

RIVERSIDE

"POTLATCH'S FAMOUS FUN SPOT"

RIVERSIDE PARK
POTLATCH, IDAHO

SATURDAY NOV. 19

COMING TO YOU DIRECT FROM
NASHVILLE, TENN. & GRAND OLE OPRY

GEORGE JONES



GEORGE JONES

MISS DEE DON



MISS DEE DON

REX RINEHART



REX RINEHART

* *

POTLATCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2016

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The text by Barb Coyner “Riverside ‘Potlatch’s Famous Fun Spot’” is reprinted here with permission from the Latah County Historical Society.

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All Riverside posters are courtesy of Leonard Zahnow and Bertha Nygaard.

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RIVERSIDE

“POTLATCH’S FAMOUS FUN SPOT”

By Barbara Coyner



Early days at Riverside, probably a Fourth of July event, courtesy of John Wolheter.

NOVEMBER 7, 1958, brought nasty weather to the Palouse, so the local dance hall’s potbelly stove was cranked up full blast as dozens of locals shelled out two bucks a head to hear Johnny Cash belt out “Folsom Prison Blues”, “I Walk the Line” and other favorites. It was a big deal that the legendary singer was stopping at Potlatch’s famous nightspot, known simply as “Riverside.” With 30-cent beers to lubricate the spirits, local loggers and millworkers prepared to have a rowdy time, and the heavy snow and bitter cold weren’t enough to dampen enthusiasm as the crowd whooped it up. Years later, Cash was alleged to have called Potlatch the toughest damned town he’d ever played in, as the lusty crowd sizzled with energy.

CELEBRATION THREE BIG DAYS JULY 3-4-5

Riverside Park

MUSIC BY BARNEY MALERICK AND HIS ORCHESTRA
Dancing Sat. Night July 3--Midnight Matinee 12:01 a. m.,
Sun. July 5, and Mon. Night July 5

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

Girls' 40-yard Dash		Boys' 50-yard Dash	
First Prize	\$100.00	First Prize	\$100.00
Second Prize	\$50.00	Second Prize	\$50.00
Third Prize	\$25.00	Third Prize	\$25.00
Fourth Prize	\$10.00	Fourth Prize	\$10.00
Consolation	\$5.00	Consolation	\$5.00
Boys' 40-yard Dash		Women's Nail Driving Contest	
First Prize	\$100.00	First Prize	\$50.00
Second Prize	\$50.00	Second Prize	\$25.00
Third Prize	\$25.00	Third Prize	\$10.00
Fourth Prize	\$10.00	Fourth Prize	\$5.00
Consolation	\$5.00	Consolation	\$2.50
Girls' 30-yard Dash		Nickle Scramble	
First Prize	\$100.00	First Prize	\$50.00
Second Prize	\$50.00	Second Prize	\$25.00
Third Prize	\$25.00	Third Prize	\$10.00
Fourth Prize	\$10.00	Fourth Prize	\$5.00
Consolation	\$5.00	Consolation	\$2.50
100-yard Dash		100-yard Dash	
First Prize	\$100.00	First Prize	\$50.00
Second Prize	\$50.00	Second Prize	\$25.00
Third Prize	\$25.00	Third Prize	\$10.00
Fourth Prize	\$10.00	Fourth Prize	\$5.00
Consolation	\$5.00	Consolation	\$2.50

\$75.00 Cash Prize
BASEBALL ---

ROLLER SKATING

RIVERSIDE PARK

POTLATCH, IDAHO
EVERY SUNDAY

2:00 to 5:00 p. m.

Shoe Skates 75¢ Clamp Skates 50¢
For Special Prices on School or Club Skating Parties
Write Club Owner-Manager
MONTY W. DICKINSON

AUTOMOBILE RACES

THRILLS and SPILLS

MODEL T DERBY

RIVERSIDE RACE TRACK

NEAR POTLATCH, IDAHO

Potlatch American Legion—Robinson Post No. 81

SUNDAY, JULY 23

1:00 P. M.

Elimination Races Start at 1:00 P. M.

Admission Adults 50¢ Children 25¢

\$725.00 CASH PRIZES

AT LEAST 40 RACING CARS ARE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE

IN OF CASE RAIN RACES WILL BE RUN THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY

“We put posters everywhere,” Zahnow recalls, noting he and Marlene easily put over 100 miles on their car each time they put up posters. “We even put them up at the colleges and often had foreign students come to our shows, some from as far away as Pakistan. Most could hardly speak the language.”

For Riverside owner Leonard Zahnow, Cash's appearance was perhaps the spendiest show he'd put on during his tenure as owner from 1957 to 1962. The cost was \$1,000 for the night with Cash claiming 70 percent of gate receipts. Zahnow and his wife Marlene had blanketed the small towns from Coeur d'Alene to Moscow with show posters, hoping to make a profit on the widely acclaimed entertainer's appearance. The booking agency had given short notice, contacting Zahnow with the brief query, “Could you use Johnny Cash in two weeks?” Without hesitation, Zahnow had answered in the affirmative. From there he enlisted the talents of Mary Wilson, who ran a regular radio broadcast on Colfax radio KCLX from her two-story Palouse farmhouse. The woman knew her western entertainers and plugged the show right up to opening night. Zahnow also mailed out stacks of handbills at three cents each touting the Cash show, while the Palouse Republic ran a small front-page ad on the day of the event.

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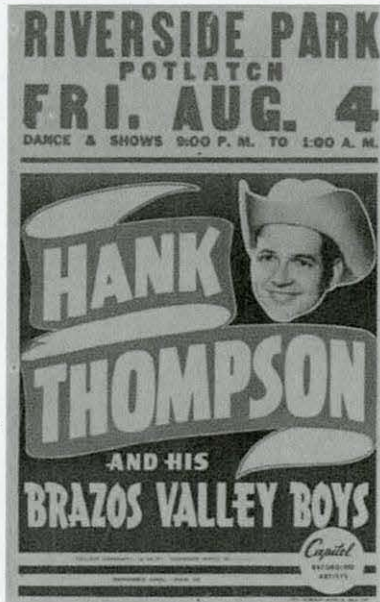
For Leonard and his wife Marlene there wasn't much dancing at the Cash show, or any of the other events for that matter. They were too busy watching the gates, checking ID's and keeping wood stoves stoked. Although the couple had gone into a 50-50 partnership with Leonard's dad Wesley mostly because they liked to dance, they found out the shows took plenty of energy just to keep things running smoothly. By the time they had swept up after the Johnny Cash show, they were already planning for the show the following weekend featuring Lefty Frizzell, Justin Tubb, Miss Deb Wood, Stonewall Jackson, and Benny Martin and his band. Ray Price was heading to town on December 5, with other lesser-known performers filling the gaps in between. Riverside also featured roller skating as part of the regular activities, and summer brought rodeos, car races and the extremely popular Fourth of July activities which usually lasted two days.

“The dance hall and all the other things didn't make that much money,” said Zahnow, as he and Marlene visited Potlatch for Potlatch Days 2014. They had come from their current home in Bellingham, Washington, for the celebration. “I worked in the mill at Potlatch where I graded lumber. Marlene worked the hall, taking care of the roller skating and school events. Riverside was a lot of work. It had a big roof to take care of. And it was

all heated with wood, so we would round up the creosote railroad ties and burn them, something you wouldn't be allowed to do now. We built bleachers, and we cut trees for firewood. I'd work all day at the mill and then cut a couple of cords of wood after work. When my dad and I started the partnership, his job was to buy the beer and pop, and I was to book the bands and do promotion. With all the maintenance, we were busy all the time."

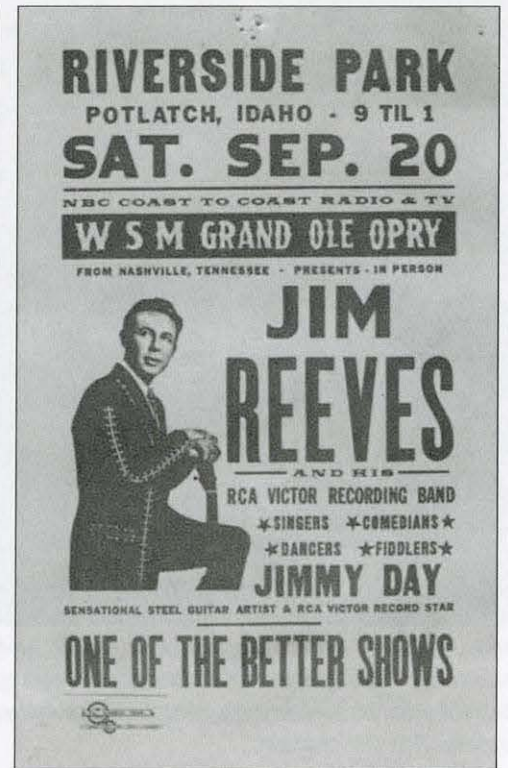
Marlene recalls that the dance hall didn't have a telephone, so the performers often walked up to the nearby Zahnow residence, a small house that came as part of the Riverside property. The house served as a familiar phone booth for performers such as Tex Ritter, Porter Wagoner, Little Jimmy Dickens, Buddy Knox, Hank Snow and others. Marlene and Leonard got to know performers in a more personal way because of the phone situation; the entertainers journeyed into Potlatch by car, bus or plane connections, then touched base with home or booking agencies via the Zahnow's telephone.

With a steady stream of stars coming out of Nashville via various booking agencies, Riverside's owners collected plenty of stories. There was the time Rex Rinehart came to perform with George Jones and the band got locked



Ray Price with the Humphery Twins and Bonnie, courtesy of Rod Headrick

up for making false statements to law enforcement, requiring \$300 in bail money to spring entertainers from a Lewiston jail. Zahnow said the booking agency offered to give him Hank Snow as a reward for posting the bail money. And then there was the situation in which Tex Ritter hit a deer with his rental car. Pee Wee King, who wrote "The Tennessee Waltz" and "Bonaparte's Retreat", played Riverside a couple of times. Marlene recalls that he was always telling stories of his own dance hall in Minneapolis which featured two floors, one with strictly polka music and the other with various dance bands.



SHOW AND DANCE
THURSDAY, JUNE 15

Sings: **FARON YOUNG**
 Hello Walls
 Country Girl
 Riverboat
 and
 many others

Your Jukebox
 Favorite
 Movies, T.V.
 & Recording
 Star.

Also GUEST STAR Gary Williams
 Hear Him Sing His Latest Album Release

They'll be talking about this show all summer!

RIVERSIDE PARK
 9:00 to 1:00 POTLATCH, IDAHO Ticket Sale
 Daylite Saving Time At 8:00

Riverside Park
 POTLATCH, IDAHO
SAT. JAN. 16th
 FROM 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Admission \$2.00

SHOW and DANCE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
IN PERSON
 Roulette Recording Artists
 "Swing Daddy"
 "I Think I'm Going to Kill My Self"

★ ★ ★
 "Hula Love" ★ "Party Doll"

★ ★ ★
BUDDY KNOX
 ★ and his RHYTHM ORCHIDS ★

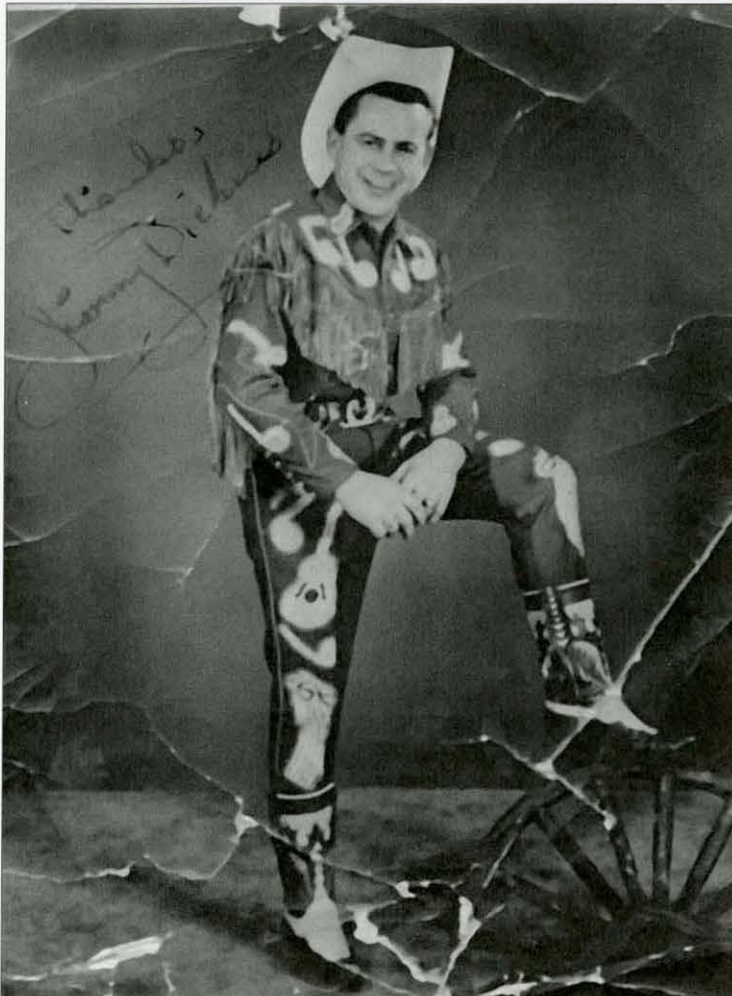
Have Fun, Go Dancing

RIVERSIDE PARK
 POTLATCH - IDAHO
FRI. SEP. 23
 DANCE and SHOWS 9:00 till 1:00

WWSM
GRAND OLE OPRY

★ STAR ★
DON GIBSON

RCA VICTOR RECORDING STAR



Treasured and worn autographed photo of Jimmy Dickens, featured on the Facebook site "You know you are from Potlatch Idaho if you remember...", noting the picture was given to Gene Anderson at the concert.

The Fourth of July was always a big deal usually spread over two days at Riverside, and one year the plan was to have Little Jimmy Dickens play both nights, while during the day there was to be a rodeo featuring cowboys from Riggins. Leonard notes that Marlene was answering a lot of calls about that event although "she didn't know a thing about rodeos." Dickens drove all the way from Nashville for the two days, never demanding a contract. Because he played Riverside at least eight times, he forged a strong friendship with the Zahnows. Viola resident Gene Anderson remembers vividly scampering up on stage with Dickens, with the entertainer always being gracious to the crowds. In many instances, old-timers recall that the performers were often in the bar just visiting with the locals before going on stage.

"Once you'd meet these people, you'd see that they all had special personalities," Zahnaw says. But the performers weren't the only ones the Zahnows grew to enjoy. There were the customers who came back again and again. Bobbi Mills (Potlatch High School Class of 1966) remembers her parents becoming good friends with Leonard and Marlene, and that meant that Bobbi and her brother Cliff also got in on the numerous shows at Riverside. Bobbi saw Tex Ritter in an afternoon show just for kids, and she did her share of roller skating too, as well as taking in the car races and gymkhanas. But the real memories were made when the Zahnows took Bobbi and Cliff with them all the way to Nashville. Because the Riverside owners knew many of the Nashville greats, the Mills kids were treated to a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



It's difficult to come up with the exact date that Riverside came into existence; scanning old newspapers such as the Palouse Republic at the museum in Palouse reveals very little about the dance hall, the race tracks and all the elements that made up Riverside. It is believed that the first version of Riverside was built in the 1920s, either as part of the grange hall at Kennedy Ford or just across the river from it. The Palouse Republic wrote in the June 29, 1923, issue that "The big dancing pavilion at Kennedy Ford is now almost complete and ready for the big two-day celebration which is to be staged at that place July 3 and 4." The article suggested that the Fourth of July extravaganza was to be the big debut of the dance hall and that attendance at the events was predicted to fill all hotels in the area, as well as drawing campers to the actual site.

Despite a lack of documentation on the early dance hall, an article by Lucas Beechinor in Spokane's Nostalgia Magazine from July 2007 furnishes more information on the new Riverside that emerged, probably in the early 1930s:

"When the old Kennedy Ford Grange burnt down in the very early 20th century, it was rebuilt by R.A. Hansen [sic], Sr., and Joe Tuft three miles west of Potlatch on the Moscow Highway. It was ninety-six feet across, had running water, electric lights, and plenty of parking space outside. A baseball park was also constructed nearby by J.O. Broyles, George Comstock, and Stanley Anderson who also put together a team that played there regularly.

"The octagonal shaped hall became a local hot spot for just about any social gathering. There was always a dance going on and advertisements for the hall described it as the "largest hall and best dance floor in Palouse Country." Over time, the hall was commonly referred to as Riverside."



Top Left: Buddy Knox at Riverside, courtesy of Leonard Zhanow

Top Right: Marlene Zahnw with Faron Young, courtesy of Leonard Zahnw

Above: Wesley Zahnw, Faron Young and Leonard Zahnw at Riverside. Faron played to nearly 900 people, making it one of the biggest shows at the dance hall. Courtesy of Leonard Zahnw

It is an interesting side note that Riverside's builder and first owner, Ray Hanson, was also known by some as "Haywire" because, according to noted chemist and early-day Potlatch resident Malcolm Renfrew, Hanson could fix anything with haywire. Hanson's son, Raymond Alva Hanson, worked at Riverside in his youth, moving tables out of the way to accommodate roller skating when the dancing was over. Young Hanson went on to



The legendary Riverside dance hall in an undated photo, source unknown

invent the self-leveling control for hillside combines. Like Malcolm Renfrew, Raymond Hanson enjoyed notoriety as an inventor, yet he never forgot his roots – or the time he'd spent at Riverside. In a 2010 interview for the Potlatch Historical Society, Renfrew, who played trombone, recalled fondly playing with dance bands that appeared at Riverside. No doubt the two prestigious Potlatch scientists kept their friendship going in later years; Renfrew often hearkened back to his merrymaking days at Riverside, frequently mentioning the Hanson family.

Another person who had an inside look at Riverside was Potlatch resident Ruth O'Reilly, who passed away in 2011 at the age of 92. As a youngster, she attended one of the first dances at Riverside's dance hall. The daughter of George and Bertha Gregory, Ruth and her older siblings Geneva and Earl enjoyed extra privileges because their father worked at the snack bar, which got them free dance tickets and a sandwich during the evening.

"I loved that place," Ruth recalled of Riverside. "It had a kitchen and was a six-sided building with windows that dropped down like flaps. They had dances there every week. One of the bands that played there was Tommy Dorsey. They were supposed to send a full band, but it was a stormy night, so when they got there it was only Tommy Dorsey and two others."

Ruth grew up dancing and her dad, a farmer, and her mom, a postal employee, were known as good dancers. Her brother Earl later became a dance instructor with Arthur Murray Studios in California. And Ruth met her husband Jim at a dance at Riverside. When the place later became a skating rink Jim also taught Ruth to skate there.

"There was all kinds of entertainment there," Ruth said in a 2010 interview for the Potlatch Historical Society. "There was a lot of baseball, too."

Ruth especially recalled the fun of the two- and three-day Fourth of July events that went on at Riverside. One year nearby Indian tribes came and another year there was an amateur rodeo, along with baseball and foot races. And of course there was dancing. In those days it was strictly ballroom – fox trot and waltz – but "no jitterbug," according to Ruth. Because Ruth's mom was the bookkeeper for the special events, Ruth got in on the dancing action and the attendance statistics as well. "One night there were 450 couples," Ruth remembers. "That's 900 people!"

Referring to the record-breaking 900 attendees, it's likely that Ruth O'Reilly was citing the Faron Young concert that Leonard Zahnow confirmed drew a huge crowd. "There were close to 900 people in that hall, and boy, that was crowded," Zahnow says. "It was February and the weather was just gorgeous. When Cash came, the weather was just terrible."

According to the *Nostalgia Magazine* article, admission to the dances at Riverside was 15 cents for women and 25 cents for men, with dancing from 9 p.m. to midnight every weekend. In winter stoves were installed all around the room to keep the place warm, and a taxi shuttled people to and from the building, the article said.

Marlene Zahnow recalls one time when a child got too close to the wood stove and the heat burned through her coat. The child was devastated by the coat episode so the Zahnows popped her in the car and ran



Riverside at flood stage, undated, from unknown source. "I remember seeing Riverside when the flood stage was as is! They were afraid that it was going to float down and take out the Hwy 95 bridge. They talked about dynamiting it in order to prevent. Not sure if they ever did?" Jim Spangler quote from Facebook

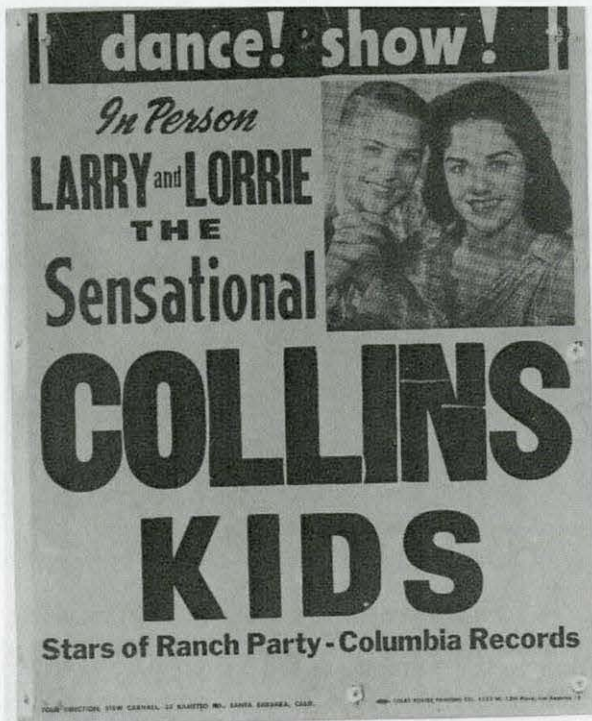
to a nearby store to buy her a new coat. "Oh, how she loved that little coat," Marlene adds of the incident.

Perhaps the biggest collection of memories surrounding Riverside was the annual Fourth of July extravaganza, which not only brought in rodeo events, singing and dancing, but even local Native American tribes who loved the auto racing and rodeos. Setting up their tepees, tribal members avidly joined the party. The whole area bustled with activities as families rolled in with kids, picnic baskets and an appetite for fun. Kids could roller skate, while the women visited and the men smoked, talked of the harvest and just kicked back for a day away from the everyday farming and logging work.

Mention Riverside these days and many of the locals growing up around Potlatch reach for their favorite memories like the place was still alive and well. On Facebook postings, Debbie Poston Rochon told of the days when her dad was part of the pit crew for the stock car races. As a kid, Debbie sat on the hillside with her friends in the hot afternoon sun, eventually getting so dusty that the dust just fell off her when she stood up. Monica Horn Keough also remembers sitting on the rocks on the hillside to watch the auto races, as well as roller skating in the pavilion. Cindy Donahue Chaney says that her mom saw Marty Robbins perform and still talks about the show as one of the best she'd seen. And Janice Vowels Johnson said that while her mom didn't allow her to attend evening shows at Riverside, she was allowed to roller skate there occasionally on Sundays. Janice's husband Irv was working the evening shift at a Moscow gas station when Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton stopped for gas after playing an evening show at the famous night spot.

Although the Zahnows enjoyed their time at Riverside and probably hosted the most famous of the entertainers there, the couple eventually sold out due to the heavy workload involved in maintaining the grounds and hosting the shows. Because of the dance hall's close proximity to the Palouse River, the place frequently flooded and had to be repaired. As a new owner took over, the dance hall finally succumbed to the often damaging flood waters and there was no move to rebuild as the famous Riverside faded into oblivion.

Notes: Thanks to Janet Barstow at the Roy Chatters Newspaper and Printing Museum in Palouse for research help. Also Dulce Kersting at the Latah County Historical Society. Interviews with Malcolm Renfrew, Ruth O'Reilly and Leonard Zahnaw were previously done by Barbara Coyner for the Potlatch Historical Society. Riverside is a community treasure chest of memories around Potlatch and it is difficult to credit the many people who reminisced about their times dancing, roller skating or attending the Fourth of July festivities. The quote about Potlatch by Johnny Cash is almost impossible to attribute correctly. Josh Ritter spoke of Johnny Cash at a concert in Moscow, quoting Cash as saying that "Potlatch was the meanest damned town he ever played." Some say Cash referred to the town as tough, not mean. Zahnaw said he and his family tried to make Riverside a good family spot, yet others said things could occasionally get fairly rowdy. Either way, Riverside will go down in Latah County history as a huge attraction and a little piece of Nashville, especially during the 50s and 60s.



The collections of the Potlatch Historical Society continue to grow with the interest and contributions of many. The Society is interested in adding memorabilia from Riverside as well as personal recollections of events and activities that were held.

“There were a couple of guys who called themselves Garibaldi and Zeke ... played at numerous events around Potlatch back in the 50s.” (Garibaldi was Gary Shawver and Zeke was Zeke West.) “They did play at Riverside and were very good. They did an excellent “Mule Skinner Blues.”

--Ed McBride and Joe Rohn

“I started going there on Sundays when I was in high school—1948-1952. It was a great place to meet our friends for some skating and socializing. The skates were clip-on. We had to wear very substantial shoes in order to keep them on. At that time, most of the girls were wearing saddle shoes, black and white. The clamps were a little hard on those shoes. We would skate for a while and then do some running around in our cars. I especially like to spin brodies in my dad’s car. I was such a tom boy and tried to keep up with the boys when it came to driving. What a muddy mess when we were done for the day.”

“In later years, since Don and I love to dance, we took in almost all of the dances with the great bands that came there. I remember Johnny Cash, T. Texas Tyler, Little Jimmie Dickens, Ferlin Husky, etc. When the big name bands were there, we didn’t feel safe going outside. A lot of times, there were fights going on in the parking lot.” --Betty Nagle



POTLATCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving the Unique History and Heritage of Potlatch, Idaho

According to Carol Haddock writing in the PHS newsletter in 2008, “the Potlatch Historical Society had its roots in a couple of other community interests – a library and a community development organization. The community had expressed its desire to see its unique history preserved when the Scenic 6 Community Development Council formed in 1993 as part of the Idaho Gem Groups. ... One evening in the spring of 1998 Carmine and Barb Lockwood, Jack and Barb Coyner, John and Sally Perrine-Hartman, Suzanne Lay, Monte Wilson and Jim and Carol Haddock met over supper to form the Potlatch Historical Society. The Historical Society held its first “History Day” in November at the high school gym.” Today the Potlatch Historical Society is a permanent committee of the Scenic Six Community Development Council.

The PHS Mission Statement is to preserve and promote an interest in the rich history of North Latah County rural communities; contribute to the location, preservation and display of items of historical importance in the Potlatch area for the enjoyment of the public; and to publish periodic newsletters, conduct annual events and promote historic memorabilia which further knowledge and interest in the history of the area. Exhibits from its collection are on display at City Hall and the Society maintains a presence at the annual Potlatch Days celebration. Memorabilia items are available for purchase at Blackbird at the Depot and at community events.

Today, as the Potlatch Historical Society is actively continuing its mission you are invited to join its efforts.

Your membership is welcome and you can find us on the web at www.potlatchhistoricalsociety.org.

POTLATCH RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION

From the 1930s to the 1960s, Riverside Park was known through the region for great entertainment such as Johnny Cash, George Jones as well as many big bands. The Association’s vision is to bring that image back to Potlatch. As an economic boost to our region, the Association is establishing the Potlatch Country Music Festival with the intent that it will become an annual event. The first Festival will be in Potlatch Ponderosa Park on August 6, 2016. The Association invites your support and sponsorship. Join in making the event a huge success and in marking a new milestone in the post company town era.

You can reach the Association at Potlatch Riverside Festival Association, P.O. Box 174, Potlatch, Idaho 83855.

COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

PRESENTED BY THE POTLATCH RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION

SAT. AUG 6

POTLATCH PONDEROSA PARK 10 AM - 5 PM

On the Stage!

**RETURN TO
RIVERSIDE**

In Person!

BEAR GRASS

SHILOH

BLUE HIGHWAY

THE HANKERS