



A Short History of Seaside

by Connie Anderson

"pity this busy monster, mankind,
not. progress is a comfortable disease."

- e. e. cummings

Somewhere behind the pavement, the aluminum-framed, junk-filled windows, the traffic, the pinball machines and snow-cone litter lurks the ghost of a pretty little beach town. A town that welcomed progress as a friend, resisted not at all, and in the short span of a man's lifetime, died under its feet with little more than a whimper. Seaside, whatever it is today, is not a pretty little town, either in physical appearance or character.

The Oregon coast wears on its shores a string of such pretty little towns . . . Cannon Beach, Manzanita, Nehalem. All today facing the same forces and modes of thinking which have transformed so many of Oregon's coastal gems into a string of tasteless clunkers.

Like Godzilla in a greenhouse, the tourist industry is a powerful force plowing through the small town's natural environment, leaving in its wake a trail of highway architecture, parking lots, condominiums, mobile home courts, souvenir junk outlets and the threat of legalized gambling. And the pretty little town loses more than just its physical beauty to the impersonal wasteland of the commercially-controlled tourist trap. It loses its smalltown energy and character, which are the truest sources of its beauty and grace and which loss no cosmetic compromises by developers can remedy. Or replace.



The history of Seaside and its determined wooing of the tourist industry is a story of ideas, dreams and schemes, some of which were carried out, others which (mercifully) died on the vine. And always, it has been a story measured by tabulated numbers of money-spending tourist bodies and punctuated by the dollar sign. Volume meant success and prosperity.

Photographs from less than 90 years ago depict Seaside as a rustic, simple and relaxed ocean resort town, a respite from the busyness of the city and a journey back to

the wonders of nature. The town consisted of cottages, summer-tents, and a few boarding houses and hotels nestled into a naturally beautiful area. The food was wholesome, entertainment was nature-oriented and the environment, for the most part, was left alone and appreciated. Today's frantic Broadway Street was a shell-covered lane winding through a grove of trees which sheltered and lent an air of privacy to white tents perched on platforms. The Necanicum River, teeming with fish, flowed through the village along treelined banks. The hotels, whether rustic or grand, were dignified, with shell-covered walking paths and wooden walkways through the woods, graceful footbridges over the Necanicum and pastures of milk cows so that guests might have fresh cream daily. Their tables were laden with wild game and fresh seafood.

Entertainment then was simple and in tune with the natural environment. There were well-used hiking trails on Tillamook Head, hotel sponsored moonlight marshmallow roasts on the beach, clambakes given by a favorite boarding house "every Saturday night," and moonlight canoe rides down the Necanicum River with lanterns hanging from the trees to light the way. Hunting and fishing were taken for granted with abundant salmon and trout in the streams, and deer, elk, bear and cougar in the surrounding forests.

Finally, though, in the age-old pattern of the settlement of the wilds, came the entrepreneurs, the speculators, the men of vision and change. Men who saw the potential of the tourist industry. And so began the schemes, the schams, the megalomaniacal visions and the lucky little tricks of the trade which made a few folks rich, gave a lot of folks jobs, and drove others under or away. And left those who remained a town whose only natural charm lay in the long narrow strip of beach which simply was too powerful to succumb to the numerous attempts at change and exploitation.

Along with a candy shop, bowling alley and a saloon along Shell Road, the first decade of the 1900's brought several hints of what was to come in the fast-moving 20's and 30's. In 1906 came the first merry-go-round to Seaside, along with the first bank, a skating rink, additions to hotels, and the birth of a community commercial club called "The Seaside Development League," which adopted as its motto "A Greater Seaside" and published a souvenir postcard depicting drawings of Seaside's hoped-for deepwater harbor and ship canal. (More about the canal later.) The club felt that the postcard "would prove effective advertising if gen-

erally used, and all loyal citizens will use them in preference to all other souvenir postcards."

This was the time for drawing more "big-business" thinkers to the area, and, coincidentally, in 1905 came the excited disclosure that diamonds and rubies were being discovered in the diggings of the ochre mine located on Elk Creek Road, south of Seaside. The "find" brought many ambitious speculators from Portland to stake claims, after which no more precious gems were to be found. But the speculators were there to stay.

By 1906 the real estate game was on. In August of that year the Seaside Signal tells the story of a Seaside man who, in 1902, leased a plot of ground 100-feet square at \$60 per year with an option to buy for \$600. Only four years later the man received a standing offer of \$4,000 for the property.

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August 4th, 1906, six thousand visitors were counted in Seaside.



Development during this time was not confined to the immediate Seaside area, and an interesting plan was being made for a point south, namely Cannon Beach's Chapman Point. A brochure had been published by an agency called the Oregon Land & Timber Company, out of Portland, which described the beauties of Seal Rock Beach, which was identified as the beachland extending a half mile in either direction from Elk Creek. The brochure offered lots for sale along this stretch of beach for \$125 to \$200 with "liberal" terms, and went on to describe the elaborate hotel planned for the tip of Chapman Point. This "modern, attractive"

hotel's most interesting innovation was that it would boast a suspension bridge from the Point out to the rocks in the sea, where observation parlors would be erected for "the delight and recreation of the guests."

The Chapman Point incident, no doubt, was part of what prompted the early show of jealous competition for the tourist dollar as early as 1907 when, as reported by the Seaside Signal, visitors reported attempts by Seaside's to discourage parties going to Elk Creek (Cannon Beach). Apparently, the parties were informed that the road was impassable, no teams passed over it, not even mail wagons, there were no hotels or accommodations of any kind (there were actually two hotels there at the time), and no means of getting supplies; and besides "there really was no beach below Seaside." The editor, in reporting the false stories, implies that it may seem justifiable "to those whose business and property interests lie here, but the invariable result is a lot of good advertising for the section of country that is decried."

As an indication that there was still a bit of the rustic about the area, the 1908 paper carried an ad from a builder who stated, "Parties desiring tent floors laid and tents erected can have work promptly and economically done by applying to B.A. Chalmers."

A year later the town went stylishly cosmopolitan when the Signal described the opening of a chop suey and Chinese noodle factory on Shell Road which had "secured the services of a Mongolian chef who was for many years the noodles and suey manufacturer to the Dowager Empress Tsi An."

The decade also felt the onset of the chronic problems which plague a tourist town, 1906 had the first curfew established, and in 1908 the editor of the Signal suggested there should be a place for young men to hang out in the evenings other than saloons, and also stated that the city was proposing a new bridge across the Necanicum so that families would not have to "run the gauntlet of the large number of men in front of the four saloons which they are compelled to pass."

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More than seven thousand visitors were in Seaside during the 1909 July Fourth holiday.

Continued on Page Six