

## STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL HISTORICAL SKETCH

It is said that one night, early in 1925, Mrs. Charles W. Bovee dreamt of a celebration in Bellevue that would bring hundreds of visitors and a great deal of recognition to her small and much loved hometown. Mr. and Mrs. Bovee, along with Mr. William Cruse, set out to make this dream a reality. Their idea? A festival honoring Bellevue's bountiful strawberry crops. The Strawberry Festival Committee, comprising 5 men and 5 women of the community, raised \$40.00 to finance Bellevue's first-ever Strawberry Festival in June 1925, a four-day event that attracted more than 3,000 visitors. Following the event, the front page of *The Lake Washington Reflector* read: "The Strawberry Festival (...) must be regarded as an unqualified success. (...) It literally put Bellevue 'on the map'..." and sent visitors away "with the impression that here was a beautiful town and a fruitful district settled by a courteous, hospitable people."

From that moment on, the Lake Washington Strawberry Festival, as it came to be known, was an annual event, spread over 2 or 3 days. The festival was held behind the Old Main Street School, located at the southeast corner of Main Street and 100th, until 1931, when it moved to the Bellevue Clubhouse (site of today's Bellevue Boys and Girls Club). The Strawberry Festival not only attracted visitors from all over King County, it also encouraged the participation of other eastside communities such as Renton and Kirkland, who often provided a day's worth of entertainment for the event.

For reasons that remain uncertain, the regular Annual Lake Washington Strawberry Festival was not held in 1930. Instead, the Businessmen's Committee chartered a ferry and organized a 'Moonlight Excursion, Dance and Strawberry Festival' for 500 people, and the Sacred Heart Church sponsored a small strawberry celebration, entertaining numerous past and present local residents. The Annual Strawberry Festival did return in 1931, to the joy and relief of all, and for the first year there was a Strawberry Queen, Miss May Carter Stewart. The 'Royalty' tradition continued each year after that.

As the years passed, the Festival continued to grow and dazzle visitors. In 1927, an estimated 7,000 people attended, and over 2,000 boxes of strawberries,  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton of flour, 100 lbs of butter and 9,000 shortcakes (baked by the girls of Fisher Flouring Mills) were consumed. In 1938, approximately 15,000 people attended the Festival, consuming a total of 4172 lbs of strawberries, 69 gallons of whipping cream, 100 gallons of ice cream, and 8750 shortcakes. In 1934, Patricia Groves wrote of her hometown's renowned event: "...The Strawberry Festival (...) holds all of the glamour and sparkle of a trip to a foreign land, so completely is our town changed while it endures. (...) All of my friends, both young and old, are laughing. (...) We feel that it is our duty, and a delightful one at that, to don our festive manners and welcome visitors to our fair city. (...) Here I (...) feast my eyes upon the visions of snowy biscuits oozing with juicy, red strawberries and topped with a luscious mound of whipped cream..."

All of this community jubilation and delight abruptly ended when the Strawberry Festival was cancelled in 1942. The Festival Association gave a variety of reasons, including the rationing of gasoline, a shortage of sugar, conservation of tires and the fact that the war effort was keeping so many workers busy. The real explanation, however, was the internment of Japanese-Americans

in May of that year. Bellevue's primary strawberry growers were of Japanese descent: at the start of World War II, there were 55 Japanese families with farms in Bellevue, with a total of 472 acres of land. Without the strawberry growers and harvesters, who were invaluable contributors to the Annual Lake Washington Strawberry Festival, the event could not take place.

Forty-five years later, in 1987, the Bellevue Historical Society (now the Eastside Heritage Center) revived the Strawberry Festival as a single evening celebration in June, a tradition that has continued every year since. The revivals have featured speakers such as Bellevue Historian Lucile McDonald, offered musical entertainment such as a Barbershop quartet, welcomed Strawberry Festival Royalty of years past, honored Bellevue's Japanese Heritage and, of course, provided lusciously delicious old-fashioned strawberry shortcakes.

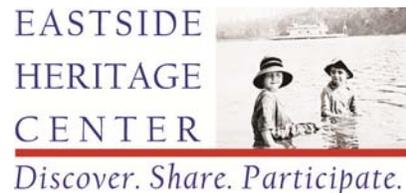
In 2003, Eastside Heritage Center (EHC) brought the Strawberry Festival back to its roots as a large-scale community-wide event in Old Bellevue. Since 2007, the Festival has been located in Bellevue's Crossroads International Park, where the 2-day event draws over 40,000 visitors from around King County. Festival participants enjoy fresh strawberry shortcake, entertainment, historical and agricultural exhibits, family fun activities, strawberry shortcake eating contests, arts & crafts, foods of the world and a Classic Auto Show.

The Strawberry Festival is the Eastside Heritage Center's Signature Event, celebrating the region's agricultural heritage and its diverse cultural past, present and future. Through this historic event, EHC brings the community together in an endeavor to create public awareness for the organization and to promote community involvement in and the appreciation of Eastside history.

By Heather Trescases  
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[www.bellevuestrawberryfestival.org](http://www.bellevuestrawberryfestival.org)



[www.eastsideheritagecenter.org](http://www.eastsideheritagecenter.org)