

Nuggets of History

Cottage Grove or Lemati: The Feud Years 1893-1899

By **Holli Turpin**
Cottage Grove Historical Society

The town of Cottage Grove sits peacefully at the south end of the beautiful Willamette Valley. Our town harbors an eclectic group of residents, and as a result it is not unusual to hear heated debates on matters of politics and the like.

Individuals, who may vehemently disagree on one issue, can often be seen working together on another. Disagreements are spirited and pride runs deep. In the late 1800's the politics of life became so polarizing that the town literally split in two.

Cottage Grove was incorporated as a town on Feb. 11, 1887. Seven short years later the residents east of the river petitioned the Oregon Legislature to secede from Cottage Grove, creating their own town, Lemati.

For the next six years, the town of Cottage Grove and the town of Lemati sat side by side split by a river and connected contentiously by a few bridges.

Each town needed the other in ways that cultivated negative feelings. Each thought that standing on their idea of right was more important than standing together as a united town.

Cottage Grove (aka Westside or Slabtown) contained the main travel route for wagons and stagecoaches, the best source of good drinking water and the all-important post office.

Lemati (aka Eastside) had the only access to the railroad and was the entrance to the flourishing Bohemia Mines.

Each town elected its own mayor and had its own police chief.

During this time there was a gold rush at the Bohemia Mines. The town's population

grew from 800 to 3,000 as people sought their fortunes in the mines and entrepreneurs started looking for ways to serve the miners on their trips off the mountain.

Hotels, saloons, bath houses, supply stores and the like popped up to cash in on the boom. The setup of the two towns brought much delight to rowdy miners who spent their gold in saloons, often becoming rowdy and out of control.

As soon as Johnny law started their way, all they had to do was make it across the river. Many instances were reported where ruffians stood on one side, taunting and jeering at the law man on the other side of the bridge.

In one story, JB Mosby, after a few too many drinks, rode down Main Street in Cottage Grove, which is now River Road, knocking over kerosene streetlamps. Marshal Joe Damewood gave chase and JB headed for the

young daughter of Lemati's Mayor.

Cottage Grove passed an ordinance prohibiting riding bicycles on the sidewalks. One day Marshal Baker caught the Lemati Mayor's daughter riding her bicycle in Cottage Grove. As she was in violation of the new ordinance, he confronted her and provided an escort back across the bridge.

The very next day, Marshal Baker forgot to remove his badge when he went across the bridge to pick up the mail at the railroad station. It did not take long before he found himself behind bars in the Lemati jail. It seems letting small infractions slide was not something either side would allow.

The stories of pursuit and mockery lend humor to recalling these times in our history. However, at the time, the laughter was one-sided and mean-spirited.

One of the most famous stories of the time regards the theft of a post office.

The Cottage Grove Post Office was on the west side of the river in the town of Cottage Grove. Typical post offices of the time consisted of a large cabinet of labeled cubbies and associated equipment, usually held in a room at the post master's home, or in a local business.

Locally, mail was delivered by train in Lemati then hauled across the river and distributed from the post office in Cottage Grove. Citizens of Lemati felt that the post office should be housed on their side of the river, as it was delivered by the railroad that ran through their town.

The walk across the river into the "other" town to get their mail was a constant reminder of Cottage Grove's importance in their



COTTAGE GROVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION

The railroad and depot were located in Lemati. This all-important resource was used as leverage in the feud against Cottage Grove.

lives. Fed up with this necessity, a few never-identified individuals from Lemati used the cover of darkness and the quiet of the late-night hours to cross into enemy territory, dismantle and remove the post office.

This group installed the post office on their side of the river that same night. The town of Lemati was now the proud owner of the Cottage Grove Post Office.

The postmaster in the town of Cottage Grove was without a doubt surprised the following morning when he arrived at work to find no post office. The feud ran its course shortly thereafter and the post office has remained east of the river from that day forward.

On January 5, 1899 a Eugene paper published an article that stated: "At a mass meeting tonight the citizens of Cottage Grove and Lemati approved the charter under which the two towns are consolidated under the old name of Cottage Grove. Some opposition to the movement was expected from many of the residents of Lemati but it did not materialize, although a number of persons who were outspoken against consolidation were present."

The same article concluded that those in opposition did not state their arguments because they considered the proceedings illegal or figured they would present their arguments directly to the state legislature.

Whether the opposition presented their arguments later or not, the unification stuck and a feud that split the town in two became a part of history.

At Bohemia Mining Days this year, the feud will be playfully reenacted. While we remember this feud, and in fact celebrate it at this year's Bohemia Mining Days, we should remember the serious contention that once took root here in our beautiful town.

When you pick your side this summer, wear your pin with pride and know the other side shares the same pride. Lemati or Slabtown, connect with your history and share the stories that make our town unique and special.



COTTAGE GROVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION

During the feud years, this was the corner of Main and Wall streets in Cottage Grove. Main Street is now River Road and Wall Street is now West Main.

river, knowing if he made it across to Lemati he was free.

Not wanting to risk making it to a bridge, JB plunged down the banks and into the river. Unwilling to lose another pursuit, Marshal Damewood jumped in after him. The ensuing struggle ended with Damewood pulling JB back to Cottage Grove where he was promptly housed in the jail.

Another story from the feud involves a bicycle and

Summer on the Hill
Explore, Learn, Create & Adventure
PreK-12th Grade Summer Enrichment
Weekly & Summer-Long Camps
June 28 - August 20
OAK HILL SCHOOL
oakhillschool.net/summer



We Have News For You

We have the news you want in print and online anytime, plus a whole lot more...

Subscribe Now to Save up to 20% Off the Newsstand Price!
Call or sign up online with code JUNE21 for limited-time special offers for new and returning subscribers.*

Cottage Grove Sentinel

Your local news delivered your way.
In print. Online. On the go!

1498 E. Main St., STE 104 • Mail to: PO BOX 35
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

www.cgsentinel.com

541-942-3325

ENGLERT LeafGuard is the permanent, clog-free gutter solution!*

*Guaranteed not to clog for as long as you own your home, or we will clean your gutters for free

QUALITY TESTED GOOD HOUSEKEEPING Since 1909 ACCREDITED BUSINESS A+ BBB

LeafGuard 16 YEARS BACKED BY THE SEAL

\$99 INSTALLATION for a limited time on a complete LeafGuard system!†

PLUS CALL DURING THIS PROGRAM & RECEIVE DINNER TO GO! FREE \$50 GIFT CARD WITH IN-HOME ESTIMATE!

WITH IN-HOME ESTIMATE!*

541-213-2311

CALL TODAY FOR YOUR FREE ESTIMATE!

- THE ONLY ONE-PIECE SEAMLESS DEBRIS SHEDDING GUTTER SYSTEM
- MADE ONSITE SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUR HOME
- SCRATCHGUARD® PAINT FINISH
- LIFETIME NO-CLOG WARRANTY

†Does not include material costs. Expires 06/30/2021. **Consumer Disclosure/Award Rules: All participants who attend an estimated 60-90 minute in-home product consultation will receive a \$50 gift card. Retail value is \$50. Offer sponsored by Englert LeafGuard. Limit one per household. Company procures, sells, and installs seamless gutter protection. This offer is valid for homeowners over 18 years of age. If married or involved with a life partner, both cohabitating persons must attend and complete presentation together. Participants must have a photo ID, be able to understand English, and be legally able to enter into a contract. The following persons are not eligible for this offer: employees of Company or affiliated companies or entities, their immediate family members, previous participants in a Company in-home consultation within the past 12 months and all current and former Company customers. Gift may not be extended, transferred, or substituted except that Company may substitute a gift of equal or greater value if it deems it necessary. Gift card will be mailed to the participant via first class United States Mail within 10 days of receipt of promotion form. Not valid in conjunction with any other promotion or discount of any kind. Offer not sponsored or promoted by Darden Restaurants and is subject to change without notice prior to reservation. Expires 6/30/2021. LeafGuard operates as LeafGuard of Oregon in Oregon under license number 223377.

*Offer good through 6.28.21. Mention this ad. This offer is not transferable and the offer is available those who have not subscribed in the last 31 days. Special introductory offers are limited to no more than two special subscriptions in a twelve month period and must be paid in advance to qualify for special rate. Once the above discounted period ends, you will be billed at the regular subscription rates.