Reflections of One of the Last Residents of Lester

By J. Higgins-Rosebrook

Stop and ask anyone opening the gate across the USFS 54 road art Lester (Washington) and he’ll have a story about Gert Murphy. If she wasn’t his teacher, she taught his mom or his uncle or cousin. Life in the upper Green River Valley since 1929 seems to have been defined by whether Gert was there or not. Gert was not the last resident of Lester for two reasons.

Her niece, Mary Aucourt was her constant companion and there is one other leaseholder and a landowner still living.

She was born Gertrude Ellen Dowd to Katherine (Morris) and Albert Dowd in St. Paul, Minnesota on 29 June, 1903. In 1908, Gert came to Kirkland with her family. The Dowd family, including Albert’s mother and sisters, settled in a log cabin compound on Rose Hill, where they established a thriving farm.

For the next several years, the family traded off between Kirkland and Seattle with one stint of three years or so on the Dowd family ancestral farm in Ling County, Kansas. On that trip, while the family waited a week in San Francisco for their household possessions to catch up to them, they learned that everything had been lost in a train wreck.

Gert’s Early Years

Eventually, Katherine Morris ended up in Fargo, North Dakota with a good job and accommodation in the boarding house where Albert Dowd, who was a baker, was living after having tried his luck in Mexico and several western states. They married and had four daughters, two of whom died in infancy.

Gert told me once that “When Papa proposed to Mama, she turned him down because she though he was younger than her. He told her, ‘Well, your birthday is April 13 and mine is May first; that’s 17 days.’ So she agreed to marry him.” It wasn’t until Katherine was 65 and urging Albert to retire that she learned that they were actually ten years apart in age! “Mama went stumping into her room and began packing her bags to leave,” Gert said, “And oh, we had a time convincing her to stay. Finally, Papa won out because they were always a happy couple and still really in love, even then.”

Injury Causes Setback

The Murphy family returned to Seattle in 1912 and Gert began third grade at the Cathedral school in the fall of 1913. Early in 1914, while leaving school, Gert fell down the stairs and hit her head. The injury caused serious vision problems and Gert missed almost two years of school waiting for her vision to return. Reading became an ordeal of trying to focus and n to zone out after that. For the rest of her school career, Gert had to have her mother or Frank help her with her reading.

During this time, the family maintained the farm on Rose Hill and weekends and summers, Katherine and her daughter, Rose and Gert, traveled back and forth from dawn and dusk across the ferry to Madison Park and up “Mr. Madison’s cow path” to 23rd, where they took on vegetables from some of the Black farmers in the area. They then drove their loaded wagon to the Pike Place Market, where they spent the day selling.

“Mama harvested everything that grew on that hill, even the weeds she used for medicine,” Gert recalled.

In April 1915, Gert returned to the Cathedral School and entered the fourth grade. That same year, her father bought a bakery with two tables at Pike and Harvard, across the street from Broadway High School.

During the school year, Gert and Rose would wake early and package up the bread and donuts their father had baked that morning and deliver them to homes and businesses before school. At lunchtime, the girls would hurry home and make sandwiches for lunch customers with meat they’d brought at the Public Market. Then, after school, they’d load up their little wagon and deliver more bread to other families.

The winter of 1916 stood out in Gert’s mind as the winter when the snow was so deep that “you had to walk along a deep, narrow valley on the side walk to an opening to the street at the corner in order to catch the trolley to Broadway.” She remembers that as the winter of the influenza epidemic, too, when one of her baby sisters died. Katherine and her neighbor, a Black woman newly arrived in Seattle, sought comfort in each other’s company while they nursed their families through that awful winter.

It was 1917 when Gert began seventh grade. At that time, the family had moved from the apartment above the bakery to a house at 516 East Union in Seattle, and Gert was earning a dollar a week working from 5:00 to 7:30 every morning cleaning a neighborhood store at Pike and Belmont and opening the doors for business. She quit that job when the proprietor began arriving too late for her to make it to school on time.

Gert started high school at Holy Names Academy in 1920. While she was a student there in the high school and as a teacher-trainee in the normal school, Gert worked at a variety of jobs, including American Can, where she worked quality control nights and summers, testing cans for leaks. The summer of 1934, she worked for the inventor of the key-opened coffee can doing testing and quality control.

She Earned Her Teaching Certificate

After having graduated Holy Names Normal School in 1925 with a teaching certificate, Gert had a difficult time finding a job teaching. Her grades were excellent and she came with a good work history, but even though she had a birth certificate with her, the school board members met all considered her to youthful (and maybe too pretty?) to be able to control a roomful of children.

Finally, she got a job at the Cathedral School because they didn’t have enough nuns to start the school year. Later that year, several younger nuns graduated and Gert lost her job mid-year.

Because a teaching certificate was good only for two years without a bachelor’s degree in Education, Gert spent the next two years scrambling between odd jobs in Seattle and the Teacher’s College in Bellingham. Twice a week, she took the boat round trip to attend classes.

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During this time, she came up against the prejudices many people held against Catholics. One time, she was interviewing for a teaching job and a school board member kept dropping names of faculty members at Bellingham and Cheney. Gert told her that she didn’t know any of those people and when the woman learned Gert had gone to Holy Names, she refused to hire her. Another time, she was interviewing for a job at the Red Schoolhouse in Maple Valley. Gert didn’t know it, but her competition for that job was Eva Gustenberier, a friend from school. When Gert was offered the job, she was told it was because the other candidate, her friend Eva, was Catholic. Gert informed the school board that Eva was a classmate of hers, they both were Catholic and she didn’t want their job either!

In the summer of 1926, Gert got a job teaching the first six grades at Northrup Elementary. The board was evenly divided in their choice of Gert and another teacher, so they decided with a flip of a coin and, after three tosses, Gert was hired!

Getting a job teaching in Nagrom, her first job in the upper Green River Valley, was a real fluke for Gert. She had spent that summer filing up applications for several jobs and, by accident, put her much-revised rough draft in the envelope she sent to Nagrom instead of her final copy. The school board (members) were so intrigued by this person who rewrote and revised so much that one of their number took the photo Gert included to the county superintendent to find out who she was. Miss Dowd taught the first four grades the first year and the first five the next.

She quit that job because of a personality conflict with one of the board members and worked at the post office and grocery for the next year in between substitute teaching jobs.

**Meet Gert’s “Future” Husband**

Frank Murphy became a part of Gert’s life in 1929. His family lived in Maywood and he ran the store at Nagrom. The store and post office were the center of activity in town—where everyone went after the train arrived in the afternoon. Everyone would have coffee and cookies and discuss the news with whoever had gotten off the train. Evenings, some of the adults would gather at the store and read to each other or play music. Frank was engaged to the other teacher at Nagrom when Gert arrived and she was engaged to a young man in Seattle. From the beginning, however, when group decisions were made among the young adults in town, Gert and Frank were looked to for approval. Eventually, the other teacher moved to Sumner and married someone there and Gert’s fiancé became quite ill and called off the engagement.
Reflections of One of the Last Residents of Lester

by J. Huggins-Rosebrook

Gertrude Dowd Murphy, 99, was one of the last residents of the town of Lester, which no longer exists except for the school house building. Born on June 29, 1903 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Gert traveled to the Northwest, got a teaching certificate, and met the man she would one day marry.

Part Two

The Lester school needed a teacher in 1932 and Gert applied for that job and got it. When she arrived in Lester, she learned that the other woman teacher had refused to share her room with Gert, and the school board was having to build another room onto the teachers’ residence. Gert moved into the Lester Hotel, meantime, and caused quite a ruckus among the entire male clientele of the establishment. since there was only one bathroom per floor, the men — all worried about “what some strange man might do” — demanded that other accommodations be found for Miss Dowd. After some discussion, the hotel owners offered to let her share their daughter’s room in their home.

When she finally moved into the teacher’s residence, Gert learned that the other teacher was, in fact, happy to share her room with Gert, she just wanted a front from for them, too! Now there was a kitchen, bedroom and front room on their half of the house. The janitor and his family shared the other half of the house. They shared the bathroom and washroom.

Gert, the Organizer

For the next ten years, besides teaching four grades at a time, Gert was constantly organizing hiking and camping trips up to Mirror Lake with the youngsters in summer as well as skiing trips to the top of Stampede Pass and back. She’d organize huckleberry harvest forays up Kelly Butte and mushroom gathering expeditions along the river as well.

Gert and Frank (Murphy) spent as much time together as they could during those years, but Gert didn’t want to marry until she was vested in the teacher’s retirement system. At that time, a woman teacher could not be married. She also couldn’t smoke, drink alcohol or be alone in the company of a man she wasn’t related to. All dates had to be double dates or group activities or they could visit one another in their perspective family homes.

Lester Was a Lively Town

Lester was a lively, prosperous town in those days. There was logging, the railroad, a paper mill and a large dairy in town, along with some Forest Service workers. It was the hub of activity for people on Stampede, New Stampede, Kennedy, Borup, Weston, Nagrom, Haywood, Eagle Gorge, Humphrey and Baldy. There were holiday events and dances at the school practically every week, as well as big group excursions for skiing, hunting, fishing, ice skating or picnics.

Just below Lester, the Hot Springs Hotel brought in tourists from all over the world to relax until it burned down for the second time and was not rebuilt. With full-time residents, summer vacationers and tourists, sometimes the population of the town swelled to 2000 people.

In 1942, Katherine Dowd (Gert’s mother) had a stroke and asked Gert to move nearer home. Gert got a job in Fall City teaching first and second grade that year. The next year, she moved to the Highline School District, where she taught first grade at Boulevard Elementary School for twenty years. Katherine died in 1953 at age 88. Albert Dowd (Gert’s father) died in 1958 at age 83.

The Dream Forest

The summer of ’42, Gert was invited to present a paper as part of her Master’s degree process at an annual workshop on environment and development at the University of Washington. the paper, titled History and Development of the Upper Green River Valley as Determined by its Natural Resources, details the history of the Valley from the early years of exploration by McClellan, Landre, Tinkle, and Bogue, through the building of the Northern Pacific Railway, logging and paper mill, towns and watershed issues to the early ’40s. In the paper, Gert describes her dream of a pristine valley under “sensible forest service management” with transient recreationists. This valley in her dreams would be accessed on the east end by parallel highway and railroad tunnels under Stampede Pass, and those roads would exit the valley through the Green River Gorge after having passed through Lester, the only town in the valley.

Frank enlisted in the armed forces at the beginning of the Second World War but, because of his age, was given leave to go home and wait until he was called up. Just before he arrived home, his family home burned to the ground with all the family’s money and possessions. He stayed on to help his family rebuild and remained with them in nagrom and Lester until his mother’s death in 1956.

No matter where she was living and teaching, Gert returned to Lester on the train about every other Friday night for the dance. She spent as many summer days there as possible and Frank came to find her at the Dowd family home every other Friday.

Gert’s mother died in 1953 and Frank’s mother died in 1956. Finally, with family obligations behind the, Gert and Frank felt they were free to marry. So they did. Gert continued to teach at Boulevard Elementary and commute weekends to Lester to be with Frank and reestablish herself in the community.

During the first years of her marriage, Gert traveled to Seattle for Master’s Degree classes but, finally, quit when reading became too difficult for her.
In 1963, Gert applied for retirement, but the school board at Lester asked her if she'd consider teaching there again and she accepted. She taught in Lester until 1969, when she retired for good—only to serve on the school board until 1985. Eleven of those years, she was chair of the Board.

In 1978, Gert's sister Rose, the mother and grandmother of all Gert's nieces and nephews and grands, died. Rose's disabled daughter, Mary Aucourt, came to live with Gert and Frank that year. Mary entered into the life of Lester, making friends and taking night classes in ceramics and other crafts at the school. From that time on, she was Gert's constant companion.

Frank died in 1983 after twenty-seven years of marriage to Gert. It was a marriage of two fiery, funny, very bright people who loved to fish and hunt and hike and camp. They traveled by car all over the western United States, sometimes getting stuck in the most unlikely places, but loving every moment of the adventure.

In the summer of '94, my local phone company heroes, like, kept urging me to go meet Gert, so one day, I telephoned and asked if I might visit. I never missed an opportunity to see her after that. Even if I was wandering around on Forest Service roads miles away, I rerouted myself to pop in somehow on the way home.

The last time I saw Gert was a little over a week ago. She didn't know then that she had the cancer that she finally went with. As I left her hospital room, she told me to tell everyone she was still planning on her 100th birthday next June.

Gert's funeral was held Saturday, October 5 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton Roman Catholic Church in Bothell. She was interred at Holy Rood Cemetery.

Mary Aucourt will be in residence soon at an assisted-living facility in Everett, where the staff are trained to work with her special needs.

The Final Years

THE ONLY REMAINING BUILDING IN LESTER is the "schoolhouse." It was used two years ago for one last reunion of residents, before the town was officially closed. Photo Courtesy of Jack & Julia Garris
Part 1 - The Town of Lester:

Once Upon a Mountain

By Doris Jones

The following is a brief sketch of the town of Lester, Washington, compiled by the author during the ten years she resided there with her family, from 1950 to 1960.

The Early Days

The town of Lester grew from a siding and section house constructed on the site in 1890. At this time it was called "Deans", because of Dean's saw mill, but was officially named Lester in 1891 with the construction of additional trackage to serve the growing community.

There is a legend that the town was named after a telegraph operator who worked in the vicinity during the construction of Northern Pacific's main line. His name was Lester Henschaker. However, when his descendants were contacted to confirm this, they didn't think that his was so, but it sounds like the most likely explanation.

(The information in which this history was compiled was supplied by the following sources: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; Puget Sound Power & Light Company Northern Pacific Railway Company; Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company; United States Department of the Interior; Bonneville Power Administration; Mrs. Frank Murphy, a former teacher in the old Nagrom School and later at the Lester School. At one time, Mrs. Murphy wrote a college thesis on the subject of Lester's history.)

Before Lester, however, came the Northern Pacific Railroad (NP), without which Lester would probably not have come into being. It was back around 1886 that the Northern Pacific and, it is understood, that other railroads as well, were offered every other section in a strip five miles wide if they would build a road over the Cascades to Seattle or Tacoma and the N.P. took up the offer after considering the Snoqualmie and the Naches Passes.

An engineer by the name of V.C. Vogue, with an Indian guide, were sent out from Seattle to survey a course for the railroad through the Cascades and it is reported to be he who named many of the landmarks as they journeyed on foot up the Green River.

When they reached the Green River Gorge, they thought it beautiful and gave it its name. As they proceeded on up the river the weather became very wet and foggy and as it became night, they found themselves bogged down in a spot where the river was too deep to wade and the banks too steep and slippery to climb. By looking around, they located a cave where they could build a fire and spend the night.

By the next morning, the weather had cleared and they were able to view the beautiful gorge they were in. As they made their way out of it and came out onto a plain, they saw a great bald headed eagle circling over them. Therefore, they named the gorge "Eagle Gorge" and the plain "Baldy", and so they are still named today. It is here that now the great Howard Hanson dam is being constructed to control the Green River in time of flood.

"Smay Creek" is believed to have retained its Indian name. Mr. Vogue and his guide reached "Friday Creek" on Friday, and so named it. They kept their camp at Friday Creek and made many side trips, exploring for the best way to continue. It was on Sunday that they came to another creek, which they named "Sunday Creek." They were in the vicinity about a week before continuing on up the Green River.

 Stampede "is said to have gotten its name after construction had begun on the railroad. One of the construction bosses was said to have been very overbearing and hard to work for, and all the men walked off the job in such a manner it was said they "stampeded." So the legend tells us that place was named Stampede.

The railroad originally took a different route than it does today. Before the viaduct and the tunnel were built, it went around by what is now Weston, which was a large town. Weston was established in 1886 and abandoned in 1914. In the same manner that Weston's name was dropped, the name of the town in the vicinity was likewise called Weston. But very little remains of it today. At one time, there were several buildings and blacksmith shops and other things that made it a busy place.

The helper engines were located at Weston, and Easton was the helper station on the other side. There are still traces of the old table and other buildings to be seen at Weston, but very little remains.
The Railroad Hotel

To come back to Lester, the depot was constructed about 897. In the same year, the NP built a hotel for use of its employees. It was expanded in 906. At that time, it had only two floors. But the floor plans as if it was the same building as stands today.

The NP records do not disclose who the first operators of the hotel were. Their first record is April 1915, when Mr. Mered Feta signed a lease with the company taking over operations from Harry E. Miles. Later it was eased by the mesdames Jennie Nichols, Gertrude Westerling, Eleanor Folmer and Constance Smyth, in that order, from 1921 through 1930.

The Lester Round House was constructed in 1914. It was that year that Weston was abandoned and Lester came into its own.

We have been unable to get any census figures for Lester during the past years, as the Bureau of the Census reports that places of a population less than 1,000 are not tabulated individually. We do know that Lester had a considerably larger population in the past than it has today. Before the advent of the diesel helpers, it took many more of the old steamers to help the trains over the mountains. It is said that they had as many as 14 helper crews working in Lester at one time, and as many as 18 men working in the roundhouse. All this made for a much larger town that it is today. There are traces here and there (pointed out by old timers) where there used to be many houses that have burned down or been torn down as they were not needed.

Gradually, fewer and fewer helper engines were needed to assist the freight trains across the mountains. The advent of the Diesels made it necessary to only use one helper when three or more were needed. Also, the trains were equipped with more powerful diesels to start with and, in many cases, did not need a helper. Many shorter, freights were run and these, too, needed no helper.

Finally, in 1958, the change came that really cut Lester’s population, importance and activity. The hotel was closed, as well as the roundhouse and boiler room, and the diesel helper station was

The Scott Paper Company

The Scott Paper Company logging camp in Lester was a huge industry, employing many men and doing more and more business each year. More and more employees of the camp moved into Lester and eventually made up for the railroad families that moved away.

The Scott Paper camp was originally the Soundview Logging camp, built in 1947. A man by the name of "Brew" had operated a small camp on this site in the past and in 1953, this camp was bought by Scott Paper, which employed approximately 175 men and shipped their logs out on flat cars to the pulp mills in Everett.

Puget Sound reports indicate that electric service first came to Lester on January 3, 1929, and the initial service included 66 customers. A telephone was first installed in Lester in 1923 and is believed to have been for E. Hocking, who was to be the postmaster in Lester for 50 years. The phone was discontinued shortly after, but was installed again in 1928 in Mr. Hocking's name.

(During the 30s) Pacific Telephone Company created a separate dial telephone exchange for Baldi, Stampede, Eagle Gorge and Lester. A particularly interesting fact in connection with this was that the unique pre-fabricated, galvanized metal building in which the exchange was located, was something very new. It was constructed in Seattle and then transported to Lester where it was connected with underground cables. This was the first such "pre-fab" building ever used in Pacific Telephone's Washington-Idaho area.

Hot Springs used to be a famous health resort, known all over the country. It was founded in 1887 and called Kendon, but did not keep that name long. The Washington Hot Springs company bought the location in 1893 and started constructing a large hotel and making it into a popular resort. The railroad laid down a boardwalk all the way from the depot to the hotel, which sat on the bank of Green River. There were lovely lawns and many trees laid out from the track to the river. Those were gay times at Hot Springs, with an orchestra and many fashionable affairs. The hotel was destroyed by fire, but the exact date of the fire is not known. However, NP records show that the depot burned on November 2, 1923. The Tacoma Watershed now owns this site and the springs were dynamited in an effort to destroy them and discourage anyone using them and polluting the water. However,

Homesteaders

There used to be a man who was called "Old Scotty", who lived at what is now called "Sweeney's." He used to bring in and locate homesteaders in those years when land was being taken up in this manner. He locate on homesteads and we paid about $50.00 a homestead. These people were required to make certain improvements in order to keep their land. Many of them did not come up to the specifications and the section was converted into a forest reserve.

Many of the homesteaders objected to giving up their land and some took up their rifles and laid in wait along the roads waiting for officials to come to evict them. My informant did not believe there was ever actual bloodshed. Some of the homesteaders closer to the railroad proved up. There are several those around Lester. Scotty lived on his homestead until he died. He had willed it to Mr. Sweeney who used to see that he had food.

Scotty trapped until he was too old. But he built many cabins in the mountains, which we used for trapping cabins.

A man still comes to Lester every summer who still owns old homestead in Weston. It comes up several times every summer to go fishing and see his property.

There are not many real old timers still in Lester. The Maniche family is about the only one. Mrs. Hilda Maniche, widow of Karl Maniche, homesteaded with her husband at Hot Springs, but they gave their place after he started working for the railroad. His son Tony and Gus still live in Lester. Their daughter, Ellen, is now Mrs. Roscoe Rainey, who I mentioned is still living at Nagrom.
By Doris Jones

The following is a brief sketch of the town of Lester, Washington, compiled by the author during the ten years she resided there with her family, from 1950 to 1960. This is also concludes a two part series that began in the August 28, 2003 edition of the NKC Tribune, page 3.

The CCC Camp

Back in the early 1930s, a large Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was located in Lester. It was Camp F 23 and was located just east of Friday Creek on the site where the tavern now stands. It was the CCCs who built most of the forest service buildings in Lester in 1934. The original ranger station for the North Bend Ranger District was located about 4 miles east of Lester. There are no improvements there now. The location is just north of the Stampede-Lester road, near the 4-mile post and under the Bonneville Power lines.

Two roads, the Stampede-Lester-Baldi road and the Twin Camp road, were both built by CCCs, primarily for fire protection purposes. Also constructed at this time by the CCCs were, Stampede, Humphrey and Meadow Mountain lookouts for the forest service. Kelly Butte lookout was built in 1924 and replaced in 1950.

The CCCs did many other jobs in the area, such as constructing 56 miles of telephone lines, thirty miles of fire breaks, 34 bridges and falling many snags.

Mr. Elmer Gochnour of Fall City was the carpenter foreman; Mr. John P. Van Orsdel, camp superintendent.

In asking the forest service about the large fires in the Lester vicinity, they have only sketchy records, but report that some of the large fires in the Green River area occurred around the turn of the century. There was a 195-acre fire in the Forbes Timber Co. operation dated August 15, 1919. This was in Sec. 16, T 20 N, R 9 E, which would be southwest of Maywood. There was a fire at Nagrom in September 1914. This was apparently a large fire, but no official details were available.

WPA Camp Lester

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) gave us some information about the Works Progress Administration (WPA) camp in Lester in 1940. Camp Lester, a 350-man WPA project was established in the fall of 1940 to clear a 300-foot right-of-way, except for the Lester-Easton section, where only 150-foot width was specified, for Bonneville Power Administration’s Covington-Coulee 230,000-volt transmission line, carrying the first power from Grand Coulee Dam to load centers of Western Washington through Stampede Pass.

Jim Bell and George H. Humbert of BPA, and two Dotson brothers of Lester did most of the supervision and directing of the work on the first building, the cookhouse, and mess hall. Later, the camp had about six barracks, an infirmary, a machine shop, and bathhouses. Building materials, land clearing equipment and tools and supervisory personnel were supplied by BPA, while workers were certified to the project by the WPA.

The Carlton Lumber Company of Lester was the low bidder on the contract to furnish “knock-down”, or portable, buildings for the camp at Lester, Selick and Easton. Jim Bell, acting head of steel line construction for BPA, handled the Carlton contract and expedited all other materials used in the construction of the camps.

Camp Lester was a scene of bustling activity as the right-of-way clearing was carried on through the winter of 1940, through 1941 and completed in the spring of 1942. It was prima-
rily a hand-logging show with perhaps a dozen HD-10 bulldozers, four skidders and some 40 trucks. Clearing, piling and burning was the routine and logs that would be worth thousands of dollars today were burned because of inaccessibility to saw mills and the comparatively low price of logs.

Recreation consisted mostly of poker sessions in the bunhouses, visits to the nearby Hot springs, teasing the bears that hung around the camp, and an occasional outside trip to Ellensburg, Wenatchee or Seattle.

Construction of the first 110 miles of the transmission line from Covington was contracted to H.H. Walker of Los Angeles, California, and begun in July 1941, with the remainder of the line—the 78 miles to Grand Coulee—contracted to Fritz Ziebarth. Walker ran into heavy snow in building through Snoqualmie Pass and, in January 1942, five “cats” under George Smith were being used just to keep the roads open to the tower sites. Work was being rushed on the line to meet defense power needs. The line was completed in July 1942.

Camp Lester was partially taken down and moved to Colockum Pass in 1942 and, more or less, disbanded. Except for a brief occupancy by 90 men of a BPA line-construction crew working on the Covington line No. 3, in 1945, it was not used again as a construction camp. BPA maintenance crews used part of the original cook house, mess hall and one barracks building, for a field station, until 1951.

Loss Of The Mail Train

On the first of April, 1960, Lester received still another loss, when the NP canceled their day-time trains No. 5 and No. 6. This was caused by the loss of the mail contract on these trains, which occurred when a new system of mail distribution by truck was put into effect.

Since the Lester road to the Snoqualmie Pass is closed nearly eight months of the year due to snow, and the road out to the West is a private road blocked by locked gates and unavailable to the public, this put the residents of Lester in a very inconvenient situation. Before, Lester residents made a practice of taking No. 6 train to Cle Elum to do their shopping, receive medical and dental care, and all sorts of necessary errands. This trip is now impossible. With trains No. 1 and No. 2 running, at such inconvenient times that a trip East would necessitate staying over a part of two nights. And the trip West, although possible, means being away from 5:00 a.m. until nearly 12:00 p.m.; very impractical for taking a child to the doctor or just buying supplies. In the case of an emergency, where it is necessary to get someone to the doctor at once, it is a really alarming situation. A plane can be chartered to fly in, but often the high mountain valley is so fogged in that it is impossible to land a plane. So, great efforts are underway to secure an all-weather road into Lester to enable its residents to get out in case of emergency, as well as to conduct ordinary business or pleasure trips.

The outcome of these errors are still to be seen.* Everyone who has lived in Lester has developed a fondness for it and its location in the lovely valley high in the Cascades. It makes a lovely place to live for the retired or anyone wanting a mountain retreat, as well as for those who have work there, either in the logging camp, on the railroad, or in some other private business.

Lester has an excellent school, built in 1953, modern and well-equipped in every way, and has maintained a four-year high school, even though its enrollment has fallen off due to the changes made by the railroad.

* The outcome, as it is known today, is that Lester was eventually abandoned. An all-school reunion was held in Lester prior to its demolition in 1985.

About the Author

Doris Jones and family lived in Lester from 1950 until June 1960, when they moved to Cle Elum. Her husband, Wilfred, worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad at this time. He eventually retired as a B and B supervisor out of Yakima.

Doris' oldest son, Wes, graduated from Lester in 1958, in a class of two.

Steve attended school in Lester through the seventh grade. He then finished his schooling at Cle Elum, graduating in 1965.

Son Gordon spent the first four years of his life in Lester, and has lived in Cle Elum ever since then.