

Once a Lusty Logging



Frank Morris, who now lives in Olympia, was general manager of the Bordeaux mills at the time they ceased operation. Picture was taken in 1941. Man in picture on wall is Wilford Bordeaux, son of Joseph Bordeaux, one of the founders of the town.

(Editor's Note: Jeanne D. (Mrs. W. Ken) Adams is an Olympia freelance writer.)

By JEANNE D. ADAMS

THE LOGGING town of Bordeaux came into being in 1887. It was built on a tract of Northern Pacific Railway land in the Black Hills area, about 20 miles southwest of the capital city of Olympia. It was named for its founders, Thomas and Joseph Bordeaux, who were originally from Ontario, Canada. In 1885, the brothers organized the Mason County Logging Company and the Mummy Lumber and Shingle Company.

In 1924, the Mason County Logging Company produced 150,001,000 feet of lumber. The Black Hills area yielded about six billion feet of logs from approximately 1925 until the time logging operations ceased, in October 1941. The Mason County Logging Company was the first logging outfit to enter the Black Hills and the last to leave.

There's very little to be found on the history of Bordeaux. Few records were kept in the early days of the town's existence. My information came from some of the people who lived and worked there, and who still live in the southwest Washington area. From this information, one can get a vivid impression of the people who comprised the little logging town. They were a tough, rugged lot, who not only looked after their own, but planned for, and in a sense provided for, posterity.

Land Sold to State

After operations ceased in 1941, the Mason County Logging Company sold the state of Washington 60,000 acres for restocking of young trees on the devastated land. This is now a part of Capitol Tree Farms in Thurston and Grays Harbor counties.

Between three and four hundred people lived in Bordeaux, with close to 150 men working in the three mills: shingle mill, planing mill and sawmill. This didn't include the woods crews or loggers. Some of these men drove from Little Rock, Rochester, Olympia and Centralia, all within 20 miles of Bordeaux.

The town sported a company hotel, where some of the single men lived and had their meals. In another building, the poolhall shared a room with the barbershop. On a counter in the rear of this building, a hotplate heated a coffeepot that brewed many potent cups of steaming hot java. It met its fate, however, one night when someone forgot to pull the plug. The pot set fire to the counter, then to the floor. Some occasional flames saw the smoke and turned in the alarm. The fire whistle blew, and in nothing flat the half-dressed volunteer fire department was on the scene. (Fire gear in those days

was anything you managed to grab on the way out the door.) The blaze was extinguished in a matter of minutes. Undoubtedly, the uppermost thought in the minds of the firemen was, "Save the poolhall!"

Trev Tupper, a white-haired man of 74, worked at Bordeaux for 17 years. He was planing mill foreman part of that time. Now, after more than half a century of marriage, his jovial wife, Armoda, is still his right hand. From their memories, and some yellowed documents they've kept, comes most of this story.

No Church

There was no church in Bordeaux during its lifetime. But there still lives a gracious little lady, now in the twilight of her life, who did all in her power to take the place of a church. It's doubtful if anyone in Bordeaux was more respected or better loved than Jennie Bowers. She took it upon herself to teach the Bible to the children of the town, having them in her home every Sunday. She also taught Bible classes for the mill workers' wives.

But there are undoubtedly quite a few people who remember Jennie Bowers for even more. It was not an uncommon sight to the people of Bordeaux to see Jennie's dining table smothered with children, all seeking help with their homework. In her patient way, she helped them all. Jennie (Mrs. Henry) Bowers still lives in Olympia. One of her sons, Hob Bowers, operates the Elkson Brothers Oyster Co. in the Mud Bay area.

The company store was managed by Ray Wynan, now also of Olympia. Since it was the only store in town it stocked everything from soap to suits, and one of the lumber company's two concrete vaults was in the store. The other vault was in the mill office.

Worry, Tragedy

Time weren't always good in Bordeaux. Like other logging towns that sprang up in the Northwest, it had its share of worry, destruction and tragedy. One of these tragedies was related by Hazel Corden, a well known hair-dresser now living in Olympia.

It was a warm spring morning in April 1904. Blanche Philby, a young mother of two who was expecting her third child very soon, picked this rare day to do some shopping for the coming baby. Her husband, Charles, worked at the mill. It was her intention to go to the mill for some money, then on to the company store.

Her home, like most of the others, was perched on the hillside, so she had to come down a flight of wooden steps, cross the railroad tracks, then on to the mill. She got as far as the tracks when she was distracted by a yell from a friend, who wanted Blanche to pick up something at the store for her.

A lone engine operated by a



The sawmill



The planing mill



Mima Creek Valley was the site of Bordeaux and its three mills
—photo by the author

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fireman, blasted around the bend behind her.

Glen Whipple picked up what was left of Charles Philby's wife and unborn child. Two little lads were motherless, and Hazel Cardon no longer had an Aunt Blanche. I was unable to find out if the two children are still alive, or their whereabouts.

Fire Always a Threat

Fire was always a great threat. Trev Tupper told about a bad one that started close to the dry shed (where dry lumber is stored prior to shipping). The fire whistle blew and all firemen responded, to a confusing noise! The fire hoses leading from the sawmill to the dry shed had been chopped with an axe in many places. From all appearances, it was a pure case of arson. Except for the efforts of the firemen and mill-workers, the town and all three mills could have been wiped out. But only the dry shed burned, along with 10 million feet of finished lumber, and a small railroad car, called a speeder.

The motive for setting the fire is still a mystery, along with the identity of the culprit who set it.

Times were tough for everyone during the depression years, including the people of Bordeaux. But rather than not work, the men in the mills chose to take a cut in wages and continue to work as long as they could.

In March 1931, Trev Tupper, then foreman of the planing mill, made \$180 a month, making him the highest paid in that department. L. W. Kuserlin, John Barnett, Bozo Mohamed and Claude Romane all took a cut in wages, some making only two dollars a day.

Others Took Cut

Many more took a cut to continue working: Merle Brock; Bill Porter; A. Fitzinger; Bob Neffinger; Charles Layton; J. Zegopoulos; G. Sense and Earl Stephens, along with Vic Kropf, Charles Lyman and Slaton Smith. These men all worked in the planing mill that had a crew of about 40 men. Many of these men are dead now, but if they could know the going hourly wage today, they'd flip in their graves.

Life in Bordeaux had its hazardous aspects, too. A man by the name of Ruby Layton went to town one night in his Model T Ford touring car. When he went and what he did was Ruby's business, but, to make a long story short, Ruby got loaded and headed home to Bordeaux. The last few miles of the road went in a straight line through the Mima Prairie moorlands (a bunch of little moorlands that are still a mystery), then up the hill to Bordeaux.

Ruby wasn't seeing too well and the Model T flipped over on its side, leaving Ruby beneath.

Five fellows on the way to work the next morning found Ruby crushed under the Model T. He wasn't hurt, but pretty insignificant, and never since has

the Mima Prairie heard such a bellowing voice blast out "Barney Google, with the goog-goog-googley-eyes. Somebody git this dammed thing offa my neck!"

Moved to Tacoma

When the mills closed in 1941, Ruby Layton moved to Tacoma, and passed away there some years later.

There are many others who had a hand in the history of Bordeaux. Frank Morris, whose father was the first bull cook in camp and who started out as a snip of a kid in Bordeaux and ended up as general manager of the mills, probably knows more about Bordeaux than any man, living or dead. He now lives in Olympia.

Jim Kalpounis, who was on the green chain for 28 years, claims to have seen more lumber pass over a green chain than any other lumber worker in the world. To date, the authenticity of this claim hasn't been challenged. "Big Jim" Kalpounis, now living in Tacoma, must have set a record.

There was Jim Tachey, Lois Tupper Lawrence, daughter of Trev and Armeta Tupper; the Bowers brothers, Bob and Frank, sons of Jennie and Henry Bowers; Dewey Blacker and Allen Turnbow, who have both walked their last mile; Art Olmsted, a personal friend who worked in the woods crew in Bordeaux, and now lives in Olympia. There are a hundred more, and a million more stories but . . .

A Lonely Place Now

I went to the canyon in the Black Hills where once the town and mills of Bordeaux were. It's a quiet, lonely, forgotten place now, with only a few head of Black Angus cattle hoofing around in the muddy, unkempt schoolyard. The Bordeaux mansion, no longer in the Bordeaux family, is owned by Arthur Currier. Other than timeless memories, it's the only usable thing left of Bordeaux.

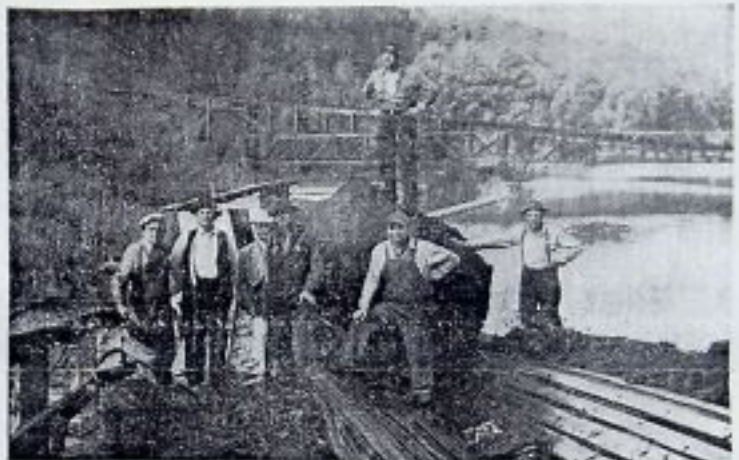
In October 1941 the little town was torn down and sold, and hauled away. What was left was razed. But only time is the final obliterater and there are still a few things left of the once booming town. The two monstrous vaults still stand where they always have, along with some huge decaying timbers, still lying on the hillside. There are still some rusty, bent water pipes, jutting from masses of tangled Himalaya blackberry vines. A few rotten boards remain of the steps down which Blanche Philby walked to her death, hanging on the hillside.

The waterless mill pond is just an alder bottom now. Alder trees 20 feet or more high are growing in the mill pond that once held millions of feet of first-growth hemlock, cedar and fir logs.

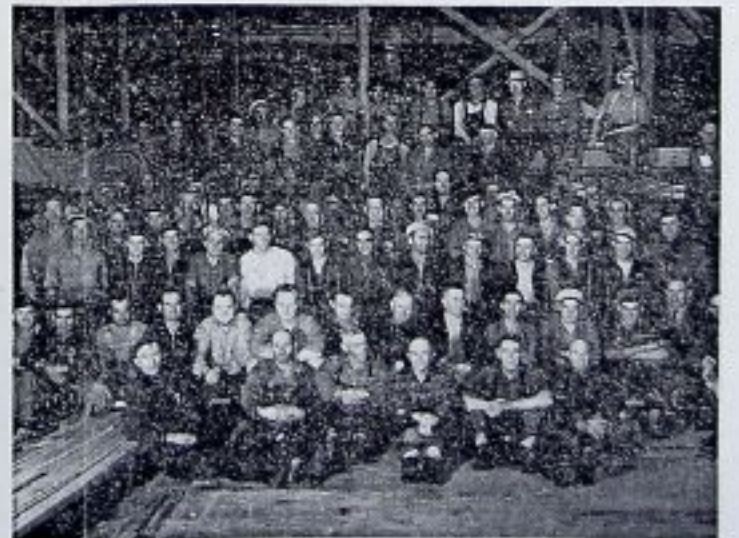
Just a stone's throw from the old two-story mansion stands the sentinel of the Mima Creek Valley, the old red schoolhouse, the Ghost of Bordeaux.



Vault No. 1 was in the company store. The other vault is covered with brush — photo by the author



This was the last log sent through the mills at Bordeaux. The men are, from left, Trev Tupper, planing mill foreman; Andy Holden (now deceased), superintendent of Bordeaux mills; Ray Bordeaux (in white hat), son of Thomas Bordeaux; Martin Hjort, sawmill foreman; Bill McPhee, sawmill filer; Clyde Dewitt, on log; and Harry Mays, far right



The planing mill crew, yard crew and shipping crew posed for this picture in 1941. Many of these men are still living in the Olympia and Tacoma areas.—This photo, and all others not by author, were made available by Trev Tupper.

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