



BOB’S THOUGHTS
BOB BAUM

Getting acquainted with great coaches

The old saying goes, coaches are hired to be fired.

And as a sports writer for nearly a half-century, I certainly have been there to chronicle both occasions.

From Doc Savage to Lute Olson to Bobby Hurley, I have worked with a lot of excellent coaches.

Of course, everyone who’s lived in these parts for a long time probably remembers Doc, who coached La Grande High School to the state football championship in 1974 and later served as county commissioner. I was just turning 18 when I was sports editor of The Observer and he treated me with absolute respect, despite my age.

He almost never raised his voice and his players seemed to love him.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Studying your soil

Before the advent of soil tests, farmers developed a lore about the significance of wild plants in their fields. Some of that lore found its way into books. In 1920, the botanist Fredrick Clements stated that each plant is an indicator. The conditions under which the plant grows and flourishes are a measure of the conditions. The plant growing in your field furnishes clues as to the composition and quality of the soil it’s growing in. Plants have distinct preferences.

E.E. Pfeiffer, one of the practitioners of biodynamic farming, viewed plants as teachers. He stated that weeds are indicating through their mere presence what is wrong. Weeds also indicate what is right with the soil.

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Process Isn’t Just For Cucumbers



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Pickled pears garnished with a cinnamon stick and cloves.

GET INTO A PICKLE

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Everyone sort of assumes it is the chicken. Everyone thinks that the process of pickling was invented as a way of preserving food in a time long before refrigeration, and that people who tried it decided that it tasted great, too.

But what if it were the egg? What if someone in that long-ago time dropped a cucumber in a vat of vinegar and salt because he thought it would taste good, and later discovered to his surprise that the liquid also helped to preserve the vegetables?

Not that it matters. Pickles are wonderful, and they last a long time. They’re the best of both worlds.

And they don’t have to be cucumbers. A wide variety of vegetables and even fruit can be pickled, with excellent results. Even meat can be pickled, if you have a mind to do it.

I don’t. I’ll do anything for food, but I won’t do that.

Instead, I made seven kinds of noncucumber pickles, covering the spectrum of ingredients and styles — sour and sweet, vegetables and fruit and eggs. I even made a Japanese version of sauerkraut which, when you get down to it, is just pickled cabbage.

I had one slight drawback in my efforts to be completely diverse in pickles: Three of the varieties I made were flavored with cinnamon and cloves. But what are you going to do? At least they taste good.

Let’s begin with green beans, which make straightforward, unfussy pickles. In that sense, you can think of them as a skinny version of pickled cucumbers.

First, you blanch the green beans; you want them partially cooked, but still crisp. After you have chilled them and put them in sterilized jars, you make a syrup of vinegar, salt and water all simmered together with an assortment of herbs and flavorings. Then you can them by putting the jars and their vacuum-seal lids into a boiling-water bath.

That’s a standard pickle, and a darned good one. Traditional spiced beets take that same formula and adds a small wrinkle, in the form of the aromatics that they use.

Ordinary pickled beets are made with nothing more than vinegar, salt and water (and maybe some red wine if you want to get fancy). But the spiced beets I made also benefit from cinnamon, cloves, allspice and the secret ingredient, star anise.

I love pickled beets. I always have. But these spiced beets may be my new go-to for canning.

Next, I turned to sweet fruit pickles, and here is what I learned about them: I really, really like sweet fruit pickles.

Pickled cherries — call them cerises au vinaigre, if you want — make a delightful snack. Try them with a cheese plate. They are nicely sweet, with just a little hint of the vinegar that makes them pickles. In fact, the pickling liquid has almost twice as much

sugar in it as vinegar.

The other ingredients? Our now familiar cinnamon stick and cloves.

Pickled pears are less like an hors d’oeuvre and more of a dessert. They are sweeter than the cherries, with just a whisper of vinegar for a contrapuntal edge. And the other flavors? Um, a cinnamon stick and cloves, but also allspice.

The other three pickles I made are different from the first group in that they are not canned — that is, they are not vacuum-sealed in jars. That means they have to be refrigerated and will not last nearly forever.

Pickled eggs are kind of a transition from canned pickles to uncanned pickles. Pubs around the world keep a big jar of pickled eggs on the bar and away from a refrigerator.

Don’t do that.

Pickled eggs use a simmered syrup, so the pickling liquid is concentrated. Even so, the eggs are subject to causing botulism if they are stored at room temperature. In the fridge, they will begin to lose their flavor after about three or four months.

But only if they last that long. Salt and vinegar are perfect complements to hard-boiled eggs, so pickling them produces egg perfection. I like to add a cooked beet to the pickling liquid, too, which not only turns the eggs a beautiful red but also tempers the sharp (but not unwelcome) flavor of vinegar.

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Sommer Building’s ghost sign is especially elusive

By Ginny Mammen

As we have been touring La Grande looking for a ghost — sign, that is — we have found that they can sometimes be quite elusive. The sign that is the subject for this article is more than elusive. It is nearly impossible to see, let alone identify. Yet there is enough to know that it is there, hiding from us. This is the ghost sign located on the upper portion of the north side of the Sommer Building. I am hoping that learning a bit more about this building, its builder and its occupants will entice the ghost to come forward and identify itself.

The building at the northwest corner of Adams and Depot, known on the National Register of Historic Places as the Sommer Block, was constructed in 1891 by Aaron Sommer. It replaced a two-storied, wood-frame general store built in the late 1880s and later destroyed by the fire of July 1891. This was the same devastating fire that had also



Photo by Ashley O’Toole

Ghost sign on the north side of the Sommer Buildings.

destroyed the area of the Bryan and Dumphy Block and many more downtown structures.

The new two-story blond brick structure soon became a beehive of activity for downtown La Grande. Some of the earliest occupants included a drugstore, a meat market and a saloon on the first floor while a variety of offices for medical and legal services occupied the second floor.

The first floor corner of

the Sommer Building has been the home to a number of drugstores over the years. As early as 1883 La Grande had Wright’s Drug Store, but it is not known if it was ever located at this location. We know by 1911 that O. E. Silverthorn had a drugstore on this corner. Mr. Silverthorn offered much more than drugs for what ailed you. He carried everything from razors to fountain pens, and Bibles to a

“home remedy treatment for whiskey and beer habit.”

Around 1923 Glass Drug replaced Silverthorn Drugstore. Its neighbor on the first floor, Westenhaver and Gilbert Men’s Store, offered clothing placing men of La Grande “on a par with the best dressed men of London and New York.” Many of those La Grande men were the ones working in the various offices on the second floor. For some of you who have been around La Grande for a while, names of some of the second floor occupants will be familiar — Drs. Ralston, Hill, Richardson, Woodell and Ingle.

The Sommer Building was constructed following a fire and it could have been destroyed due to a fire. In May of 1966 fire struck again.

This time the structure was saved and brought back to life. The fire, however, may have been the reason the ghost sign went into hiding for all these years.

Who was Sommer? He has been almost as elusive as the

ghost sign on his building. Aaron Sommer was born in Alsace in 1836, later claiming Germany as his home country. As a young lad of 19 he came to the United States to find his fortune. By 1862, at age 26, he had arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley. He became one of the first merchants in old town as shown in the city directories of 1863 and 1864, listing him as having a grocery on C Avenue. In 1866 he married 20-year-old Bertha Wutherines, a young woman from Rodersweir, Germany. The 1880 Census still had him listed as a grocer, but the 1900 Census listed him as a “Capitalist.”

What had happened in those years between 1880 and 1900? Aaron was a hard worker and he knew when to take advantage of a good opportunity. The railroad arrived in La Grande in 1884 and Aaron Sommer, like his fellow entrepreneurs, moved into the area closest to the railroad, buying property that would best service that industry. Following the fire of

1891 he built both the Sommer Block and the Sommer Hotel, located on the corner of Depot and Washington.

Mr. Sommer was one of the original stockholders in the La Grande National Bank which was founded in 1887. Of his personal life we know very little. He and Bertha had five daughters and three sons. His obituary stated that he “had hundreds of friends who would miss him dearly.” Aaron Sommer died in La Grande in 1902 and Bertha died in 1909. Their daughters, Fannie and Mary, took over for their father and in 1926 remodeled the part of the building housing Glass Drug, putting in new fixtures, updating wiring and plumbing and installing eight modern show windows and a “handsome center entrance” to the drugstore.

For now however, the ghost sign peeking out from the side of the Sommer Building seems to have chosen to remain a mystery for for us to ponder.

Keep looking up! Enjoy!