Lake Oswego’s Forgotten Bridge
Stephen Dow Beckham

For more than a century a mighty bridge has spanned the Willamette River in the City of Lake Oswego. Because of its location and use by the railroad, few—except daring teenagers who dash across it on foot or on their bicycles—are aware of its presence or history.

The Southern Pacific Railroad Company erected the structure as a bypass to move its trains to the east side of the Willamette and away from Fourth Street in downtown Portland. Its lines from Union Station crossed to the east bank via the lower deck of the Steel Bridge constructed in 1912 by the Oregon - Washington Railway & Navigation Company. Southbound traffic then passed through east Portland to Sellwood and Milwaukie. The main line headed south to Oregon City, Salem, and Eugene, while a spur crossed to the west bank to run through Lake Oswego and on to Newberg and McMinnville or northwest to Beaverton.

Designated the “Willamette Structure 743.27,” the bridge was erected in 1910 at River Mile 20, its distance upstream from the Columbia. The west approach has a 50-foot steel span constructed in 1900 by the Phoenix Bridge Company and recycled to this site in 1931. A 60-foot trestle constructed in 1934 connects the steel span to the bank.

The main bridge is made up by two, pin-connected through truss spans that run for 298 feet over the river. They rest on three flared concrete abutments that anchor the structure. The spans carry the railroad deck and tracks and connect, on the east side, to a 668-foot trestle constructed in 1927.

The right-of-way was originally acquired by the Beaverton & Willsburg Railroad Company, founded in 1906 as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Southern Pacific. The first train ran on July 17, 1908, presumably on the Beaverton to Cook route.

The bridge is owned by the Union Pacific Railroad but is under lease to the Portland & Western Railroad (PNWR), a subsidiary of the Genesse & Wyoming Railroad of Rochester, New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut. The G & W operates more than 110 short-line railroads around the world, including two in Oregon, and is the largest rail network in Australia. G & W lines in Oregon connect the Portland metropolitan area and its port with Astoria and Toledo on the coast and to Eugene at the head of the Willamette Valley. Its marker sidings near the Oswego railroad bridge are Willsburg in Sellwood and Cook in Tualatin.

Further reading:

Winter scene with snow. Photo in OHC collection - a gift of Julia Marx.
A Hidden Community  By Steve Dietz

Ann Fulton, in her illustrated history of Lake Oswego, Oregon, Iron, Wood & Water, notes that “Lake Oswego has a hidden past. Much of its history as a sawmill site, an iron town, and a backwoods lake resort is invisible.” Today, few know that an entire community once existed that occupied an area on what is now the south side of the City of Lake Oswego, Oregon. Now largely invisible itself except for its name given to a playing field, that community was known as “Hazelia” and was comprised of the farms of early pioneers who tilled the soil and used the land to raise crops and animals. Known as Hazelians, they also raised families, some of which, generations later, still reside in what was Hazelia on the farms begun by their ancestors.

The approximate center of Hazelia was the area between Rosemont and Childs Roads where the Cook Farm and Luscher Farm buildings still stand. The earliest maps of the Hazelia area show few inhabitants. The 1852 General Land Office survey of the vicinity indicates a single structure marked “Wilson” near what is now the intersection of Stafford and Rosemont Roads. The area to the north is labeled “Land rolling & hilly. Soil good 2nd rate clay loam” and “Timber large scattering fir etc.” Undergrowth hazel, willow, fern etc. To the south nearer the Tualatin River, the map notes “loam Timber a stately growth of fir” and “Thick undergrowth & loggy.” The hazel undergrowth which had to be removed to clear the land for farming was apparently the source of the name “Hazelia,” perhaps a tongue in cheek reference to a stubby-fue.

Later maps show that by the turn of the century the area had been divided into parcels of various sizes, many of which functioned as farms. The 1928 and 1937 Metsker Maps for Township 2S, Range 1E provide relative parcel sizes and owner names for properties that surround a large circle labeled “Hazelia.” The circle was positioned inside the Cook farm on Stafford Road near Rosemont Road. Owner names include those of early and well known Hazelia and Oswego families including Shipley, Cook, Laidlaw, Carter, Zivney, Pattullo, Baker, Childs, Papoun, Wanker, Hagl, Borland, Johnson, Bethke, Walling, Long, and Legett. A few of these remain today as road and location names.

Agriculture supported many Hazelians over the years and continues to do so for some. Crops were grown for self consumption and also for sale to markets in Oswego, Oregon City, and Portland. Lucien Davidson, a farmer and carpenter who lived on his farm a mile and a quarter south of the steamboat landing at Oswego, kept personal diaries from 1876 to 1911, and mentions a number of crops, some of which he sold in Oswego and Portland. He lists cauliflower, pears, cherries, peaches, quince, figs, rutabaga, strawberries, gooseberries, peas, radishes, lettuce, onions, turnips, cabbage, melons, beets, and wheat as well as eggs, butter, chickens, and calves. Hops were also grown as a cash crop. Historic photos show large extended families coming together for harvests.

One of the largest farms was owned by Adam Randolph Shipley and extended from Rosemont Road to the Tualatin River. The farmhouse was constructed in 1862 or 1863 and is still standing along with other outbuildings. Shipley, an Ohioan who traveled over the Oregon Trail to Portland in 1852, worked as a woodcutter before opening a book and stationary store which ultimately increased his personal worth to almost $20,000 in 1860. He served as Portland’s 5th Postmaster until 1861 and moved soon thereafter to the area known as “Oswego.” He would eventually purchase and own about 1,000 acres and the farm would become a center and model for agricultural practices in the area. He became recognized as an authority on grape culture and at one time grew forty-five varieties of American and European grapes before settling on Concord as the best variety for local markets. Shipley was ever active in the Grange, helped organize the Oswego Grange in 1875, and was the State Grange Master from 1875 to 1880. A small building on the property was used as a Grange hall until 1890.

A portion of the farm was also used as the site for the construction of a school for the Hazelia School District 37. The Oswego Methodist-Episcopal Church used the school for services twice a month in 1888 until a new church was erected in the town of Oswego. Shipley was a charter member of the Oswego Odd Fellows Lodge No. 93 (formed 1888) and helped organize the Odd Fellows Cemetery which is now the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery on Stafford Road where many Hazelians are buried. In C. 1891, he was appointed to the Board of Regents at the State Agricultural College (now OSU) and became its Treasurer and Librarian. He would eventually move to Corvallis and sell portions of his acreage, including land, to his children. The Shipley farm would be sold to James Preston Cook in 1900 and continue through the years as a working farm and community meeting place. The Shipley-Cook farm is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Hazelia as an election district or precinct is present in U.S. Census records for the years 1930 and 1940. Prior to these years Hazelia was included in the Oswego Precinct. The 1930 U.S. Census for “Electvision District 43, Hazelia” recorded 172 individuals within the area of the district. The censuses include the names shown on the Metsker maps as well as others, and allow one to determine various population demographics and changes to the same over time. While most are listed in the earliest and later censuses as farmers, other occupations begin to be recorded in the 1920 census until, by the 1940 census, there is a wide variety of recorded occupations including attorneys, electricians, salespeople, mechanics, chiropractors, dentists, brokers, and photographers. A definite shift from use of the land for almost solely farming to that of residences for non-farmers is evident.

The Oswego Times, which served to provide news to Oswego during the early 1900’s, offered a Hazelia column to its readers by bylines given to, among others, Hattie E. Wanker, “KATYDIDN’T” and “TILLICUM”. The later Oswego Review would also report on Hazelia, although there wasn’t a specific column. Instead, articles which included Hazelia residents and events were included. The articles give a glimpse into the lives of Hazelians who undertook a wide range of activities, often meeting together at events taking place locally and at various distances away from their homes in places like Newport, Baker and Mt. Hood. Hazelians were early automobile owners and made good use of them soon after they arrived for sale.

One might never guess that there was once a “Hazelia Literary and Debating Society” which met at one of the three Hazelia school buildings which were constructed at various times with the last being built in 1916 and used until 1946, or that church and Grange meetings were also held in the same schoolhouse where “The Apple Butter Lady”, Flora Jarisch, gave and sold her treat to...
other members. Or that socials, parties, piano recitals, and performances at the school were attended by as many as 50 to 100 people and featured a piano purchased with funds raised by a piano committee from Bernard Shoninger & Company of New Haven, Connecticut.

One might also not know that many of the people who lived in Hazelia were significant and important to the history of not just their community, but to the histories of Oswego, Clackamas County, and Oregon. Hazelia was, early on and for its time, an active, innovative, forward-thinking, and not-so-invisible community that helped shape the future of the region.

**Historic Home Tour Information**

Many of our strong annual events are just around the corner. In celebration of National Historic Preservation Month and in recognition of our community’s historic past and architectural diversity, Oswego Heritage Council announces its 6th Lake Oswego Historic Home Tour. On Saturday, May 18, 2013 from 11:00am to 4:00pm, the Council will celebrate the beauty of Lake Oswego by showcasing five historic homes and gardens.

Tickets are limited in number, and are available for purchase at the following locations—by visiting our website at http://www.oswegoheritage.org/events/hometour.html and/or by visiting the Heritage House at 398 Tenth Street, Lake Oswego, Oregon. The cost is $20. per ticket for members.

Members of Oswego Heritage Council are asked to buy tickets at OHC or online. You get a discounted price. For further information about purchasing tickets, call Oswego Heritage House at 503.635.6373.

Non Member tickets are $30. and can be purchased at 7 Dees on McVey, online or at OHC.

Please buy your tickets soon as they are selling quickly.

We would like to acknowledge a few of our sponsors: Premier Sponsors – Mary’s Woods, Cascade Sotheby’s International Realty. Distinguished Sponsors - MCM Construction, Jennings Insurance, City of Lake Oswego, Lake Oswego Review, Phil Chek, Willamette Valley Vineyards, Ed and Phyllis Miska.

We look forward to seeing all of you at the Historic Home Tour on May 18th.

The Collector Car and Classic Boat Show will be August 18th. You can register your car now online at www.oswegoheritage.org/events/carshow.html
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