

Vancouver Uncovered Clark County Historical Museum

This text is taken directly from the Vancouver Uncovered exhibits at the Clark County Historical Museum. This text corresponds with the Vancouver Uncovered PowerPoint.

Desirable Situation

Early Inhabitants

People called the Chinook lived along the Columbia River when the Corps of Discovery passed through the area in the early 1800's. The diversity of plants and animals along the river and its tributaries made it an attractive place to live

Food sources were plentiful and Wapato, camas roots, berries, and a variety of fish and game contributed to the Chinook people's diet. Raw materials to make baskets, clothing and other essential household items were easily obtained.

It wasn't until 1825 when the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Vancouver that the landscape began to change. The impact of these changes shaped the social, economic and cultural development of the Pacific Northwest.

The Witness Tree

Amos M. Short carved his initials in a tree near the Columbia River at the south end of Main Street in 1846. This marked the first American homestead claim in what would become the city of Vancouver. The "Witness Tree" established a legal landmark in property disputes, as well as the point from which much of Southwest Washington was surveyed.

When the old tree fell onto the bank of the river on June 27, 1909, people came from all around to cut off pieces of wood as souvenirs. Two years later, the remains finally drifted away.

Shoots taken from the old tree were planted throughout the city. Unfortunately, none of these offspring are documented as still alive today.

Changing Landscapes

Both British and American governments wanted control over the land north of the Columbia River. The uncertainty of who would control the region caused many Americans to settle in Oregon territory.

In 1846 the 49th parallel firmly defined the northern boundary of our country and Americans began to move into Washington Territory. Settlers claimed the land west of Fort Vancouver and called their community the city of Columbia.

American troops arrived to establish a military presence in the Pacific Northwest in 1849. The post, built advanced to the fort, was later named Vancouver barracks.

The Hudson's Bay Company remained for ten years, until their trading privileges drew to a close and they departed. Soon, all signs of the British Fort Vancouver disappeared.

Americans Vancouver

Initially called Vancouver County, the region was renamed Clarke County in 1849, after William Clark of the Corps of Discovery. The extra "E" at the end of Clarke reflects a spelling error which was officially corrected in 1926.

The Washington territorial legislature changed the name of the young community from Columbia City to Vancouver in 1855. Even today there is occasionally discussion about changing the name in order to avoid confusion with Vancouver, British Columbia. America's Vancouver is a good way to describe our city.

Vancouver incorporated on January 23, 1857, creating the foundation for the city we see today.

Bid for the state capital

The developing community desired to have Vancouver appointed as Capital for the State of Washington. After all, the location was good and the governmental activity in the city would ensure growth and stability.

Attempts to secure this position in 1887 almost succeeded. In fact, the Washington territorial legislature approved the designation. But several errors in the preparation of the document, and resistance by the people in the Puget Sound area, defeated the effort much to the disappointment of the citizens of Vancouver.

Vancouver Barracks

Pearson Air Park

Located on the east edge of Vancouver barracks, the air field attracted early aviators as well as the military. The Army Air Corps used the site as an operational base for forest fire patrol in 1921 and soon a commercial field started up next to it. Eventually the fields merged and were renamed in honor of Lt. Alexander Pearson from Vancouver, who was killed during flight practice in 1924.

Russian aviators visited the Field twice: once when their monoplane stopped for minor repairs in 1929 and again in 1937 on the completion of the first non-stop transpolar flight from Moscow to Vancouver.

Military Presence

American Army troops arrived in 1849 and established what was to become the primary military reservation in the Pacific Northwest until WWI. Here army personnel trained soldiers, participated in the Indian wars, explored new territory, and policed civil unrest in the region.

Close proximity between the city and the barracks provided jobs for civilians supplying the military with goods. Soldiers spend their paychecks at local bars and businesses. The

occasional conflict between rowdy soldiers and the growing community was not uncommon, but overall it was a mutually beneficial situation.

Spruce Production Division of the Signal Corps

WWI brought people and employment to Vancouver. Lumber was needed to build airplanes and the Pacific Northwest had the kind of trees that were required.

Organized by Col. Brice Disque, the Spruce Production Division became the largest cup-up plant in the world. Built south of the Barracks, it overlapped the area where Fort Vancouver and Pearson field are today.

Under governmental oversight, over 30,000 civilian loggers and unskilled soldiers worked together to process over 141 million board feet of lumber. Most of it went overseas to allies for the construction of airplanes.

The plant closed and the loggers dispersed at the end of the war. The mill was razed and the land reverted to airfield use in 1924.

Vancouver Barracks Civilian Conservation Corps District (CCC)

Organized in the spring of 1933, the CCC provided useful employment for men during the Depression. The combination of hands on work experience and educational training helped participants improve their employment opportunities.

The Vancouver barracks district started with four camps and later expanded to twenty-two. Regional CCC projects included the construction of forest fire lookouts towers, telephone lines and roads, and recreational areas. Nationally, over three million men participated in the program during a nine year period.

Citizens Military Training Camp (CMTC)

Between 1921 and 1940, Vancouver barracks was one of fifty Army bases participating in a voluntary program called the citizens military training camp.

Offered during the summer, the one month program provided young men between the ages of 17 and 24 with basic military training. An estimated 400,000 young men participated in the program nationally.

Kaiser Shipyards

Soon after the onset of WWII, Vancouver was chosen as the site of one of seven Kaiser Shipyards along the west coast to build ships for the war effort.

Kaiser Shipyards set many records in the production of ships as well as in the speed the ships were produced. During this time, they also instituted changes in employment practices to eliminate discrimination against race and color.

At the peak of production, there were 38,000 people working at the Vancouver Kaiser shipyards; more than 10,000 of the workers were women. During the war, these men and women constructed 140 ships and two dry docks, with shifts working around the clock.

Common Purpose- Common Ground

The House of Providence

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Providence arrived in Vancouver in 1856 with the mandate to care for the sick, educate children, and introduce the light of Christ to everyone they met. Under Mother Joseph's leadership, health care and social ministries were established throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The House of Providence, constructed in 1874, is one of the visible remains of the Sister's efforts. Constructed for use as a school, orphanage and dormitory, it was the largest brick building in Washington. Thousands of bricks made by the Hidden Brick Company went into its construction.

Robert Hidden purchased the building in 1969 and converted it into an office and retail space. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

House of Worship

St. James Catholic Church was the first church in the community. Built near Fort Vancouver in 1849, the church was ordered to vacate their property in the 1870's by the military, a result of a property dispute which lasted nearly half a century. A gothic style church was built in 1885 closer to downtown.

In 1853, Rev. John McCarty, Episcopal Chaplain of the Army post, became rector of St. Luke's, the first Episcopal Church in Washington Territory. The church building went through several expansions and then a devastating fire in 1931. It was rebuilt at this current location on Fourth Plain Boulevard.

As Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and other churches established in the area, they provided both a place of worship and a sense of community for the growing city.

"Gretna Green" of the Pacific Northwest

Gretna Green, a small village in Scotland bordering England, allowed marriages without parental consent, where the groom could be as young as 14 and the bride 12 years old. England required both the bride and the groom to be over 21 and parental consent was mandatory. The result, many people from Scotland and England eloped to Gretna Green.

The relatively lax marriage requirements in Washington State- no waiting period between application and issuance of a license, and no physical exam- and the fact that Vancouver was just across the river, appealed to many Oregon couples.

To make it even easier, licenses were available at the Clark County Courthouse day and night, and parsonages surrounding the Courthouse hung signs on their porches advertising their services. For a time, Vancouver was the "marryingest" city of its size.

The Prunarians

The Elks, Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary Clubs are recognized organizations in our community. But have you ever heard of the Prunarians?

Many people shun the dried, wrinkly fruit known as the prune. But in 1888, prunes were an important industry. In fact, by 1920 Clark County considered itself the Prune Capital of the World.

Local businessmen organized the Prunarians in 1919. They constructed an auto campground, supported the Fort Vancouver Restoration Project and performed other civic duties. For several years they sponsored a Prune Festival, complete with Prune Queen, and one year they held an elaborate picnic in Esther Short Park for the entire community.

As the prune industry declined in the late 1920's, the Prunarians disbanded.

Green Space

The people of Vancouver enjoy nearly 7,000 acres of parkland and 44 miles of trails which encourage walking, biking and exploring the great outdoors.

Esther Short, one of Vancouver's early settlers, established the first park in 1853 and deeded the land to the city when she died. The park became a popular place for picnics, social gatherings, campaign speeches and entertainment.

The first piece of public art was unveiled in the park in 1929. "Pioneer Mother," a bronze depicting a woman with three young children, is a tribute to all the mothers who settled the Pacific Northwest.

Esther Short Park is now a central point in the redevelopment of downtown Vancouver. The Farmer's Market, concerts and various events keep the park buzzing with activity.

Places to Eat

Places to Eat

As the popularity of dining out increased, so did the "eateries." Many cafes and restaurants have come and gone, replaced by new establishments.

The Holland Restaurant, a downtown icon for many years, is now the location of Dulin's Village Café. Fast food available during the 1950s at the Spic N Span hamburger "drive-in" is now provided by Muchas Gracias.

The second Burgerville, founded in 1961, still stands on the corner of Mill Plain and C Streets. It continues to serve up hamburgers topped with a "special sauce" as well as seasonal treats such as Walla Walla Onion Rings and Pumpkin Milkshakes.

Tokens in Trade

Bus tokens, trade tokens, sales tokens have one thing in common: they are a substitute for currency.

Washington's Revenue Act of 1935 required taxes to be paid based on the selling price of an item. As a result, differences of a fraction of a cent were often involved with purchases. The tokens or "coins" were made of a variety of materials.

In reality, they were actually somewhat of a headache as it required additional calculating as well as having the appropriate token on hand. This system was disregarded by merchants and customers.

Places to Drink- Temperance

The earliest attempts to enforce Prohibition came in 1855 when a Washington Territory referendum for prohibition was defeated by less than 90 votes. But those supporting the cause merely reorganized and continued their efforts.

Temperance rallies, marches and speeches recruited public support and the movement grew in strength into the 1880's. By 1886, nine of Clark County's 16 precincts voted to go dry, but Vancouver was not one of them.

On December 1915, Washington joined 18 other states that chose to go dry, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol. It was the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States in 1920 that enforced Prohibition on a nation level.

Places to Drink- Tempers

A "great experiment" Prohibition became a point of rebellion for many people. The result was an immediate increase of illegal activities revolving around moonshine and creative ways to get around the new law.

For thirteen years, local law enforcers confiscated equipment and moonshine, often at the risk of their lives. Here is a glimpse of what was going on in Vancouver at the time:

- third week into prohibition, 400 gallons mash and 10 gallons moonshine taken from Fruit Valley
- 1921, Japanese freighter Kaikyū Maru raided in Vancouver harbor, 200 cases liquor destroyed
- 1923, electrically equipped winery at Harney Street was destroyed
- 1932, over 800 quarts beer and 90 gallons moonshine poured down Vancouver sewers- in one day
- Quantity of moonshine produced per hour increased steadily during Prohibition era as production techniques improved

Places to Drink- Brews

The Lucky Lager sign is gone now, but for many years it greeted people as they drove of the I-5 Bridge into the city.

Vancouver has a long history of beer making, with the first brewery established in 1856. Although there were shifts in ownership, the brewery was in continuous operation until the Prohibition era. It reopened in 1933 and closed permanently in 1985.

Soda fountains were popular alternatives during prohibition, but the taverns and "beer and wine parlors" opened up for business again as soon as Prohibition was repealed in

1933. Bars and clubs are still well represented in Vancouver, as well as breweries and a place to brew your own.

Vancouver: the place to ship

Milk and War

Into the early 1900's, the most settlers kept a cow to provide milk and butter. As Vancouver grew, it became increasingly difficult to maintain a cow in town. Dairy farms and creameries became a popular alternative.

Cooperative dairy associations formed to strengthen the market and promote grading standards. But there were differences of opinion on the fairness of some of the regulations. Clark county dairymen protested what they felt to be unfair grading practices by Portland distributors and started a "milk war" in August 1931.

Dairymen blocked roads and the I-5 Bridge, dumping 3,500 gallons of milk from Portland trucks into the Columbia River and along the roadside, the battle escalated, guns and weapons brandished, and one man was killed. Six days later an agreement was reached and the fight was over.

The Wrinkled Prune

For a time, prunes were the largest industry in Clark County. The first prune dryer in the areas was an "American Steam Fruit Evaporator" which could dry 5,000 pounds of fruit a day.

The Vancouver Independent describes the activity at the Porter Bros. Packing House on September 30, 1901.

"The prune's are reviewed in sacks on the first floor, weighted and thrown into a bin, where they are carried by a prune carrier run by steam to the third floor where they are run through a monster grade— through a steam processor; to the second floor, where some 25 girls lay the bottoms of the boxes with two layers of prunes. Men then take them, fill the boxes, and nail on the cover."

After several years of bad weather, disease and a small insect called a thrip, prune crops began to fail. Soon, prune orchards were cut down to make rooms for the expanding community.

Of Business and Industry

Here are just a few of the businesses and industries which have been a part of Vancouver's growth and development.

- 1856, Muench Brewery started the beer tradition in Vancouver
- 1871, Hidden Brick Co. Founded by LM Hidden; last produced bricks in 1991
- 1884, Lucia Mills, largest sawmill in Vancouver with a 25,000 board feet per day capacity.
- 1907, Vancouver Soda Works is established; renamed Wineberg Bottling Works in 1912; closes in 1935

- 1912, voters authorize the start up of Port of Vancouver. The Port will ultimately deal with imports of steel, plywood, fertilizer and autos and exports of wheat, bulk minerals, lumber, pulp and steel
- 1917, Standifer-Clarkson Shipyard is established; ship building for WWI
- 1920, The Washington Growers packing plant begins operations
- 1924, Columbia River Paper Mill begins paper manufacturing
- 1926, manufacture of plywood begins; becomes Vancouver Plywood in 1935
- 1940, Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), buys 215 acres and begins production; closes in 1986
- 1947, Jantzen Knitting Mills begins operations; remains in operation until 1997
- 1949, full production begins at the Carborundum Company plant in Vancouver
- 1990s, technology finds a home in Vancouver; production of semi-conductors, silicone wafers, computer chips and printers
- 2000, Hewlett Packard, top manufacturing employer in Clark County, focuses on inkjet printers

Water, Lights and Actions

The Vancouver WATER Company, a private corporation, began providing water to the growing city in 1868. Water service providers changed several times until 1937 when the city took over the system.

LIGHTS were turned on in the city in 1889. Three years later, the Vancouver Independent reported the “light wires” “telegraph” wires and “electric car” wires– are strung over our streets in great profusion– necessitating the presence of a large number of unsightly poles on streets and corners”

The first two miles of SEWERS were laid down in 1890. Within a year it was mandatory to connect all outhouses and cesspools within 100 feet of the sewer line. Today there are over 662 miles of sewer lines in the city.

Health and Education

The A, B, Cs

When Washington became a state in 1889, there were 1,800 students in Clark County; today there are 22,508 students in the Vancouver School District.

The earliest educators were from Fort Vancouver. Individuals and churches offered private school, but public education was not offered on a regular schedule until the late 1880's. Other higher educational opportunities included the first Normal School for teachers in Washington Territory, a seminary, and colleges.

Vancouver was also the location for Washington’s School for the Deaf, Blind and Mentally Challenged. Initially, there was one school serving these multiple needs, but by 1913 the school had separated into three sites.

A Circulating Library

In 1876, a library was established in the office of the Vancouver Independent Newspaper. Soon the Vancouver Library Association organized, charging a subscriber fee of 25 cents a month.

For a short time, the Women's Christian Temperance Union maintained the library and in 1891 the city funded a libertarian position. A request to philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for support to build a library in 1903 was successful.

Carnegie provided \$10,000 for the building, LM Hidden offered the site of a former brickyard for the land and the city set aside \$1500 for new books. The library opened on December 31, 1909.

The library outgrew the building in 1963. The Fort Vancouver Historical Society used it as a research library and museum.

Clark College

Clark College a private, two year junior college opened in 1933 and classes were held at the Lowell Hidden house for the first few years. It was during this time; students removed a papier-mâché penguin from an advertising display of menthol cigarettes and placed it on the fireplace mantle of the house. This became the prototype for the college mascot.

In 1941, Clark College started receiving Washington State financial support and in 1967 became a part of the statewide system of community colleges. Closed for a few years during WWII, it reopened with a new vocational training component.

Today there are 13,000 students at three campuses and through partnership with several Universities, bachelor degrees are offered.

Community Health Notes

Doctors often traveled great distances to visit patients in outlying areas. Pharmacies were also available and provided a variety of drugs and medical supplies to the community.

As health care became more formalized, ordinances and the development of structured medical assistance changed the way health service was delivered. Here are a few notable medical milestones:

- 1889, a health and cleanliness ordinance introduced by City
- 1880, first public health meeting held in Vancouver
- 1881, city ordinance requires reporting cases of contagious disease and quarantine enforced
- 1882, four physicians listed in Vancouver
- 1918, all public places are closed for over a month because of the Spanish Flu epidemic
- 1912, nurses training school opens at St. Joseph's Hospital
- 1939, community pitches in to purchase a vehicle and resuscitator for the Vancouver Fire Department after an accident claims the life of Francine Manary
- 1942, Kaiser Shipyard present health plan to workers and their families

- 1945, Clark County TB League presents the health department with a “complete - ray laboratory on wheels” to combat TB
- 1948, Vancouver Aerie of the Eagles Lodge and local businessmen present the Clark County Health Department with a portable iron lung to treat people with infantile paralysis.

Going Places and Getting There

Means of Transportation

Planes, trains and automobiles are all quite familiar forms of transportation. It wasn't that long ago that there were limited options: by foot, horse or some sort of animal drawn vehicle.

Sept 13, 1878

The ferryboat at Vancouver, tied to the bank, was sunk by an “alternation of the tides.” Efforts to get it off the bottom failed due to mishaps. After three days she was raised and towed to Portland for repairs

April 27, 1890

“Professor” William Lang made a balloon ascension at 13th Street. It ascended 500 to 600 feet and descended about two blocks away. “The ascension was a success in every particular.”

April 19, 1891

Prof. Vilas, an Aeronaut, made a successful balloon ascension and jump at the corner of Main and 12th Street. He went up about 800 feet when the parachute dropped and descended with moderate speed, barely missing a picket fence. About 1500 witnessed the event.

May 27, 1891

Reported that “Miss Eva Woodruff and Miss Ella Davis are the first Vancouver ladies to enter that most exhilarating sport of bicycling and have purchased high grade ‘safeties.’ For our part we do not see why a lady should stand aloof from cycling more than a gentleman”

April 2, 1896

“We are patiently waiting for the completion of the successful flying instrument, and the overcoming of the laws of gravitation. How nice it would be to soar in space and gaze upon different continents, islands, oceans and seas, and the great cities, lofty mountain peaks and beautiful landscapes as they swiftly pass beneath us”

Aug 27, 1892

The first Vancouver street car ever to run by electricity had its first trip; started at 3:54 pm from 3rd and Main, carrying 48 joyriding passengers.

Sept 10, 1901

“An automobile driven by Morris Wells, of Portland, appeared on the streets of Vancouver–, and quite startled the natives as well as the horses. This was the second appearance of an automobile in the city.”

Nov 22, 1901

The locomotive of the Washington and Oregon Railroad entered the city limits – in a downpour of rain– pulling the construction train– just before noon, preceded by the track layers by only 23 minutes. By night the track was laid to the Porter Bros. Packing plant, where several cars of prunes awaited shipment.

Feb 1 1915

“Jitney” bus service started in Vancouver, arranged by Ralph Avery of the recently organized Interstate Passenger Service CO of Portland. “Self-propelled five cent passenger busses,” went from the ferry to east Vancouver.

Feb 14, 1917,

The Interstate Bridge at Vancouver was opened. “Yesterday was the biggest day and the greatest day in the History of Vancouver. The ceremonies and program went through without the slightest hitch.”

Sept 19, 1922

“The Prunarians’ Pacific Highway Day” was a great success. Hundreds of automobiles traveled from Vancouver to Kalama over the completed pavement. 4,836 cars crossed the Interstate Bridge.

(Excerpts from Vancouver Area Chronology, 1784-1958, Carl Landerholm)

Rest and Relaxation

Independence Day

The Fourth of July is a time of celebration and the citizens of Vancouver have always found time to honor the day. Baseball games, parades, races or all sorts, food, speeches and fireworks were some of the celebratory activities.

Esther Short Park was the site of many of the early celebrations. Now the action is on the Parade Grounds at the Vancouver National Historic Reserve.

Early in the day people arrive to stake out their spots with blankets and chairs, ready to spend the day hanging out, listening to music and checking out the booths. Around 10 pm, what has been billed “the biggest fireworks display west of the Mississippi River” begins directly overhead.

On With the Show

A precursor to the movies was the “Magic Lantern” or stereopticon. The mid-19th Century novelty projected images from painted glass slides. Viewing was both entertaining and education as they showed far way places and events.

Vaudeville, popular during 1880s-1920s, relied on the talents of actors and other performers. Melodramas, musicals, and comedies were performed in local theaters. This form of entertainment was soon in competition with silent films. Replaced by “talkies” in the 1930s, vaudeville acts and silent films faded from the scene.

One of several movie theaters in Vancouver, the Kiggins opened in 1936 and continues to show motion pictures. It is now the only cinema in town to offer double features, previously a common practice for movies theaters.

Early Sports Highlights

Sports activities provided an inexpensive form of entertainment and an opportunity for competition. As you can see, numerous sporting activities kept the community occupied.

Jan 26, 1847

Game of curling on the frozen Columbia between officers of the British warship Modest and officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company at Fort Vancouver. The former won.

May 29, 1867

The first baseball game known in which a Vancouver team participated. Score: Vancouver Occidentals, 62; Portland Pioneers, 79.

May 17, 1877

“Croquet has become the all absorbing game in Vancouver. Baseball is nowhere.”

Sept 26, 1895

Reported that the Vancouver High School football team had defeated the Portland High School team, 14 to 4. “Portland rooters routed– they came to crow and went home whipped.”

Jan 1 1901

“The new year and the new century were ushered in with a flurry of snow, which commenced falling early in the morning and continued until noon, about 4 inches of the beautiful snow covering the ground. Snowballing was the order of the day. Sleighing was good during the forenoon, and quite a number indulged in the exhilarating pastime”

May 15, 1902

Reported from Ellsworth: “Ellsworth golf links, as now perfected, are out of sight. Practices are not as general as it might be, owing to the difficulty in securing caddies. Kids the right size are going into long pants, or they go off and drop potatoes for some fellow.”

Nov 22, 1911

“After a heated discussion” the student body of Vancouver High School voted to organize a basketball team. To practice in St. Luke’s Hall.

Jan 10, 1918

“The new spruce mill (south of 5th Street in the barracks) is growing so rapidly– that the landscape is changed every 24 hours. What was a piece of polo grounds two weeks ago is covered with the foundation for a building 300 to 360 feet.”

Excerpts from Vancouver are chronology, 1784-1958, Carl Landerholm

Lay a Wager

Gambling is a popular activity and one of the earliest gambling opportunities came in the form of horse races. Fort Vancouver hosted the first horse race open to the public in 1846.

A race track opened near Main and 29th Streets in 1892. Over 700 people attended opening day while music by the 14th Infantry band played in the background. The following year, the new electric street car system brought people from the ferry to the races. Unfortunately the race track was sold and torn down just 7 years later.

Horse racing started up again at the new county fair grounds in 1912. When Bert Bagley purchased the property, he kept the track busy until fire demolished the grandstands in 1940.

In 1933, Greyhound dog racing was inaugurated at Bagley Park in spite of warnings by the State Attorney General that it was illegal. In May 1935, the Governor of Washington ordered the State Patrol to arrest anyone gambling at the race track. It wasn't long before dog racing was discontinued.

For a while card room gambling was popular, especially in the southern portion of Main Street. With the introduction of the WA lottery, card rooms were phased out.

Attempts to establish a Washington lottery began in 1973. It took 9 years before it passed through the legislature. In 2002, Washington joined the multi state lottery program, Mega Millions.

Can you guess which location in the state that sells the most lottery tickets? It is the Day and Nite market located on the corner of 5th and Washington street.

The Privy

Sanitation Reform

Changes in waste management began after the Civil War when germ theory was proven and the relationship between health and sanitation discovered. The first board of health was formed in New York, 1868; soon other cities followed suit.

The privy was used well into the 20th Century. As urban areas developed sewage systems, the bathroom evolved into a modern convenience. It took rural areas longer to have the luxury of indoor plumbing.

One of the Works Progress Administration (WPA, 1935-1943) projects was to build thousands of outhouses in rural areas. The use of cement floors and ventilation shafts improved sanitation and reduced the risk of disease related to poorly constructed privies and contaminated groundwater.

The Privy

One thing people have in common everywhere is the need to go to the bathroom. But before the “bathroom” was the privy or outhouse. We may think of the outhouse as primitive, but it worked better than using a chamber pot and throwing the waste in the street.

The privy was usually a small building with walls and a door separate from the main house. Inside there was one or more seats made of a board with a hole cut in it and placed over a pit. If there were children in the house, one of the holes was smaller. Instead of the soft white toilet paper we are familiar with, old catalogs, newspapers, leaves and corn cobs were used- when available.

Crescent Moon or a Star?

The cut outs on the doors of privies bring to questions whether or not they correspond to male and female privies. Some sources say that the women were represented by the crescent moon and the men by the sun or star.

But the practice is inconsistent enough to be questions. Besides, most people did not have the desire or resources to build and maintain two privies. It may have simply been a way to add a little light and ventilation in the space.

Getting the Message Across

Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

The first “local” newspaper was the Oregon spectator of Oregon City, initially published in February 1846. It wasn’t until June 30, 1860, that publication of the Vancouver Chronicles began, but less than a year later H.C. Struve took over publishing. He only lasted eight months before calling it quits.

Urban E. Hicks took over the paper in December 1861, and changed the name to Vancouver Telegraph. Within six months it was announced the “the Vancouver Telegraph is dead” and the equipment was offered for sale. The Morning Oregonian was the “local” newspaper for a while.

The Vancouver Independent began production on September 4, 1875. The paper changed hands several times with the final issue printed in July 1910. The Clark County Sun of Vancouver was founded in 1906 and continued publication until August 20, 1947.

The Vancouver weekly Columbian published its first issue October 10, 1890. 18 years later it became the first daily newspaper in Clark County.

Herbert J Campbell purchased the Columbian on May 1, 1921. Since then, there have been three generations of the Campbell family publishing the newspaper.

Pushing the newspaper into new forms of production, it was the first business to install Model 30 Linotype machines, the most modern machines available in 1937. That same year, they also began the Associated Press wire picture service.

The newspaper office has had several homes, each building providing a slightly larger work space. Its newest home is currently under construction and scheduled to open in October 2007.

Now publishing seven days a week, The Columbian provided coverage for local and national events, and offers access to news and information on the web.

“Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these courageous couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

Many people recognized this phrase in some form or another as relating to mail delivery. However, there is no official US Post Office motto. The saying comes from Herodotus' description of the Persian mounted couriers he observed in 500 BC.

One of the architectural details on the NY General Post Office, built in 1896, includes the phrase engraved over the main entrance. Mail carriers nationwide unofficially adopted the motto.

In 1850, the first Post Office was established in Vancouver, tying with Olympia for the first in Washington Territory. Initially located near the waterfront, the office moved several times, operating out of stores and other buildings. In 1917, the Post Office moved into its new building on 12th and Daniels Street.

Yakety Yak

We take it for granted that we can just pick up the phone and talk to whomever we want, wherever they are. Not long ago, it was a little harder to get a message to someone.

January 8, 1850

US Post Office established at Vancouver.

June 30, 1860

Publication of Vancouver's first newspaper, the Vancouver Chronicle began.

August 16, 1864

The telegraph first came to Vancouver. Immediately after the cable under the Columbia reached the north bank it was connected with a transmitter and messages could be sent to Portland and San Francisco.

1874

The first Sholes & Glidden type writers sold, produced by gun makers in NY. Less than 5,000 sold.

August 27, 1892

“Our pretty little city moved a long way nearer (to Portland) when telephonic communication was established between the two cities. The Vancouver “central office” is in the Hotel Columbia, and the bell has been on the continual jingle since.”

March 19, 1926

The first letter in the airmail service between Seattle and Vancouver was delivered at Pearson Filed by the president of the Pacific Air Transport Company.

October 15, 1953

KOIN TV, a new Portland television station, went on the air for the first time.

July 7, 1954

“Vancouver’s newest radio station (KHFS) said to be the first high fidelity AM Station in the US, “Went on the air at 5500 Fourth Plain Avenue.

Excerpts from Vancouver Area Chronology, 1784-1958, Carl Landerholm)

Fires, Floods, and Acts of Nature

Floods

The Columbia River has flooded its banks several times, resulting in roads, buildings and millions of feet of timber being washed away. While it was convenient to be adjacent to the river and the ferry, Vancouver’s business district eventually moved further north out of the flood zone.

One of the worst flooding events happened on May 30, 1948. Water broke through the embankment and washed away much of Vanport, the second largest community in Oregon. Few lives were lost, but property damage was extensive.

Widespread flooding was seen in Vancouver along the waterfront and through Fruit Valley where over 200 families were evacuated. Water reached inland as far as 2nd and Washington Street.

Windstorms and Tornadoes

Windstorms occur regularly in the area, felling trees and telephone poles, causing power outages and blowing away anything not securely tied down. A few tornadoes have touched down in Clark County, but the most deadly one to arrive in Vancouver was on April 5, 1972.

Traveling north from Portland, it touched down several times on the Oregon side, then again near the east side of Vancouver. It roared along for nearly nine miles toward Brush Prairie, damaging schools, residences and the Waremart grocery store. The final toll was six dead and 300 injured.

Snow and Ice

It is true- the Columbia River has frozen solid from time to time. Solid enough to drive across in a sleigh. Solid enough to skate or play on. The last time the river froze was in 1979.

Freezing weather has often caused havoc on local transportation. Giant blocks of ice immobilized the ferry. Street cars lost power and were unable to move for days. On occasion, the Interstate Bridge refused to rise when there was too much ice. During these events, the city became somewhat isolated.

Snow and freezing rain still slows down the commute and reminds us how dependent we are on our transportation system for getting us around town.

“Sans Peur et Sans Reproche”

On August 23, 1866, a fire destroyed ten buildings along Main Street. The devastation spurred the community to organize the first volunteer firefighting company. Before long two other volunteer companies joined forces to become the Vancouver Fire Department. “Without Fear and Without Reproach” is the motto they adapted in the late 1800's.

Today the Vancouver Fire Department responds to over 20,000 calls a year over an area of 92 square miles. Their mission is “to provide highly trained professionals, well-equipped to respond effectively to the education, prevention, and emergency response needs of our community.” Three cheers for the Fire Department!

Police, Pests and Public Nuisances

Vancouver Police Department

“We serve the city of Vancouver with courage, strength, integrity, compassion and pride”

City Council appointed Moses Kitchener as the first constable in 1853, a one-year volunteer position. It wasn't until 1868 that more than one constable was appointed at a time.

Formal “beats” were established in 1882 and the first night patrolman was put in place a year later. As the town grew, so did the police department. The first Police Chief, George A Nerton, arrived on the scene in 1900.

Police began using horses to patrol the expanding community. In 1915 Motorcycles were introduced just a few years later. By 1941, automobiles were necessary.

Today, Vancouver police patrol 530 miles of roads. Staff includes 189 officers and 34 civilians to cover the two precincts.

Pests and Public Nuisances

Early residents of Vancouver were subject to some unusual pest and public nuisances.

March 7, 1862

“see here, Messrs. ‘City Fathers,’ cant you arrange it... to have the sidewalks...fixed up in a little better style. It's a heavy undertaking to get down to the Post Office from our establishment, saying nothing about other places where we occasionally want to drop in a moment.’ We are confident if a good safe route was constructed on Main Street that it would add much to the comfort and convenience of our citizens... besides saving a good deal of scrubbing and washing at home”.

April 1878

The Independent reported that Vancouver citizens had castigated freely Portland hoodlums on the steamer Gazelle, with the result that the latter were threatening to come over and “take the town and run it.” The newspaper told them they would be properly “welcomed” — nothing happened.

April 17, 1879

Report on the results of a new Vancouver city ordinance; “The ordinance restricting the running at large of horses, cattle and hogs is being strictly enforced by Marshall Slocum, – (the city) is no longer a vast hog pen.”

June 29, 1896

Marshal O’Neil of Vancouver arrested a Portland bicyclist “for traveling the streets — without a bell on his bike,” The biker left \$3, all he had, with the city justice for his appearance Monday. He did not show up.

August 12, 1886

“A nest of yellow jackets at the corner of 8th and Main street offered lively exercise for women and children, and some men had a pretty good time getting away from it.

January 13, 1887

Editorial comment: “It is the proper time now- to remonstrate against cigarette smoking in the theater during performance. Some uncultivated heathen recently has seen fit to pollute the air, which ladies, gentlemen and children have to breathe. The management ought to see that every cigarette fiend, who dares to do the like, is fired bodily”

May 28, 1890

Reported that a “cow ordinance” had been reenacted at Vancouver (after a lapse of several years) to the relief of citizens. “Formerly at this season of the year, the city has been overrun with horses, cattle, sheep and a pig here and there, driven from the bottom lands by high water, causing the resemblance of the streets and common to a picked goose.”

August 16, 1893

“One day last week Thos. Young killed a rattlesnake on the riverbank down by the sawmills. It was three and a half feet long and had ten rattles. It probably came down the river on driftwood.”

January 2, 1895

Reported “A Colony of English sparrows has taken up its abode in this city– these chattering pests may be seen – on Main street— picking up refuse along the street.”

August 12, 1907

Mrs. Platt of Portland was arrested by Sheriff Sappington on the ferry for speeding down Main Street in Vancouver and frightening a horse into a runaway, then not stopping to check the result. “The automobilists from Portland are disposed to turn loose their machines when they arrive in this city and ride rough-shod over everything in their way.”

Excerpts from Vancouver Area Chronology, 1784-1958, Carl Landerholm