

Lost at sea, buried in Seaside

Who knows how many lives were lost?

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COAST WEEKEND

The wall marking Sailors' Grave stands about knee-high, encompassing a 12-foot-by-12-foot patch of land at the southeast edge of the Cove.

Inside the wall is a hand-carved rock that reads "Known Only To God." The street side bears the inscription "Found On The Beach, April 25, 1865." No names or countries are inscribed on the stones.

Accounts have been retold throughout the decades surrounding the mystery of the grave. No one really knows how many unknowns are buried there.

This mystery so intrigued Bill and Robin Montero, who purchased their home on Sunset Boulevard in 2010, they wanted to find out more. When the opportunity presented itself, they shared their research on who may reside within the walled grave at the February History & Hops speaker series event.

Gravesite

The Monteros discovered the current location of the grave is not the original 1865 gravesite. When local builder Al Hansen built his home at the Cove in 1937, he also built the walled memorial seen today.

One story, as told by Sarah Gearhart Byrd, Robin Montero said, was about a man named John Hobson, who in 1865, happened to be at the south end of Clatsop Beach when three sailors rowed ashore from an anchored ship near Tillamook Head, looking to fill their casks with fresh water. The sailors wanted to return to their ship before dark and soon headed back.

When Hobson noticed the weather change and fearing for the sailor's safety, he built a bonfire on the beach to help guide the sailors back to shore. The next morning, to his dismay, Hobson saw the sailor's bodies and buried them above the high tide line, placing a marker in acknowledgment.

Another story is derived from a 19th-century interview with Judge Thomas McBride, who attended the funeral of the captain of the ship *Industry*. *Industry* set sail with 23 passengers and crew from San Francisco in February 1865. After reaching the mouth of the Columbia River in March, it anchored offshore for two weeks due to inclement weather, waiting for a pilot boat to guide the



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Sailors' Grave sits near the beach in Seaside.

POINTS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

- **Mrs. Phillip Gearhart** planted the original daisies at the grave that bloom every summer.
- **Ben Holladay** had the flagpole installed at the Cove so passing ships would know where Seaside House was located.
- **Seaside House**, built by Ben Holladay, was a palatial Italian-style villa with a racetrack and stable, and is the current location of the Seaside Golf Course.
- **John Hobson**, his father William and

ship through the channel.

On March 15, the *Industry's* Capt. Lewis saw a pilot boat headed toward them. Believing it was coming to guide the ship, Lewis raised the *Industry* flag and started over the bar. However, the ship drifted upon the sand. A small boat was launched with a first mate named Coppin, but the rough sea capsized the boat and Coppin drowned. During the night storm, the remaining small boats were destroyed.

Two makeshift rafts with the remaining

four siblings moved to Clatsop County from Derbyshire, England in 1843. It was William Hobson, who introduced his native plant, the Scotch Broom.

- **John Hobson** was a successful businessman and shipwreck salvager, which included the U.S.S. *Shark* that ran aground in 1846. One of the ship's cannons was discovered years later, giving Cannon Beach its name.

- **Two-thousand vessels and 700 lives** have been lost on the Columbia Bar since 1792.

passengers and crew launched into the cold waters the next morning. The storm pounded the 300-ton *Industry* into pieces, and Capt. Lewis and 16 others perished. Soldiers from a nearby fort rescued only seven.

"It's noteworthy to say that burial of the dead was mainly in the Clatsop Pioneer Cemetery," Montero explained. "However, there are incidents when the area of the original sailors' grave was used instead."

According to the Monteros, the grounds above the high tide line at the Cove are the

last resting place for many unnamed souls.

A Seaside resident told the story of two fishermen who drowned after their boat capsized off Tillamook Head. They were buried on the rocky rise behind the original gravesite. Legend also recalls a drowned man who was found strapped to the deck of a sloop and recovered by residents. They buried him in the high ground area of the gravesite. Another report tells of a child who died and received burial by the gravesite.

"The Cove was used as a burial ground as there were no houses in sight, the ocean was in front and lush spruce and pine trees behind," Montero said.

A 'sacred place'

Even today, she added, remains of the deceased are scattered at the Sailors' Grave in memoriam and homage to all those who perished before. "It is a sacred place of respect."

Today, the gravesite is maintained by a group of neighboring residents: the Monteros, Walt and Denise Walthour, Walter Daggett, John Parks, Jay and Jan Barber, Lynette Scribner, Marcus Lundell and Bill Basiliko.

The group is currently working on identifying more homes built by Al Hansen, and they plan to design a plaque recognizing the local builder. Ten homes have been identified, including the Hansen-built homes each member lives in, Montero noted.

At a 2011 Seaside City Council meeting, Robin Montero and Gloria Linkey presented a proposal to the council for an information board to be erected at the gravesite with a narrative of the three sailors, Capt. Lewis and ocean safety information. The board was installed last summer.

Before last summer, only nautical flags were raised on the flagpole. Without continuous lighting, the American flag could not be raised without being lowered and removed at dusk every day, Montero said.

With the assistance of the city and Public Works Director Dale McDowell, the flagpole was upgraded with an LED light and the nautical flags were replaced with an American flag.

Steve Wright, president of the Seaside Museum & Historical Society, concluded the evening by putting the year 1865 into perspective. April of 1865 held momentous impact: the American Civil War ended April 9; Abraham Lincoln was shot April 14 and died April 15; and John Wilkes Booth died April 26. **CW**