LA CENTER MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

HISTORIC LOGGING — AUGUST 23, 2007

by Jeanine Liston and Barbara Barnhart

WELCOME

I join with all members of the La Center Museum Association in welcoming you to our fourth presentation focusing on historic La Center.

The City of La Center's 100th anniversary of incorporation, August 23, 2009, is around the corner. Our goal is to pump you up for the celebration by introducing you to elements of La Center's historic past. Thus far, we have visited the old bridges, the sternwheelers and the historic old town of La Center.

Tonight's presentation is a little different. We will not be using slides, but we have prepared a small collection of historic logging photos for you.

We are also very fortunate to have as a part of our program tonight Bob and Joanne Zumstein from the Woodland area. A lifelong area resident, Bob has hands on knowledge of the logging industry as he owned a logging company for over 20 years and logged in the Lewis River Valley. And in retirement, Bob and Joanne are devoting their time, energies and their farm to the preservation of logging history. Their portable museum brings you logging tools from the past and the present. And Bob will share with you the details of what they were used for and how they worked.

Tonight's topic, logging, is a large subject. Historically, logging and the industry's economic enhancement to communities and some men was not a new thing when the first Donation Land Claim and Homestead Act participants arrived in the then Oregon and Washington Territories in the mid-1840's and 50's.

The folks that set foot on that rock near Plymouth Massachusetts and other 17th century colonists found themselves engulfed in trees. Standing trees, primarily eastern white pine that stood about 100 feet high and almost three foot in diameter, covered most of the east coast. The Colonists cut down trees to build homes, to clear fields for crops, to burn as firewood for cooking and winter warmth. The first sawmill was built at Jamestown, Virginia and by 1700 Maine was exporting lumber to the West Indies, Europe and elsewhere.

The first priority for settlers was to have shelter. If you were lucky you might find a clearing on your land claim to build your house on. The Lewis River Valley was covered with dense forests. Some hugged sloping hills and others formed greenbelt bands on the sides of steep mountains. The timber included stands of fir, hemlock, pine, sitka spruce and cedar. Trunks four or more feet in diameter were common.

I have to take you back to the 17th century colonists again and those who pushed the Western Frontier of the United States to the Pacific Northwest. Our immigrating forefathers brought with them a variety of skills from the old countries. By 1800 the east coast lumber companies

had put out a call for workers from as far as Scotland and Ireland. The immigrants brought with them the knowledge of cutting trees, building mills, sawing lumber.

Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor at the Hudson's Bay Company Fort Vancouver, had a water power mill built on the mouth of Mill Creek on the north bank of the Columbia River about seven miles east of Fort Vancouver in 1828. It is believed to be the first mill in territory. The mill cut timbers for local use and for export by sailing ships to South America and the Sandwich Islands, now known the Hawaiian Islands.

When the United States and Britain finally agreed to the northern territorial boundary, the pioneers by way of the Oregon Trail from Springfield, Missouri to the Willamette Valley in Oregon were encouraged to come north of the Columbia River to stake and record their land claims.

The first business agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad came to the Washington Territory in the summer of 1869. He came to look at a proposed rail route but was awestruck by the Northwest's vast timberlands.

The forests were not white pine, they were fir, hemlock, sitka spruce, pine, cedar and to the south in California, redwoods. Word of the timberlands in the then unsettled territory had been "rumored since the early 1800's when reports from Lewis and Clark and sailing ship

captains whose ships sailed the Puget Sound area recorded descriptions of the forests.

The Western forests were vast beyond comprehension and they were rich beyond calculation. The timber did not glitter like gold and silver but for nine decades brought it enormous wealth to the men who harvested the trees, who converted the logs to lumber and did the work of moving the lumber to the marketplace. It made visionaries who had invested early in huge timber holdings extremely rich.

The sources for much of the information about La Center presented tonight are included in Carl Landerholm's "From Cayuse to Cadillac", a chronology of historic newspaper clippings from several early Clark County newspapers. These include the Clark County Register and the Vancouver Independent.

It is from the July 22, 1875 Vancouver Independent that we have a report of two gentlemen, Titus and Banzer having put 700,000 feet of logs into the water. "These gentlemen are entitled to credit for setting about an enterprise which has resulted in various men getting profitable employment at home and the bringing in of considerable money." The logs were probably put into the East Fork of the Lewis near the Banzer homestead claim, going west to the freeway. They probably entered the river via a log chute and then were boomed – secured – until an outgoing sternwheeler was contracted to haul them to points unknown.

In May 1881, we have a second report that the Bolen Brothers, "proprietors of the La Center sawmill, are rushing work right along, and with present facilities are excelling all previous efforts in this line at their mill. A steady and increasing demand for lumber is noted, an indication of the prosperous times now prevailing in this section."

Little did the writer know in 1881 just how prosperous the logging industry was going to become in the Lewis River Valley, starting with historic La Center.

Remember La Center was technically in inland port. The sternwheelers were able to get to the site of the current bridge almost year round bringing settlers, goods and even equipment. Dense forests and available transportation were two of the igniters to the fast growing logging industry. And remember, the Northern Pacific railroad agent had already been through the territory in 1869.

Another one was the breaking of a new frontier in the machine age. Prior to 1882, oxen or horse teams pulled downed timbers to mills or log chutes. The teams dragged the logs over skid roads, so called because they were frequently greased with lard to help the logs skid along. Oxen were strong; horses were smarter than oxen but lacked strength. It was often a long, tedious drag to the mill. But in 1882 a retired Naval Lieutenant, John Dolbeer, who lived in California at the time, invented the steam donkey. His first design was classically simple – a single cylinder vertical boiler and a horizontal engine with a drum. At first iron cables and then steel cables – beginning in the early 1890s - could

be attached to the drum and winched in – thus relieving the oxen and the horses of the drag job to the mill. For a number of years horses still had a use – they were used to haul the lines back out to the far end – and were called "line horses." A note about the steel cables – they could wind and unwind rapidly on the donkey drum without tangling, had a pulling range of 1,500 feet and the strength to do just about anything.

And then with a simple improvement a "haulback line" was joined to the main line making along loop which traveled through a pulley anchored to a tree. The horses were then retired.

Dolbeer's first model evolved into donkeys mounted on barges to herd rafts of logs, "road donkey's used to pull logs over skid roads, and "bull donkeys" which could lower entire trains of log cars down steep inclines.

The donkey engine ushered in the era of what was called ground-lead logging with the donkey engine's cable bumping and battering everything in its path as it pulled the log to the mill site.

One of the Pacific Northwest lumber barons, Simon Benson, who was based in Portland and had holdings in Southwest Washington, stated in 1899 that the invention of the donkey engine cut his costs of getting logs out of the woods from $4.50 to $2.10 per thousand board feet. A lumberman named William Kyle summed it up this way: "When the machine don't work it don't cost anything to keep it, and you don't have to feed it when it is not earning anything."

Yes, the donkey engine did eliminate horses and oxen but with production increased and highballing along, more jobs were available. La Center area logging camps were home to 40 to 60 employees each.

Another piece of kindling to the logging fire were the railroads. Finally after crossing the country east to west, with lines in place in the mid-section of our country, the railroad industry was ready for the Pacific coast area. One company started laying line at the Mexico/California border and headed north. The second company began laying line at the newly admitted Washington State and Canadian border and came south. It was agreed they would both complete their lines and join.

The railroads needed hundreds of thousands of one main construction item – railroad ties. The owners and investors of the two companies knew the quickest way to get the product was to have them available as close to the area they were needed in as possible. And they knew where the product source was to be found.

Enter the "railroad Avon person." They visited "door to door" offering incentives to the farmers to become loggers and mill owners. Remember, the Donation Land Claim and Homestead Act participants had no less than 320 acres or 160 acres respectively. If the wife claimed a section they had double the amount. And if the couple had a son who was 21 and staked a claim next to dad and mom it is quite possible they had a joint venture of 960 acres.

The railroads offered incentives to the novice mill owners including equipment and training on operating the mill saw. Finding skilled loggers was not a problem because wherever the railroad was building, loggers were right behind.

The La Center area with its unique inland port and sloping hills was a natural site for another enhancement to logging operations. Flumes. Two products – railroad ties and cordwood – were the dominant exports. Some were probably brought to the river dock area by wagon. But they weren't. Although some of the mill operations were over six miles from the historic town, the elevation of the hills was a natural gateway to the dock and all that was needed was the "chute". Grounded log chutes were in use in the 1870's along the East Fork and the North Fork – this was a direct wooden or sculpted pathway to the river for a whole log.

The elevated and trestled flumes started appearing in the mid-1890's and by 1900 there were at least seven in the outlying area that fed to three that came all the way to the La Center dock east of the bridge where the ties or cord wood were loaded onto waiting scows.

The January 10, 1901, Vancouver Independent reports the following: Flumes in the La Center area area: the La Center Mill Flume, 3 miles, The Wilson Mill, 3.5 miles, The West Highland Mill, 6 miles, the East Highland Mill, 7 miles and 117 feet high at one elevation, Wilson and Oleson Mill, 7 miles, the Columbia Mill flume, 5 miles, the Columbia Lumber and Tie Company, 5 miles.

How many ties were made in the La Center area? In an article from The Columbian and written by Ted Van Arsdol, he reported that N. R. Rashford, an owner/operator of several tie mills in the area, stated that 60 per cent of the ties cut on the west coast for the railroads came from the Lewis River Valley area. One of Rashford's mills, the Oakdale Mill, shipped 40,000 to 50,000 board feet of ties daily when the flumes were operating.

The Dayton Mill, owned by Olaf Agaard, May 1907 month end statement notes that 46, 628 ties were sold during May at 40 cents each or $18,651.20.

All of these elements lent to the development of what remained the industry with the biggest economic impact (succeeded only by the card rooms) within the La Center area. The loggers worked six days a week getting off work on Saturday afternoons. Those that did not have families often came to town. They wanted a bath, a good meal (although they were fed very well at the mill camp cookhouses), maybe they need to see the blacksmith or needed new clothes. With an average of approximately 20 logging operations and mills at work simultaneously beginning in 1894 through 1914, employing between 40 and 60 men, it is no wonder there were at least 4 hotels, several boarding houses, three saloons, and numerous mercantile stores doing a brisk business on the weekends. And the loggers had money to spend. The ledger from the Dayton Lumber Company, located along Cedar Creek, shows wages ranged from $5 to $2 per day. The logger's rate of pay depended on

their job and often, the higher the pay per day, the more dangerous the job.

Let's talk logging job description titles. Each job title evolved from what the job was. Here are a few:
Faller – used axes and long saws (misery whips) to cut the tree.
Bucker – cut the tree into specific lengths – 16, 24, etc. feet.
Choke setter – set cables around the downed log.
Bull whacker – prodded the oxen teams along.
Skid Greaser – used a broom and grease on the skid road.
Flume herder – spread out along the flumes to clear jams
River pigs – these were the men who walked or rolled along boomed logs breaking up jams as the logs were boomed down the river.
Pond monkey – most mills had ponds where the logs were kept until they went into the mill. The pond monkey helped clean the dirt off the log. The Pond Monkey's job was to ease the logs onto a conveyor belt that led to the sawmill.
Whistle Punk – gave the go-ahead signal to start the donkey engine. Very important job in high lead logging.

It is not possible to list of all the mills that were in operation in the La Center area the thru boom times because during the boom times, several were characterized as fly by night. But here are a few with their approximate locations. I am also including a few North Fork of the Lewis River operations.

Kinder Rock Shingle Mill, also called Cedarville.

Banzer – west and upriver towards Paradise Point.

Allen Gilson Sawmill – located hear his home at Pekin.

1874 – Ad C. Reid bought a water power mill on Cedar Creek from a Mr. Perkins.

Frank and Harry Reid and Shell Anrys formed a logging company and sold out to the Harvey Mill Company.

Luther Paulsen had a sawmill and 1800 acres of timberland. In 1914 he sold to the Harvey Mill Company.

Bolen Brothers – north, off of Pacific Highway.

Johnson-Andrews – east of La Center at the bottom of Oak Dale Hill.

Vic Martin Mill – east of La Center in View.

Oakdale Mill – east of La Center at the bottom of Oak Dale hill.

Star Mill – East near Rock Creek, south of Fargher Lake.

Wilson Mill – off Doyle Road.

Brothers Mill – in the Charter Oak area, northeast of Beetree.

Jenny Creek or Payette Lumber and Tie Mill – north along Jenny Creek road.

Dayton Mill – Cedar Creek, 5-6 miles below Amboy

Agaard's Mills – 2 in West Highland, East Highland.

Mixstet or Nextstet Mill – NE 339th.

La Center Mill- east of La Center Bridge.

La Center Lumber Company – 3 miles up Brezee Creek.

A.W. Scott, the man who platted the then Town of Woodland, logged up the Lewis River. On a Scott log drive down the North Fork, three of the crew drowned in Shirttail Canyon.

The Coast, published in April 1909, was supplied information about then La Center by Nicholas R. Rashford. Mr. Rashford was a gentleman of standing within the community. A store owner and the original owner of the Mayor's Corner, at 5th and Pacific Highway.

Mr. Rashford wrote this: "Within a radius of seven miles around La Center there are at present about twelve sawmills engaged in cutting lumber and ties. These mills employ from forty to sixty men."

The Coast was published just months before the residents of La Center voted to incorporate.

The contributions made by the sternwheelers - bringing settlers in, taking out crops to market followed by the incredible logging activities, set the cornerstones for the foundation of La Center. Who wouldn't vote for incorporation to add permanency to the community?

As the timbers were downed in the nearby hills, the logging operations and mills moved further away for a new supply. La Center wasn't easily accessible to the camps located further out. And besides Yacolt did get rail service. Logging, which had made an enormous impact on the local economy by producing hundreds of thousands of board feet of railroad ties, giving work and pay to hundreds ended about 1916.

There is certain amount of irony in the fact that railroad ties made at the early mills near La Center brought rail service to the area but not to La Center. The completion of the railroad in 1906 bypassed La Center with the nearest depots in Woodland or Ridgefield.