

# NOT ON OUR HILL

People from all over the United States and the world visit the Astoria Column. The great majority are delighted and awed at the expansive beauty of ocean, rivers, valleys and mountains from the top of Coxcomb Hill. From wherever they visit they acclaim the view as among the most beautiful anywhere. "You can see the whole world from up here," a 5 year old girl once exclaimed.

The Astoria Column, 78 years old this year, was built to mark the end of the Oregon Trail and establishment of Astoria as the first American city in the West. Lewis & Clark ended their transcontinental trek here two centuries ago, and the bicentennial of their journey is expected to draw large crowds these next few years.

The Friends of the Astoria Column, a bifurcated group that includes a few eminent Astorians as well as Portland elite, restored the Column to its former grandeur, and its incredible scroll of history that resembled a mudpole now gleams like a new tattoo. But the Friends have a bigger agenda than restoration; their grand scheme is to redesign everything around the Column.

Astorians realize tourism has replaced logging and fishing as the city's major industry, but they do not wish for their hometown to be refabricated into a vacationers' elysium. Locals as well as visitors have voiced comments and opinions of the plans to redesign the Column's environment, but unless they are in favor they are snubbed.

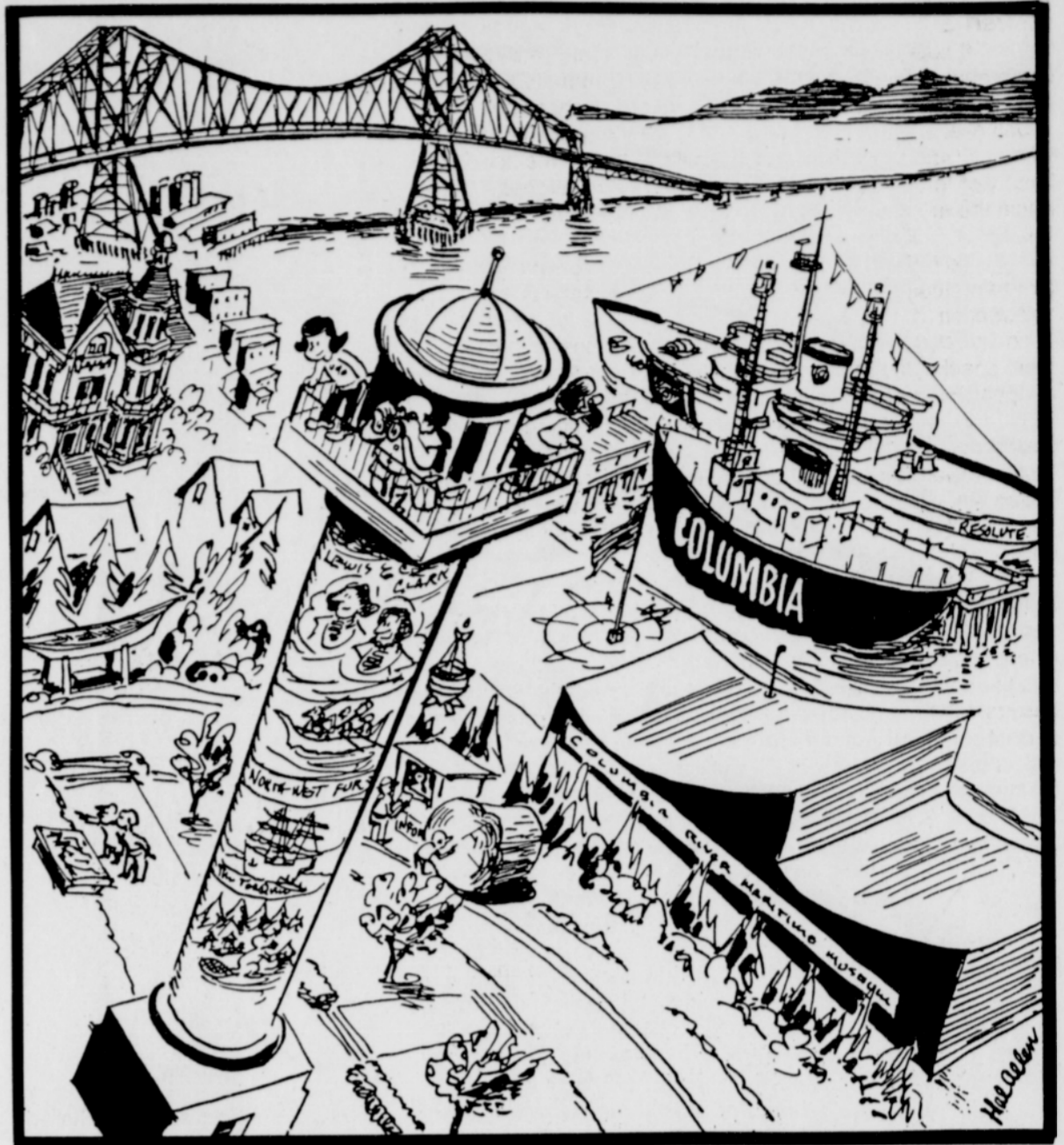
Nearly a thousand Astorians signed petitions to have public input on the design, but they have been ignored, and despite expenditures that will cost gross amounts of taxpayers' money for the project there has not been a citywide vote despite the Mayor's promise. (A city official said off-the-record that Portland millionaire Jordan Schnitzer, who wishes the planned interpretative center named after his grandfather, is to have his way with the Column because the city wants him as a patron for other civic works.)

One ploy absent from city/Friends' effulgent tributes to Column "renaissance" is charging admission to John Jacob Astor Park to help cover costs.

The comments on these pages are excerpted from letters written to *The Daily Astorian*, Astoria city officials or members of the Oregon legislature, and are public record. No attempt has been made to present various sides of the Column debate. This correspondence is decidedly against further development on Coxcomb Hill, and represents the majority of opinion.

As John Goodenberger has said, expressing disappointment of a "utilitarian response" to an esthetic site, "There is a lot less grace in experiencing Coxcomb Hill and the Astoria Column these days.

—MICHAEL McCUSKER



HAL ALLEN (COLUMBIA PRESS, 1986)

## Karen Mellin

Coxcomb Hill is a sacred spot to many. Promontory hills usually are. It is an awesome experience within to watch the golden sun slip into the ocean through protective clouds that gloriously change color all the while. And from that view swing around to see a world of wilderness on three sides, with our beautiful river below. Here we can be one with all those who looked out from this spot before us and feel spiritual. Nature has been overly generous to us.

Any more development on Coxcomb Hill would be an insult to this gift of Nature. It is not in need of interpretation, nor any more disruption of its landscape. It's an outrage to even suggest a parking lot on the site of our lost wonderful woods that were ravaged so brutally. A painful shock to many who loved them.

The Column is a railway monument, erected to celebrate the coming of the railway, and thus commercial enterprise, to this outpost. The artist arrived by rail at our own train station on the waterfront. From there the Column is visible, just as it was planned, standing majestically on the hill. The station, and its important connection to the Column/monument, seems to have been ignored in the proposals for an interpretive center. Why is this historical site not considered?

Friends of the Astoria Column: thanks, but no thanks. Not on our hill.

## Marcia Fenske

I am opposed to the interpretive center at the Astoria Column... This is a city park. While all of Oregon, and the world, may enjoy the Column, the park and the scenic vistas... It belongs to the city of Astoria. We, the citizens and taxpayers of Astoria should decide if, when, and how changes should be made. I know we are grateful to the 'Friends' for their contribution to the Column. I realize a lot of time and money has gone into this proposal. I just don't believe this new building is necessary... I've heard so few comments in favor of this building, yet it proceeds.

## George Fulton

It is abundantly clear that the city of Astoria is situated on unstable ground and by disturbing the unstable condition at the Astoria Column, are we creating a problem? Why jeopardize the area by disturbing the unstable condition? What if, after the contemplated improvements are made, the area is subject to massive movement? Who do we, the taxpayers, look for to repair the structure? Would the parties proposing the additions to the park be willing to guarantee all expenses of remedying the problem?

...To me it appears that the council has assumed the position that they know what's best for the taxpayers, without listening to the taxpayers... Why are the taxpayers of this city, who pay the highest tax rate in the county, being denied the right to vote on this issue?

## LaRee Johnson

I am concerned about the push for the proposed interpretive center for the Astoria Column and the \$345,000 tax dollars requested... I have copies of the more than 850 signatures gathered on petitions to halt the project a couple of years ago... after attending countless council meetings, letters to the editors and finally the Mayor's appointment of a citizen Master Plan Review Committee which spent six months researching and devising a plan... all of which has been swept under the carpet.

The "Friends" have completely disregarded the recommendations of the Astoria Master Plan Committee to keep an interpretive center under 2500 square feet as well as locate the building toward the back of the site (current caretaker house location).

How will the digging out of the hill affect the stability of the area? The recent earth movement on the east end of Astoria (coinciding with the pounding of pilings and the digging out the "toe of the hill" by nearby businesses) is reason for more concern for our Astor Park and jeopardizing the safety of homes, the college and indeed the Column itself. Not to mention the cost to the city/citizens to rectify a situation gone wrong, as in the case of the east Astoria earth movement. Since Astoria has a history of movement this should be a wake-up call from Mother Nature.

Another concern is the cavalier attitude as regards relocation of the canoe that gives tribute to local Indian tribes,

the wonderful topographical map donated by the Angora Club that so many people use for orientation, and the Sesquicentennial Time Capsule that is buried at the Column with a flat marker, not due to be unearthed until 2044.

We live in an information age...telling people too much, not letting them find and explore and experience. The mere simplicity of the experience can leave an indelible impression of a place that people remember and long to return to. One of the most majestic experiences is overlooking the Columbia River, whether it is storming or sunning. The Column does the interpreting for the history of the area in a most beautiful way.

On behalf of many silent citizens, I implore (the city and "Friends") to reconsider something we do not want to financially burden future generations with or alter what people come to Astoria to see... an incredibly beautiful small historical town.

(excerpted from letters to the *Daily Astorian* and the *City Council* and *Mayor of Astoria*.)

## Arno Michaels

Coxcomb Hill is unique in all the world. It seems there is no other major river delta that can be viewed from a natural high place. And what a view we have! The Column is great, but incidental to the view. The view is it. The view is spiritual, or magical or just plain incredible as our individual orientation may interpret. We catch our breath as we walk to the rim of the hill and gaze. It never grows old. It never needs repair. It is different every time. Our wondrous weather guarantees it. Yes, it's the experience of the view that draws us to the hill.

Jordan Schnitzer, president of the Friends of the Astoria Column, has his own vision of the hill...

He sees thousands of children scurrying up the Column, their fingertips touching exhibits. Seniors from throughout the world viewing the Column; only briefly, as they scurry into the interpretive center to view a fake column close up. He imagines all these visitors tapping into computers to check out the history of the Astors, watching films, buying gifts, stopping for a bite to eat and just hanging around.

All of this occurs indoors — perhaps underground — in the interpretive center surrounded by a vast parking lot needed to support this ant hill.

I find it sadly irreverent the preservation of our view, our hill, our cathedral in the sky, is not included in Jordan Schnitzer's vision. Let us each ask this friend of the Column to become a friend of our view, and do his interpreting at sea level where it will be welcome.

## Jane Audrey

The world is crowded with places to buy stuff, get information, hear someone else's music, breathe exhaust fumes, feel stressed — all courtesy of mankind. But where does one go to get away from it all?

Up to now, my favorite place has been Coxcomb Hill, and what made it so was not the souvenirs, not the canoe, not the telescope, not the amplified music and signs and gift shop; not even the Column! What the hill has to offer me is the view and the awe and peace I feel at the opportunity to get away from the "real world" for a look at something beyond.

## Annie Oliver

As a member of the Mayor-appointed Astor Park Master Plan Committee, I find it very discouraging to see the plans for a bunker-type interpretive center at the Astoria Column. Our committee spent most of one summer getting public input and working on a plan that the majority of local people approved.

A bunker in the hillside was not one of the plans. But now, as a homeowner in the area of the current landslide disaster, I find myself very concerned over what could potentially happen to the Column. I am sure no one foresaw what might occur in our area when construction of Safeway and excavation of the Hauke property began.

The city is spending a lot of money for a geotechnical firm to find out why the earth is moving. And they are spending a lot of money to repair sewer lines, gas lines and water lines. We, as taxpayers, will share this cost. Do we really want to take a chance on a similar disaster occurring at the Column?

## Lawrence Seeborg

It is unfortunate and ironic that Jordan Schnitzer and his associated Friends of the Column seem determined to seriously damage views from the Astoria Column in order to accommodate visitors who are coming to enjoy these views! This seems a bit self-defeating to me, or, as the old saying goes, "With 'Friends' like these, the Column doesn't need any enemies."

(He lives in Sandy, Utah. His Finnish grandparents settled in Astoria in the early 1900s. His family contributed to the restoration of the Astoria Column.)

## Frankye Thompson

(The Astoria) City Council...has decided that we have to have an interpretive center at the Astoria Column. The City Council has no business deciding what should be put next to the Column without allowing all the people of Astoria to take part in that very important decision.

I have been to several meetings where it is very obvious that the majority of the people were against building an interpretive center. Most of them were interested in building a new gift shop and handicap-accessible restrooms, but the feeling was very strong against the center. The Friends of the Column and the City Council paid as much attention to those people as they did a call-in vote Tom Freel of KAST staged one morning...the vote was 100 to one against building the center.

To quote a (*Daily Astorian*) article... "Mayor Willis Van Dusen has suggested that an interpretive center should be put to a citywide vote." How soon do we get to do that, Mr. Mayor? If I didn't feel so much like crying, this whole miserable mess would be laughable.

I trusted the Mayor when he told us... that we would be allowed to vote on the interpretive center. Please do not put my grandchildren's names on granite pavers to replace the bricks. I do not want future generations to think I had anything to do with building the interpretive center at the Column.


(Excerpted from two letters to *The Daily Astorian*.)

## Diane Beeston

The major attraction of Coxcomb Hill is the breathtaking view and the Astoria Column is the frosting on the cake. The only improvements necessary are updated and wheelchair accessible restrooms and a good looking souvenir store, all of which could be placed where the caretaker's house is now since the present souvenir store is an unattractive view blocker and should be enlarged anyway.

Nothing should block that view! To build a multi-million dollar building to house a model of a column to explain a column that is already there makes no fiscal sense whatsoever. Why not a simple, plexiglass-covered table (placed low enough as to not obstruct any view) with a photograph of the Column along with an explanation of each of the cartoons and if you like, a brochure station down by the Columbia River Maritime Museum as an interpretive center with bus service to the Column if visitors don't have their own transportation?

To the Friends of the Astoria Column: you did a tremendous job in restoring the Column, and I, for one, am eternally grateful for that. Now the time has come to leave it alone. Don't mess with success. Redirect those funds into areas that can sorely use them.



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