



Of a certain AGE

Sue Stafford
Columnist

Don't erase history

As the Oregon Live banner headline ran across my phone's screen, I instantly felt like I'd been kicked in the gut. As I clicked on it and went to the story and photos online, tears began to collect in the corners of my eyes.

What could elicit such an immediate emotional response? Who had died? To anyone else, it was just another story of an historic statue being toppled. But to me it was the statue of my great-grandfather, Portland pioneer, historian, and editor of *The Oregonian* newspaper for 40 years, Harvey Whitefield Scott.

His statue had stood atop Mount Tabor in southeast Portland since 1933, larger than life, which matched his purported personality. Harvey died in 1910 at Johns Hopkins Medical Center where he had gone for surgery. His widow, Margaret McChesney Scott, had the bronze statue erected in 1933 to honor her husband, a man held in high regard regionally and nationally for his editorship of the largest paper in Oregon and his many other

civic contributions. The statue was created by Gutzon Borglum who, at the same time, was working on Mount Rushmore.

That statue has been a point of pride for the large clan of Harvey's descendants. Harvey's many grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been taken to see the statue and hear about Harvey's many contributions to Portland and Oregon. We were all steeped in the Scott family history, from the 1852 wagon train that brought Harvey, his siblings, and parents (his mother died of cholera on the trail) to the Willamette Valley, to Harvey's role in Portland history and his sister's (Abigail Scott Duniway) legacy regarding the women's suffrage movement.

I am well-versed in the other side of that history coin. Colonialism, degradation of the indigenous peoples, "manifest destiny," and more. Jim Cornelius and I had just had a conversation the day before the statue was torn down about the importance of learning from history and not trying to erase it. Then Jim asked the question, "What about the statues of Lenin, Saddam Hussein?" Who decides which statues deserve to come down or be removed?

I know that as a young man Harvey fought in the bitter Yakima Indian War at age 18. At first, he vehemently opposed his sister editorially regarding the women's movement for voting rights, although he did later soften that position. I am quite certain Harvey was the epitome of the white privileged conservative males of his day. He was living according to

the accepted norms of the day. The fact that some of those norms are no longer acceptable doesn't diminish him as a valuable contributor to the early days of Oregon.

The vandalism and tearing down of history's statues is a repudiation of all that has come before — honorable, dishonorable, ugly and laudatory. I don't know who vandalized Harvey's statue in the past with red paint, and a variety of graffiti, or who is responsible for the toppling and damage to it now. What I do know is that it feels like a personal assault on the pride I have always felt about my roots. My Scott ancestors were a tenacious lot, from the time they left the shores of Scotland to make their way to North Carolina, on into the mountains of western Kentucky, then following the western expansion into Illinois, and finally to Oregon in 1852 when Harvey was 14.

He helped clear and cultivate three farm sites in Oregon and Washington. He worked as a logger and surveyor and in his father's sawmill. With his photographic memory, he taught himself Latin and Greek and at 25 earned the region's first classical A.B. degree as the first graduate of Pacific University in Forest Grove. After a time in the Idaho mines in 1863, Harvey moved to Portland, where he studied law, became the Portland library's first librarian, and freelanced editorials for *The Oregonian*.

In 1865, he became editor of the paper, and later part owner. Harvey's classical education added a creative dimension to his career. His writings shared the fruits of

his education and his serious life-long studies of the great literature of the Western world, local and world history, and higher criticism and comparative religion, making his editorials an extension of his persona. The Oregon Pioneer Association summed up his career at his death: "Mainly he was an instructor... tens of thousands were his daily students."

The Scotts' road was long and challenging, but their perseverance made it possible for me to be a fifth generation Oregonian and proud of it. I am sorry for the treatment of the natives in the white man's quest for land. I am sorry Harvey didn't initially support Abigail and the suffrage movement. I am sorry that people who probably don't know about all the good done by Harvey saw fit to drag his statue to the ground and



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

The Harvey Whitefield Scott statue on Mount Tabor was toppled. That was a personal blow for columnist Sue Stafford.

damage it. I am not sorry that the Scotts had the drive and fortitude to cross lands originally inhabited solely by the first Americans, to make homes and raise families using only their own hard work, determination, and intelligence.



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