



Offbeat Oregon History: Lakeside resort and Hollywood



By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

For people like Bing Crosby, Lily Pons and Clark Gable, success in show business came with some distinct drawbacks ... millions of them: the fans. Screaming, pointing, asking for autographs and sending mash notes, they were a great inconvenience — yet it was their attention that had made the movie-star lifestyle possible.

On most days, the big stars handled it OK. But everyone needs a break now and then. Sometimes they wanted to go (with apologies to the classic sitcom Cheers) where absolutely nobody knew their name.

On those days, they would often point their long, low, powerful automobiles northward and drive deep into the lush forests of southern Oregon.

There, you might find them fishing on the Rogue, or relaxing in the Wolf Creek Tavern. But you would be more likely to find them playing \$100-a-hand baccarat in the Lakeside Café on the pier in Currier's Village.

Currier's Village was an isolated resort property at Lakeside, on Tenmile Lake by the southern Oregon Coast. It was the pet project of a fascinating Los Angeles man named Roy Currier, a tall, charismatic patent-medicine peddler with friends in some very high places — as well as, persistent rumor had it, some very low ones.

Roy Currier made his fortune in the patent-medicine racket long after most other patent-medicine hucksters had been forced out of the market by the American Medical Association and Federal Trade Commission. In 1928, he founded Currier's Tablets, Inc., the corporation behind whose veil he would launch his bid to turn about fifty dollars' worth of antacid tablets into a fortune numbered in millions.

Currier's Tablets were a bit different from other patent medicines, in that they actually listed their ingredients on the front label: Bismuth Subnitrate;



Magnesium Hydroxide; Sodium Bicarbonate; and mint oil for flavoring. For a "secret formula" remedy, this was unusual.

There may have been a method in that madness, though. Most of the patent-medicine scandals of the 1910s and 1920s involved remedies with secret ingredients. Usually those ingredients were either dangerous — powerful opioid drugs, toxic heavy metals, that sort of thing — or completely ineffective and therefore an outright fraud. To expose them, the AMA investigators would buy a sample and run it through a chemistry lab, then go to the FTC with the evidence to shut them down. By putting the ingredients on the label, perhaps Currier hoped to avoid this.

But there may have been another reason as well. The best remedy then available for syphilis was an arsenic preparation called Salvarsan (arsphenamine — popularly called "The Magic Bullet"). And it had just been learned a few years earlier that Salvarsan worked much better if augmented with bismuth. Bismuth Subnitrate is one of the less stable compounds of bismuth; the FTC, when it finally got around to investigating Currier's Tablets, noted that there was a "risk" of it decomposing into elemental bismuth and nitric acid in the stomach. That would be bad for some-

one with ulcers, since the nitric acid would attack them; but it would be a pretty happy outcome for someone with syphilis ... and, of course, having a cover story along the lines of "I get heartburn real bad" might be important for a secret syphilis sufferer whose public image would be irreparably harmed if anyone found out.

This, of course, is pure speculation. Still, it's an interesting thought. And certainly there had to be some reason why Currier's Tablets sold so astonishingly briskly at such a shockingly high price; a bottle of twenty of them fetched \$1.25, which in modern dollars comes to just under \$20 — a dollar a pill, for what amounts to an Alka-Seltzer tablet soaked in Phillips Milk of Magnesia and Pepto-Bismol.

But perhaps those brisk sales can be simply put down to dishonest advertising:

"CURRIER'S FAMOUS STOMACH TABLETS never fail to rid sufferers of gas pains, indigestion, ulcers, nausea, heartburn, acidosis, constipation!" screamed one newspaper ad from the early 1930s. "Agnes Riley of Monrovia, Calif., writes: 'My husband in bed with terrible gas pains and ulcers was given up. After taking three CURRIER'S TABLETS he began to improve. Now he is well and at work!'"

"Please do not confuse Currier's Tablets with the ordinary stomach remedy, or anything that you have ever heard about or tried before," cautioned a radio announcer, in an advertisement transcribed by FTC investigators. "The discovery of the formula for Currier's Stomach Tablets has startled the civilized world, and I say to you that it makes it absolutely unnecessary for anyone to continue to suffer from these conditions."

It would be these advertisements that would finally get Currier into trouble with the FTC, in 1934. But he wouldn't get into very much trouble at that. By 1934, six years of diligent huckstering had done its work, and Currier's brand had taken its place on the shelves of drugstores alongside mainstream remedies such as Alka-Seltzer. Moreover, he was already negotiating with McKesson Pharmaceuticals to buy him out. By the time the FTC, citing the examples of bad advertising mentioned above, issued him a cease-and-desist order (commanding him, among other things, to never again claim that X-rays could reveal the status of stomach ulcers or that his pills had "startled the civilized world"), he no longer needed to advertise the things. He'd cashed out.

Then he turned and sank his cash into building his dream resort on Tenmile Lake, on the Oregon Coast.

The resort he built there wasn't outrageously opulent. The cabins were neat and tidy, but tiny. Guests weren't paying \$250 a week (\$3,700 in 2016 currency!) for deluxe accommodations; they were paying that money to spend a week away from prying eyes, in a place with top-shelf cuisine, fantastic entertainment, and a little surreptitious casino action downstairs.

Actually, the casino action wasn't very surreptitious at all. It didn't have to be. The whole place was on private property — Currier's very

own 160-acre townsite. No cops, no district attorneys, and of course no liquor-control agents were allowed in Currier's Village.

What Currier was going for was a nice, tidy, and very discreet rustic getaway on a great fishing lake. He spent an enormous sum on landscaping to make it look just right, and paid his carpenters well above prevailing wage to ensure he got the very best craftsmen. The amenities were all there: an airstrip; a seaplane to charter for cruises; and, of course, boats to rent to take out on the lake and fish. The fishing on Tenmile Lake was really good.

To top it all off, Currier built a home for himself and his wife, Jane, on Tenmile Island. The house was accessible only by boat. It was a massive rustic palace with myrtlewood walls, an extensive aviary, and climate-controlled kennels for his Great Danes that actually had their own kitchens — specially equipped to barbecue goats for the lucky dogs. In the front yard, facing the lake, a bed of flowering azaleas was planted and trimmed like a hedge, shaped to spell the name "CURRIER."

Currier advertised the place in Los Angeles as a vacation getaway you could drive to without ever leaving paved streets. And he worked all his contacts in Hollywood to make sure word got around. Celebrities who came to stay at his place included Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Lily Pons, Sidney Greenstreet and Roy Rogers. Roy came with his band, the Sons of the Pioneers, and played a gig there. Another time The Ink Spots came and played.

Rumor has it Currier was working some other contacts, too. The claim was that he had some connections in organized crime, which were helping him out with advice and maybe financial assistance with his gambling and fine-dining operations.

In any case, Roy and Jane Currier lived there like resident royalty in their great lakeside palace, dining and hobnobbing with the stars in their plush dockside restaurant, until 1939, when Currier sold the place to Edward Jackson of San Diego for \$75,000 (\$1.3 million in 2016 dollars — a smoking deal if true; the newspaper reports on it at the time seemed skeptical). He hung onto his home on Tenmile Island, though, and he and Jane stayed on there until a fire burned it to the ground in 1942. When that happened, the Curriers moved back to Los Angeles. Roy Currier died there in 1960; despite announced plans to rebuild and move back, he never did.

As for Currier's Village, it soldiered on, looking seedier and seedier, as the postwar boom slowly changed the state around it. With Currier no longer there, the celebrities stopped coming, and cabin prices dropped back down to normal-tourist rates. In the early 1950s it was still there; but by the end of the decade, it was starting to be dismantled. A couple of fires, including a monster that broke out in 1965, helped the process along.

Today, all that remains of Currier's Village are the concrete pads that once underlaid the garages of its cabins; the Lakeside Lodge now stands on the old grounds.

Cottage Grove Sentinel

(541) 942-3325

Administration

James Rand, Regional Publisher
Gary Manly, General Manager Ext. 207
 gmanly@cgsentinel.com
Aaron Ames, Marketing Specialist Ext. 216
 aames@cgsentinel.com
Tammy Sayre, Marketing Specialist Ext. 213
 tsayre@cgsentinel.com

Editorial

Caitlyn May, Editor Ext. 212
 cmay@cgsentinel.com
Zach Silva, Sport Editor Ext. 204
 zsilva@cgsentinel.com

Customer Service

Carla Williams, Office Manager Ext. 200
 Legals, Classifieds Ext. 200
 cwilliams@cgsentinel.com

Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor Ext. 215
 graphics@cgsentinel.com

(USP 133880)

Subscription Mail Rates in Lane and Portions of Douglas Counties:
 Ten Weeks \$9.10
 One year \$36.15
 e-Edition year \$36.00

Rates in all other areas of United States: Ten Weeks \$11.70; one year, \$46.35, e-Edition \$43.00.
 In foreign countries, postage extra.

No subscription for less than Ten Weeks. Subscription rates are subject to change upon 30 days' notice. All subscriptions must be paid prior to beginning the subscription and are non-refundable.

Periodicals postage paid at Cottage Grove, Oregon.

Postmaster: Send address changes to P.O. Box 35, Cottage Grove, OR 97424.

Local Mail Service:

If you don't receive your Cottage Grove Sentinel on the Wednesday of publication, please let us know. Call 942-3325 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Advertising Ownership:

All advertising copy and illustrations prepared by the Cottage Grove Sentinel become the property of the Cottage Grove Sentinel and may not be reproduced for any other use without explicit written prior approval.

Copyright Notice: Entire contents ©2017 Cottage Grove Sentinel.



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.