenings included many war films such as “Yank on the Burma Road” and “The Wife Takes a Flyer.” After the war, Joan Fewless Quigley recalled, “The Lake Theatre in Oswego beckoned with Esther Williams movies and three businesses opened the evening it was set on fire, I think by firecrackers. We were living on A Avenue at the time and I have pictures of it. One of the fire trucks turned right over there on A Avenue that had come from somewhere else. It was a terrible fire with all the lumber going.”

College-Educated Cabbage

Mark Twain said, “Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.” Both cauliflower and its less educated cousin, cabbages, once played a large role in Oswego’s agriculture. Pearl Kruse recalled: “The Oregonian, on November 9, 1913, had an article about the cauliflower they [Kruse family] were raising. It was under the heading “New Industry is Thriving in the State.” It showed pictures of Charles [Kruse] and the fields of cauliflower.” Cauliflowers and cabbages were entered into fairs and Charles Kruse won the Certificate of Merit award from the Oregon Agricultural College in Corvallis Horticultural Show in 1922.

Did You Know?

The name of the city has been “Lake Oswego” since 1960, but since 1913 the official name given to the lake by the United States Geographic Board has been “Oswego Lake.”

Cow Troubles

Early Oswego was a dangerous place for cows. Wandering cows were mired in the lake or they fell into the smoldering underground fire of the “charcoal dump.” The dump was located on the terrace behind the first furnace where ore and charcoal were stored in sheds. When the sheds caught fire, the charcoal dump continued to burn underground for years. Sallie Shannon Pettinger recalled that, “The charcoal hill near the old furnace, sometimes set on fire by camping hobos so that it smoldered for days, became a hazard to cows, which in those days were permitted to graze wherever they wished, on hillsides or along the sweeterbait that cluttered the grassy streets.”

Nellie Nelson Kyle recalled that, “The cows ran at large until about 1919. They kept the streets greased well. But a few people objected to the bells. Everyone knew their own cow’s bells. Practically everyone owned their own cows and had their own source of milk and butter. And until about 1919 or thereabouts, everyone had a pasture outside. The city put into effect that cows had to be restrained.”

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SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Marylou Colver, Historic Resources Advisory Board Vice-Chair, for researching and writing this Centennial publication.

Additional research by Erin O’Rourke-Meadors.

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PICS THAT WORK

Fencing around the lake was to keep out cattle.

PHOTOS

Unless otherwise noted, the photos used in this publication are from the Lake Oswego Public Library collection online at www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/special/History.htm.
Oswego in a Jam

In 1897, Florence Dickinson started making jams in her Oswego farmhouse kitchen and this homegrown enterprise grew into a world-renowned industry. The business began in the Dickinson home on Stephenson Road. Arthur Jones said, "I remember seeing on a store shelf in London, Dickinson Brothers [sic] Jams and Famous Jellies, which are sold all over Western Europe and South America, as well as America. When the Dickinson brothers were helping their mother with the jams and jellies, and I was a little boy and sold berries to them, they worked in a sort of small shed out beyond the kitchen. I think they had a big stove there and a big stove in the kitchen and they worked on the back porch. It was a very simple, primitive sort of plan by which they put these jams and jellies together. And it was just the very beginning of this industry." A 1932 obituary for Florence Dickinson notes: "In addition to her 40 years’ work in the Orange at Oswego, she was an expert on grape culture and founded and managed the Dickinson Products company, manufacturers of jellies, jams and grape juice. Mrs. Dickinson was the first woman to talk over the Bell telephone system in Portland." One newspaper account credits her with proving, against popular belief, that Concord grapes could be successfully grown in Oregon.

In a 1938 Works Progress Administration interview with her father-in-law, C. T. Dickinson of Oswego, he noted: "They began by taking orders for jams and jellies from people in Portland. They would take the orders early in the fruit season and in summer deliver to the various families. The first year, he said, they put up about six-dozen containers. The second year there were five barrels of 25 doz. containers each. The third year he ordered his glasses by the carload. From that time on they had a well-established business that is thriving today [1938]." Another distinction came with the opening of Disneyland on July 18, 1955. The Dickinson Company was picked to operate a jam and jelly concession on Main Street. A 1960 television program on the Dickinsons gives credit for the quality and flavor of one of their jams to the "rubus vitifolius," or wild mountain blackberry. The J.M. Smucker Company acquired the business in 1979 and continues to sell preserves under the Dickinson label.

In 1939 Works Progress Administration interview, Rush Mendenhall said, "Do I recall anything about the old White House, out on the Rivardale Road? I’ll say I do. I was there a lot in my young days. The White House was started, if I recall rightly, by a man named Leonard. H. C., I think, were his initials. The road leading out to the place was the first macadamized road in this part of the country, and for a long time it was known as the Macadam Road, where anybody who owned a horse, fast or otherwise, went out to take their girls buggy-riding. All the gay folks in town went out to the White House where no questions was [sic] asked and most anything could he had. I was under age, I remember, and couldn’t get anything in town, but nobody questioned me out there. Leonard kept up the Macadam Road through leasing a toll. It began at about the foot of Hall Street, if I remember correctly, where the tollgate was. About half way out there was a place called the Red House, but that was later and not high-toned like the White House." According to the Oregonian’s front page story of June 28, 1904, the day after the White House burned to the ground, "A motley throng of railroad laborers ran from their camp and, when the learned that it was not a church [that was burning] risked their lives manfully to carry them out. All the gay folks in town went out to the White House where no questions was [sic] asked and most anything could he had. I was under age, I remember, and couldn’t get anything in town, but nobody questioned me out there. Leonard kept up the Macadam Road through leasing a toll. It began at about the foot of Hall Street, if I remember correctly, where the tollgate was. About half way out there was a place called the Red House, but that was later and not high-toned like the White House."

Who’s Buried in Linus Pauling’s Grave?

The 1954 Nobel Prize in chemistry and the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize were awarded to a person with strong ties to Oswego, Linus Carl Pauling. Other than Marie Curie, he was the only person to win two Nobel prizes in different fields. He was also the only person to win two unshared Nobel prizes.

Pauling’s grandfather came to Oswego to work at the second iron furnace. Pauling was born in Portland, but as a baby he and his parents lived briefly on Second Street in Oswego. His grandparents, Carl and Adelheid, lived on Fourth Street and the family customarily vacationed every summer with them. Herman Pauling, Linus’ father, was apprenticed to an Oswego druggist and this became his vocation.

Linus Pauling was a brilliant scientist and a controversial individual. A complex and outspoken larger-than-life figure, Pauling earned epithets ranging from wizard to fascist. Pauling passed away in 1994 in Big Sur, California. A cenotaph, or marker placed to honor a person buried elsewhere, was placed in the Pauling family plot in the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery by Pauling’s sister, Pauline. Many people assumed that Pauling was buried there. Actually, it was not until 2005 that Pauling’s ashes, along with those of his wife, were moved from Big Sur to the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery.

Mechanical Horses

Bicycles were the result of a quest to invent a “mechanical horse.” As early as 1896 the Multnomah Wheelmen published a map of bicycle routes. The first bicycle path in Portland led toward the White House roadhouse and the adjacent Riverside Race Course situated about half way between Portland and Oswego at the river end of today’s Military Road. Today’s Macadam Avenue was once known as the White House Road. In 1870 Hermon Camp Leonard was the fourth wealthiest man in Portland. Leonard was a principal in Oswego’s iron industry and Leonard Street in the Old Town neighborhood is named in his honor. Leonard bought the establishment in 1886 and renamed it the Riverside Hotel. The popularity of the White House, as it continued to be called, was based on horseracing, trap shooting, gambling, drinking, and other consorts and distractions.

Dog and Horse Racing, Oswego-Style

In 1933, as part of the Lake Oswego Water Carnival, a number of riders entered a race across the lake on horseback. Participating in the Lor Acheson Trophy event, regardless of where Herbert Kruse, of the Kruse farming family, entered an unlikely pick, his plow horse named "Old Dobbin." Herbert Kruse recalled, "I knew I had tough competition in this race with a big draft horse that weighed sixteen hundred pounds against a light race horse. I didn’t feed my horse the day before because I knew that feeding a horse and filling him up with hay and grain would put pressure on his lungs. Being able to get his breath all the way across was a very important thing. Nothing takes your breath faster than swimming. And another thing is, I lined up a tree across the opposite side of the lake that would go in a straight line instead of in a curve." The other strategy he used was to encourage his horse verbally, instead of whipping him. Herbert Kruse and his horse won the race by approximately fifty feet.

On September 3, 1935 the Morning Oregonian reported on a three-day Oswego event, the Aqua Show. Herbert Kruse won the horse race again with several thousand spectators in the grandstand on their feet to witness the close finish. Herbert Kruse won by only half a length.

A dog race was also staged as part of the Aqua Show festivities. Dogs in the race were taken to the center of the lake and dropped overboard. Their owners stood on the shore and called to their dogs to encourage them in the race to shore. Ulla Moore of Oswego and her dog Spider were triumphant. It is assumed that Spider used the dog paddle to swim to victory.
A Blast From the Past

"Miraculously the basalt masonry of Oswego's first iron blast furnace has survived for well over a century. It has narrowly escaped the natural ravages of weather, vegetation, and time plus the human threats of dynamite, gunfire (a spray-on form of concrete), neglect, and the suggestion that it be used as a base for a statue of Samuel L. Simpson, Oregon's first poet laureate.

On January 26, 1932, an unsung hero sent the following letter to the editor: "I would like to ask why Oswego's Monument to its Pioneers is not taken seriously. Today as I passed by it I saw mostly brush and weeds growing around it. I am referring to the stone furnace down by the river. In a few years more it will be the center attraction of a jungle... Why could not a few more dollars be spent to fix up around it and put a sign on the highways to point out to the many hundreds of tourists who are out to see the many attractions of the various cities they visit? Perhaps if a few tourists would stop to see it they would remember to buy a few necessities and leave a few tourist dollars in Oswego. Why could not a history of its origin be written and placed in a frame so all could know what it was? Pretty soon the last old timer will be placed under the sod and the only history that could be written will be from hear say. Would it not be nice if it could be placed on the map as it once was? Why could not one of the various organizations take this matter up and see it through, or should it be forgotten and just be called a pile of rocks! I wonder why, Mr. Editor! Observer"

Over the decades there has been a succession of prominent champions of saving the 1866 furnace. These include George Rogers in the 1940s, Mary Goodall in the 1950s, and the Lake Oswego Junior Historical Society members in the 1960s who placed "Save the Stack" donation boxes at local merchants. In recent times Susana Koo has dedicated years to spearheading efforts to restore the edifice. Thankfully these collective efforts have come to fruition. Not only has the furnace been saved, but also a careful preservation and stabilization project was completed in 2010. Interpretive panels will insure that its significance will be understood by future generations. The influx of "tourist dollars" envisioned by the anonymous writer in 1932 can now be realized. The restored blast furnace, paid for in part by "Save America's Treasures" grant and an increase in the local hotel/motel tax, is Lake Oswego's major heritage tourism attraction.

The Thiele House that once stood on Lakewood Bay.

Giving Logs a Lift

Old River Road was once the main road from Oswego to Linn City (now West Linn). It crossed Sucker Creek via a covered bridge near where the footbridge in George Rogers Park now stands. The fort-like cement structure on the riverbank was built by the Crown-Willamette Paper Company to hoist logs out of the Willamette River. The log was to be lifted onto rail cars for transport to the paper mill. Fire, spruce, hemlock, cedar and Douglas fir were cut on the Columbia River near Astoria and brought in bogs, i.e., rafts of logs, by sternwheelers to Oswego. A crew of a dozen men worked what was officially named the "Oswego Log Loading Station." Logs were sorted into loads and then lifted up the bank with the help of a motor. Roy Headrick who started working on the hoist in 1916 recalled, "We loaded six [Southern Pacific flatbed rail] cars. The train took the six cars to Oregon City [Note: Both sides of the river used to be referred to as "Oregon City"] and brought back empties to load while they were gone. A train ran six times a day and we loaded thirty-six cars." The train ran on a trellis against the hoist. On the hill above the log hoist sits the circa 1905 Tug Master's House. Ruben W. Conner served as manager of the log hoist and later as tug master.

Lyle Arthur Baker also recalled a story about the log hoist. One very cold winter the Willamette River froze about two and a half feet deep and the logs were stuck in the ice. John Erickson decided, "to bullet-crack the ice." So he put one hundred and fifty sticks of dynamite on top of the ice. Oh, brother, he smashed it up all right. He cracked the ice halfway to Oregon City.

Today some windows from more recent times remain from when there was a thwarted attempt to build a residence atop the hoist. Covered with graffiti and ivy, it now stands as a neglected monument to Oswego's industrial heritage.

Tree-Eating Furnaces

There were once two iron furnaces in Oswego and they had insatiable appetites for Douglas fir trees. Of course the trees first had to be converted to charcoal. In the nineteenth century, Chinese laborers were hired to fell the trees. Once the wood was cut the job became even more dangerous. Colliers, as charcoal makers were known, carefully stacked the four-foot billows of wood on end around a tall pole in the center of a level clearing. The wood was stacked in three tiers so the finished mound stood about twelve feet high and thirty feet wide. A covering of dirt and leaves was used to prevent the pile from suddenly catching fire. This labor-intensive, messy and risky method was used through. This labor-intensive, messy and risky method was used to make charcoal along the Columbia River. In the nineteenth century, the conversion of the Oswego Weavers factory into condominiums. The building that housed the factory has been converted to condominiums.

Photograph, taken by Herbert Hergert in 1947, of the abandoned furnace located in today's George Rogers Park.

The Oswego Landing in 1921 with the log hoist in the background.

Celebrity Chef

Long before Bruce Carey and Chris Israel put Portland's restaurant scene on the national map in the 1990s, the 1960s who placed "Save the Stack" donation boxes at local merchants. The building that housed the factory has been converted to condominiums.

Tied Up in Knots

In 1935, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Glenn Tierweller relocated to Oswego from Santa Fe, New Mexico and started a business. It was initially called the "Indian Tie Company," and was later known as "Oswego Weavers." It was reported: "They have two looms going, weaving their own patterns and cloth from which they make ties, bags, etc." The building on Lakewood Bay that once housed the manufacturers for the Red Electric trains was used in the 1940s as the production facility for the Oswego Weavers. The company produced nationally famous "Oswego Hand Made Ties." Men originally operated the handlooms that were capable of weaving from one yard to 40 inches in width. At World War II Cascade and monument, women worked the looms. Theresa Truchot remembered: "The old power plant on the railroad track was made into a necktie factory. Mr. Cook helped me to get a job there working in the factory. I just loved it because you did certain things. You had cloth in front of you to make neckties and you cut them at a certain angle and it was very particular. Then they sold out or closed down and so I didn't have a job. Actually the company was forced to shut down for the duration of the war because of a labor shortage. The building was then converted and renovated into the Lake Front apartments to help address the housing shortage during the war. After the war, the Oswego Weavers went back into production in a facility in Oak Grove and were later absorbed by the Oregon Worsted Mills. The building that housed the factory has been converted to condominiums.
Speaking of History

In 1972, Mrs. Theresa Truchot, at the age and weight of 81, was the powerhouse who started interviewing Lake Oswego residents about life in the old days. Mrs. Truchot considered herself a "newcomer" since she had only moved to Lake Oswego in 1922. Armed with the encouragement and the personal tape recorder of Lake Oswego Public Library reference librarian, Steve Turner, Mrs. Truchot forged ahead without a budget. She compiled a list of old timers and started with the eldest and the ill. As word about the project spread, Edwin T. Cornelius donated tape recording technical assistance. The Lady’s Circle magazine published an article on the oral histories in the June 1974 issue. Volunteers joined Mrs. Truchot’s efforts and these interviews were eventually published in 1976 to coincide with the country’s bicentennial. The publication is titled: In Their Own Words.

One interviewee, Arsenius F. DeBau, said he witnessed the fall of the Willamette meteorite. This was quite a feat for a meteor that fell 15,000 to 13,600 years ago in the area that is now Montana and was carried here by the Missoula Floods! In the 1940s, long before In Their Own Words, Mrs. Truchot interviewed Charles Dickinson who was 94 years old at the time. She was so fascinated with his account of working in the iron industry as a child that she wrote the book Charcoal Wagon Boy and it was published in 1952. Although she raced to complete it, Mr. Dickinson didn’t live to read her account. Mrs. Truchot wrote a sequel, Iron Works Bay, which has not been published.

Other than a Works Progress Administration project done in the late 1930s, In Their Own Words comprises the only published oral histories of Lake Oswego residents. In honor of the city’s centennial of incorporation, the Lake Oswego Public Library staff members and volunteers are producing an updated and illustrated edition of the thirty-four year old volume. Speaking of history, the city’s 2010 centennial celebration would be a perfect occasion to record what time, and current residents, will tell.

A $10 Reward for Mrs. Parker

On August 13, 1903, according to a wanted poster, Wilda Parker of Oswego, Oregon deserted her home and four children. The poster states: “She is 36 years old, is 5 feet 6 inches in height, weight 155, eyes very large and blue, hair dark, complexion fair, front teeth gold filled.” A handwritten note on the poster indicated her aliases as “Pearl Jackson or Moss.”

Mrs. Parker’s accomplice, John F. Grant, was an ex-convict who used the names “John F. Thompson or Charles Moss.” He is described as 38 years old, 5 feet 9 inches tall, weight 150 has peculiar round head and face, with scoup-shaped lower lip, a scar on his forehead above eyebrow, is of French descent.” Whether Mrs. Parker and her partner in crime were ever apprehended or, indeed, if this poster is truly authentic will probably remain an unsolved history mystery, but the lively details of their physical descriptions and the reasons for Mrs. Parker’s desertion of her family remain enduringly tantalizing. Could she have been a victim of foul play at the hands of John Grant?

Limericks and Land

A poetry contest is a unique way to promote real estate. The 1925 Oswego Acres development faced stiff competition from the Ladd Estate Company, the largest land developer in Oswego. Oswego Acres was located in Lake Grove near the Ladd Estate Company’s Rosewood development. To publicize the enterprise, the developers of Oswego Acres held a limerick contest. Limericks are a humorous verse consisting of five lines. The first, second, and fifth lines rhyme with each other and the third and fourth lines form a rhymed couplet. First prize for the completion of the following limerick in the 1925 contest was an acre lot:

There was an old lady named Kitty, Who found great expense in the city, High taxes and rent, To escape them she went— The origin of limericks is obscure; it may or may not have anything to do with the city in Ireland, but they appear to have been invented around the turn of the twentieth century. Although there isn’t a prize, feel free to make up your own last line to complete the limerick.

The “Windy City”

Hurricane-force winds brought widespread destruction and one death to the Lake Oswego area. The storm etched memories of the day in the minds of a generation of Oregonians. High winds had been predicted, but not the ferocious gales that struck about 5:00 pm on October 12, 1962. What began as Typhoon Freda became a non-tropical windstorm that swept through Oregon from south to north. To this day it remains the strongest to hit the lower 48 states. Peak wind gusts at the coast reached 138 miles per hour before the wind instrument was damaged. A local newspaper reported that many large beautiful trees in Lake Oswego were toppled as though they were matchsticks. Adrienne Brockman recalls that on that day she was riding four-abreast in the Oswego Hunt arena when she noticed a huge uprooted tree rolling down the polo field as if it were a tumbleweed. Mrs. Sarah J. Nordeen stood in her yard to witness the fury of the storm and was crushed by a falling tree; it was the only fatality caused by the storm in Lake Oswego. Two homes were whipped to shreds by the wind. One home exploded when uprooted trees broke a gas line that ignited in a ball of flames. Falling trees smashed cars and homes. Roads were strewn with downed live power lines, telephone cables, trees, and tree branches. In one freak occurrence at the Jane’s home at 242 Iron Mountain Boulevard, the wind lifted a vase and set it down on another table without spilling the water. Damage to the area was estimated at 1.5 million dollars (about 10.6 million dollars today).

Stay up-to-date on LO Centennial news, features, and events!

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