

MANY LAURELS WON BY REPORTER IN 30 YEARS

Leander Wells, Who Broke Into Newspaper Game in 1885, Credited With Exploits From Driving Out Gamblers to Escaping Political Intrigues.



L. H. Wells

leaders organized the famous East Portland Improvement Association. W. D. Fenton was president for the first year and after him came Whitney L. Boise. Mr. Wells was secretary for 12 years. Through the influence of this powerful organization the gulches and sloughs were filled and the central East Side virtually made over. It is doubtful if any body of men ever did so much for a section of Portland as the East Portland Improvement Association did for the East Side. Its labors put 30 people on the East Side in 1915 where there was only one in 1885. Mr. Wells is regarded by many as the father of Milwaukie. Without his help to William Shindler the movement for incorporation there has failed. He saw Albina come into existence in 1887 and go out of existence in 1891, attending the first and last meetings of its City Council. He was present at the beginning of municipal government in St. Johns and was close to the city fathers when Sellwood had government before it was merged with Portland. He would have been on the ground floor at Sunnyside and Montavilla if the movement for city government at those places had materialized.

After Portland, East Portland and Albina had voted to consolidate in 1891, Mr. Wells was instructed to watch the City Councils of the East Side cities in their last days. He was feared in Portland that East Portland and Albina would, before consolidation became effective in July, vote bonds and franchises that would burden the greater city. Both cities did, indeed, go well along to the limit, but their acts have not burdened anyone. Albina's boulevard system and Columbia Park are tributes to the farsightedness of the last city government of Albina.

Street railway franchises were especially desired in East Portland and the Council granted many of these in its last hours. The Council in one of its sessions tried to throw Wells off the scent by a pretended adjournment at 10 o'clock at night. The members did disperse, but reassembled at midnight and remained in session until the early morning hours. Mr. Wells was not fooled by the ruse, however. He got the news and published it fully, correctly and promptly.

Mr. Wells, after 30 years of work, is still the East Side man of The Oregonian. The Telegram and he dropped 24 years ago. His beat runs out to Gresham, which is nearer the West side now than Lone Fir Cemetery was in 1885. Long ago he discarded his faithful horse and took to the bicycle and the bicycle has in turn given way to the telephone and the streetcar. He now brings his copy to The Oregonian twice a day.

Thirty years ago he handed it to Captain Van Auker or Captain Robinson, at the foot of East Washington street, then L street, at 10 or 11 o'clock at night, and when the Stark-street ferry steamed over to the West Side the captain delivered it to The Oregonian business office at Front and Stark streets, whence it was shot up to the local room.

Record Begets Pride. Mr. Wells has every reason to be proud of his record of 30 years. No more loyal and faithful man than he ever worked for a newspaper. In all his years of service he never was staked a day until a few years back, and then the trouble was not serious. No matter how stormy the weather, he was on the job. He got the news, wrote it clearly, correctly and without coloring and got it into the paper. He never failed to reach the office with his report, be the contribution large or small.

To get to the office he has crossed the river in the river ferry boat, in the rowboat after midnight, on the bridge in streetcar or afoot and on the ice when the river was frozen over, but he always landed. No city editor ever had to worry on account of Leander Wells. Leander brought the news, not excuses for a fall-down.

No man ever controlled Wells, as witness his experience with the water jobbers who tried to wreck him. Neither attempts at physical violence nor threats of death ever awaked him from the right. He saw the straight path and followed it. His was a grand distinction of writing the news fairly and honestly and without fear or favor.

Mr. Wells is to be congratulated upon having completed 30 years of service so creditable to himself, to his newspaper, to the material welfare of the great East Side and to the glory of Greater Portland.

PIONEER MILLER, 89, DIES. A. J. Chapman, Native of England, Survived by Family of Eight. A. J. Chapman, one of Oregon's first millers, died Tuesday morning at the home of his daughter, near Alba, Or., at the age of 89 years. Death came suddenly and was due to old age.

Mr. Chapman was born in Devonshire, England, August 22, 1826. He left England at the age of 22 and a few years later married Miss Nancy Markwood, a native of Ohio. In 1855 he crossed the plains to Oregon, building a flour mill on the banks of the Oregon City and supplying flour for many of the large farms throughout the valley. Mr. Chapman's Oregon City mill was washed away by the flood and his wife barely escaped destruction in the flood. Later Mr. Chapman operated mills in different sections of Oregon and Washington and became well known throughout these two states.

He is survived by eight children: A. E. Chapman, Edward Chapman, D. W. Chapman, F. V. Chapman and Mrs. John Lightfoot, all living near Pendleton; Mrs. C. H. Horoman, of Centralia, Wash.; K. G. Chapman, of Tacoma, Wash.; Mrs. R. B. Gibson, of Eagle Creek, and Mrs. S. J. Eddy, of Portland.

ELECTIONS TO COST LESS. City Auditor Compiles Figures to Show Saving Under New Law. After this year elections are to cost the city, the county and the state considerably less than heretofore, according to figures compiled by City Auditor Barbur to show how the act passed by the State Legislature cutting off one judge on each election board will work out. It is shown that the law will save the expense of employing in Portland elections a total of 588 persons.

In the elections in Portland there are 293 precincts. Each has two election boards, each with six members. By cutting off one member on each board the total number of persons cut off will be 586. Each official receives \$3 a day and the two judges on the two boards to be eliminated are allowed \$150 for meals. This makes a total of \$750 paid out for these officials in the 293 precincts. In county and state elections the same rule will apply.

SPOKANE WILL PETITION. Repeat of Amendments to Initiative and Referendum Sought. SPOKANE, Wash., March 12.—(Special.)—Petitions calling for a repeal of the primary bill and a new initiative, referendum and recall enacted by the State Legislature will be in circulation here the first of next week. The petitions will be presented at Olympia within 10 days from the time of adjournment of the Legislature. Spokane backers of the proposed



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constitutional, and its decision was affirmed by the Supreme Court. The suit was brought to force the payment of premiums.

WORKMEN LAW RULING DUE. Constitutionality Is Issue Before Washington Supreme Court. OLYMPIA, Wash., March 12.—(Special.)—Before adjournment of the May term of the United States Supreme Court a decision will be handed down affecting the constitutionality of Washington's workmen's compensation act, according to Attorney-General Tanner, who is preparing the plaintiff's brief in the case of the state against the Mountain Timber Company, of Cowlitz County.

Death by Roadside Due to Heart. CENTRALIA, Wash., March 12.—(Special.)—Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Newell, who investigated the death of Albert Johnson, farmer of Ethel, who was found dead in a road near there Wednesday, pronounced death due to heart disease. The funeral was held at Ethel this morning. Mr. Johnson, who was 70 years old, was walking from the Ethel store with his wife to their home, a mile distant. He grew faint and Mrs. Johnson suggested that he sit down and rest while she went home and started a fire. His wife to their home, a mile later by Walter Brim.

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BY HENRY E. REED. THIRTY years ago, my beat on the old Portland Daily News included the East Side. I was expected to cover as regularly as possible all the territory from Hawthorn avenue northward to the Portland Flouring Mill and wind up with a day's work on the West Side. The late S. Bullock was The Oregonian and Telegram reporter in the same district.

One night in March, 1885, after I had turned in my day's copy, my chief editor, Jack Egan, told me that Mr. Bullock was going into other business and would be succeeded in the newspaper work by a new man. "His name," said Mr. Egan, "is Leander Wells. The Oregonian and Telegram are going in strong for East Portland news, and Wells is going to give all his time to the work."

And so, on March 7, 1885, Leander Wells broke into the newspaper writing game as the East Portland reporter of The Oregonian and Telegram. His was a district of wonderful distances and some 4500 people scattered far and wide. In those days, the East Side was in the imagination of most people, a long distance from the real Portland on the West Side. So true was this that Mr. Wells as the East Portland "correspondent," as if he lived at Salem or Astoria, and sent in his copy by mail.

Population Only 25,000. In going back over Mr. Wells' 30 years of active and continuous service on The Oregonian it may interest many people to give an insight into Portland and its environs 30 years ago. The real Portland then was that part of the city west of the Willamette River, not including territory annexed at a later date.

The population did not exceed 25,000, probably not 23,500. Business strain and depression which followed the collapse of the Villard boom, were still severe, but the sky had begun to clear and the people were hopeful. First street was made ready for retail business, although there were no stores on Front street. Second street was Chinatown, while Morrison and Washington streets were of minor importance. The Esmond was the hotel of the town, and the principal place of amusement was the old New Market Theater, on First street.

After the theater the average Portlander who was satisfied with oysters at Keith's at 25 to 50 cents a tray. The hangout for Republican politicians was Joe Meyer's cigar store, on First street, near Alder, while the Democrats congregated at the Holton House, on Fourth and Alder.

Street Lighting Fairly Electric. Street lighting was partly by electricity, partly by gas and partly by coal oil. Bull Run water was in the distance. Horse-drawn streetcars ran on First, Washington, Third and a few other streets. There were about 400 telephones, with little pressure on the service after 9 o'clock at night. There were no bridges across the Willamette.

Communication with the East Side of the river was entirely by boat. Speedy little boats ran to Sellwood and Albina. There were four ferries—the Jefferson street, which shut down at 3 P. M.; the Stark street, which ran its boat until about midnight, and after that the rowboat; the railroad ferry at Sanders street, which stopped at 6 P. M., except when the trains were late, and the Lower Albina ferry, which stopped in the early evening.

The East Side, to which Mr. Wells was assigned to collect news, had just about begun to grow in 1885, but was not taken seriously except by a few enthusiasts. Any man who would have predicted 30 years ago that the East Side would ever outrank the West Side in population as it does today would have been pronounced crazy. East Portland, incorporated as a city in 1870, was the main center of population south of it, with the exception of Sellwood, and north of it was Albina. Both of these places were incorporated in 1887.

St. Johns was name, while Sunnyside had not been heard of. East Portland was an uninviting place. It was full of wooden bridges, gulches, and running over low, marshy ground, though east of Grand avenue there were many comfortable homes. Poor streets were poorly lighted with oil lamps. Street railways and telephones East Portland did not exist. But it had a separate city government and was young and ambitious.

Mr. Wells Only Left in Game. When Mr. Wells started news gathering he had as co-workers on the various daily papers the following: Newman J. Levinson, E. L. Coldwell, Allen B. Slauson, Bailey Avery and Oscar I. Clay on The Oregonian; John M. Baltimore and Otto Greenwood on The Evening Telegram; John Milliken on The Standard; and John G. Egan and the writer on the Daily News.

Coldwell, Avery, Clay, Baltimore, Greenwood and Egan are now dead, and all the others have retired from the newspaper work. It will not be practicable in limited space to follow Mr. Wells in detail since 1885, so a few incidents of his career stated without regard to chronological order will suffice. The young reporter when he started to work got what the old city editors used to term a roving commission. That is to say, travel as far as you like and as long as you like and get news where you find it. Leander's first act was to buy a horse and saddle. In no other way could the East Side have been covered 30 years ago and long afterward except on horseback.

Leander and that horse made East Portland famous. The horse always took Leander where he wanted to go, but did not always come home with him. Frolicsome boys sometimes turned the horse loose while Leander was reporting a meeting and the reporter had to make his way to town afoot. Once the horse was driven away while Leander was reporting a commencement at Columbia University, where Columbia University now is, and Wells had to walk to town. He got his story into the paper, just the same.

Gamblers Take to East Side. Along about 1889 the big Portland on the West Side had a spasm of virtue and drove out the gamblers, who immediately flocked to East Portland. The main headquarters of the gamblers on the East Side was in a large wooden building near the northeast corner of East Water and East Morrison streets. Here they had a combined saloon and gambling hall.

Wells took to the gamblers through The Oregonian and aroused public sentiment against them. Then the gamblers thought it would be a good idea to give Wells a beating, so they invited him on some pretext or other to visit the place. Wells accepted the invitation and went to the gambling-house, carrying in his hip pocket a trusty six-shooter.

As soon as Wells stepped inside he was told that a sick man in a rear room wished to see him. Wells said he would not go. At this a big gambler stepped toward Wells and told him that he would have to go back to see the sick man whether he liked it or not. Wells whipped out his revolver, covering the gambler and his friends, said quietly: "Gentlemen, please open up a path between you. I am going out that front door and I do not desire anyone to stop me."

Wells got out of the place without further trouble. He kept after the gamblers and soon drove them out of East Portland.

The things sent Wells a menacing letter with death's head and cross-bones, and threatened to kill him if he ever showed up in Albina again. Wells kept at his work and kept after the thugs and cleaned them out of Albina.

Frame-Up Evaded, Too. Leander Wells not only defied the attempted violence of the East Portland gamblers and the death threats of the Albina thugs, but he came triumphantly through a frame-up by certain unscrupulous politicians to wreck him or send him to the penitentiary. As East Portland grew it developed municipal problems, and one of these was a water supply. There were two contenders in the field, the old company, for which Mr. Wells had at one time worked, and a new enterprise.

To each of them Mr. Wells said: "I will give you a fair and even break in what I write and will not play favorites. However, if either of your employers did not want a square deal, they wanted the best of it, and when they saw that they could not control Wells or his writings they went out to get him."

Although Wells had been out of their employ for two years they spent \$700 to make their books say that Leander had taken \$1700 of their money.

Then they went to the grand jury and asked for an indictment against Leander. The grand jury immediately saw through the game and threw the charges into the waste basket. Leander's accusers long ago left Portland.

Mr. Wells has been a constructor on his own account as well as a narrator of events. Fifteen years ago the great consolidation of the cities, Mr. Wells depression of 1893. It was plentifully supplied with good carlines and has adjusted itself to the results of the consolidation of the cities. Mr. Wells thought the time opportune for a forward movement, so he and a few other