

## HISTORY OF LAKE WILDERNESS & THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Transcription of taped interview: Bud Byers of the Maple Valley Historical Society. Recorded 7/31/95 by Holly Taylor, for the King County Parks Division Cultural History Research Project [Revised 12/15/95]

BB: I suppose I should start out when I was a youngster: I was four years old when I came to Maple Valley. Prior to coming to Maple Valley, my folks and I were living on the Duwamish River just off of Marginal Way. At that time there were three saw mills right close together. The first one was Bissel's, and it was located where the Kenworth Plant is, on Marginal Way. Coming south there was the Standard Lumber Company, and next to that was Pankrantz. And where we lived was right close to Pankrantz. These three mills were right close together, on the river, right behind where the Boeing Development Center is now.

The reason I mention this is because my folks purchased some property in Maple Valley, and for our first house, some of the lumber came from Standard Lumber, the reason being that my father was a crane operator there. When he bought the property in Maple Valley, he bought a team of horses and a wagon, and my granddad drove the horses and the wagon out loaded with lumber, and that lumber went into our first house in Maple Valley.

1925 is the time period when I'm talking about, and I was four years old. This house was supposed to be a temporary structure, which was later to be used as a chicken house, but it never got to be a chicken house, it was lived in, and the house is still standing today. When my folks passed away, my wife and I moved into it, and we lived there for thirteen years, and then I built another house on the piece of property, and then I sold the old house, but the house is still standing.

That might seem like quite a haul with the team of horses, but that's the way things were done in those days. We had a car--a sedan. My dad had a little delivery truck, Model T Ford, and

we used those for transportation, mainly. But when work had to be done, the team of horses was used.

HT: Do you remember how long it took to get from the lumber mill to out here?

BB: Well, I would have to guess that it probably traveled maybe three miles an hour, and the distance would be sixteen miles, something like that. So, five or six hours, my mathematics are...

HT: How about in the Model T?

BB: Well, you could travel about 20 or 25 miles an hour in that. In those days, speaking of Model T's, they had a magneto that generated the power--it worked off the transmission. If you traveled at night, that's where you got the power for the lights. And the faster you went, the brighter the lights were. At no time were they very bright, but coming to where we lived out in Maple Valley, if you traveled at night on a brick road--the roads out to Renton were all paved with brick, red brick--and the road would go around where Longacres race track is, and it was really foggy. And I've heard of people where the housewife would get out with a flashlight and walk in front of the car, because you couldn't see the edge of the road, because you had to drive slowly, and the lights weren't very bright.

Another thing about the Model T Fords--the gas tank was under the driver's seat. And you had no fuel pump on them--the gasoline flowed by gravity to the engine. And if your tank was down a little bit and you were going up a hill, you would probably have to back up the hill, because of the gas flow.

HT: That happens to my car now--I never thought about backing up the hill. Now I've heard that there was some pretty bad traffic on this Maple Valley Highway, like even in 1930.

BB: When we came to Maple Valley, the two miles from Renton out to Elliot was paved, and about the time that we moved they paved another two miles in a southeasterly direction, and then the third phase was two miles that started in Maple Valley and went towards Renton. In between, it was gravel road. And the road, at 196th, coming toward Maple Valley, wound around on a hillside. If you are familiar with the highway--there is a light there, at the end of the four lanes, and the road takes off like it's going up the hill, well 196th actually wasn't there, except that it took off and went just a little ways up the hill, and then it wound around and it came out this side of where that brick house is, about a half a mile, or a quarter of a mile toward Maple Valley. There is brick house there with a high fence around it. In back of that you'll see a barn, and that barn is sitting on the old road up there. And that wound around, about half way around that big deep bend that's behind that house, is a road that took off and went up to the top of the hill, up to Shadow Lake and Otter Lake. At 196th the road didn't go very far, it was just the Maple Valley road.

HT: Is Otter Lake the one that is called Spring Lake now, that is in Jenkins Creek Park?

BB: Otter Lake is Spring Lake; Echo Lake is Lake Desire. And there is another little lake over there--Shady Lake. And then Lake Meridian was Cow Lake, Lake Youngs was Swan Lake, Shadow Lake was, I believe, Low Lake or Spoon Lake. There was a family by the name of Stokes, and they are credited with changing the name to Shadow Lake. They used to have an ice cream business in Seattle; I believe it was on 1st Avenue where they manufactured ice cream, but they lived here in Maple Valley for many years.

Coming this way from Renton, there was a lot of farming. The new Black Diamond mine was in the process of being developed at that time.

HT: Did people from Maple Valley go out there, and to Franklin, to work? [Note: In a later conversation, Mr. Byers explained that generally if you worked in the mines at Franklin or Black

Diamond, you were expected to live in the company town, shop at the company store, etc., so workers were not really drawn from the surrounding communities. This began to change sometime during the 1930's, depending on who you talk to.]

BB: Yeah. People worked at the new Black Diamond mine, which locally was known as the Indian mine because that was an Indian reservation or space. And those days it was kinda like that song that Tennessee Ernie Ford used to sing about "16 Tons and What Do You Get." If you worked for the company, you traded at the company store, and you also took the train from Black Diamond down to the Indian mine to work. I don't know what they charged, but that's the way you got to work.

HT: So they got your money coming and going?

BB: Well, I don't know. If you worked for three or four dollars a day anyway, and of course you could buy a week's groceries for five dollars, perhaps, if you were well off. I was 20 years old and this neighbor lady was complaining because she went to the store and she spent \$5.00 and she got it all in one paper bag. She had a roast for Sunday dinner, and everything else she would need for during the week all in that one paper bag. People living in the country in those days would all have gardens. Very likely they would have a couple acres of land, and if they did that, they would have a cow. They'd raise pigs, they might raise a steer and then they would have meat.

They didn't have refrigeration, but they had ways of taking care of food. The housewife did a lot of canning. Meat was often times put in salt brine and cured, or smoked perhaps. Another method was that you would have a ten gallon crock, and you would put a layer of lard on the bottom, and then take the steaks or pork chops or whatever cuts of meat you wanted, and you put it on top of that layer. You'd cook it to where it was almost done, and then you'd put a layer of lard, a layer of meat, a layer of lard...the final layer would be lard, and that would seal it.

HT: How long did that keep?

BB: Oh, six months. Then you would take the top layer off, heat it up, and pour it back into the crock again, and that would seal it.

HT: So the stuff you were talking about buying at the grocery store--that would be like sugar and salt, and stuff they didn't have?

BB: That's it--you'd buy your baking powder and yeast maybe, and coffee--very likely you'd buy the coffee beans, and you'd have a coffee grinder, and you'd grind your own coffee, but you could buy coffee in a can. When we were talking about lard--you'd think that it would get stale, but you'd put the lard in a kettle, and you'd boil it with a potato in it. Take the potato out, and your lard is fresh. That was common knowledge. People did a lot of those things--there are home remedies that you wouldn't believe. If you had a infection, in your foot or something, you'd soak it in Epsom salts. Another way, you could get some blue clay, and put your foot in that bucket of clay, and it would pull the infection out. One that is really hard to believe, is you take green cow manure, and stick your foot in that. If you had a cold, you would probably end up with a mustard roll, or a mustard plaster, and things like that. Vick's vapor rub. I know you've heard of those. And people took a lot of laxatives. Epsom salts. Castor oil was about the worst thing you could possibly take. You'd take it in orange juice, and then you couldn't drink orange juice for a month after that. Possibly the most common laxative used in this area was cascara tea. Cascara bark was peeled from native cascara trees and steeped on the back of the kitchen stove.

HT: Yikes! So, what kinds of things did you guys used to do for fun around here?

BB: Being a little kid--we had wagons and stuff. I had an old sink, with a pump on it. It came from a soda fountain someplace. And I used to amuse myself pumping water with that thing-- little things like that, simple things like that. And then when I got older, I built a little shack. I cut the poles up in the woods and hauled them down the hill. And I split shakes from cedar blocks and made a little shack. Using my dad's tools--which didn't amount to much, he had a hammer and a saw and a fro, and that's about all the tools that carpenters had too--everything was done by hand.

HT: What about, like today when it is so hot, people floating down the river on inner tubes?

BB: Well, I don't remember seeing much floating in tubes. Kids would build a raft or something like that and use it in a still part of the river. And, of course, we would go swimming in the river. That's where I learned to swim--in the Cedar River. On a day like this, it's fine when the sun is out, but the minute that sun goes down it gets cold. But I used to start swimming at the end of May, and right up to when school started in September. Every day I would go swimming.

And when I got older, I would go to the lake for something different. But actually, I liked to swim in the river better than in the lake. There's something about the water when you came out of the river you felt refreshed, and the lake you felt tired for some reason.

HT: So when you are talking about 'the lake,' would it have been Lake Wilderness that you went to?

BB: Well, Lake Wilderness in my estimation was the best lake to go swimming in--the water was pretty clear. Some of those smaller lakes, they would get pretty warm. Shadow Lake was kind of an interesting place--it didn't really have any nice beaches, it just dropped off. They were man made beaches that they did have. When you'd swim in that lake, one part of your body would be

in warm water and one part would be in cold water. It was spring fed from underneath, and you'd think it would all get churned up, but it doesn't.

HT: So, do you remember when there was a sawmill on Lake Wilderness, or was it only resort and recreation when you were younger?

BB: I don't remember the sawmill. I think that the Gaffneys came there in 1926 or 27. I wasn't much interested in sawmills then. I know there had been a sawmill there, in fact, there were sawmills all over the country. Right down over the hill there was one; we used to throw rocks when I was going to school here into the old mill pond down there. There was one up on the old Peacock place, in Hobart; there was Wood-Iverson mill at Hobart; there was a shingle mill at Kerriston--there were mills all over the place--Lake Sawyer had a mill on it; there was a mill at Four Corners...

HT: What about Soos Creek, were there a couple up there?

BB: It's quite possible--I really don't know. It was before my time. One that you here a lot about was Samstrum's mill.

HT: And where was that?

BB: You know where the fire station is up here, in Maple Valley, up toward Wilderness Village, and the fire station? There is a light there. Kind of behind that fire station, I am told, that's about where that mill sat. I couldn't tell you exactly.

HT: I'd like to ask you some questions about Lake Wilderness, because that is one of the parks that I am doing research on for the King County Parks Division, but also about Maple Valley, and

the communities in this area where people lived who went there, to go to dances, or go swimming...

BB: Well, there were two brothers, and they came from Sprague, I believe it was. They were wheat farmers, and they came to Maple Valley and started the resort. There wasn't too much there then--there was a house that set there, that Tom Gaffney and his family lived in, and I think Kain's house was built after they came here. There was an old dance hall, and they had a slide, a boat house, some tennis courts, some summer kitchens where picnickers could camp, they built a few cabins, and they kept developing as time went on.

And the original dance hall, it seems to me it burned, and I'm not sure, they might have torn it down, and then rebuilt another dance hall there, and that dance hall was a beautiful thing. We have some pictures of that we can show you.

HT: Now was that at Gaffney's or was that at Dickman's?

BB: That was Gaffney's. Actually there were three resorts on Lake Wilderness: there was McKinney's, there was Gaffney's and there was Dickman's. Now McKinney's had this water equipment: slides, canoes, rowboats and that. They had a two storey building. Upstairs they had a roller skating rink, down below they had a bowling alley, and a little store; they had a few cabins, they had a picnic area, and a ball park. Gaffney's had just about the same thing, except they didn't have the roller skating rink or the bowling alley, but they had a little store, as a separate building, and then they had water slides and a top that you could go on and tip the top over and fall in the water, and then they had boats and canoes and paddlewheels, and they had tennis courts, little cook shacks and cabins.

Gaffney's eventually bought McKinney's out. Gaffney's, like I said, didn't have the roller skating rink, but they had a beautiful dance hall. That ballroom just was gorgeous. People on Saturday night would come out, and the dance hall would be filled, the roller skating rink would

be going full blast. The cabins, it ended up I think they had 82 cabins, and the cabins would be filled.

HT: Would people come out from Seattle? Or would they be from a long way away?

BB: Well, to come to the dance, some would come from Seattle. And from Renton, Kent, Auburn, Black Diamond, Enumclaw, they would come to the dance, and roller skating. And picnickers on Sunday would show up, and the cabins were filled still from Saturday.

HT: Did you pay admission, or was it free?

BB: No, I think it was about 15 cents or something to get in the gate.

HT: So then did you choose whether you were going to go to Gaffney's or to McKinney's or to Dickman's?

BB: Well, Gaffney's was separate from the other two until Gaffney's bought McKinney's out, so then you had just Gaffney's and Dickman's. And Dickman didn't have all the facilities that Gaffney's had, but they had some. After Gaffney's bought McKinney's out they had a Knights of Columbus picnic there one Sunday, and they claimed they had 10,000 people there. And we have some information here that they were equipped to handle 9,000, so very likely they did have 10,000 people. Maple Valley highway was pretty busy in those days. Now we are talking about the late 1930's and 1940's.

And when I was talking about dances, that's the late 30's, and the road was paved and straightened, and things like that.

HT: So did you drive from here to Gaffney's?

BB: Oh yes, from my place it's about 3 1/2 miles, maybe 4.

HT: Did you always take a date, or would you go by yourself and meet up with friends?

BB: Oh, I would go by myself most of the time.

HT: Did girls go by themselves?

BB: Oh yes. Well, you might take a date, but I usually went by myself. Now, we've been talking about what went on at Lake Wilderness. These other lakes had things too--Shadow Lake had two resorts, and they had a dance hall. Foss's had a dance hall on the southeast side, and on the northwest side, Hierser's had a dance hall, so there were two dance halls there, and those places were busy too.

HT: So how did you decide? Say, it's Saturday afternoon and you are done working. How did you decide where to go?

BB: I used to go up to Lake Wilderness to the dance, and they had a little different type crowd than at Foss's. Foss's had an older crowd. And there wasn't all the fighting. So I used to go up there, to Foss's. I should have stayed home and saved my money, because that's where I met my wife--at Foss's.

HT: So what used to go on at Lake Wilderness?

BB: Oh, I don't know. Just young people, some of them would get in fights. I never got in any fights, but then it just seemed like...well, they played a little different kind of music. They had a

big band--Ky Fox's band played up there, and I think there were 8 pieces in it. They played swing. But Foss's wouldn't play swing, they played a little older style. Not the minuet or anything like that, but they would have a circle two-step every once in a while, or schottische, or polka, and waltzes of course.

HT: So did you pay admission to go to the dance? Did that pay for the band?

BB: That's right. You wonder where all the people came from. But entertainment was a big part of the area. There were also local things that took place. People would belong to the grange down here, and there were some community clubs. I don't know just how that was, but they would all have a queen or something, and the governor would come and honor the queen of one of these clubs. And they would meet once a month, and have a dance or something.

HT: So were most people who lived out here still farming at that point, or were they working down in Renton?

BB: Well, like I said, farming was important, but a lot of that farming was just those little two or three acre farms, for their own use, what amounted to a second job, but not to sell. There was a lot of dairying. And later, well, in 1932, the high school hired this agriculture teacher. And when he came to the community, he spent as much time running around telling the farmers how to do things as he did teaching. And he liked poultry. There was a lot of chicken ranching after that. He got people interested, and they would have a flock of maybe 4 or 500. But that's not really so many--I did some ranching in later years, and I was raising maybe 2000 fryers a month. The way I got involved was that my dad had chickens--laying hens. And he had the license and everything, and he would candle and weigh all the eggs and take them to the store, and we had a pretty good business.

Well, I was going to school over in Pullman, and he had a stroke, so I had to come home and take over the farm. And I didn't get drafted, because they figured that farming was more important. And it was toward the end of the war that we decided to raise fryers instead of eggs, because you see fryers weren't rationed, and meat was rationed, and so there was a big demand for them. Well, I just got going real good and then the war came to an end, and everybody was filled up on fryers, so I kept the Pullets for layers and got rid of the rest of them, and then I went to work. That kind of ended it--I don't know how they can farm today and make a living at it. You know, eggs are \$1.00 a dozen, and I used to get 35 cents a dozen, retail price, when feed was \$35.00 a ton. Now it's a couple of hundred dollars a ton, and everything else--taxes and everything.

HT: So when you went to work, what did you do?

BB: I went to work Pacific Car & Foundry, and of course Kenworth was owned by Pacific Car. And after 4 years working for them, they moved me over to Kenworth, on Marginal Way. And I was there for 6 years, and after 6 years, they moved us back to the car shops, because they were pressed for room at Kenworth. And then after a year, they got rid of the bus business, and I transferred to another shop. I put in 34 years working for them.

HT: Did a lot of people from this area work there? Was Renton the biggest industrial area close to here?

BB: Oh yes. Well, there were clay products, and some sawmills yet, and Taylor was still going. Taylor had just about shut down by that time, but they had made clay products. Big sewer tiles and things like that. They employed about 180 people or something like that at one time.

HT: So, did everybody mix pretty well? I mean, like if you went to a dance, did it matter what you did for a living? Were people known by whether they were a farmer, or worked in a plant? Did that matter?

BB: No. Well, you might make a joke about being a farmer, or something. They weren't credited with being too smart sometimes. But it was friendly.

HT: Were there very many people who lived in this area who were not white? Who weren't from European family backgrounds? Were there Indian people still out here?

BB: When I was a kid, going to school here, I think there were two girls in this family, and they went to school here about six months. That was the only time we had any Black children in school. No Orientals. Down at Elliot, they had some Japanese gardens, and there were a lot of Japanese that went to the Elliot school, but they lived on the Renton side of the river, and when they graduated from the 8th grade, the ones on that side of the river went to Renton high school, and the ones on this side went to high school up here, at Tahoma.

HT: What about workers at the mines?

BB: Well, from the early days, when they were putting in the railroad, they had Japanese and Chinese, and of course you probably heard about Franklin having a strike up there--now that was before my time, but they had a strike, and they brought in a lot of Blacks up there.

HT: What about, when you were a kid, do you remember there being any Indian people out here?

BB: I remember one Indian, and his name was George Bill. And yet, prior to that there had been lots of Indians, and they used to fish the Cedar, when the salmon used to run up there. I don't

know just where they went. I see the name Moses here in the paper a lot, and they are probably all the same, the Indian family Moses.

HT: So was it mostly people from Scandinavian families living here? Was it a whole mix?

BB: We had a lot of Finns, a lot of Italians, Scandinavians. Some of the kids I went to school with--this is a strange thing. One fellow I graduated from high school with, we started the first grade together. And he told me one time after we got out of high school, he said, "you know, when I started the first grade, I couldn't even speak English." And I got to thinking about it, you know, how do kids communicate with one another when they don't speak the same language? And we had Italians, it would be the same way, and we could do it, never thought anything about it. Actually, I couldn't speak very well myself. I didn't have many kids to play with from the time we came out here until the time I went to school. The only people I could converse with would be my parents, you might say, and you pick up a lot learning from someone you play with, and we didn't have a radio, and we didn't have television, either. Kids can learn a lot from those things. I think the first TV we had in my house, my wife and I had, and there was one TV station, and they would have the pick of the networks, all the best shows, and the thing would go off at 11 o'clock at night. Nothing like we have today.

We had a lot of school functions, that people would turn out for. Basketball games, and things, but no football. We'd have dances--each class might have a dance: junior prom, senior ball, and they would have a big turn out, and people were pretty well entertained. And people would go to the movies. We had a fellow come around, I believe it was twice a month. And he had a movie projector which he set up in the middle of the floor in that room, and the screen was where the stage is. He shielded himself and the camera projector from the audience with a shield made out of canvas. Well, those old projectors were quite dangerous because of the fire hazard, and so that is why we have that booth up there now, to accommodate that fellow. That booth is

lined with metal, so it is fireproof. And it was silent movies--we would watch Keystone Cops and Rin Tin Tin, with a packed place.

HT: I'm not sure if I remember this right, but were you telling me a story about the old still that is in there? Did that have some connection to when they were showing the movies?

BB: No. The reason that still is placed in there is that we were setting up a kind of a diorama there, and so below that projection booth was a good place to have a simulated wine cellar, and we had acquired some wine barrels and bottles, and the two stills that are there.

There was a lot of that--that was one of the leading industries in Maple Valley during Prohibition. I would guess that, well, I mentioned that we had a lot of foreigners, and of course they always had their wine and things like that, but there was a lot of moonshine made for sale. Actually, when people would drink that stuff they would get sicker than the dickens, when you look at how those stills were made, with all the lead and things like that.

HT: Was Gaffney's going during Prohibition? Was Gaffney's already started?

BB: Oh yes. Prohibition was repealed in 1932, shortly after Roosevelt took office. Then they repealed prohibition, and 3.2 beer was allowed. And then it was a few years later they established the liquor stores, where they sold the hard liquor. You could not buy a drink in a regular bar. You could go to a club or something and have liquor that way.

HT: So was that part of these resorts, where there were dance hall and stuff? Did they have clubs also?

BB: They didn't sell it. But there was a lot of it there.

[break]

BB: At the end of the war, people started changing their habits. They started going longer distances away from home; they were going camping, places like Seiku and things like that to go fishing, extended vacations. So these close to home things kind of went down hill.

We've been talking about Lake Wilderness and Shadow Lake mostly, but all these littler lakes attracted people for picnics each weekend, and even along the Cedar River there was a lot of picnicking that went on. Just out of Renton where those apartments are, where they play bingo, there was a park there, and they had a dance hall there, and picnic tables, and every Sunday there was something going on. There were political gatherings around election time, and things like that. Down at Cedar Grove they had a dance hall and picnic area. This was mostly like Sunday afternoon, and maybe there would be a nickelodeon, or an accordion player, or something, for entertainment for the picnickers. Later on, when Foss's dance hall burned down, the band went down there, and the crowd followed them down there, so there was a period there when they were busy on Saturday night too. But eventually people just quit going to these big dances. The Spanish Castle and all these places that were so popular...now these postage stamp dance floors have taken over, and they accommodate half a dozen people, and that's about it.

HT: Yeah. So what about parks in this area? Did people go to just kind of hang out in a park, or would there always be a dance hall or something like a restaurant?

BB: Well, like I said, Cedar Grove had a dance hall, but there were places that didn't have a dance hall or anything. Just off the Maple Valley highway, about two miles down here there was a park on the river, and people would go there and camp, and right down here in Maple Valley people would camp along the river.

HT: Like just to be in that spot, not because there was a draw that was entertainment, or something?

BB: Yeah. Then there were a lot of people who would buy a lot on the river, and they would build a little summer home, or weekend home. Dorie Don, I don't know if you've heard of that? That's what that was. Beyond Dorie Don, they call it Upper Dorie Don now, but that was Orchard Grove, and there was a different developer--Johnny Daniels developed that. And then down in Maple Valley there was an area--my dad developed the Cedar River camp sites--it was 27 lots on the river.

[Looking at a map of Township 22N, Range 6E which hangs on the wall of the Maple Valley Museum in the office room]

HT: So was Eddyville where the sawmill was?

BB: Yeah, down by 4 Corners. C. M. & S. P. was the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, and this one is the Pacific Coast Railroad, and later it became Great Northern. But the Milwaukee Road came in at Maple Valley. The one that is labeled C. M. & S. P. on the [late 1920's] map is actually the Pacific Coast, and that went up to Black Diamond, because the Milwaukee Road comes into Maple Valley way down here someplace.

The Pacific Coast one is the one that went up to Newcastle--it went there first, and it was a narrow gauge road, it was called the Columbia & Puget Sound.

--end of tape--