

Human, Intimate Incidents in Life Of Charles L. Wheeler Recounted

(By Joe D. Thomison)

Let it be said in the beginning that Charles L. Wheeler is a modest individual. Engaged in advance publicity for the seaways dedication, the writer several weeks ago sought a cut of Mr. Wheeler in Portland newspaper offices. The library files of not a single one of the metropolitan dailies contained the needed pictorial record, desired for use in Portland and Mid-Columbia newspapers. It became necessary to apply directly to him in San Francisco for a photograph, made especially for newspaper reproduction. He graciously complied with the request.

This cut was wanted particularly for the weekly newspapers of the Mid-Columbia country, those of Hood River, where Charles L. Wheeler lived 30 years ago during the heyday of apple orchards, in White Salmon and Bingen, Wash., where he was well known and where he still has admiring and loyal friends.

Charles L. Wheeler, as chief executive of a great transportation concern and allied interests, is very busy. He made sacrifices to attend the dedication ceremonies. When he finally so budgeted his time he could be here, and flew at night from San Francisco, arriving at day-break last Friday in Portland, his first thoughts after reaching a hotel from the airport were of a few close friends of older days. He wanted them to be with him on the first ship, a ship of his line, perhaps dearer to him than any of the others because it bears the name of his son, to make history in navigating a new additional 100 miles up the Columbia river.

On Saturday, as the staunch freighter steamed from Bonneville ship lock, following the dedication ceremonies there, and forged steadily to The Dalles, Charles Wheeler remembered incidents of olden days. He recalled the top-floor corner room of the old Waucoma hotel, now the Hood River hotel, where he lived. In those days the mail to and from the O. R. and N. station was carried in a wheelbarrow by a Japanese boy. One Autumn day, when this Japanese was at the handles of his barrow, trudging up the grade of Second Street, a loitering representative of that band of young men of wealthy families who had been attracted to gentleman farming on Hood River orchards espied the barrow's motive power. Charles had just returned from some orchard with a batch of big, red Spitzenburgs, beautifully colored but still as hard and firm as a piece of basalt. The youth picked up one of the apples and thoughtlessly tossed it from the fourth-story window. He intended that the red apple drop with a "squash" at the feet of the Japanese and startle him. Instead it plunked squarely on top of his pate. Togo's head seemed pushed between his shoulders, which sagged forward. Those boys in that corner, top-floor room emitted "ohs and ahs" of alarm. But Togo almost immediately recovered. This is the way Mr. Wheeler described it the other day:

"The boy's head came up, he looked right on the level, peeringly, and then we saw his head come up, up, until he was looking directly into that window of my room. He then looked forward, and went trudging rapidly up the remaining block to the old post office. We all sighed with relief, but for me the period of surcease was brief.

"My room had been spotted, and in a very short time an officer called and informed me that it was a most serious offense to interfere with the United States mail. Just how we eased out of an embarrassing situation, I have forgotten, but I want to say that for a time I was more greatly frightened than at any other time during my Hood River residence.

Mr. Wheeler recalled the happy comradeship that existed among the congenial spirits who congregated in

the store of J. C. Vogt, for many years a merchant in Hood River. He recalled the named of men prominent in the early days of Hood River orcharding—Charles R. Bone, B. E. Duncan, W. J. Baker and many others. It was most pleasing to him when he saw the great crowds of Hood River people on the rooftops of buildings and sight-seeing vantage points of this beautiful gorge-side city cheering the passage of his ship.

Saturday morning as we dallied over breakfast with Captain Peter Lund of the Wheeler, waiting in the ship lock for the ceremonies. Mr. Wheeler declared to the writer, who wrote his first newspaper stories in Hood River, many of them inspired by association with energetic, enthusiastic Charles Wheeler, that he was going to do one thing if nothing else that day.

"When we reach Hood River," he said, "I'm going to grab the whistle cord and I want you to get me by the left hind leg and keep clinging until we make even Mount Hood and Mount Adams know that we are there."

Mr. Wheeler did just that.

The Charles L. Wheeler, Jr., was passing by majestic Mitchell Point, with its windowed tunnel, more famed for beauty and as an engineering feat than Switzerland's older Azenstrasse. The executive officer of the fleet of merchant ships looked up and recalled a visit made 30 years before to the homestead home, back behind the crag, known as Storm King to the Indians, of Mr. and Mrs. George Martin. Barney Martin, now a resident of The Dalles and an employee of the Union Pacific system was then a boy, scarcely in his teens.

Last Saturday the crew and guests aboard the Charles L. Wheeler, Jr., looked out upon the Columbia river highway, the first persons to behold the mid-stretches of this great scenic boulevard from an ocean steamer. It is interesting to recall here that the first semi-official action ever taken toward bringing about this highway was initiated by Charles L. Wheeler. It was in 1909 or 1910 that Mr. Wheeler made a motion at a meeting of the old Hood River Commercial Club, now known as the Hood River chamber of commerce, that a committee be appointed to confer with the Portland commercial club over plans for a highway between the two cities. If we recall aright, C. C. Chapman was then manager of the Portland commercial body. In a few years the Columbia river highway was a reality, though a great many older skeptics doubted the consummation of such a task as did modern skeptics the coming of an ocean ship to The Dalles until last Saturday.

And how we laughed when Charles L. Wheeler recalled last Saturday as did many others in Hood River 30 years ago, that The Dalles was a place whence an orchestra was secured for dances and where young men went to secure ingredients with which to spike punch.

And now this story is told about Mr. Wheeler to show his friends of old that he has not changed. He was always loved for his intense desire to do things for those who worked with or for him in loyalty. Last Saturday night, as we sat around a family group after the auditorium banquet at The Dalles, Mr. Wheeler was telling Mr. and Mrs. James W. Mott, Mrs. Thomison and the Thomison kids something of how he worked in his garden around Burlingame. He then told of the baby of the faithful Filipino, long a loyal servant in their family. It seems that many of the families there in Burlingame have Oriental house servants. When babies come, it was formerly the custom for them to place them in a nursery home for care. Not so, however, for this faithful woman, and he had quarters built for Mercy on the estate. He became interested in the little mite of humanity, with soft brown eyes and straight, black bobbed hair, giving it the effect of a lovely animated doll. This baby of Mercy was given the finest infant accoutrements available in San Francisco's great department stores.

"And do you know," said Mr. Wheeler, "Mrs. Wheeler laughingly but with, I think a little pique, informed me the other day that Mercy's baby was costing us more money than had our own Charles, Jr."

The Wheeler came to dock on schedule Saturday, and Mr. Wheeler and the writer stood at a deck's edge, and the deep emotion of the great crowd touched them both and tears, unashamed tears, rolled down their cheeks, as they laughed. They grasped hands and rejoiced that fate had so shuffled the men of the great chess board of life as to bring about a renewal of friendship by an event climaxed by dreams come true; that a great task had been performed, a history-making one, with both of them participating.

Everything evens up in the end. The poor man pays a little each month for six months, and the rich man takes six months to pay."

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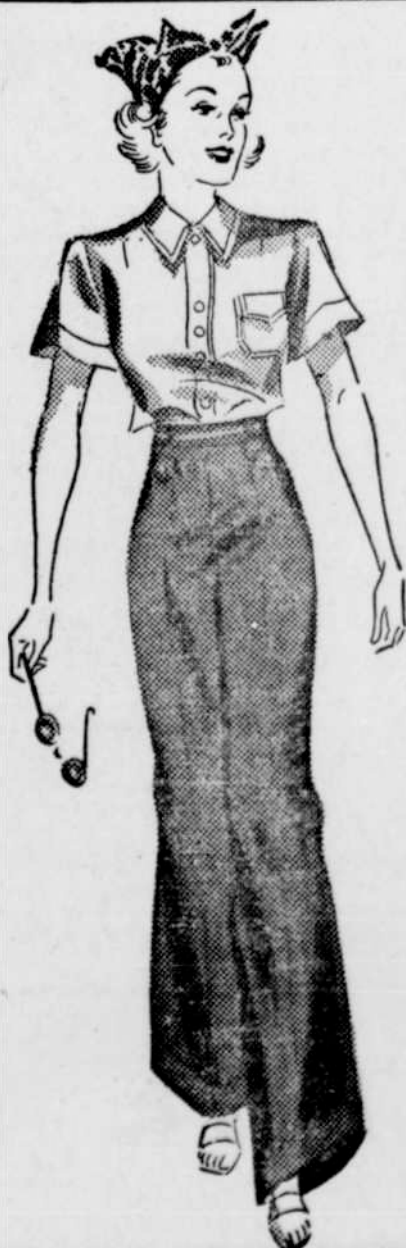
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Mount Hood will be illuminated by flares of 3,000,000 candle power next Saturday night, as the final spectacular touch to herald the the annual American Legion climb.

The flares, magnesium alternating with railroad flares, will be carried up from Government Camp to Cooper Spur by Roy Kirby's pack string, and will be placed by men on the mountain. The load will weigh 300 pounds, and all of them will be ignited within 30 seconds, starting at 10 o'clock.

Members of the flare gang are:

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On Cooper Spur Trail—Rusty Fowler, Fred Bradley, Bob Samuels, Eddy Mohr, Mel Seierkropp, Paul Haslinger, Melvin Monroe, Jack Baldwin, John Arens, Kenneth Wells, Dale Nunamaker.

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