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CONCRETE HERALD ANNIVERSARY EDITION

A History of the Upper Skagit Valley And It's Pioneer People

History, as we know it from books, begins with the coming of the first settler to the wilderness. The upper Skagit valley was still a wilderness 100 years ago. At that time it was known there was a large river tumbling into Puget Sound from a wide, flat delta within sight of a beautiful snow-capped peak, but this information was relegated to the logs and maps of the explorers who were busy charting the shores within reach of their boats. So the upper reaches of the Skagit had to wait. In some ways they are still waiting, for after a hundred years there are many sources of wealth that lie untouched, awaiting the proper and convenient time to be turned into jobs, into materials, into dollars.

Of the days before the coming of the white man, little is known except that the Indians lived happily and well in a land filled with game of all kind, a river and many streams teeming with trout and salmon, a shore line where clams, crab or salt water fish could be caught in any quantity. The soil was fertile for any type crop they wished to raise. It was a land of plenty. No one had any thought of cutting timber, clearing land or mining gold only of living comfortably.

Nature occasionally brought disaster to the land. There are tales of a great flood on the Skagit in 1815 when the river at Concrete rose to thirty times its normal flow. Then in 1843 came terrible days as Mount Baker erupted and threw flame and ashes high into

the air, setting forests afire and covering the valley with cinders. The huge lava flows from the mountain can still be traced from later eruptions in 1854, 1858¹ and 1870 dates having been figured from tree rings of burned stumps found where the hot rock flowed.

Early Discovery by Cook

It was in 1792 that Captain Cook following the stories of other early seafarers came to the West Coast in search of new lands to exploit and found his way into Puget Sound. The inland waters had somehow been missed by others up until that time. Then came Capt. Vancouver to fully explore the inlands and the mainland shore. A number of other explorers visited the Sound, but few left any sign of permanent settlements.

Disputes over the territory were partially settled in 1846 when Great Britain and the United States set an international boundary. Then came the settlers and in 1858 the lands of Northern Puget Sound were ceded in treaty by the Indians who moved to a reservation on Fidalgo Island. First white settlements were at Coupeville, Utsalady and Anacortes. By 1860 a number of settlements and homesteads had been founded.

¹ Mr. Stewart's second monster flood was in 1856.

Log Jams Blocked River

The first recorded visit to the upper Skagit was a trip made by Major Van Bokkelen and party in July of 1858. According to his report the party started up the river only to find three huge log jams in the first twelve miles of progress. After working their way past these obstructions they found easy going and followed the river through many miles of forest-lined banks.

In search of gold, the party prospected all likely looking bars and found traces of the yellow metal in almost every case. Their trip continued until they came upon a smaller river entering the Skagit from the north. This they followed through a deep canyon and for many miles into swift water, eventually coming out on a huge lake, behind which rose almost the full height of Mt. Baker. About the lake they found several camps of friendly Indians. No large gold strike being found the party returned down river to tell their story of discovery to others.

The lure of gold brought many others up the river. With the gold seekers came the homebuilders and homesteads began to appear along the banks of the lower reaches. It was 1870 then and the influx had begun in earnest. Here was new land, rich land, waiting to be taken. The log jams at Mount Vernon still blocked all traffic except by canoe but still they came. And they found unlimited timber, minerals, coal and even gold!

The first settler above the jam was A. R. Williamson who found his ideal homestead in the vicinity of Lyman in 1871. From that time on, every year would see more log cabins raised at some likely-looking spot along the river and there would be one more place for the weary canoe parties to stop and rest, get a good meal and a night's sleep under a roof.

Discover Hamilton Coal

Amasa Everett, Lafayette Stevens and

Orlando Gramm were in search of minerals in 1874 when they stopped near the site of Hamilton to prospect the hills there. The latter, not being a mining man, went off to look at some black rock the Indians had told about and came back with news that a mountain of coal had been located. Mr. Everett unfortunately broke his leg on this trip so the partners returned to civilization. The primitive setting of the leg, however, was far too crude and the leg had to be amputated.

Not to be discouraged, Mr. Everett and his party made another trip a year later, in 1875, in which they went as far as Marblemount. They returned discouraged and took up a claim on the east bank of the Baker River (then called the Nuhcullum). A new member of the party, John Rowley, took up this claim directly across the Skagit and both Everett and Rowley erected log cabins. They spent the winter in searching for gold. They found it in many places, but never in paying quantities. They made most of their cash for buying supplies by splitting out cedar for cabin doors. These they took down the river to Mount Vernon to sell for \$4.00 each. Cedar oars also brought good returns at \$2.00 a pair.

Rowley continued to prospect the Skagit until a few years later he hit upon the gold-loaded gravel of the Ruby Creek district and started the biggest rush to the upper valley that has ever been known. In his party at that time were Otto Klement, Charles von Presentin, John Duncan, and Frank Scott. Their trip consisted of a journey to the head of the Skagit, across the Cascades and into the Methow valley. On the return trip down the river their boats were upset and lost and they barely made it back to the Baker River where their provisions were stored with "Cascade Charlie", an Indian. He transported them back to Goddall's landing just before the Skagit gorge, where they built a log hut and whipped out lumber to build sluice boxes with which to work the gold bearing gravel. All this was in 1877.

Winter forced the party to return down valley but they came back in the spring to start work. It is interesting to note that their records tell of finding the remains of a natural rock bridge about 15 miles above Goddall's landing (Diablo canyon). A cabin built at that point was known as the Tunnel House and was a place for the storage of their supplies. Gold was not too plentiful, but enough to keep them working.

Ruby Gold Strike in 1879

In 1879 Albert Bacon put in a wing dam on the river and washed out fifteen hundred dollars in gold dust in a season. Rowley, Duncan and Sawyer opened a claim on Canyon Creek, some ten miles above Bacons' claim and took out a thousand dollars. Their return to Mount Vernon with pouches of gold dust set off the inevitable gold fever and the rush was on.

By this time the government had been persuaded into paying the cost of removing the log jams on the river at Mount Vernon.² For the balance of 1879 and into 1880 over four thousand men fought snow, high water and winter cold to tear at gravel bars and rock hills of the upper Skagit with pick and shovel. They came by canoe, by trail by river boat. Some even pulled barges but gave up by the time they had reached the Baker. Many were drowned in the raging Skagit canyon, many died on the trail or in the bitter cold of the camps in the winter of 1880 snow was thirty feet deep in the district and many years later tree stumps could still be seen cut thirty feet above the ground where the miners fell them for fuel and lumber from the surface of the snow.

Clothier & English of Mount Vernon set up a branch store at Goddall's landing, many road houses prospered along the river all

the way to the gorge, known as "Portage." Ruby city, which is said to have been platted on twenty feet of snow, also had a small store.

Steam Boats Arrive

The fare on the steamers from Mount Vernon to Portage was \$12, then dropped to \$8 as the time necessary for the trip was cut to two days. It was 80 miles from Mount Vernon to the landing. Boats traveling on the river were The Chehalis, The Josephine and The Fanny Lake³ and rivalry was great between the captains as they sought to outdo each other on passengers, freight and speed.

Captain Brennan of the Chehalis was said to have been a big Irish man with a wild temper who judged the length of the trip by the amount of whiskey he had in his keg. He'd start from Seattle with a full keg and when it ran out he would start back, no matter just where he happened to be on the river.

Captain Bailey of The Josephine was a half breed, but a fierce competitor of the irascible Irishman. It was he who first brought his boat as far as Lyman and started the feud to see who could go furthest up the river. Paul Pressentin tells of a boat race between the two rivermen which reached a climax just below the site of Birdsvew where the Pressentin homestead was located. He isn't sure which boat won, but as the leader came around the bend through the rough water it slowed almost to a stop. The other came around the bend through the rough water it slowed almost to a stop. The other came up and began to steam past. As it became apparent that if something wasn't done the first boat would lose out, a big cloud of black smoke rolled from its smokestack and it took off with such speed that it came into Pressentin's landing just in time to nose out its rival. The passengers were cheering and shooting off guns in wild celebration. It turned out that the captain, in

² According to Corps records no money was ever appropriated from the government to remove the log jams.

³ Later another boat called the *Indiana* dubbed "the mail boat" also made the trip to Portage.

desperation, had tossed a sack of bacon into the fire for the extra spurt of steam.

The Pressentin place was a favorite stopping place on the river as there the boats bought wood for fuel and the passengers could get food and lodging. Other stops were made at Dave Batey's at Sedro-Woolley, Williamson's at Lyman, Everett's at the Baker, at Sauk and at Marblemount.

By the end of 1880 the gold rush had subsided into a quite working of the claims already staked. The get-rich-quick boys were gone and the workers stayed on to prospect and mine the hard way. All supplies had to be carried over dangerous trails by pack train, but this was done as a matter of course. There was gold to be found and men to find it. Huge stamp mills, tons of cable, heavy mining tools, all managed to find their way over Devil's Elbow⁴ on the backs of pack animals in a manner that many tall tales of recent years seem half hearted.

With the gold rush dying, many of the men found the river and it's land still interesting. Many stayed to build homes and start hewing down the forests to lay out farms. Frank R. Hamilton and his wife settled at the mouth of the Baker in 1880. Mrs. Theodore Sunter was the first white women to settle here and Mrs. Hamilton the second. At that time the population included the Sunters, the Hamilton's, Ell Frome, A. Everett, Orrien Kincaid and S. Anderson.

Indian Trouble

The following year the little community had Indian trouble. The Indians were protesting the government survey of the upper Skagit district, saying that no treaty had been made to give them the land. The surveyors were warned by Everett to shoot to kill if attacked and this was overheard by the

⁴ Today Devil's Elbow is referred to as a section in the Skagit River just before The Dalles. In 1880 it was a notorious bad spot in the trail just above Newhalem.

Indians. Later Everett was attacked and in self-defense wounded two, one fatally. He escaped down the river with Willard Cobb in a canoe and gave himself up at Mount Vernon for trial and was acquitted. The tribal gathering of the Indians sustained Everett and they settled their differences by payment of money and the return of things that had been stolen from his cabin.

An interesting sidelight of this incident was a visit of a Colonel Pollock and forty soldiers from Port Townsend to investigate the trouble. Col. Pollock was apparently a pompous and self-important individual who immediately got on the bad side of both Mr. Everett and the Indians. Between them they decided to test the courage of this high and mighty army man, so arranged to set an ambush long the river bank as his party went by. They fired a number of shots, all carefully placed away from the boat. The Colonel and his men made a new record for speed and failed to make another appearance here.

As a result of the argument of the Indians against the survey and their protest against any further settling above the Baker, it was many years before the final survey was made.

But the valley continued to grow below this point and in November of 1881 the government granted a petition for a mail route by steamer, twice a week from Tulalip, to Stanwood, to Skagit City, Mount Vernon, Sterling, and Lyman.

Skagit County Formed

In 1883 a bill was passed in the legislative assembly of the territory setting up the county of Skagit. Previously all the Skagit valley country had been part of Whatcom County. It was quite a victory for the Skagit boosters as the bill was defeated once then revived after the Whatcom delegates had gone home and was passed successfully.

At this time the upper Skagit was

served by good trail along the north side of the Skagit as far as the Baker River trail, and from there a passable route could be followed to Sauk. At Sauk one trail turned off for a crossing of the Cascades to come out at Wenatchee (over Buck Pass) and the other branch went up the Skagit to the Ruby Creek mines. The mall route was by water and was handled by Adolph Behrens⁵ – a 42 mile trip twice a week from Mount Vernon via Avon, Sterling, Lyman and Hamilton to Birdsvew for the huge sum of \$690 a year.

Lumbering was now coming into being in the upper valley with a saw mill at Birdsvew operated by B. D. Minkler. This was a water-power mill built in 1878. The name “Birdsvew” was taken from the first name of Mr. Minkler, “Birdsey.”

For a close view of the logging industry of that day, a record of a Skagit river lumberman shows that there were nineteen logging camps on the Skagit at this time, employing four hundred men. An average camp consisted of sixteen men and one team of seven-yoke of oxen. The camp could be run for \$60 a day and could bring out \$150 worth of timber. If they did not own the timber the cost of stumpage was 75¢ per thousand.

Railroads Interested

With all the fine timber going down the river, the railroads began to become interested in the upper valley. A number of ambitious companies were organized, one even capitalizing for five million to run a line from Whatcom, up the Skagit and Sauk rivers, to Spokane. In 1889 the Seattle & Northern Co. had reached a point just six miles west of Hamilton. There they suddenly stopped for lack of money, much to the dismay of the valley residents. Two years later the company had raised sufficient funds to get to Hamilton

⁵ It is believed that this was the skipper of the mail boat *Indiana*.

and soon trains were running to that point and showing a return profit.

Huge Forest Fire

The next item of historic record is a forest fire which swept over the upper valley and into the Sauk valley in 1894.⁶ A great stand of timber was destroyed and homes, barns and other buildings were lost by F. Szrinski and H. C. Crockett on the Sauk, George Perrault, J. McCorkendale, W. James, J. Logan, Frank Backus, and Wm. Newby on the Skagit. The Cascade school house also was burned in the holocaust.

To supplement salmon runs of the Skagit, the state had been operating a small hatchery at Baker Lake.⁷ This was purchased by the government about this time and improvements were started.

As young Skagit county went into the new century the 1900 census showed Birdsvew with a population of 331, Cascade 138, Hamilton 563, Lyman 353, Baker 213, Sauk 254. The land was proving good, people were coming in from the east, the railroad had arrived. Industry was developing and the resources of coal, iron, minerals, limestone, water power, cedar and fir timber were being counted upon as proof of certain prosperity for generations to come.

The Turn of the Century

The beginning of the 20th century found the town of Hamilton in the spotlight for the upper valley. Hamilton was incorporated as a town in 1892 in boom excitement of the coal and iron discoveries there. By 1901 the excitement had died away but the industrialists were on the scene in

⁶ Evidence of this forest fire is believed to be shown on the Seattle Municipal Archives site at [2218](#) showing the Davis Ranch in 1927.

⁷ According to a companion article in this issue the hatchery ceased to operate in 1933.

earnest, developing the properties and planning for a big future.

There were two mountains across the river from Hamilton, one called the Iron Mountain and the other called the Coal Mountain. One was a veritable mass of iron ore, the other containing large veins of coal. The Skagit Cumberland Coal company was spending thousands of dollars driving tunnels, erecting buildings and flumes and putting in machinery to bring out the coal. Another coal property was being promoted by J. J. Conner. The coal was said to have ranked with the best in the nation.

In 1901 several hundred tons of iron ore were shipped out to Pacific steel at Irondale. Talc and asbestos were also taken out in small quantities. Shipping of the iron ore proved too costly, legal battling over the coal properties finally drove all companies into bankruptcy. The coal and the iron are still in their respective mountains-waiting.

During this time the Cokedale mines were put in operation and they ran until 1904 producing both commercial coal and coke.

Baker Waits For Railroad

During this time the town of Baker was waiting for the Northern & Seattle railroad to reach its locality. The Baker River Lumber Co. was built in 1901 in anticipation and that year the railroad was extended through Baker and as far as Mountview (Faber). At this time the main industry of the community was cutting of the easily obtained and easily processed cedar of the Baker river district. Bolt camps were operating all along the Baker and the mill was built to cut the bolt into shingles. The bolts were floated down the Baker in "drives", trapped by a boom and herded into mill ponds for storage.

It was in 1900 that Baker was given its first general store. Wilson A. Aldridge came up the valley looking for a likely spot for a mercantile store and selected Baker as ideal in

that there was no competition.

With the railroad came the first signs of progress. Amasa Everett had interested eastern money in a cement plant. Soon O. C. Miller purchased some 45 acres on the east bank of the Baker and in September 1905 work was started on building the Washington Portland Cement plant. N. L. Warford was the designer. Originally having a capacity of 900 barrels a day the plant soon developed an output of 2,500 barrels, and loading facilities for 40 cars every 24 hours. Rock was brought by an aerial tramway from the quarry above Everett Lake.

The Washington plant became the center of the community and soon had a hotel, a number of residences and was the only regular stop on the railroad line. The new subdivision was named Cement City.

Superior Plant Started

1906 brought big news again as John C. Eden began to build another cement plant west of the Baker. Eden had secured 80 acres for his plant and some 240 acres of limestone cover on both sides of the Baker River. By 1907 the buildings began to rise on the site of the plant, machinery arrived and was installed. On July 23, 1908 the wheels turned for the first time in regular production and by August the first 2,000 sacks were delivered to the Seattle market. The Superior plant had a capacity of 500 barrels at the start, operating only one kiln. The rock was brought in on a standard gauge railroad which tapped both rock and clay deposits for necessary raw materials.

Now the two newspapers, the Baker Bulletin and the Enterprise began to sound off in large type of the opportunities and future of the upper valley. Two cement factories! The cement center of the nation! Their words paid off as business men and workmen swarmed in to get on the rising tide of prosperity.

New buildings appeared almost

overnight on Baker's main street as Magnus Miller and other property holders began selling lots of their well laid out plat. A roster of the 1908 Baker showed two cement plants with a payroll for over 400 men, a shingle mill, two hotels, three general stores, one shoe shop, meat market, bakery, confectionary, drug store, two restaurants, two pool halls, one blacksmith shop, a tailor, three saloons and a brand new Presbyterian church. New residences filled out Garden addition, Mill addition, Capitol Hill and East Concrete. Membership in the Eagles lodge was 130 and they just purchased the opera house on Main Street for the lodge room upstairs and had added a gym for their members to keep up on the new fad of physical culture.

After a long, hard fight a depot was built in Baker and the train stopped there as well as Cement City. Lock boxes arrived and were duly installed in the new post office. It was getting to be a pretty important community, so important that everyone felt it should be incorporated. It soon was.

Town Incorporated

The election for a petition of incorporation was held April 27, 1909 and passed by a big majority. The first council met May 10, 1909 with D. D. Dillard as mayor, E. W. Murphy, A. S. Nichols, A. B. Melville, E. L. Smith, and W. E. Jackson as councilmen, P. J. Lindbeck was named clerk, L. E. Wolfe, police judge; G. L. Leonard, attorney; H. G. Cupples, engineer; T. F. Cole, marshal; and E. F. Mertz, health officer.

First business was to declare the new town of 1200 people, the Town of Concrete and the boys immediately got down to business by passing ordinances for salaries for all officers and another to tax and control the sale of liquor. With that they settled back in their chairs with the air of a job well done to watch the town grow. It did just that.

The Superior Company had extra

power from their station at Bear Creek so began installing electric lights for the town. First to come were five arc lights for Main Street, then 17 poles for the street lights. Soon the lines were extended to all homes and business houses. Soon afterward the Superior Company installed water lines and the new town was as modern as any in the county.

1909 also marked the advent of Dr. M. J. Power, the first dentist. Then came the crowning glory – the first bank. The State Bank of Concrete opened its doors on Monday, June 21, 1909 with S. A. Post of Bellingham as its manager. The town was booming, it needed a place to store its wealth.

With the town incorporated, two cement plants operating and the logging industry providing a large payroll, the following years were those of building the community for a rosy future. People were swarming into town to buy or start businesses, build homes and take jobs. So much so that the school building was soon outgrown, although already enlarged from its former size. So in 1910 the new cement building was built in back of the old school (this is now the "old Grade School") on Main street.

The telephone company, originally started by the cement companies for communication, was now reorganized with Mrs. Kate Glover as manager and a group of local stockholders. George Ross came to town to open a tailor shop, E. L. Pine opened a store at the corner of Main and A streets. Then came Dudley I. Green to open his drug store and a number of others found the town a likely looking spot to build a fortune.

In 1912 the mills were operating full blast. The Sauk Timber Co. at Sauk had a larger payroll, as did the Hawkeye mill at Rockport, the Burpee Lumber Co., the Grasmere Shingle Co. below Moss Hill and the Hightower Mill at Birdsvew. Shingle bolt camps lined the upper Baker, logging camps were everywhere. Freight from the Concrete depot totaled second only to Bellingham in the

northwest, with receipts of over \$45,000 a month. Concrete was “the town” and Hans Brattle saw the light, moved his Herald to this city from Hamilton, changing the name from “Hamilton Herald” to “Concrete Herald”.

By another year the town had the usual cultural and civic organizations blossoming among the citizens. There were the Eagles, I.O.O.F., Knights of Pythias, Rebekahs, Women of Woodcraft, a Ladies Aid, Women’s Club, Booster Club and Commercial Club. 1913 also saw the completion of the St. Catherine’s Catholic Church.

Big Fires in 1915

Opening of the year 1915 found the finest weather in years. Only five inches of rain during February and the coldest day being 27 degrees. But it was not so balmy for the Concrete Herald as on March 12, 1915, the 3-story Herald building burned to the ground, destroying all the old files, all fixtures and equipment.⁸ Editor Drutlie⁸ estimated the loss at \$9,000 – but was back the following week with next edition through the help of lower valley papers and soon had another shop in operation. A word-feud between the “Enterprise” and the “Herald” was in progress at the time and gave the Enterprise editor opportunity to refer to his opponent as “the burning boob of bonfire brink” in one of his leading editorials.

At this point our history takes on new life and accuracy with the opening of complete files of the Herald. Canadian shingles were upsetting the market, Men’s heavy cotton longies sold for 70¢, John Greiner, local wrestler, lost to Vernon Breedlove, featherweight wrestling champ in two straight falls. Professor Geo. White resigned after seven years as principal of the local school. The town let a \$10,500 contract

for paving west Main Street. Citizens showed civic pride by demanding in a petition that the post office buy a new flag to replace the tattered one then displayed in front of the building.

1915 was a bad fire year. In June the Hightower mill at Birdsvie burned down. July 2nd the townsfolk of Concrete stayed up all night to watch the south side of Main street char into cinders as seven store buildings and all their stock burned in a \$35,000 blaze. Hardly had business been resumed in tents and other emergency quarters before fire broke out again, this time at Grasmere to destroy the two Grasmere stores. Carlson and Robinson groceries lost five buildings and some \$10,000.

Closing the years happenings the Washington Plant installed the world’s first dust collectors for cement plants. Superior began a new cement dam at Bear Creek, the school purchased the land for a school field from Magnus Miller for \$2,500, the Herald was sold briefly to Ralph Benjamin who purchased a new typesetting machine, Geo. Campbell was elected mayor – and as a fitting climax to the fires of the year the old log building that was Baker’s first store building when occupied by Mr. Aldridge in 1901, burned to the ground.

Prohibition in 1916

To the sorrow of the dry throats in a town where once eleven saloons managed to stay in business, the coming of January 1st, 1916, found prohibition in force. Bars converted their facilities to soft drinks, cigars and pool tables while weather turned cold with 28 inches of snow and 1 degree temperature. The new bank building was completed and S. R. McGowan moved into the lower store space. The Washington plant won a contract for furnishing 125,000 barrels of cement to Snohomish County for road construction. Dudley Green and E. E. Aldridge secured

⁸ May be incorrect spelling – text hard to read.

permits to rebuild on Main street.

Spring found the Baker River mill ready to start. Chas. Ramsdell, theatre operator and city clerk, shot himself in the dining room at the Whitney hotel. In May the county announced that a new bridge would be built over the Baker at Concrete by J. R. Wood of Seattle at a cost of \$21,740—cement to be provided by the local companies. Contractor F.S. Heakett started pouring concrete on a new building for Max Davis' "The Model" in June. Ben Mutchler of Marblemount won the log bucking contest by cutting a 41" log in six minutes, 20 seconds.

The usual 4th of July celebration brought a train load of visitors from the lower valley, the Conway-Fir band and Hi Hammer of Sedro-Woolley as main speaker. Heskett was given the contract to pave Mill & Division streets for \$2,576. August found Carl Monrad taking over the E. L. Pine store. Concrete Rifle Club had its first shoot at Lars Moen's farm. Lars also entertained the Eagles lodge with a picnic for over 200.

In September word was received that M. C. Talt of Seattle had filed for power site rights for a dam 16 miles above Marblemount on the Skagit River—also for others at Ruby Creek and Diablo Canyon.

By October the false work on the Baker River bridge had been removed. The longest single cement span in the nation stood alone. Flood waters in November moved the railroad and highway bridges at Van Horn. The Washington plant announced the lease of the Cokedale mines to provide fuel for their operations here.

1917

In 1917 the upper valley was preparing for big advances. There were rumors that a big dam was to be built in the Baker canyon, the Baker river bridge was completed, a new bridge was under construction at Rocky Creek; new coal bunkers were being installed

at the Washington plant to take care of shipments from the Cokedale mine; a \$4,625 section of the Cascade road was started by the state and the survey was started by local business men for a new road up Burpee Hill. Then came the startling news that war had been declared against Germany.

With war came draft registration, patriotic meetings, victory gardens. War did not effect plans too much as in May the engineers arrived to start work on the Baker River dam. Van Horn school built on two new rooms; Baker River Mercantile sold out to H. Boas of Seattle; Joe Morovitz sold his 4th of July mine and the City of Seattle acquired a permit to build a \$5 million dollar power project on the upper Skagit.

Minor news items of the year included loss by fire of the old Van Horn Hotel and the Grasmere school, as well as the bunk house at Bert King's bolt camp. The Royal Neighbors lodge was organized with Nell Wheelock as oracle. The first Chautauqua⁹ came to town and the year finished with a flood during December that came within two feet of the 1909 mark.¹⁰ The Fulk and Moran farms at Sauk were badly damaged and the flats were flooded in the lower valley.

War Years

War changed the lives of the upper valley folks in the same way it did the rest of the nation. The stores adopted a 9-hour day, Liberty bonds took all extra cash, Superior plant hired women for the first time, sugar was limited to 2 pounds per person a month. Then came the first casualty—Lloyd Parker of Hamilton, killed at Marne; later it was news that Hobart Holyfield had been wounded in

⁹ An annual summer school or educational gathering, often held outdoors and offering lectures, concerts, and theatrical performance.

¹⁰ This is significant because USGS (Stewart) has the 1909 flood 3.4 feet above the 1917 flood which cast further dispersions on Mr. Stewart's 1923 study.

France; then came word of the death of Berton Arnold and Paul Heskett, killed in action. On the other side of the war ledger Harold Reese of Baker Lake was decorated for bravery, Dr. E. F. Mertz was made a captain. So on November 11th it was a great joy that the end of the war was celebrated. The Italians of the community, led by G. Frank and D. D'Amico hired a band and made it a real event.

News events of the year included the death of Henry Thompson in a train wreck at Sedro-Woolley. His son, Richard, was appointed to fill out his term as commissioner. Sam Wainright, a pioneer of the 1880's, and Henry Robertson, Van Horn resident since 1892 passed away. The first graduating class was honored at Concrete high school. The graduates were Emma Williams, Maida Bride, Mae Elkins and Wesley Howard. The Baker River Bridge was dedicated; voters approved 2 mills to level the school field, the valley closed down completely for Spanish influenza. Marblemount completed their new school. Cokedale started shipping 100 tons of coal a day to the Washington plant.

1919

Fire played a big part in the year of 1919 with January marking the loss of the A.L. Howard home at Van Horn and the Charles DiSalvo home in Concrete. **In July the Baker Lake Hatchery burned** and in October the Eagles Hall, popular gathering place, was destroyed.

News headlines were: Garnet Thompson buys interests in Sauk Shingle Co., Alger Mill building on Lars Moen property, J. E. St. John takes over management of "Model", Carl Monrad buys new Ford truck; bank reopened with local management; Galley sells interest in The Club to Harry Cooper; Carl Monrad buys stock of Boynton store; automobile stage started between Concrete and lower valley; logging camps offer beds, mattresses, clean sheets and bedding to

workers—a radical change! A big banquet was given for returning service men. The Odd Fellows purchased the old Bryson store building on E street. C. G. Knott, superintendent at Superior, was killed in an accident at the plant.

1920

An outline of the events of this year reveals that the American Legion post was organized with H. E. Thompson as commander, Ben Weaver purchased 22 acres of land at Grasmere, to build a home. Bert King bought the Charles Crooks place on Baker Street; **five hundred workmen were at work on the City Light power site**; a rail road was started toward Newhalem from Rockport. The Van Horn Shingle mill burned in May with a \$35,000 loss. C. E. Tumleson leased the dining room at the Rockport Hotel, the first contract was let for the Mt. Baker road from Glacier, the Eagles organized a 21 piece band under direction of P. J. Lindbeck. J. D. Owen was appointed marshal; Superior payroll hit \$60,000 a month; a \$14,000 contract was let for the Birdsvew School; the Baptists purchased the old Springsteen cabin on Aldridge Street to rebuild it into a church. The Legion purchased the old laundry building as a hall. The year closed with Kate Glover being elected to the city council and the Union High School plan being voted down by Van Horn voters.

1921

Business people were restless as the year 1921 opened. Albert Zabel, in business 10 years, retired; George Ross moved to his new tailor shop on Baker Street; H. V. Davies opened a cash and carry store in the old Pine building and C. E. Prater bought the Chavis interest in the meat shop.

A. Griffith was appointed station agent, the first Boy Scout troop was organized by Rev. Hugh Armstrong; Fred and Earl Robertson started a new milk route; the old Baker River Mercantile store was closed down. "The Kid" was showing at the local theater.

In May the Charles Pressentin's of Birdsvie celebrated their Golden Weeding. Paul Pressentin sold his store at Marblemount; C. A. Groken opened a machine shop in west Concrete; City Light completed its temporary power plant; fire again tried to wipe out Concrete and succeeded in taking the north side of the street from Baker Street to the school. Three building were totally destroyed, more damaged. As a result the town bought a chemical fire engine. Lisherness had to build a new garage. Two deaths marked the close of the year, P. J. Lindbeck dying from injuries received in an auto accident and Elario Pinelli, who came to Hamilton in 1895, passed away at his home there. In December another flood covered the lower valley and passed the high mark of 1909 here.¹¹ Water was four feet deep in Sauk; ferries washed away. Crofoot addition was flooded and water was in many of the houses.

Ruby Dam To Stop Floods

In 1922 it was proposed that a dam be built at Ruby Creek to stop further Skagit floods. H. P. Swain opened a dental office here. The Beatty Hotel on A Street was totally destroyed by fire. It was built in 1915 by Thos Pennie in February the McNeill O'Hearn logging camp opened on the hill above town, the Model moved to the Cooper building, the first P.T.A. was organized, Wm. Meyers, 28 years a resident at Bear Creek, was found dead at his homestead there. L. H. Gates bought land in Crofoot addition for a home and farm.

¹¹ Mr. Stewart has the 1909 flood higher then the 1921 flood.

Standard Oil Co. purchased land for their plant here, the Forest Service began a survey of the Baker Lake road, the gold rush hit Rockport, J.P. Brooks bought a farm at Grasmere, J. G. Webster sold his interest in the Concrete Herald to A. J. Collins. A gas car took over on the railroad run to Anacortes. July found another big celebration put on in Concrete, a new gym was started at Rockport, pavement to Hamilton was finished, John McMillan, Ruby Creek packer, died.

The valley again voted down the Union high school, a big fire at Birdsvie damaged a million feet of timber, Mrs. T. A. Saltsman was killed while crossing the railroad trestle here. Davies & White purchased the Cooper bldg., Bill Cupples bought out the Robertson milk route. Nov. 18th the post office and drug store was the scene of a burglary. The safe was blown open and \$5,000 in cash taken. Albert von Pressentin passed away in Seattle, R. Rogenstrob, mill operator here since 1902, passed away also.

Contracts were let in December for the new theater building and pool hall and for the Argerin bldg.

1923

In January of 1923 the Concrete ferry was put into commission with Commodore Jim Webster in charge. W. E. Whitney bought the City Market from Joe Just, cold weather, and snow was the rule. Sunday delivery at the post office was discontinued in March. April found the Burpee hill road completed. Work was also started on the new Baker Lake road. At the annual 4th of July celebration Katie Smith was chosen queen in a hot contest. Bonds were approved for a new school gymnasium. Tod Morgan, a local boy, had just won the featherweight championship of the Pacific coast. By September the Baker Lake road was at Bear Creek when forest fires stopped progress. The high school had their

first football team in 7 years with Brown Wiseman as coach. Van Horn dedicated their new gym Sept. 29th. Virgil Cantrell bought out H. C. Six at the Van Horn store. Crofoot and Boynton opened a store across from the school in Concrete. Sam Thompson, Van Horn Sauk pioneer of the 1880's passed away. December was again noted for bad flood water in the Skagit.¹²

Start Baker Dam

The next few years were busy ones for Concrete. January of 1924 found work started on the Baker River dam.¹³ Stone & Webster began building their huge camp and by May had 300 men at work—in July it was 900. By October the pouring of cement had begun.

Headlines for the year found E. A. Morris, Rockport postmaster, dead after 36 years of useful life in that community; H. V. Davies and Charles Von Pressentin also passed away that year. The contract for a new high school building was let at a cost of \$13,442. R. C. Reynolds took over the Cash & Carry Store. The theatre opened in its new building. Supt. Edwin Bolton arrived to open classes in the new high school. Two more miles of road were started on the Cascade highway, the school gym contract was let to O. Linne for \$3,490. Paving of main street was started. A two-story hotel building was under construction by A. Stoneman.

The boom was beginning; Crofoot and Boynton built cabins of panel doors, all houses were filled. The Newhalem power plant started up when Pres. Coolidge pushed a button in the White House. Jesse Middleton and Ben Milton opened a hardware store. Real excitement came with an I.W.W. strike which ended with martial law and the strikers

taken out of town by armed deputies.

Dam Brings Prosperity

Through 1925 the town of Concrete and the entire upper valley was enjoying the boom brought on by a population of 2,000 people within the city limits and many more living on the outskirts. The construction of the Baker Dam was progressing rapidly; a contract was awarded to J. R. Wood for a bridge across the Sauk, Frank McGovern was named postmaster to replace the late Judge Wolfe, Joe Barta built a big dance hall at Bacon Creek; the Superior tram line was completed and Concrete's Moose Lodge No. 1379 was chartered with 125 members.

Concrete built a new city hall, Superior Mercantile erected a new warehouse, and foxes were received for Gailey, Oliver and Monrads Vogler Lake fur farm. In November the first power surged from the new Baker powerhouse.

1926

The year 1926 found the valley irked and excited over the closing of the Rock Cut road for new construction. A toll road was established through the House farm and a cost of .50 cents per car. It wasn't until July that, the new road was open and free traffic could resume. 1926 was the year the Rockport Mercantile burned to the ground, the year they built the Grasmere gym, the Marblemount gym and the Lake Shannon shingle mill. The school field was leveled and drained, John Phebus, pioneer theatre owner died and S.R. McGowan had to close his store. The town started to enforce a 9:00 curfew, a Women's Community club was organized.

1927

Prospects for 1927 zoomed when it was decided to build the new Baker dam 33

¹² This is the only mention of a flood in December 1923 in any of the historical newspapers.

¹³ He must be referencing the work on the camps as has been documented in earlier articles, the actual work on the dam site itself did not start until April 1, 1924.

feet higher. Hugo Bauman started his career as our county commissioner; Bert Kauffman was on the U. of W. rowing squad, Jake Lorentzen left for California to play baseball with the Seattle Indians. The Cascade highway got a \$150,000 appropriation; Baker Lake road was made part of the highway system and \$45,000 made available for a gravel road to the lake. Crofoot and Boynton opened their Birdsvew auto camp and store. The new Indian church at Grasmere was dedicated. The state voted \$70,000 for a bridge at Marblemount, the road from the Rock Cut to Concrete was given a bit of straightening.

1928

This year was featured by the big explosion in September in which a ton of stumping powder blew up at the Martin Glitz ranch. Thirteen plate glass windows were shattered in town, Glitz was found 100 feet from the blast dazed but still alive. The people of town were given a bad scare and it was the subject of conversation for years.

Other events of the year were the awarding of the bridge contract at Marblemount for \$97,669, completion of the Baker Lake road to the Whatcom county line.

Diablo Dam Started

January of 1929 found foundations for Diablo dam to the level of bed rock; John Eden, president of SPC, Inc. died in Seattle; bids were opened on the first stretch of forest road toward Baker Lake; the new small-sized paper currency was put into use; the Rockport virgin timber was set aside for state park; Edward Aldridge one of Baker's first merchants died; in August Gov. Hartley dedicated the new Marblemount bridge; the new Sound Timber Co. camp opened at Rockport; Chuck Dwelley took over the Concrete Herald; a blast at the Superior quarry

killed Fred Baker and injured six others; Ben Solomon lengthened his stage run to Rockport; Jim Owen, town marshal for eight years died in Seattle.

1930

The first "talkie" was shown at the Concrete Theatre; Shell Oil Co. built their storage plant here; Union built a station on Main Street; a bond issue was voted for a new addition to the high school; the Concrete Herald moved into a new building; water was turned into new Diablo Dam; another 3 miles of Cascade Highway was contracted; the school purchased lots for enlarging the play field.

1931

January 16th the first rural mail delivery began at Concrete; the new Faber road contract was let; the State Bank was robbed in a daring daylight hold-up with a loss of \$4,500. Rev. Pedersen resigned as pastor here; 24 graduates made the 1931 high school class the largest in history.

At Rockport the women raised funds to install 4 street lights. Our town baseball team won the Skagit county championship.

1932

In January the Rockport timber tract was set aside for a state park; the Concrete Hotel was opened by Bud Thompson. More money was allotted to the Baker Lake road; Magnus Miller died; hunger marchers stormed the court house; the county floated bonds for relief work; D. D. Dillard was killed in an auto accident at the Rock Cut; C. D. Stickley died. A landslide demolished three homes in East Concrete, no one hurt.

1933

This year the depression really hit the valley; Great Northern closed their Rockport depot and cut train service to two trips a week. Banks were closed for a holiday to stop rushes on them. Beer became legal to keep folks amused, C.C.C. camps kept youngsters busy, N.R.A., local merchants tried a “Guest Day” to stimulate business. Work started on the Birdsvew-Hamilton cut-off; local welfare board started clothing drive; relief slips. Civil works projects employed 700 men.

1934

Concretes Volunteer Fire Dept. was organized to start the year. The CWA airport was approved, then dropped locally. The work shortage eased up with the starting of the shingle mill and the cement plant. The first liquor agency was opened in the hotel. Birdsvew was placed on the rural route and the post office closed. The dry kiln at Lake Shannon mill burned but the new firemen saved the mill. Concretes high school football team won the county title—unscored upon.

1935

This was the year that Ben Solomon started hauling school kids; when the Royal Bakery put in the first bread slicing machine and when the Skagit Valley Rural Telephone Co. bought out Glover and Wheelock. Superior landed the big Grand Coulee contract; **Ruby Dam was given the go-ahead sign.** The Grasmere school closed after a fight of many years to consolidate them with Concrete.

1936

In 1936 Leroy Reynolds became new postmaster; Gordy McGovern built his new garage; the first Cascade Days celebration was held with Laura D’Amico as queen. Concrete had an assessed valuation of \$573,373.

1937

Things moved—the post office moved from the drug store to the bank building; the valley road was put on the state highway system. The Department Store bought the Argerin building; the bakery put in a new oven; Marvel Morgan opened the drug store and Bert Ward started a grocery in the IOOF building. Superior got a big contract from Ruby Dam.

—And here, dear reader, we close our resume of the history of the Skagit Valley, as further history is to be carried weekly in our “15 Years Ago Column” from now on. It has been our only regret that all the interesting items in our notes could not have been written in detail, but space was limited. We hope the review of the years has been interesting and entertaining.