



Old Friday and his klootchman Thursday.

YARNS of the SKAGIT COUNTRY

Ray's Writin's
by Ray Jordan

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Foreword

This volume is composed of 145 articles roughly divided into four sections, namely: REMINISCENCES, HISTORICAL SKETCHES, TIMBER TALES, and INDIAN LEGENDS AND STORIES.

Since most of these features were written as a separate entity for the newspapers between 1955 and 1973, some repetition will be found, for which please forgive us.

As for the HISTORICAL SKETCHES, we are well aware of the pitfalls that lurk along the trail of the amateur historian. It has been said that half of the historians spend their time making liars out of the other half. This is as it should be since it helps in keeping the record straight.

This modest effort was compiled more for our own convenience in research work than with any thought of publication.

And a word of warning: if you can't abide anything less than the King's English, or don't care for our homespun style, it would be advisable to stop here.

Sincerely yours,

Ray Jordan
Ray Jordan

REMINISCENCES

1.

Early Recollections of Sedro Woolley I

HERE ARE SOME RECOLLECTIONS of my boyhood days around Sedro Woolley, and if my memory is bad I hope some of you old-timers will speak up and straighten me out. Rustling beer bottles and five-gallon coal oil cans to raise funds for the movies. Bottles brought five cents a dozen and cans a nickel each.

Those bang-up week-long Fourth of July celebrations we used to have, with a balloon ascension by a Mr. Brooks, the main attraction; the numerous inebriated gentlemen sleeping it off peacefully in that triangular-shaped grove across the track from Saloon Row; the night of the last day when everyone let down his hair and whooped 'er up until the wee hours. Two bits was a big stake for a boy then, and it never seemed to rain on this magical week.

Clumps of vine maples growing along the sides of Metcalf Street—The old board sidewalks—The muddy streets in winter—Women with dragging skirts and a bunch of kids trying to cross same—The same streets ankle deep with dust in summer—Runaway horses and the ensuing excitement.

The octagon-shaped building (or was it hexagon?) that stood on the west side of Metcalf opposite the Great Northern station. The Hightowers had a confectionary store on the ground floor. The upper story was open around the sides and served as a bandstand. Here the band boys used to gather on pleasant summer evenings and serenade the town with sweet music. What a thrill for a small boy!

The tame bear at the Great Northern station and how he liked his beer—Chan Ingham driving his fast, blind Thoroughbred buggy-horse down the streets—The first movie house in

At this time the Cook Road was nonexistent. There was some clearing on the Cook Ranch, owned by Mortimer Cook, but much of the country around was still covered with virgin timber, though Millett and McKay were edging into the east end of the Cook holdings.

If you wanted to reach the nearest railroad, you struggled through the woods and swamps to Belleville. If you traveled to Sedro, you wound through the wilderness across the Holtcamp and Dreyer homesteads to get to Sterling and then up river to the metropolis of the Upper Skagit.

Mortimer Cook, who had the first business at Sedro and for whom the Cook Road was named, raised a lot of hogs on his ranch which lay south of the Daniels homestead. Sometimes they would hear one squeal when a bear felt hungry for pork chops.

Young Ira, who drove team for Cook at times, remembers one trip to the Carsten slaughter house at Sedro Woolley with a load of hogs. He got stuck in one of those infamous mudholes and had to shoo the swine to the back end of the wagon in order to pull the front wheels out, then reverse the process to get the hind ones out of the bog.

He also recalls driving oxen when the Cook Road was cleared, though not the exact year, but thinks it was in the late 1890's. As he remembers it, a man by the name of Neilan had the contract. Loggers were still operating on what used to be the Wersen place while the road building was in process.

About the only neighbors they had at the very first were Sam Bell (for whom Belleville was named) and Jack Kelleher who lived on what is now the Dahlstedt place. Mortimer Cook, who had a store in Sedro, lived in town, but often made trips on his buckskin pony out to his ranch to supervise the work there.

Cook closed out his holdings in Skagit County, and departed for the Philippine Islands in 1899 and is reported to have died there the same year.

After a lifetime of farming, most of it on the home place, Ira and his good wife, Ellen (a former Youngquist girl), retired to their present Mount Vernon home in 1947. At 88 (as of 1970), he enjoys talking about the old days and marvels at the changes he has witnessed in a long, full life which spans the era from ox teams to jet planes.

(This interview was doubly interesting to the writer since he was a neighbor of the Daniels during 1904-05 while living on the Cook Ranch then owned by David M. Donnelly of Sedro Woolley.)

Who's Crazy Now?

THE MILLS OF THE GODS grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine," or something like that, someone has said. They could be right.

We've been thinking about the campaign now in progress against pollution and waste. To many it is something new and alarming, but to others it is old hat, though it was a long time before many would listen.

A hundred years ago the Indian, appalled at the enthusiastic waste of timber, game and fish, voiced dire forebodings for the future. Conservation was a strong and logical part of his religion. He was thankful for what nature provided and showed it. But he was considered a simple, backward soul and laughed at for his fears.

"There will always be plenty of timber, game and fish," said the wise paleface.

Who's crazy now?

While we helped butcher the timber for many years as a necessary means of eating, we were always aghast at the waste, and hundreds of other loggers were too. Smash it up. Get over as many acres a day as possible. Cut it and get out, there's lots more of it. More was wasted than was ever used.

We lived on a beautiful small river for many years. At first you could take a drink out of it, or any other small stream around without contracting typhoid. But that didn't last long. As the land settled up it became a common practice to dump stumps, garbage, chickens that had died of disease, and dead animals into this cold, clear stream.

Now, it is safe only in the high mountains to drink wild water, and we wonder how long this will last.

Our restless people in land clearing usually stripped the stream banks of vegetation causing ruinous erosion, all for a few more acres to till. Untold acres washed downstream, but not until it was too late did the mistakes register.

A large part of the fish spawning grounds were destroyed by the ditching of small streams, draining of swamps, or filling them with logging debris. A beaver was a dirty so-and-so for building dams to form pools of water. Curiously enough, some of the same people who insisted that the beaver be cleaned out have dug their own ponds for the same reason.

We've been around long enough to have done considerable observing...Forty years ago there were a few old fuddy dummies who thought that they could see where we were headed,

but the few who protested at this time were thought to be queer.

"You must be against progress." "Whose side are you on anyway?" "You lost your marbles?" "You're agin' everything." "You're living in the past. Why don't you look to the future?" They WERE peering into the future by remembering the past. Presently, some of the best brains are being called upon to help in cleaning up our mess. Who's crazy now?

Was there ever another country so successfully gutted and polluted in so short a time? Where have the intelligensia been for the last 150 years while these conditions were building up?

For years, public spirited people have tried to entice new industry to provide more payrolls. For a long time a town seemed to measure its well being by the number of smokestacks it could boast. Now, it is bring your new industry, but leave your smog makers behind. How time doth change things.

In the past we have invited pollution with one hand while halfheartedly fighting it with the other.

Some years back we had occasion to check on unemployment. There was one oil refinery here then and big things were expected from it. From what we could learn, winter unemployment was running about ten per cent that year. Since then another refinery has come in and paradoxically, winter unemployment at this writing (1971) is over 20 per cent according to news releases.

The fetish "progress" can be called by many names. Too often it is used to make the cash register ring oftener, now, with little thought of the future. New, large businesses coming in always seem to bring many new workers with them and also more new businessmen, leaving us pretty much the same as we were before, except that we are taxed more heavily to provide additional facilities. How much new industry would it take to produce the ideal economy?

You can't have your cake and eat it too, but there are some that think you can.

Once we attended an Indian fishing rights trial. Sitting beside me was an avid sports fisherman. A very old Indian witness was answering questions. Yes, the Baker River used to teem with salmon, but the dam virtually destroyed the runs. Strangely enough, my bench companion, a supposed friend of the fish, excused this by saying, "Well, you just can't hold up progress you know." The dam was okay with him. The Indians were the villains.

Sometimes we are confused as to what is progress and what is deterioration, and so are many others.

With increasing population genuine progress will have to come, but at a heavy cost in some ways. Waste and pollution should be curbed, but we hope horse sense will prevail.

There are those who say that history repeats itself. We wonder if it will do so to the extent of using our legs for walking purposes again, or riding horses, and not wanting everything we see whether we need it or not, but turning to the simpler things of life so as not to squander our remaining dwindling resources before our garbage dumps overwhelm us.

Of course hindsight is better than foresight, so why ignore hindsight? This is not meant to be an "I told you so" sob story decrying the past practices of others, for this writer is not blameless by a long shot, but as a bit of local history as we've seen it.