

A Walking Tour Of Potlatch Neighborhoods



Unidentified people in front of 720 Cedar Street

"Life in Potlatch was different," noted Ray Harris, who knew the place well. The town kept time to the rhythm of the mill, waking with the morning march of working men to the plant; taking noon lunch when the sawmill paused at mid-day; preparing for evening activities at the night whistle when sometimes, if the plant operated at full capacity, the homeward-bound day shift walking up the hill met the plantbound swing shift going down. Potlatch residents slept in company houses, attended company schools, walked on company side walks, kept company yards, shopped in the company stores...Life here was different for everyone who lived it...How one lived depended upon nationality, age, sex, income, marital status, and house location.

Keith C. Petersen, *Company town: Potlatch, Idaho, and the Potlatch Lumber Company.*

A Brief History

Where would Potlatch Lumber Company house the 500 workers needed to operate its new sawmill, planned to be the largest white-pine mill in the world? Frederick Weyerhaeuser and the company's stockholders had already decided that the millsite they owned in nearby Palouse, Washington was too small. Besides, they wanted their own town which they could control. The idea of a company town providing decent living conditions was modeled on the planned community of Pullman, Illinois. Potlatch officials agreed that strict control of housing, schools, and hospitals, and forbidding the sale of alcohol would, in Weyerhaeuser's words, "give us conditions of life which will be attractive to the better element of laboring man."

Construction began in 1905, and the mill began operating in September 1906. By 1910 Potlatch had a booming population of slightly over 2,000 people. It remained a company-owned and operated town until the 1950's.

Potlatch was planned with two residential areas on the north and south hills, separated by a commercial district close to the millsite. The Company hired Spokane architect C. Ferris White to plan and supervise construction. When he arrived in January 1906, 28 small houses were already built. By spring there were over 100 finished on the north hill, and White eventually oversaw the construction of 201 more homes.

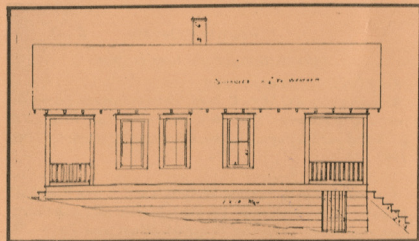
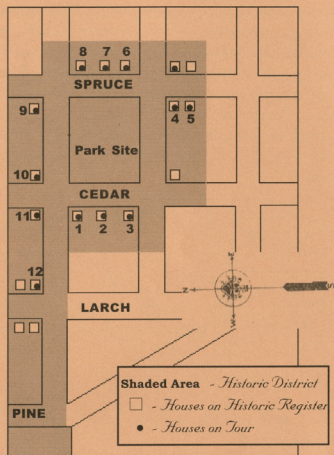
The houses constructed for the mill managers were on what became known as Nob Hill, south of the commercial district. The Nob Hill Historic District, outline on the map, includes the original ten houses constructed in 1906 and others built later. As planned by Assistant General Manager Allison Laird, the houses surrounded a park in the classical style. Trees lined the streets, and boardwalks kept pedestrians out of mud or dust. These substantial houses are all wood frame bungalows, a popular style at the turn of the century, distinguished by gable roofs and dormers, and usually of one and one-half stories. Some had steam heat piped from the mill.



Workers' Houses

Tour of the Nob Hill Historic District

The Nob Hill houses on the tour are identified by the name of the original occupant, and the symbols indicate the 19 that are on the National Register of Historic Places. All houses are privately owned and are not open to the public. The central park is now owned by the LDS Church.



Blueprint of workers houses at 655, 665, 710, 720 and 740 Pine Street.
 "Entire building to be sheathed outside and inside with #3 and #4 sheathing
 - outside and subfloor laid diagonally - all joints on bearings. Cornice -
 usual bungalow style. Outside doors fitted with mortise locks. Inside doors
 - Rim Locks. Windows fitted with spring bolts. Inside base of 1" x 8"
 baseboards and quarter round. Chimney to have 8" flue. Woodsheds and
 water closets same as others on same alley. All rooms lined with felt and
 ordinary wall paper over same. Three coats of paint outside and two
 coats inside. All workmanship shall be first class."

1- 330 Cedar: William Deary, the company's first general manager, personally selected this site and worked closely with architect White on its design. It was the largest house with nine rooms and the most expensive at \$6,342. Deary, an Irish Canadian and experienced woodsman, helped convince Weyerhaeuser to invest in North Idaho white pine. His hard work and shrewd business sense became legendary, and the town of Deary is named for him.

2- 320 Cedar: The seven-room W.D. Humiston house was constructed in 1906. Note the original front boardwalk, one of the few remaining in Potlatch. Humiston arrived in 1906 as the company's land agent. He later advanced to assistant general manager and oversaw Potlatch's innovative efforts in forest products research which began in a laboratory in the basement of his house.



Interior of the Laird Home. Allison and Alice Laird, Will Hays, Elizabeth, Anna and Charlotte Laird.

3- 310 Cedar: The Allison W. Laird home has seven rooms and cost \$4,171 when constructed in 1906. Anna Laird designed the exterior and interior. It was the second most expensive house in Potlatch and was enlarged to nine rooms in 1912. First as assistant general manager and then as general manager of the company, Laird oversaw the construction of the town and supervised community activities. After Laird's death, general managers J.E. Irwin and James J. O'Connell lived here.

4- 230 Spruce: On the corner of Spruce and Third Street is the six room house built for W.J. Gamble. A railroad man who worked his way west, Gamble was hired by Potlatch in 1910 in part because the company baseball team needed a good player. He was general manager of the company's Washington, Idaho and Montana Railroad until 1951.

5- 220 Spruce: The P.M. Lachmund house constructed in 1914 has nine rooms and a handsome large porch. Lachmund was the company's first sales manager and member of the Potlatch home guard which was founded in 1917 to defend the mill from socialist saboteurs.

6- 315 Spruce: The house was built for E.J. Davis, the company's master mechanic. Maxwell Williamson, the next occupant, was the assistant sales manager, and is remembered for convincing Laird to build the town gymnasium. An early Potlatch map indicates that this house was White's design #108, the same used for the Humiston house at 320 Cedar. Although the exteriors are different, they have the same number of rooms and cost about the same to build.

7- 325 Spruce: The seven-room F.C. McGowan house was built in 1906. It has the stone foundation, gable overhang room and shed dormer typical of White's designs. The McGowans moved to Deary in 1907 to manage their half share interest in the Deary Townsite-Company. Along with Joseph Terteling, McGowan was one of the original incorporators of the Potlatch Brick Company.

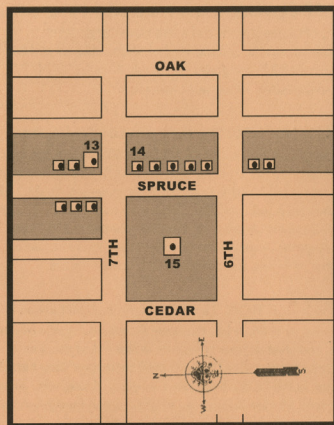
8- 335 Spruce: The G.W. Morgan house has eight rooms and was constructed in 1906. Morgan was the company's first townsite supervisor and lived here until 1910. From 1910 to 1919 the A.A. McDonald family lived in the house. As the aggressive general manager of the Potlatch Mercantile, McDonald attracted customers from throughout the inland region.

9- 410 Spruce: The two-story, seven-room F.I. Divers house remains virtually unaltered. The current occupant, Paul Tobin, Jr. was the last manager of the Potlatch Unit when the company dismantled the sawmill in 1983.

10- 415 Cedar: The two-story, eight-room C.W. Rogers house was built at a cost of \$3,056. It has bays on the north and south and an eight-post open porch on the west facade. Rogers was in charge of shipping for the company.

11- 410 Cedar: The Fred Gleave house has seven rooms; the deck on the west and north is a new addition. Gleave was the company's auditor and bookkeeper until 1915 and a staunch supporter of recreational programs for the workers.

12- 415 Larch: The two-story, eight-room M.L. Seymour House was the first house on Nob Hill to be occupied. It is the only one of the original ten management houses not located around the central park. Seymour began working for the company in 1905, helping to lay out the sawmill. He became the mill's first superintendent.



Tour of the Workers' District

Workers' houses were built on the north hill on a grid plan. The company rejected the original design of curving boulevards as too expensive. Architect White followed a few basic designs, grouping similar types on a single block. The houses are wood frame bungalows with wood siding. Variety in the placement of the doors, windows, and porches helped provide individuality. The houses ranged from three to seven rooms and cost from under \$450 to \$2,000. The smallest were at the bottom of the hill, and as workers gained seniority they moved up into larger quarters. A variety of outbuildings located in the alleys included wood sheds, storage sheds, and outhouses. The company preferred hiring married men whom they regarded as more reliable. Only married workers could rent houses; bachelors lived in boarding houses or rented rooms from families.

Spruce Street has the highest concentration of workers' houses retaining their original appearance. The Workers Historic District is located on a three-block area of Spruce Street and the 600 block of Cedar Street. It includes 13 houses and the Catholic Church. Walking up Spruce from Sixth you can see the variations on the basic bungalow design. On some houses it is still possible to see the original stone foundation and placement of front and back stoops. It is interesting to note changes made in the houses under private ownership.

13- St. Mary's Catholic Church: The company constructed this church on Spruce street in 1906. The bell tower, added in 1920, has Gothic arched windows. The attached rectory was built by the congregation in 1926.

Three houses, one on Spruce and two outside the historic district, represent typical three-, four-, and six-room styles.

14- 655 Spruce: The six-room house was constructed in 1906 at a cost of \$1,676. Note the diamond lattice window on the door and the side.

15- Potlatch School: Across Spruce Street was the Potlatch School. Designed by C. Ferris White, the original building had eight rooms. Allison Laird took a personal interest in the school, and the community took pride in its ranking as one of the best in the state. Today it is an apartment building.



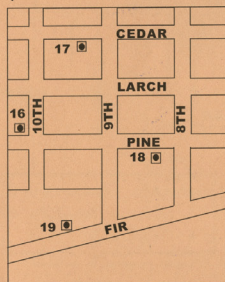
Potlatch School

16- 1015 Pine: This bungalow is the best preserved of the town's four-room houses. Constructed in 1908 at a cost of \$844, it was one of 14 houses the company built for the expanding work force.

17- 940 Cedar: In 1906 the lumber company constructed 19 three-room houses. This is the only one which remains largely as originally constructed. This square 22' x 22' bungalow was designed by C. Ferris White and built at a cost of \$604. It has a wooden door on the east and one on the west with eight double hung sash windows, two on each side of the house. The foundation, probably stone, has been covered by vertical wood siding. Next to the bachelor quarters in the boarding houses, these were the least expensive rental units.

18- 850 Pine: In 1910 there were at least five boarding houses in Potlatch. Historically known as the Green Boarding House, this structure is a reminder of how workers' lived in the early 1900s. In addition to serving as a boarding house, this was also the community bakery. By 1923 the building also housed the town hospital. Between 1910 and 1928 wings were added on the south side. Today it is an aptment house.

19- 1015 Fir: The only brick house constructed by the company is the Joseph A. Terteling house. This eight-room house was constructed in 1916 at a cost of \$3,164. One of five Potlatch houses built in that year, it was probably designed by A.M. Holmes. Terteling established the Potlatch Brick Company which supplied bricks for the mill. The Terteling home was no doubt constructed by the family with brick from their company, although like all the other houses in Potlatch, it was owned by the Potlatch Lumber Company.



Workers' Districts



Acknowledgements

Information for the tour is from

Keith Petersen, Company Town
Keith Petersen and Mary E. Reed, "Reconnaissance Survey Report, City of Potlatch," Sept. 1984; and Petersen and Reed, "Potlatch Historic Site Survey, National Register Nominations," Dec. 1985.

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