

## ***A Look Back at 1915, and the history of the Butler-Perozzi Fountain***

*By Mike Gardiner, Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission – Chair*

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The year was 1915. Babe Ruth hit his first career home run. The first stone of the Lincoln Memorial was set in Washington, D.C. The first stop sign was introduced in Detroit, MI. The “Chairman of the Board,” Frank Sinatra was born in Hoboken, NJ. And in celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal the “Panama-Pacific World Exposition” was held in San Francisco, CA.

That was the news of the day in 1915. Most folks did not know that George Herman “Babe” Ruth would become one of the greatest baseball players of all time. And who the heck needed a stop sign? And no one knew the impact that Frank would have on mid-20<sup>th</sup> century music and cinema.

But if we back up a few years we can set the stage for 1915 Ashland and the beginnings of Lithia Park. In 1908 the citizens of Ashland had voted to amend the city charter and create a City Park and a parks commission to oversee a parks system that would grow and expand over the next 100-plus years. In 1914 the Ashland Commercial Club (think early Chamber of Commerce) had a vision for Ashland as a resort town tapping into the mineral springs that were abundantly located around the area. By way of another vote the Ashland citizenry chose to support the Commercial Club’s endeavor and a Mineral Springs Committee was formed to examine the potential and promote the idea of a mineral water resort town. Ashland voters supported the venture by passing a \$175,000 water bond. The plan included the acquisition of approximately 19 acres, which constitutes the central section of today’s Lithia Park. The contract for piping the mineral waters was awarded to the Smith Emery Company and John McLaren, the builder of Golden Gate Park, was hired to design a landscape plan for the private venture that would be known as Lithia Springs Park.

In early 1915, with all these grand plans taking shape, two Ashland citizens, Gwin S. Butler and Domingo Perozzi, traveled to the Panama-Pacific World Expo and returned with two treasures that were gifted to the City of Ashland. A marble statue of Abraham Lincoln and the marble fountain designed and sculpted by Antonio Frilli in Florence, Italy. The Lincoln statue was placed prominently in the Lithia Springs Park and the Butler-Perozzi Fountain was installed just below Granite Street near the entrance to the new park.

Whereas Abe Lincoln was unfortunately vandalized multiple times over the years and has since been retired to the APRC Lithia Park Administration Office, the Butler-Perozzi Fountain is still an iconic feature of Lithia Park and part of the original McLaren design. But the fountain is need of help.

The Southern Oregon seasonal weather is not the kindest climate for this marble fountain and the concrete stairway and pavilion where it sits. With help from past Community Development Director, John Fregonese, the fountain was re-sculpted by Jeffery Bernard of Ashland in 1987. The marble boy and swan atop the fountain were too vulnerable to the elements, so they were removed and placed in the Ashland Public Library and replaced by bronze figures. Since then the entire fountain system has continued to age. Repairs and/or a complete rebuild are needed for the aging internal plumbing system. The concrete structures that surround the fountain, while from a distance look fine, upon closer inspection reveal the need for repair and upgrades.

The Ashland Park and Recreation Commissioners have consistently emphasized the importance of fixing the fountain. It is anticipated that we will need to spend up to \$550,000 on the fountain in future years, but this capital improvement project is unfunded. APRC currently has \$70,000 of Food & Beverage tax money allocated in our CIP (Capital Improvement Project) plan that can go toward the fountain. The Fregonese Family started a GoFundMe campaign and between that and the Ashland Parks Foundation we think we can count on another \$25,000. But we are currently short of the funds to proceed with much of the work that is needed for the Butler-Perozzi Fountain.

Support from interested community members will be critical to the long-term maintenance and rehabilitation of this valued community treasure. Additional funding mechanisms will need to be sourced to meet our goal of preserving the fountain for future generations. In the 1980s this community came together and supported the effort to extend the life of this historic feature of Ashland's past. The spirit of these past efforts will need to be resurrected in order to meet this challenge. You can contact APRC or go to the APRC ([AshlandParksandRec.org](http://AshlandParksandRec.org)) or the Ashland Parks Foundation webpage for information and donation opportunities.