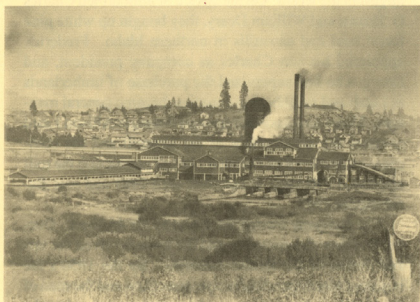


A Walking Tour of the Potlatch Commercial District



Potlatch Mill

The Potlatch Lumber Company soon found out that they didn't have enough room down there (at Palouse) for the size of plant they wanted to build, so they came up to Potlatch where land was cheap and they bought the whole site for the townsite and mill and storage and everything...And their idea was that a company town, properly run, was better than the average town. Their idea was that their men should not be burdened with excessive rates, rentals, that you should have good schools for them, you should have a company store where they can buy things at a fair price.

Railroad Man: A Conversation with W.J. Gamble

A Brief History

North Idaho's immense stands of white pine drew the attention of Great Lakes lumbermen, particularly lumber baron Frederick Weyerhaeuser. At the turn of the century the great pine forests of the midwest were gone, and they looked to the west for new resources. Of all the companies the Weyerhaeusers established in the Pacific Northwest, Potlatch Lumber Company, created in 1903, was the largest. Weyerhaeuser and his various associates conceived and planned the Potlatch mill to be the largest in the world. On the advice of lumbermen Charles O. Brown and William Deary, they bought up white pine forest land and sawmills in northern Idaho. Frederick appointed his son Charles as company president, and Deary, who had supervised the purchase of timberlands in Latah and neighboring counties, became general manager. Deary and assistant general manager Allison Laird oversaw the construction of the sawmill and the company-owned town of Potlatch. At full production the mill employed 500 men. It operated until 1981 and was dismantled in 1983.

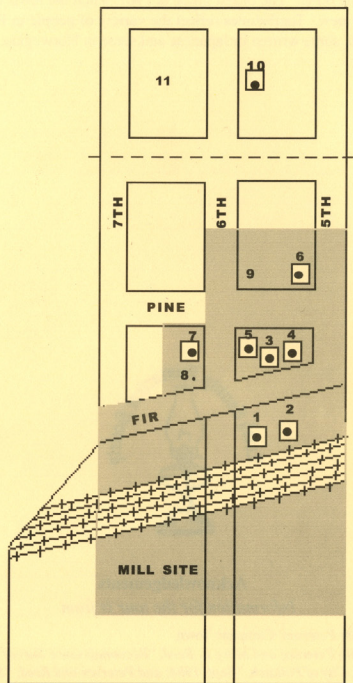
The company owned the townsite for 45 years. During that time the company and the town survived the ups and downs of the lumber business. By the 1950's the business was expanding in new directions and the men of the board of directors most interested in preserving the company town were now dead: William Deary, Allison Laird, and Charles Weyerhaeuser. In the fall of 1952 the Potlatch Company sent letters to the residents of the town announcing its plans to sell the townsite and offering them the first option to buy their homes. The Potlatch Company donated the library, fire hall and truck, church lots, and other public facilities to the town.

Potlatch was designed to meet all the needs of a community of 2,000 people. The company provided social amenities, police and fire protection, schools, a library, clubs and civic organizations. This tour highlights some of the nonresidential structures remaining from those days when Potlatch was one of the West's largest company towns.



Allison Laird & Frederick Weyerhaeuser at a Potlatch Lumber Camp

Map of the Commercial District



Shaded Area - Historic District
 □ - Houses on Historic Register
 ● - Houses on Tour



Washington, Idaho and Montana Railway depot and train

1- W. I. & M. Depot: The Commercial Historic District is grouped near the old mill site. The first major building completed in Potlatch by architect C. Ferris White was the Washington, Idaho, and Montana Railway depot. The W. I. & M. was constructed as a logging railroad but also carried passengers, mail, and freight. A W. I. & M. steam engine stands north of the depot in the Scenic Six Historic Park. The depot also housed the first administrative offices and at one time had apartments on the second floor. The exterior is essentially unchanged.

2- Creamery: Bordering the W. I. & M Railway depot on the south is a small frame, one-story building which was the creamery. Local farmers brought or shipped their cream here which was made into butter for the town and the numerous logging camps.

3- Storage Shed: Across the alley from the depot is a storage building built during that period. **This building has been demolished and replaced by a City of Potlatch garage since the first publication of this brochure.**

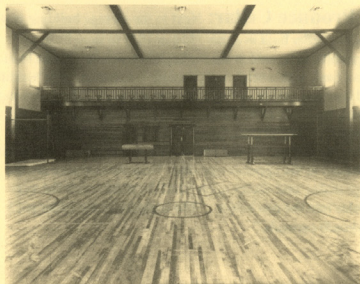
4- Produce Cellar: Next to the storage building is a produce cellar built in either 1910 or 1911 to store fruits and vegetables to be sold at the Potlatch Mercantile. It was built into a bank with a brick and concrete foundation. The building had double wooden sliding doors on the west. The following description is from the July 21, 1911 *Palouse* (Washington) *Republic*: "The walls are solid brick 14 inches thick, and extend downward 14 feet to a cement foundation. Wagons are unloaded at the upper or east end. Near the entrance are the large scales, and chutes upon which to slide or roll the vegetables into the pits below... The capacity of the cellar is 25 (railroad) carloads."



Administration Building

5- Administration Building: The Administration building was constructed in 1917 and is distinguished by the large open porch on the south facade. The Townsite Department, located here, supervised the town's various operations. These included the hospital, the Mercantile store, fire department, school, gymnasium, repairs to houses and streets, garden plots, and the cemetery. When the town was incorporated in the 1950s it became the city hall.

6- Townsite Department Warehouse: This two story frame building was the Townsite Department Warehouse. The building has a wood ramp on the south side leading to two large double doors.



Basketball court in the town gymnasium

7-Gymnasium: The gymnasium, designed by architect A. M. Holmes in 1916, is the largest building in Potlatch and was one of the most important. It housed a basketball court with a maple floor, lounges, club rooms and locker rooms. People of all ages and backgrounds gathered at card games and social events. The open porch has a balustrade that runs the entire length of the south facade and wraps around to the east and west sides. The town's original gymnasium burned in 1915.



William Deary on his "Speeder"

8- Deary Monument: In front of the gymnasium is a large monument erected in 1921. Two large boulders with a bronze plaque are dedicated to the memory of William Deary, first general manager of the company, who died in 1913. As the general manager Deary supervised the mill, logging crews, the railroad, and construction and maintenance of the town.

Two sites along 6th Street were important to the life of Potlatch and are either gone or greatly changed

9- Site of the Merc: The Potlatch Mercantile, commonly called "The Merc," designed by C. Ferris White and owned by the company, opened in 1907. It was one of the area's largest stores. With two floors and a basement, it sold everything from groceries and clothing to hardware and machinery. In 1963 it burned to the ground and the site is now a parking lot and a small shopping center.



Selling Force and Delivery Wagons of the Potlatch Mercantile Company, Potlatch, Idaho.

The company built two churches for the community. The original Protestant Union Church was replaced by a larger structure on the corner of 6th and Cedar Streets in 1912. The church was the largest place of worship in the county and had stained glass windows donated by Allison Laird. The building was used for many social events before it burned to the ground in the 1950's. St Mary's Catholic Church on Spruce Street is still in use and is in the Worker's Historic District.

To the right of 6th Street you can see the playfield and the community park where the annual community day and logging competitions are held.

10-American Legion Cabin: On the south side of Scenic Highway 6, opposite the cemetery and adjacent to the park, is the American Legion Cabin. The cabin is one of the very few buildings in Potlatch not constructed by the Company. It was erected in 1929, as the plaque indicates, as a memorial to Potlatch servicemen who died in World War I. The company donated the site and logs to the Legion and members and friends constructed it. In addition to serving as the Legion headquarters, the cabin was an important social center and meeting place.

11- Cemetery: Across the highway from the Legion cabin is the city cemetery. As was customary at the time, Catholics were buried on one side of the cemetery and Protestants on the other. The oldest grave is 1907, when the town was very new. Tombstones reflect the variety of people in Potlatch, some written in Japanese and some in Norwegian.



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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