



From 1918 to today, city’s spirit lives on

By Bill Berg
For Seaside Signal

As we look back over a hundred years, we can’t help but ponder the greatest mystery of our origins as a home town: after the great hotel fires of 1913 and 1915 that destroyed its identity as a destination resort, why wasn’t Gearhart (or “Gearhart Park,” as it was then known) immediately and willingly absorbed into Seaside, or at least reclaimed by Clatsop County? Whence came the unruly spirit, among that band of folks in overalls and aprons back in 1917, that culminated in their successful petition for independence?

Maybe it helps to put the election of Jan. 28, 1918 — the vote that created the City of Gearhart — into a global perspective. In those bygone days, upheaval was worldwide, with revolutions happening in Russia, Germany, Ireland, Mexico ... the list goes on and on. And that’s without mentioning World War I, which wouldn’t be over until autumn. Not to say that Gearhart’s declaration of independence was a revolutionary



Two of Gearhart’s venerable citizens, author Bill Berg and Bob McEwan, a lifelong resident.

act; still, it involved a fistful of like-minded residents doggedly engaged in a process of self-determination. In those days of global insurrection, maybe that kind of self-assertion was just in the air we breathed.

Gearhart Park

Gearhart Park, with its chautauquas and carnivals and hotels and boarding houses and vacation cottages, had thrived in its early years before and after the turn of the 20th

century, but had then died a lingering death of neglect, with its amenities and platted lots being passed along from one syndicate to another, each of whom simply milked it for whatever profit it would bring, and then passed it on to the next syndicate.

Their cavalier attitude toward the whole enterprise was never more evident than in their failure to provide fire safety for the residences, and especially for the two major hotels. The first grand hotel,

the one that stood where city hall now stands, burned to the ground in 1913 because the Gearhart firefighters were no more than a bucket brigade with no fire trucks or hoses or hydrants to hook up to; and the second hotel on the ocean front, the brightest jewel among resort hotels along the entire West Coast, burned down two years later because its developers had never bothered to make sure that its hydrants would fit Seaside’s fire hoses. The Seaside fire trucks showed up, but there was nothing they could do.

With the touristic features of the town pretty much in ruins, the locals who had worked for the syndicates and for the vacationing tourists by maintaining the chautauqua and hotels, and by acting as food servers and housekeepers and carpenters and caddies; the farmers in the good land east of the highway who’d supplied the hotels with food; the shopkeepers and real estate agents; the workers who’d laid planks on the main roads and hauled baggage and tourists from the railroad station to their lodgings and back;

the men who’d laid water lines and dug cesspools — in short, those who had performed all the needed services to keep the resort going — those people now worried about their own future and the future of their numerous children — kids they had educated, by the way, in the school they’d built on the Ridge Path in 1912.

Band of upstarts

A small chorus of voices declared that the time was ripe for the local community to take control of its own town and its own destiny. The prime movers in that process were Henry Ober, who’d built Ocean Home Farm in 1888, and his sons Henry and Fred; Jim Cutler the grocer; Fred Hager, who’d got the school built back in 1912; Dick Schroeder; John Tyberg; and Bill Badger, the first black American to hold public office in the state of Oregon. He was appointed to the Gearhart city council to fill out an unexpired term in 1918.

When he ran on his own in 1922, he lost, but in the depression years of the thirties, with

all the new settlers coming in, he was elected overwhelmingly, and re-elected. During the dark days of World War II, he and Leslie Miller kept the town running and even prospering. But that’s another story.

So the original band of upstarts were a wonderful mix — English-American, German-American, Scandinavian-American, African-American. Add native Americans, and you saw a similar diversity among all Gearhart residents. But not many — just 30 — were able to make the trek to the ballot box at the county court house that January day in 1918. All but two of them cast their votes to establish the city of Gearhart.

What exactly inspired that unity of purpose remains a mystery, perhaps buried forever with the founders of the city. If anyone still alive can shed light on the question, please come forward. There’s much to be proud of in our history; there may be even more.

Gearhart resident Bill Berg is the author of “Gearhart Remembered: An Informal History.”

People make Gearhart special

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eyeing how much candy I was about to bring home. Or it was passing by our neighbors like Carol Lucas, Bob McEwan, and Bill Berg along the path.

How many times have you as a Gearhart resident had someone ask you on a trip where you are from, and you proudly exclaim “I’m from Gearhart, Oregon” and the person inevitably says, “Oh my gosh I love Gearhart!” “Do you know so and so” and “so

and so”? And you say, “Yes, of course, they are my neighbors!” This has happened to me as well many times and it makes you realize that it’s the wonderful people we know that makes this community so special. Celebrating 100 years of the City of Gearhart is really about celebrating the special connections and relationships we have had with the people of Gearhart over these many years ... and that is something that will never change.

Community volunteers make a difference

Principal from Page 1B

awesome students, talented teachers and supportive parents, but most of all, it’s the community we live in.

Gearhart Elementary has approximately 300 students in kindergarten to fifth grade, who all come to us from the communities of both Gearhart and Seaside. The thing that makes Gearhart Elementary and all of the schools in the Seaside School District especial-

ly unique is our amazingly supportive communities. From Gearhart to Seaside and south to Cannon Beach our communities always support our students and staff. On a daily basis you will find parents and community members volunteering their time at Gearhart Elementary. Some plant flowers, while others read or work on math with students. Those who can’t volunteer weekly at the school, support us by helping with

fundraisers, volunteering for field trips or even allowing our students to come to their business for a field trip. Each and every one of these people makes a difference in the lives of our students and a positive impact on our school community. They make our little school a very special place!

As we celebrate 100 years of Gearhart and the 70th year for Gearhart Elementary School, I find myself reflecting on the history,

but also looking forward to the future. New safer schools are on the horizon and soon both Gearhart Elementary School and Seaside Heights Elementary School will be on one campus. It will be hard to leave our special little school, but at Gearhart Elementary we are looking forward to the new opportunities that combining both schools will bring for our students, staff and community. We are excited for new adventures ahead!



The Gearhart Hotel and Gearhart Golf Links have been a part of the community since the 1890s. The 18-hole public golf course is the oldest in Oregon and west of the Mississippi. The Sand Trap Pub has been a lightning rod for camaraderie and epic gatherings of golfers and non-golfers alike for more than a decade.

We continue the tradition of offerings in Gearhart with the new addition of our hotel Annex, outdoor patio and Swingers Lounge with virtual golf. Visit our newest small bar, The Sand Bar, tucked between the dunes and the 1st and 9th holes.

Come by to experience all the new amenities – with a handcrafted ale.



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