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MILTON (WA) HISTORY C.1

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MILTON WASHINGTON  
THE EARLY DAYS

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MILTON, WASHINGTON  
The Early Days

I. First Settlers

The earliest recorded history of the area that now comprises Milton tells us that the Cushman Indian Commission had allotted land to the Puyallup tribe on the prairie south and west of Tacoma in the area that is presently Fort Lewis. That land was poor for the needs of the Indians and an Indian chief was therefor instructed to travel with a company of surveyors for one days ride for the purpose of selecting new reservation land. His choice was equal to a township in size. The east border began in the present Darling Addition of Milton. It ran from the crest of the hill down a line which later became Porter Avenue and then took a westerly direction to the bay and included part of Vashon Island.<sup>1</sup>

In 1876 Andrew J. Martin gained permission from the Indian agent at Cushman to settle, with his family, on the Puyallup Indian Reservation. A horse ranch was also established in this area. W. J. Meers who was the stepson of a man named Counter said that the Counters had arrived in Orting from California in 1879 and then moved to the Milton area in 1882. In 1883 Charles Blauvelt Sr. bought twenty acres of land from Andrew Martin and another eight from Cash Kenny. A few other land transactions occurred when white men bought property from the Indians, but the provisional government which was later established declared that these transactions were illegal. Indian heirs later reclaimed the land and<sup>2</sup>

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1. Vera S. Adams, Early History of Milton Washington, p. 11-2.

2. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

the whites were forced to evacuate. Josephine Martin, a daughter of Andrew, married W. J. Meers who had the distinction of building the first road in the section where they lived. Charles Blauvelt Sr. married another of the Martin daughters. Both families continued to live in the area the rest of their lives. Another early homestead was that of Mr. Porter who built on top of the hill.<sup>3</sup>

The St. George Indian School, the first of its kind in the Oregon country, was established in 1878 in what is now the northwest corner of Milton. A prominent Philadelphia heiress, Katharine Drexel, founded the religious order and financed the school. At the school, which included grades one through eight, boys were taught farming as well as reading and writing.<sup>4</sup> White children also attended St. George School. Indian graduates of the school could go on to Cushman while the white students continued at Stadium High in Tacoma. Father Hylebos, after whom the waterway is named, was one of the first Catholic missionaries to serve the St. George Mission.<sup>5</sup>

A cemetery on the lowland beside Hylebos Creek and near the St. George School had grave markers that bore many Irish names. Most had died in the 1880s.<sup>6</sup>

Early settlers in the area spoke well of their Indian neighbors. Complaints were usually related to the Indian's use, or misuse, of alcohol. A number of the Indians were considered to be well-educated as they had attended the Indian school of Chemawa, Oregon. Henry Cross, a half-breed from this area became a successful lawyer in Kansas. The father of another half-breed had homesteaded and the son operated a 160-acre berry farm for several years. Henry Sicade and John Guyetter, both Indians, had their homes along the base of the hill south of the main business area.<sup>7</sup>

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3. Adams, op. cit., p. 2.

4. Bill Granberg, Seattle Post Intelligencer, April 18, 1965, p. 13.

5. Adams, op. cit., p. 7.

6. Granberg, loc. cit.

7. Adams, loc. cit.

## II. Milton Land Company

In 1904 T. B. Wallace brought together men of foresight and formed the Milton Land Company.<sup>8</sup> The company purchased land from the Northern Pacific Railway and from private individuals. In 1904 when the group filed a plat, the description included that Milton was, "situated on the upland three miles east of Tacoma on the Puget Sound Electric Railway."<sup>9</sup>

The Milton Land Company launched an enthusiastic advertising campaign. They even ran a bus, free of charge, from Tacoma for prospective customers to travel out to look at property. A picture of this vehicle reveals that it had a roof but no windows and that it was chain driven. The chain is visible under the bus. A sign near the driver said, "Fife and Milton," and larger lettering along the side advertised, "MILTON LAND COMPANY." Among pictures of the early downtown area are two in which advertising for the company appears on the sides of buildings. Mrs. Parker believes that the pictures were probably taken in 1904. The lots advertised were 25 feet wide and 110 or 120 feet deep. The ads read as follows:

THIS IS MILTON		
Lots \$9 - \$29	Acres \$29 -	(A telephone pole
No taxes	No interest	obscures the final
MILTON LAND COMPANY		
Tacoma Realty	Seattle Office	number.)
120 Fidelity	206 Pacific Avenue	

and

Nowhere Else Can You Get  
Such Productive Land at  
Such Low Prices  
William Richardson<sup>10</sup>  
MILTON LAND COMPANY

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8. Adams, op. cit., p. 7.

9. \_\_\_\_\_, Auditor's Annual Report for the fiscal year ending December 31, 1909.

10. Helena Parker, personal interview, July 1982.

### III. Sawmills

The area was originally called Mill Town because there were, indeed, many mills situated there. The largest was run by the Puget Sound Electrical Company which also ran the Interurban Line. The mill was located at what is now the corner of Porter and Kent. At first shacks were thrown up to house workers, but gradually homes were established and a boarding house was erected below the site of the first school. This two-story structure had one large room upstairs for sleeping and a kitchen and dining area downstairs. The first business area was at the base of the hill along present Porter Avenue and long-time residents said that nearly all of the hill from there, to and including Jovita, was involved in logging. In 1892, the 60 workers employed by the Puget Sound Electrical Company's mill included men from many different national origins. Among them were many Italians, Irish and some Hawaiians.<sup>11</sup> W. J. Meers who was the mill foreman said that he hewed squared timbers 12 by 12 and 12 by 16 for erecting the mill. Men cut 60,000 feet of timber there per day.<sup>12</sup>

The last logging operation that was in existence in Milton was on the camp that had been established near the corner of the present Porter and 10th Avenue. The skid road for this operation was along present Porter Way.<sup>13</sup>

### IV. Name

When the Milton Land Company was organizing, they found that the United States government would not allow a fourth class post office to have two words in the name. And since there was also another place in Washington called Mill Town, the name was shortened to Milton.<sup>14</sup>

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- 11. Parker, personal interview, July 1982.
  - 12. Adams, op. cit., p. 6.
  - 13. Adams, loc. cit.
  - 14. Adams, op. cit., p. 8.

V. Postal Service

The first mail service was through a rural route from Puyallup. Later a petition was filed so that some of the residents could receive their mail through Tacoma.<sup>15</sup> Charles Herman was the postmaster when the Milton post office was established on July 31, 1905. Post office records show that a different man or woman served in that capacity for each of the first four years.

VI. School

A school building that was approximately 12 feet by 20 feet was constructed in 1903. Miss Edyth DuFresne taught 60 students who came from all over the United States. One had even come here from Australia. She said that the one room of the school was completely filled with desks, the kind with the fold up seats and the children had to sit two at a desk.<sup>16</sup> When Pierce County School Superintendent Benbow visited the school in the fall he said that it had the largest class for a one-room school of any in the county. He promised another teacher by Christmastime. On a subsequent visit he said that the district was too far in debt to hire another so it was two years before that occurred.<sup>17</sup>

The classes were not graded; students were placed according to their knowledge in reading and in numbers. A test was sent from Olympia in the spring and eighth graders who passed were eligible to attend Stadium High School. In later years Milton students went on to Lincoln High School. The teacher's salary was \$50 per month.<sup>18</sup>

In 1905 a larger building was constructed by David H. Glenn and his son David L. Glenn who was then thirteen or fourteen years old. The original building became the domestic science building. In 1912 more space was needed in the school. The addition was made by adding a section identical to the first structure, rather in the manner of a Rorschach print. I saw pictures of both the original and the 1912 structure and was very impressed with the way this addition had been designed.

15. Adams. op. cit., p. 8.

18. Parker, interview

16. Parker, interview

19. Ibid.

17. Adams, op. cit., p. 9.

## VII. Incorporation

Milton was incorporated as a city of the fourth class at a special election held on August 24, 1907, by a vote of 46 for and 18 against. The first mayor of Milton was C. H. Weeks and Leonard Stebbins was treasurer. The five councilmen were: C. E. Boys, George H. Waters, E. T. Short, Jesse Williams and Will J. Kloepple.<sup>20</sup> By 1915 Milton boasted a population of 250. Each family had enough land for a small farm and a little stock.<sup>21</sup>

## VIII. Railway

The interurban railway travelling from Tacoma sent a line through Milton that went down from there to Des Moines on its way to Seattle. Round trip fare to Tacoma was 15¢ and a transfer to various areas of Tacoma could be secured without charge. The railroad crossed over the boggy area that lies now between Highway 99 and the Milton hill. The story was told that one evening at quitting time a flat car was left on the trestle and by the following morning the trestle, flat car and load had all sunk into the bog. Pilings 180 feet long were then driven one on top of the other. Even after this repair the line continued to experience difficulty crossing this area. A long-time resident remembered being a passenger when the train was stalled in this area. A baby was crying loudly and a gentleman passenger walked to the nearest farm to get some milk for the baby. Another problem of the electric railway was that the tracks could be hazardous for pedestrians. A small Indian boy from near St. George's School was bringing a salmon to the settlement to sell it. He had the salmon on his line, and as he dragged it across the rail, he was electrocuted. A good depot building served the people at Milton. In 1906 40 to 50 workers, more than any other stop, boarded the train at Milton to travel to work in various industries in Tacoma.<sup>22</sup>

20. W. P. Bonney, Pierce County Washington, Volume I.

21. Frank Herbert, Tacoma Times, February 25, 1948.

22. Helena Parker, personal interview, July 1982.

IX. Churches

I believe that the best way for me to describe the early churches is to quote directly from Vera Adams work. "The Milton Land Company allotted land for the first church if someone would build 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. Reverend Simeon Annette from Alaska was the minister. Mrs. Klepple had Sunday School classes in the store. This organization was the 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 Company gave to the Methodists another plot of land farther up the hill behind the school. In 1907 the church was built there... The Lutherans gave up and their building was sold and torn down in the early forties."<sup>23</sup>

X. Water

Most early settlers had to haul their water in barrels. Many tried well-drilling and had varying degrees of success. E. T. Short drilled 190 feet but could not find water. Reverend Annette succeeded at 77 feet while Frank Fetterly who lived near the Sweet Water Creek said that he simply put down a post-hole auger and got water. One of the first projects taken on by the city officials was building a water system. The first tank was in the Darling Addition near Porter's homestead. It was a large rectangular box that stood on timbers.<sup>24</sup>

XI. Wildlife

Early settlers remembered that at night they could hear the salmon going upstream in the Hylebos Creek. There were many beaver, muskrats, deer, bear, wildcats and birds in the area.

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23. Adams, op. cit., p. 10.  
 24. Ibid., pp. 12-13.  
 25. Ibid, p. 11.

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