

Village Voices

— Foothills Historical Society Publication —

Stories and History of the Carbon River Corridor!



Local Heritage, with a Rich History



The community voted and now we would love to introduce.....
Buttercup !

HOURS OF OPERATION

TUESDAY: 12PM-4PM

WEDNESDAY: 12PM-4PM

THURSDAY: 12PM-4PM

SUNDAY: 1PM- 4PM

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Secretary: David Battey



Treasurer: Jean Contreras



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Annual Dues:

One Person: \$15 dollars

Family: \$25 Dollars

Business Membership \$40

Curator: Martha Olsen

Advisors: Ann Trullinger, Meagan Rhoades, Doris Maris, and David Meshke

Phone Number: (360) 829-1291

Please leave a message

Email: foothillsmuseum@cityofbuckley.com

Website: foothillshistoricalmuseum.org

Village Voices Editor : Chloe Mickelson

Tragedy at the Buckley High School Pool

By Jean Contreras

In the early 1900s, Buckley High School made headlines with its state-of-the-art "swim tank"—a large indoor swimming pool built beneath the gymnasium floor. However, this architectural feat came with challenges: the pool's humidity warped the hardwood court overhead, causing unpredictable bounces during basketball games. Eventually, the pool and gym were removed, replaced later by tennis courts and now a parking lot near River and Park Avenue. Middle school student Larry Porter remembers "not being able to dribble very well in the court" because of the damage and the pool sat unused for many years.

On April 2, 1930, tragedy struck during a school swim lesson. Mrs. A. Harter, the swim instructor, had concluded the session and directed the girls to exit the pool and head to the showers. As the group dispersed, one student, 12-year-old Sylvia Kuki, daughter of Finnish immigrant Isaac Kuki went back into the water for one final dive. She dove head-first, presumably striking her head and losing consciousness beneath the surface. Sylvia was not found until the girls began dressing. Attempts to resuscitate her, including using a pulmotor (an early mechanical resuscitator), unfortunately failed. She was pronounced dead shortly thereafter. The Tacoma Daily News reported the incident and noted that the school remained closed for the rest of the week.

State Form No. 825-1921—Approved by Department of Efficiency.

PLACE OF DEATH: Buckley

Washington State Board of Health Record No. 180

BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

Registration Dist. No. No. _____ (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number)

2. FULL NAME: Sylvia Kuki

(a) Residence No. (Usual place of abode) St. 203

(b) If non-resident, give city or town, and state.

(c) How long in Registration Dist. yrs. mos. ds.; how long in U. S. If of foreign birth yrs. mos. ds.

Personal and Statistical Particulars

3. Sex: 4. Color or Race: 5. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (Write the word)

6. (a) If married, widowed or divorced: Husband of _____ or Wife of _____

6. Date of birth: March 28 1912 (Month) (Day) (Year)

7. Age: 13 yrs. 5 mos. 5 ds. hrs. or min.

8. Occupation of deceased: Student

9. Birthplace (City or town) (State or country) Bremerton, Wash.

10. Name of Father: Isaac Kuki

11. Birthplace of Father: Buckley, Wash.

12. Maiden name of Mother: Hilda Kuki

13. Birthplace of Mother: Finland

14. Informant: Isaac Kuki

Address: Buckley, Wash.

15. Filed: April 2, 1925

Medical Certificate of Death

16. Date of death: April 2, 1925 (Month) (Year)

17. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from _____, 1925, to _____, 1925, that I last saw her alive on _____, 1925, and that death occurred on the date stated above, at _____, in _____, (State the causes causing death, or, in death from violent causes, state: (1) Means and nature of injury; and (2) whether ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDE, or HOMICIDAL). The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: (Primary) accidental drowning 182

CONTRIBUTORY (Secondary) (Duration) yrs. mos. ds.

18. Where was disease contracted if not at the place of death? _____

(a) Did an operation precede death? _____ Date of _____

(b) Was there an autopsy? Yes _____ autopsy _____

(c) What test confirmed diagnosis? (Signed) Edward Kuki M. D.

19. Place of Burial, Cremation or Removal: Buckley Wash. 4-52 1925

20. Undertaker: J. Jones Buckley

N. B.—Every item of information should be carefully supplied, so that it may be properly used. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important.



Fun Fact: All swim suits in the early 1900's had a sleeveless top (men's and women's) and were made of wool. They were referred to as "tank tops".

BUCKLEY GIRL IS DROWNING VICTIM

BUCKLEY, April 2.—(Special)—Sylvia Kuki, 13-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Kuki of Buckley, was drowned in the swimming tank of the high school here about 10 o'clock this morning. Accidental drowning was the verdict after an autopsy was performed this afternoon.

Miss Kuki, with several other girls, was in the tank under the direction of Mrs. A. Harter, their teacher. She was not missed until the girls were dressing after the swimming lesson. Some one said they remembered having seen Miss Kuki dive into the tank, and it is probable she struck her head and was rendered unconscious. All efforts to revive the girl with a pulmotor failed. School was closed for the remainder of the afternoon.

Sylvia was born on March 28, 1912, in Pierce County, Washington, to Isaac and Hilda Kuki. The family homesteaded near Buckley, Washington, after Isaac emigrated in 1891 and later worked in local mines. She tragically died on April 2, 1925 (although some accounts reference 1930). She is buried at Buckley Cemetery.

The drowning of Sylvia Kuki stands as a somber chapter in Buckley High School's history. The accident profoundly affected the community, briefly closing the school and prompting discussions about pool safety.





Heritage in the Park Restorations

2024-2025 Update

The Foothills Historical Society is proud to share exciting progress on the Heritage in the Park restorations taking place throughout 2024-2025.

These efforts are made possible by generous funding from the Foothills Historical Society and Pierce County Landmarks and Historic Preservation grants, alongside invaluable support from community partners, volunteers, and local contractors.

WS Forest Service Cabin Restoration

Thanks to community collaboration and dedicated funding, the historic WS Forest Service Cabin is undergoing a thoughtful and thorough restoration. Key contributors to this project include:

Chimney Rebuild – Sam Adams

Roofing and Chinking – Jonnie D'Aguila and John Hillding

Landscaping – Frank Stratton

Log Preservation and Painting – Nancy Stratton

Signage – Jean Contreras and Duffy Markel of Graphic Artistics

This project represents a collective commitment to preserving our local heritage for generations to come.



Electrical Upgrades & Extension

Essential electrical upgrades across the historic park facilities are underway, fully funded by the Foothills Historical Society. These improvements are being carried out by:

Straight Up Electric

Upgrading breakers in utility boxes

Interstate Excavating – Installing underground conduit for extended electrical service



Thompson Electrical Constructors – Extending power to the Saw Shop, Bunkhouse, Blacksmith, Dairy, and Farm Shed



We are grateful to these teams and their employees for bringing modern safety and function to our cherished historic spaces.

Steam Donkey Restoration

This exciting and complex project is made possible by Southworth Construction by transporting the logs and worked alongside Johansen Construction to dismantle and in the reassembly of the steam donkey, all in proud partnership with the Foothills Historical Society.

Work includes:

Replacement logs – located with help from the US Forest Service
Dismantling and removal of decayed logs and decking
Transporting logs from the US Forest Site to FHS in Buckley
Reassembly of the Steam Donkey on site
Painting of the Steam Donkey equipment – David Meshke
Railroad track restoration – Southworth Construction and David Meshke



These efforts ensure the preservation of one of our most iconic logging-era artifacts, with deep thanks to all involved. Restoration was funded by public and private donations. With heartfelt appreciation to all the volunteers, contractors, and partners, we honor your contributions to safeguarding Buckley's rich history.

The Foothills Historical Society invites the community to continue supporting and celebrating these incredible restoration projects.

Together, we are preserving the past to inspire the future.



Lookout Tower Renewal

Also funded by the Foothills Historical Society and Pierce County Landmarks and Historic Preservation grant, restoration efforts on the Lookout Tower are being completed through the hard work of dedicated volunteers:

Volunteers: Dave Meshke, Mike George, and Duffy Markel

Scope of work includes:

Removal and replacement of decking planks

Removal and replacement of railings and wire mesh

Painting all railings



Their time and labor reflect the true spirit of community preservation.



August Hermanson

By David Battey



Window Display and Restoration Business



Stop by the Museum any time and see August Hermanson's axe and logging display in the newly reconfigured window on our River Street side. This window allows us to share a little history, 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Foothills president David Griffin transformed our primary window to the outside world into a display area that can be seen from the sidewalk and is lighted at night.

Our first display for the reconfigured window was created by August Hermanson, who will be a senior next year at White River Highschool. August, using a metal detector locally, found significant numbers of axes and other logging-oriented tools that used to have wooden handles. He then purchased new wooden handles and fitted them to the best-preserved antique tool heads he found.

At the Museum during both Buckley Log Show days, August and friends Melody and Dexter displayed and sold some restored tools and non-restored tool heads and has named his business:

'The Evergreen Axe Restoration Company.'



Dexter August and Melody



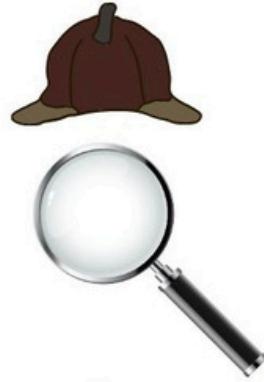
Window Display at Museum

Thank you August for your dedication! We appreciate you!



By Sara Sutterfield

Secrets in Stone on Wilkeson Creek



There's something about a summer creek bed that invites deeper looking.

Along Wilkeson Creek, the sunlight scatters like coins tossed in the ripples, cottonwood branches flutter in a windless hush, and the creek bed reveals more than just water-worn stone. If you linger long enough, you begin to see half-hidden memories reveal themselves: petrified wood, a rusty railroad spike, or (if you're lucky), a whisper of history itself.

Tucked along this stretch of stream are three silent, solid wonders—each holding its own story, or at least the echo of one.

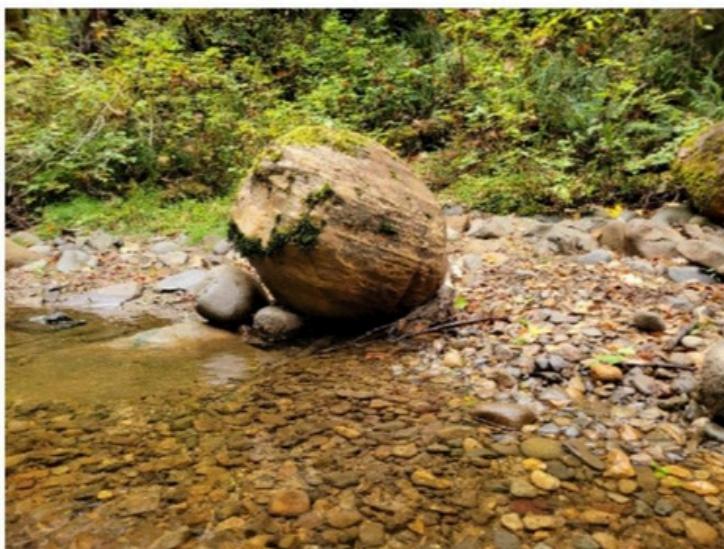
The Orb Stones



First, two nearly perfect spheres—smooth, warm-hued sandstone—sit quietly a throw from each other near the water's edge. At first glance, they look placed by playful gods. Too round to be real. Too two to be random. The sort of thing that sparks lore of ancient aliens, tectonic titans, and conspiratory cataclysms.

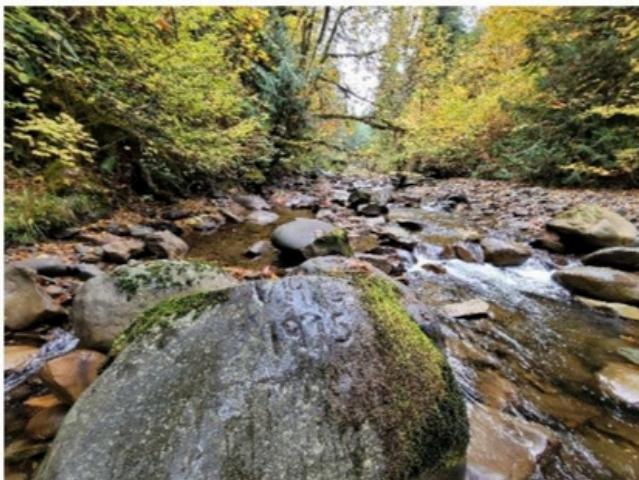
In reality, these spherical marvels are known as concretions, a naturally occurring geologic phenomenon so extraordinary it borders on magic. Over millions of years, sediment clumps around a tiny core (perhaps a shell, a leaf, a marine skeleton), bonding together via minerals like calcite. Layer upon layer, a stony pearl forms. And when the softer surrounding rock erodes away, what remains is this improbable orb, born of time, pressure, and patience.

Across the globe, such stones are revered, historied, and sometimes feared. Here, amid the algae and sulfur of Wilkeson Creek, these legend-less orbs sit like sentinels of deep time, still watching the water flow. But maybe that's changing.





The 1915 Stone



Further up creek, moss gives way to an engraving:

VHG

1915

The initials are carved into a cool, grey boulder, now halfway buried in silt and memory. I've searched. I've scoured digitized census records for the town of Wilkeson and the surrounding hamlets—Carbonado, Buckley, even hitting up online technologies to search throughout

Washington State—looking for a “VHG” born before 1900, living through the First World War. Not a single match. Was it a soldier, freshly returned from the trenches? A young stone carver leaving their mark? A love note to permanence in a time of great uncertainty?

Whoever they were, they've left a ghost signature on the land, carved to last longer than their name in any ledger.

The Salmon Carving



But perhaps the third and most evocative curiosity is this: a carving of a fish—possibly a salmon—etched into a piece of larger rockface perched slightly apart from the creek, as if deliberately tossed aside.

The shape is unmistakable. Spine, fins, tail. Stylized,

but not modern. It bears the look of a petroglyph, though I hesitate to make assumptions without proper archaeological review. The rock appears to be blasted or split from elsewhere. Could it have been transported? Revealed by erosion? Or carved in situ, decades before Wilkeson was named and mapped?

Long before coal mines and stone quarries, this creek belonged to the salmon and to the original Peoples of this land. The Puyallup, Muckleshoot, and other Coast Salish tribes have lived, gathered, and fished here since time immemorial.

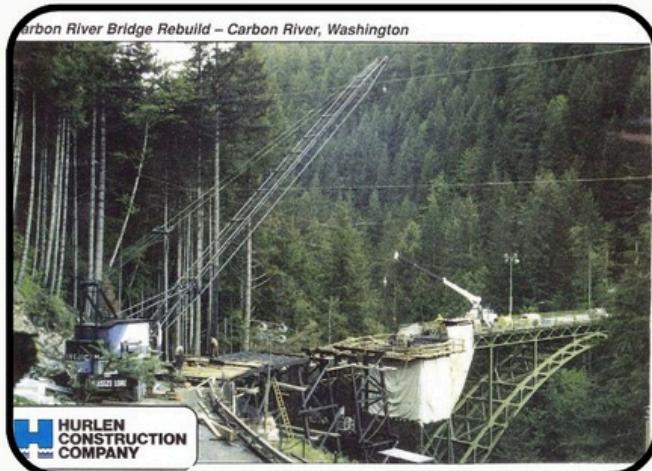
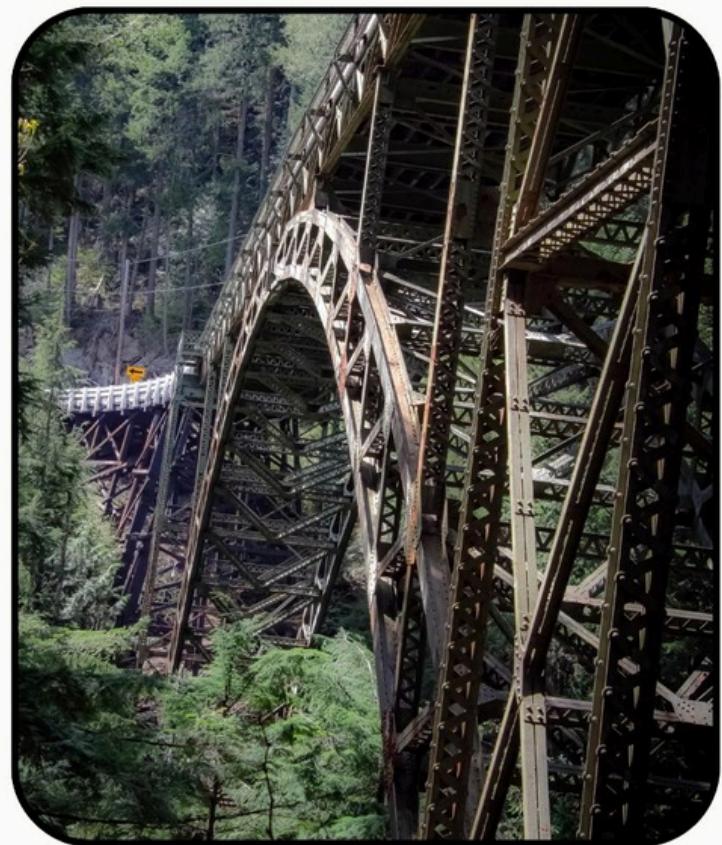
Today, we speak of land acknowledgements not merely as a polite gesture. They are ongoing invitations to remember that we live in a layered place—where Indigenous knowledge and stewardship stretch far deeper than our own thoughts can reach.

Wilkeson Creek doesn't rush here; it murmurs. Inviting all to stop, to listen, to wonder. Among round stones and ghost names, among a silent fish pictured on rock, we're reminded that we don't always need to know the whole story to honor it. Sometimes, it's enough to be curious.





On December 17, 1921, Pierce County opened the bridge across the Carbon River Canyon with a dedication ceremony. Schools closed for the day and citizens came out in droves to attend. The event included a ribbon-cutting ceremony, parade, 20-piece band concert, sight-seeing automobile tours, and a gala with local singers Myrtle and Gertrude Abraham. Nancy Irene Hall described the scene in her book Carbon River Coal Country: "There, in the center of the bridge, a breath-taking 300 feet above the thundering Carbon River, Myrtle's voice rang out as Gertrude accompanied. The river's voice blended with the echoing across the canyon, as the many dignitaries and local people looked on". Dignitaries included Pierce County Commissioner James R. O'Farrell, after whom the bridge was officially named, the Supervisor of Mount Rainier National Park W.H. Peters, the Manager of the Rainier National Park Company T.H. Martin, Judge Ellis Roberts of Wilkeson, and Dr. C.E. Martin of the Rainier Sportsman Association. In the evening, there was a banquet, dance, and a host of speeches.

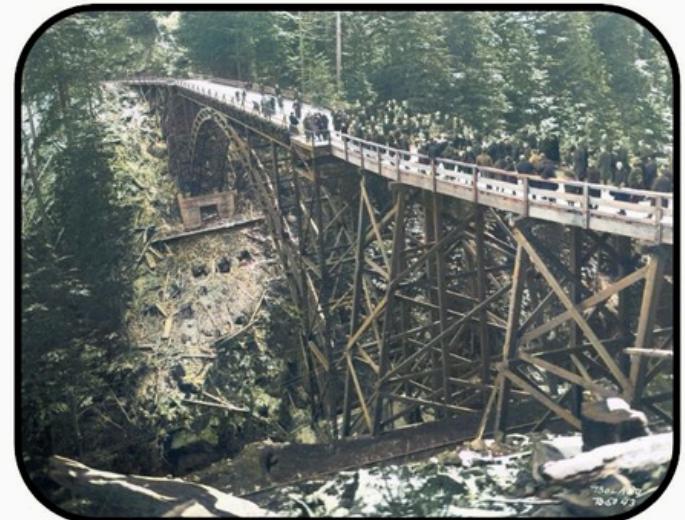
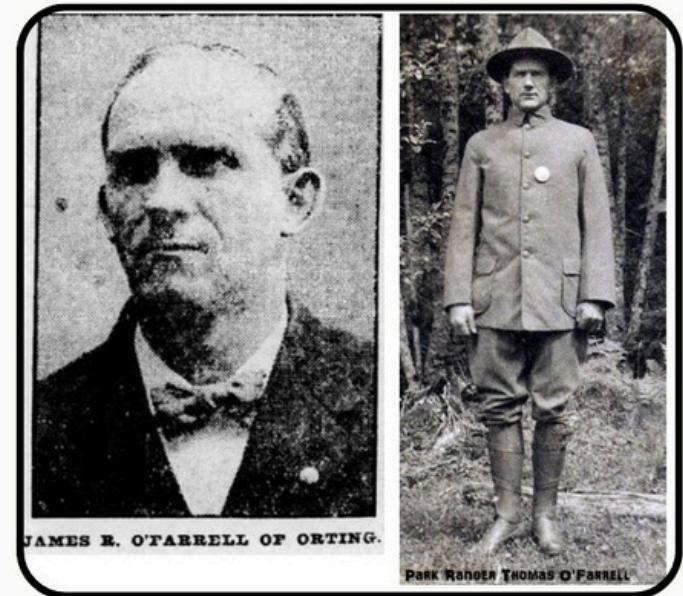
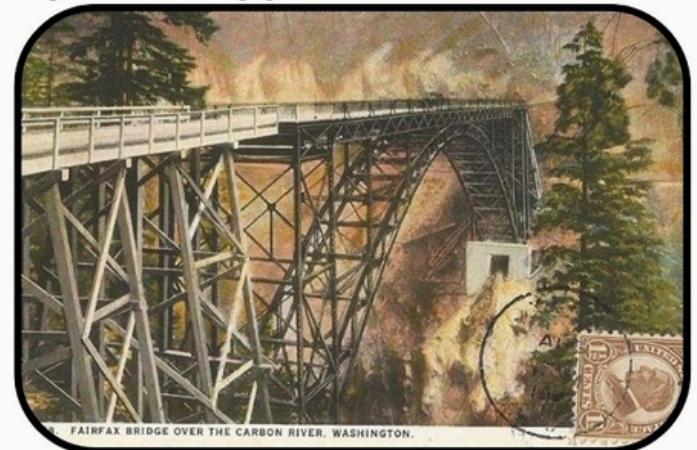




Why Did They Build it?

Prior to the construction of the bridge and highway, the only route into the upper Carbon River Canyon was by train. The residents of Fairfax, Manley-Moore and Montezuma could only reach the outside world by railroad or pack train (a string of animals for transporting supplies and equipment). The train passed through Fairfax twice a day, and the only alternative was walking to Melmont, where there was a wagon road to other towns. As commerce, population, and the availability of automobiles increased, the need for a road became increasingly pressing, and the citizens brought their plight to Pierce County. For a decade they petitioned for a road, and even when the project was approved in 1918, it was shelved for the duration of War War I. Citizens pressed the need to transport coal, as the region produced a whopping 250,000 tons every month, which was putting a strain on the horses and railways going out of their way to move coal where it needed to be, which was north to the other towns in the Pierce County coal district. Another point they brought up was the need for emergency egress: If an accident happened in a mine, there was no quick way to get injured men to a hospital. The construction of a bridge would be a vital transportation link to this remote region, as well as to the Carbon River entrance of Mount Rainier National Park, which had been established in 1899. The Citizens were heard by County Commissioner James O'Farrell, and the dream became a reality.

By Shane Wryly

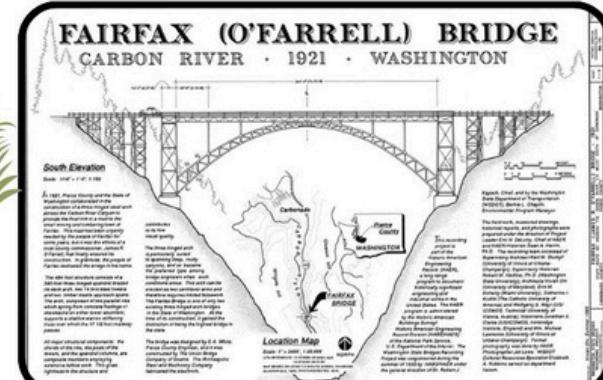


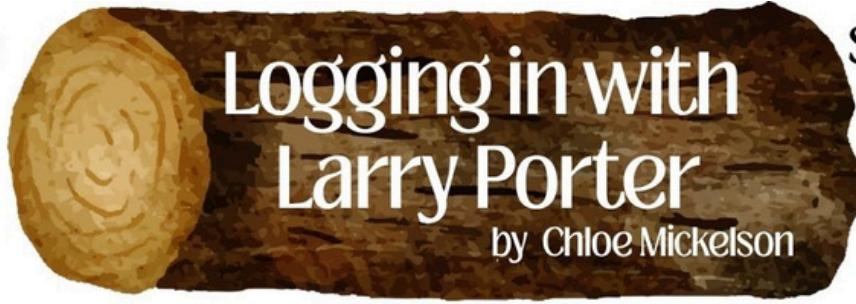


Maintenance: As one would expect, a 1921 structure built of a combination of wood and steel in a wet climate has a tough challenge standing up to the test of time. Rust and decay are its enemies, and it has not survived without help. The approaches and the deck were reconstructed in 1945, and again in 1995. In 2009 WSDOT banned wide loads from using the bridge and in 2013 expanded its restrictions to exclude all commercial vehicles. The wooden deck was replaced again in May 2023. In 2024 a weight limit of 16,000 pounds was instituted due to advanced signs of deterioration.

April 14, 2025 Temporary Closure: WA State Dept. of Transportation's (WSDOT) Official Announcement: Today, our state bridge engineers made the decision to close the 103-year-old Carbon River/Fairfax Bridge on SR 165 in east Pierce County until further notice. Recent inspections revealed new deterioration of steel supports on the bridge. In the coming weeks, engineers will perform further analysis on the bridge. Until those results are final, the bridge is closed as a safety precaution. April 22, 2025 Permanent Closure: WA State Dept. of Transportation's (WSDOT) Official Announcement: 103-year-old SR 165 Carbon River/Fairfax Bridge Permanently Closed CARBONADO – The WA State Dept. of Transportation has permanently closed the SR 165 Carbon River/Fairfax Bridge to all vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The single-lane bridge is located near milepost 11.5, three miles south of Carbonado. On Monday, April 14, WSDOT closed the bridge as a safety precaution after a recent inspection revealed new deterioration of steel supports across the bridge. Follow-up inspections prompted the agency to permanently close the 103-year-old bridge. Photos show the bridge support column is bent in two directions and starting to buckle. "It's very apparent from the visual changes in the columns that the bridge is no longer safe to use," said Olympic Region Administrator Steve Roark. The bridge provided access to Mt. Rainier National Park's Mowich Lake Entrance, Carbon River Ranger Station and other outdoor recreation areas. Due to the closure of the bridge, there is no public access from SR 165 to these areas. "Closing the bridge was our last option. We fully understand the magnitude of this decision for everyone who relies on this bridge," Roark added. A 9-mile emergency access detour is available for first responders and local property owners south of the bridge. The emergency detour route is not open to the public.

This article was excerpted with permission from Shane Wryly's blog Tales from the Plateau Tales From the Plateau – History & Reflections





Logging in with Larry Porter

by Chloe Mickelson

Sitting down with Larry means his lovely bride Jennet is close by, ready to keep him honest. Their son Reese says Paul Harvey's voice on the radio was basically like another family member, always playing in the background. Like Paul Harvey, Jennet chimes in with 'the rest of the story' as Larry spins his yarns. I met them in their home which was imagined in Larry's doodles before he had it built for the family in Carbonado, Washington. It quickly became the heart of their family, and is still where everyone gathers. Carbonado was the kind of place where you grew up knowing who baked the best pie, who fixed what, and who told the best tall tales (hint: probably Larry, but Jennet made sure they stayed mostly true).

Larry L. Porter: A Life Built on Grit, Family, and a Whole Lot of Logging

Larry Porter, a lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest and a seasoned logger, has spent his life deep in the timber country—behind the wheel, beneath the load, and at the heart of a changing industry. Through decades of hard work, injury, and adaptation, Larry built not only a respected career but a life rooted in family, community, and quiet strength. His story is as much about the evolution of logging as it is about the endurance of character.

In April of 1964, at just 19 years old, Larry's world changed forever. His father passed away, and within the same year, he married his high school sweetheart, Jennet Fralick. It was a year marked by both grief and the beginning of a lifelong love story. Over sixty years later, their marriage still stands strong—a testament to commitment, resilience, and likely a few laughs shared over spilled coffee and muddy boots and surprises from garage sales tucked away in the garage.

Larry started work at the veneer mill in Enumclaw for Tom Rickett and soon moved on to Weyerhaeuser, where he would stay until the company shut down. If it had an engine and a gear shift, Larry learned how to run it—and probably better than most. Log trucks, dump trucks, graders, backhoes, even helicopter-assisted jobs—Larry's career spanned the full range of timber industry demands.

Larry has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the way logging is done. In his early years, success depended on hands-on experience, razor-sharp instinct, and split-second decision-making. "You used to have to be able to use your experience and care," he explained, recalling how loggers once judged blade placement, cut depth, and safety based on their own skill and awareness.



Logging in with Larry Porter

by Chloe Mickelson



Today, machines have taken the lead. Modern equipment includes printer boards that direct operators where to cut and how deep. Excavators, graders, and choker systems are now pre-programmed for safety and efficiency. "Everything's safer now," Larry acknowledged. "But it's also taken the man out of the machine."



He doesn't dismiss progress—but he doesn't romanticize it either. While the job is undoubtedly safer, it's also less personal. "It eliminated a lot of jobs," he said, noting that tasks that once required entire teams can now be done by a few machine operators in climate-controlled cabs.

The dangers of the job weren't theoretical—they were personal. In 1989, Larry was seriously injured when a binder snapped while unloading a log truck, a short sticket maple log rolled off, crushing his foot. The injury left him with a lifelong reminder of the job's risks. But in typical Larry fashion, he didn't complain. He adapted, pushed through, and got back to work. When asked about dangerous moments, Larry is blunt: "You never forget the ones that almost went wrong." Snapped chokers, falling trees, malfunctioning machines—logging in the earlier decades meant trusting your crew and staying sharp, because one mistake could be your last.

Through it all, Larry and Janet raised five children: Lorraine, Vicki, Mandy, Raymond and Reese. Whether in the woods or around the dinner table, Larry was steady and dependable. He worked hard, showed up, and made sure his family knew they were his greatest accomplishment.



With hard work comes slow days to enjoy, Larry found joy in simpler pursuits—fishing trips to Alaska, camping, and family time. He's a proud grandpa and great-grandpa now, always happiest when the whole clan is together. And while the pace of life may have slowed, the grit hasn't faded.

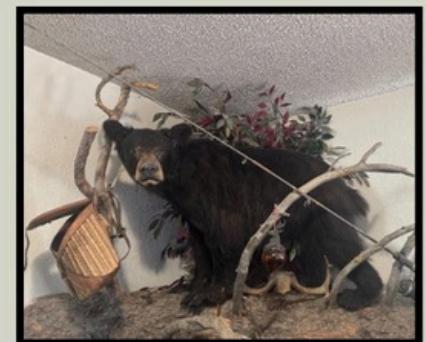
Larry L. Porter's story is one of resilience, quiet leadership, and unshakable work ethic. From hauling firewood at age ten to mentoring the next generation with a story and a smile, Larry never just talked about doing the work—he did it.

Whether you knew him from the fire department, the backroads of Buckley, working with Walt Olsen finding the Steam Donkey to bring down to River Ave, or a fishing hole on the Kenai, one thing was certain: you were in the presence of someone who lived with purpose, worked with integrity, and loved with his whole heart. And he did it all well.



Logging in with Larry Porter

by Chloe Mickelson



SAVE THE DATE



Annual
Fundraiser
@Buckley Hall

OCTOBER 11th 2025



PO Box 530
Buckley, Washington 98321