

Fairfax, Washington

Fairfax once thrived as a lumber mill and coal mining town on the last leg of the Northern Pacific Railroad system up the Carbon River Canyon.

The town was located in 1892 by W.E. Williams and his father. Williams later became a Pierce County Commissioner. Fairfax was named after Fairfax County Virginia for its well-known coal producing area.

The only transportation in and out of town was the railroad until 1921 when the Burnett to Fairfax highway was put in. Previously, residents who owned a car had to park in Carbonado and catch a train the rest of the way home. The new county road opened on December 17, 1921 and citizens no longer relied on the railroad for transportation in and out of town. The beautiful and historic O'Farrell Bridge was completed at the cost to the county \$250,000. The price included paving to the town.

Fairfax was the home of the Manley-Moore Lumber Company, one of the largest and most modern inland sawmills in the state. When the sawmill was running at full capacity it employed over 200 men at the mill and logging camps.

The Fairfax Mine also owned and operated the Fairfax Hotel, supplying it with electricity and water.

Brehm Brothers General Merchandise ran the post office, which opened on November 18, 1896. Items such as hardware, ranges, cook and heating stoves, granite and tin ware, guns and ammunition, paints, oils, glass, wall paper, automobile supplies including the Goodyear tires, Monogram and Standard gasoline and service pump, complete stock of miners' supplies, stationery, furniture, window shades, rugs, carpets, linoleum, matting and a supply of clothing from hosiery to ready-made suits and shoes that were guaranteed to fit could be purchased.

The town had a train depot, turntable, school with an indoor swimming pool, coke ovens, butcher shop, baseball field, and mine buildings. The company also owned the houses including the Victorian style mine superintendent's house with a tennis court. Everyone rented their homes from the company. Also located in Fairfax was the Manganese Coal and Copper Company.

The Carbon River Shingle Company produced quality shingles of the highest-grade cedar.

Fairfax also had one of the richest coal deposits in the state. It specialized in furnace coal of the highest grade. Practically its entire output of coal was converted into that form of fuel. Eight-five employees were on the Fairfax Mine, Inc. payroll in 1917 and drew approximately \$15,000 a month. The company operated sixty coke ovens with a monthly

capacity of 252,500 tons, which went to the Tacoma smelter. The mine also furnished the town with electric lights and water.

In 1896 work began by the Western American Company on properties in section 26. The construction of a railroad from Carbonado, and the opening of the mine were carried on in 1897 and 1898 and in 1900 the mine became a producer. The property was first operated with white, then black, and finally Japanese labor. In 1900 the company had built twenty-five coke ovens and increased the number to sixty in 1901. In 1907 the Tacoma Smelting Company secured the property and worked it until 1911, at which time work was started on a new mine in section 34.

The population for the years 1915-1916 was about 500 residents. Fairfax was a melting pot of southern and eastern Europeans. Poles, Bulgarians, Czechs, Serbs, and Italians mixed with a few Finish and Japanese immigrants all lived in this beautiful mountain glen beneath the shadow of gigantic, snow-crowned, picturesque Mount Rainier.

Baseball was a big sport then and if the ball was hit into the river it was considered a home run. Horse races were held down the main street every 4th of July. The biggest celebration was at Christmas time, when miners took up collections weeks in advance. The money was used to purchase presents for every child in town. No child went without a present for Christmas. The Schoolhouse tree was decorated and Santa handed out the presents to the children, purchased of course at the company store.

The buildings are all but gone now. Pillars for the mine buildings remain as well as the school swimming pool, a few coke ovens and the centerpiece for the railroad turntable. Streets can still be seen, but by 1941 Fairfax was all but a ghost town when the company pulled out and left. The post office closed in 1943. The mines had shut down and the buildings were either abandoned or torn down and used for salvage. Even the bridge crossing the Carbon River has washed away. The hotel and schoolhouse burned down.

Mother nature is reclaiming the town. Fairfax retains the rainforest characteristics of the Carbon River valley. Elk, bear, cougars and bobcats, can be seen in the meadows or crossing the streets. Deer nibble at the abandoned apple trees. Bull trout, steelhead and Chinook, Coho salmon, Coastal Cutthroat and Chum swim up river to spawn. Old growth cedars line the riverbanks. Pileated woodpeckers, wood ducks, and eagles nest. Marbled murrelets fly past on their way to Mount Rainier National Park for their nesting grounds. Trilliums, wild roses, orchids and assortment of ferns now line the abandoned streets. In spring and fall a large variety of mushrooms appear.

The Fairfax town site is a link to one of the few remaining wild life corridors in the upper Carbon River valley. It is also a large section of the greenway connecting Commencement Bay to Mount Rainier National Park for Pierce County Foothills Rails-to-Trails.

The Foothills Rails-to-Trails Coalition is actively negotiating with Timber Companies to reopen the former rail bed to Fairfax as an extension to its namesake multi purpose trail.

Historically the rail line crossed the Carbon River via a bridge connecting the north side of the valley with the Fairfax town site. Concrete bridge abutments remain in place still today. A goal for creation of the trail is to rebuild the bridge.

The Fairfax town site would provide a wealth of educational opportunities through interpretive signs as well as a rest area for trail users who may choose to stop off on their way to visit Mount Rainier National Park. Multi purpose trails offer a chance to explain people and events that came before. Fairfax is the best opportunity to demonstrate that past to future generations.

Eighty Autos Make Trip. - 1920's

About 80 automobile loads of visitors from Tacoma, Puyallup, Seattle, Kent and the towns represented by the Rainier Sportsmen's Association attended the celebration. Many comments of surprise at the scenic splendor of the district were heard.

"It is marvelous," T.H. Martin of Tacoma, manager of the Rainier National Park Company, said. "The road presents an easy grade and makes a shorter route from Tacoma to the mountain. Also it opens a new and beautiful territory to the people of the Sound district."

"I am much surprised to find such a grand country at our back door," said W.H. Paulhamus, president of the Puyallup and Sumner Fruit Growers Association. "I am truly glad to see the district opened to highway travel for it means a wealth of mineral and lumber resources will drain out to us, and it gives our people a new chance."

This bridge was put on the National Register of Historic Places July 6, 1982. It is also listed on the Washington State Register under Bridges/Tunnels in Washington State as #TR820004273.



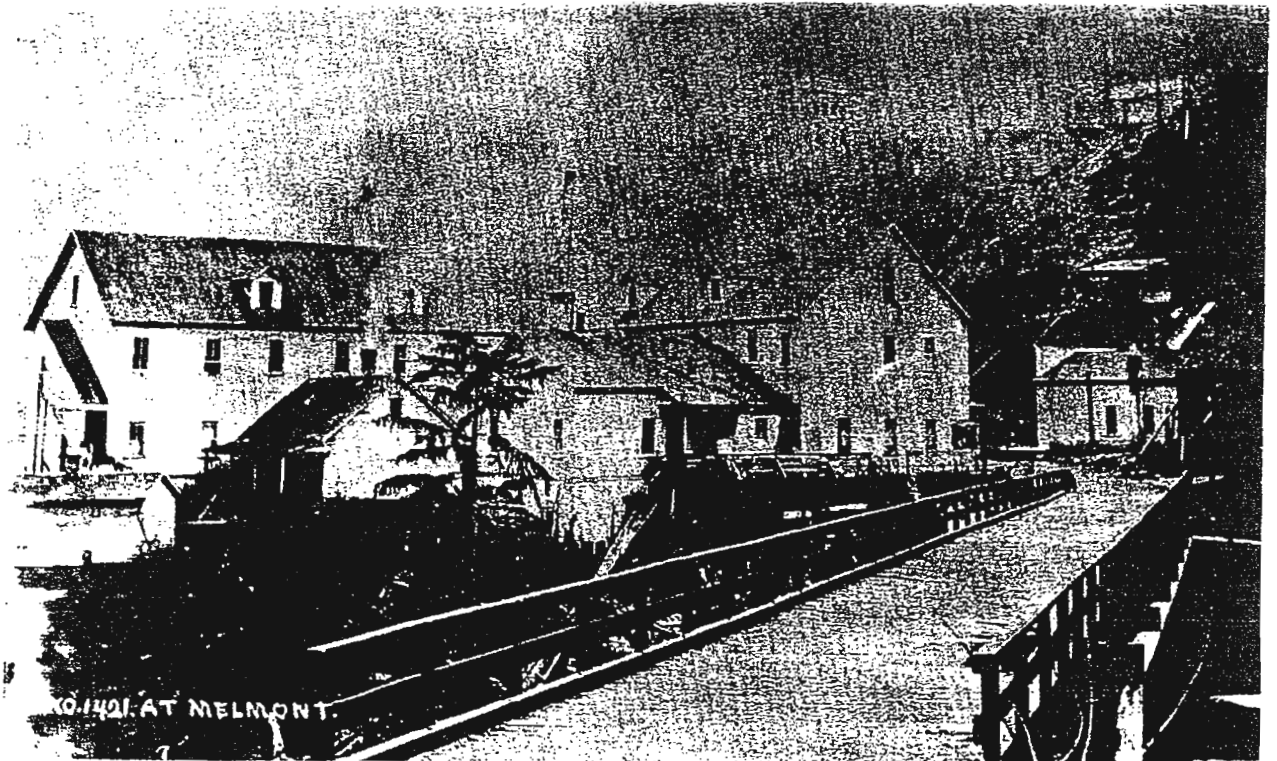
MELMONT - (Near Fairfax Bridge)

Melmont began in 1900, as a company owned coal town by the NW Improvement Co., which was owned by the Northern Pacific Railroad. Its main customer was the Northern Pacific.

The town consisted of miners cottages, a school, depot, saloon, and a hotel. The hotel had a store, post office, and butchershop on the 1st floor. There was a bridge that crossed the Carbon River next to the hotel that went to Fairfax. Fairfax and Melmont were then linked by a dirt wagon road. There was no other road to the outside except a horse trail along the Carbon River canyon or the railroad. The passenger train came once daily.

The Carbon Hill Coal Co. bought the town site in 1918. The company pulled out of Melmont in approximately 1920 and much of the town burned after that.

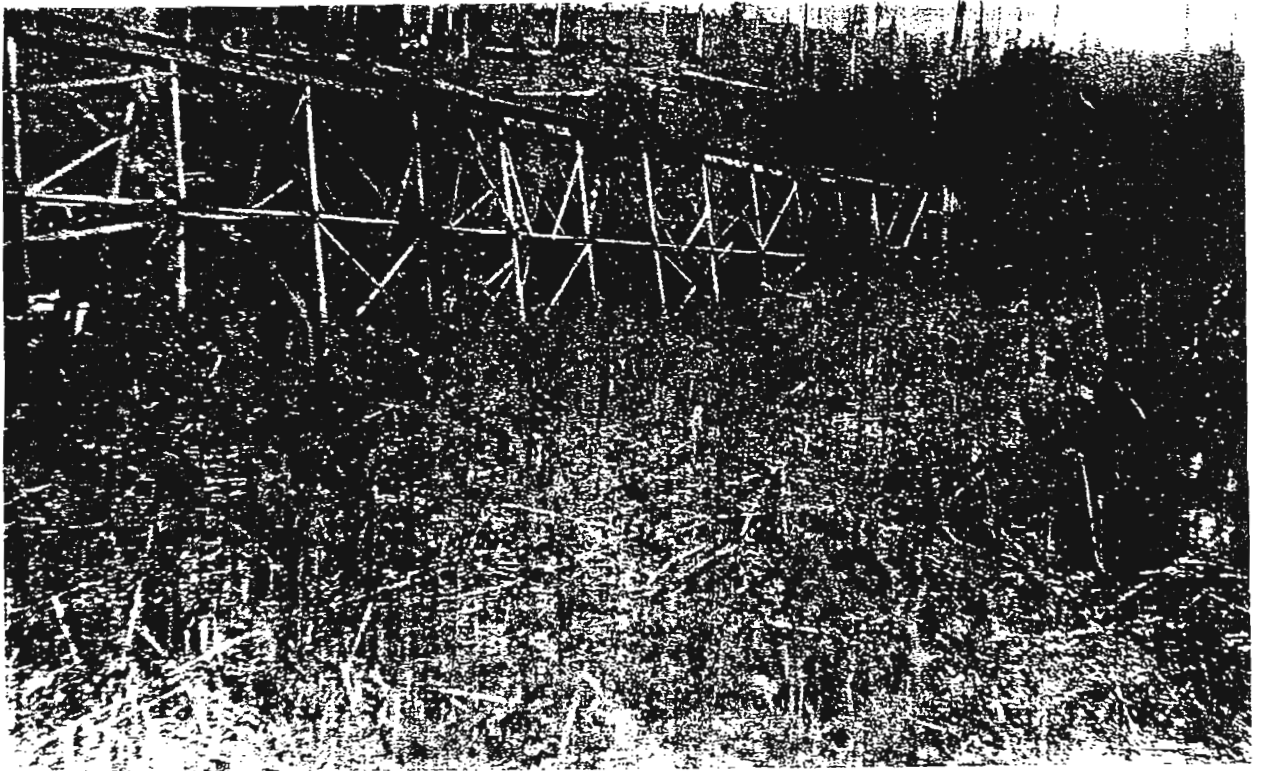
All that remains of the town is the school foundation, an old bridge foundation, the powder house, and the trail that was once the railroad bed.



Melmont Company Hotel

MONTEZUMA

Montezuma began when a mine opened in 1901 as the Montezuma Mines Inc. The coal was sent to Fairfax by a 4,000 foot long wooden coal-flume because there was no railroad to this site. They used water from the Evans Creek to run the coal down to a point near the railroad at Fairfax. At the bottom of the flume were 25 coke ovens and a bunker. The coal was taken from the bunker to the ovens, and then when ready it was loaded on the railroad cars for shipment. The mine closed down in 1909.



M1 Part of the 4,000 foot coal-flume that was at Montezuma. On the right in background are the steps up to the walkway which ran along the sides of the coal-flume.

Photo: Mr. & Mrs. John (Jack) Abraham.

MANLEY-MOORE

Manley-Moore townsite was owned by the Manley-Moore Lumber Co., which originally began in Arline just west of South Prairie. They moved their mill up to the Carbon River area site in 1909 and began operating the mill in 1910. The railroad ran a track from the millpond across Evans Creek to Fairfax. From Fairfax the lumber was shipped out on the Northern Pacific Railroad. There was a cookhouse, store/office, bunkhouse, a 26-room hotel, a doctor's office and homes along Evans Creek. There was also a two-story schoolhouse. At one time the mill employed 250 men. There were 17 miles of track and 4 geared locomotives.

The only means of transportation to Fairfax was the speeder until 1923 when the new highway was constructed. If you had a car you would have to park at Fairfax and ride in on the speeder.

The mill shut down in the early 30's after the depression hit and labor troubles erupted making it difficult to make a profit. All remaining buildings were torn down in approximately 1991 by Burlington Northern Railroad. At that time there were approximately 10 homes and buildings still standing.

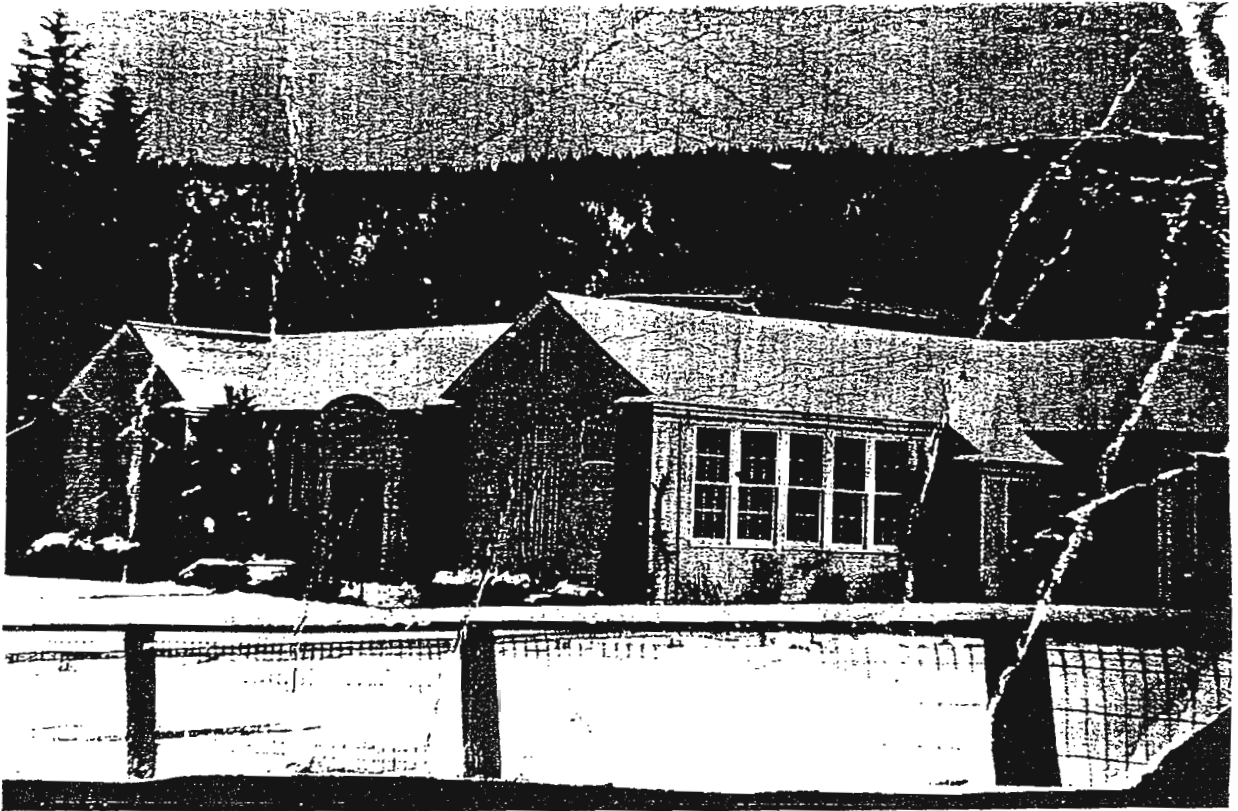


MM7 Manley-Moore Lumber Company's saw-mill. It was the highest saw-mill in the state. It sat at 1,600 feet above sea level.

Photo: Mrs. Viola (Calahan) Morris

CARBON RIVER SCHOOL

The Carbon River School was constructed at Montezuma in 1936 to replace the school in Fairfax that had burned in 1934. It served the neighboring communities of Fairfax, Manley-Moore and Montezuma. By the time it was finished the mining had just about come to a halt and the school was later sold. By 1941 the few children that were left were bussed to Carbonado. The site is now on the Pierce County Register of Historic Places.



FX12 This was the second school built at Montezuma on Evans Creek for the Fairfax area. The original burned in 1934.
Photo: Florence (Kirkpatrick) Schmidt

FAIRFAX

The town site of Fairfax was located in 1892 when coal was discovered and it was platted in 1897 when the mines opened. The Northern Pacific Railroad extended the track from Carbonado to Fairfax in 1897. In 1915 the population of Fairfax was 500. There were miners houses, a hotel, school, depot, store, saloon, doctor's office, and a butchershop. There was a turntable that turned the engine around so it would be heading back down the mountain. A railroad bridge crossed the Carbon River to the original mine sites on the other side.

By 1941 the town had become a ghost town when the company pulled out and left. The buildings stood empty for many years before being torn down.

The only way in to Fairfax was the railroad until the highway was constructed in 1923. The old railroad bed is now a county owned road that is a 400-yard walk from the Carbon River highway above.



FX8 Town of Fairfax showing the "turn-table" at the extreme right above center. Mine buildings are in front and the school is on the left. Carbon River runs through the trees at the top of the photo.
Photo: Mr. & Mrs. Tony Basselli

CARBON RIVER RANCH

In 1920 Steve Poch bought the Melmont schoolhouse and dismantled it. He used the lumber from the top two stories to build his home. The lumber was shipped on the incline railroad, which ran from the Manley-Moore Lumber Mill to his homestead. The new house was constructed on the hillside behind the old homestead in 1923. For a few years they operated a store on the first floor but had to quit when it failed to have enough business to keep it running.

The house is now known as the Carbon River Ranch and is owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Thompson who have lived in it for approximately 45 years.



HM12 Poch's house built in 1923 with lumber from the Melmont schoolhouse.
Photo: Caroline A. Gallacci, Office of Historic Preservation, Tacoma