

Offbeat Oregon History: Multnomah Falls

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

William C. Griswold surely thought he had a fortune in timber on his hands.

Griswold had homesteaded a heavily timbered 142-acre plot of land high on a bluff overlooking the Columbia river. And, even better, there was a large creek running through the property, for powering flumes to take the logs to the river below — where they could be easily and cheaply floated downstream for sale to one of the many sawmills there.

There was a problem with his plan, though. He quickly found out that the most powerful people in Portland were dead set against his plan, and were pulling every string they could reach to stop him.

The reason? Scenic beauty. Specifically, the creek that ran through Griswold’s property was the creek that runs over Multnomah Falls — at 620 feet, the tallest waterfall in Oregon, and already widely known as the “jewel of the Gorge.”

In Oregon at the turn of the 20th century, scenic beauty was not usually a highly prized commodity. But Multnomah Falls was an exception. This was partly because of its unusual character; but the main reason was because it was making some very powerful people a whole lot of money.

As the city of Portland had grown larger and more squal-

id over the years, the residents there had started looking for nearby places to get away and drink in the scenic beauty of nature. One of their favorite Sunday afternoon pastimes was to board a steamboat or excursion train and travel east on the Columbia River Gorge, drinking in the scenery and maybe stopping for a picnic lunch or a short nature walk along the way. And the highlight of that short excursion was Multnomah Falls.

This had been going on since the late 1870s. By the early 1880s was a steamboat dock in the river, and a stopping spot for outbound excursion trains. A well-developed trail led from those points up to the falls, crossing a wooden bridge between the upper and lower falls along the way.

Would those upper-middle-class Portlanders don their Sunday best and board an excursion train for a trip to picnic in a stump-strewn field by an almost-empty streambed, noshing on their lunches to the rumbling sound of logs passing over their heads on leaky, rickety flumes?

The Oregon-Washington Railway and Navigation Company and the Union Pacific rather thought that they would not. And so these most powerful of Portland industrialists were dead set against Griswold’s plan.

Finally, Griswold and his investors ran out of money and had to give up on the scheme. Griswold moved back east and

gave the land to his daughter, Jennie Griswold, an artist from Washington, D.C. She, quite sensibly, gave up on the timber-harvest fantasy and started charging the visitors 10 cents each (a lot of money in those days) to visit and picnic there.

Then, in 1904, a Colorado mining lawyer named Lafayette “Lafe” Pence moved to Portland and, before anyone knew what he was about, claimed the water rights to every creek in the west hills of Portland — including, famously and very briefly, Bull Run, the city’s water supply.

Pence’s plan was to use the water to wash and blast the northwest hills down to fill in Guild’s Lake, a scheme that ended in dismal failure just a few years later; but it gave Portland land developers a real education in water-rights law. It turned out you didn’t have to own a piece of property to claim water rights on it, or even get permission from the person who did; you just had to file.

So, the very next year, a Portland developer named George Wetherby did just that: claimed the water rights in Griswold’s land. Then, having thus gotten his foot in the door, he negotiated a lease from Griswold in early 1906. He claimed he was planning to install a water-powered sawmill at the foot of the waterfall.

It isn’t clear just what Wetherby was trying to do here. Oregonian writer Joseph Rose takes his assertion at face value,

calling him a “ruthless industrialist”; but this claim is hard to buy. Although most times of year Multnomah Creek provides enough water power for a modest sawmill, its location is extremely inconvenient for any timber not harvested directly up the hill from it. It is remotely possible that Wetherby planned to use the falls to generate electricity, which would then power a sawmill on the Columbia; but that seems a tremendous expense to undertake to do what a moderate-sized boiler and steam engine could easily and cheaply do, partly powered by the sawmill’s own trimmings and waste; moreover, a steam engine could be made as large as necessary, whereas there was only so much power available from the creek. Indeed, with a few massive exceptions like the mills at Willamette Falls in Oregon City, water-powered mills were very rare by this time.

Possibly this was the story Wetherby had to tell Griswold to get the lease approved, that with the sawmill in place it would finally be possible to harvest her father’s timber. Possibly the sawmill was his cover story for having claimed the water rights (under the law, the proposed use had to be “beneficial”).

Or perhaps he was trying to use the sawmill as leverage to get the railroad to buy the place for an inflated price. If that’s the case, it didn’t work out quite like he planned. Instead of buying him out, the

railroad pulled some strings and the state Legislature promptly passed a law forbidding the diversion of Multnomah Creek for any reason. That was the end of the sawmill idea — and, most likely, Wetherby’s water right as well, since he no longer had a “beneficial” use for it.

But Wetherby was still leasing the property in 1913, when the Columbia Gorge Highway was platted. At that time, with the encouragement and sponsorship of Simon Benson, the City of Portland opened negotiations to buy the property.

Wetherby, of course, promptly exercised his option to buy the place, anticipating marking it up sharply before selling it to the city for a tidy windfall profit. Or, rather, he tried to do this. Griswold, no doubt excited by all the interest and hoping to make a much larger profit than she could have made by delivering on her deal with Wetherby, refused to comply, and a brief court battle ensued, which Wetherby lost. Just like that, he was out.

Griswold now claimed the place was worth \$50,000. Benson thought \$2,500 was more like it. And there things stood until suddenly someone figured out that the City of Portland could actually condemn the property under Eminent Domain.

With that threat in the air, Griswold settled for \$5,250 and the city officially acquired the falls. (A persistent version of

the story claims Benson bought it from Griswold and then donated it to the city, but he did not; he just acted as a broker in the deal.)

I haven’t been able to learn what Wetherby’s lease-option price was. It would be deliciously ironic if it were more than \$5,250.

After that, Multnomah Falls as a public park was all but in the bag. The railroad donated the land at the foot of the falls, with the stipulation that a lodge be built there costing no less than \$12,500. This was done (the enthusiastic city actually spent \$40,000 on it). The wooden footbridge having long since decayed and fallen away, it was replaced with the bridge that’s there now — one of the first continuous-pour bridges ever built, and named after Simon Benson. And in early 1915, inspired by a speech from legendary highway engineer Samuel Lancaster, the Progressive Business Men’s Club of Portland took on as a fund-raising project the construction of what would become Larch Mountain Trail, the first 1.1 miles of which are the trail to the top of the falls.

The City of Portland owned the park until 1939, when it was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service (Benson Park was transferred to the state of Oregon). And so it has been ever since.

Dr. Fuhrman: For young, healthy looking skin look to your diet



The skin is the largest organ of the human body and a barrier that protects us from microbial pathogens and other damaging elements. The health of our skin is a reflection of our overall health, and the skin’s resilience to sun exposure and outward appearance can be enhanced with high-nutrient foods.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S., affecting one out of every five Americans.¹ Ultraviolet radiation from the sun promotes skin aging and cancer via oxidative stress, inflammation, and damage to DNA. Ultraviolet (UV) exposure also leads to alteration of the skin’s structural proteins, causing sagging and wrinkling. Taking proactive measures such as using a safe mineral sunscreen and limiting mid-day sun exposure are crucial to protecting your skin from the sun’s UV rays. Phytochemicals from natural foods can provide an extra source of protection, by enhancing the body’s natural defenses to help prevent sun damage and slow the aging of the skin.

Carotenoids are one class of phytochemicals that offer photoprotection. After we consume carotenoid-rich foods, carotenoids accumulate in the skin, where they oppose UV-induced oxidative stress. Individual carotenoids, mixed carotenoids, and carotenoid-rich whole foods have been shown to have photo-protective qualities that prevent or repair DNA damage to the skin caused by the sun.^{2,3} For example, lycopene, found in tomatoes and pink fruits such as watermelon, grapefruit, and papaya, helps to protect the skin from sun damage.⁴ Similar results have been found for lutein and zeaxanthin, found in leafy greens, and beta-carotene, found in yellow and orange vegetables.^{2,5}

In addition to carotenoids, another class of antioxidant nutrients—polyphenols—may have photoprotective actions. There are hundreds of polyphenols, and they are present in most whole plant foods.⁶ Polyphenols from cocoa and green tea, for example, have been shown to counteract UV-induced skin damage in human studies.^{7,8}

Wrinkles and other signs of skin aging are related to chronological age but also strongly influenced by UV rays. It is estimated that 80 percent of the visible aging in the face is due to sun exposure.⁹ The phytochemical-rich foods that offer sun protection also offer some protection against wrinkles. In one study of older adults, higher intakes of vegetables and legumes and lower intake of dairy and sugar were associated with less visible sun damage.¹⁰ Another study assessed skin aging in middle-aged American women, and found that higher dietary vitamin C intake was associated with fewer wrinkles.¹¹ In a study of Japanese women that related dietary variables to “crow’s feet” wrinkling, higher intake of green and yellow vegetables was associated with fewer wrinkles.¹² In studies on green tea and cocoa polyphenols, in addition to UV protection, these interventions improved appearance factors such as elasticity, hydration, and softness.^{7,8}

Structural proteins in the connective tissue of the skin are also affected by diet. There is evidence that beta-carotene reduces the levels of one such protein that promotes skin wrinkling.¹³ Also, tomato paste supplementation was found to reduce the activity of an enzyme known to degrade structural proteins in the skin, presumably slowing skin aging.⁴

In spite of the well-known damaging effects of the sun on our skin, many of us still perceive a suntan as healthy-looking. Food-derived carotenoids can also affect our skin coloration, and research has shown that carotenoid-colored skin is perceived as healthier and more attractive. In the wild, carotenoids are responsible for the bright feather colors of male birds, which make them more attractive to potential mates.¹⁴ There is a much more subtle, but similar phenomenon in

humans. An increase in carotenoid-produced skin coloration was consistently found to be perceived as healthier in people of Caucasian, African, and Asian descent.¹⁵ One interesting study found that people preferred the skin color caused by eating carotenoids over the skin color from a suntan.¹⁶ Another study investigated skin carotenoid coloration changes in response to increased fruit and vegetable consumption. They found that photos of individuals a few weeks after increasing fruit and vegetable intake by three serving per day received higher ratings of health and attractiveness than “before” photos.¹⁷ Furthermore, the improvement in appearance has been shown to be a motivating factor for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.¹⁸

Each time the skin is exposed to the sun, some carotenoids are “used up” for their antioxidant activity, so they must be constantly replenished by the diet to maintain the protective effects (smoking and alcohol also deplete carotenoids from skin).^{2,19} Consistently consuming antioxidant-rich plant foods will build up the stores of these protective phytochemicals in the skin. You can even quantify your skin carotenoid levels using a specialized scanner to confirm the accumulation of dietary carotenoids in your skin.^{20,21} I use one of these scanners in my medical practice to confirm and motivate patients to eat a Nutrtarian diet, rich in these colorful phytochemicals. A nutrient-dense, plant rich (NDPR or Nutritarian) diet is designed to be rich in antioxidant phytochemicals and promotes health inside and out, protecting against chronic disease, heart disease and cancer, while at the same time protecting the skin from sun damage while giving a natural, healthy-looking glow.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My kudos to the Sentinel and BMD Committee. As has been pointed out, I have been reader of small town newspapers since a child. I subscribe today to 3 papers, the RG, Sentinel, and Chronicle.

In my opinion, the Sentinel is doing a great of covering subjects in the community, and I applaud Caitlyn and Zack for the effort they are putting in to a small town newspaper – good job!

My thanks to the BMD committee for giving me opportunity to be Grand Marshall

in the BMD parade. That was certainly unexpected. .

As the readers know, I am very supportive of volunteerism in the community. We are so lucky, as a nation, to have grown up with a way of life that included volunteers.

Many years ago, at age 22, I was going to a United Way meeting in Everett. A circuit court judge I had seen in meetings before – I made a remark to him – I valued his volunteer time in the community. His remark was -- Volunteers can do the work

more efficiently and without tax-payers, than government can do it through red tape. If the job is necessary, it will be done, one way or the other. Volunteers do it cheaper.

In 1998-1999, when Rotary established clubs in the old Soviet Union, the surprise we all had is – Russian people had no concept of volunteerism in a community or city. They had been raised with government control on everything.

Don Williams
Cottage Grove

Letters to the Editor policy

The Cottage Grove Sentinel receives many letters to the editor. In order to ensure that your letter will be printed, letters must be under 300 words and submitted by Friday at 5 p.m. Letters must be signed and must include an address, city and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be printed. Letters must be of interest to local readers. Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary. If you would like to submit an opinion piece, Another View must be no longer than 600 words. To avoid transcription errors, the Sentinel would prefer editorial and news content be sent electronically via email or electronic media. Hand written submissions will be accepted, but we may need to call to verify spelling, which could delay the publishing of the submission.