

# Sellwood-Moreland Bee

## 1956-1981: Recovery & Prosperity

"We add that our newspaper's policy, established in its first issue, October 6, 1906, will remain the same. Community news will be given coverage to the limit of our ability; we will stand behind all projects that advance the well-being and growth of this community; we will take care that no one is hurt or embarrassed by irresponsible journalism. The Bee's ambitions are tightly linked to the prosperity and welfare of this area, and we hope and believe your community newspaper will...contribute."

— Fern Hilson, Editor  
The Sellwood-Moreland Bee  
October 14, 1956

BY EILEEN G. FITZSIMONS  
for *The Bee*

When Fern and Howard Hilson purchased *The Bee* in 1949, they were aware of the historic separation between Westmoreland and Sellwood. An initial attempt by the Hilsons at reconciliation was combining the two community names on the masthead, a signal to readers that they considered the rivalry an outmoded notion. In late October, 1956, they were encouraged that a "Sellwood-Moreland Area Council" had been formed to "take under consideration problems facing the community." At the time four separate interest groups were in operation: the Sellwood Business Club, Moreland Commercial Club, Sellwood Community Club and Westmoreland Community Club.

In a January, 1957, New Year editorial, the Hilsons suggested some issues that the new Council might address:

- 1) Protection and conservation of the Willamette River, including public acquisition of land;
- 2) Construction of a ramp onto McLoughlin Blvd. from Bybee Ave.;
- 3) Construction of a new community center, ideally in the middle of Westmoreland Park;
- 4) More housing;
- 5) Parking lots in the shopping areas;
- 6) Reduction of serious juvenile delinquency, which including burglary, underage drinking, and sometimes assault.

However, progress by the Council was imperceptible; Westmoreland continued to thrive and Sellwood continued to stagnate. Members of the two Community Clubs spent their time in separate social activities, kept to themselves, and worked for their own self-interests. Merchants in Westmoreland did open up a small parking area (still in use, at Milwaukie & Claybourne), and organized seasonal events to attract shoppers that included parades, and drawings for prizes, such as television sets and musical performances by local TV

stars, like local cowboy singer Heck Harper. However, these events were beneficial primarily to the sponsors in Westmoreland.

In Sellwood, under the leadership of businessman Dent Thomas, a handful of shop owners and residents formed an improvement association to clean up the area and make it more customer-friendly. They began hunting for and noting cars on parking strips and front lawns, old appliances abandoned in public view, and un-mown grass. They contacted city regulatory agencies about all these, but got little help. Many of the properties south of Tacoma Street were rentals, and getting action from absentee landlords proved difficult. Finally, at the end of 1960, an opportunity arose that challenged the community, but ultimately paid big dividends for Sellwood: The threatened demolition of the St. Johns Episcopal Church in Milwaukie, which was constructed in 1851.

Within a few weeks, a small group of activists announced their desire to save the church, and partnered with Portland City Councilman (and architect) Ormond Bean to obtain city-owned property at the south end of Sellwood Park on which to relocate it. The group then raised \$4,300 to lift the structure off its foundation, remove the steeple, truck it to the Willamette River in Milwaukie, barge it downriver to Sellwood, and transport it up to its new lot at S.E. Spokane and Grand Streets.

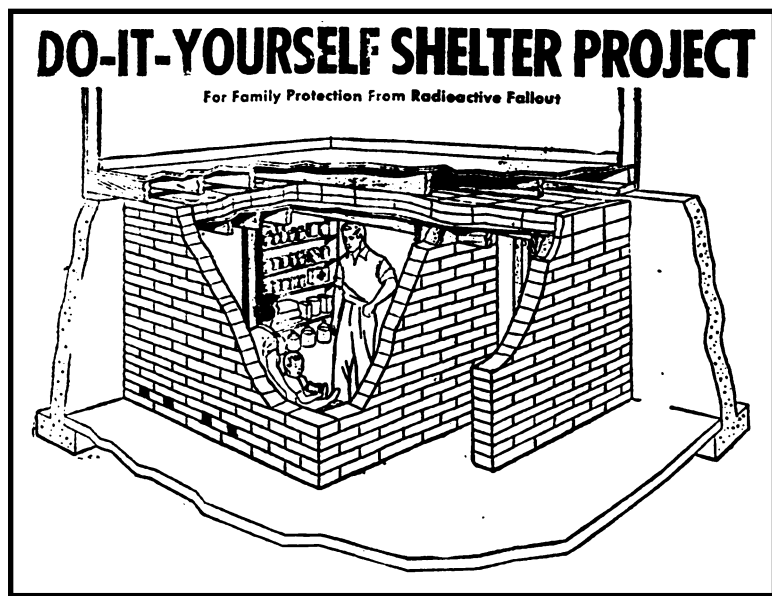
The dramatic and successful effort by the "marginal" neighborhood of Sellwood received intensive media



Westmoreland Business Association members gathered in front of what was then known as the "Poll Parrot Restaurant" on S.E. Milwaukie, just north of Bybee, in December of 1947, to celebrate the Christmas season.

coverage, and created a fresh image of a dynamic, "can do" neighborhood. Many years of work lay ahead but the rehabilitation attracted volunteer labor from contractors, garden clubs and individuals. In addition, the church preservation group had to incorporate and apply for nonprofit status.

Initially it was thought that the building would serve as a historical museum, but as the restoration was



If the Russians were going to attack during the Cold War, Sellwood-Westmoreland residents should be prepared. It is not known if anyone in the neighborhood actually built a fallout shelter. Taken from the August, 1959 issue of *The Bee*.

being completed, a couple inquired if it could be used for their wedding. That first service led to many more — and managing thousands of weddings, memorial services and family reunions led to development of the very business-like entity now known as the Sellwood Moreland Improvement League (S.M.I.L.E.). In 1974, SMILE rewrote its bylaws to become an official City of Portland Neighborhood Association. The income generated by church rentals is shared with the City's Park Bureau, and pays for a scheduler/manager and ongoing building maintenance. The remaining money is distributed through SMILE into a variety of programs that strengthen the neighborhood.

In addition to the successful preservation of what became known as the Oaks Pioneer Church, new businesses began to move into the vacant storefronts along S.E. 13th Avenue. In February of 1965, Garthwick resident Liz Fowler moved her business, 1874 House, from S.W. Corbett Street to Sellwood. *Bee* reporter Doris R. Leppert stated that Mrs. Fowler had the "unusual hobby of lugging home staircases, doors in their frames, stained glass windows, and other pieces of yesteryear's architecture." Much of Fowler's early material was salvage from old houses being demolished for the "Foothills Freeway" (I-405).

She soon had company on Thirteenth Avenue, as additional vendors began to arrive to develop the specialty shopping district which became known as "Antique Row."

Like the effort to preserve the Pioneer Church, this was an unplanned phenomenon that grew and prospered for almost 30 years, bringing new energy and outside shop-

pers to Sellwood. The old business buildings were not demolished, but preserved and spruced up. Unfortunately, except for the Thriftway Store, the increase in business did not translate into convenient shopping for residents, who had to go elsewhere for necessities.

I recently interviewed Ann Walker, who in December of 1968 opened her antique store "Ann-tiques of Sellwood" at 8624 S.E. 13th (now the location of "The Divorce Shoppe"). Ann's primary advice to would-be fellow antique dealers is that they should "have another source of family income." Her husband had a dental practice, which he continued during the eight years that she ran the shop, and her son Tony refinished furniture.

The Walkers purchased their building, a former false-front grocery store, and when they moved into the apartment on the second floor, they discovered it had no heat. But excitement was building in the neighborhood as more dealers arrived. She recalled Bill Bauer, Earl Taylor, and Jim and Leslie Goldsmith, who still operate their shop "Den of Antiquity" two blocks north of Tacoma Street. Some of them were members of the Sellwood-Moreland Commercial Club, which met in the basement of U.S. National Bank on Milwaukie Avenue.

Ann's shop-owner routine was to go to estate sales and auctions to select items for her shop, which was primarily furniture, but also included Haviland china. Previously she had cruised Goodwill stores; but, as interest in antiques increased, especially approaching America's Bicentennial in 1976, competition also increased, and the supplies became limited. She also began to notice people who oper-

ated "perpetual" garage sales. Ann had a business license and paid taxes on her income, but there were individuals who seemed to have "garage sales" all the time, and were really "de facto" dealers.

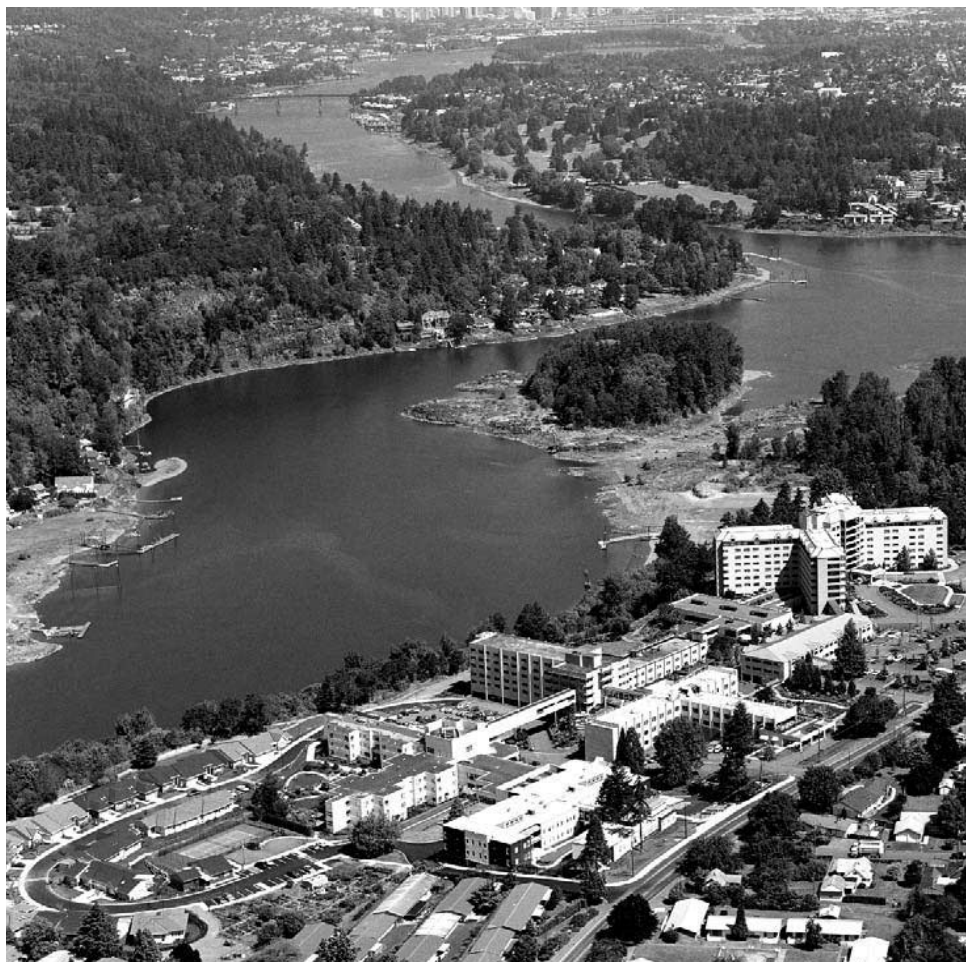
While running her shop she was also studying for her realtor's license, which she finally obtained. Then her husband fell ill, and, as they did not have health insurance, she needed a more reliable income to cover his treatment. She sold the store and began working for Tarbell Real Estate company on Milwaukie Avenue, across from Kienow's (today's QFC location).

In a way, her new career unexpectedly branched back into the antiques business. When putting their house up for sale, a homeowner would often have more furniture and household items than they needed, and would ask Ann what they should do with it; she occasionally ended up conducting an estate sale!

Ann recalls her days as an Antique Row merchant with pleasure, especially enjoying the moment of selling the perfect item to a happy customer. She related an incident when she ventured to a winter antique show in Palm Springs. A dealer from San Diego purchased everything—primarily recipe books, valentines and toys—except for an old rocking chair, which she bought. As she was loading it into her vehicle, a young couple rushed up and begged her to sell the chair to them. In addition to paying her price, they also gave her a box of grapefruit from their farm!

While business was improving in the "Sellwood-Moreland" neighborhood, changes were afoot at the state level that would involve residents in complicated and contentious issues for decades to come. In 1973, under the leadership of Republican Governor Tom McCall, the Oregon state legislature passed Senate Bill 100, which created the state Land Conservation & Development Commission (LCDC). The most sweeping mandate was adoption of fourteen statewide planning goals that local towns and cities had to meet.

Implementation of SB100 by the City of Portland's Planning Bureau led to the introduction of residents in neighborhoods all over the city to the concept of trying to plan future development. It was a steep learning curve for planners and citizens alike, as they attempted to articulate what they valued most about their city and neighborhood and more difficult, how to plan future growth while retaining that identity. In 1979, Portland area voters create Metro, a regional planning body. Struggling to involve citizens in multi-level planning decisions was a complicated task for officers and members of SMILE, and it is one that remains ongoing today, thirty-five years later.



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