

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

CONCRETE HERITAGE MUSEUM

Welcome!

Our exhibits tell you about the people and industries that have shaped the Town of Concrete and the Upper Skagit Valley for more than a century.

From pioneers to prospectors, from loggers to cement plant workers, they all played important roles in our community.

Our volunteers share their stories as you take the tour.

#1

The Bunkhouse - life in a timber camp

By Cheri Cook-Blodgett. Exhibit designed by Robin and Gerald Wood



Logging in the Skagit started near the shores of Puget Sound; forests of giant fir, hemlock and cedar were encountered by early settlers as soon as they arrived. The unending stands of timber in the raw Skagit wilderness were a problem for the potential homesteaders, but became an opportunity for men of vision.

Ed English was one such visionary; when he arrived in Skagit County in the late 1800's he was one of the founders of the town of

Mount Vernon. He soon went on to organize the English Logging Company, with its headquarters camp near Conway. Crews were hired to cut and haul timber, and they transported logs to the South Fork of the Skagit (near present-day Milltown). The logs were formed into rafts and transported across Puget Sound to mills in nearby communities.

Railroads were the most efficient means of transportation, and track was quickly laid in spur lines to facilitate the harvest. The map of Skagit County on the wall by the museum entrance shows the progress of logging and the location of the rail lines. Camps were numbered in sequence; as one area was cleared, the rail line was constructed to the next camp location. The dates on the list of logging camps and their locations show how quickly the company progressed into the hills. Ed English partnered with Lawrence Dempsey to build the Puget Sound and

Baker River Railroad (known as the “English Road”, which eventually extended to Hamilton. An astounding 2-1/2 billion board feet was harvested.

Railroads also transported workers, and since they lived where they worked, the camps included tool/repair sheds, cooking/dining halls and bunkhouses. These were usually rudimentary structures which could be easily dismantled, packed on flatbed rail cars, and taken to the next location (see **photo to the right of the Bunkhouse, of English Camp**.) Glass windows were rare, and reserved for the manager’s office and the saw filing shack. Workers were transported on small steam engines with platforms around the edges (see **photo of the Speeder**.) As the years passed, more specialized equipment mounted on rail cars was created (see **photo of the car-mounted Flyer**).

After a typical ten to twelve hour workday, loggers retired to their quarters. This **Bunkhouse** would be considered quite fancy, compared to the usual logging camp quarters where plank bunks for ten to twenty men were stacked two or three high, wet and sweaty clothing was always hanging above wood stoves on clotheslines, and bathing was reserved for the weekend in town. Imagine the ripe odors! Clothing and equipment essential for a “timber beast” in the forests of the Northwest included: **gloves, a hickory shirt, long johns, suspenders on “pegged” canvas pants** (cut high on the calf to avoid snagging on log stubs and brush), a **“tin hat”** (actually made of canvas, until the 1940’s when aluminum safety hats were introduced), and several pairs of **caulk boots** (pronounced “cork boots”) which were soled with spikes enabling the wearer to walk on wet, slippery logs, or hustle out of the way of a falling tree.

This Bunkhouse would also have been typical of a trapper’s cabin located in the remote mountains. Perhaps a mother or sweetheart pieced

together the quilt on the bunk. Cans of “tabacky” or “chew” were essential, and so was the ceramic jug of moonshine; books would be a less essential luxury. Snowshoes, strap-on crampons, and a backpack hang on the wall. A prospector’s gold pan and hammer can be seen above the woodstove, and a fishing creel would bring more satisfying results for dinner. Small animal traps hang above the window, and on the floor to the left a massive bear trap is ready to snag one of the black bears which were numerous here. Around the corner to the right, look for a photo of a “Mountain Man”. This is one photo from a collection contributed by Hazel Tracy. In the early 1900’s she worked for her aunt Sadie Cudworth, running the Marblemount Hotel, a stopover for early prospectors, pack trains, and other travelers in the Upper Skagit.

A large stone, just below the Mountain Man is thought to be a Native American guide stone. You can just make out a faint outline drawing on the surface. This relic was found in Jackman Creek, just east of Concrete, by resident Jim Parker. More information about native residents is displayed in Exhibit #4.

Against the wall to your left are an Alaska Camp Stove and Lang’s Camp Oven. These massive wood-fired units were recovered from an old logging camp that was abandoned on Baker Lake. Hard-working loggers could easily consume 6,000 calories a day. With the cook staff feeding 40-100 hungry men at a time, they were required to mass-produce regular meals of a quality that would satisfy the camp. Frequently it was not just the payroll, it was the food that kept loggers on the job, and the “bull cook” carried as much authority as the camp manager.

The Kinsey photo on the Camp Stove shows a cooking crew posed with a huge frying pan. Yes, women worked in the camps. When queried about how females were treated, one old logger simply said, “You

have to remember that all the women in the camp were someone's mother, wife, daughter, or sister. And these same men worked next to you all day with very sharp implements. Showing disrespect to the women was not tolerated and you considered yourself lucky to be fired before anything happened to you." A **Kinsey photo displayed on the Camp Oven** shows the Faber Logging Company at Van Horn. Look closely at the photo, and what appear to be window panes in the background are actually more Darius Kinsey photos displayed for sale.

#2

Blacksmith Shop and Filing Shack

By John Boggs. Exhibit designed by Jim Harris. Mural background by Don Smith.



Nowadays everything seems to be disposable. You use something until it no longer works, and then you go and buy another one. Long before the days of disposable, almost everything was fixable, if not locally made in the first place. The general-purpose fix-it shop was the blacksmith's. He was the guy to go see if you needed something repaired or if you needed something made from scratch.

The stereotype of a big, dull-witted bruiser as the blacksmith in the old westerns does them a grave injustice. Their ingenuity in solving problems, developing new tools, and fixing old ones, allowed the wilderness to be conquered. Within the Town of Concrete there were several blacksmith's shops to serve the nearby residents, but the logging camps, often located far from town, all had their own. Having them on-site to handle the many repairs needed on the equipment was a necessity. Everything that broke in the woods needed to be fixed in the woods.

Also on display here is a filer's clamp used for securing the large saw blades used in the logging camps for sharpening. As any true craftsman knows, more injuries are caused from trying to use a dull tool than a sharp one. Saws require not only filing to sharpen the cutting edges of the teeth, but also a slight twisting of the teeth, called "setting". This twist is what

pulls the wood chips and sawdust out of the cut while you are sawing and allows you to keep cutting through the log. The width of the cut, determined by the spread of the blade's teeth, is called "kerf". A saw must also be kept "balanced", that is, all the teeth need to be exactly the same in height, sharpness and twist to avoid binding. If you were a logger standing on a narrow springboard fifteen to twenty feet off the ground, trying to cut through a large tree, and the saw was "binding up" because it wasn't sharpened correctly, you would probably be having a heated discussion with the saw filer when you got back to camp at the end of the day—if you waited that long.

Chainsaws today are fairly commonplace, but the development of chainsaws is rather interesting. The first attempts at powered saws were steam powered. In some ways this made sense; the steam powered donkeys or winches that were so essential to the movement of harvested logs out of the woods, were readily available to provide the steam. The bulkiness of the hoses required to get that power from the boiler to the saw were, as you can imagine, very cumbersome in the deep woods. The saws themselves were also bulky and cumbersome, but in some of the original old growth stands of timber they were used because of the huge diameter of the trees. Smaller, more portable saws were needed and numerous attempts were made to develop them. Early attempts used four-cycle gasoline engines that required a crankcase for engine lubricating oil. That crankcase had to be kept under the engine while it was running to ensure the engine was lubricated and didn't seize up. A good example of this is the McCulloch Model 99 standing in the back corner. To get around the limitation of keeping the engine level, the saw has a lever located on the power head that allows the cutting head to be rotated 90 degrees while cutting so the crankcase remains correctly positioned. These saws had a lot of power and could be dangerous. The handle on the far end was commonly called a "stinger" and helped keep the saw

under control. If the saw was revved up quickly it could easily jump out of a hand.

Today's chainsaws work well in almost any position because they are two-cycle engines that don't require a crankcase.

The first truly successful chain saws were developed and patented in Germany and Sweden by Stihl and Husqvarna. Their patents kept American companies from using those advancements in their own attempts. It wasn't until after World War II that American companies started successfully manufacturing decent chainsaws.

The Vaughn drag saw displayed here was manufactured by the Harsch Machine Works of Portland, Oregon. The company started manufacturing them in 1909 and they were available until 1948. They all came on wood frames and the original cost in 1917 was \$145. The company also built some saws that were steam powered for heavy-duty applications that weighed 425 pounds.

#3

Timber Harvest and Photo Display

By John Boggs. Exhibit design by Jim Harris.



The photographs displayed here are a small sampling of the work of Darius (da-rye'-us) Kinsey. Although he made a large part of his living by portrait photography, he was legendary for his photographs of loggers, logging camps, and the wild forests of Northwestern Washington. He traveled to remote camps carrying many pounds of delicate camera equipment, glass plates, and

enormous ladders and tripods. Returning to the studio in Sedro-Woolley (and later in Seattle), his wife Tabitha used her developing skills to create photographs that documented this historic period of logging. Darius would return to the camps to sell these pictures to the loggers themselves as souvenir records of their time in the mountains. An extensive collection of the original glass plates is housed at the Whatcom County Museum in Bellingham. The high quality and resolution can be seen in the enlargement of a Kinsey photograph of a timber rigging operation on the back wall.

Another documentary of life in the Northwest woods in this display is the “Chuck Jenkins photo album”. Chuck’s father, Will Jenkins, was a newspaperman for the Bellingham Herald and later a noted historian and author. The family lived near Lake Whatcom. Chuck grew up loving the wild Cascades, and eventually became one of the primary “mule-skinners”

hired by the U.S. Forest Service (a profession that requires the handling of strings of pack animals on remote trails through the mountains).

Before the use of helicopters for supplying back county trail camps and mountaintop lookouts, all supplies were carried in by pack train. Many lookouts were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's to help manage the wildfires that destroyed thousands of acres of valuable timber. Chuck and his wife Wilma knew and loved the backwoods, and shared their knowledge of logging tools and wilderness camping with generations of Forest Service and Park Service employees.

The wall on the right holds a demonstration of pulleys as they were used in high-lead logging. Try it for yourself, and see how the right rigging can make it easier to lift a heavy log.

Tools on the central display include:

Two scaling sticks for use in estimating how many board feet are in a log of a certain diameter and length. A board foot equates to a 12-inch by 12-inch square of lumber that is 1 inch thick. That unit of measurement is used by timber mills to determine the value of a log. There are also scaling and grading rule books.

A paper-covered cylinder with numbers that calculates the amount of board feet that can be produced from logs of different sizes;

Log brands (stamps), a hammer-like tool that branded logs or bolts before they were floated downstream to be collected for milling. Early loggers often transported logs to mills by simply floating them down the rivers. Quantities of logs were bound together, usually with chains, and towed downstream as rafts. The log brands were not heated (as cattle brands are); they were used to firmly strike the end of a log to leave a lasting impression. A log brand was registered to a particular owner. It was not uncommon for logs to come loose from the raft, and the brand enabled rightful ownership to be determined. Old timers tell us that the

impression can be seen by wetting the end of the log; even if several inches are trimmed off by someone attempting to call it their own.

The large piece of wood on the left of the display is a **single plank from a Douglas fir tree**. Notice the curvature of the growth rings at the end of the plank, and extrapolate that curve to better visualize the huge diameter of the original tree—most guesses are in excess of twenty feet. Even in 1926, it was remarkable enough that a section of the slab was sent to the World Trade Fair in Chicago. Don't confuse this with a current-day 4' X 8' sheet of plywood, which is made from layers of wood peeled from numerous logs and then pressed together.

The **high climber** was undeniably the bravest man on a logging crew, and the tools of his trade included a **climbing harness, spurs, topping saw and topping axe**. Working his way up the trunk of the tree, he cleaned off limbs as he climbed, often reaching several hundred feet off the ground. Dangerous limbs that were rotted or weakened were known as “widow-makers”. As he approached the top, he secured his harness and set to work cutting off a level platform, judging which way the top was likely to fall. Once the top was headed for ground, the next challenge was holding on to the wildly swaying trunk. Occasionally the bravest of the brave would climb onto the flat top and dance for the crew on the ground.

The glass case on the table between displays holds **a piece of Douglas fir bark** that is 19 inches thick, from a massive tree that was undoubtedly many hundreds of years old. In the days of old-growth timber, mature trees were insulated from the heat of forest fires by this thick, moist bark. Before current large-scale timber harvesting, forest fires were more likely to burn underbrush to open up timber stands, and the heat was important for the release of Douglas fir seeds from their cones. Today the harvest

cycle for fir trees is generally 30 years, and wildfires are an increasingly serious threat to large expanses of forest land.

Also displayed on the table are several bottles of lubricants. The shape of the bottles is distinctive and recognized as originally containing other types of “lubricants”. While loggers may have emptied the bottles during a Saturday night foray into town, they were saved for work, and filled with old motor oil and kerosene to sprinkle on the blade of a “misery whip” (crosscut saw). Tightly wound wire held hooks that could be fastened conveniently on the tree bark.

#4

Early Days of Logging

By Cheri Cook-Blodgett. Exhibit designed by Jim Harris, murals painted by Valerie Harris and Don Smith



The hand tools in this display are basic to the woodsmen of the early 1900's. Taking down the giant trees of the Northwest was a demanding occupation, and relied on muscle and grit.

“Springboards” elevated the working logger above the “swell-butt” of the tree. Prime wood was the objective, and the lower part of the tree was not considered marketable timber, so many tall stumps were left to

rot. Holes were cut in the tree, and the metal tip of the springboards inserted for a tight fit. Loggers climbed up to these board platforms to start work.

The undercut was a v-shaped notch that determined which direction the tree would fall, and axes made the chips fly in the first assault on a massive tree trunk. Then the crosscut saw men took over on the opposite side to weaken the trunk at a level above the undercut. Two men pulled the blade back and forth, often for many hours, until the forest giant toppled.

Once it was limbed and loose bark removed, the log had to be transported out of the woods. The mural backing this display shows a pioneer using his horse in harness to pull a log. **Tongs** were fastened to logs to lift them. A **peavey** would snag logs to lever them into position.

If the log was to be used in local construction for a building, it was squared up by scoring the sides and then using a **broad axe** to shave or chip off the scored sections.

Cedar was a prized tree with clear, straight grain for making roofing and siding. Logs were cut in uniform length rounds, then the rounds were split into “bolts” (blocks) with a **maul and wedge**. To make shakes and shingles with a natural taper, you used a wooden mallet called a **bedel** (“beetle”) and a long blade called a **froe**. The froe blade is placed on the top of the block, tapped into place with the bedel, then twisted down by the handle. When done correctly, a perfect cedar tapered shake pops off the block, measuring less than 1/4” thick, and increasing to about 5/8” at the weather end. Then the block is turned over to repeat the process and create a reverse tapered shake; the process is repeated until enough shakes are produced to complete a roof. The oil in cedar makes it naturally water repellent and slow to rot, and hand-split **tapers** are especially noted for their longevity.

This labor-intensive process was soon mechanized, and shingles were produced by saws in mills. To tell the difference, touch the surface. A split shake will have the vertical texture of the grain of the wood; a sawn shake feels more like rough sandpaper.

Shake mills were set up in many locations along the banks of the Skagit River; bolts were often floated downstream from logging cuts and captured by “shear booms” set out in the river. An early industry in the town of Baker (which changed its name in 1909 to “Concrete”) was the

Baker River Lumber Company founded by Dan Dillard and R. Roggenstroh. Set up near the location of the Great Northern Railroad crossing on the Baker River, the mill was fed by shake bolts floated downstream from logging camps on the upper Baker, before the Lower Baker Dam was constructed in 1924. They were credited with producing a million shakes per day.

The pioneers who settled here in the late 1800's were not the first people in the area. Native Americans, the Sba-le-och tribe of the Upper Skagits, had large villages in the Concrete area, and other tribes were located east on the Skagit River, on the Sauk River, and all the way down the Skagit to Puget Sound (the "Salish Sea"). By the time white settlers arrived in the area, the tribes had been decimated by smallpox to a fraction of their original populations. Although some lived a traditional hunting, fishing and gathering life, many adapted to the influx of civilization and worked in logging camps or hired out for farm work. Before steamboats, they used their native canoes to transport people and goods on the rivers. A native-styled wooden canoe in this photo was used by the von Pressentin family at Birdsvew, and is preserved as part of the Museum's collection. Note also the Dictionary of Chinook Jargon. A trade language was developed to facilitate communication between early trappers and traders and the native people they encountered. Interestingly, many of the words are used and understood today.

Much exploration in the 1800's was conducted by prospectors heading into the mountains in search of gold and minerals. The years following the great "49-er" gold rush in California sent aspiring fortune hunters north to Seattle and farther into the wilderness of Washington Territory. While many claims were staked, few produced financially significant results in the Upper Skagit.

One mineral that they did find was 'talc', a variant of magnesium silicate that had a number of practical uses including stove liners and cooking griddles. Also prized by creative artists, the rock is easily carved with saws or knives, and can be polished to a high gloss, showing off the grain and coloration. This display of work by local artist Jon Selin illustrates a variety of small talc sculptures, as well as his rough native-style "totem" in the corner. The carved bears are relatives of his massive "Bear" sculpture, made from an ancient Douglas fir log, and preserved under cover at the corner of Main and Baker Streets in downtown Concrete.

The other mineral that changed the course of events in this community was the discovery of high quality limestone deposits in the hills north of the Skagit and Baker river confluence. Homesteader and geologist Amasa Everett set in motion events that led to the development of the town of Concrete and the profitable cement industry.

#5

Homestead and Camp Kitchens

By Cheri Cook-Blodgett. Exhibit design by Robin and Gerald Wood.



Taking care of animals and gardens, canning and preserving the produce, hauling water and cooking on wood stoves kept homestead families busy in every season of the year. The kitchen was the heart of the home 100 years ago, and food preparation was a focus of life. “Do It Yourself” was the motto, as well as “Use It Up, Make Do, or Do Without”.

The rough camp table holds a collection of kitchen tools indispensable to cooking in the era before electricity and plumbing. Look for the “cherry pitter” on the right, and other more familiar items hanging overhead.

The giant “ceramic crocks” recall food preservation methods of yesteryear. Cabbage would be shredded and placed in the crock with vinegar to make sauerkraut; cucumbers with vinegar and spices made pickles. Even meats could be kept for months in the fall and winter, layered in lard. Fruits and vegetables were preserved in glass Mason jars, and every home had a pantry stocked with the summer’s produce.

The cast iron Montag stove was a coveted item, especially with porcelain finish and an oven thermometer for producing baked bread, biscuits and pies without burning. Cast iron cooking pots kept savory soups and stews simmering on the stove tops, and the enamel coffee pot was a standard. In the left corner, an elaborately decorated Majestic stove came from the Great Majestic Stove Company in St. Louis.

In an era where every penny counted, stores often carried only staple items: flour, sugar, coffee, dried beans, soap, thread and yard goods. Buying from bulk containers was common, and the local store would necessarily have a Toledo counter scale to measure out small quantities of various purchases.

For the homesteader, shopping was only done on special occasions, and months might go by between trips to town to “stock up”. When mail order catalogs started to appear, with ready-made clothing, shoes, and durable goods that could be shipped directly to the purchaser, they quickly became popular. Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalog sales went on for decades.

The treadle sewing machine was a household necessity for making the family’s clothing and other domestic goods. No electricity was required, just foot power.

The painting of the Diablo Dam on the wall is part of a collection of paintings depicting the locations where Superior Portland Cement was used. There are several more of these paintings in the “Office” exhibit. At one time the paintings were displayed in the Superior office building.



As you move on to the left, you will see a model of the Concrete Ferry, created by Jim Parker. Automobiles became popular, but road building was still difficult in the Skagit Valley terrain. Ferries were set up in many locations where vehicles needed to cross the meandering Skagit River. When replaced by a newer ferry, the old Concrete ferry was transferred to Rockport and continued service there. It is currently preserved on the grounds of Rockport's

Steelhead County Park. In 1952, a steel bridge was finally built across the Skagit River just south of town (Dalles Bridge), and is still in use as part of the Concrete-Sauk Valley Road.

Keep moving to the left, and you will find the tools of laundry day. This was carried out in the yard or on the porch, when water was heated on the wood stove and carried to a metal tub. Clothing and linens were scrubbed on washboards, and dried on a clothesline in the sun, or on wooden racks inside. Flat irons were heated on the wood stove, and tested with a drop of water or a finger (ouch!). The Maytag wringer washing machine was a modern improvement valued by every housewife.

#6

Larsen Family Heirlooms

By John Boggs and Cheri Cook-Blodgett. Exhibit design by Robin and Gerald Wood.



As you approach this exhibit, you should note the window over the ferry display. These are actual window panes salvaged from a demolished building in Concrete, and still carry traces of cement dust caked on them. With literally tons of cement dust falling continuously over several square miles during the era of operation of the cement plants, it was a continual nuisance for residents. The cement company provided free bottles of hydrochloric acid to remove the

dust from windows of automobiles and homes, and kids made extra pocket money providing regular cleaning service. There was one positive side to this story. During the dust years, the Women's Garden Club regularly won awards for their roses. The lime in the cement dust helped neutralize our normally acidic soil (caused by the decay of conifer needles), and allowed the roses to flourish.

Over the many years of cement plant operations (1905 to 1967), the various companies tried many methods to cut down on the amount of dust caused by the plant. After all, that dust could be bagged and sold, so it was in their best interest to find ways to capture it. However, when air

quality standards were nationally defined in the 1950's, it was a precursor of the end of an era. Although the company tried various methods, they eventually deemed it too expensive to upgrade old equipment to modern requirements, and phased out the operation.

The buffet to the right in this section was a family heirloom of the Larsen family, and arrived aboard the very first train to arrive in Concrete in 1900. The Great Northern Railroad played a major role in the development and success of the Skagit Valley, including both the timber and cement industries. Track was eventually laid all the way to Rockport, with depots in Concrete and Sauk. (The table in our display came from the train station at Sauk.) At Rockport, the standard gauge railroad ended; a few years later a narrow-gauge track was laid up the valley by Seattle City Light to transport materials to their dam construction base at Newhalem. Narrow-gauge railways were somewhat cheaper to construct, and they also had tighter turning radiuses. For this reason, they were preferred in the mountainous terrain of the Upper Skagit. However, all material, equipment, and passengers had to be transferred from one train to another at Rockport.

The founder of our museum, Herb Larsen, was the son of Danish immigrant pioneers who settled near Concrete, and he worked for the English Logging Company as a young man. Realizing that changes were coming, he and his friends gathered an amazing collection of early logging tools and memorabilia which he loved to show off and describe to visitors. When he retired in the 1986, he moved the collection to its present building—at the time, an unimproved garage. He named it the “Camp Seven Museum” in memory of the camp near Lake Cavanaugh where he worked. The “Camp Seven coffee mug” was hand painted for Herb by artist Bob Williams of Mt. Vernon. The present-day Concrete Heritage Museum Association was formed in 1996, and our volunteers

made the transition, continuing to care for and add to Herb's collection. Photos and mementos from Herb's life are displayed on the buffet, including one with his wife, Kay Stafford Larsen.

Other heirlooms of the Larsen family are included here:

Baseball uniform and glove from the Concrete Nighthawks. Many teams were formed from various local cement company and lumber mill groups to engage in this nationally popular pastime, with fierce competitions.

Telephones (wall mount and table models) Concrete was one of the first communities in the Skagit to be outfitted with telephones, thanks largely to the cement plants. See more about the local telephone company in the central display about Kate Glover and Nell Wheelock, the "Telephone Ladies" of Concrete.

Victrola player Dating from 1922, this was originally a gift to Harry Selin from his granddaughter, on his return from fighting in World War 1.

Radio was the principal entertainment in the home. Concrete made the national news in 1938 when Orson Wells' "War of the Worlds" story was broadcast the power went out in Concrete due to a transformer failure. More than a few residents assumed that it had been caused by the alien invasion, and headed for safety in the hills with their families.

Treadle sewing machine belonged to Herb's sister, Lena Scales.

#7

The Old Office

By John Boggs. Exhibit design by Robin and Gerald Wood



This display contains mostly office equipment, which always held a fascination for museum founder Herb Larsen. Photos show the old Superior Office exterior and interior.

The display of typewriters and adding machines on the right contains many of the different models in use. The early Remington Model 7 typewriter is unique because the letter keys strike the platen (roller) from underneath and the typist cannot read what is typed until the paper is rolled forward. For this reason, many early typewriters were called “blind” typewriters. This model became unpopular after other companies invented mechanisms that would strike the paper so it was easily readable by the typist. An unusual model is the Corona Portable from the 1920’s which fit into its own carrying case. A safe and cash register are also here.

The Baker River Power, Light and Water Company billing machine is at the front left. Concrete was basically a company town. Utilities such as electricity were supplied to residents by the company for many years, and utility bills were paid at the company office.

The paintings of dams hung on the walls were once proudly displayed in the company office building, and depict a few of the many locations where Superior Portland Cement product was used to construct dams and other structures. These included the Rock Island Dam and Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River. Concrete supplied about 2/3 of the material for the massive Bonneville Power project in central Washington.

The bookcase contains photo books detailing the daily progress of building the Lower Baker Dam. At the time of its construction by Puget Power (1924-1925), this was the tallest single-arch concrete dam in the world. In this type of dam, designed by Stone and Webster, the pressure of the water against the arch (Lake Shannon) holds the dam in place, braced against the narrow canyon walls. See additional photos on the left wall and the painting at the back.

Photos on the left wall also show Concrete's Thompson Bridge. This structure is on the National Historic Register, and at the time of its construction (1916-1918) it also set a world record for the longest single-arch concrete bridge. Cement for the structure was donated by the two local plants, and complex engineering was required to create the bridge which slopes its roadway downward from west to east, and spans the Baker River which had no dam in place at that time, and frequently carried large timber downstream. It was named for local pioneer Skagit County Commissioner Henry M. Thompson, who championed its construction, but was tragically killed in a railway accident just months before its completion.

#8

Cement Plants and Quarry

By John Boggs. Exhibit design by Bob Keith and Don King.



In the 1880's, geologist and prospector Amasa Everett discovered an abundance of clay and limestone in the hills northeast of the confluence of the Baker and Skagit Rivers, where he had staked a homestead claim.

Clay and limestone are not, in themselves, precious minerals. However, when ground up and mixed together they are the main ingredients for what was at the time a building and road surfacing material that was rapidly gaining popularity: Portland cement.

Everett took the initiative to interest East Coast financiers in his discovery, and the Washington Portland Cement Company built a plant in 1905 and began producing cement on the east side of the Baker River. The community, including a hotel and residences, was called Cement City. Immediately in 1906, a second competing plant, the Superior Portland Cement Company was founded in the community of Baker on the west side of the Baker River.

The two communities decided to combine in 1909, when the local population had grown to well over 1000. The matter of a name took some consideration, but in deference to the two cement plants, it was called “Concrete”. In 1919, Superior bought out the Washington plant, which it immediately closed and dismantled.

A local researcher, Eric Archuleta, examined the 1910 census, and determined that of the 996 documented residents, 336 were listed as coming from foreign countries. A graphic display shows the wide variety of countries of origin.

The diagram of plant operations on the wall to the right shows that there is much more to making cement than most people realize. This is from a 1930 published article. By that time, the Superior Plant laboratory had developed state-of-the-art formulations, processes, and techniques used by the entire cement industry.

Originally limestone and clay from the quarry was moved to the plant by rail. The photo of the Baker River rail trestle shows a massive timber structure, just north of where the present-day Lower Baker Dam was built. The trestle still exists, but is covered by the water of Lake Shannon. The cement company devised a different method of moving raw material from the quarry: an overhead tram system that passed from the quarry over the southern end of Lake Shannon, down the Baker River canyon, and then over Main Street (and many homes in Concrete) on its way to the plant. Nets were installed over Main Street to contain occasional rock fall.

The photograph on the back wall shows an aerial view from the 1930's. Tall stacks at the plant show cement dust being vented from the milling and kiln operations, where the clay/limestone slurry was heated to over 2500 degrees Fahrenheit. Other photographs in this section show

the office, the giant rotary kilns, and many other details of plant operations. Railroad lines ran past the giant silos, where the powdered raw cement was held for aging, then loaded into rail tanker cars for transport to project sites. (In the early days, cement was sewn into cloth sacks.)

The limestone quarry on Lake Shannon supplied the raw materials. Hundreds of pounds of dynamite would loosen the rock from the side hill, rock would run through a crusher, and then travel by conveyer through a gallery to load into gondola buckets for transport to the plant. The quarry was a dangerous place to work, and lives and limbs were lost, even though an active safety program was instituted by the company.

A Safety Statue was installed outside the office on Main Street in 1932, awarded by the national cement industry to commemorate a year without significant accidents. Only a handful of these monuments were ever awarded, and only a few are still intact. Concrete's Safety Statue contained a copper Time Capsule that was opened in 2009 at the Concrete Town Centennial. The contents of the copper box are documented in a display at the entrance to this exhibit.

The last owner of the cement plant, Lone Star Industries, closed out in 1967, and dismantled the equipment. All that is left are the giant silos. The "Welcome to Concrete" sign painted on them was created by Warner Brothers Motion Pictures in 1992, when they filmed the movie "This Boy's Life" on location in Concrete. This movie was based on a memoir/novel written by author Tobias Wolf, who lived in the community in the 1950's. Look for the display of movie memorabilia in the central Museum area. "This Boy's Life" books and DVDs are available in the gift shop.

The former plant site was filled, graded, and turned over to the Town of Concrete in the 1990's. Now known as Silo Park, you can still see the abandoned office/power plant building and Safety Statue. It is home to the current Town fire station, community garden and children's play areas.

#9

Concrete Schools

By Cheri Cook-Blodgett. Exhibit design by Robin and Gerald Wood.

This alcove contains memorabilia from the history of schools in Concrete. The first school was a one-room structure, long lost in history. As the population grew in the 1900's, a school building was built on Main Street, across from the current Bank building. This building was eventually moved, and currently is in use as the Town Hall and Sheriff's Office.

The first Concrete Grade School was built in 1910 of fireproof cement, followed in 1923 by Concrete High School. Both structures stood overlooking the playfield on Main Street. (The current school complex is located on South Superior Street next to the Concrete Airport.)



The Concrete High School yearbook since 1923 has been known as the "Yanica". We maintain a collection covering nearly all the years it was published, and add the newest copy each year. These are part of the Museum's archives and may be accessed by request. Scans of graduating class photos are accessible on the Museum web site. A letterman's sweater and other school memorabilia, as well as a number of class photographs are on display.

Concrete High School Concert Band was also noted in the 1962 publication of “First Chair In America” for their excellence, led by music teacher Durward Sobek. His band uniform is on display, along with a photos and notebooks detailing the music curriculum. The Museum web site includes repertoire by the band which was originally recorded on vinyl LP records from 1960 through 1964.

The next room, accessible by request, contains a small library and archives of the Concrete Herald newspaper from its start in 1910 to the present day. Its most famous editor, Charles “Chuck” Dwelley, published the newspaper from 1921 through 1970. Dwelley is also the author of a book on the history of Concrete, called “So They Called the Town Concrete”, which has been reprinted by the Concrete Heritage Museum Association.



Please take a moment to visit our Book and Gift area as you leave. We offer a selection of locally made and American heritage gift items for sale, as well as the following publications that will broaden your knowledge of the history of Concrete:

“So They Called the Town Concrete” by Charles Dwelley

“The Story of Kate” by Jean Claybo

“Men of Concrete, A Pictorial Essay” by Gary J. Mosher