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MILTON (WA) HISTORY C.2

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EARLY HISTORY OF MILTON, WASHINGTON

COLLECTED BY VERA S. ADAMS, JULY 1948

The following people were interviewed, who gave this information:

ALBERT SIMMONS

ETHEL WATERS

EDITH WATERS

CHARLES BLAUVELT JR.

MR. & MRS. W. J. MEERS

MR. & MRS. JOSEPH MARTIN

MR. & MRS. FRANK FETTERLY

EARLY HISTORY OF MILTON, WASHINGTON

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In 1885 or 1860 Fort Steilacoom was the largest settlement or town in this area. There was a military road leading to Seattle over which soldiers and supplies passed. This road followed an easterly direction; then turned sharply north, passed through what is now Puyallup; the town, and went directly north past Five Mile Lake to the port of Seattle, a telegraph line followed this road.

There was an Indian Commission set up near what is now the Cushman Hospital. It was called Chushman then, also. The Puyallup Indian tribe was in this area. At first the Indians were allotted land for a reservation out on the prairie south and west of Tacoma about where Fort Lewis lies now. The Indians did not like the location. The land was poor for their needs; so the Indian chief was allowed to travel through the woods to choose the land he wanted. He did not follow the lines heretofore marked off by the white man. The chief chose creeks and rough land where his people could hunt and fish. The Indian chief in company with the surveyors, travelled through the woods to point out the land of his choice for their home. It was equal to a township in acres. He did not follow the valley land around Puyallup and that around Fife, through the richest and the best. The east border line ran up on the bluff or crest of the hill on Porter Avenue now in Milton, and in a westerly direction to the Bay even including a part of Vashon Island. This choice was made in one days ride.

As a defense, a block-house was erected on the bluffs, now called Fife-Heights. It stood there until 1920 when owners of the property demolished it.

In 1876 Andrew J. Martin, with his family, was the first white settler to live on the Puyallup Indian Reservation.

He had permission to do so from Indian agent at Cushman.

Jerry Meeker, a half-breed Indian who lives at Brown's

Point now, helped to care for a stallion on the farm which

was used for the propagation of better horses in this section.

There seems to be some dispute concerning who was first in

this matter of white settlers. W.J. Meers, stepson of

Mr. Counter, a Civil War Veteran, claims that Counter, with

his family came into the same locality in 1882, having

arrived at Orting in 1879 from California.

In 1883 Charles Blauvelt Sr. bought twenty acres of land

from Martin and eight acres from Cash Kenney, whose stepson

was John Chapman. They were among the earliest in the

section beyond the St. George Indian School.

The Indians sold some of their land to the whites before

the provisional government of the state was set up; but

those sales were illegal transactions and the sales were

not approved by court later. As a consequence, the Indian

heirs came back and claimed their land, forcing the whites

to evacuate. One man is known to have lost as much as

\$250.00 in this manner.

W. J. Meers claims the distinction of making the first

road in that section where they lived. He married Josephine

Martin, daughter of A.J. Martin, Charles Blauvelt Sr. married another Martin daughter, Martha. Both families continued to live there for most of the remainder of their lives. Both reared families of their own. Sarah Meers became Sarah Roark. Charles Blauvelt had four sons, Charles Jr., Thomas, Walter, and William, all living in or near Milton, and two daughters. A third Martin daughter married a brother of W. J. Meers and returns to visit occasionally.

Libo and his son, John Libo took homesteads. John J. Gale came in 1882.

Pat Kelly, a Civil War Veteran, settled on the same section as Mr. Webb. Mr. Webb did not live there continuously, however. He went to work for Jim Carson, who owned and operated a ferry on the Puyallup River very near the present town. That was before there were any bridges across rivers.

There was another ferry up near the Cushman School which was operated by Indian Chief Sitwell. These so-called ferries could transport only one team of horses at a time.

In 1889 Webb established his settlement on the southeast corner of a crossroads to be known later as Webb Center. Mr. Webb bought rights to A. J. Martins' school land. Mr. Morrill, Cash Kenney, and his stepson, John Chapman, were among this group also. Mr. Miller, who was on a homestead, sold his right to Timrow Conner, a negro who worked as a janitor in Tacoma. Mr. Porter had a homestead on top of the hill. There was a trail from Porters house about where

Etherington's house now stands, down the hill where Porter Avenue now is, to the home of his son-in-law, C.A. German. Later, his homestead was divided and sold as lots for other homes. People walked because there were only trails. Even wagon trails were very difficult to traverse, because the buffalo tracks caused them to be very rutty. The dense growth of berry vines and underbrush, added to the thick growth of Douglas Fir, made it next to impossible to go anywhere except the paths made. Mild climate and great precipitation caused the vegetation to remain the same. The hillsides were so dense with Douglas Fir, that a wagon trail, hewed out in 1901 or 1902, was dark and only just wide enough for one-way traffic, with occasionally a "turn-out" along the way where wagons might meet. This was described by Fannie Vandershelton Fetterly, and the road was the one leading to Des Moines from her home on the present Roosevelt Avenue in Milton where she and her husband, Frank live.

In 1889, Seattle burned. It consisted of wooden shacks built at about the present site of Yesler Way. A fire engine was sent from Tacoma to Seattle. The engine that figured in that episode, a traction steam engine which ran on the so-called highway, was sold to the Stone-Webster Co. of Boston for use in construction of the interurban through this section. Bosworth Bros. surveyed first. Trestles were built for the engine and flat cars were used to haul gravel and dirt for the train bed. 125 teams of mules and horses were used with scrapers. Deep ravines had to be filled in. They lived in

shacks around the mill. Frank Fetterly was cook at the mill, beginning in March, 1901. Mrs. Fetterly helped him, of course. Their son, Bert was born Nov. 2, 1901. He was the first new baby in this section. Mrs. Fetterly said that at one time, the entire camp was quarantined for two months with smallpox. The boy who waited on tables, Harry Hazelton, had it worst. She helped to care for the sick. She wasn't alarmed about her baby getting it. None of the Fetterlys got it. One evening at quitting time, a flat car was left on the trestle. The following morning, when the construction gang came to work, they looked in the direction where work had been suspended, and they just couldn't believe it. Trestle, flat car, and load had disappeared. The bog had "swallowed" it all. In that section then, they had to drive pilings, one on top of the other, 130 feet long, before they hit bottom. That happened right down below the old city hall where there was a wild cranberry bog. Joseph L. Martin, son of A. J. Martin, was one of the many who worked on that construction gang. There were workmen of every kind; many Italians, a few Hawaiians, men from all parts. They lived in shacks and tents near the mill. Mrs. Fetterly claims to be the first white woman to take a train ride to Tacoma. That was its first trip, in the summer of 1901. The engine went that far. Its first official run was in October 1902 and they went shopping in Auburn. The Puget Sound Electrical Company operated the Interurban line and owned the timber and lumber mill. The local men helped to cut the first trees. The mill employed 60 men. W. J. Meers, in 1892, was

foreman of logging on the western slope at the top of the hill and back toward the canyon of what is now Jovita. He said he hewed squared timbers 12 by 12 and 12 by 16 for erecting the mill. Men cut 60,000 feet of timber per day, one old-timer states. The machinery was installed and the rest of the mill completed after that. The whole western slope of the hill on which Milton is built, you might say, was in the midst of these logging operations. The last skid road was on Porter Avenue. A camp was built about where Charles Blauvelt Jr.'s house sets now. Another was where the Milton Food Center is. The mill was down on the flats about the center of the present Commercial Avenue. The power house for the interurban line was near. Sawdust from the mill filled in the draw where Britts now live. Klepples store stood just south of the present site of Albert Simmons' store. It burned later. Mr. Herman operated a store near it a year or two after that.

There were a number of other mills in this vicinity. A shingle mill operated near where the lower pump station stands. Mr. Hughes started a mill in 1908 towards Firwood. Hostetter's mill was a large one in the edge of King County. The Hostetter daughter married Mr. Mielke of Fife. Reynolds and Reynolds owned a mill this side of Hostetter's. Monte Vista Lumber Co. had one near those two.

The St. George Indian Catholic School was one of the first schools established. It is thought that it possibly began in 1875 or 1880. It was a grammar school, grades one through eight.

When the Indians completed that, they could attend Cushman. Some white children attended St. George's also. Mrs. Fetterly was one who did. When they finished the course there, they could go to Tacoma to high school. Fr. Hylabolis was one of the first Catholic missionaries to come to the St. George Mission. Hylbos Creek was named after him. A number of the Indians and half-breeds, especially, were well-educated, having attended the Indian school of Chemowa, Oregon. Henry Cross, a half-breed, went back to Kansas and did well as a lawyer.

Eugene and Kenneth Kautz, half-breed Indian brothers, lived where the Fife Flower Shop now is.

Joe Craig lived across from the present site of "The Red Pig".

One half-breed owned a 160-acre berry ranch for a long time.

His father had homesteaded the land. Henry Sicade owned good valley land where Mr. Andree now lives near Firwood.

John Guyette, an Indian, built the house where Miethke's live now, just across the road from the Flower Shop. He lived there for quite some time.

The white settlers all speak well of the Indians of this section in regard to their dealing with them. They didn't bother the whites in any way. The only thing for which they were criticized was their inertia and shiftlessness after they began to use alcoholic drink. The Milton Land Co. was organized with the idea of promoting the sale of land. In 1904, Mr. Darling platted the Porter section. It was filed at the county office the same year. R.C. Culver Sr. was the salesman in 1905, and represented the company. His son, R.C. Culver Jr. and daughter,

Mary, who is Mrs. Tom Blauvelt, live in Milton now. A free car was chartered on the Interurban to sell land to prospective buyers.

The settlement was first called Mill town. The first mail came through Puyallup, a rural route. By petition, it was arranged to have it come out by way of Tacoma. When the Milton Land Co. was organizing, they found that the U.S. government would not allow a fourth class post office to have two words in a name, and there was at that time some place in Washington called Mill Town; so they shortened it, and felt it to be proper because of the name of the renowned poet. The first post office was at Herman's store, established July 31, 1905. Charles Herman was the first postmaster.

The first school was built after the town was named. The original structure forms the framework for the present building. The first teacher was Edythe Du Frasco. She later became Mrs. Joseph I. Martin. She is a sister of Mrs. Birtley Ball who lives in Milton on Porter Avenue. The Martins lived in the house on 2nd. Avenue occupied by Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Johnson, across from the Methodist Church. There were 60 children in that first school in 1905. The children were not graded at all. They were all ages. Miss Du Frasco had to find out from what they knew in reading and numbers just where they should be placed. There were all grades and children from all over the United States, even one from Australia. The County Superintendent was Mr. Benbow. He promised her an assistant at Christmastime. There were good seats and desks. The room was heated by a wood

heater. The children brought in the wood, but the teacher had to do her own janitor work. She received \$50.00 a month, which didn't seem too meager then, because the cost of living was very low. Sperry Flour Mills were operating even then, and a 50 pound sack cost only 65¢. Before Christmastime, Mr. Benbow came to visit. He said this time that the district was too far in debt to hire another teacher; so regardless of the fact that Milton was the largest school in the county, she would just have to get along that way. There was no way for her to tell whether she was giving the eighth grade pupils the required things. She just had to use her own judgement. The questions would be sent from Olympia in the spring. Luckily they all passed, she said. In the fall of 1906 Miss Du Frasné returned and she had a teacher to help her. The school board members were Mr. Herman, Mr. Waters, and Mr. Schroeder.

There were Basket Socials at intervals and a program for every holiday. Every summer the teachers were required to attend Normal School session in Tacoma for six weeks. Mrs. Martin said she still remembers how well Mr. Dewey taught her how to present History in an interesting way, a method similar to diagrams. The pupils seemed to like it and remember it well. The fathers of most of the school children worked in the mill. They all seemed to be on an equal--no very poor people, no very rich.

In 1903, 1904 and 1905, some of the following families arrived and stayed to help in this task of building a town; C. E. Boyd,

Dwight Reeves, E. T. Short, Geo. H. Waters, George Kennon, Miss Edna Simmons and mother, and a brother, Arthur Simmons. In 1907, the town was incorporated. The first town officers were: Mayor Claude Weeks; Councilmen C. E. Boyd, E. T. Short, John Williams, W. J. Klepples, Geo. H. Waters; Clerk Arthur Simmons; Treasurer L. Stubbins; Police Judge Simeon Annette; Marshall Dwight Reeves.

The Milton Land Co. allotted land for the first church if someone would build on it. Sunday School classes were held in the mill dining hall. This group became the Baptist organization and had the church built there below the present school site. Rev. Simeon Annette from Alaska was the minister. Mrs. Klepple had Sunday School classes in the store. This organization was a Methodist group. The Baptist organization dwindled and the Methodist group wasn't very large either; so they held services in the same building on alternating Sundays. The church building was later sold to the Lutheran Society. The Milton Land Co. gave to the Methodists another plot of land farther up the hill behind the school. In 1907, the church was built there and many years afterward a parsonage was built alongside it. The Lutherans gave up and their building was sold and torn down in the early forties.

Young people in the vicinity beyond and around the St. George School found amusement in neighborhood dances. They took turns meeting at the various homes; the Counters, the Webbs, and Gales, especially. Young men and old found a great deal of sport in hunting and fishing in the streams and lakes as well as the Sound.

Indians always found plenty there, too. W. J. Meers remembers as a boy, at night, hearing the salmon going upstream in the Hylbos Creek to spawn. The Sweetwater Creek was a favorite, too, for wildlife. Before the white man came, there were beaver cuttings in all the streams. Muskrats are found in large numbers yet, in the Wapato Creek near Firwood. Deer, wildcats, bears, and wild birds were bountiful. Bears came to salmonberries and elderberries in these dense woods. Mr. Meers said that with the help of his good dogs, he had the house well furnished with bear and wild-cat skins. He said he killed four bears in one week in the swamp behind Simmons' store. He shot one bear in the road in front of the present Dayton garage. He was never afraid of anything. Only one bear ever fought him--a mother bear with cubs. His father gave him a shotgun when he was nine years of age. He had been shooting an old musket of Civil War vintage previous to that. He tells an amusing story about a hunting trip which he and brother-in-law, Charles Blauvelt experienced. Meers had loaded his gun before starting, and Charlie said he wasn't going to load his until he got "on the stand". That's what he did, while Meers and the dogs scared up the deer, or so they thought. Charlie was on the stand with his gun ready. The stand in this case consisted of two fallen trees, side by side. A big bear came running down one of those logs, not seeing Charlie. He raised his old musket and fired. It made a terrible noise and smoked. Charlie was sure he'd bagged his bear, but no, the

bear rolled off the log and disappeared. Charlie dug out the load in the other barrel and found to his amazement that he had put all the gun powder in one barrel, and all the buckshop in the other one. The gunpowder had merely frightened the bear, and he had time to get away. Meers said that something always happened to Charlie when they went hunting...he just got too excited...couldn't hit a thing.

Men experimented in planting and raising to sell for profit. In 1906, Geo. Kennon had his first crop of strawberries for sale. In 1906, Rev. Annette raised vegetables and berries for market. He planted apple trees, too.

Men were being employed in industries in Tacoma as time went on. In 1906, 40 or 50 men went in on the car each morning to work. More people, they said, travelled from Milton on the Interurban than from any other station along the way.

There was one thing that wasn't so attractive about the Interurban system..the third rail was extremely dangerous.

One day, a little Indian boy from around St. George's School came down to sell a large salmon which he had caught. He had it on his pole and it dragged across the rail as he stepped over. His feet were wet and the ground was damp; so he lost his life there.

One of the difficulties encountered in this section around 1903-05 was to drill a successful well. E. T. Short drilled 190 feet and never did get water. Rev. Annette, who lived where Wm. Kemper now lives, succeeded in getting water at 77 feet. His well was the only one this side of Surprise Lake.

Frank Fetterly, who lived on the bank of Sweet Water Creek, said he simply put down a post-hole auger and got water. There were springs along the bank there. This general inability to secure proper wells caused the town officials to put in a system for the good of all, as soon as possible. It was pretty rough for each family to have to haul water by barrel every day. The water system, with its several large pumps, now supplies Milton and several surrounding communities as a result of the foresight of these pioneers.