

A THREE-TIME QUEEN

Pendleton girl once pulled off royal trifecta

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A look into Pendleton's early history reveals a town with nerves-of-steel cowboys, wild women and whiskey and a community that could become an unstoppable force when working toward a common goal.

Take for example the strange and wonderful case of Muriel Saling.

In 1916, the Portland Rose Festival opened up selection of its queen to the entire state of Oregon and southwest Washington.

"The people in Pendleton found out about this and were very excited about their local favorite Muriel Saling possibly being the Portland Rose Festival queen," said Randy Thomas, a director on the Round-Up Association Board.

Saling, the popular deputy clerk of Umatilla County and once a star Pendleton High School basketball player, had reigned as queen of the Pendleton Round-Up court in 1912.

The city mobilized, not only with efficiency, but with stealth, according to East Oregonian articles. Votes could be purchased 10 for a penny and sometimes for less if bought in big blocks. The city revved up its fundraising efforts and set out to get their darling elected. Just before the deadline, the 22-year-old Pendleton beauty trailed in votes, but Rose Festival



E.J. Harris/East Oregonian

Muriel Giorgi, of Reno, holds a photograph of her grandmother, two-time Pendleton Round-Up Queen and Portland Rose Festival Queen, Muriel Saling in front of the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds.

tival officials were oblivious to the sneak attack that was about to come their way.

"Pendleton had a strategy to lull the competition into low voter turnout," Thomas said. "On the final night of voting, Pendleton delivered to the Portland Rose Festival office five million votes, obliterating the competition, so much so that she won over the second place candidate by over four million votes."

Knockout punch

An East Oregonian article described this knockout punch and explained the strategic maneuvering in detail. About two million votes had trickled into Portland from Pendleton during the spring campaign, but most Saling votes were hoarded in secret. According to the newspaper, "more than five million were purchased by Portland people to whom the local committee had sent money. They purchased

heavily, refusing to disclose to the festival management the name of the candidate for whom their votes were intended."

Dale Chessman, who managed the campaign, held on to the big reserve until the final minute. When the results were tallied, Saling had 7.4 million votes and had beaten second-place finisher Lillian Hendricksen, of Portland, by more than four million. At the Rose Festival headquarters, there was "gasping amazement."

By pulling off this coup, Pendleton also earned the right to select the Rose Festival King. The town chose Umatilla County Sheriff and Round-Up President Til Taylor. The pair was crowned at Multnomah Falls, shortly before presiding over the official opening of the Columbia River Highway.

What happened next flabbergasted Saling and the entire town.

Enter Astoria

The Astoria Regatta issued a surprise invitation to Saling to rule over the annual August regatta. At the time, it — along with the Rose Festival and the Pendleton Round-Up — were the three biggest festivals in the state. Til Taylor was also named as honorary admiral of the Astoria Regatta Fleet.

"Pendleton was so pleased with their successes that it named Muriel Saling again, for the second time, as queen of the Pendleton Round-Up in 1916, thereby effectively accomplishing her triple crown," Thomas said.

Crowns for the regatta and the rodeo were bestowed at the same ceremony.

To honor Saling's trifecta, the Pendleton Round-Up Association invited Saling's granddaughter, Muriel Giorgi, of Reno, to experience the rodeo over which her grandmother had reigned. After making Pendleton on Friday, Giorgi sat down at Starbucks to relax from the 600-mile car trip and reminisce about her grandmother over a cup of iced tea. She said she loves sharing the name Muriel with her grandmother.

"I wear my grandmother's name proudly," Giorgi said.

Tragic end

Saling, Giorgi said, married Frank Cronan soon after the 1916 Round-Up, gave birth to two daughters and eventually divorced. Eventually she married "the love of her life," Edward Crane. The couple ran their linoleum store in the Bay Area until disaster struck.

"They had been married nine months when somebody came into the store and robbed him of \$90 and killed him," Giorgi said.

Saling eventually moved to Reno to be near family where she worked as secretary at an insurance office. She kept her husband's glasses, cracked in the fatal attack, in her lingerie drawer. She never married again.

Saling was something of a paradox, said Giorgi, who saw her grandmother most days until her death at age 75 of a stroke, when Giorgi was 17. Saling, a southpaw, remained a long-legged looker even into her later years and also possessed a shrewd mind. She loved wearing pearls and fancy hats — her favorite sported a peacock feather.

"She was a sharp dresser," Giorgi said. "Even when she was gardening, she was a sharp dresser. She was pretty prim and proper."

No nonsense

Conversely, she had a fondness for smoking cigarillos and often had a cocktail in hand, Giorgi laughed. Her grandmother said what was on her mind and didn't put up with nonsense from her grandchildren. In all their time together, Saling spoke little about her time as a triple-queen in 1916.

Giorgi will try to glean some more details about her grandmother during her first visit to Umatilla County. She and a friend will visit Weston, where Saling was born and family members ranched. She will look at Saling's photo hanging on a wall at the Pendleton Round-Up & Happy Canyon Hall of Fame. She'll soak in the Westward Ho! Parade.

According to Thomas, "she'll attend the Pendleton Round-Up for the first time on the 100th anniversary of her grandmother's triple crown."



Pendleton Round-Up Queen Muriel Saling and Round-Up President Til Taylor ride the arena track in 1916.
W.S. Bowman/File Photo



9-1-WHAT?

THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

What the cluck?

Sometimes, emergency dispatch just leaves us speechless ...

"Caller reported a sex offender in her chicken coop feeding her chickens."

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT.

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/14 @ 3:49 p.m.} Man skateboarding around Safeway harassing customers and trying to trade rocks for food. #Astoria

2

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/14 @ 4:48 p.m.} Someone threw two beer bottles out of their car window on the #Astoria Bridge.

1

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/17 @ 3:25 a.m.} Woman stealing plants from First Lutheran Church. #Astoria

1

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/15 @ 6:40 p.m.} Report of juveniles on top of shipping containers throwing rocks. #Hammond

7:00 AM - 20 Sep 2016

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/20 @ 12:47 a.m.} Caller reported a sex offender in her chicken coop feeding her chickens. #Astoria

1



Now available in the
**The Daily Astorian and
Chinook Observer**

For more information call 503-325-3211

Coast River
BUSINESS JOURNAL
crbizjournal.com