



Benn's Bulletin

A Publication of *The Friends of the Aberdeen Museum*

July 2010

Wishkah Valley Memories

by Larry DeLorme

Coming Events

Aberdeen Museum Board Meeting
First Tuesday of each month
Aberdeen Museum
7:00 p.m.

Friends of the Aberdeen Museum Meeting
Third Tuesday of each month
Aberdeen Museum
7:00 p.m.



Photographs Clockwise:
Lonny Huffman's Driveway
The Wishkah River
Tom's Place

Courtesy of Marcia and Larry DeLorme

Coming Events

Mark your calendars

September 17, 18, 19, 2010
Pieceful Discoverers'
2010 Quilt Show

October 9, 2010
Harborite of the Year
Dinner

The human memory can be tricky. Unsupported by other evidence, a person's remembrance of past events can be more fiction than fact, more imagined than real. In his final years, the great American writer, Samuel Clemons, visited the town of his boyhood, Hannibal, Missouri. He stood for a time, studying his childhood home. Someone asked him what he was thinking. "It shrank," he replied.

In recounting past life along the Wishkah River, I have kept in mind the danger of exaggeration. I believe my memories are relatively accurate, since whatever formative experiences I had in the time I spent in the Valley were balanced by my ongoing life in the city of Aberdeen.

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Aberdeen Museum of History

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Happenings at the Museum

Here we are at the 50 yard line of 2010. The Aberdeen Museum has been busy with private and public events. The volunteers participating in the Women of Grays Harbor History, debuted some of their new costumes when they appeared at the opening of Aberdeen's new Grays Harbor Transit Transfer Station (now that is a mouthful). Elegantly dressed for the occasion was Mrs. Cora McDermoth (Marty Horner), Mrs. Martha White (Sharon Eager), Miss Nellie Thrift (Celia Barry), and Mary Byles (Linda Wilson). They were also accompanied by W of GHH project co-ordinator Sally McCarthy. These lovely ladies braved the cold and created quite a stir showing off their historic apparel.

On March 21, the Women of Grays Harbor History presented their second presentation to an enthusiastic audience. The women volunteers awed the attendees with an outstanding historic portrayal of Fran White, Elnora Bacon, Martha White, Cora McDermoth, Mary Byles, Josepha Kestner, Nellie Thrift, Anna Haynes, and Amanda Slover-Fry. The pioneer women were selected by the volunteers. Writers for the adaptations were Doris Backholm and Dolores Erak.

The W of GHH has given two additional presentations to private clubs, and they are looking forward to future performances. If you would like to arrange a performance for your club, church, history class or other organization, please call the museum a month in advance of the date you desire.

Also, hats off to Byron Eager. Among other things he is the

Museum's Sorcerer of neatness and organization. Byron jumped in and organized several scary and overwhelming areas of the museum: the workshop, storage areas above the chair-room and work shop, the furniture area on the balcony and, the best yet, the entire lumber storage in the annex across 'I' Street. He built racks to hold plywood, sorted lumber into manageable sections—with each board labeled with its width and length. All kidding aside, Thank you Byron, great job!

Also on the list for kudos is a new and short lived volunteer, John Lloyd. John and his family live in East Hoquiam. After visiting the museum John asked if he could take over the chore of cleaning the Auto Repair Garage exhibit. John was full of surprises. He built new hanging display cabinets to display valuable small artifacts like our collection of wheel hubcaps from early autos, cleaned and organized tools, created a display of local dealership license plate frames, and mounted early auto-price lists on the wall. The garage is nearly complete, and the museum staff and visitors alike will enjoy it in the days to come. Through his kindness, John made the museum a gift of a framed display of the drawings and specifications of the first Heron Street Bridge, built in 1890, as well as a logging brand used by the Grays Harbor Logging Company. A sad note for the Aberdeen Museum—John and his family will be relocating to Pennsylvania in August. Everyone at the museum wishes the best to John and his family, but until his final departure we will enjoy John's sense of humor, and his knowledge.

My maternal grandparents, Tom and Mildred Proctor, made two attempts at settling in the Wishkah Valley. Shortly after the turn of the 20th Century, Tom had taken his young wife and two children, Harold and Edna, to live on a rental property at Aberdeen Gardens. He then departed for work in a logging camp. In his absence, the rented cottage burned down. My grandmother and the two children were not hurt, but the fire destroyed all the young family's belongings, including wedding gifts. In Tom's absence and no way to communicate with him, Mildred bundled up the children, hitched a ride on a logging company's tugboat to Aberdeen, then traveled back to Colorado, where Tom rejoined them.

Clearly, the area (if not the first experience) asserted a hold on the family however, and in the early 1920's, the Proctors again left Colorado for Grays Harbor. This time, eleven acres of land was purchased some five miles upriver from Aberdeen. The land title was in Mildred's name—perhaps a gesture of security after the unhappy results of the first settlement experience. Tom constructed a house on a knoll well back from the river, then, cleared most of the remaining acreage. I say “most” because a considerable number of large stumps were left in what became pasture, and I remember the family gathering around burning stumps, throwing potatoes into the embers and telling stories while waiting to retrieve the tubers, peeling away the blackened skins, and salting and eating the powdery spuds.

Although my memories of my grandparents' farm begin about 1949,

when I was three years old, and are mostly positive, by that time, the Wishkah Valley was settled with people who like the Proctors, had arrived in the second decade of the twentieth century. Most folks purchased relatively small acreage, cleared away the remaining underbrush, and established pastures and small kitchen gardens. The loggers had preceded them, cutting down the magnificent stands of cedar and Douglas Fir that had once crowded the river and inspired generations of Americans and European explorers. (in two three-year periods, 1824-27 and 1830-33, the Scottish botanist, David Douglas, headquartered at Fort Vancouver and made numerous trips to the Chehalis and Wishkah Valleys, included samples of the local trees in his collection of some 7,000 new plant species sent back to Britain).

Local conditions discouraged much commercial farming in the valley. In the years when the loggers continued operations in the upper valley, splash dams were utilized to send great rafts of logs crashing down the river and settlers soon learned the folly of attempting to farm along the sometimes flooded river bank. In addition, much of the soil in the valley contained an overabundance of iron. Few farmers of that time knew how to adjust crops to soil conditions. Apart from Firland Dairy in the upper valley, commercial agriculture was nearly nonexistent, and what cultivation was attempted was kept to the north side of the Wishkah Road, which by the end of the 1920's consisted of patches of hard surface amidst the gravel. The road would remain only partially hard-surfaced until monies from federal and state

sources were added to county funds in 1994 to finish eliminating the loose-rock portions.

A single farmer, Lonny Huffman, utilized his acreage for “truck farming.” Lonny owned two parcels of land: a ten acre farm with a house and small barn adjacent to my grandparents' property, and an even smaller farm closer to Aberdeen. He raised mostly carrots and beets on the larger farm, and cabbage on the other, he sold the crops to merchants who operated vegetable stands in the Grand Central Market in Aberdeen. My first paying job as a youngster was hoeing cabbage for Lonny.

Typical of farmers of his day, Lonny worked very long hours in the growing and harvesting months. In the winter he slept days and read and planned his crop distribution at night. He also provided valley young people with opportunities for socializing. After a particularly destructive Halloween, when an unknown group of teenagers swept across the valley, breaking into barns and moving or destroying some of the numerous outdoor toilets, Lonny organized Halloween parties at his farmhouse. He would comb the valley for youngsters, piling them on his flatbed truck for transport to the farm. The wood-burning stove in the kitchen was fired up, and a massive kettle was used to cook frankfurters. Buns were toasted on the stove top. A pot of baked beans was kept hot. Guests were encouraged to participate in parlor games. I remember on occasion, a lively round of charades was played. My

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Uncle John drew the name of Winston Churchill. He put on an old vest, stuffed it with a pillow, and tried his best to imitate an English accent. (His downfall came when he lit a cigar, and was soon made ill by the smoke and taste).

The Proctors enjoyed games as well, whiling away many rainy evenings with cards and checkers. My Uncle Jim was especially good at checkers. The game brought out his serious side, and he almost always won. Sometimes, John and I listened to radio programs, like "Superman," "Tom Mix," and the "Cisco Kid." When my grandfather reached home however, the radio was usually dialed to country music, and some of the lyrics still reverberate in my memory.

Looking back, I am amazed by the volume of work that was undertaken by my grandmother. In the years before the close of the 1940's the only running water in the house was supplied by a hand pump fastened to the wooden drain board in the kitchen. She prepared meals, oversaw the weekly baths, which were taken in a large galvanized tub moved into the kitchen and filled with water heated on the stove. She tended the large kitchen garden, fed the chickens (with some help from my younger uncles), milked the cows, churned the butter, and supervised the little country store and filling station that stood on the edge of the Wishkah Road.

She never learned to drive a car. When one of her married children needed help, she would "find" a ride to town and walk to that family member's home. I recall her arriving at our house when my



*From top to bottom:
Larry's Grandparents
Tom and Mildred Proctor,
and Uncle John Proctor*

Courtesy of the DeLorme Family

mother was ill, carrying a package of soup bones with which to prepare an evening meal.

She greatly enjoyed story-telling, usually relating to events in her childhood. Whether in our homes or in the warm kitchen of the farm, we loved to listen to her stories, as we popped corn on the stove.

I have never known a more patient, kindly person. When I was very small, and my two youngest uncles were chopping and carrying bundles of kindling, she asked if I would like to help them. "No thank you," I replied. I recall her laughing at the answer, then shooing me out the back door.

Once chores were done, Uncle John and I always found something to do. We fished the river, using an old boat and a small, ancient outboard motor he kept running smoothly. We could easily pass a warm summer day on the river, usually utilizing simple tackle like "Ford Fender" spinners to troll for trout, while munching on the peanut butter sandwiches that we almost always carried. We especially liked to add slices of my grandmother's home-canned dill pickles to the peanut butter. On one occasion, we raided her canning cupboard in the cellar and consumed at least two quarts of pickles. She was most unhappy with us.

We visited other youngsters. One friend of John's had hollowed out a massive cedar stump and used it as a "fort." We also sought to construct our own "cabin," starting at least a half dozen cabins in the woods above the farm. We finally

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MEMORIES *continued from page 4*

succeeded in finishing one, covering the roof with a roll of linoleum given us by Uncle Harold.

I always attributed our success in this case to the fact that we had taken along a thermos of coffee, to which we had added a large portion of cream and at least a pound of sugar. (We had to spoon the substance out of the thermos bottle.) On some Saturdays we would hitch-hike to town, attend a matinee at a local theatre, then spend the rest of the day imitating the heroes we had admired in the movies—sometimes, a cowboy star like Gene Autry or Roy Rogers, sometimes a super hero such as Batman or Superman.

Those days left me with wonderful memories and supplied me with lessons for life as well. I watched my Uncle Jim apply his penchant for disciplined thinking to a desire for higher education. He worked his way through the University of Washington and graduated with a degree in accounting. He then enjoyed a successful career in business, retiring as a senior vice president at Westinghouse. My Uncle John was equally intelligent, but found formal schooling not to his taste. Still he went on to serve in the U. S. Air Force for three years, where he applied his excellent mechanical skills, then had a long career at the Rayonier ITT Pulp Mill in Hoquiam. Both uncles married fine women and raised wonderful children.

The influences of my boyhood adventures in the Wishkah Valley remain among my strongest and happiest memories. I know that I have consciously striven over my lifetime to emulate the commitment to family and earnest hard work that I witnessed in my extended family. Like many before me, I was touched

by the Valley and its people—perhaps made a bit better by my experiences there.

*Check Out the
NEW ITEMS
for sale in the
Museum Gift Shop.*

***Kurt Cobain Memorabilia**
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***Jig Saw Puzzles**
of local historic sites*

***Walking Staffs**
made from
local Devil Club shrubs.*

Local History books

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**We look forward
to hearing from
you!**



In Loving Memory

Richard Lundgren - February, 2010

Marge Kauhanen - April, 2010

Donald Davidson - May, 2010

Sylvia Katainen - June 2010

Considering the unstable national, state, county, and city economy folks are still digging deep into their pockets. We truly thank the following dedicated people for their contributions. If you Haven't already sent in your Annual Fund Drive Contribution, there is still time.

*The City of Aberdeen
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