

Former Editor Writes of the County in Retrospect

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The Passing Years Bring Many Changes to St. Helens and Vicinity; Story Is Pageant of the Past; Many Changes Are Noted in Fifty Years.

By David Davis

Material things are our possessions but not our treasures, because the greater things of life, such as friendships, are intangible and abstract. Contacts made in pursuits of service are as real and as lasting as can grow out of any other background, and each passing year surrounds these friendships with a finer and deeper sense of appreciation and understanding. Time is the test of the genuine, as only through years of trial comes the knowledge of what is true and what is false, and the good stands out more boldly as the bad falls by the wayside. Honorable service signifies the allegiance of an institution to a cause, principle or creed. The stamp of character becomes a symbol. It represents a well executed purpose and duty, the result of years of character building, years of steady progress, not measured by financial success, but years of friendship and devotion of service, which is something more than mere service can reflect.

Fifty years of retrospect of life, if the game has been played on the square, is a pretty picture- a pageantry of the past.

It is no doubt because my parents took me to St. Helens more than fifty years ago, because of my more or less intimate knowledge of fifty years of Columbia County history, because it was in the printing office of The Mist that I first sniffed the aroma of printing ink when serving as the editor's helper on press day, and because at one time I was owner and editor of this paper that I am asked by the management to contribute something to the information contained in this, the jubilee number, in commemoration of fifty years of faithful service rendered to the up building of Columbia County by this newspaper.

There seems to be some conflict of opinion as to the exact date of the founding of The Mist. I resided in Columbia County all the time, but I was that age when play and a well-filled stomach were more important than the establishment of an uplifting influence such as a newspaper. Hence, I am no authority on that matter, although intimately acquainted with most of the editors of the paper- and they have been many-ever since the paper was established, with the bare exception of the man who installed the plant and produced the first issue.

I recall his name was Glendys? That he had an unconquerable thirst for the material which de? he "beat up" his defenseless wife and was either requested to leave town or voluntarily disappeared in shame and disgrace after but a few months as "the editor" was somewhat of a personage in the community. Upon his absence to fall much of the leadership of community up building and there was

much to be done. I presume The Mist was established in the latter part of 1882. That date seems in d? into the long train of circumstances.

St. Helens then, as now, was the county seat. There was the old wooden courthouse facing the river, the one-room school house, the community church house standing alone on the hill, the sawmill that cut 15,000 feet of lumber in an eleven-hour workday. Muckle's wharf, which provided the only moorage for steamboats-the only means of transportation. Streets, if they could be called such, were lob? Of mud mixture with refuse from cattle and hogs roaming at will.

Unimproved roads radiated from the town for short distances, over which as occasional lumber wagon rattled and rumbled the contact of the metal tires with the basalt rock foundation vibrating and echoing, announced the approach of some urban resident bent on buying bacon or beans and getting his mail. The St. Helens post office served the entire country for miles around. These were conditions when I first saw St. Helens October 11, 1881. Everybody seemed content, probably because the mode of life was ?

The Mist was not the only newspaper published in Columbia County. Major Enoch O Adams established The Columbian at St. Helens some time previous to the birth of this paper. Major Adams was a down east" Yankee. He acquired the title of major through service in the Union army during the Civil War. He was quite scholarly. The Adams home was located just south of town on the bluff overlooking Frogmore. It was the home also of The Columbian.

The Major had an obsession for food. He had received an injury in the war. The bullet was lodged in his head. This did not impair his talents but had destroyed his sense of taste. At intervals the Major was also obsessed of a disposition to unmercifully malign his imaginary enemies through the editorial columns of his newspaper. This practice soon evoked the wrath of some of the leaders of industry in the community, hence The Mist.

The Majors' penchant for food became known hither and yon. This with other traits of character were matters of general comment. It inspired C J Curtis, a brilliant young lawyer and capable newspaper man, then publishing a paper in Albina, before that suburb became part of greater Portland, to compose and dedicate to the Major a lengthy poem; "The Hungry Man from Frogmore," I think copies of this poem are in possession of some of the old time residents of St. Helens. The poem evoked much comment throughout the state. The plant of The Columbian was later moved to St. Helens but soon passed from the picture and the editor and his good family returned to Yankee land.

E H Flagg, a capable newspaper man, succeeded the founder of The Mist as its owner and editor for many years. Other, many of them, followed; Charley Meserve, J H Hine, J R Beagle, David Davis, K H Gabbert, George Flagg, Ed Miller, S C Morton and others prior to the late owners, Meier, Hyde and Garrill.

It is unfortunate that complete early files of The Mist were not preserved. Under my stewardship and that of some of my predecessor's files were preserved and nearly found. On several occasions I was ? into court with a file of The Mist containing statements of fact or fancy on some matter at ? and the statements read into the record of the trail. However, I escaped jail and a libel suit.

Columbia County is not an agricultural county. Its vast area was too heavily timbered. Thus its development was more or less retarded. Its sixty miles of waterfront on the Columbia River was a factor in attracting a class of people in early days bent on pursuits other than farming.

Logging and sawmilling were first to have attention. No doubt four fifths of the county's area today are unproductive. The first crop had been harvested. In doing so substantial sums of money were invested in logging railroads, sawmills and other industrial plants using wood as a base material. From these activities healthy payrolls were maintained for many years. From taxation upon industrial plants and timber-the latter largely a commendable degree of development has taken place and thriving cities built up.

Proximity to the central point of population, proximity to the great watercourse of the Pacific and the otherwise natural geographic location are factors favorable to continued attractiveness for those with courage to carve out homes amid the stumps. Before many years most of Columbia county's timber will have been removed. It is a reasonable assumption that timber will be taken from interior points in Oregon, probably long distances to apply even larger sawmills along the Columbia river. The stage seems to be set for such a future course through establishment at St. Helens of a water terminal for Oregon Electric Railroad, which may transport timber from the Cascade mountains in Linn and Lane counties to be manufactured on the Columbia river.

Transportation of lumber in future to the interior of the United States will be largely by water. Development of the Mississippi, Ohio and Missouri rivers for barge movement of freight from the Gulf of Mexico has already been accomplished. Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Waterway will make the route from the Pacific through the interior to the Atlantic.

Building of the Northern Pacific railroad in 1883 from Portland to Goble under the heavy Villard regime was regarded as the signal for an era of great advancement for Columbia county. When A B Hammond built the railroad from Goble to Astoria it was certain the progressive future of the county was established. Bent almost entirely upon commercial pursuits centralizing along the river the interior was neglected. Highways penetrating the back regions where the timber was being removed would have materially changed the agricultural aspects.

Much of the early day logging in the vicinity was tributary to St. Helens. The largest sawmill was here. Dean Blanchard had a rather pretentious sawmill at Rainier. But it operated only spasmodically, Muckle Bros. sawmill at St. Helens operated steadily over a long period of years. Many small logging operations kept it supplied with logs. Logging was done by simpler, cruder methods. Milton Creek Valley and the surrounding hills provided many of the logs cut at St. Helens.

Wash Muckle, Nick Brinn, Herb Howard, Charley Emerson, Ingersell Standwood, Herb Corliss and Holstein were among the early day loggers on Milton Creek, in the vicinity of Yankton. In the group were a number of Maineyards. They established the Yankton community. Yankton was named for Yankton, Maine.

The logs were driven down Milton Creek mostly in winter. A dam impounded a considerable body of water. Everybody knew when a log drive was to start. The event was a matter of moment. It not only released several million feet of logs, but also released a lot of money through their sale and delivery. If the logs went through without jam everybody was happy, everybody "flush".

It was also occasion for other manifestations of joy. The Volstead act had nothing to do with the boundary lines of Columbia county. There was never controversy whether it should be three point five or three point two.

Many million feet of logs were taken from back of Deer Island. The Bumgardners, the Enyarts and Wm Seffert logged on Tide Creek. Wm Seffert put in a good many hundred thousand feet of logs by hand.

Ox teams were the motive power for taking out logs on skid roads, and how those teams did pull. A red-headed, tobacco-chewing puncher urged the beasts to tighten up in their yokes by use of a goad stick and a vocabulary of profanity that would put the fear of God into anything. Such fellows, however, had big hearts and merciful souls. They knew both the capabilities and limitations of their oxen.

The Colvins and the Grahams were early day loggers around Marshland; Norman Merrill and the Tieheners around Clatskanie.

Four roads entered Nehalem Valley. One by way of Forest Grove and Burton. Another from Clatskanie to Mist. A road also led from Astoria via Young's River. Olney and Jewell into that portion of Nehalem Valley. It was in the late seventies when a passable road was opened from St. Helens to Pittsburg and Vernonia. Negotiation of the road- and I say this without reservation- was attended by considerable hazard of life. No not wild animals- mud. Brief periods in summer the roads could be negotiated with safety but not with much speed or comfort. In winter most sections of the roads would mire saddle blanket.

However, mail had to be delivered from the waterfront post offices to Nehalem Valley. Mail for upper Nehalem Valley-Pittsburg and Vernonia- was worked at St. Helens. Later at Houlton. Joe Campbell was one of the earliest mail carriers from St. Helens. His route was through Yankton via Bunker Hill. Originally that route was an Indian trail. Its course was along the tops of the ridges, Indians, I was told, chose highest elevations for travel through mountains and hills for observation purposes. My first trip over the route from St. Helens to Bunker Hill in 1880 confirmed in me an abiding belief in the statement.

At the base of Bunker Hill is a spring. Elevation 1300 feet. The flow from the spring those days was copious. This spring is the head and source of Clatskanie River. The water was coldest I have ever known. Legend says the Indians burned the timber in the vicinity of Bunker Hill in real early days. They wanted a hunting ground. Strange how tradition and habits of the Indians have been adopted by the white man.

Joe Campbell made the trip afoot with the mail, going one day, returning the next, if he had luck, and be usually had. The service was weekly. Volume of mail was light. The pouch was strapped over the carrier's shoulder. Joe always carried a rifle. He was a "sure bet" and a lover of the big outdoors.

Mr. Campbell purchased some knowledge of geology and metallurgy. He soon observed the deoxidized ?? in several places along Bunker Hill route. Casual prospecting resulted in the insurance that iron existed in the region – both coal and iron. Great deposits of both area underlies that portion of Columbia county. Their development some future time will take place. Most extensive coal cropping's

are in the Pepple Creek mine. Quite extensive development was carried forward there over forty years ago. Good sized veins of coal are exposed in the Germany Hill country back of Columbia City. The coal seems to be "under age," but iron deposits give evidence of existence in paying quantities.

It was no more than natural that the south end of Columbia county should be more rapidly settled than other portions. Fort Vancouver, Wash., founded by Dr. John McLoughlin in 1824, radiated its influence, as did Portland. The rugged shore line of the Columbia river did not hold out inspiration to the prospective settler. The topography of the country was not at all inviting as homesteaders. The point of confluence of the passive Willamette and the mighty Columbia was recognized as a factor to aid in the building of a city.

St. Helens was once head of navigation on the Columbia River. A rather pretentious dock was built and used as an upriver terminus by Pacific Steamship company. Portlanders were envious. The dock was burned. Charred, half destroyed structure. The present St. Helens city dock occupies the site.

I think I recall that Captain F A Lemont told me when a youngster that he sailed a vessel up the Columbia river in 1829 and tied it to the rocks on the shore at St. Helens near where the present McCormick mill stands. Part of the cargo was beads, colorful blankets tobacco and some articles of food which were exchanged with the Indians for furs. The Captain sometime later returned to the home port, Bath, Maine, sold the furs and the vessel. He purchased another vessel and after a few years returned to the Columbia river and St. Helens. The cargo of the second vessel consisted of much the same character of goods at the former cargo, in addition to many articles of more substantial materials which white men would care to purchase.

This ship also brought considerable lumber. Several houses were built at St. Helens from lumber brought by Captain Lemont. Some of them were quite pretentious, one, a hotel, just at the site now occupied by Mrs. E E Quick's residence. Jay Deming resides in one of the houses; also the building nearby, occupied for many years by the Jack McKie family. Mrs. Mary George owns a building situated at about the rear of the Masonic temple, built of lumber brought in the same cargo.

Captain Lemont lived in and operated a grocery store in the McKie building. He did more. He "took up" a donation land claim just west of Nigger Creek. The land adjoins the Knighton donation land claim on which the original St. Helens was established. The Captain built a large residence on the basalt bluff overlooking the Columbia, just west of St. Helens. A mixed orchard was there. Much of the fruit was good quality. I know I and my playmates often used the premises as playground and incidentally stole some of the fruit; but don't page the sheriff.

Numerous attempts were made to take the county seat away from St. Helens. Rivalry was furious after Hammond built the Astoria railroad from Goble. Clatskanie had aspirations, but Rainier was the most formidable contender, candidates for the legislature had to be pretty cunning causes. People of contending communities wanted opportunity to vote on the issue. St. Helens did not. Such opportunity could come only through passage of an enabling act by the legislature, in which the representative would be a star performer.

The late Dr J E Hall, then of Clatskanie, who died within recent months, was representative in the 1903 session, which passed an enabling act, and the fight was on. Clatskanie was suspicious of Rainier, other places erected lightning rods. Rainier feared the whole group- St. Helens had a walk-a-

way. I had removed from Columbia count, but the boys kept me posted. My sense of honor forbids mentioning further details.

Fifty years ago there were not many voters in Columbia county. When I became an age to take interest in politics I think there were 1200 or 1300 voters. Women suffrage had not been adopted. Both Rainier and Clatskanie had more votes than St. Helens. Up to the time McCormick interests started developments the dwindling population at St. Helens, ?, Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." I question of the population was 200.

When Habersham? and Cooper made the survey for the Astoria & South Coast Railroad in 1884, projected by Dundee Reid, Nehalem Valley began to be noticed. The line was routed from Forest Grove via Buxton, down the Nehelam Valley, touching where Vernonia stands, thence on to Young's River and Astoria. Town sites became numerous. Joseph Vanblartom "laid out" the town of Vernonia, Spencer Ross and William Mellinger laid out Rose's Addition and Mellinger's First and Second Additions, offered "lots for sale." And people bought them. "The railroad was coming," Vernonia boomed.

People poured into Nehalem Valley to appropriate Uncle Sam's public domain, which held a heavy stand of most excellent timber. Homestead, pre-emption and timber and stone acts were possible to file under. Whether lawful or not I think some people used all three of the rights. I believe two were permissible.

A newspaper, the Nehalem Journal was established at Vernonia in 1889 by Gus Byron and Will Braden. Mr. Byron said to Mr. Braden after a couple of years waiting for the railroad, Mr. Braden hired myself to run the paper, which I did for a couple of years.

The railroad came, but not for many moons. It's final going inspired big developments, the native of which you are all familiar.

Foremost in affairs in Columbia county when I was a youth included the Colvins and Grahams at Marshland; the Conyers, Merrils, Bryants and Tichenors at Clatskanie; the Maygers and Fluhrers at Mayger; the Dibbles, Perrys, Double-bowers. Mocks, Doans, Pomeroy's and Dean Blanchard of Rainier; the Meserves in Beaver Valley; the Nears, Fosters, Fowlers and Farris at Goble; Englishes, Swagers and Merrills at Deer Island; Freemans, Powells, Brouses, Detricks, Pringles, Keaseys, Adams, Spencers, Shannahans, Weeds in Nehalem Valley; Watters, Cloningers, Lambersons, McKays, Wests, Price at Scappoose; Fullertons, Beegles, Bacons, HARRISES, Hawkins, Slavens, Copelands, Beavers, Bennetts, Hazens, Magnus, Saxon at Warren; The Broyses, Kellys, Frantz, Godkins at what is now Houlton-West St. Helens- the Whartons, Caples and Maxwells at Columbia City.

These were among the leaders outside of St. Helens, where the Muckles and McBrides dominated the industrial and mercantile field. SA Miles was "the money power." Blakesleys, Meekers, Darts, Lemonts, Taylors, Moores, Colts?, Georges fitted into the group at St. Helens.

I want to refer back to some thoughts expressed in the opening paragraph of my article. Those statements were inspired through desire to connect the history and work of this newspaper for over half a century with the intimate friendships and material things which fifty years of continuous service has achieved.

The Mist through its years always wielded as influence for up building of Columbia county. It has some influence in politics. It helped make and mar the political destinies of several people. Columbia county furnished a number of citizens to fill high positions of honor and trust. A United States senator, the late George W. McBride; two supreme judges, the late Hon. Frank A Moore and the late Hon. Thomas A McBride, each many times serving as chief justice during their long tenure of office; a judge of the fifty judicial district court, and judicial district attorneys. These honors were mute evidence of the high character of the people of the county.

The Mist very worthily assisted in the elevation of these honorable citizens to their high positions. This paper has always championed the things best calculated to promote the wellbeing of the community-local, county, state and national. In doing so it created enemies, yet commanded respect and established lasting friendships.

Through all the years this paper did not have an open field. Many papers were established in the county, several at St. Helens. Those with the honest purpose have succeeded where success was possible. Many were fly-by-nights, the product of designers, established as vehicles to promote, selfish interests. They long ago passed out of the picture.

“Every open month gets its bites.” The power for good of the legitimate, worthy paper was impaired in proportion to the amount of patronage accorded the unworthy. The Mist deservedly survived.