



Potlatch Mercantile the focus of n

By Liz Smith

Special to the Daily News

The old Mercantile store played an important and vital part in the city of Potlatch. Its history will be recounted in a debut program for the newly formed Potlatch Historical Society Saturday.

"The Potlatch Historical Society was an outgrowth of the Scenic Six Development Council looking to preserve the unique cultural heritage of the community," said Suzanne Lay, a member of the Potlatch Historical Society.

The biography of the old Mercantile store and Potlatch will be presented in a series of programs at the Potlatch High school from 2 to 6 p.m.

Saturday, History Day, will be a fund-raising event to help build the Heritage Center that will be housed in the new Potlatch Library.

The Society's current goal is to raise \$5,000 towards the purchase of new computers and scanning equipment to be used for storing archives.

In addition to several exhibits on the history of the Potlatch Mercantile store, the

Jammers, a youth fiddling group, will perform at 2 p.m. and refreshments will be served throughout the day.

"The Potlatch Historical Society in cooperation with the Scenic Six Community Development Council and the City of Potlatch will preserve and present the unique history of the area through exhibits at the Heritage Center," Lay said.

Long ago, for the local Indians of the Northwest, the town of Potlatch was a meeting place for celebrations and feasts, which gave rise to the town's name.

Around the turn of the century, Potlatch was centered on timber. After the frontiersmen elsewhere logged themselves out of business, three firms from the East sent a representative out to seek new timber cuttings. William Deary, the representative, bought tracts of white pine in Latah and Clearwater counties of Idaho. The result of his expedition, in 1902, was the formation of the Potlatch Lumber Company.

Potlatch was an impressive site for a lumber mill and an ideal company town to house the com-

with no bathroom the Warner lived modestly during the time of the Depression. Borton recalled how hard the times were "yet we still played on like there was nothing wrong," she said.

"Money was short, so my mom could stretch a two-pound roast for a week, instead of one meal. And at times when I wasn't playing, my job was to go to the Mercantile to get groceries for my mom."

Since Potlatch was a company town, the Potlatch Lumber Company owned everything: the store, the schoolhouse, churches, homes, etc. Therefore, the people who lived in this company town worked for the company and owned essentially nothing. Thus the town's money never left Potlatch, it made one complete circle from owner to worker to owner.

However, because of the high quality facilities available Potlatch was quite a successful town, with a big general store.

People from all around the Northwest would come to Potlatch to shop at the company store, the Mercantile or the "Merc." The Merc was the best in