

Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974

Forty Years of History in the Making



*Museum and Office
428 South Water Street*

Silverton's Skid Shacks

By Fred A. Parkinson

Synchronicity at work..... Interesting ideas for our society newsletter sometimes appear in the most unlikely of places. We sincerely appreciate those who contact us with interesting story ideas. A chance encounter at a local grocery store led to the rediscovery of two of Silverton's hidden gems, remnants of Silverton's timber past that sit tucked away in two quiet residential neighborhoods.

I was recently approached by Herb Lay, a member of the historical society, while grocery shopping. He and his wife, Bee, had seen my articles in the SCHS newsletter. As we stood chatting in the aisle, he asked me if I was aware of the skid shacks that were over on Third Street. I told him I didn't know anything about them.

I know about them now.....

Silverton is a town with much distinctive architecture. Silverton's older buildings can be seen as the gateway to our past. Among the most prominent are the Wolf Building and the Wolfard Store building, both located at the often photographed intersection of Main and Water Streets.

However, there are other notable structures in town as well, including the old Silver Creek Creamery building on North Water Street and the recently razed Safeway building on East Main Street. These hidden jewels, typically utilitarian in design, provide an insight into a bygone way of life.

Our newest hidden gems are actually a collection of buildings situated in quiet residential neighborhoods on both North Third and Pine Streets. These buildings are seemingly innocuous, but they hint at a time when the timber industry contributed significantly to the Silverton economy.

During the lumber boom times in the early part of the twentieth century, the two largest Silverton lumber companies, the Silverton Lumber Company, followed a few years later by the Silver Falls Timber Company (SFTC), harvested product in the Cascade foothills. Lumber companies built railroad lines into the mountains, allowing the harvested timber to move more quickly and efficiently from the forest to the mill.

In order to economize operations, logging camps were established close to the harvest sites, adjacent to the railroad lines. The Silver Falls Timber Company established numerous logging camps in the region, simply identified by number. These temporary camps consisted of portable buildings that would move from one location to another as the harvest proceeded.

These buildings included bunkhouses, a cookhouse, mess hall, tool sheds, blacksmithing facilities as well as structures for other uses. The buildings were typically of prefab construction, built to fit on flatbed railroad cars.

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Two Houses in Silverton Added to the National Register

The DeGuire-Ludowitzki House and the Louise Adams House of Silverton, are among Oregon's latest entries in the National Register of Historic Places.

The DeGuire-Ludowitzki House, built about 1907, is a notable example of a modest Colonial Revival-style residence in the foursquare form. Charles Francis DeGuire, who was the son of one of Silverton's established families, constructed the home. He later sold the residence to German immigrant and local builder John Ludowitzki and his wife Mary. The house remained in the Ludowitzki family after their death until 1938. Foursquare homes are generally two stories tall with four relatively equally sized rooms on each floor arranged around an entry and stair.



A flexible house type, Foursquare residences could exhibit a number of styles, including Colonial Revival, which drew inspiration from classical architecture. The DeGuire-Ludowitzki House exhibits the style through the symmetrical placement of windows and doors with decorative trim, round wood Doric columns supporting the wrap-around porch, corner boards, and wide fascia at the roofline.



Built in 1924, the Louise Adams House is a modest Craftsman-style home, typical of many residences constructed during the period, yet notable for its striking octagonal porch. An American style developed in California, Craftsman-style homes characteristically feature low-pitch roofs with broad roof overhangs supported by decorative bracing with exposed rafter ends; multi-light windows; decorative porches; and open interior floor plans. Prominent lawyer, businessman, and politician Louis J. Adams had the building and another on an adjacent lot built as

rental homes, which he gifted to his daughter, Louise, after construction. Educated in Silverton, Spokane and New York schools, Louise worked in Silverton at the Coolidge and McClaine Bank as a bookkeeper before marrying newspaper lithographer Timothy Brownhill in 1933. Divorced in 1954, she lived in the house until her death in 1988.

Oregon's State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation recommended the building nominations at its October 2014 meeting. The two Silverton homes are among 15 historic properties now listed in the National Register. The National Park Service maintains the National Register under the authority of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. More information about the National Register and recent Oregon listings is available at the [Oregon Heritage website](http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/hcd/pages/index.aspx). <http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/hcd/pages/index.aspx>

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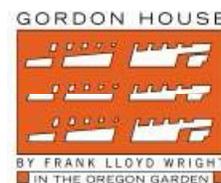
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Pictures of a SFTC logging camp depict some buildings with a gentle curve to the roofline, as are the cabins on Third Street, as well as those with a more pronounced gable, as are the apartments on Pine Street. These structures were probably used as bunkhouses that sometimes had no windows, as seen in the accompanying picture. What made these buildings unique was that they were placed on wooden "skids" that allowed them to be dragged around the campsite to their new "semi-permanent" location. These buildings became known as "skid shacks."



This view of a SFTC logging camp shows the two types of bunkhouses. Wooden skids are clearly visible in the foreground under the two nearest shacks

When harvest was completed in one location the camp was then moved to the next harvest site along the railroad line. Camp buildings were loaded onto flatbed railroad cars for transport to the next camp site.

Once the buildings were offloaded at the new site, a major lumber industry innovation allowed the skid shacks to be moved around with relative ease. This was the development, in the 1880s and refined into the early twentieth century, of the donkey engine, more commonly known as a steam donkey. The machine consisted of a steam engine and geared winches with wire rope attached to drums that could move logs from the stump site to a central loading area, a process known as yarding. Steam donkeys were often temporarily repurposed by attaching cables to the skid shacks and using the winch to pull the buildings around.

As the forests were gradually harvested, the available timber supply dwindled and by the 1930s the local timber industry was in decline. Camp 18, located thirty miles south of Silverton at the upper end of the Abiqua basin, was the last Silver Falls Timber Company logging camp to remain in operation. The company announced the imminent closure of its private logging operations in a September 2, 1938 *Silverton Appeal Tribune* article. The last trainload of logs was hauled down from the camp to the Silverton mill on September 6, 1938. Engineer Mike Stewart was at the throttle of that last train, which was made up of eighteen railcars. Coincidentally, Stewart was also at the controls when the first train reached the mill as the SFTC logging operation commenced in the spring of 1913.

The mill in Silverton would continue operations for another six years, fulfilling contracts to process timber from other logging operations until the mill ceased operations in 1945. The logging shutdown meant that there were surplus camp facilities available.

The company announced that many assets, including steam donkeys, locomotives, flatbed railcars, a huge Lidgerwood lumber skidder, bunkhouses, and other items were to be sold wherever a buyer could be found. Locomotives, steam donkeys, and the Lidgerwood skidder were purchased by other logging operations.

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As the assets were being sold off, four bunk houses were hauled to Silverton and relocated to North Third Street where they were placed on a permanent foundation. These became both apartments and what were referred to as “tourist cabins”

The February 24, 1939 *Silverton Appeal Tribune* ran an article under the headline “**Homeseekers’ Cabin Series is Finished.**” The article read:

“The Homeseekers Agency has completed the first four of a series of tourist cabins to help meet the need for housing facilities in Silverton. As an interesting departure from the usual custom, the agency will reserve two cabins for overnight tourist use. Many people who come to Silverton to look around would stay overnight if they had available quarters, the agency stated. The present series of cabins is located on North Third street between Oak and B streets. They were made over from former bunk houses of Camp 18 of the Silver Falls Timber Company. All the cabins are neat, clean and airy-looking and provided with the necessities, including garage space.”



Present day Third Street Skid Shack

Those cabins still exist today as apartments on North Third Street, although no garage space is apparent. They are easily recognizable, having a distinct shape that includes a gently curved roofline and dimensions that would allow them to easily fit on a railroad car. Windows were probably installed when the cabins were moved to Silverton.

Another set of skid shacks was also relocated to Silverton at some point. They are currently also in use as apartments. They have the gable style roof and, like the Third Street buildings, are easily identifiable by their size and shape, although some of the buildings have been modified over the years. They are located, set back from the street, on a lot in the 700 block of Pine Street. These apartments might have once been owned by Elmer Johnson, a local hardware merchant in the mid twentieth century.



Present day Pine Street skid shack

Few reminders of Silverton’s illustrious timber history survive today although there is a significant collection of timber related artifacts viewable at the museum. If imagination is used, the steam rising above the Bruce Pac plant might be vaguely reminiscent of the lumber mills’ distinctive smoke plumes that billowed into the sky and were plainly visible at the north end of town for over forty years. Timber was king in Silverton in the early twentieth century and was directly responsible for bringing hundreds of jobs to Silverton, staffed largely by

new residents relocating from the Midwest. The effect of the timber industry on Silverton’s early economy cannot be overstated, nor should it be forgotten, as we ponder our town’s past.

Keep informed of what is going on at your Museum by way of this newsletter, through our website, www.silvertonmuseum.org, or follow us on Facebook.

Meet Our New Curator—Judy Lowery

Judy was born in Portland, Oregon to Tom and Joyce (Simmons) Johnson. Her parents met at an Army hospital where her mother, after graduating from Seattle College, now Seattle University, was an Army nurse and her father was a wounded soldier. The family lived in Portland until Judy was eight and then moved to her grandfather's farm in Central Howell. Her grandfather was A.W. Simmons who married Clarissa Palmer, so her pioneer blood runs deep.



Judy has a younger brother Wesley and both of them graduated from Silverton Union High School. She is married to William Lowery who grew up in the Lake Labish area so they share a similar pioneer heritage. They have two children Jon and Elizabeth and a beautiful granddaughter Emily, who attends Linfield College.

Judy received her Bachelors of Arts in teaching from Mt. Angel College and her Masters of Education in Curriculum Development from the University of Portland. She taught for 29 years in the Silver Falls School District, everything from classroom 4th through 6th, PE and middle school language arts, all at Robert Frost and Butte Creek.

After her classroom work, she had the opportunity to teach pre-service teachers and supervise their classroom experience at Western Oregon University. She has recently retired from teaching but still maintains a small supervisory role. When we heard she was retiring, we snatched her up!

Judy says, "With my pioneer roots, I am so excited to be able to be a part of the museum and am ever surprised with the discoveries that come our way each day. Being a history major in college with a strong geography background, working with the museum is a very special 'cup of tea' for me, and I am grateful for this opportunity."

Dime Toss Time is coming up!



Save your cool glass containers for our Dime Toss booth at the Homer Davenport Community Festival to be held August 7-9 in Coolidge-McClaine City Park. This is a fun-filled event for all members of the family and one of our major fundraisers. You can leave glassware at the Museum during our open hours, 1-4 pm on Saturdays or Sundays, or call Chris at 503-873-4529 for other options. Thank you!



Recently at the Museum—

Dolores Blust, pictured here at the left, is one of our staunchest volunteers. She regularly hosts the first Saturday of every month with Jack Hande and the two of them are guaranteed to make your visit to the museum extra special!

Visiting with Dolores on her most recent hosting Saturday were her friends Rosetta Totland and Dorothy Hatteberg,. They look so sweet and innocent don't they? But I heard them sharing some stories from their childhood, and now I am beginning to wonder!



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Celebrating 40 Years in the Community

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Thank you to these generous donors to the fund for the
War Memorial Plaza—Silverton Fallen Heroes
The Knights of Columbus—Silverton

And thank you to all who have given anonymously or contributed via the collection
containers through out town or at various events!

We apologize if we have omitted anyone.

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your prompt response.
Thank you!**