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Watering Troughs Disappearing

Horses Vanishing Faster But City Still Has 20 For Each Fountain

By Arthur D. Hawkins
Staff Writer

Portland's watering troughs, once as familiar a sight as traffic lights today, rapidly are becoming vanishing bits of Americana.

Time was when a horse could quench his thirst at any one of 16 watering places here, but today only four troughs remain—and only three of those are in operation.

A good idea in its time, the trough's usefulness passed with the horse and buggy era, Reuel F. Woodman, 30 years with the City's public works department, opined today.

"They gradually became just a nuisance—plugging up, running over and sometimes icing the streets," explained Woodman, supervisor of the PWD's sewer division.

Used To Wash Fish

Supposedly set aside for Old Dobbin, the troughs along the waterfront area in later years even were used by youngsters to wash fish catches in, Woodman recalled.

In fact, it seems that no one aled a tear, or became aroused, when city officials in 1933 tagged as a traffic menace the grandiose, gaslight-topped Congress Street trough at Railroad Square.

By then, according to accounts, most owners preferred to water their horses out of individual pails—shunning the troughs in fear of standers, a gland-hardening disease of the equine family.

That year, there were only 179 horses listed on the books of city assessors here. Their total valuation was $13,875. In 1908, the year the Railroad Square fountain was erected, there were 3,078 horses taxed in Portland within a valuation of $188,650.

Only 62 Horses Now

Today, there are only 62 horses here, according to assessors, and valuation has dropped to $4,000. Most of these, as all their predecessors in 1933, are saddle horses which never see a downtown city street.

Fate of horses on Congress Street today really would be a curiosity," remarked Raymond L. Hearn, of Portland's Board of Assessors.

With the passing of the horses, Portland's watering troughs found various and sundry ends.

Edward M. Hunt, retired public works department commissioner, recalled that two of the round, iron troughs were sold for use as bird baths to U. S. Representative Edith Nourse Rogers, of Lowell, Mass., and some others were disposed of as junk.

Three of the iron troughs, with standards dated 1886, are piled today in the yard of the sewer division's storehouse, 1128 Forest Avenue, appropriately the site of the old Deering City stable.

Work Of Londoner

There also is the bronze, ornamental statue of a girl holding a bowl, the work of a London sculptor, which once graced the Steven's Memorial fountain at Park Avenue and High Street until it was knocked off its pedestal by World War II vandalism.

Posing a problem to Park Superintendent Karl F. Seliner are the remains of the huge, granite Railroad Square trough, now discarded at the city greenhouse, 571 Park Avenue.

This $1,000 gift of the National Humane Alliance was dismantled in 1934, after being a target for track-jumping "electrics" and skidding autos.

Records at the public works office, for instance, show that the City of Portland billed Uncle Sam in 1930 for $104.87—the cost of re-erecting part of the fountain after a mail truck had rammed it.

Six Of Stone, Nine Iron

All told, there were six stone and nine iron troughs here in 1926 when maintenance of them was transferred from the park department to public works.

William J. Dougherty, director of parks and recreation, and nearly 38 years with the park department, explained that the troughs constantly evoked sewerage and drainage problems with which the PWD was better able to cope.

Only granite troughs are in operation today. They are located at Congress and Mountfort Streets, Federal near Market Street and Park Avenue at High Street.

Still in existence, but not flowing, is the 4ft-year-old Boothby Square stone trough damaged by an automobile last year. Whether it is to be placed back in operation, Public Works Commissioner Frederick H. May doesn't know. Repairs probably would be too costly, he believes.

Pullen Fountain Is Ornate

Most ornate is the Stanley T. Pullen fountain at the Federal Street public market where a farm horse today is a rare sight.

The fountain bears the inscription, "Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge."

Known to Portland school children as "The Bubble," it is ornamented by six dolphins—four of which "spout" water into three troughs. There is a drinking fountain, or bubbler, for humans and also two small troughs.

This fountain was erected in memory of one of the founders of the Portland Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who later was instrumental in forming the Maine Society for the Protection of Animals with which the local SPCA was merged.

Watering troughs formerly were located at Congress and St. John Street, Congress and Waldo Streets, Congress near Pore Street, Cumberland and Pleasant Streets, Danforth and West Commercial Streets, Union Wharf at Commercial Street, Park Avenue at St. John Street, Pine and West Streets, Forest Avenue opposite Kennebec Street, Washington near Allen Avenue and Pure near Center Street.

Move From Congress-High

The Stevens Memorial fountain on Park Avenue near the U. S. Post Office formerly was located at High and Congress Streets. It was moved when the State Building was erected.

Most of the troughs were removed between 1934 and 1938, although the one at Park Avenue and St. John Street stood until May 13, 1942.

They were dismantled, former PWD Commissioner Hunt recalled, because the decline of horses "just didn't justify their maintenance."

Hunt also pointed out that during the times the troughs were operated in Winter, they were a menace because of water overflowing, wind-blown and icing in the streets.

Horses Went First

Comparatively speaking, horses have decreased faster than the troughs here. Even if all Portland's horses today slaked their thirsts at the public watering places, there would be one trough for every 20 horses. The ratio 40 years ago was 156 horses per trough.

As far as their original purpose was intended, the value of the troughs today is "nil" according to Commissioner May.

They have an ornamental value, as vanishing pieces of Americana, the commissioner pointed out, however, and those in operation today all are equipped with bubblers for thirsty, two-legged Portlanders.

What's more, it has been noticed that they still are widely used as bird baths.

By Evening Express Photographer

GASLIGHT MEMORIES—Once a thirst quencher for Portland horses, the 39-year-old Railroad Square fountain now lies in pieces near the city greenhouse. A gas light once topped the massive structure. In later years, the fountain was declared a traffic hazard. Wallace E. Sterling, 21, of 111 State Street, University of Maine sophomore, who was employed by the Park Department last Summer, examines the dedication plate. The fountain's huge circular trough is at the right.

By Evening Express Photographer

POTENTIAL BIRDBATHS—With Old Dobbin fast becoming a rare sight here, Reuel F. Woodman, supervisor of the city's sewer division, examines a pair of the oldtime, round, iron horse troughs now junked at the former City of Deering stable. Some of the discarded troughs were sold for use as birdbaths.

Dogs And Master Used Same Plate, Court Informed

Los Angeles, Sept. 20. (AP)—A pair of Irish setters named Pat and Gunner, designated heirs to a $30,000 estate, and their benefactor, the late Carleton R. Bainbridge, led a companionable life, the court was informed.

Attorney Harold A. Pender, representing Sherman Bainbridge, brother of Carleton, said Friday that the dogs went to the movies with their master, slept in the same bed and ate off the same plate with him.

"I have heard unbelievable stories," declared Pender, arguing that Bainbridge, onetime prominent attorney, suffered from illusions after a long illness. The brother is contesting the will on those grounds.

OBSERVA-STORIES

Realistic Merchant—A local business establishment apparently doesnt think the public believes in signs.

Alongside of two signs—"Parking reserved for customers in our store on business" and "No public parking"—they painted this notice:

"Parking, if you insist, 50 cents per hour."

New Brand Of Life Savers—A young Portlander scanned an assortment of souvenirs in a local gift shop. "These are life-savers, aren't they?" he asked the salesman. "No, I wouldn't call them that," the clerk replied, somewhat nettled at the boy's description. "Sure they are," the youngster insisted. "People buy them and save them for the rest of their lives."

Add Landlord Stories.—A local woman seeking to buy a rent receipt book in a Congress Street stationery store was told in one quick breath first, that the store was all out of the item and, second, that the male clerk would give her $20 more than she was asking now for any of her apartments, regardless of its location.

Stop Us, If You've Heard It Before—They tell about the novice reporter who ran to the city editor and proclaimed excitedly, "There has been a murder at the Acme Hotel."

"How long ago," the editor countered.

"One hour," replied the novice.

"Sorry," said the editor, "but that's too old to be news."

Undaunted the reporter returned shortly with a story about a fire in a nearby apartment house.

"When did it happen," queried the editor.

"Fifteen minutes ago," the boy answered.

"Stale news," replied the indomitable editor.

With his enthusiasm battered but still intact the reporter bravely approached the editor that same day with a tale of an explosion in a factory building.

"How long ago," said the editor.

"Listen," demanded the novice.

A few seconds later a terrific explosion shook the editorial rooms knocking the editor from his chair.

A dog may be man's best friend as is often claimed, but we doubt if a certain mutt in Deering is the best of canine distinction in one Greater Portland household. The above is our conclusion after observing a dog, tied too close to a clothes line, rip about a quarter of the family's washing to the muddy ground before he was spotted in the act.

Obviously.—"And now, children," inquired the Sunday School teacher, in a review of the day's lesson, "who can tell me what we must do before we can expect forgiveness of sin?"

There was a moment's pause and then little Wilbur made his logical contribution: "Well," he said, "first we have got to sin."—Thomas Dreier in Your Life.

Life Expectancy.—The expectation of life at birth for the general population of the United States, based on recent studies was 63.55 years for white males and 68.95 years for white females, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica 1947 Book of the Year. The Negro males had a life expectancy at birth of 55.30 years and the Negro females, 58.90 years.

U. S. Develops New Jet Fighter

XP-86 Wings Employ Swept-Back Design

Washington, Sept. 20. (AP)—The United States Air Force has developed another jet-propelled fighter plane, the North American XP-86.

An announcement said the new, radically designed fighter is being tested at Muroc army air base in California preliminary to its first test flight.

It presents "a somewhat different appearance" from jet fighters now in service, the air force said, employing a sweep-back design in its wings and tail surface.

Portland, Maine Fountains disappearing, 1947

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