



Offbeat Oregon History: Cold snaps and ice rinks

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

As late spring warms up an exhausted and weatherbeaten Willamette Valley, Oregonians are looking back on one of the grimmest winters they can remember.

But memorable though it was, the winter of 2016-17 — with its month-long cold snap and torrential rains — wasn't that much of an outlier.

The worst cold snap in living memory is probably the winter of 1948-49. That's the winter thousands of Oregonians learned to ice skate ... on Cottage Grove Reservoir.

The ugly weather started on Dec. 12 in 1948, according to back issues of the Cottage Grove Sentinel. For more than a month and a half, the temperature never got out of the teens, and stayed in single digits much of the time. By the last day of January, the cold snap had broken records for both length and depth; the mercury bottomed out at one degree below zero on Jan. 24.

By that time, someone had discovered that the six- to 10-inch sheet of ice covering Cottage Grove Reservoir from shore to shore was thick enough to support foot traffic. On Jan. 10, the day the mercury plunged to seven degrees, and someone went down to the lake with a pair of ice skates.

Soon skaters of all ages had hit the lake. On one day, the Sentinel reports, a crowd of 1,500 was down there, ranging in age from toddlers to 91-year-old lumber patriarch A.L. Woodard — who, according to the newspaper, "took off across the lake where it was a mile from shore to shore and returned as though it were a daily habit."

It wasn't as if there was anything else to do. Cottage Grove's timber-based economy had skidded to a halt when the temperatures dropped below 10 degrees. Mills in Western Oregon just weren't built to work in such conditions; and log trucks and skid loaders struggled to stay on the icy, snowy logging roads and landings.

Of course, ice skates were not a regularly stocked item in Cottage Grove's sporting-goods establishments. No problem; roller skates were, and most Cottage Grove youths had a pair that were used in warmer weather. It wasn't much trouble for the local millwrights and fabricators to remove the wheels, sand a couple old files smooth, and weld them to the skates' trucks.

The Sentinel reports that the cold snap wasn't the coldest — Christmas Eve on 1924 had seen seven degrees below zero; and it wasn't the most snow: that honor went to the 15 inches that fell on Feb. 24, 1917. But no cold snap, before or since, has approached this one's depth and duration.

There have been some bad ones since then, of course. The cold

snap of 1972 saw temperatures at 12 degrees below zero on Dec. 8, 1972, at the Eugene Airport — which is the coldest weather ever recorded there. And more recently, the cold snap of December 2013 got well down into the single digits.

Of course, when temperatures in the valley get down that low, pipes burst and engine blocks freeze; but there was one cold snap that did more than just that.

The night of Jan. 16, 1943, was a bitter cold one — around 10 degrees. It was cold enough that residents of the Laurelhurst neighborhood in southeast Portland were able to ice-skate on the shallow pond there in the park. The brand-new 523-foot, 16,000-ton steam tanker S.S. Schenectady, which had just rolled out of the Kaiser shipyard in Portland a week or two before, was docked there on the river, building steam to put out to sea.

And then, around 11 p.m., with a crack that one bystander said actually shook the ground, the huge ship suddenly broke in half, folding like a jackknife. The bow and stern plunged down into the water and wedged into the muddy bottom of the lagoon, pushing the middle of the ship high into the air. And the 30 crew members, who had been preparing the big ship to cast off and head out to sea, surely thought they were about to die.

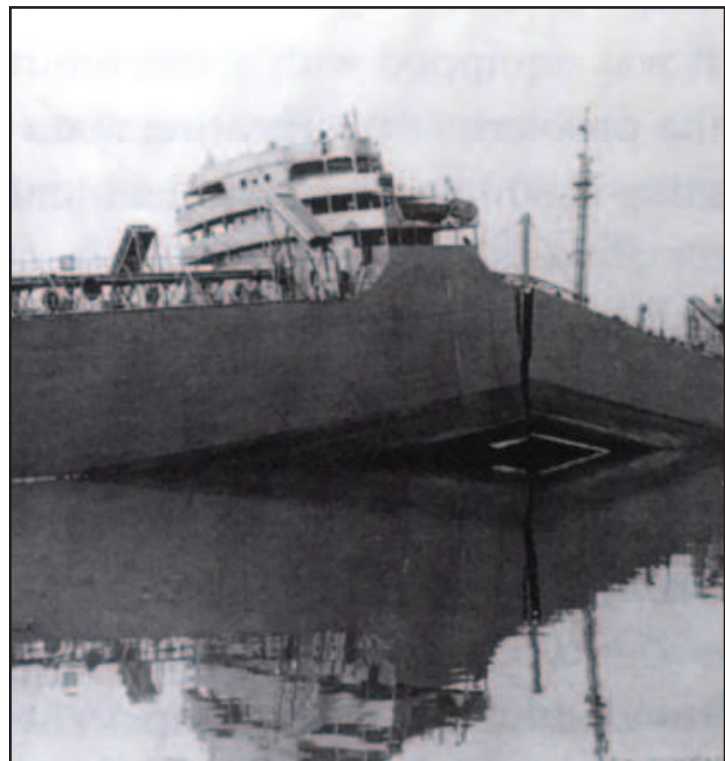
Luckily, the water beneath the dock was shallow — barely deep enough to float the ship, which drew up to 30 feet depending on its load. The crew members were easily able to get up on deck. In the rush to escape, the third mate hurt his ankle, but that was the only injury.

This being war time, suspicions naturally turned to sabotage. But authorities quickly ruled that out. Eventually it was determined that flaws in some of the steel used to build the ship had made it brittle, and the temperature differential between the 10-degree air and the 40-degree river water had been enough to start a crack, which had raced around the ship from one side to the other, splitting the big vessel in half.

Because of where the ship was, the repair was relatively simple. The ship was simply sunk the rest of the way, so that it rested entirely on the bottom of the shallow lagoon; this naturally forced the crack closed as the weight of the ship straightened her out. Then scabs were welded across the crack, and she was refloated, and limped back upriver to the shipyard. A few weeks later, good as new, she was heading out to sea with a load of gasoline to power the American war machine.

We can only imagine how apprehensive the sailors assigned to the Schenectady's crew must have been as the big, freshly patched ship cleared the Columbia Bar and headed out into the deep blue

sea. But they did have one consolation: They were headed for the Pacific Theater ... so at least it would be nice and warm.



Dr. Fuhrman: Soda depletes your body's calcium

The average American drinks 216 liters of soda each year. Soda drinking overall is associated with lower bone mineral density in women and children, and one recent study focused specifically on the effects of diet soda on bone health. The authors commented that this research was sparked by the observation that diet soda

drinking behaviors are often different than regular soda drinking behaviors — women often use diet sodas in an effort to avoid weight gain — either to stave off hunger between meals or as a replacement for calorie-containing beverages. Many women drink over 20 diet sodas per week.

These researchers discovered that parathyroid hormone concentrations rise strongly following diet soda consumption — this is troublesome because PTH acts to increase blood calcium by stimulating bone breakdown, and as a result calcium is released from bone. What happened to the calcium after it was released? Women were given 24 ounces of either diet cola or water on two consecutive days, and urinary calcium content was measured for three hours. Although caffeine is known to increase calcium excretion and promote bone loss, caffeine is likely not the only bone-harming ingredient in sodas. A 2006 study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found consistent associations between low bone mineral density and caffeinated and non-caffeinated cola, but not other carbonated beverages. One major difference between the two

is the phosphoric acid in colas, absent from most other carbonated beverages.

In the Western diet, phosphorus is commonly consumed in excess — at about three times the recommended levels, whereas dietary calcium is consumed much less. Although phosphorus is an important component of bone mineral, a high dietary ratio of phosphorus to calcium can increase PTH, which stimulates bone breakdown. Studies in which women were given increasing quantities of dietary phosphorus found increases in markers of bone breakdown and decreases in markers of bone formation. Therefore, it is likely that the phosphorus content of colas is what triggers calcium loss.

Diet soda is simply water with artificial sweeteners and other chemical additives. The safety of many artificial sweeteners is questionable, and their intense sweetness disrupts the body's natural connection between taste and nourishment, promoting weight gain. Diet sodas don't just weaken our bones; they are linked to kidney dysfunction and promote obesity and other common medical problems — there is nothing healthy about diet sodas.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos to The Cottage Grove Police Department for their continuing dedication to keep this community very safe and build trust within the local area. These folks potentially put their lives' on the line every day. Next chance, shake a cop's hand; it'll make you feel good.

Respectfully submitted,
M. Gotcher
Cottage Grove

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