

The Cut

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By Jim Speirs

for the residents of North Portland to stop and ponder certain idiosyncrasies and anomalies that have become such odd parts of our landscape.

The genesis of the Cut may have been born during the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition. I say *may* because political activities in 1905 were much easier to conceal than they are in today's world because scrutiny of activities was much less, and records often were conveniently lost.

During the hugely successful world-class Lewis and Clark Expo, all of Portland became a stage that was visited by Americans and royalty from the four corners of the globe. Vast numbers of famous and wealthy dignitaries were housed in the Portland area. They traveled throughout the community to enjoy the centennial events, picturesque beauty of the area, and to explore business opportunities that might be available in proximity to the Lewis and Clark celebrations. One of the most fascinating and talked about discoveries was the enormous vibrancy and potential of a city near Portland. Its name was St. Johns.

St. Johns in the early 1900's was one of the most desirable places a person could live. The community, which was never clearly defined geographically, kept expanding and moving its borders east, as neighborhoods like Portsmouth and Kenton clamored to be included in the burgeoning economic growth and spirit of St. Johns. Its houses were beautiful and its streets were lined in perfect order, and it had a commerce center that was very provincial and self-serving. The city of St. Johns was "the" place to reside.

Travelers to the Lewis and Clark Exposition had taken notice of these attributes, and increasingly so had the city of Portland. St. Johns had its own College, rivers that buttressed both sides of the peninsula insuring robust commercial expansion, and a local leadership that was very protective of the jewel that was their prosperous and growing community.

The future of St. Johns was clear and with its ever expanding success and growth, the city of Portland began to cast its eyes on the smaller neighbor to its north and

by the early 1900's the ugly word "annexation" had become the sinister siren call from Portland to St. Johns.

As the city of Portland saw (and envied) the economic machine that St. Johns was becoming, there came a cacophony of voices from Portland that would eventually seal the fate of the proud and independent city of St. Johns. The larger city was greedy and saw some of the most talented and entrepreneurial people and industries choosing to locate in St. Johns at the expense of Portland.

Political in-fighting, backstabbing and closed-door deal making became the order of the day. One of the enticements for St. Johns was the suggestion that Portland would use its much larger political clout to bring money to St. Johns for a bridge over the Willamette River. At the time, there was only the ferry to facilitate business over the river, and the addition of a bridge would greatly help St. Johns livability. Many of the newspapers of the day were filled with articles that addressed the annexation issue.

An example comes from the *St. Johns Review* – the newly formed newspaper which was "the" paper in North Portland and rivaled both the *Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal* in influence and power.

In a September 4, 1908 *Review*, the headline read: "ANNEXATION FOLLY AGAIN." The subtitle saying, "Nothing to be Gained and Much to be Lost by Such a Move at this Stage of the Game." The article concluded with: "*St. Johns is the most desirable suburb about Portland, will be one of the biggest revenue getters to the big city when she becomes a part of the big corporation, as she will someday perhaps. But we do not want to go into the big city now, when there is not a single good thing to be gained and a big lot of things that are very undesirable that be fastened upon us.*" (The style of writing in those days certainly was baroque.)

St. Johns feared annexation and had a dire, yet clear idea of what incorporation with Portland would mean for the stubbornly independent and successful St. Johns. Another statement from the *St. Johns Review* said: "*To go into Portland*

will set St. Johns back ten or fifteen years, and the very ones who are agitating the change will curse bitterly the hour they ever put their fingers into the matter. This is particularly true of those who have property interests."

So, the stage was set, the cauldron was agitated and St. Johns and Portland continued on a collision course with the wheels of intrigue and manipulation spun at a frantic pace. For Portland, one of the ways to lessen the growing resistance to annexation was to create divisions within the city of St. Johns – divide and conquer, as the saying goes.

The fierce opposition to annexation forced the city of Portland to seek out partners that might be able to assist in the dissection of the prosperous, proud and independent city of St. Johns, and that "aiding and abetting" came from a very powerful source - the U.S. Railroad industry.

Part II continued in the April 8, 2016 issue.

Picture of the Week

This picture, taken by Marshall Snyder gives a unique perspective of the bridge through time lapse photography. Very unique.

The MASTHEAD in this issue was taken by Melissa Bartoszewski and of course makes us all long for all the spring flowers to be in full bloom.

Send your lovely and/or unique pictures of the bridge (that you've taken yourself,) today to perhaps see them in the April 8, 2016 issue of the Review. See page 2 for full details.

SEND YOUR PHOTO OF THE ST. JOHNS BRIDGE TO: reviewnewspaper@gmail.com in high resolution jpeg.



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