Coal in Those Hills

by Jerry Bates

THE old Northern Pacific Transcontinental Railroad ran along the foot of South Hill's eastern ridge. That section of the rail line had another purpose years before it directly connected Tacoma and Puget Sound with the rest of the country in 1888. The original track was completed in 1877 to connect the coal mines in Wilkeson and the Carbon River Corridor to Tacoma's deep-water port. The plan was to sell coal to California to help pay for the NP's expansion into western Washington.

Large coal deposits were discovered along the upper Carbon River in the 1860s. Coal would transform the river valley and give the river its name. For a short time, it was one of the most important regions in the developing Washington Territory. Small towns sprung up in the river corridor all supporting a coal mine site—among them Wilkeson, Carbonado, Burnett, Melmont, Montezuma and Fairfax. Melmont, Montezuma, and Fairfax are gone today—abandoned and consumed by dense forest. The last coal operation in the corridor closed in 1936 but some mining activity occurred during WWII.

It's hard to believe the small quiet communities of today's Carbon River Corridor, totaling around 2,000 residents, once had a population of up to 65,000 people. Back then there was even serious talk of relocating the state capitol to Wilkeson!

This fascinating local history was presented to South Hill Historical Society during our May 2018 General Meeting. We were fortunate to have guest speaker, Paul Marsh, who grew up in the Carbon River Corridor on the Zavitski homestead near the old town of Fairfax. He's a current resident and has raised his family there. Paul works with the Pierce County Planning and Public Works Department in the Maintenance and Operations Division. Among the many roads main-

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tained by our county, Paul and his team operate and preserve a 20-mile road system in unincorporated Pierce County along the northwest area adjacent to Mt. Rainier.

Paul talked about the history of the coal mines, lumber mills, homesteads and towns (former and present) in this area. His presentation included slides full of historical photos of the former town sites, coke ovens, buildings, maps, early settlers, and homesteads. Paul gave brief histories of the coal mining towns of Carbonado, Wilkeson and Burnett, plus the long gone sites of Fairfax, Melmont and Montezuma. We learned the history and current status of the Zavitski, Poch and Kolisch homesteads. In addition we heard the story of the picturesque 1921 O' Farrell Bridge that connected Carbonado with Fairfax. Most who visit the area today are familiar with the beautiful site where the narrow old bridge crosses the deep river gorge. Paul's talk wasn't all about the coal industry; he also covered the Manley Moore Lumber Co. and the area's other valuable resource—sandstone.

Paul Marsh

The O' Farrell Bridge built in 1921 connected Carbonado with Fairfax by road. The one lane bridge is still in use today along SR165 to Mount Rainier National Park.

Coal & Coke
Coal was the area's most valuable resource and main attraction for Washington Territory job seekers—mostly European immigrants, Yugoslavians, Russians, Swedes, Germans, Austrians, and more. In the late 1800s coal was critical to make steel for the expanding railroad infrastructure in the Pacific Northwest. Refining steel requires coke and coke is made from coal. Coke burns hotter and longer than coal. Coke ovens were built in the mining towns. Coke was created by refining coal; burning it at a high temperature for 48 to 72 hours to smelt away impurities in beehive-shaped brick ovens. The coke was then sold to smelters for many metals; primarily steel. Remains of the old ovens are visible today.

Sandstone
Wilkeson Sandstone is unique; it's very dense sandstone, watertight and resists cracking and discoloration. The sandstone was used as a very high grade building material—numerous buildings and homes in the Northwest used Wilkeson Sandstone. Among them are the Seattle Art Museum, several buildings at the University of Washington, Lincoln and Stadium High Schools, Tacoma's Bank of California, the Rust Building, as well as the Washington State Capitol. The stone was mined and worked at the Wilkeson quarry site, where raw stones weighing several tons each were cut first into smooth slabs with huge stone-cutting saws. Elaborate shapes could then be sculpted by hand. This cutting and sculpting process continued into the 1950s. Shaping the sandstone was done, similarly to marble and limestone, for fancy windows doorways and spires used for churches and other buildings. The skilled stone shaping techniques were passed down from father to son and has since become a lost art.

Lumber
The high mountain hills and valleys were full of old-growth timber and cedar. J.E. Manley and Robert Moore formed the Manley Moore Lumber Co. in 1907, and built the highest elevation sawmill in Washington State. It was located on the south bank of the Carbon River near the Kolisch homestead. They purchased timber from the Kolisch, Zavitski, and Poch homesteads as well as railroad land. The company built their own rail line that connected to the Northern Pacific Railroad for transport to Tacoma. By 1925, it was one of the largest mills in the state. It ceased operation in 1930 due to the Great Depression and labor unrest.

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Wilkeson as seen today one of the few surviving former Carbon River Corridor coal mining towns.

The Present

Today the area is known as a "Gateway Corridor" to Mt. Rainier National Park's Carbon River entrance following highway SR165. It's the least developed of the routes to Mt. Rainier; however, this less popular portal to the Park gives access to the unmatched beauty of crystal clear Mowich Lake and the popular river hike up to the Carbon River Glacier. It's the lowest glacier in the contiguous 48 states and the source of the Carbon River.

Although the historic mining towns mentioned above are no longer in the mining business or have disappeared, the town of Wilkeson thrives with its old-time main street of stores, restaurants, business and public mining attractions and displays. Carbonado is off the main highway and is more residential.

The Rail Line

In its day, besides passengers from the east, the old rail line along South Hill's eastern edge brought coal, timber and sandstone from the high country approaching Mt. Rainier—but the story isn't over! Today the original rail bed is experiencing a revival thanks the Foot Hills Trail. This very popular walking, biking, non-motorized asphalt path follows the old rail bed up to Buckley, with future plans to extend as far as Wilkeson and Carbonado.

We all thank Paul Marsh for introducing and perhaps reviving an interest in this fascinating chapter of local history. More information on the Carbon River Corridor's history can be found on the excellent Website *carbonrivercorridor.com* and for more info on Wilkeson try *townofwilkeson.com*.

The Northern Pacific Railroad & South Hill

By Carl Vest

There are no railroads on South Hill. At one time there were trolleys providing service to some areas but those tracks are long gone. During the logging era there were also some temporary rail installations for moving cut timber. They have also disappeared. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that railroads have had a significant influence on the use of land on South Hill.

The impact can be traced to Federal actions in the 1860s and 1870s. During that period transcontinental railroads were thought to be the way to connect the US east and west coasts for commerce and the movement of settlers to newly acquired lands. In 1869 the first line was completed, named the Central Pacific/Union Pacific.

It linked San Francisco and Chicago. That track did not serve the Pacific Northwest.

In 1864 Congress produced a second Bill that brought railroading to the northwest. It was signed into law by Abraham Lincoln. This act authorized a program to develop a railroad and telegraph line from Lake Superior to Puget Sound. The port on Puget Sound to be the terminal was Tacoma, Washington Territory — not Seattle. The company formed to carry out this effort was named the Northern Pacific Railroad. The line was completed in 1883.

Paying for this proposed railroad was also a part of the law. It authorized, for example, that cer-

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tain public lands along its right of way be granted to the Northern Pacific which was then to sell this acreage to pay for construction costs. The grant was every other square mile of land along the route, to a depth of either 40 or 80 miles depending on location. In Washington Territory the depth was 80 miles. This created the so-called checkerboard pattern of allocations along the railroad's path.

The Northern Pacific's way through the Cascade Mountains was Stampede Pass. On the western side the line passed through the present-day towns of Enumclaw, Buckley, and Orting, and then along the Puyallup River to Alderton, Puyallup, and Tacoma. This route put the railroad just north of South Hill between Orting and Puyallup. South Hill was, as a result, subject to the land allocations given to the railroad.
The Northern Pacific disposed of its lands on

South Hill in a number of ways. Some parcels were sold to individual investors, but most of it was acquired by Frederick Weyerhaeuser. A 1915 map, for example, shows Weyerhaeuser, at that late date, still owning either all or parts of Sections 1, 15, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, and 35.

That's ten Sections out of the 36 on South Hill, a total approaching one-third of the Township. A Section is one square mile and the numbers illustrate the checkerboard pattern of the railroad's titles. As for sales to individuals, title abstracts can be found, even now, that illustrate land transfers.

Many land owners probably do not know the historical roots of their holdings. But many of their titles can be traced to the original grant awards to the Northern Pacific Railroad.

A Town Important to Old South Hill Families Built Along The Northern Pacific Transcontinental Line

by Jerry Bates

Not much is left of Alderton. I've noticed it doesn't even show up on some current area maps. I assume our readers know where Alderton is, if not, it's the little cluster of buildings a mile north of the intersection of Old Military Road and State Route 162 (Valley Ave.) as you head towards Sumner.

where you went for supplies, mail, church and general contact with the world beyond lonely farm and tall trees.

Strange as it seems to us nowadays, there was a time when living on the hill didn't mean you belonged to Puyallup. There was

The Alderton store 1913, seen here with the much-remodeled store of today.

Looking Back
Let's go back a hundred and twenty years, or so. Alderton wasn't always so obscure. For early residents of the hill, say prior to 1888, Alderton was the closest center of activity,

no road to Puyallup until 1888 — years after many families had already occupied the hill. The story is often told of the early settler Alois Kupfer, living on the hill six months before discovering where Puyallup was. At that time travel was oriented

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east and west across the hill following the Military Road not north and south following Meridian Ave. E as today. For many early hill families a trip to "town" would mean following the Military Road down the hill to Alderton, not down the hill to Puyallup. Back then Alderton was approaching its heyday, a thriving new community, larger than Sumner to its north, sitting astride the Military Road and a busy rail line running north and south.

The lure of Alderton for these hill families rapidly diminished after a road up the hill from Puyallup was completed in 1888. But one significant South Hill connection to Alderton remained for many years after that, and is still vivid in the memories of many local old-timers. A landmark business during the early commercial era of Willows Corner was the Howard Annis Chevron Station; the owner's grandfather, Orson Annis, was the "Ezra Meeker" of Alderton.

A town is born
During the early days, the site of Alderton was the proverbial fork in the road. After descending into the Puyallup River valley following the Naches Pass route across the Cascades and arriving at the river, the road went off in two directions. One way was to Seattle; the other crossed the river at the Van Ogle's farm, then traveled the remaining width of the valley floor and wound its way up the hill and on to Steilacoom.

Orson Annis and his family were among the first to homestead in the valley on the west side of the Puyallup River, at today's site of Alderton, in 1869. In 1876 the Northern Pacific Railroad completed a spur from the Wilkeson coal mines and sandstone quarry to Puyallup. A train passed Alderton every ten minutes. There were many stops for wood along the route to feed the wood-burning locomotives; one of these was just west of the Annis homestead. Annis saw the potential for a future town. He and a neighbor, Mr. Oliver, gave the wood stop the official name of "Alderton," inspired by the heavy stand of alder

trees in the area. Annis and his sons cleared the land, planted fruit trees, built a sawmill, a store and hotel. Annis later became the first Postmaster and ticket agent, thus earning him the title by people of the valley "Father of Alderton."

Meeting Reminders

Our general meetings start at **11:00** the third Tuesday of the month—no meeting July and August. More parking spaces are available just a short walk from the Community Center. Get some exercise, leave open spaces close to the community center for our less agile members.

Please respect the parking restrictions in front of the Community Center building, such as the parking spaces reserved for "Future Dwellers." Parking is never allowed on the sidewalk in front of the facility, not even if you're loading or unloading!

We continue to be very thankful to the Highlands management for allowing us "free" use of such excellent meeting facilities. Lets respect the Highlands public parking guidelines.

Additional Parking at the Highlands

Community Center
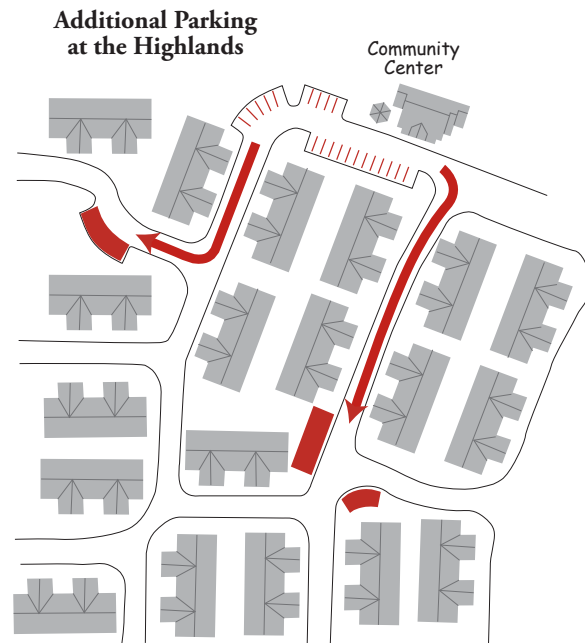
Oops! *In the previous newsletter issue, Spring 2018, the lead article title "Captain William Swanson" should have read "Captain John Swanson."*

New faces for top slots

South Hill Historical Society Officer Elections for 2018-2019

by Jerry Bates

During our June General Meeting, the Society Officers are elected and/or reelected. After being confirmed by a vote of the June attendees, they're in office for the following year. Many of our officers are willing to continue their duties and are reelected. This year we had two non-incumbents throw their hats into the ring—one for society president and one for the vice president position. Yvonne Thorp was confirmed as our new president and Joe Hoenhous our vice president. Both have been longtime members and we congratulate them for stepping up to their new responsibilities and becoming more involved with the society. Former President Wes Perkinson and Vice President Terry Maves graciously stepped aside to let the new office seekers fill their former positions. We all welcome and look forward to working with both Yvonne and Joe!

Both Wes Perkinson and Terry Maves did great jobs while in office—we all benefited by their leadership. They will be remembered for their commitment and willingness to perform not only their elected duties but their participation in many society events. As Society President for two years, Wes brought valuable "historical society" expertise gained from his involvement with the Puyallup Historical Society, the Meeker Mansion, and his current membership on the Puget Sound Heritage League board of directors. Wes remains our Society Archivist working with the PastPerfect software cataloging our newspaper clippings, documents and artifacts. Terry Maves was Society Vice President for five years, often serving as general meeting host. As vice president, he was responsible for our monthly meeting programs. Terry's networking talents paid off with excellent and interesting speakers—our general meeting attendance definitely improved during his time in office.

A society is only as good as its leadership. We've been lucky, so far, over these many years. Some of our fellow historical societies are currently struggling to survive due to lack of leadership—not having anyone willing to step up and help keep things running and moving forward. We're in good shape thanks to the commitment of those officers past and present who have kept the South Hill Historical Society going strong now into its seventeenth year.

**Yvonne Thorp
President**

**Joe Hoenhous
Vice President**

**Susan Beals
Secretary**

**Beverley Zook
Public Relations**

**Carl Vest
Research
Coordinator**

**Ben Peters
Treasurer**

**Jerry Bates
Newsletter
Webmaster**

From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

Welcome to New Member
Richard Casmier

Please call, e-mail or write any change of address to me, Ben Peters, 253-845-7028, poppaben2002@yahoo.com, South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582, South Hill, WA 98374.

Also, don't forget that we are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Dues, donations, etc., are fully deductible from your income taxes if you are able to do so. If you need a receipt for tax purposes, contact Ben.

Dues Reminder
I will attach a sticky note to the Society newsletter mailed closest to your renewal date. **No need to fill out the membership form unless there is a change of some kind.**

The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the THIRD TUESDAY of the month, 11:00 AM, (no meetings July and August) at The Highlands in the Community Center. This complex is located at 502 43rd Ave. SE, adjacent to and east of the Mel Korum YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information, contact Wes Perkinson at (253) 241-5397.

In Memoriam
The South Hill Historical Society
regrets the passing of

**Dorothy (Swalander) Norris
&
Mark Starkel**

South Hill Historical Society
Meeting Place

**The Highlands
South Hill**

**502 43RD AV SE
Puyallup, WA 98374**

N

512

Meridian AV.

South
Hill Mall

(116TH ST E)   43RD AV SE

YMCA

161

Our Current Members

Andy G. Anderson
Andy & Ruth Anderson
Elizabeth Anema
Marion Armstrong
Bob Ballou
Jerry Bates
Susan Beals
Katherine Bennett
Teresa Best
Marilyn Burnett
Debbie Burtnett
Bruce Carpenter
Richard Casmier
Vernon Cox
Gary Cressman
Dave & Patti Curtiss
Robert & Lynn Daughtery
Karen Day
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Ira Gabrielson
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Evelyn Swalander Hess
Wilma Walsworth Hinshaw
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Matt Holm
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Art & Lorraine Larson
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John & Carrie Loshbough
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Terry Maves
Laurienne Stewart Minnich
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Dorothy Nelson
Juanita Nordin
Dorothy Norris
Ron Pearson
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Ben Peters
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Bill Riley
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Vern Rockstad
Helen Rohlman
Earl Root
Stan Salmon
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Lori Stock
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Ralph & Yvonne Thorpe
Jade Trevere
Margo L. & Joe Tucci
Lee Van Pevenage
Carl Vest
Neil & Celia Vincent
Joan Vosler
Ed Zeiger
Hans Zeiger
Allan S. & Ellen M. Zulauf
Beverley Zook

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southhillhistory.com

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South Hill Historical Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name		
Address	**Phone**	
City	**State**	**Zip**
E-mail Address		

Signature _____ **Date** _____ **Renewal,** *check here* ☐

Annual Dues: Society membership $25.00
Note: Please do not send cash.

Make check or M.O. payable to South Hill Historical Society and mail with this application to:
**South Hill Historical Society, Box 73582,
South Hill, WA 98374**

**South Hill
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Box 73582
South Hill, WA 98374

To: