



Contact your elected officials

Cottage Grove City Hall:
942-5501. www.cottagegrove.org/

Cottage Grove Mayor Tom
Munroe: 942-5501.

Cottage Grove City Councilors:

Mike Fleck, At Large:
942-7302

Heather Murphy, At Large:
942-3444

Jake Boone, Ward 1:
653-7413

Jeff Gowing, Ward 2:
942-1900

Garland Burback, Ward 3:
942-4800

Lane County Commissioners:

Faye Stewart, East Lane
Commissioner
Lane County Public Service
Building
125 East 8th Street
Eugene, OR 97401
Phone: (541) 682-4203
Fax: (541) 682-4616

Oregon State House of Representatives:

Rep. Cedric Hayden (REP)
District: 007
900 Court Street NE
Suite H-288
Salem, OR 97301
Phone: (503) 986-1407
Fax: (503) 986-1130
Email: rep.cedrichayden@state.or.us

Oregon State Senate:

Sen. Floyd Prozanski (DEM)
District: 004
900 Court Street NE
Suite S-319
Salem, OR 97301-0001
Phone: (503) 986-1704
Fax: (503) 986-1080
Email: sen.floydprozanski@state.or.us

Governor:

John Kitzhaber
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047
Phone: (503) 378-4582
Fax: (503) 378-6827

United States House of Representatives:

Rep. Peter A. DeFazio (DEM)

District: 004
United States House of
Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Of-
fice Building
Washington, DC 20515-
0001
Phone: (202) 225-6416
Fax: (202) 225-0032
Email: <http://www.house.gov/formdefazio/contact.html>

United States Senate:

Sen. Ron Wyden (DEM)
District: OS1
United States Senate
230 Dirksen Senate Office
Building
Washington, DC 20510-
0001
Phone: (202) 224-5244
Fax: (202) 228-2717
Email: <http://wyden.senate.gov/contact/>

Sen. Jeff Merkley (DEM)
District: OS2
United States Senate
404 Russell Senate Office
Building
Washington, DC 20510-
0001
Phone: (202) 224-3753
Fax: (202) 228-3997
Email: <http://jmerkley.senate.gov/webform.htm>



Offbeat Oregon History

Sudden windstorm caught steamship at worst possible moment

BY FINN J.D. JOHN
For the Sentinel

It was just past midnight on Jan. 12, 1936. Gale warning pennants were flying in Astoria, warning ships that they could expect winds of 39 to 54 miles per hour as they crossed the bar — rough weather, but not nearly rough enough to stop the big ships as they came and went, and they'd been doing so all day.

So there was no particular reason why Captain Edgar L. Yates, the seasoned and competent skipper of the 410-foot, 8,800-ton steamship Iowa, should hesitate. He held a bar pilot's license, so there was no need to wait for a pilot to come aboard.

So across the bar the Iowa steamed ... and the shipwreck that ensued would be the worst loss of life on the Columbia River bar since the Civil War.

From far away, the Iowa looked like a

very unlikely candidate for destruction on the bar. It was a full-size modern freighter, and a fairly new one at that. The ship had been built in 1920 for the U.S. Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation. It was one of 18 similar ships built by Western Pipe and Steel Co. of San Francisco.

But the ship had an Achilles heel, as it turned out: its drive system. For one thing, it was somewhat underpowered for its size; its triple-expansion steam engine delivered just 2,800 horsepower, giving it a top speed of just 10.5 knots. But more importantly, it was driven with just one screw (propeller). That meant if the Iowa were to lose her rudder for any reason — or even to lose headway through the water — there would be no way to steer.

This appears to be what happened on that fateful early morning. Because almost the instant the Iowa crossed the bar into the open ocean, the rough-but-

manageable gale weather freshened until it was an actual hurricane: sustained 80-mph winds screaming out of the south-southwest, pushing the Iowa relentlessly back, back toward the long, hungry tongue of sand that jutted out just beneath the waves on the north side of the river — the dreaded shoals of Peacock Spit.

The wind put Capt. Yates in an impossible position. He could try to turn the ship around and head back into port. But this would involve turning the ship momentarily broadside to the colossal seas that were now surging against it. A rollover would be the likely result of that. His best choice seemed to be to ring for as much power as the ship could handle and charge into the teeth of the gale, taking the brutal seas on the bows.

But by 3:45 a.m., it was clear that the hapless freighter would not make it. A distress call went out — the last the ship would ever make — that she was unmanageable and adrift and moving toward Peacock Spit, just three miles off the shore — far too close for a ship that drew 22 feet in saltwater.

At about 4:30 a.m., the assistant keeper of the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse spotted the stricken ves-

sel, which was still drifting helplessly at that point. The lighthouse crew watched in sober, horrified silence as the big freighter was driven into the sandy shoals, three miles from shore.

Assistant meteorologist Charles Hubbard was watching through a telescope as the waves now started pounding the big steel ship mercilessly, and with visible effect. Pieces soon started breaking off. As Hubbard watched, a crew member exited the pilothouse and ran for the foremast, obviously in a desperate attempt to get up into the rigging and out of reach of the seas; but before he could reach the mast, another massive comber overwhelmed him and swept him into the sea. A few minutes later, the pilothouse he'd just left was torn from the ship and hurled overboard, along with the funnel and bridge.

"Finally, after being a defenseless target to several more merciless combers, the Iowa gave a violent heave, bobbed a trifle out of the water like a bouncing cork, and then slipped silently and swiftly out of sight," the Portland Morning Oregonian's Don McLeod recounted in the next day's edition. "Only the mast remained above the water."

It appeared that the wave action had carved out a big hollow in the sand just

inland from where the freighter had struck, and now the waves had pushed the ship into it. There could no longer be any doubt as to the fate of the 34 crew members. No one could swim three miles in seas like that, even if the water weren't 48 degrees.

Throughout this time, the Coast Guard lifesavers had been trying desperately to get close enough to the wreck to help. They had sprung into action as soon as they got the SOS, a few hours before dawn, with the 165-foot cutter Onondaga. It took an hour or two for the Onondaga's boilers to heat up, but she was soon steaming out across the bar as fast as she dared.

The trouble was, it was obvious from the start that she wasn't going to be able to do much of anything. The storm was so violent it actually tore two of the lifeboats off the cutter. She finally arrived at the scene of the wreck around noon, a good eight hours after the hapless freighter had drifted onto the sands, but could do nothing but gather up sailors floating in the sea — all of whom turned out to be dead, drowned or killed by hypothermia in the chilly waters.

Please see **OFFBEAT**, Page 5A

You say tomato—We say Lycopene, a protective carotenoid

BY JOEL FUHRMAN, MD
For the Sentinel

Carotenoids are a family of cover six hundred phytochemicals, including alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein and zeaxanthin. Ca-



rotenoids are abundant in green and yellow-orange vegetables and fruits and help to defend the body's tissues against oxidative damage, which is a natural byproduct of our metabolic processes; oxidative damage from free radicals contributes to chronic diseases and aging.

Lycopene is the signature carotenoid of the tomato. The lycopene in the American diet is 85 percent derived from tomatoes. Lycopene is found cir-

culating in the blood and also concentrates in the male reproductive system, hence its protective effects against prostate cancer. In the skin, lycopene helps to prevent UV damage from the sun, protecting against skin cancer. Lycopene is known for its anti-cancer properties, but did you know that lycopene has also been intensively studied for its beneficial cardiovascular effects?

Many observational studies have made a connection between higher blood lycopene and lower risk of heart attack. For example, a study in men found that low serum lycopene was associated with increased plaque in the carotid artery and triple the risk of cardiovascular events compared to higher levels. In a separate study, women were split into four groups (quartiles) according to their blood lycopene levels; women in the top three quartiles were 50 percent less likely to have cardiovascular disease compared to the lowest quartile.

A 2004 analysis from the Physicians' Health Study data found a 39 percent decrease in stroke risk in men with the high-

est blood levels of lycopene. Data from an ongoing study in Finland has strengthened these findings with similar results. One-thousand men had their blood carotenoid levels tested and were followed for 12 years. Those with the highest lycopene levels had the lowest risk of stroke — they were 55 percent less likely to have a stroke than those with the lowest lycopene levels. Previous data from this same group of men found that higher lycopene levels were associated with lower risk of heart attack as well. A meta-analysis of 12 trials also found that daily supplemental tomato products (approximately 1 cup of tomato juice or 3-4 tbsp. of tomato paste) reduced LDL cholesterol by 10 percent — this effect is comparable to low doses of statin drugs (with no risk of side effects, of course).

Of course, lycopene is not the only nutrient in tomatoes — tomatoes are also rich in vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and flavonol antioxidants, just to name a few. Single antioxidants usually don't exert their protective effects alone; we learned this lesson from clinical trials of

beta-carotene, vitamin C, and vitamin E supplements, which did not reduce cardiovascular disease risk. It is the interactions between phytochemicals in the complex synergistic network contained in plant foods that is responsible for their health effects, and this is something that we cannot replicate in a pill. Out of all the common dietary carotenoids, lycopene has the most potent antioxidant power, but combinations of carotenoids are even more effective than any single carotenoid — they work synergistically. Blood lycopene, as used in many of these studies, is simply a marker for high tomato product intake; similarly high alpha-carotene and beta-carotene levels are markers of high green and yellow-orange fruit and vegetable intake. Colorful fruits and vegetables provide significant protection.

In a given year, a typical American will eat about 92 pounds of tomatoes. Enjoy those 92 pounds and even add some more! Add fresh, juicy raw tomatoes to your salad, diced or unsulphured sun-dried tomatoes to soups, and enjoy homemade tomato sauces and soups. Be

mindful of the sodium content of ketchup and other tomato products — choose the low sodium or no-salt-added versions. No salt added, unsulphured dried tomatoes are also great. Diced and crushed tomatoes in glass jars are preferable to those in cans, to avoid the endocrine disruptor BPA. Also keep in mind that carotenoids are absorbed best when accompanied by healthy fats — for example, in a salad with a seed or nut-based dressing. Lycopene is also more absorbable when tomatoes are cooked — one cup of tomato sauce contains about ten times the lycopene as a cup of raw, chopped tomatoes — so enjoy a variety of both raw and cooked tomatoes in your daily diet.

Dr. Fuhrman is a #1 New York Times best-selling author and a family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine. Visit his informative website at DrFuhrman.com. Submit your questions and comments about this column directly to newsquestions@drfuhrman.com. The full reference list for this article can be found at DrFuhrman.com.

Cottage Grove Sentinel

116 N. Sixth Street · P.O. Box 35 · Cottage Grove, OR 97424

ADMINISTRATION:
JOHN BARTLETT, Regional Publisher.....942-3325
GARY MANLY, General Manager.....942-3325 Ext. 207
• publisher@cgsentinel.com

ROBIN REISER, Sales Representative.....942-3325
Ext. 203 • robin@cgsentinel.com
E. SCURRY ELLIS, Sales Representative.....942-3325
Ext. 213 • esellis@cgsentinel.com
MELISSA WARE, Inside Sales Representative.....
942-3325 Ext. 203

NEWS DEPARTMENT:
JON STINNETT, Editor.....942-3325
Ext. 212 • cgnews@cgsentinel.com

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If you would like to submit an opinion piece, Another View must be no longer than 600 words.

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