LIFE IN POTLATCH WAS DIFFERENT

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This is the now generally-forgotten story of Potlatch, Idaho, during its exciting years as an almost 100 per cent company town. It is on U.S. Highway 95, 18 miles north of Moscow, home of the University of Idaho. The Palouse Country hills, famed for their wheat, dry pea and lentil yields, roll like stormy waves to the north and west. East and south a vast, largely mountainous timbered area tosses 100 miles to the Bitterroot Divide.

Withered now to a 1970 census count of only 871 inhabitants, I knew Potlatch 50 years ago when its population peak was around 2,000. I attended grade and high school there, unaware of anything out of the ordinary about my home town. It wasn't until many years later that I fully realized I had been a fortunate guinea pig in one of the most liberal socio-economic experiments ever underwritten by Big Business in the Pacific Northwest.

The Potlatch of today is a memorial to the Potlatch Lumber Company, which gave birth to it in the early 1900's, administered and civically pampered for 45 years, then turned back to its residents to govern themselves. Just before the century's turn, two Minnesota and one Wisconsin lumber firms, after logging themselves out of business, sent William Deary west to stake out new holdings to cut. In 1901, he bought tracts of the finest white pine, mixed with other species, in Latah and Clearwater Counties, Idaho. Result of this venture was formation of the Potlatch Lumber Company in 1902 with Deary as its general manager. By 1920, its total holdings, mostly in the watersheds of the Palouse and Potlatch Rivers and Elk Creek, amounted to 265 square miles.

To get this timber to market, the company directors went first class and whole hog, sparing neither horses nor money. They ordered immediate construction of a 49-mile railroad, the Washington, Idaho and Montana, from its Northern Pacific connection at Palouse, Washington, to its new logging headquarters at Bovill, Idaho. Next they hired the nation's leading sawmill designer, grandfather of "Bud" Wilkinson, the coach who made the Oklahoma Sooners one of the nation's top college football teams, to plan the most modern sawmill possible that also would be one of the largest in existence at the time. And finally, they directed a model town be built near the mill to house its 1,500 employees and their families. That was in July, 1905.

Able as Bill Deary was as general manager of the entire operation, the directors soon realized the three-ring circus he was directing was too heavy a load for one man. So they sent him an assistant, Allison W. Laird, a personable, 40-year-old banker from the lumber town of Winona, Minnesota. Deary, who always had preferred the outdoor end of the business, was agreeable, and relieved.

However, he and Laird together worked on the initial phase of planning the town, but once that was done, Deary willingly turned the job of completing and running it over to Laird. As the new assistant general manager, he set about making Potlatch another Pullman, Illinois, the model town in which Pullman cars were originally built under then unheard of good working conditions. He was convinced a similar policy at Potlatch, would, like Biblical bread thrown upon the waters, be returned to management in better services by employees.

Seventy years ago, sawmill and mining towns everywhere in the United States were about the most squalid imaginable, and unfortunately, some aren't too much better today. What Laird didn't want was a town like Harrison Idaho, for example, on Coeur d'Alene Lake. In 1904 it had seven lumber mills, four shingle mills, 16 saloons, a surplus of gambling and ill repute establishments, shack housing, few retail stores, one school, several struggling churches and a minimum of medical and health services.

Potlatch would be different, Laird vowed, and it was. From the beginning, gambling and sale of liquor were banned. So was organized prostitution, which was then, and still is, taken for granted, especially in mill towns with a lot of single men. The Company kept it out through its housing monopoly. There was no private housing, not even squatters' shacks, to buy or rent.

The speed with which the railroad and huge sawmill complex were built was almost beyond belief. The mill was in working condition in less than a year, without the help of today's sophisticated machinery. Everything was done by hand, with hundreds upon hundreds of workers using picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. They did have the help of horses pulling plows, scrapers and wagons, the latter two of "shirt-tailful" capacity.

There were separate crews working simultaneously on virtually all of the 13 major buildings and projects of the mill and railroad. These included the sawmill; power plant; steam and electric generating plant (which also supplied the town); a giant refuse burner; dry kilns; a 65-acre drying yard laced with narrow gauge railway tracks connecting with all parts of the mill; a huge planing shed with its own power plant; a vast dry shed; the main office; mill machine shop; roundhouse, railroad machine shop, car repair shop and depot. The band sawmill, when completed, was claimed by its builders to be the largest entirely under one roof in the world. Its capacity was 350,000 board feet of rough lumber in a 10-hour shift.

To me, one of the most intriguing buildings in the mill area was the horse barn, undoubtedly the largest and best operated within hundreds of miles. It had stall space for possibly 100 horses. In the early 1900's, when gasoline engines were still new, horses were used for all general hauling in town, including delivery of slab wood fuel to homes. There still was a need for horses at the mill because electric locomotives weren't always available to haul loaded cars out of the way or spot empties where needed.

All the mill construction was on a wide meadow in which the meandering Palouse River was dammed for a large log pond. The town, only half completed when the mill began operating September 11, 1906, overlooked the mill complex from two low hills at the east edge of the flat.

The residence district surrounding the downtown area was a block up from the depot. Two large, two-story brick buildings dominated the core area, the company store and company bank. Not far from them were the hotel, the confectionary store and the first of three large frame boarding houses for single men. Two blocks up the hill was the Union

Protestant church, and not far from it the elementary school and the Catholic church. All these buildings, surrounded by 275 frame houses built for employees, covered an area 10 blocks long, east and west, and six wide.

Southeast of the store, on a smaller hill, a section of larger and better homes was built for management personnel. It was known as "Nob Hill." To supply the mill and town with water, the company built a million gallon capacity concrete reservoir on the highest point in town. Water was pumped from two artesian wells drilled close to the mill power plant, and distributed through 10 miles of water mains. One hundred fire hydrants were installed for fire protection. Several fire stations were built and volunteer fire crews recruited and trained. The town's fire loss record was enviously low.

As a sawmill town, Potlatch naturally had wooden sidewalks. They were well made initially, and well maintained for many years. Wooden walks made it possible to bridge small gullies and still hold normal levels or grades. Several such structures resembled early day wooden railroad trestles. There must have been 20 miles of wooden walks in Potlatch. The only concrete sidewalks were on the west and north sides of the store and bank buildings, a block each way.

In an effort to beautify the town, the Company planted trees in the Nob Hill park and along the streets, and since the town's inhabitants were accustomed to the Midwest and familar with deciduous trees, the Company maintained a nursery for seedling trees. The streets were named Pine, Locust, Cedar, Oak, Elm and Maple. Potlatch residents jokingly said their first letters stood for, "Potlatch Lumber Company Owns Everything, Maybe."

Along with a water distribution system, the Company supplied electricity to all public buildings, and to all homes. It also piped steam to heat the public buildings, and the managerial homes on Nob Hill, again at a very reasonable rate. It franchised a garbage and sewage disposal service to a farmer. He did the collecting with what we called "honey wagons," for wasteland burial.

Owning, as it did, every building in town, the Company had a large and efficient maintenance or townsite department. For its nearly 300 rental homes, this service was included in the rent the occupants paid. If anything went wrong, all they had to do was telephone the townsite department, and it would send out a man or crew to do whatever was necessary, and usually quite promptly, especially on Nob Hill. Still another service the Company provided was police protection. This was a one-man department, a town constable who doubled as a county deputy sheriff. He had little to do other than harrass bootleggers and occasional noisy drunks.

There actually were four distinct categories of housing in Potlatch. Most imposing were the substantial and spacious homes for management people on Nob Hill. They were completly modern, with full basements and three or four bedrooms. They compared with the better homes in our Corbin Park (Spokane) area and rented for $40 a month, plus $10 for steam heat and $1 for water.

Next, in Class 2, was a smaller group of rather substantial homes close to the school and both churches. They were modern, but not steam heated, and rented in the $20 to $24 range. Class 3, and by far the majority, were houses of three to even eight rooms to fit various family sizes. They had running water, an ample woodshed and attached privy next to the alley. At appointed times, possibly every two months, a night crew emptied the drawer and treated it with a deodorant.

These houses rented for $2 a month per room. Thus a three-room house rented for $6 and a six-roomer for $12. A news story in the October 17, 1909 issue of the (Spokane) *Spokesman-Review* reported Potlatch was "sponsoring matrimony" in that no houses would be rented to single persons; to qualify as a renter, a "man had to have a wife."

Unfortunately, there was a Class 4, the very small houses near the foot of the hill below Pine Street. They generally were reserved for the various national groups such as Greeks, Italians and Japanese. So there was an element of segregation in evidence, but generally these people preferred to live close together in less expensive housing. Their rent probably was about half as much as for Class 3 houses. As far as I know, there were no Blacks in Potlatch up to the time I lost communication with it in 1930.

For single men, there were three boarding houses, very large frame buildings housing sometimes 100 or more men each. They had running hot and cold water, steam heat, but otherwise were not modern. They were very important during the early years of the development, but gradually lost favor as more of the workers became family men. The first one to be abandoned was converted into a movie theatre in the mid 1910's, and the second made into a hospital about 1918.

What visitors from out of town probably best remembered about Potlatch was the Company store, the Potlatch Mercantile Company, or to us, the Merc. It was the Crescent (Spokane's leading department store) of the Palouse Country when I was young, and rightly so; first, for its size, two floors and a full basement about 250 by 300 feet in dimensions; and second, the remarkable variety of goods it stocked.

It sold just about everything. Departments I remember were groceries, meats, women's wear, men's furnishings, shoes, furniture, home furnishings, hardware, millinery, drugs, jewelry, candy and a

soda fountain. It had sufficient space for its departments so it didn't look junky. It boasted an efficient freight elevator and one of the first refrigeration plants in the Inland Empire. As the years passed, it was continually remodeled and upgraded.

In its early years it didn't handle farm implements, but it soon became apparent that to serve a rural area adequately, such a department was needed. So a new building was added for it south of the store. It also stocked many common logging supplies. The first postoffice had space in the store building, but was moved to larger quarters in 1911.

Until the first temporary service station began operating in Potlatch in 1915, the only place in town where petroleum products could be purchased was at the Merc's hardware department. To take delivery, buyers had to drive to a bunker-like brick building nearly a block away from the store and nearest dwelling. The reason, of course, was danger of explosions and fires.

All early gasoline and oil came in five-gallon cans, same as kerosene. We bought kerosene often from the Merc for our lamps and lanterns, and later gasoline for our Coleman lamp and water pump engine. Before 1915, gasoline had to be poured into automobile tanks from five-gallon cans and filtered through a chamois skin in the funnel.

In 1906, cars were strictly a toy for the wealthy, and for several years there couldn't have been more than two in Potlatch at a time. By 1917, Model T Fords were being shipped to Potlatch annually by freight car loads; and a thriving garage business had been established. Potlatch as well as the whole nation had acquired wheels, and never would be the same again.

The Merc really found its place in the sun in 1909 when Mr. Laird hired A. A. McDonald as its new manager. He stayed until 1921, and was responsible for the store's most profitable and colorful era. To broaden its service area, he soon began conducting special sales four or five times a year. They usually were two day affairs, with loads of special buys in every department, and a free box lunch at noon in the lodge hall or opera house above the bank next door.

McDonald advertised heavily in the area's weekly newspapers, especially in the *Palouse Republic*, which was published nearest to Potlatch. In it he usually bought two pages of space, and at least one time as much as four. These ads were reprinted on colored paper stock of almost cardboard weight and then tacked on crossroad signposts for 20 miles in every direction.

The crowds such advertising attracted were fantastic for a town no larger than Potlatch. At specified times during the day, McDonald held drawings for prizes the store supplied. In the evening another free lunch and a free dance were provided. He used these devices to relieve congestion in the store and to keep buyers in a spending mood.

Another service he inaugurated was free parking for customers' teams, buggies and wagons. This was in a large, L-shaped livery shed built not far from the store. It had stalls for 12 to 15 teams and rigs to tie up for the full day, if necessary. Their exposed sides opened to the east and north, thus giving teams protection from the weather. Close to the entrance of this facility was a large water trough.

An adjacent building provided free tieing-up space for about 15 saddle horses. Several hundred feet of extra hitching racks were handily provided at the rear and one side of the store. During some of the Merc's sales days, as many as 265 teams and rigs were tied up around the store, and at noon the Merc even gave the horses a free feed!

One year the Merc sponsored a Fourth of July celebration for which it built an outdoor dance floor on a vacant lot just west of the store. At a later sale, an automobile — the flashiest and most popular make then on the market — was locked into a fixed orbit around the dance floor. All day long customers were given free rides in it, a real attraction back in 1914.

Another sales day featured a horse show. Farmers from near and far entered their best horses or teams groomed to the "Nth" degree to compete for attractive prizes the Merc offered. Another time, Buster Brown, a youth nationally know as the advertising symbol for a shoe company of the same name, was the special attraction.

The December sales day, of course, always featured Santa Claus being escorted to town in a fancy rig or sleigh drawn by a beautiful team of horses from the company barn. Tall, sandy-haired Adolph Bye always seemed to be the driver, wearing a long black coat, white collar and black tie, and, of course, a stove pipe hat. All children received bags of candy and nuts, and possibly a Christmas stocking filled with inexpensive trinkets.

These events were money making schemes for the Merc; but they also helped provide the attractive, exciting atmosphere of a community of real importance. They cemented relations between townspeople and rural folk. Even though the Merc's customers ended up paying the costs of such promotional efforts, the sales days helped a community its residents grew to love.

I should explain Potlatch wasn't absolutely a 100-per cent company town. Laird did permit a few independent or franchised entrepreneurs to operate in his domain. Pete Wagner had the first barber shop, and was still there when I left. He hired his own help and was very successful. Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Fisher ran the Merc's jewelry department until they retired and moved to Spokane. A shoe repair shop was provided space in the implement building built about 1911. When a vacancy occurred in this shop in the 1920's, Ted Saad came from Spokane to operate it. He retired a few years ago.

The Company built and rented a confectionary store building which also housed a pool hall and a cream collection station. Waltzer's independent blacksmith shop was a block from the depot. Until the coming of the automobile, it did a flourishing business. Felix Stapleton took over management of the Merc's auto parts and service business, and in 1917 moved into a new garage building on Main Street. As usual, A. A. McDonald made a big occasion of it with a sales day, complete with free noon lunch and dance that night. In 1919, Stapleton bought into the business, and in 1926, took it over completely.

For years there was a bakery adjacent to Boarding House No. 2 which must have been an independent operation. I'm sure the moving picture theatre was run by a regular company employee on a moonlighting basis. In the early years, an independent tailor was recruited to take care of the company executive and supervisory personnel's clothing needs. One such man was A. P. Detlof, one of the best in his profession. He moved to Spokane, where he had a shop until he retired.

In 1911, an office building was erected across from a later built garage to house the postoffice, the physician and the dentist. The latter rented his space and charged patients for his services. Dr. J. W. Thompson, the company physician, was in charge of a health service program which provided care and treatment in case of accidental injury. All company employees were covered, in all divisions, but not their spouses or children. From what I've been able to learn, this program was satisfactory as far as it went, and helped lay the basis for more complete family plans in later years. Dr. Thompson was permitted to treat non-company patients on a fee basis.

The company hospital was originally at Bovill, which meant Potlatch patients had to go there by train. A Dr. Hein of Palouse, as a company employee, maintained an office and very small hospital in Potlatch for a day or two a week for a few of the town's early years. It was next to the hotel in a small building later taken over by the town's library. In about 1918, the hospital in Bovill was closed, and a replacement opened in Potlatch in the vacant No. 2 boarding house.

Through special arrangements with state and county school authorities, the Company was given virtually complete control of the town's school system. It paid the same county and state taxes all other property owners did, and in addition, assumed all school costs. Mr. Laird, as school board president, insisted the Potlatch schools be the best possible, and not limited to a three-R curriculum. He wanted the whole gamut of that day, including separate room and teacher for each grade as soon as enrolment allowed.

One justification for this policy was that it would help induce high quality management and supervisory people to move to an unproved frontier town. Mr. Laird and his fellow management directors had two

advantages most school boards lack: personnel management experience enabling them to select best qualified teachers, and a higher salary scale than other schools in the area. Potlatch teachers were paid almost as much as those in Spokane. As a result, Potlatch attracted top caliber, dedicated teachers.

In November, 1906, the town's first school opened with 150 children in temporary quarters. The following year the school moved into a new three-story building which eventually housed the eight lower grades and the manual training department. In the first few years the few high school students were assigned to unused rooms. Two seniors made up the school's first high school graduating class, in 1912.

Physical training, domestic science, manual training, art and music were a part of the curriculum from the beginning. After the Company built a large community gymnasium in 1916, all P.T. classes were scheduled there, as were all competitive sports. Potlatch High School eventually earned an enviable reputation in athletics, especially in the early 1920's when Rich Fox was the coach. He had been an outstanding basketball star at the University of Idaho.

Potlatch had special art and music teachers long before most of the larger cities in the Pacific Northwest did. Mr Laird saw nothing wrong in pressuring teachers to participate in civic activities. I saw a telegram he sent to a surprised newly elected special music teacher for 1924-1925 informing her that leading the church choir would be one of her duties. A fringe benefit the single women teachers appreciated was an attractive, furnished house in which they lived cooperatively at minimum expense. All school employees went to the company bank at the end of each month to sign for their checks.

The first superintendent was a "Professor" Reese. He was there for several years and was succeeded by a quick tempered, stub-armed Mr. Houston who stayed only one year. Fred Lukens, who succeeded him was an excellent administrator who remained for many years. From Potlatch he went to Grangeville, then to Boise as secretary of state. He was the author of a text on Idaho government, a required course in the eighth-grade curriculum.

My family moved to our farm four miles from Potlatch in 1908. My two older brothers attended a local two-room country school. Our parents immediately wanted better schooling for us, so they sent us to Potlatch at $3 tuition per month each through the eighth grade. High school tuition was the responsibility of our local district. For six of us, attending school in Potlatch over a period of 18 years, that was considerable extra expense, but we and our parents felt it was a fine investment.

All 12 years I was in the Potlatch system, it emphasized regular attendance and punctuality. Rooms meeting prescribed percentages in both received rewards of half and quarter day vacations the last day of each month. Non-qualifiers worked until the 4 o'clock dismissal bell. I'm still benefiting from those early formed habits.

One remarkable school-related incident I vividly remember happened when I was in the sixth grade. Two families had just arrived direct from Sweden. So Monday morning, here came six or seven immigrant cousins to school. In an ordinary school system that would have caused consternation. In Potlatch, it was almost commonplace.

The newcomers were sent to Ruth Hall's first grade room, where there were larger and adjustable desks for just such contingencies. Ruth was no bigger than a minute, but she had a knack for putting such youngsters, and all others, at their ease. She taught them to read and speak English, and within six weeks two or three had advanced to my sixth grade room, and before long were challenging the best of us in class competition!

Ruth Hall and several other teachers also ran a night school for many of the Company's newly arrived foreign workers who wanted to learn to speak and write English. It was a service that helped hundreds of immigrants in their transition to becoming loyal Americans. Ruth Hall started first grade at Potlatch in 1909, and was retired in 1937. I was privileged to have her as my first grade teacher.

It became apparent in 1912 that high school students needed their own building. Because the Protestant church was then too small for its congregation, Mr. Laird talked his superiors into building a new church and converting the old one into a high school. The new church of all wood construction, rivaled in size, beauty and completeness any of our existing churches of that time in Spokane. By using the side Sunday school rooms and raising four or five sliding doors, its seating capacity could be increased to about 1,000 people. It became the civic auditorium as well as the church sanctuary, and all public events of a dignified nature were held there. It cost $25,000 to build, all donated to the community by the Company.

In two years of probing for what made Potlatch tick, I discovered the Catholic priest and Protestant minister both were on the company payroll, at least during the community's early years. One of the Sunday school rooms of the church was the first home of the town's public library. It was open several afternoons a week, with Mrs. Jessie Metcalf in charge as librarian. By 1930 it had grown to the point it had to be moved to Dr. Hein's old office next to the hotel.

It was from the Catholic church that Bill Deary was buried in 1913. The year before, when one of his good friends lost a young daughter in an epidemic, Deary grieved because the little body had to be taken to the church and from there to the cemetery in the company store's delivery wagon. One detail the Company had overlooked was to buy a hearse. This so saddened Deary that he immediately ordered one. It was drawn by two beautifully matched and outfitted horses. Adolph Bye again was the driver, wearing his long black coat, white collar, black tie and top hat. The irony of this story is that the hearse wasn't needed again until Deary's own funeral, a year later.

There were many Japanese in Potlatch by 1920. The Company built a large, completely modern boarding house for them, which they ran themselves. In this facility they had imported their homeland custom of integrated toilets. I worked for my brother on an extensive milk delivery route when I was in high school, and had one toilet in the building spotted for emergencies. Once I was about to enter when a cute Japanese kitchen maid emerged. She immediately greeted me with a smiling, "Tee hee, you have go go nearly every day, don't you?"

Japanese families weren't big milk users. They almost always bought it by the pint, one or two per family, never by quarts. The Japanese were happy and industrious people, and so appreciative of any courtesy or recognition we natives showed them. I had occasion to use the services of a Japanese laundry woman who did hand washing in her home. She always would have some little gift wrapped ready for a customer when he brought her his laundry, and another when he picked it up.

Nor did the Japanese forget Mr. and Mrs. Laird on Christmas morning! I'm sure the first time they brought their gifts to their "benefactor" and his wife, the Lairds were completely overwhelmed. I was told virtually every Japanese family in Potlatch made a Christmas pilgrimage to the Laird home each Christmas in their early years.

Hundreds of Chinese laborers were used in building the company railroad, but the only Chinese I remember being in Potlatch in 1924 was the cook at the hotel to which we delivered five gallons of milk and possibly a quart of cream daily. I often stopped to visit with him a few moments. Each time he would point to two pieces of pie on a plate on the window sill that I had to pass returning to our delivery wagon, one for me and one for my partner. That was a great lift at the route's half way point.

In the early years we used horses to pull our delivery wagon. No more efficient power for a delivery vehicle has ever been devised. Two of us would make runs back and forth to the houses. The team soon learned the route and would go just as far as necessary to meet us two or three houses down the street, and there stop and wait for us. The horses learned to go to opposite sides of streets to save us extra walking.

Another Potlatch route experience I remember concerns my farmer father, who was a good butcher. Two or three times during the winter we would have a butchering bee. The next day he would load the wagon or sled with the quartered cuts of beef or pork and head for town, to drive up and down the streets shouting his wares. Housewives could come out and order whatever they wanted, and he would cut, weigh and sell it to them at a considerable discount over the Merc's prices.

Sometimes he would come home with several hundred dollars stuffed in his pockets after such trips. Mr. Laird and the store manager were aware of this competition, but they never questioned it. I'm sure it was a part of their good will policy to keep workers happy. Imagine health authorities allowing such peddling today!

Twenty or 30 recent emigrants from Greece formed another ethnic group in Potlatch. They lived two or three together in the smaller Class 4 homes. Usually they were quiet, mannerly good workers. We always understood such men sent a considerable part of their wages back home to families each month. I'm sure there never were any Greek families there. One such Greek was Tony Giannou, who still has the shoe shine concession in the basement of the Davenport Hotel. He came from Greece in 1913, stayed in Potlatch until 1942, when he moved to Spokane. He was married in 1944, and since has reared a family of five children.

The many Italians in Potlatch were a different story. They, too, usually were very good workers, but definitely assertive and volatile. I believe most of them were family men. The Italian youngsters took advantage of the free boxing lessons at the company gym. Because I was too busy with farm chores, I didn't learn the art of self defense, so in fights with Italian boys I'm sure I never was victorious.

By far the greater proportion of common laborers the Company hired were Scandinavians. Many had come from mills of the Midwest, but more came directly from Norway and Sweden. What wonderful memories all of us Potlatchers have of those fine people! They were so kind, generous and friendly that it was a wonder my partner and I ever got through our milk delivery routes on time. Many would have hot coffee and cookies waiting for us, especially on sub-zero days.

Life in Potlatch, as I remember it, was pleasant, but certainly different than in towns and cities in which I have lived since then. Potlatch residents up to 1951 had absolutely no voice in town affairs. They could vote on county, state and national issues but not on matters dealing with the administration of their town. That was handled solely by Mr. Laird, who actually was a benevolent dictator.

Living there only as a student, I didn't have a chance to determine if the smothering effect of living in a completely controlled environment, like a laboratory animal, would be upsetting. I did have several stints

at mill work during summer months. The only jobs I could get were on night shifts, involving such deadly monotonous duties as making sure boards from a big saw carriage fell cleanly on the delivery rollers, throwing off scraps from the edging saws, or running a corrugator in the box factory. Those experiences convinced me I had to break out of that working class into something with more variety and a more secure future.

The Company virtually ran the lives of its employees, as shown by its payroll deduction system. Payday was the 10th of each month. Workers stood in line at the pay window and were handed envelopes containing what was left of their monthly wages in currency and coins, to the exact penny. Often there wasn't much left, after deductions had been taken out for rent, water, electricity, steam heat for those in executive housing, slabwood and mill ends for the less affluent, company store charge account, medical insurance and hospitalization, telephone, garage and any advances made since the previous payday in the form of coupon books.

They came in $5, $10 and $20 denominations, and were usable in any business establishment in town. With coupons you could pay for a haircut or shave, eat at the hotel or confectionary, or play cards or pool, buy bakery products, or get your shoes repaired, and buy jewelry. These concessionaires in turn used the coupons to pay their company bills.

Most of the common laborers lived a pretty much hand to mouth existence, especially the young single workers. They nearly always ended the month with very little cash in their pay envelopes, but could draw coupons on their next payday immediately. This would take care of their during-the-week expenses, but after cars became common, they would need money for weekend trips to Palouse, Lewiston, Moscow or Spokane. Some concessionaires took advantage of this practice by buying up coupon books for cash at a 20 per cent discount. The Company didn't engage in this racket; it merely looked the other way until things eventually got out of hand and had to be stopped.

Potlatch employees could determine immediately from the schedule of deductions what it cost them and their families to live. A modern finance company with a budget advisor would have had little to do in Potlatch. The Company had already done it. For many people, this procedure was a comforting one, and even a parental service. For others it was repugnant. They lost all the thrill of paying their own bills and managing their own finances.

The Company certainly had a sure thing going for itself, and few workers ever were able to leave Potlatch owing it money. It also could be quite a shock for a family, after living in Potlatch for a number of years, to move to an open community and have to start exercising the disciplines necessary to come out even or ahead financially at the end of every month.

I had poor luck finding any really accurate figures on the Company's pay scale. Common labor initially was paid about $1 for a 10-hour day. This was rather consistent, at least through 1912. Tony Giannou came in 1913 and worked in the mill for $2 a day. I found another former Potlatch resident who said he started to work in 1916 at 17 1/2 cents an hour for a 10-hour day. Skilled workers were paid more, of course. A millwright got $3 a day and his assistant $2. Alice Hodge's father was a building contractor in 1911. His time books show he paid his head carpenter $3.50 a day and other carpenters $2.50. A really ambitious man, or a two-man team, could double or even triple earnings working on contract. This practice, gyppoing, was in no way unique to Potlatch. It was universal in the lumbering and mining industries, and still is a fairly common incentive system.

So I have concluded it wasn't higher pay that attracted workers to Potlatch. It had to be the fringe benefits that went along with their jobs. It is difficult to translate any set of earnings to make a comparison with today's incomes. One typical Potlatch worker reported on in Laird, Norton's *Timber Roots,* was Carl Olson Hegg, who came to Potlatch in 1914 as a grader on the green chain. When interviewed in 1956, he said he was proud of having "raised six children and put them through college." I was privileged to have several of his grandsons as band students, and they surely were tops. Both of the fathers were well known and successful ministers.

Through my many interviews with Potlatchers who lived there during the Laird years, a story along the following pattern kept coming up: Mr. Laird became very much loved by most residents. There was also a deep respect for him and in some cases, a fear. The common story seems always to involve an incorrigible youngster who was causing trouble both at school and in the community. It was usually resolved by the father taking the boy to the woodshed, not for the usual punishment, but to be admonished that he and his whole family were in serious trouble because of his actions. Unless he immediately mended his ways, Mr. Laird would fire the father and the family would have to move elsewhere. The implication always was that to avoid such an ultimate disaster, the young offender mended his ways.

Potlatch residents were enthusiastic sports fans. The Company built an athletic field on the flat close to the horse barn, complete with covered bleachers. In 1910, Mr. Laird hired Walter Gamble, a promising baseball player from the East, to organize and train a town team. He did such an outstanding job of it that Potlatch became a strong baseball town. Gamble stayed on to make a career with the Company. He quickly rose in the managerial ranks, and before long was in charge of the company railroad system.

No team ever had more loyal supporters than the Potlatch players did. Once a large amount of money was raised to induce two major league teams to play a game in Potlatch. The Company maintained a free gymnasium for its employees and employed a qualified instructor to supervise it and also teach the school physical training classes.

He also was the boxing instructor, and conducted many classes because the sport was popular locally. When the first gymnasium burned down in 1916, it was replaced with a beautiful and spacious new one costing $16,000. It then became the town center for both athletic and social occasions.

Potlatch had other recreational opportunities. For those who liked hiking, there were many scenic jaunts from which to choose. Before cars became common, families could hire a team and rig from a livery stable just over the hill from Potlatch. For hunters, the area was heaven. Between 1916 and the mid 1920's there were several winters when ice skating and bobsledding were excellent. The Company had a splash dam on the Palouse River just east of Nob Hill. The pond usually was empty of logs in the winter, and I can remember several times when hardy skaters had smooth ice as far as Princeton, nearly four miles distant.

Such winters brought out the most daring adventurers, the bob-sledders. From the top of a steep residence area hill they charted a run down through six street intersections and over a flat, swampy area near the warehouses. Some times the sledders ended up across the railway, a half mile from their starting point. They attained unbelievable speeds, but the bumps and jumps at the street crossings took their toll of injured. I still shudder at some of the close calls we had with teams, and even trains!

Another winter activity we enjoyed was a ride in a horse-drawn bobsled to some home where a chili or oyster stew treat would be waiting. Sometimes we played parlor games or danced, but the real fun was riding in the sled to the accompaniment of jingling sleigh bells and squealing sled runners. Being a farm boy, I usually furnished the sled, team and straw. After the round trip, I still had to go home, but that was easy. I just started the team out, tied up the reins, crawled under the blankets and slept until the horses stopped at our barn door.

When both log ponds were filled in the spring, another favorite sport was "walking the logs." Although generally forbidden by parents, it was great fun, and we young Potlatchers became quite proficient at it. I don't remember any drownings.

I left Potlatch in 1926, which was a good year for the Company. In 1929, an economic slow down that was the prelude to the Great Depression began to be felt in all the lumber producing areas across the country.

Coupled with that was the tragic death of Mr. Laird in April, 1931, after unsuccessful treatment for cancer. By this time, the depression was taking its toll in bankruptcies everywhere. The Potlatch Lumber Company, the Rutledge Lumber Co., Coeur d'Alene, and the Clearwater Timber Company of Lewiston narrowly managed to avert financial disaster by merging as Potlatch Forests, Inc., on April 29, 1931, with headquarters in Lewiston.

Some masterful moves by the new management salvaged all three operations, and eventually they prospered. By the early 1950's the new firm had decided it was time to step out of the town management business. Then Potlatch, for the first time, became self governing, with residents owning property. After that, "life in Potlatch" did indeed become different from what it was when I lived there under Mr. Laird's paternalism. But its original sawmill has been operating all these years, manufacturing finished and dimension lumber, but not in the quantities it did up to the 1931 reorganization. The mill now has 184 men and women employees.

In appearance, Potlatch has changed comparatively little since I left it 50 years ago. Most of the mill buildings are still there, and in use, as a subsidiary unit of the Potlatch, Inc., operation in Lewiston. Logs from the back country to the east now are hauled to the mill on trucks, but the finished lumber is shipped out on the railroad. As on most other railroads, passenger trains were discontinued many years ago, and its freight tonnage is only a fraction of what it once was.

The original sawmill, the planing mill and the dry kilns are still in use, but more economical electrical motors have been substituted for the original Corliss steam engines. The Washington Water Power Company bought the town's electrical distribution system a good many years ago and now supplies the town's and mill's power. The giant refuse burner still stands, but no longer wastefully burns sawdust, chips and scraps. Those byproducts are trucked to the Lewiston mill, where they are transformed into fiberboard, Presto Logs and other profitable byproducts.

The company store, the company bank next door, and the large Union Protestant church all burned in the last 18 years. The church was rebuilt but on a much smaller scale, and a modern but small shopping center now occupies the space where the Merc and the bank stood. The Potlatch bank is now a branch of the Idaho First National Bank. The hotel was torn down about 30 years ago when its dwindling patronage finally made it unprofitable.

The school system has undergone the greatest change of any institution. State directives requiring that large contingent areas be combined into consolidated districts came into effect in the late 1940's. It was the school problem which speeded up the Company's disposal of the last

of its townsite property in the early 1950's. This was because Idaho law allows only property owners to vote in school elections involving money raising. Once the decision had been made to build consolidated schools serving the surrounding countryside as well as the town proper, the Company cooperated by making total private ownership of the townsite property possible.

The result of this consolidation was a complete replacement of all school buildings with the modern spread out type so popular today. Sixty years ago, it often took us an hour each way to drive our team and hack to and from school. Now a modern fleet of comfortable busses hauls students from two to three times as far in a fraction of the time.

Potlatch still must be a pleasant and satisfying place to live. This can be attested to from the fact that at least 20 of my former school associates have continued to live there through all the intervening years and are still there in their retirement.

Growing up in Potlatch was one of the best things that possibly could have happened to me. It was a clean, wholesome town, with virtually no drinking, gambling and crime. We had one constable, with little to do, and no attorney. Mr. Laird and his associates from the very beginning had planned to build such a completely model town that it would attract high quality personnel. That objective was met to the fullest, and I, as a product of the community experiment, was greatly enriched by contact with those superior people in every department of the operation.

The church had a much greater influence on me than I then realized. It was impressive both by its physical size and grandeur and its large congregation. Numbers and bigness are factors which always have done things to me. Mrs. Laird was my first Sunday School teacher, and it was at church that I had my first and most frequent distant contacts with Mr. Laird. It was there that I started my musical career, which was nothing more than pumping a giant reed organ from behind a screen, but it was musically oriented.

Some of my most vivid and pleasant memories are those connected with the Mercantile Company and the many sales events it sponsored. We moved to our farm near Potlatch in 1908 when I was just three. This was in pre-radio and pre-television days. I probably didn't see my first movie until several years later. I had plenty of books and magazines, and we always had the standby mail order catalogs.

All these were just eye openers. I always like to see real things. Then A. A. McDonald came upon the scene and began his four or five times a year sales. These were big experiences for a farm boy, I'm sure I never was the same after any of them. The Merc fascinated me. I loved

to watch it operate and improve year by year. No wonder one of the town's residents was unimpressed when, on a trip to Chicago, he was shown through Marshall Fields. "It's just bigger than the Merc," was his reaction.

From the Potlatch schools I received an academic foundation that could have been equalled or bettered only by large city school systems. I had superb, dedicated teachers who taught in a curriculum ahead of its time in this region. They made me want to learn. I remember well the efforts and encouragement of special music teachers from the sixth grade on through high school. By the time I was in high school, I had been well prepared in the rudiments of music and could read it with ease. Prominent parts in two operettas further deepened my interest in music. One special music teacher offered to give me piano lessons free if I would just buy the necessary books. During my last two years in high school, I had a particularly talented teacher. She was an accomplished violinist, and also the first in Potlatch to teach instrumental music.

That seemed to be just what I had been waiting for, as I always had wanted to play a horn. It was decided I could do well on a cornet, but from my financial standpoint, it had just as well have been a Stanley Steamer. I finally heard of a farm family several miles from our place that had a horn I might borrow. It turned out to be a cheap, hard to blow Czechoslovakian instrument, but I got a start on it, and before the end of the year somehow acquired a good, first grade horn.

During my senior year, our seven-piece Potlatch high school orchestra was the talk of the town, and by June, I already had enrolled for the fall semester in music education at the University of Idaho. A musical fuse was ignited in me at Potlatch that was to burn for 40 years. During that time it was my privilege to lead thousands of school youngsters to drink of the wonders of playing a musical instrument. That was the ultimate test that I, as a sociological guinea pig in Mr. Laird's Potlatch experiment, passed with flying colors.

One minor aspect of living in a mill town was the commanding sound of the ever present mill whistles. The main one at Potlatch had a resonant, throaty tone loud enough to be heard easily at our farm four miles from town. Modern mills and locomotives employ strident air horns which never produced tones equalling those from steam whistles.

The first whistle was three long blasts at 5:30 a.m., presumably to waken mill workers for a new day. At 6:50, a smaller one announced the big engines were starting, and promptly at 7:00 the Big Ben again sounded to burst the whole mill complex into full production. At noon the big whistle blew again, and the same starting sequence was repeated at 12:50 and 1:00. The final whistle blew at 4:00, and if a night shift were working, only the small whistle sounded.

I realize mill whistles have been criticized as an invasion of privacy, and by some as being insulting. As one Potlatcher who heard those deep throated, mellow tones every working day for 17 years, I loved them and think back on them with real nostalgia. I well remember how long and wildly the mill whistle blew at the time of the World War I armistice signing, and how I ran half a mile across our farm to tell my father what it meant.

My last memories of Potlatch, and the ones I seem most often to bring to mind, are of walking down the Main Street hill at noon against the traffic of at least 300 mill, store and office workers walking home for lunch. Almost every worker could get home and back for a hot lunch if he or she wished, as many did. I remember best how genuinely happy those workers were. This happiness undoubtedly was responsible for their friendliness. They all called each other by first names, and it was plainly evident that they really meant the friendly greetings.

Of course, this can be said of many small towns even today, but it was so concentrated in Potlatch because of everyone's schedule being tied up with the one main activity of the community, the Potlatch Lumber Company. I'm still convinced Mr. Laird's keen interest in each one of us, his fatherly guidance, and even his insistance that we bow to his will were exactly what I needed up to the time I left.

Most of the material for this paper has been gleaned through scores of interviews and friendly visits with both present and former Potlatch residents. That search began in earnest more than two years ago, but since leaving Potlatch 50 years ago, I never have missed a chance to add to my knowledge of the town's early history. My first and most valuable source was Elizabeth Laird Ainsworth of Oakland, California, lone survivor of the A. W. Laird family. She still sends me bits of information when they come to her, and has constantly been helpful and encouraging.

Others who have been of major help are Amelia Horskotte Burk, Alice Carr Hodge, Lillian Compton Olson, H. H. Hanson, Walter Gamble, Joe Cada and Mrs. Earl Renfrew.

I am especially indebted to Allison Decker, son of Arlie Decker, a former Spokane Westerner who was a son-in-law of Mr. Laird and a member of the company's management team until the 1931 reorganization. He loaned me some of his father's books and papers.

Printed sources I found most helpful are *Timber Roots: the Laird, Norton Story* by Kohlmeyer; *Timber and Men; the Weyerhauser Story* by Hidy, Hills and Nevins; and two newspapers, the *Palouse Republic* and the (Spokane) *Spokesman-Review*.