

Whispers from the past

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The threat of fire was very real in the early days of Sisters, when all the structures were crafted from wood and the city didn't have a professional fire department. Fires in 1923 and 1924 destroyed a good share of downtown, which partially accounts for the small number of remaining original structures along Cascade Avenue.

The front page of the June 27, 1960, *Bend Bulletin* was emblazoned in large bold type – “Fire Wrecks Sisters Garage” — accompanied by a black and white photo showing “firemen attempting to check the fire (at the Wakefield Garage), which also damaged a store and the Sisters Hotel.”

The garage had enjoyed a long history in Sisters before being consumed by the fire. Early Sisters resident Hardy Allen, known as a “stockman, blacksmith and general businessman” (according to “An Illustrated History of Central Oregon,” published in 1905), operated a blacksmith shop that served as a meeting place for the locals. The second story of the building was used as a dance hall and venue for other social events.

With the advent of the automobile, Allen both repaired cars and continued blacksmithing, shoeing horses and repairing farm equipment. In about 1920, he converted the shop fully into a garage, when it became obvious the automobile was here to stay.

The fire of September 11, 1924, completely consumed the garage, but Allen started over when he built a new service station on the corner of Cascade Avenue and North Fir Street, the location of the current Sinclair gas station.

During World War II, Allen rented out his garage and went to Vancouver, Washington to work in the shipyards. After returning to Sisters, he sold the garage to George Wakefield, who continued to operate it as a garage until it was taken over in 1951 by Dave Altier.

On that June day in 1960, according to *Bend Bulletin* reporter Phil Brogan, “Altier had just completed repairing a leaky gas tank and was attaching a trailer on the car of an unidentified motorist from Roseburg, when the fire surged through the building. A trailer house attached to the Roseburg car was unhitched, but the car was destroyed.” Several other automobiles, as well as all of Altier's equipment, were destroyed.



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Wakefield Garage burned down in 1960.

Altier was alone in the garage at the time the fire broke out and, after removing the trailer from the car, had to run from the building as the flames spread. Initial information suggested that the fire started from a light bulb on an extension cord that may have shattered, touching off gas fumes from the leaky tank.

Brogan reported that Altier believed the aluminum roof on the 50-by-114-foot frame building prevented the flames from scattering burning embers over the town. Black smoke from the fire was driven by a wind out of the north, choking the town, and raising fears that the entire town would go up in flames. A fortunate shift of the wind to the northwest reduced the threat.

Even in 1960, the “mutual aid pact” between communities existed and the Redmond Fire Department responded rapidly to assist in protecting buildings adjacent to the incinerated garage.

The Sisters fire chief at the time was Gordon George, the ranger in charge of the Sisters Ranger District. Equipment from the Sisters and Metolius districts, usually used for the control of forest fires, was used to help contain the garage fire. Volunteer firefighters fought the flames as concern grew among the assembled spectators that the garage's buried gas tanks might explode.

The Leithauser Super Market, located directly across Cascade Avenue from the garage, lost all its plate glass windows, which broke due to the heat from the flames. The store also lost some of its produce to the heat. The paint on the east side of the Sisters hotel blistered. Fortunately, the fire was contained to the garage property and Sisters was spared.

In more recent times, the northeast corner of Cascade and Fir has been home to a Shell service station, which

became a Sinclair station in 2017, with its recognizable green dinosaur out in front.

Floyd Leithauser, whose family owned the Liethauser Super Market (location of Sisters Drug) where he worked growing up, provided the copy of the *Bend Bulletin* article as well as photos. Other information came from “That was Yesterday” (Wilson and Scott). The sources provided conflicting information as to the timeframe of ownership of the garage, but the general story is believed to be accurate.

Obituary

Ruth Elizabeth Paul

December 31, 1925 – January 30, 2018

Ruth Elizabeth Paul passed away on January 30, at The Aspens Living Center in Hines.

She was born on December 31, 1925, to Carl August and Lina Marie Heck in Roseburg. After graduating from high school in Roseburg, she attended Biola Institute and Oregon State University.

On April 7, 1946, she married Walter Grensted Paul in Roseburg. They farmed on South Deer Creek near Roseburg, where their two daughters were born, and they later farmed near Sheridan, before moving to Bend. There Ruth worked at Bend Senior High School and Walt worked for the U.S. Forest Service.

In 1979 they moved to a new home that Walt built on land purchased near Sisters. Ruth worked part-time at the Bank of the Cascades in Sisters and volunteered at the Sisters Public Library for 20 years and Habitat for Humanity for 10 years.

In 2004 they moved to Hines, where Ruth volunteered at the Harney County Library. She and Walt also



volunteered at the Harney County Senior Center.

Ruth and Walt enjoyed camping, fishing and hunting trips, and both loved gardening. Ruth and her sister-in-law Vernie Deniston regularly joined friends on wildflower hikes in the Cascades near Sisters.

Ruth is survived by her husband, Walter Paul; her daughters Nancy Shaw and husband David of Boise, Idaho, and Annette Denker and husband Thomas of Ketchum, Idaho.

A memorial will be private. Donations in memory of Ruth Paul may be made to the Alzheimer's Association, Oregon – Greater Idaho Chapter, 1311 NW 21st Ave., Portland, OR, 97209, or to the charity of your choice.

Hey Batter Batter! Parents, register your players online now!

**AMERICA'S
FAVORITE
PASTIME**

**Sisters
LITTLE LEAGUE**
BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL



Registration is open Jan. 1 - Mar. 10
\$25 late fee applies after Feb. 28

REGISTRATION IS NOW ONLINE (not at SPRD)

WWW.SISTERSLITTLELEAGUE.ORG

For additional information please visit www.sisterslittleleague.org or contact:
Darcy Davis, SLL Player Agent, playeragent@sisterslittleleague.org • 541-419-6426
Ryan Smetzler, SLL President, president@sisterslittleleague.org • 971-216-9460

Community Support needed: Umpires, Coaches & Volunteers
Donations, Buy a Field Banner, Sponsor a Team & Scholarship Fund

Sisters Little League, PO Box 951, Sisters, OR 97759
— Everyone Plays! Nonprofit and completely volunteer. —