



## Offbeat Oregon History: Patron saint of bike commuters

In recent years, bicycle commuting has had something of a resurgence in Oregon. That's especially true in urban areas, where you'll see these hard-bodied, Lycra-clad road warriors out in all kinds of crazy weather, jockeying for position with larger vehicles in traffic and trying not to get run over by inattentive motorists.

Proud of their weekly mileage though these hard-core commuters are, few of them can hold a candle to the ninth governor of the state of Oregon — who bested all but an elite handful of them using a heavy steel "safety bicycle" in the twilight years of the 19th century.

T.T. (Theodore Thurston) Geer was the first Oregon governor to have actually been born in the state. He served from 1899 to 1903; before that, he was a state representative and a Presidential elector. So, it's safe to say he spent a great deal of time in Salem.

Which was something of a challenge for him, since he actually lived 10 miles outside Salem, on a farm in the Waldo Hills near the unincorporated hamlet of Macleay.

Most legislators and other state politicians solved dilemmas like this by taking a small pied-a-terre in the capitol city, from which they would journey home on weekends. Some of the more determined commuted each day with a horse and buggy, or rode horseback.

As for Geer, when the roads were dry enough, he made his commute most days by bicycle.

Geer was an enthusiastic participant in the 1890s bicycle craze that broke out after the "safety bicycle" was invented and came into widespread use. The "safety bicycle" is essentially the same design used today — two smallish wheels, one driven with a chain. These were called "safety bicycles" for a reason: they were far less likely to kill you than earlier variants, especially the high-wheeled "ordinary bicycles" of a few years before.

"Ordinary bicycles" (sometimes called penny-farthings) commonly had no brakes, because braking too fast caused the all-too-common-and-occasionally-fatal accident known as a "header," in which the rider rotated over the front of the six-foot-tall front wheel and smashed into the ground. Plus, just getting aboard one required an act of gymnastic excellence beyond the skills of most.

Geer leaped aboard the bicycling bandwagon in June of 1898, a little late by nationwide standards; but he had just been elected governor, so his adoption of this new hobby was headline news. The headline is one of the earliest examples of the penchant for awful puns that newspaper copy editors and headline writers are notorious for. It read, "GEER HAS A WHEEL."

"Wheel" was still common slang for "bicycle" in 1898, because in the old penny-farthing days bicycle riders appeared to be perching atop a single giant wheel. By the late 1890s, the lethal penny-farthings were no longer in use, but the term endured.)

Geer proceeded to use his "wheel" every chance he got. But it must not have been a very good one, because just eight months later he bought a new one — a Rambler brand, bought from bike dealer Fred T. Merrill of Portland.

It was this bicycle that Geer was riding on May 1, 1900, when the Ramblin' Governor set out for his most famous ride.

On that morning, Geer hopped on his Rambler and pointed it northwest. He was riding not to Salem, but all the way to Champoeg — 30 miles distant.

"I shall never forget that beautiful ride," Geer wrote in his memoirs. "It was a perfect day, with a firm north breeze, not a cloud in the sky; the roads were in splendid condition, the crops were growing splendidly, birds were singing everywhere, seeming to be in harmony with Nature's

glad mood."

Geer rode north, probably following Howell Prairie Road, to Gervais and on from there to "Woodburn, the 'Metropolis of French Prairie,' railroad junction and all-around pushing town." At Hubbard he turned off to the west, and a few hours later arrived at Champoeg.

Geer was on a mission for the newly chartered Oregon Historical Society. He planned to meet up with the Society's secretary, George Himes, to find and mark the exact location where, 57 years earlier, a group of Oregon residents had voted 52-50 to form a provisional government for the Oregon Territory — the step that had led to the territory joining the United States rather than Canada.

Helping them in this quest would be the last surviving member of the group, François X. Matthieu. Matthieu, in fact, had played a key part in that decision, having successfully convinced a fellow French-Canadian to come over to the American side, with the result that the vote was 50-52 rather than a 51-51 deadlock.

Upon arriving at Matthieu's farm, Geer found that Himes was there, and had brought along a Portland photographer to document the occasion; but Matthieu, having forgotten the appointment, had hopped a train to Portland to run some errands.

A long-distance telephone call ensued, and soon Matthieu was on his way back to Champoeg.

While Geer and Himes waited for their host, Himes suggested that they play a game of Horse-shoes.

"This was agreed to, with the declaration on the part of each that he hadn't pitched a horseshoe for more than 20 years," Geer recalled. "But I soon afterward had reason to suspect that (Himes) ... had forgotten his dates."

Himes was a strict Congregationalist, so it's unlikely that any bets were placed. But if they had been, Geer would have been cleaned out. Himes,

it seemed, was something of a horseshoe shark.

Finally, after more than an hour of repeatedly having his head handed to him, Geer gave up on the game and went to join the ladies of the house on the porch. There, he made the mistake of commenting that the lawn needed to be mowed.

"I was at once informed that a very good lawn-mower was in the woodshed!" Geer recalled. "Game to the last, I expressed my undying fondness for pushing a lawn-mower — that, in fact, it was one of my particular pleasures in life; and to prove my sincerity, I mowed something like a half-acre of heavy blue-grass during the next hour and a half, much to the enjoyment of the demon Himes."

Geer does not say so, but one assumes he slept well and soundly that night.

The next morning, he joined Himes, Matthieu and the photographer on the bank of the river, at the spot where the state government of Oregon was born. Matthieu having pointed out the spot, the governor of Oregon borrowed an ax from a nearby neighbor and used it to chop down a six-inch-thick Garry Oak tree. He then chopped through its trunk again to form a heavy stake. Then he handed over the ax to Matthieu and held it while the old ex-Frenchman struck the first blow. The three of them then took turns pounding on it until it was firmly wedged into the ground.

This done, the governor climbed aboard his Rambler and set out southward, heading back to Salem and home. Was he at least a little sore when he arrived, after so much exertion? The record is silent on that score.

The following January, the Legislature approved an appropriation to install a monument on the site, replacing the stake. It remains there to this day — although to look at it, it's hard to avoid the suspicion that whoever designed it was rooting for the British side in that 1843 meeting; it resembles nothing so much as a tombstone.

## Dr. Fuhrman: Diet soda can rob 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 (PTH) 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. Women who drank diet cola excreted more calcium in their urine compared to the women who drank water. The authors concluded that this calcium loss may underlie the observed connection between soda drinking and low bone mineral density.

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 (both regular and diet), 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, such as phosphoric acid. 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.

*Dr. Fuhrman is a New York Times best-selling author and board certified family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine. Visit his informative website at [DrFuhrman.com](http://DrFuhrman.com). Submit your questions and comments about this column directly to [newsquestions@drfuhrman.com](mailto:newsquestions@drfuhrman.com).*

**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  
**Jana Stelle**, Marketing Specialist.....Ext. 203  
 jstelle@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.....\$9.50  
 One year.....\$37.65  
 e-Edition year.....\$35.00  
 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

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. 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. The Sentinel reserves the right not to print letters that may contain libelous content.

### NEW BRIEF SECTION

The Sentinel has a new space for community events. The weekly/monthly calendar will remain in the B-Section of the newspaper where it's always been. In addition to the traditional calendar, this page (A4) will now house a space for weekly events. If you have an event you would like included, please send basic who, what, where and when to [cmay@cgsentinel.com](mailto:cmay@cgsentinel.com).

The "In Brief" section will cover the week from the day of The Sentinel's publication to the following Tuesday.