



Photo courtesy of Gresham Historical Society.

This 1915 photo, taken before a Statue of Liberty was placed on the horse trough at the intersection of Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard, shows the Gresham Rexall Drug store at right.

The store, named Gresham Pioneer Business of the Year on Monday night, has been there 83 years.

Rexall Drug top pioneer firm

by SHARON NESBIT
of The Outlook staff

The Gresham Rexall Drug Store, which has stood at the corner of Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard for 83 years, was named the city's pioneer business of the year Monday night at the Gresham Historical Society's annual banquet.

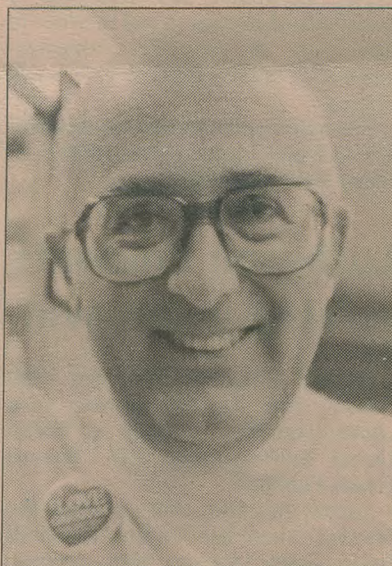
Stafford Dowsett, 79, the second in a three-generation span of Dowsett family pharmacists, accepted the award at the Gresham Elks Lodge and told the more than 125 people present of the days when medicines were mixed by hand.

"I would go to the back and mix medicine powders for a while. We mixed at least 100 different powders in those days. And then I would go up front and work at the soda fountain," he said.

The Gresham Rexall Drug will display the pioneer business plaque for a year before the trophy goes on to the next recipient. Last year it was awarded to Roger and Margaret Kidder of the former Kidder Hardware.

Arthur Dowsett, Stafford Dowsett's father, started the drug business in 1903 on the corner of Gresham's chief intersection. He obtained the Rexall franchise in 1904, according to a history of the store written by Ray Bolkan.

"It was in the old wooden Metzger Building and there was a dance hall



DICK DOWSETT
Third generation

on the second floor," said Dowsett, who was born in Gresham in 1906. The store's famous soda fountain was installed about 1914, he said.

Stafford Dowsett attended Gresham Union High School, where he met Frances Welling. The two were married in 1929. They picked their photos out of a 1925 class portrait at Monday night's banquet.

After completing his education at Oregon State University, Stafford Dowsett joined the drug store in 1928.

During his working career, he was mayor of Gresham and helped establish the Gresham Elks Lodge.

He retired in 1962 and sold the store to his son, Dick Dowsett, who runs it in partnership with Bob Mansen.

Other awards given at the historical society banquet included the preservationist of the year award to Leo Larsen, the retired carpenter who spearheaded completion of the exterior work on the old First Baptist Church, the society's future museum in Main City Park.

Archie Harris, who heads the society's oral history project and also takes history programs to the local schools, was named board member of the year.

Vera Peters was the first recipient of a volunteer of the year award. Peters, who was chairwoman of the banquet, created the society's Pioneer Appreciation Day, gathered the bulk of the society's photo collection and published a book of historical photos.

Karl Hayes, president of the society for the last three years, also was honored with an award for his work for the historical group.

Ross Fanning was honored as a patron of the historical society and was presented a Statue of Liberty medallion. Howard Berg, chairman of a special project to put a Statue of Liberty in Main City Park, was awarded a similar medallion.



7-19-62

Sidewalk Days are still a week away but already Gresham businessmen are preparing for the July 26-28 sale. Bob Tourney, manager of Gresham's Sears store, is taking some of the store's lawn furniture out on the sidewalk for a trial run. His pretty helper is Bobbie

Wiesinger, from Gresham Rexall. During the three-day sidewalk sale, participating merchants will move sale items to special bins on the walk in front of their store.

(Outlook photo)

Watermelon Contest, Too!

First Sidewalk Sale Planned Next Week

Gresham's first annual Sidewalk Sale days will be held next Friday and Saturday — with scads of bargains guaranteed.

All in - Gresham stores have been asked to participate. Plans call for special sale merchandise displays on the walks in front of the store-plus additional sale items in the stores.

"We expect to have the largest clearance offerings ever put on during one city-wide sale," members of the Gresham Boosters group, sponsors of the Sidewalk event, said.

In addition to the sales event, a giant watermelon eating contest will be held on the new city parking lot at 3rd and Miller which will be blacktopped and opened by that date.

The melon contest will be held in two categories. Group one will be contestants under 12. Group two will be for persons 12 and over. Prizes in each group will be \$10, \$7.50 and \$5 merchandise certificates in Gresham stores. Winners will

be determined on the basis of the most melon consumed in a 10-minute period.

"This is the right time for a sale," said the Boosters. "The

cool summer weather has slower has slowed sales of summer merchandise. We have lots to move and because we have this stock, prices will be hot!"

Gresham's two soda fountains put town on livability list

Progress hasn't eliminated this tasty tradition.

by Suzanne Ashmun
people editor

Not all connoisseurs delve into truffles and wines.

Some specialize in ice cream soda fountains.

There are those who say the corner drugstore is passe, that the meeting place of a hundred summer days is dying.

Not so in Gresham, which boasts not one, but two, fountains to warm the soul and widen the hips.

Not everyone eats hot fudge sundaes, or course.

Over at Gresham Rexall, there are people who've been sharing morning coffee for years. One couple—he works

the night shift, she the day shift—have shared a coffee break for years.

"It's still 10 cents," said owner Dick Dowsett. "Something has to stay the same."

The drugstore at Powell and Main has been around since 1903, although there was a six-month period when the watering hole dried up.

"We remodeled in 1960 and the guy who did it told us soda fountains didn't fit in with a

modern drugstore," Dowsett recalled. "Unfortunately, we believed him. 'It was gone for about six months, but popular demand made us put it back in. It loses money every day it's in operation, but it's become a Gresham tradition.'"

Around the corner on SE Roberts is McBains Drugstore, which Erv Ide purchased 24 years ago. The store, started by Don McBain has been in this location since 1951. Original store was built in 1946 on the south side of Powell.

"We started with 10 stools in 1952. This is the third or fourth time it was enlarged and we've got 23 stools now."

Ide said it's as much a community meeting place as a place to quench a thirst or fill a stomach.

"We've had all sorts of sales consummated at the fountain," Ide said. "I've threatened some customers with giving me a commission for the real estate deals made and legal problems solved here."

One unusual aspect is personalized coffee cups for regulars, a practice started by the late Laura McBain.

"Of course if there are four guys with the same name we just give them one cup and four straws," Ide joked.



SODA FOUNTAINS are disappearing in Gresham, which boasts two.

But getting back to the ice cream shakes, sodas, sundaes, and cones, both places have tasty stuff. The people behind the counter dip into those real ice cream buckets with steady hands.

And if you're trying to fit that size 16 body into a size 10 bikini, you could pass on the ice cream and try a flavored cola, Gresham-style. Any flavor or combination.

"If they'll drink 'em, I'll mix 'em," the person behind the counter promised.

But please don't call her a soda jerk.



appearing in some towns, but
is two. This is Gresham

Rexall, which has been holding down the corner of Powell
and Main since 1903.

(Outlook photo)



FOUR CONNOISSEURS of soda foun-
tains came to McBains Drugstore just
before the morning coffee break rush. This
fountain on SE Roberts started out with 10

stools, but has kept adding until there are
23, proof soda fountains are not passe in a
friendly town like Gresham.

(Outlook photo)

A Few Words About Prescriptions

Your doctor fights disease with medicine. If the medicine is not right, he cannot conquer disease. If the druggist does his duty the medicine will be right, and your doctor will stand a fair chance of winning the victory.

In no other branch of the Drug Business should the details receive more care and attention than in the Prescription department. Every detail there is important.

We realize this fact and make thoroughness a feature of our prescription case.

Every Prescription dispensed at this store has the personal attention of the proprietors.

We use only the PUREST and BEST DRUGS obtainable and our prices are guaranteed lower than any place in the city.

GRESHAM DRUG CO.

The REXALL Store

Gresham, Ore.

We've Kept East County Healthy For Over 86 Years



We're proud to be serving the Gresham area. Because by establishing ourselves during the birth of this community, we have developed with your needs.

When it comes to being up to date, we're as modern as tomorrow — but the service you'll receive from us still has that old-fashioned, personal touch.

"Blending Our Past With Your Future!"

Gresham Rexall Drug

5 East Powell • 665-9191

HOURS: M-F 9 a.m.-8 p.m. • SAT 9 a.m.-6 p.m. • SUN Noon-5 p.m.

Convenient Parking

Outlook Mar. 1991

We've Kept East County Healthy For Over 89 Years



We're proud to be serving the Gresham area. Because by establishing ourselves during the birth of this community, we have developed with your needs.

When it comes to being up to date, we're as modern as tomorrow – but the service you'll receive from us still has that old-fashioned, personal touch.

"Blending Our Past With Your Future!"

Gresham Rexall Drug

5 East Powell • 665-9191

HOURS: M-F 9 a.m. - 8 p.m. • SAT 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. • SUN Noon - 5 p.m.

Convenient Parking

OUTLOOK APR. 1987

Fountain gets a new place in old home

If change keeps you young, the fountain at Gresham Rexall Drug Store is just a baby. The fountain has been moved several times in the past 80 or so years, and it's moving again.

Owner Dick Dowsett is moving the fountain to the east end of the store to make room for Rick Stone's Hallmark, which is moving in on the west side.

The fountain, a fixture in the store for as long as Dowsett can remember, is a Gresham institution. "Regulars" gather at its counter everyday like clockwork, clerk Marcie Olson said last week. "You can

set your clock by them, except today it's unplugged."

The clock wasn't the only thing unplugged, unfastened or unassembled. The entire fountain sat in pieces in the back of the store where workers left it after taking it apart and moving it the night before. In its place, Dowsett and his crew set up cloth-covered card tables and chairs and offered surprised and disappointed customers free coffee and cookies until the fountain could be reassembled in its new location.

Dowsett isn't sure whether the store had a fountain when his grandfather, Arthur Dowsett, opened it in 1903.

But it did soon after, he says.

For years the store was a popular stop for Sunday travelers out for a drive from Portland to Gresham, who would drop in for ice cream cones before heading back to the city.

Its popularity continued for years. Dowsett, who later became a pharmacist, began working at the drug store when he was 14 or 15.

"My earliest recollection of the fountain is ladies doing backbreaking work," he recalls. "They made their own ice cream."

The ice cream was made with a mix that came in milk cans, says Katie Egglestean of Gresham. Egglestean was 23 when she began working at Gresham Rexall in about 1941.

The women mixed the ice cream in five-gallon tubs, then froze it. They made three flavors: chocolate, vanilla and strawberry.

"We had to add the strawberries," she says.

Egglestean does not remember a regular group of coffee klatchers filing into the store each morning to exchange local gossip. In fact, "I don't think we even served coffee," she says.

In the 1960s, the fountain became a popular hangout for teen-agers; Gresham High School students hotfooted it down to the Rexall store the way "Happy Days" characters hustled over to Arnolds after school.

"In the '60s it was wild," Dowsett recalls. "You couldn't even hear yourself think for an hour or so (every afternoon)."

Nowadays, youngsters drive their cars to fast food restaurants for their mid-afternoon snacks, he adds.

And it is the older generations that keep coming back to the fountain of their youth. Every once in a while a customer Dowsett doesn't recognize saunters in and tells how he had his first milkshake at that counter. Such visitors often bring in their own children so they can have the same experience.

They sip nostalgia along with a straw full of chocolate malt.



Dick Dowsett and Solon Spencer inspect old fountain site while customers sip free coffee.

THE DRUGSTORE

Written 1983 by Ray Bolkan - D.H.S. Senior
as school project

Many businesses have come and gone in Gresham: Gresham Meat Market, Metzger Brother's store, Sterling and Kidder Hardware, C.C. Cotton Store, Hessel's Implement, and many other businesses have all operated in Gresham at one time or another, but operate in Gresham no more.

But at least one store has lasted eight decades, the Gresham Rexall Drugstore. The drugstore may be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, functioning business in Gresham today.

The present day drugstore continues to be located on the original site that Arthur established eighty years ago. The original drugstore was housed in the Metzger Building. This two story, wooden building was built by John Metzger on the original site of the Metzger Bros. store. The businesses located in this building were Crenshaw Plumbing and Tin Shop, Biddle's Variety Store, and the drugstore. For many years a dance hall was located directly above the drugstore. On Friday nights music and dancing could be heard very well throughout the Metzger Building.

The drugstore was located in the southwestern corner of the ground floor of the building. The drugstore's storefront windows looked directly upon Powell Street. Along the outside wall of the Gresham Rexall, a wooden sidewalk was built so that the shopper's could enter the Metzger building without walking through mud. This wooden sidewalk was constructed extra high so as to allow the ladies to step directly down from their carriages and buggies onto the sidewalk. Further out from the sidewalk on the Powell side, a horse's hitching post and watering trough ran the length of the drugstore.

Also, in the front of the drugstore on Powell a person could find men gathered pitching horse shoes. During the summer much betting and wagering was done by the spectators of many horse shoe tournaments.

The Gresham drugstore was very prosperous, the stock was ever increasing to supply the needs of the community. More medicine and prescriptions were being sold to the surrounding area. A few of the popular over-the-counter drugs were Electric Bitters for rheumatism, Chamberlain's Cough Remedy, and

Veronica Water. These were just a few of the large supply of medicines.

However, the drusstore offered more than just medicines and other pharmaceutical goods, it also sold cosmetics, greeting cards, and other assorted household goods. For the reader, the drusstore offered a large variety of magazines on a wooden bookrack. And for the candy lover, Hershey's chocolate bars were only five cents.

The drusstore also sold fine candies by the pound. Many jars of candy adorned the counter tops. Jars of peppermint sticks and salt water taffy were part of the selection. Many customers became regular buyers of the fine chocolates, including chocolate covered marshmallows. The drusstore had just about everything needed except food.

One unique object in the drusstore was the cigar lighter. The cigar lighter was constructed of a metal pipe which pointed downward at head level. This pipe carried the gas (probably hydrosen) to the flint, which upon striking, would produce a flame which to light the cigar. At the cigar counter a buyer could see the various brands displayed in the wooden boxes in the display case. One of these brands was Muriel. Cigarettes were also sold at the drusstore.

However, the feature that was most associated with the drusstore was the soda fountain. The soda fountain has been present in the drusstore from around 1910. But the drusstore lacked a "new, modern soda fountain" until 1928 or 1929. The fountain in 1929 had a counter top of solid marble. The tables were also topped with marble. Patrons would sit at the tables in ice cream chairs, metal chairs with wooden seat. These chairs were very popular in many drusstores.

At the soda fountain a person could buy ice cream, sundaes, parfaits, sodas, shakes or malts. All of these items could be bought for fifteen cents. Also, if a person wanted something to drink, Coke and rootbeer were sold at the fountain for only five cents.

For those who did not eat their treats at the drusstore, ice cream could

be carried home in a cardboard carton, with a small wire handle. At this early time in Gresham the drugstore was about the only place to buy ice cream.

Besides the drugstore's merchandise and soda fountain, the drugstore had many services. The first major contribution was the addition of the post office, closely followed by the addition of the telephone switchboard in 1903.

Under the supervision of the Multnomah County Mutual Phone Company, the switchboard was placed in a back room of the drugstore. Soon, forty subscribers had telephone lines and the numbers were increasing fast. The four businessmen who originated the idea were H.G. Smathall, Archie Meyers, C.R. Keller, and Arthur Dowsett. Mrs. Glen Ewalt (Pauletta Dowsett) remembers that Arthur and Pearl would have to sleep at the drugstore occasionally to watch the switchboard.

The drugstore has changed much in its long history in Gresham. These changes have come in the form of subtle shifting and rearranging of the parts of the drugstore. But three drugstore transitions are noticeable in its history. The first crucial change in the drugstore came in 1929. The wooden Metzger building was replaced with the present brick and concrete structure. A basement was dug for the drugstore in this year. A man named Charles Adams, described as a bull of a man, dug the hole in which the basement is located. Charles would drive his team of horses into the hole, then with the attached scoop, he would drive his team to the spot where the dirt was deposited. This process went on until the basement was dug. With the new building a new Soda fountain was also added.

The next large change in the drugstore came in 1960. This change involved the moving of the soda fountain from the northwestern wall to the west wall. New fixtures and displays were also added to the drugstore.

The last of the major changes was Gordon Stone's addition in 1970. In this year, Gordon Stone's moved from its store adjacent to the drugstore to another location. With the empty space next door, the drugstore decided to expand. A new gift section was added to the already large stock.

The drusstore has been an important part of Gresham for eighty years.
May the dtuastore keep on providing for the needs of the Gresham community as
long as Gresham is a city.

B

"Yeah Ma'am, gimme a Strawberry Soda, will ya? I'll take a Double Hot Fudge Sundae- with nuts and ^{an} cherry too!" These orders have been requested by customers of the soda fountain at Gresham Rexall Drug for eighty one years now.

In 1903, the founder of Rexall Drug, Arthur Dowsett, opened a general notion store on the corner of Main and Powell Blvd. in downtown Gresham. The store sold sewing goods, hardware supplies, and whatever other miscellaneous items that customers rendered as important. After two years of business, Arthur received his pharmaceutical license, and added drugs to the store's inventory.

During that time period, a streetcar travelled in between Portland and Gresham during the day and evening. Being the ambitious entrepreneur that Arthur was, he built a soda fountain in his store in 1910: thinking that people riding the streetcar would pick Rexall as a stopping point to enjoy an ice cream or soda. Right he was, people loved the fountain. Not only did the streetcar passengers visit the fountain, but town locals flooded the soda bar- a colony of bees swarming their hive.

Stafford Dowsett, Arthur's son, took over the operation in 1928. Thirty-two years later, Stafford's son, Dick Dowsett (current owner) began working with him. In 1972, Stafford retired, leaving Dick to carry out the company. Stafford and Dick made many innovations to the building- remodeling and adding space. Due to the several remodeling jobs and "add ons" to the building, the fountain changed locations in the store six different times. Dick recalls that after another remodel job and add on in 1970, he removed the fountain from the store. "People complained so badly, that I had to put it back in the store. Luckily, I had saved the parts to the fountain, and stored them in the building next door," quoted Dick. From then, the fountain only moved one more time to where it is currently located today.

Dick claims that except for the new Coke dispenser and coffee maker, the fountain

Explain

consists of its original parts. This gives it an "early to mid" twentieth century look. Spinning chrome bar stools with round, orange cushions line the counter, just as a football team lines up along the sideline of the field. Upon the counter top are napkin dispensers armored with chrome; sugar containers with silver tops; ashtrays for the regulars that come in and talk endlessly; and several baskets containing cookies, crackers, nuts, and candy bars that can be purchased to go with a menu item.

ok but needs development or blending

Across from the counter, against the back wall of the pharmacy, lies another counter. This counter is entirely topped with that popular smooth, silver metal. In the middle of the counter is a three section sink. One section is full of bursting white suds, resembling popcorn tumbling out of an overflowing bowl. The middle section contains a sea of clear water that has utensils upon its bottom. The last section is dry and empty— a vacant manhole. To the left and right of the sink, the top of the counter has ~~h~~ nobs sticking out of it. Pulling up on these nobs lifts a section of the counterpart. Beneath these doors is a freezer and refrigerator— to the right, the freezer; to the left, the refrigerator. Dairy products inhabit this chilling space. To the left of the refrigerator hole, is a rigid area for slicing bananas for banana splits and such. Behind this cutting platform is a long, curved pipe that goes up to an old fashioned spicket. The spicket has a black handle on the top of it that is pulled down when the server wishes to obtain water from it. This release of water sounds like the gurgling in a fish tank that is caused by the blupping bubbles that rise out of the air filter. Upon the chrome counter and to the right of the water spout, is a row of chrome canisters that have a small hole in the lid of them for long, slender scoopers to stick out of. The round heads of the sterling silver ladles gasp for air, as they are drowned in various flavors of syrups, diced fruits, and chopped nuts. Just to the right of the last canister, is a milkshake machine. It has three long serrated rods that hang from the top of it. These rods are then placed in tin milkshake containers, where they violently grind and

good

good

swirl the milkshake ingredients together.

Covering the majority of the back wall are large mirrors. Extending out from the mirrors are glass shelves supported by metal brackets. These shelves linger above the back of the chrome counter, as if they were helicopters hovering over a landing strip. On the first level of shelves, fountain containers are stacked. Sundae bowls that are narrow at the bottom and grow fatter towards the top are there, oval shaped banana split dishes occupy space, and drinking glasses and coffee mugs line the rest of the first level shelves. Early 1900's remedies and medicines are placed on the rest of the shelves. The faded labels reveal such life saving potions as S.S.S. Tonic, Gall Remedy, and Blackberry Balsam. Dark brown bottles contain Derma Zema Alternative, Strawberry Shade, and Passiflora. Naturally, the average customer has probably never heard of such drugs before, but a feeling of medical history is understood and felt for when he runs his eyes across such old substances. Above the glass shelves is the 7-UP sponsored menu- a bible for the serious soda fountain consumer. Finally, to the left of the menu is the clock. The clock that keeps on progressing, even though the fountain endures these lashes of time, keeping its original stature.

Whether the customer is of Arthur Dowsett or Dick Dowsett, the soda fountain of Gresham Rexall Drug is a trademark to him. Today the fountain is not in place as a large profit maker, but as something to warm the hearts of the many that pass by it. Dick Dowsett claims that some things are priceless, like his fountain on the corner of Main and Powell.

*The pumpification
Attach of the
elements of the
fountain work well.*

*Probably in alcove
titled to
too much about the
details of the
fountain.*

GRESHAM REXALL PHARMACY
(submitted by Patricia Bennett --- 669-9101)

In contrast to the modern drugstore chains and discount stores, the Gresham Rexall Pharmacy has remained in the hands of one family since its beginnings in 1903.

Arthur Dowsett came with his family from _____, Wisconsin to Gresham. When he first opened the store, he was not a licensed pharmacist, but he trained with a pharmacist for one year and in 1905 he was licensed.

The pharmacy, at the corner of Main Street and Powell Boulevard, featured sewing notions in addition to the medicinals. Many of these medicinal products were made from herbs and some contained quite a large proportion of alcohol, being 20-40 % proof. The words, "contains no alcohol" may have been included to accomodate Prohibition. During Prohibition, alcoholics could obtain a prescription for their drink from the doctor. The alternative, of course, was to obtain it illegally. The grandson of Arthur Dowsett, Dick Dowsett, is the present owner of the store and is its pharmacist. Mr. Dowsett keeps a framed copy of a prescription for 'Spirits Fruments', or alcohol, in the store. It appears to be a square dollar bill, having the same green scrollwork as a note, and in fact, it was printed by the Treasury Department.

Many of the preparations dispensed at the pharmacy in the past were laxatives and kidney stimulants. Powdered opium was dispensed in suppositories for pain relief. Aspirin was a new creation and welcome relief for pain and fever. The herbal tonics and remedies often required extensive preparation, keeping leaves and roots, fermenting and mixing with syrups to be made palatable. The pharmacy has old bottles and boxes of liniments, powders, salves and tonics in the basement. They have such names as Swamp Root, Passion Flower, ~~and~~ White Liniment,

Mr. Dowsett was himself a patient of Dr. Hughes, who delivered him in a Portland hospital, there being none in Gresham. When asked about changes in medical practice in Gresham, Mr. Dowsett noted the trend away from solo practice, leading groups of physicians to form partnerships to spread the emergency duty over a greater number of physicians. He also noted the tendency of hospitals and other health care providers to build and manage physician's office complexes.

A trip to the pharmacy gives one the touch of history as old photographs of Gresham's first buildings are displayed throughout the store.

*Kadd? Clover tops red, Pineoleum, Victor's gall remedy, and
Blackberry balsam.*

AFTER BRAINSTORMING

March 11, 1991
(2nd Monday)

TOPIC: Rexall Drug Store

(Use a separate page for each topic))

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: One of my childhood memories was of the Rexall Drug store. I lived on ~~the~~ Cochran Rd, and attended Cedar School on Troutdale Rd. In the fall before school started we were to go into Gresham at the Rexall Drug & pick up the subject books, paper etc. we needed for the year. I remember my father taking my sister & I into Gresham to do this. It was exciting. I remember the smells of the new & used books, paper & pencils we were to purchase.

SPECIFIC SOURCE OF INFORMATION (People, Newspaper dates, books, etc.):

Mildred (Davis) Graves

Dowsett's
date of
occurrence.

We've Kept East County Healthy For Over 89 Years

APR. 2, 1994



We're proud to be serving the Gresham area. Because by establishing ourselves during the birth of this community, we have developed with your needs.

When it comes to being up to date, we're as modern as tomorrow – but the service you'll receive from us still has that old-fashioned, personal touch.

"Blending Our Past With Your Future!"

Gresham Rexall Drug

5 East Powell • 665-9191

HOURS: M-F 9 a.m. - 8 p.m. • SAT 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. • SUN Noon - 5 p.m.

Convenient Parking

4-13-83



Roy Belton talks to a patron at the Gresham Drug Store as part of his history project

Staff photo by Cheryl Blankenship

History: Gresham High student finds the past at old drug store

by SHARON NESBIT
of The Outlook staff

Gresham high senior Ray Bolkan is one of those kids who hangs around the drug store.

But Bolkan is not slurping up cherry Cokes or scarfing down chocolate sodas like "Archie" in comic strip. Instead the 17-year-old has pencil and paper ready when he slips onto a stool at the counter of Gresham Drug Store. He is writing a history of the 70-year-old store and the Dowsett family which founded and still runs it.

The history of the venerable drug store, center of Gresham life since 1903, is Bolkan's personal project in Gresham high's talented and gifted class. Guided by his mentor, former Gresham high teacher and historian Irma Greisel, he has become fascinated with Gresham as a small town.

"I've never done much with small-town history — a place where everybody knew

everybody," says Bolkan. "It's fascinating to follow the business leaders of the community — how they ran the city. In 1900 there were only 360 people in Gresham."

With so few people, Bolkan found it easy to keep track of the players as he researched old Outlook articles and interviewed people around town.

His research history centers on the store and the Dowsetts with major events in Gresham's history for background. He is grateful to Pauletta Dowsett Ewalt and Stafford and Dick Dowsett for their help in piecing the family story together.

"Gresham Drug is one of the oldest businesses still running in Gresham," says Bolkan, "and it may be one of the oldest Rexall stores in the nation."

It was started by Arthur Dowsett who turned it over to his son, Stafford. These days, Dick Dowsett marks the third generation at the store.

Life in the drug store has centered around the soda fountain and Bolkan is delighted with the pictures and descriptions he has of the store's early fountain.

Bolkan figures his history will be finished in late April.

"It's not a book, it's pamphlet-sized," he says. He doesn't know if he'll be able to print his history but he has promised a copy to the Gresham Historical Society.

"Maybe at a later date, the society could incorporate it in a book," he says.

Bolkan is a relative newcomer to Gresham. He came here three years ago from Hawaii. Thanks to his research, however, he talks like an old-timer, rattling on about events that shaped Gresham long before his birth.

"I sure do know a lot about Gresham," he says, shaking his head. Hanging around drugstores may be more productive than people used to believe.

13-23

Gresham's two soda fountains put town on livability list

Progress hasn't eliminated this tasty tradition.

by Suzanne Ashmun
people editor

Not all connoisseurs delve into truffles and wines.

Some specialize in ice cream soda fountains.

There are those who say the corner drugstore is passe, that the meeting place of a hundred summer days is dying.

Not so in Gresham, which boasts not one, but two, fountains to warm the soul and widen the hips.

Not everyone eats hot fudge sundaes, or course.

Over at Gresham Rexall, there are people who've been sharing morning coffee for years. One couple—he works

the night shift, she the day shift—have shared a coffee break for years.

"It's still 10 cents," said owner Dick Dowsett. "Something has to stay the same."

The drugstore at Powell and Main has been around since 1903, although there was a six-month period when the watering hole dried up.

"We remodeled in 1960 and the guy who did it told us soda fountains didn't fit in with a

modern drugstore," Dowsett recalled. "Unfortunately, we believed him. 'It was gone for about six months, but popular demand made us put it back in. It loses money every day it's in operation, but it's become a Gresham tradition.'"

Around the corner on SE Roberts is McBains Drugstore, which Erv Ide purchased 24 years ago. The store, started by Don McBain has been in this location since 1951. Original store was built in 1946 on the south side of Powell.

"We started with 10 stools in 1952. This is the third or fourth time it was enlarged and we've got 23 stools now."

Ide said it's as much a community meeting place as a place to quench a thirst or fill a stomach.

"We've had all sorts of sales consummated at the fountain," Ide said. "I've threatened some customers with giving me a commission for the real estate deals made and legal problems solved here."

One unusual aspect is personalized coffee cups for regulars, a practice started by the late Laura McBain.

"Of course if there are four guys with the same name we just give them one cup and four straws," Ide joked.



SODA FOUNTAINS are not Gresham, which is

But getting back to the ice cream shakes, sodas, sundaes and cones, both places have tasty stuff. The people behind the counter dip into those real ice cream buckets with steady hands.

And if you're trying to fit that size 16 body into a size 10 bikini, you could pass on the ice cream and try a flavored cola, Gresham-style. Any flavor or combination.

"If they'll drink 'em, I'll mix 'em," the person behind the counter promised.

But please don't call her a soda jerk.



appearing in some towns, but
ists two. This is Gresham

Rexall, which has been holding down the corner of Powell
and Main since 1903.

(Outlook photo)

OREG. 30 OCT. 1997

Gresham drugstore succumbs to modern ills

■ Dick Dowsett closes his pharmacy at North Main Avenue and East Powell Boulevard, and will lease the building

By JACKIE SCOTT
of The Oregonian staff

GRESHAM — When Dick Dowsett closes his drug store on Friday, he'll have to decide what to do with the remaining inventory.

"I don't know at this point," said the 63-year-old pharmacist, who dispensed his last prescription at Gresham Rexall Drug a year ago. "I will either give it away or sell it some other way."

Dowsett, whose store has anchored the corner of North Main Avenue and East Powell Boulevard since 1960, went out of business gradually, citing competition from discount pharmacies and other changes in the health-care industry.

He phased out his soda fountain last spring when he couldn't find anyone to lease it. The store continued to sell Hallmark cards, candy, seasonal decor and over-the-counter drugs, but in August, Dowsett discontinued the remaining inventory. He set Saturday as the clearance deadline.

"We think we want to keep the building for income property," he said. A couple of people have offered to buy the Dowsett building, but he said he would prefer to lease it.

After he joins other downtown merchants in giving Halloween candy to children from 4 to 6 p.m. Friday, Dowsett will close the store for good.

"We are going to try to find the right tenant for downtown Gresham," he said. "We will get some professional help."

Meanwhile, Dowsett's sister, Gayle Hibbard, said her stomach was in knots. She has been keeping the store's books and managing the

clearance sale for months.

"We have had people rolling in like mad wanting to buy stuff," Hibbard said.

Dowsett's vintage medicine bottles, patent remedies and equipment date from the time of his grandfather.

The Dowsett family tradition began in 1903 when Arthur Dowsett peddled his bicycle to Gresham and established a business selling over-the-counter remedies.

In 1904, he bought a Rexall franchise and founded the Gresham Rexall Drug Store. Arthur Dowsett's son, Stafford, trained as a pharmacist and joined him in the business in 1928. He married a hometown girl and became Gresham's 14th mayor.

The Dowsetts' son, Dick, always planned to work in his father's business. He grew up at the store, stocking shelves and dusting bottles, and he went to Oregon State College, now OSU, just like his father.

Remnants of Arthur Dowsett's era catch the eye.

A bottle of Swamp Root — advertised as an aid for the kidneys — is one of dozens of old-time products displayed in the drug-store windows. Robinson's patent barley, Marathon Foot Powder and Palmer's Skin Success all promise to cure ailments or at least make you feel better.

"There were millions of dollars made by carpet-bagging medicine purveyors," Dowsett said. Most likely, the high alcohol content of patent medicines was responsible for their popularity, he said.

Over the years, he collected some obscure equipment, such as a 1940s-style vaporizer. He also has a machine that made suppositories and a stamp dispenser that sold 8-cent U.S. postage stamps for a dime.

Dowsett plans to give the choicest of his historical items to the Gresham Historical Society.

Out & About

OUTLOOK AUG. 27-05

PHOTOS BY CAROLE ARCHER - THE GRESHAM OUTLOOK



Artist Dan Stevens gave the Gresham Historical Museum an ancient wooden sign Thursday, Aug. 25, that once hung under the eaves at the Gresham Rexall Drug Store.

The drug store stood at the corner of Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard for more than 90 years and the sign is seen in a 1906 photo of the store. Stevens was an art teacher at Gresham High when his students spotted the old sign in a collapsing shed. Liking old stuff, he took it to his studio and studied it for a couple of decades, determined its origin and "forty years later I am finally getting around to getting it back here," he said. "It's part of Gresham and if I don't do it, no one else will."

Social fountain



IT MAY BE early morning, but all stools are filled at Gresham Rexall soda fountain, and the air crackles with friendly chatter.

The Gresham Outlook - July 3, 1979

Across the country, soda fountains are becoming
a dying breed. But at Gresham
Rexall Drug Store, the constant fizz of early-morning
conversation transforms a counter into a



by LORI VAROSH *Gresham Outlook*
of The Outlook staff *July 3, 1979*

Gances of finding an empty stool at 8 a.m. are slim. The Gresham Rexall Drug Store regulars perch in a predictable pattern along the eastern end of the counter. It's not just a soda fountain, it's part of their lives.

"One guy drives from Orient twice a day," notes current owner Dick Dowsett.

"We open the door at 8 in the morning. Between 8 and 10 after, we'll have between five and 10 people, all laughing, talking and jabbering away.

"If it wasn't for that, we'd have nothing but background music and silence."

Orders have evolved from banana splits, sodas and bromo selzers to coffee, donuts and lots of milk shakes, but silence has never been part of the fountain fare since it was installed after the turn of the century.

Many of today's regulars were yesterday's irregulars.

Bill Farris remembers downing his first ice cream sundae in the establishment. It was strawberry.

"Musta been 1910," he figures. "It was a new thing out then — a strawberry sundae. We didn't spend much time here, though. We didn't live right square in town.

"As soon as the kids got bicycles, they were over here all the time."

There was a dance hall upstairs then. Dick Dowsett's grandfather started the drug store in the town post office. The two-story frame building also housed the town's first telephone switchboard.

Planted in the center of town at the corner of Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard, it was a gathering place for families.

"We had people come out from Portland every Sunday just to have some of our famous ice cream sodas," Dick's father, Stafford Dowsett, recalls.

On a Fourth of July, the fountain sold roughly 100 gallons of ice cream cones at a nickel a crack.

When he started working at the store in about 1928, Staff says, the pharmacist had to do everything, including fill in as soda jerk. While some flamboyant types were tossing scoops of ice cream through the air like pizza dough, Dowsett didn't get that fancy, he says.

"But if someone came in with a

headache, he'd say, 'Give me a bromo selzer.' We'd put water in a glass, put the selzer in another glass and pour it back and forth to fizz it up."

For a time, the operation even sported a regular parlor with round tables, wrought iron chairs and marble inlays on the counter, old-timers remember.

"Kids in those days didn't have any money," Stafford says. "A lot came in for a nickel Coke or a cone, but they didn't have the money for a soda."

Kids had gotten more affluent by the time Dick began working in the store around 1948.

"High school kids had few other places to go," he says. "Back in the '50s and as late as 1965, kids after school flocking down the street would be so noisy you could hardly hear yourself think.

"We used to have 30 to 40 kids descend on the fountain. You can imagine . . . the phone rings and you couldn't hear yourself talk."

"I remember when a boy and girl used to buy one soda and use two straws," adds Izola Armstrong, a long-time employee.

The fountain became a rendezvous for daters and an employer for college-



MARION HOSS, left, Edna Kaser and Ann Pankratz, right, discuss Gresham's aches and pains as part of a daily routine.

Photos by Don Ryan

bound students.

Cars eventually took the high school kids to other haunts, but the Rexall fountain keeps buzzing.

Some Gresham residents would as soon eliminate visits to the fountain as forego church on Sunday.

"They each have their own stool," chuckles Ken Hads, who calls the early morning crowd his clan. He happily trades insults and even bakes cakes for his patrons' birthdays.

"I should have a memorial on this stool," says Marion Hoss, who, with Edna Kaser, admits coming in every day.

"We're beating on the door at 8 a.m.," Edna grins. "At 10 a.m., it's the City Hall bunch.

"You get to know everybody's aches and pains."

"They visit with one person and when he leaves, they pick up their coffee cups and move beside someone else," adds Ken.

"Most of the people don't know each other outside of here. They catch up on everything at the fountain. Talk about Peyton Place..."

A packed row of stools still can't make the fountain a profitable proposition.

"We lose money every day it's open," Dick observes. "But it's worth it as a customer convenience. It's a gathering place. Who knows? The fountain might draw people in and they might buy something."

"Back in 1960, we took the soda fountain out — it was the coming trend in those days. You should have heard the people scream."

"We took it out in 1960 and put it back in in 1960-point-five," he chuckles.

"I really would hate to see it go," Stafford admits. "It's got sentimental value."

"There are very few left."

Dusty streets meant dry throats

Gresham summers might not have been any hotter some 60 years ago but they certainly were dustier. And nothing quite slaked a parched throat as a milkshake, sundae or ice cream soda from the corner drugstore.

Paulette Ewalt scooped up her share of chocolate, strawberry and vanilla during the summers in the late 1920s when she worked in the Gresham Rexall Drugstore on the northeast corner of the then-unpaved Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard.

"On hot days we did a terrific fountain business," she says. On hot Fourth of Julys the drugstore employees would stay until 11 p.m. dipping ice cream and making milkshakes.

"I think I was the envy of the younger generation. Jobs were pretty scarce and that was a lot better than picking berries," she says now from her spacious Gresham home.

She earned 25 cents an hour while she was working the afternoon and evening shifts. "It was pretty little but I was awfully glad to have it."

Ice cream was more of a treat then. It wasn't something every house had in the deep freeze. One advantage to working in the local soda fountain was Ewalt could have what ice cream she wanted. "I didn't really crave it after dishing it out all day," she says.

Ewalt remembers the ice cream being brought to Gresham by train and the drive to the Gresham depot to pick it up. The frozen treat was brought back to the drugstore on the running board of a car, she says. Later, Ed Anderson ran a small delivery business and he picked it up for Ewalt's uncles, Arthur Dowsett and Joe Patneau, who owned the store.

Every night the ice cream had to be packed in ice and salt to keep it frozen.

"One week it would be so soft you wouldn't

want to dip it. The next week it would be so hard you couldn't dip it. It just depended on who closed up," she says.

And then there were the regular customers. "I remember the bus driver. About 10 minutes after 4 p.m., he'd come in for his chocolate milkshake."

Of course the buses weren't the fancy Tri-Met rigs that buzz through Gresham's downtown now. Ewalt remembers the old buses as being open cars with four rows of seats.

Then there were the men from the lumber yard.

"It was a daily ritual for them to come in for a milkshake."

The drugstore wasn't a social hangout for teenagers.

"We didn't do that sort of thing. When they got through with school they had to go home and work on the farm."

While drugstores have changed somewhat, parts of them will remain the same.

"Aspirin was the same and it always will be the same," she says.

Medicine didn't come from the factory already in capsules. That was a job for the druggist.

"I remember seeing them filling these capsules with the powders," she said.

In addition to prescriptions, the drugstore carried patent medicines and had candy and cigar counters. No household goods were sold, but school supplies were a big seller in September.

The school didn't furnish books, Ewalt recalls. The drugstore sold them and the building usually was packed with school children after the first day of school, clamouring for their required textbooks.

"That was bedlam. It'd be just full of kids wanting the books."

— Tom Fluharty



Paulette Ewalt, left, remembers scooping ice cream at the Gresham Rexall Drugstore. Joe Patneau, below, was a druggist at the store where Mrs. Ewalt worked.

