

OPINION

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Water under the bridge



Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers

10 years ago this week — 2008

"Buildable lands" sounds like jargon, but a group of Astoria leaders believes those two words signal the future of the community.

Astoria has room for more than 1,600 new homes within its existing urban growth boundary, a land-use consultant told a joint work session of the Astoria City Council and Planning Commission earlier this month. More than 600 would be second homes.

Matt Hastie, of Portland-based Cogan Owens Cogan LLC, presented the results of the buildable lands inventory and needs assessment he had been working on since May, with input from the commission. His inventory also showed that more vacant land in Astoria is zoned for multiple family dwelling and that there is a surplus of commercial land.

The National Marine Fisheries Service wants the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deny a critical permit for the Bradwood landing liquefied natural gas project.

A five-foot bronze statue of Sacagawea and her baby was stolen from Fort Clatsop Saturday night.

The statue — which stood at the Netul landing area — disappeared sometime between 5:20 p.m. Saturday and 8:45 a.m. Sunday, according to Clatsop County Sheriff's office Sgt. Kristen Hanthorn. It had been cut from its mounting bolts.

Vandals who wrecked a fiber-optic phone line are being blamed for causing the outage that left some 20,000 North Coast customers without phone service for much of Friday and part of Saturday.

The phone service was back on track today, with businesses lamenting disrupted operations and law agencies seeking the vandals who broke the line in the greater Kelso, Wash., area.

Clatsop County commissioners have a message for the public: Stay out of the forests. They're dangerous right now.

So, they are trying to move quickly to hire a forester. They said they want a forester to assess the timber and get it harvested, to make the forests safer and to generate revenue from timber before markets get flooded with blow-down.



The Daily Astorian

Dave Cook, of Bigby's Tree Service, watches after a final cut from his chainsaw brings down the second of a pair of cypress trees that had threatened the Flavel House in 2008.

50 years ago — 1968

Treasure hunter Tony Mareno will resume drilling on the beach at Manzanita this weekend just outside the steel casing sunk 40 feet into the sand.

The Salem father of 11 said there is a possibility the big steel tube is about three feet off center from where he believes a multi-million dollar Spanish treasure is buried.

Astoria wore a white snow blanket Friday morning for the first time this winter.

The fall was about an inch deep on higher hills in town, thinning out to only a trace reported at the Clatsop Airport station of U.S. Weather bureau.

A truck-trailer rig loaded with lumber and an SP&S freight train collided early Monday at a grade crossing in downtown Warrenton, spewing two by fours over the road.

Ray Garlock was driving a Warrenton Lumber company truck towing two lumber-laden trailers in tandem. Driving slowly on snow-covered Harbor Drive, he apparently failed to see the approaching train on a little used track along Harbor Drive, until it was almost upon him.

75 years ago — 1943

The coffee situation in Astoria is becoming critical, D.J. Lewis, ration board chief, warned today and it may become necessary to curtail the quo-

tas allotted to fraternal organizations, churches and clubs.

There have been a number of complaints turned into the board, Lewis said, of abuses in the ration program on the part of institutional users and that all the calls for coffee are not justifiable.

No more applications for coffee will be taken from institutions.

Six Astorians are hospitalized and 32 are homeless as a result of the fire that gutted the Astoria rooming and apartment house 527 Exchange Sunday afternoon and brought death close to a score of people. At 12:45 the fire was discovered by John "Bimmy" Elfving, who with his wife occupied an apartment on the ground floor of the building. The back porch of the structure was in flames, apparently resulting from a carelessly thrown cigarette in a pile of refuse.

John Niemi, 25, former Clatskanie and Astoria resident and now a member of the United States merchant marine, figures that he's just been lucky so far in his journeys through the sub-infested waters of the seven seas. Three ships on which he has served as steward have been wrecked but so far he has not been subjected to either a bombing or torpedoing and he has no thrill-packed story of weeks adrift in a lifeboat to reveal.

Home for a short visit with relatives and friends, Niemi told briefly of how the last ship on which he served went aground on a coral reef in the south seas. The ship hit the reef near midnight but remained afloat for nearly 24 hours. All of the crew were rescued by a U.S. Navy cruiser, badly battered from the Guadalcanal battle, which answered the cargo vessel's SOS.

GUEST COLUMN

York's saga an underreported chapter of Lewis & Clark story

York is not a household name, except perhaps to Pacific Northwest history buffs.

He was the black slave who accompanied his master, William Clark, on the 28-month trek to explore the Louisiana Territory and find a direct water route across the American landmass.

We know of him in fragments, through the writings of Clark and others, but we have nothing of York's first-person account.

(He, like several Corps of Discovery members, was illiterate.) What did the Lewis and Clark Expedition look like to him? We cannot know for sure, but we can put forth an educated guess.

That's the focus of a one-man show written and performed by Gideon For-mukwai, a local author and storyteller originally from Cameroon, a French-speaking country in Central Africa. For-mukwai recently premiered his dramatized interpretation of the overland journey — as seen through York's eyes — at Manzanita's Hoffman Center for the Arts.

By telling York's underreported story, what he calls a "well-kept American secret," For-mukwai hopes the show will inspire viewers to spotlight the "unsung heroes" in our midst — the people whose work, done diligently and with quiet dignity, makes our society possible, but whose contributions are often ignored.

York is a fascinating figure, and not just because he was the only African-American on the trip. He was allowed to hunt with a firearm and savor a certain measure of freedom across the Continental Divide and back, even while technically enslaved. He was a man at the center of sweeping historical events, yet denied his due glory and largely consigned to a footnote. (In this, of course, York is far from unique.)

We know York had a wife and was newly married when he set off with Lewis and Clark. We know he helped the expedition engage peacefully with native tribes.



A painting of York, the only African-American member of the Lewis & Clark expedition, on display in 2003 at the Gateway Arch Museum of Westward Expansion in St. Louis.

When the time came to decide whether the Corps would winter on the Columbia River's north or south side, York's opinion was noted (along with that of their Shoshone guide, Sacajawea).

We also know that, when the troop returned from the Columbia-Pacific, York was not given the honors, acreage and double pay awarded to his Corps comrades. Instead, he remained Clark's property, his

name — a one-word identifier like that of "a dog or a pony" — ranked near the bottom of the team members, For-mukwai said.

Clark later told the writer Washington Irving (in a disputed account) that he eventually freed York about a decade after they returned. York allegedly went into business for himself, failed at it, then tried to reunite with Clark before dying of cholera. There is no evidence that he ever found his wife.

Between the lines of this secondhand sketch, a private drama is playing out in the soul of someone whose inner character is lost to us. So we are left with questions. What did pride, self-respect and heroism mean to York, who could only experience them in a state of bondage?

The data is sparse; we are forced to read into the narrative gaps. But we can certainly surmise what York felt.

When his master did not free him after the expedition, York apparently became self-destructive. Clark would allow York to leave for a few days, and the slave would be gone much longer, For-mukwai said. Clark wrote to his brother that he punished York for his behavior.

The York who came home is "not the same York who went on the expedition," For-mukwai observed. Some scholars believe that, after York spent more than two years feeling liberated, the idea of remaining subjugated was simply intolerable.

The history of westward expansion is shot through with casual inhumanity, darkening even the celebrated Lewis and Clark story. Between the adventurous highlights — in the undocumented silence where we can infer the screams — lies pain unvoiced and persecution unatoned.

For-mukwai said we should find a way to acknowledge what each of us brings to the world, including and especially the people low in the social strata. For though institutional slavery is over, there are modern-day Yorks, living somewhere between freedom and captivity, waiting for their stories to be told.

Erick Bengel is the editor of Coast Weekend.