

Peg Leg Pete and the Fair Oaks Dump

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If you lived in Fair Oaks in the 1930's and 1940's, you disposed of your garbage and trash at the Fair Oaks Dump on the north side of the river at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue. The overseer of the dump was an old man called by the locals Peg Leg Pete (or just Peg). Stories abound from the "old timers" about how he subsisted by reselling the "junk" that residents brought to the dump, milked rattlesnakes and sold the venom to hospitals, that he lost his left leg in World War I, he had a hoard of gold buried in his shack, and that he was generally unkempt with a long grey beard and shoulder length grey hair. Probably some truth in all of this.



In the years that I've been involved with the Historical Society, I've made several attempts to track down information on Peg Leg Pete and find out more about him. Totally unsuccessful. Without his real name, locating historical documents on him is impossible.

At the last FOHS Board meeting, Lynn Steen handed me an envelope with photos of Peg and the dump. She also said that her mother was the Fair Oaks correspondent for the Bee and had done a story on Peg in the 1940's. Things just get better. Newspapers.com had just finished doing a complete scan of the Bee which was word searchable. That enabled me to find the article, and Peg's real name. Onward.

B. Oviatt Giberson, aka Peg Leg Pete, was born in Indiana in 1880 and in his younger years seems to be a bit of a wanderer. He registered for the WWI draft in 1918 in Salem, Oregon and listed his occupation as "Horse Trader." He was rejected from service due to "Left foot amputated nine inches below knee." So we know that Peg's loss of his leg was not war related.



A little speculation – Peg’s tenure at the dump began in 1932, just into the depression, and a hobo camp was located on the south side of the river at the rock crushing plant. The residents of the camp came in on the spur line of the Fair Oaks railroad and camped along the river. It’s a reasonable assumption that Peg arrived that way and stayed. That would also explain his leg loss. It was common for individuals riding the rails to stumble when trying to climb on a moving freight car and suffer serious injury.

Peg lived at the dump in his “tin can palace” for 15 years until the county moved the dump to the vicinity of Coloma Road and Folsom Blvd. Peg’s tenure as “self appointed keeper of the dumps was recognized officially. He was made a deputy sheriff and authorized to regulate the dumping. He probably stayed on in that capacity until he officially retired in 1965. He died in Placerville in 1968.