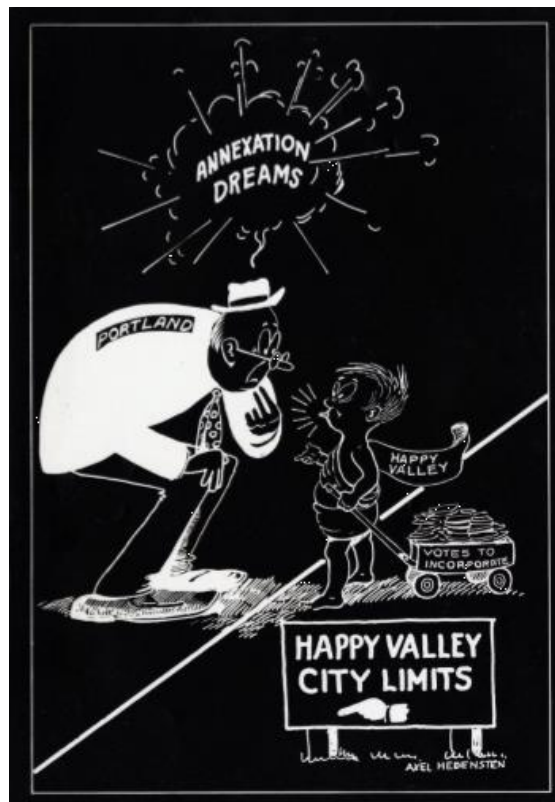


Almost Portland: The Incorporation of Happy Valley

By Mark Hurlburt

If you lived in Happy Valley in 1965, you were faced with the possibility that your peaceful, nature-blessed and isolated community could be swallowed up by annexation into the commercialism of the City of Portland. When Portland annexed the Willamette National Cemetery property and the land on Happy Valley's borders, the valley residents came together to discuss the option of incorporation.¹ When Portland planned to hold a meeting regarding the expansion of that city southward into the hollow, the motivated local residents wanted immediate action to avoid the prospect of losing their identity as a rural residential community and the fate of paying taxes to the City of Portland. One of those concerned residents was Noreen Sample, who reflected on the situation, "Being grabbed and gobbled up into Multnomah County and Portland was appalling, the desecration of commercialism unthinkable. Happy Valley had to be saved from the fate of losing its individuality".² Community leaders wanted to be the deciding voice in Happy Valley's future, but they would need to hurry.



Happy Valley Annexation Cartoon

By Axel Hedensten

Happy Valley also faced the threat of a new Oregon law that was set to take effect in August that would ban the incorporation of new municipalities within three miles of an existing city.³ With Happy Valley seated on Portland's border, this new law would apply to them. In June and July the issue of clarifying Happy Valley's boundaries was settled with the Board of Clackamas County Commissioners. The new city limits were proposed to be set between Lincoln Memorial Cemetery and Sunnyside Road. Then, the community of approximately 300 citizens held a special election on August 25, 1965 to decide whether to incorporate as Clackamas County's eleventh municipality. The community cast their votes at the Happy Valley Fire Station on King Road and the results ended up favoring incorporation with 111 for and 66 against.⁴



Happy Valley Fire Station, 1987

Photo by Bud Unruh

After the people made their voices known, the newly incorporated City of Happy Valley would begin, however without its own basic public services. The fire department would continue to consist of volunteers and the policing of the city would be provided by the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office.⁵ The election for the first city council was held on November 9th with Louis Bauer, Jr., Jack Kato, Ken Leavens, Alan McEachern and James Robnett receiving the most votes from eleven candidates.⁶ The newly elected City Council held their first meeting on November 17, 1965 at the fire station.⁷ Also present at the meeting was Clackamas County Commissioner Stan Skoko, city attorney Donald Huffman and acting clerk Robert Bryant.

The duties at this initial meeting included electing a mayor and adopting municipal codes to govern the new city. Mr. Huffman declared that nominations were open for mayor of the city. Robnett, Kato and Bauer, Jr. were nominated by their fellow councilmen. The election was held by secret ballot among the councilors and the ballots were counted by Bryant. Robnett and Kato tied at two votes each, and it was explained by Commissioner Skoko that the procedure for

breaking the draw was by a coin toss. Robnett flipped the coin into the air while Kato called “heads”. It landed on “tails” and James Robnett became the first mayor of Happy Valley.⁸ While this is how the event was officially recorded, the actual coin toss happened differently. According to Robnett, Kato was victorious in the the coin toss but chose him to be mayor instead. It was a position Robnett would hold for the next three decades, keeping the city’s growth at a minimum, until he was ousted by the City Council in the mayoral election of January 1995.⁹ The change in leadership marked the beginning of the city’s huge population expansion and Happy Valley becoming one of the fastest growing cities in Oregon.



City Council meeting, 1969
(left to right) Jack Kato, James Robnett,
Harry Niehoff and Jack Allen
Courtesy: City of Happy Valley

In the following years, Happy Valley transformed from being the small, isolated community of its beginnings into the popular suburban city that we know today. Although much has changed, much has remained the same. Happy Valley has managed to keep its individuality and the peaceful settings of days gone by, and along with many other benefits explains why so many people want to live in the special place that is the City of Happy Valley.

Mark Hurlburt is a lifelong Happy Valley resident and the volunteer librarian in the Wilmer Gardner Research Library at the Museum of the Oregon Territory.

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