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Harry Devin Gives Sketch of Sedro-Woolley History

By H. L. Devin

I have been asked to sketch briefly, for the younger members, why the city was located here, the origin of its name, what supported it in its early days, now, and the prospect for the future. Several factors contributed to its location at this point, but the principal one was the bitter fight between Se-

attle and Tacoma over the location of the terminus of the Northern Pacific Railway.

After Tacoma won out as the terminus, the business men of Seattle determined to build their own connection with the East via the Canadian Pacific. They called their road the Seattle, Lake Shore and Eastern, and not wishing to build up another rival port on the northern part of the Sound, they selected a route well inland, running north from Seattle along the northwest shore of Lake Washington and north along the lakes, crossing the international boundary where Sumas is now. They employed a New York engineer named Norman Kelly as location engineer.

Kelly believed that where the railroad crossed the Skagit river would be a good location for a town, as at the time the Skagit river was the only means of transportation for a large portion of the county. He made an agreement in 1888 with W. S. Jameson, a large property owner along the Skagit river, whereby Kelly was to locate the line so as to cross 320 acres of Jameson's land, locate a station on it and plat a townsite, for which he was to receive a three-fourth interest in the plat.

Choose "Sedro" As Name

As a name for his town he took Sedro, the name of a postoffice already established on the bank of the Skagit, half a mile from Jameson's land. The postoffice had been located by Mortimer Cook, some three years before. Cook was a typical frontiersman who had had a varied and adventurous career; a Mexican war veteran, he joined the rush to California when discharged, mined, tried stock raising, store-keeping, and organized the first bank in Southern California, opening the First National Bank of Santa Barbara in 1871 and being its first president. He joined the rush to the B. C. placer mines and engaged in various other enterprises, making and losing three fortunes.

In 1884 he came to Skagit county with a modest stake and believing that the completion of the Northern Pacific railroad would open a market for Puget Sound lumber in the prairie states, he bought considerable timber land on the Skagit, and 34 acres on the bank for a landing, at the upper end of Batey's Slough, where the city dump is now located. Here he built a dock, warehouse, store and residence. Next year he built what was at that time the largest shingle mill on the Sound, shipping the

shingles by water to the terminus of the Northern Pacific railway, thence East by rail, being the first to ship Washington shingles East by rail; finding the freight rates pretty high, he conceived the idea of kiln drying the shingles to save weight. This had been done previously to hasten the drying of lumber for use, but not to shingles, and many jokes were told at his expense: "Nobody but Cook would think of cooking shingles," etc. However, he demonstrated its practicability and economy.

In 1886 he wanted a postoffice and applied for one, asking that it be named Cedra, the Spanish word for cedar, but the department refused the name, having several Cedras already, so Cook changed the first and last letters, making Sedro, which the department accepted and appointed Cook postmaster.

Meantime, the Oregon Improvement company incorporated a railroad to run from Ship Harbor, now Anacortes, up the Skagit valley to tap the timber, coal and mineral resources, and cross the Cascade pass to a connection with the Northern Pacific at Spokane. At the same time the city of Fairhaven, now Bellingham, incorporated a railroad, called the Fairhaven & Southern, to run from Fairhaven south to a connection with the Northern Pacific, selecting the same inside route adopted by the Seattle Lake Shore & Eastern, but crossing the Skagit river three quarters of a mile above Kelly's survey. They offered the contractor, Nelson Bennett, a bonus of \$50,000 if he opened train service to the Skagit river before Christmas, 1889. Bennett ran the first passenger train to the river December 24, winning the bonus.

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This made the site selected by Kelly the junction of three lines of railroad. Kelly employed A. G. Mosier to survey and plat his town-site, plat of the first 80 acres being filed in the summer of 1889 and of the remainder the following winter. At the same time Bennet and Larrabee of Fairhaven bought 200 acres adjoining the Kelly plat on the south, which they platted and also called Sedro, filing their plat in the fall of 1889.

Woolley Plats Town

In 1890, P. A. Woolley platted 80 acres adjoining the plat of Sedro on the north and called it "Woolley, the Hub of Skagit County." All three lines of railroad were being rushed to completion at the same time and Sedro was the supply point and pay station for them all, giving the town a flying start.

The building of these lines of railroad through a fine stand of virgin timber, which had hitherto had no outlet, caused the location of mills and camps in all directions, for which Sedro was the most convenient supply point, supporting the town for many years, the agricultural resources at that time being limited to raising oats and hay; but as the timber was cut off and the mills and camps moved further back, the land was cleared and the agricultural resources developed, dairying soon taking the lead, with fruit and vegetables and poultry racing for second place.

There was bitter rivalry between the two towns of Sedro and Woolley for several years, and in 1896 the Twin City Business League was organized to try to get the business men of the two towns to work together for the common good. It was successful, and after a couple of years the two towns united under the compound name of Sedro-Woolley, neither being willing to give up its name, and the Twin City Business League became the "Commercial Club," later changing to Chamber of Commerce.

Commercial Club Work

The old Commercial club was an energetic organization and largely responsible for the growth of the city, working for new and better roads, the development of the agricultural resources, bringing in experts in dairying, fruit growing and poultry to talk to the farmers, encouraging the location of new industries and raising large sums for sites and contributions to the stock of new enterprises, and for advertising the resources of this section.

As to the future, I believe we must depend largely on further development of our agricultural resources of all kinds and the introduction of new lines, for the support of the city. The old Commercial club secured the building of a smelter to handle the iron ore deposits near Hamilton, with coke from the Cokedale mine. The coke proved of excellent quality, but the iron ore was refractory, requiring the mixture of a large proportion of soft ore from Taxada island for successful smelting. It was not a financial success; but in Sweden within the past few years they have perfected a process for the electrical smelting of similar refractory ores and are now producing large quantities of excellent iron from ore formerly considered worthless. I believe we should investigate this, as electric current in large quantities will be hunting a market in the near future.