

GERRY FRANK ~ Oregon's Premier Citizen

Gerald Wendel Frank was born Sept. 21, 1923, in Portland, the son of Aaron (Bud) Meier Frank and Ruth Frank and younger brother to Richard (Dick) Frank, LHS '34. Aaron Meier was Gerry's great-grandfather, and Sigmund Frank his grandfather, thus establishing the illustrious family's multi-generation legacy of the Meier & Frank department store in downtown Portland. Gerry remained close with Dick's five children and became a mentor to Dick's eldest son, Stephen (Skip) Frank, after Dick passed away in 1962.

Gerry attended Ainsworth Elementary and graduated from Lincoln High School in 1940 before pursuing higher education at Stanford. He joined the Army in 1943, where he had an accoladed military career, shipping off to France for the European theater of WW II. In 1946, he received the EAME Campaign Medal with two battle stars. He was chosen to represent the United States as a GI at Cambridge University. He was later accepted as a civilian, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in economics and politics.

in 1955 Gerry returned to the United States and began working at Meier & Frank and became the store manager when Meier & Frank opened a new department store in Salem. With Gerry at the helm, Opening Day festivities drew more than 75,000 visitors, half again as much as the 49,000 listed population of Salem at the time. Gerry remained the vice president of Meier and Frank in Salem until the family sold the Company in 1965.

"His story is such an American one," said Kerry Tymchuk, the Executive Director of the Oregon Historical Society and friend of the late Frank. Kerry further stated, "Nobody loved Oregon, was as dedicated to Oregon, every corner of this state, then he was. One person can make a difference... He made a difference in so many ways for so many people, so many causes for so many communities just through sheer willpower, enthusiasm and perseverance."

While he was vice president of the department store, Frank served as the Oregon Economic Development Commission chairman under Oregon Governor and friend Mark Hatfield. This position lasted from 1959-to 1966 when Hatfield was elected to the US Senate.

When Hatfield became a Senator, he asked Frank to help organize his offices. Gerry served as Hatfield's chief of staff from 1973 to 1992. During that time, Frank traveled with the Senator around Oregon and became trusted with the community. So much so, he became known as "Oregon's Third Senator."

Gerry Frank was also a well-known successful author based upon his travels to New York while he was in Washington DC as Hatfield's chief of staff led him to write "Where to Find it, Buy it, Eat it in New York," which is now in its 20th edition and has sold more than 1.2 million copies. He also wrote a guidebook to Oregon, "Gerry Frank's Oregon," in 2012 and published four additional editions. Frank was a long-time columnist for the Oregonians and a correspondent and commentator on news stations in the state.

Many alumni knew Gerry was an expert of sorts on chocolate cake, having judged the chocolate cake contest at the Oregon State Fair from 1959 to 2019, which led him to open a European bakery and restaurant in Salem, Oregon. He was a co-owner of Gerry Frank's Konditorei space from 1982 to 2017.

He was passionate about being involved in and giving back to his community and served on various boards for charitable organizations around Oregon. Providence Health released a statement stating it had lost a great friend in Frank. It said in an emailed statement:

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Gerry had a special concern for children, and because of that, Providence launched The Gerry Frank Center for Children's Care at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. The center features a full range of family medical services, including children's surgeries and procedures. The young patients receiving care there today might not know Gerry Frank personally, but when they look around at the bright rooms, the relaxing, comforting clouds on the ceiling, and hold their "Gerry bears" - they know that someone cared about them a lot. That someone was Gerry Frank.

Gerry Frank is celebrated in many ways for his contributions to the state; including being the Grand Marshall of the Portland Rose parade, being named by Oregon Business and Industry as Statesman of the Year, the first recipient of Willamette University's Glenn Jackson Leadership Award, and designated as Honorary Superintendent of the Oregon State Police. Gerry is the first and only person to be proclaimed as "Oregon's Premier Citizen" by the Oregon Legislature passing a resolution honoring Frank for his "venerable civic, political, entrepreneurial, literary and culinary contributions to the people of Oregon and service to community, state, and country" in 2000.

The bottom line is Gerry Frank was connected. The walls in the fifth-floor penthouse office for 20 years at Spinnaker Place in southeast Salem were decorated from floor to ceiling with autographed portraits; all signed to Frank by Bob Hope, Sammy Davis Jr., Lucille Ball, President George W. Bush, Queen Elizabeth and Tony Blair, just to name a few.

A subset collection displayed in his office included documents and photographs signed by all the presidents of the United States and all the presidents of the Continental Congress. It took 20 years of perusing auctions and bookstore attics for him to complete his collection.

In 2019, the Gerry Frank Salem Rotary Amphitheater was dedicated to him for his service to Oregon.

Gerry reluctantly moved out of his Salem penthouse office, In October 2020, realizing it was time to downsize at his age. He shared much of the collection with businesses, restaurants and organizations across town and the state; places that were part of his life. His only request was that the items collected throughout his life be shared publicly, not locked up in a vault.

Gerry Frank is memorialized as a gentleman of integrity, a true humanitarian, and a dedicated philanthropist throughout his life to the end.



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THE FARM



Tall native trees frame the low rambling cottage
[SUNSET MAGAZINE • FEBRUARY 1929]

Interview excerpts by Elaine Shreve and Virginia Vanture in Gerry Frank's Salem Office, April 5, 2010

Editor's Note: Gerry Frank spent the summers of his childhood in Garden Home at the Frank farm built by his father in the 1920's. During our interview he often expressed how much he enjoyed those years and looked forward to each summer when the family would return to what they considered their summer home. Gerry referred to the house and property as "the Farm" though those living in

Garden Home now refer to the property as the Frank Estate. The property was sold sometime in the 1970's by the Frank Family and developed into a condominium community. The original house, as well as several of the outbuildings, still exist though the stable and track are no longer there. The rail line, which once was used to load the horses as they were transported throughout the country for showing, is now the Fanno Creek Trail, a walking and bicycling trail through the neighborhood.

Oregon has been home to seven generations of the Frank family. The farm home was built sometime in the 1920's, open all year, but we lived there only in the summer months until the mid-fifties, when it became our full-time residence. Sunset Magazine wrote about the house; the article was titled "A Little Gray House in the West." (Sunset Magazine, February 1929. "A Grey-Shingled Home in the West" by Naomi Swett-Sommers.)

My father, Aaron, bought the property because he wanted a place for his show horses. It was a perfect location since the land was adjacent to the Nicol Riding Academy and the Portland Hunt Club; and the Oregon Electric railroad came directly from Portland to Firlock Station where we could load and unload the horses from the estate.

My father had a large stable of horses that he showed all over the country, which was why he built the farm. We had both indoor and outdoor tracks and two stables. Horses were the love of his life.

Mother would sometimes ride, sometimes drive an English Houghton, but she mostly loved gardening and having friends visit the farm. My mother loved entertaining and my brother and I always had friends there. She made it an inviting, warm home for her friends and her kids.

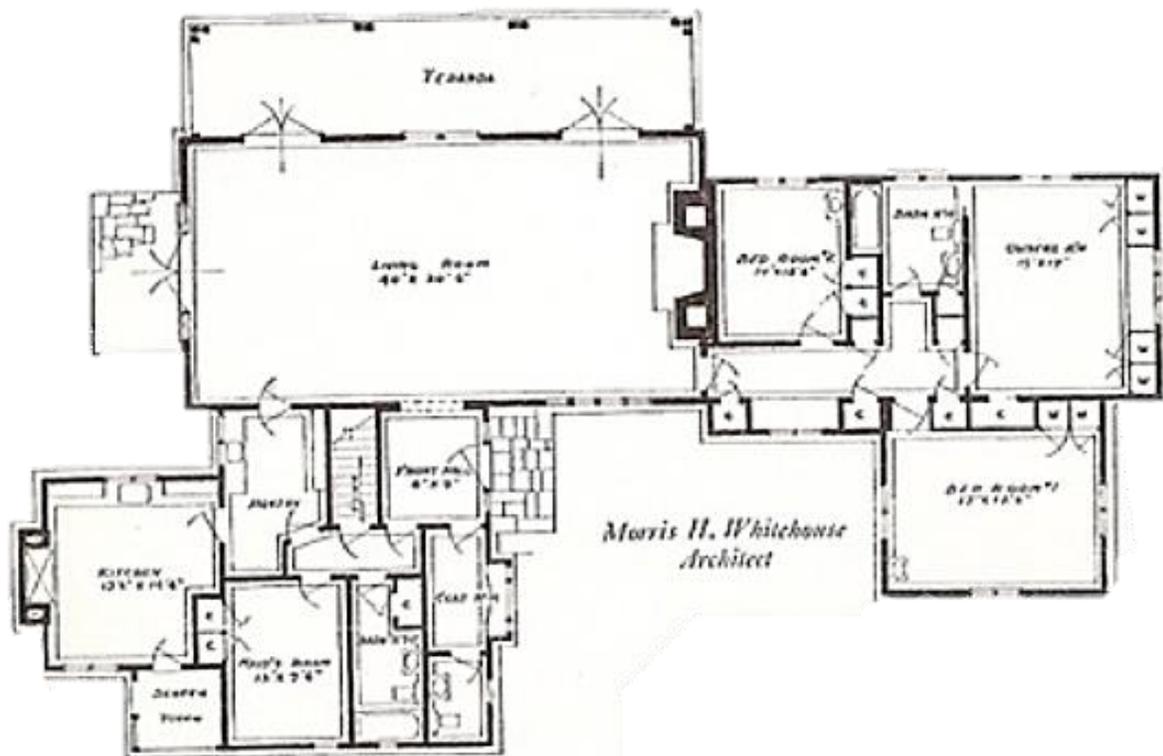
Dick was 6 years older than me, very sweet and athletic. As an adult, he managed the sporting goods department at the Store. He and his wife, Paula, had five children before he passed away in 1962 when he was only 45 years old.

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What I remember well is being allowed to organize a horse show with a group of friends. We were just school kids, and thrilled when my Dad gave his permission. It was held in our indoor ring and turned into a really a big event as an early WWII benefit for the Save the Children Fund. We made a lot of money with hundreds of people in attendance. It was really something and perhaps the nucleus of my personal civic awareness and the realization of what satisfaction there is in doing for others.



Within a few hundred steps of, and in full view of the house, are the famous Frank stables which Mr. Frank himself designed for his horses



GERRY FRANK'S IN MEMORIAM PHOTOGRAPHS AND WRITTEN CONTENT SOURCES:

<https://gardenhomehistory.com/2010/04/25/aaron-frank-home-article-in-sunset-magazine-1929/>

<https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/>

<https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/gerry-frank>

<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2022/03/13/gerry-frank>

<https://www.salemhistorymatters.net/>

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