



OPINION

Offbeat Oregon History

Fish wheels a legacy of when Columbia swarmed with salmon

BY FINN J.D. JOHN
For the Sentinel

If you get out on the Columbia River in the more inland reaches – past the Beacon Rock area – you’ll often notice that there are lines of rotting, weather-beaten posts leading out into the waters.

These posts are all that’s left of what was once one of Oregon’s biggest industries: Salmon canning. Specifically, they are the mortal remains of riverside canneries with their adjacent fish wheels.

Your basic fish wheel is a diabolically simple device. It’s like a big water wheel with scoops instead of paddles. As a salmon swims upstream toward its spawning grounds, it encounters the scoop, which is moving the opposite direction. The scoop picks the fish up out of the water, and at the top of its turn rotates past a chute that allows the fish to slide out of the basket and drop into a net-walled pen or holding tank, ready for processing.

The story of fish wheels on the Columbia is an old and complicated one. Many people believe their use is responsible for the fact that the Columbia, once renowned for having such a massive annual salmon migration that folks wondered if they might walk across the river on their backs, now has comparatively few. This isn’t really true; the real destroyer of the big salmon runs was Grand Coulee Dam, up in Washington, built without fish ladders, which cut off returning salmon’s access to close to half of the river’s spawning grounds.

But the fish wheels certainly didn’t help. By the time the dam project delivered the coup de grace in 1934, the Columbia River salmon fishery was on its knees, hammered almost to the point of full collapse by 50 years of enthusiastic overfishing by the fish-wheel operators, competing with growing swarms of gill-netters on the lower stretches of the river.

The first fish wheel and cannery was built on the river in 1866 by Hapgood, Hume & Co. It was a colossal success, both in its production of fish and in the enthusiasm with which the canned product was received in the market. After that, the canneries came thick and fast to the banks of the river with pile drivers and construction crews, and soon the shallow stretches of the upper river toward the Cascade Rapids virtually bristled with them. By 1883, the market was essentially saturated with canned salmon, and 39 fish wheel-canneries were run-

ning on the upper river, scooping out fish by the millions. In that year, 42 million pounds of salmon meat was canned up and shipped out by the fish-wheel operators. And it wasn’t an unusual year. Even as late as 1906, the catch was still phenomenally strong, although dwindling; in fact, one particular cannery, just north of The Dalles, pumped out almost half a million pounds of canned salmon all by itself that year.

Meanwhile, though, a vast fleet of gillnet fishermen had gone into business on the broad, quiet waters of the lower river near Astoria. The gill-netters had been there before the first fish wheel went in; a Maine fisherman named Thomas Hodgkins made the first net and went into business out of the town of Oak Point, near Clatskanie. Others, noticing his success, followed, and soon the river was becoming increasingly thick with them.

No gill-netter could make the same dent in the fish run that a wheel by Cascade Locks could make, of course; but they made up for it in sheer numbers. The fleet soon numbered in the hundreds, possibly thousands.

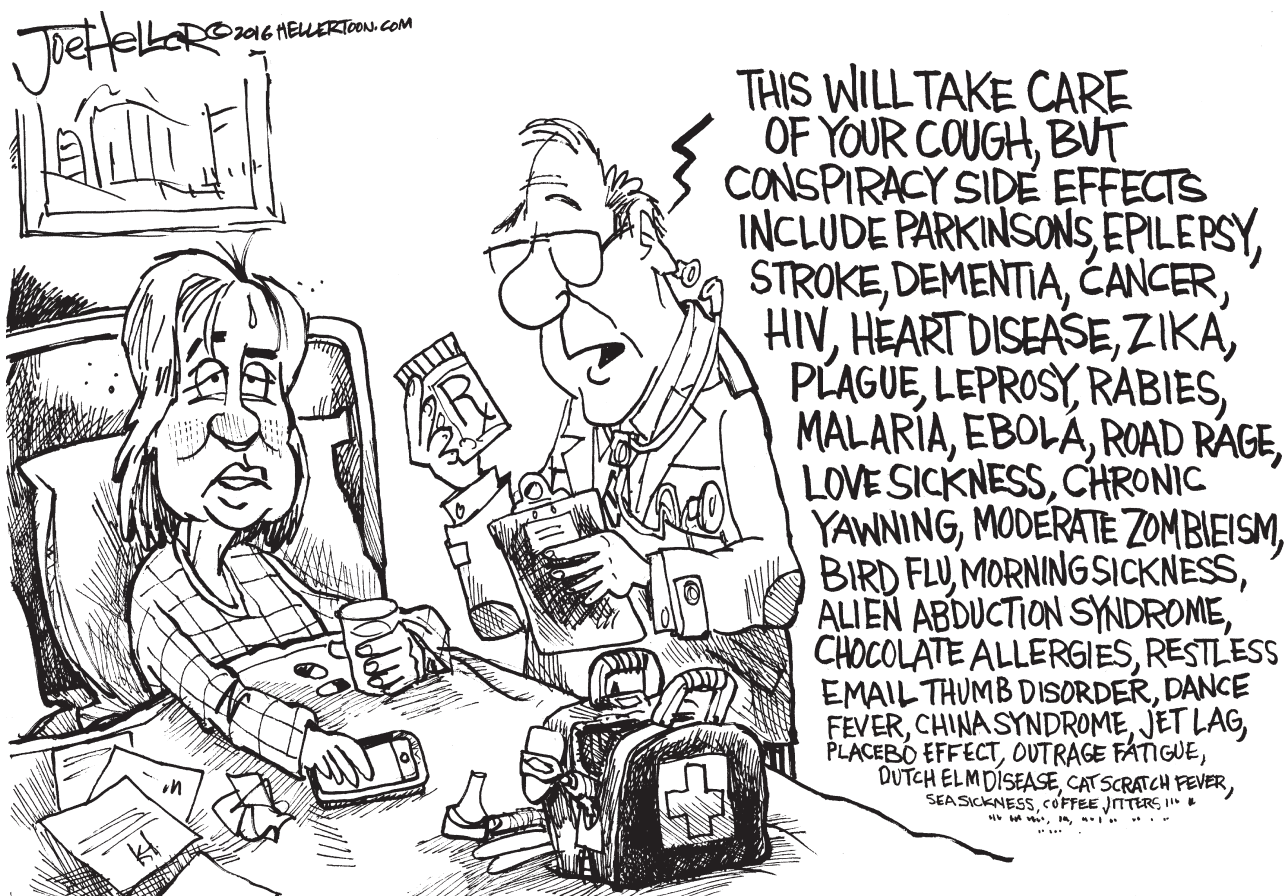
So no one was surprised when the numbers of fish being landed started to decline, because everyone involved had someone they could comfortably blame for it. The businessmen running the fish wheels raged at the swarms of small-fry gill-netters hogging all the fish before they could even get up the river to their wheels; the weather-beaten fishermen groused in their taverns in Astoria and Brownsmead and Cathlamet and Altoona about the fat-cat cannery owners snatching up so many fish that none were left to spawn.

The truth of the matter, of course, was that both parties were right.

The people of Oregon seemed to have felt that way when, in 1908, they voted to ban both practices. The gill-netters that year had used the brand-new Initiative and Referendum system to propose that fish wheels be banned from the river. Independently, the fish-wheel operators had gotten a proposal on the ballot that would have essentially banned gillnet fishing.

Both initiatives were passed by a public that was growing increasingly alarmed at the prospect of the salmon being totally fished out. And both initiatives – in a development that was to become very familiar to the sponsors of initiative petitions in subsequent years – were blocked from enforce-

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bike Event — Flagger Smaller flyers please

Saturday’s bike event (Cycle the Lakes) went really well. No bikers were hurt on their long trek or got hit crossing the streets! And that’s why we were there! Posting and signage was good. The majority of motorists would stop, though some did not. The latter seemed to focus on the 30 mph and not the crosswalk. I was on 10th and Main — a very busy area. I had a great time and the bikers were happy. Thank you all.

P.S. Sixth Street and others are still bad!

Ike Shepherd
Cottage Grove

As KNND’s Community Calendar Coordinator I’m noticing more groups in town are using a larger size format to promote events on community information bulletin boards and in the windows of businesses. We are blessed to live in a small town that has SO much going on each week. As the editor of T.E.A.M.-Cottage Grove’s weekly community e-newsletter, Around The Grove, We distribute a limited number of hard copies around town and most receive it via email. I’m delighted that more local organizations are now promoting their events at least two weeks before it happens. Most businesses are happy to display this information. KNND has dedicated two of our three large windows for posting community

information and I maintain it each week to keep it all current. With an increasing number of the posters, rather than the traditional 8.5 x 11 flyers, we simply don’t have room to put up the new posters if the current posters are still up.

These larger posters are a bigger challenge for all the smaller bulletin boards around town and for business owners that want to see out of their front windows.

My request is a simple one to local organizations promoting events in the future. Please consider using the flyer vs poster format in fairness to other events happening around the same time that must share the same space. Thanks!

Cindy Weeldreyer
Cottage Grove

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Junk food may limit children’s intelligence and learning ability

BY JOEL FUHRMAN, MD
For the Sentinel

There is a clear impact of nutrition on the potential development of Alzheimer’s



er’s disease and other late-life cognitive disorders. Green vegetables, berries and other plant foods reduce risk, whereas animal products and processed foods increase risk. However, the damaging effects of unhealthy foods on the brain occur throughout life. Research now suggests that the typical American childhood diet including burgers, pasta, pizza, chicken

nuggets, French fries, processed sweetened cold cereals, sweets and soda negatively affects school performance and learning. Overall math performance in the U.S. lags far behind many other developed nations, and it is likely that the nutrient-poor American diet is a significant contributing factor.

We as parents are strongly committed to supporting our children’s academic achievement. We want the best for our children, and we take an active interest in their schooling; we do everything we can to make sure that they will be well educated and able to compete as working adults in our increasingly technological world. However, how many parents think about the impact of the foods they give their children on their academic performance?

Early childhood: Parents must give their children’s brains the right raw materials with which to learn – and start early. Breast milk provides a DHA-rich foundation for a healthy brain, and when solid

foods are added, their nutritional quality is of paramount importance for the brain’s continued development. Several studies have now found that dietary patterns in early childhood affect IQ scores years later. In one study, greater consumption of fruits and vegetables upon introducing solid foods was associated with higher IQ and better memory skills at four years of age. Similarly, in another study, children who regularly ate cookies, chocolate, other sweets, soda and chips during the first two years of life showed decreased IQ at age eight compared to children who did not eat these foods. Nutrition during this formative period has a meaningful long-term effect, providing building blocks to construct the growing brain. The brain is highly susceptible to oxidative stress, so a healthful, antioxidant-rich diet is especially beneficial for the brain and is likely involved in this link between natural plant foods and higher IQ scores.

Teenage years:

Young children who are fed processed, nutrient-poor foods are likely to become unhealthy teenagers and eventually unhealthy adults. Now 23 percent of teens in the U.S. are pre-diabetic or diabetic, 22 percent have high or borderline high LDL cholesterol levels, and 14 percent have hypertension or prehypertension.

A recent study tested cognitive abilities and performed brain MRIs on teens with and without metabolic syndrome, a combination of at least three diet-related metabolic abnormalities among a list including insulin resistance, high triglycerides and hypertension. The teens with metabolic syndrome had lower spelling and math scores, lower IQs and reduced attention span. Their brain MRIs showed a smaller hippocampus, especially in those with insulin resistance – extremely important since the hippocampus is a part of the brain involved in learning new information. This means that our American obesity promoting diet actually can cause parts of the brain to shrink. The researchers concluded that insulin resistance and other components of the metabolic syndrome, as a result of a poor diet, may impair teenagers’ academic performance, and maybe even their learning abilities throughout their lifetime.

The time to feed your children healthfully is now. A diet rich in greens, berries, other fruits and vegetables, beans, nuts and seeds is the only way to ensure that children get the array of phytochemicals, antioxidants, fatty acids and other micronutrients to adequately supply their growing and constantly learning brains. Junk food is not for kids.

Dr. Fuhrman is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Eat to Live* and *Super Immunity*, and a board certified family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine. Visit his informative website at DrFuhrman.com.

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Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary.

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