SignalViewpoints

Celebrating the achievements of James and Chuck Reed

'Oregon surfing began in 1962," states a recent book on the topic.

Family members of brothers James and Chuck Reed want to let it be known that their relatives staked out Seaside long before legends like Dana Williams and Dick Wald surfed the Point in the 1960s.

"Jim supervised the construction of the first real Hawaiian surfboard ever used in Oregon," his niece Melinda Masters said. "He introduced surfing to Seaside and explained to the public how the surfboard is considerable value to lifesaving work.

"These were the original 'Beach Boys,'" Masters' brother, also named Jim Reed, said. "People here did not know what a surfboard was."

All this may not even match Jim Reed's greatest athletic achievement: a 9-mile swim from Seaside to Tillamook Lighthouse in July 1934 — Terrible Tilly, aka "The Killer Lighthouse."

Masters and Reed came to Seaside this summer to celebrate the lives of two men, largely forgotten, for their incredible string of achievements: as swimmers, surfers, lifeguards and ultimately, in the case of James Reed, in service to their country.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jim and Chuck Reed and their surfboard, long before the surfin' craze of the 1950s and '60s.

'These were the original "Beach Boys." People here did not know what a surfboard was.'

Jim Reed, son of Chuck Reed and nephew of Jim Reed

SUBMITTED PHOTO

R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

LEFT, Lt. James Reed was killed in 1942 fighting for his country. His nephew, Jim, and niece, Melissa Masters, hope to revive memory of his achievements. RIGHT, Jim Reed and Melinda Masters, whose father was Chuck Reed, at the Signal office. Jim was named after his uncle.

Webfoots

Charles W. Reed Jr. and James Reed grew up in Hawaii in the early 20th century after Charles Reed Sr., an accountant, and the family moved from the Northwest.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX

The boys grew up on Waikiki Beach, where the sport of *he'e nalu* — "wave sliding"— was integrated into the culture.

While in Hawaii, the Reeds "surfed at the knee" of Duke Kahanamoku, the famous competition swimmer and founder of modern surfing.

The Reeds were younger, but "they were on the same beach," Masters said. "I'm sure they met up."

Their early experience riding longboards stayed with them after their return to the mainland to study at the University of Oregon, where both were recruited for the swim team, known as the Webfoots.

Jim Reed was a individual medley and freestyle specialist who help lead the team to the 1936 Pacific Coast championship.

Chuck was 200-yard backstroke champion and several times bettered the record mark in the 100- and 220-yard backstroke.

Together the brothers would help forge a program that remained unbeaten in dual-meet competitions during their Oregon tenure under head coach Mike Hoyman, winning three straight Pacific Coast Conference Northern Division championships from 1935 through 1937.

Along with other University of Oregon swimmers, the Reeds lifeguarded in Seaside over summers.

The Reed brothers first considered bringing boards to the Coast as a way to aid people in distress, Reed said.

If they had longboards like they grew up with in Hawaii, the brothers reasoned, they could reach struggling swimmers more quickly. And once they reached the victims, they could use the board to hold onto for the return to shore.

"Surf board riding introduced here by beach life guards," the Signal headline. "Reed supervised the construction of the first real Hawaiian surf board ever used here … When the tide and surf are right, Reed can ride the board for several hundred yards to the beach."

Swim to the lighthouse

Swimmer Julie Havelka of Eugene made headlines in July when she swam the mouth of the Columbia.

She was following in a long tradition.

Long-distance swims were popularized in the 1920s by English Channel swims and silent star Johnny Weissmuller, better known as the actor who played "Tarzan."

Jim Reed undertook the crossing when he entered the first Columbia River swim as a contestant, a feature of the 1934 Astoria Regatta. The swim was a 4 1/2-mile stretch from Megler, Washington, on the north bank to Astoria on the south.

Jim won the race in a time of 2 hours, 34 minutes. His performance won so much approval, wrote the Astorian's Vera Gault in 2011, that the race was publicized as a race called the "trans-Columbia amateur marathon swim."

That feat was only surpassed by Jim Reed's 9-mile swim from Seaside to the Tillamook Lighthouse rock in the Pacific Ocean on July 20, 1934, what the Signal's Fulton H. Travis described as "nine miles of cold ocean and treacherous currents," battling the sea all the way.

Accompanied by U of O freestyle swimmer Wally Hug, Jim Reed and Hug lubricated themselves with axle grease at 5:30 a.m., launched by a small pilot boat captained by one Bill Hoops.

By 8 a.m., "the stroke of the swimmers has slowed perceptibly," wrote Travis, who accompanied Hoops in the skiff. "The strain is terrific. Their faces have gone dead white beneath their tans and the lines of their faces have drawn tense. Their lips are black with cold."

Hug complained of seasickness and leaned against the boat for a sip of beef broth before resuming his swim.

The pilot boat rocked "drunkenly," according to the report, as Hoops called out "Riptide!"

Panting and nearly exhausted, the swimmers rolled onto their backs when the rip w crossed.

As the lighthouse grew in size, the waves "grow bigger with every passing minute," finally close enough for Reed and Hug to board the skiff and tumble into a swinging basket and hauled to the beacon. "Perfect manipulation of the oars is necessary to keep from shipping a wave," reported the Signal.

At 9:25 a.m., the swimmers reached their destination.

Their final time was registered in the lighthouse log dated July 20, 1934: "The first men to make the swim from Seaside to the Tillamook Lighthouse: 3 hours, 45 minutes."

They were treated to a hot bath and a breakfast of "fried eggs, slabs of ham, seagoing coffee, fresh bread baked by one of the crew," and canned fruit for dessert.

Aftermath

Jim Reed died as he lived, Masters said, as a hero protecting others, and giving of himself.

A test pilot, Jim's plane went down in 1942. Even in death he was a hero, she said. Before the crash, he ordered his crew to bail out. Once his crew had safely left the aircraft, Jim remained with his craft in an unsuccessful attempt to land the plane.

"My dad and my uncle were only a year apart," Masters said. "When we lost him in the war, it was very traumatic for my father. It was hard for him to talk about. My grandmother was never the same."

Chuck Reed began a career with the phone company in 1940, but "kept coming back" to Seaside, Masters said.

As a lifeguard in 1942, Chuck Reed fought a riptide that carried seven swimmers to sea. Reed, with three of the distressed swimmers on his shoulders, battled the current and the breakers "for better than a half-an-hour," the Oregon Journal reported.

Reed managed to get the three to a buoy, "then, almost exhausted," he swam to the shore for help.

Two of the seven swimmers caught in the undertow died as hundreds watched the dramatic rescue at the Turnaround.

American heroes

Surfing on the North Coast languished for many years after the Reeds first brought the Hawaiian longboard, the younger Jim Reed said.

It wasn't until the popularization of the wetsuit — developed by Jack O'Neill in the 1950s — that the sport came northward and modern surfing took hold in Seaside.

Chuck Reed died in 1989 and his wife Georgette died in 2002.

In 2015, James Reed was named into the University of Oregon sports Hall of Fame. Reed "helped attract national acclaim on Oregon's swimming program unlike any other," the athletic department wrote at the time of presentation.

What inspired this retelling was a box received by Masters by the war widow of Jim Reed. She had remarried, but the impact of her first husband was so powerful she and her second husband named their daughter Reed in his honor. The contents of the box proved so compelling Masters later sought to revive the memories of her father and uncle.

"I'm the one that went through this box that was sent to me by the widow of Jim Reed," Masters said.

The American flag that draped his coffin was in the personal collection.

"I almost didn't want to touch it, because it was so emotional," she said. "It was just amazing to find out who he was."

What is the legend of the painted rocks?

You know about the quick access to the beach, don't you, the woman who used to live in this house said. She was checking up, I think, on her former front garden. A waggish friend told her we'd pulled up everything she planted and covered it over with cement. She seemed quite relieved to discover her friend was pulling her leg.

You mean that cut through I replied, referring to a graveled, poorly identified short stretch of road I'd discovered that was a shortcut to the beach.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX

The place with the painted rocks, she said. I nodded like I knew what she was talking about although I didn't. She said something else about painting rocks not being strictly legal and how once they're painted they're considered trash, but almost as soon as she climbed into her truck and drove off, I went looking.

Since it is sort of a secret place, I'm not going to divulge the precise location of the painted rocks. There is a bench. It might be private property or at least private property adjacent. It lets out on to a very rocky part of the beach. The amazing part about this magical spot is that it's been made magical by a the dozens of handpainted rocks humans have so carefully placed.

After my initial discovery, I returned again and again. Mostly I go in the mornings. Mostly I'm the only person there. Although the view is spectacular — a treacherous expanse of dark natural rock, the sea, and the sky —it's the sounds that speak to me; the crashing surf, the bird cries.

A few days ago I encountered another human, which was a bit of a surprise. He was a 30-something man, sitting on the bench. He was reading a novel. I was with my very young dog, Lucy, who was nose to ground. I thought I'd leave the man to it and come back another time. Then he looked up and said hi.

Hi, I said. Do you come here often? Even as the words were leaving my mouth, I felt silly, because they are such an obvious pick up line.

My wife and I are renting for the third year in a row a place just up the street, he said, waving his arm in a general southerly direction. I like to come here and sit and read while she's out shopping or napping. It's my tranquility place.

In the next few minutes he told me a bit about himself, how he would prefer to live at the beach, if he could only figure out a way to move his business from Seattle. I cautioned while it was very beautiful that day, winters could be tough at the beach. I said there's lots of wind and rain.

There's a lot of rain in Seattle, too, he said.

Since he'd been coming to this particular place a few years, I asked if he'd learned any lore about the painted rocks. He said he also was curious, but no one he'd met could tell him anything. Together we looked at a bunch of rocks, remarking on a color or a date or the words that had been written on it. One said "Suzanne." Another said, "Life is Good." Another said, "Road Trip 2017 L.A. to Seattle."

At that point I said I'd better be going. There were more dogs to walk and stories to write and soon it would be time to make lunch. At home I did a little sleuthing on line. That's how I learned my magic place is actually kind of famous. It's called Painted Rock Beach. Tucked away as it may be, it is still a tourist attraction.

Luckily for me, the spot is still relatively undiscovered. If you go, leave a painted rock behind with your name and an inspirational quote, or perhaps just the date on it.

LETTERS

Zoned for residents

I'd like to introduce some history and logic to the current rental housing crisis in Seaside. For the past 30 years or so, many of us tried to convince the planning commission and city council that allowing vacation rentals in residential zoning would destroy the purpose of such zoning, creating motel zones, instead. No one in either entity was interested in the opinions of locals. Creating housing for tourists became their priority. Many city council and planning commission members conveniently owned vacation rentals, or sold them for a living.

Now there are 398 vacation rentals here. Of that number, no less than 200 were formerly long-term rentals that provided housing for the people who lived and worked here. Where is the logic in claiming that vacation rentals and the housing shortage are two completely separate issues ("Wanted: Long-term rentals in Seaside," The Daily Astorian, July 19)? Those 200-plus vacation rentals used to be housing that is no longer available to anyone. And now they are talking of ending all restrictions/licensing of these properties.

Think of this: At approximately 16 residential lots per block, Seaside has managed to divest us of residential housing, and replace it with 25 blocks of vacation rentals in a town of only 7,000 or so people. Wouldn't it be nice to have 25 full blocks of housing available for rent? The council and planning commission are not working for the residents. They are working for anyone who comes from out-of-town, and couldn't care less about those of us who live or work here. Creating tiny increments of housing by allowing over-retail apartments will not address the tremendous need these people have created via their thoughtlessness.

How about using some common sense, and stop the proliferation of commercial-use housing in residential zoning? How about encouraging use of residential zoning for residential use? What a concept, eh?

I'm so sick of their excuses.

Sandy Rea
Seaside

Seaside Signal

PUBLISHER David F. Pero
EDITOR R.J. Marx
CIRCULATION MANAGER Jeremy Feldman
ADVERTISING SALES Brandy Stewart
PRODUCTION MANAGER John D. Bruijn
SYSTEMS MANAGER Carl Earl
STAFF WRITER Brenna Visser
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Skyler Archibald, Rebecca Herren, Katherine Lacaze, Eve Marx, Esther Moberg, Jon Rahl

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