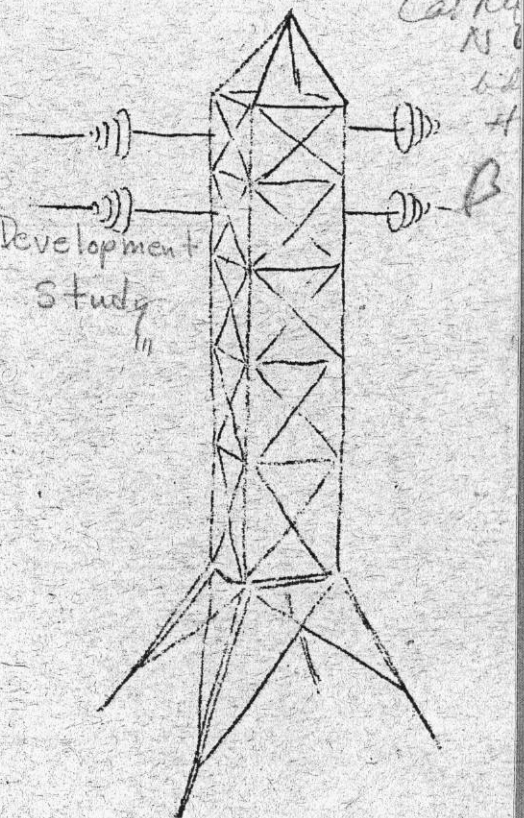


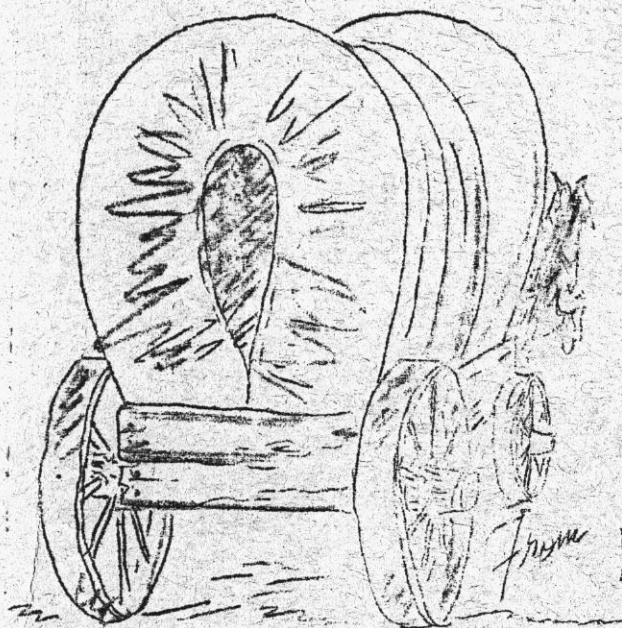
Grand Coulee Dam Area Community Development Study

Community
DEVELOPMENT STUDY



HISTORY OF
GRAND COULEE DAM
AREA

APRIL 1958



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In the following pages, we have attempted to give as accurate account as possible of the early history of the Grand Coulee Dam area. It is a vast area and because of that, some historical events might have been unintentionally over looked.

9 - Eliza Schmidt Carlson

GRAND COULEE DAM AREA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STUDY
HISTORY REPORT

Early history of the Grand Coulee Dam area

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CONDON FERRY

The Condon Ferry across the Columbia River was an important connecting link for many years between the Conconolly and Okanogan region and the Big Bend. It was located on what is now part of the Weber Brothers' ranch below Strahl Canyon and had roads leading east to Barry or Wilbur and south connections to Leahy and also to Coulee City.

Condon's Ferry was built by Samuel Wilbur Condit (or Condin) who was undoubtedly the first white settler of both Lincoln and Douglas counties, as he came to the Wilbur area about 1859. A story of "Wild Goose Bill Condon" as published in the Spokesman-Review follows:

The Spokesman-Review

July 5, 1953

Death of "Wild Goose Bill" by C. S. Kingston

Samuel Wilbur Condit (Condon) or "Wild Goose Bill" as he was widely known, was one of the most picturesque characters of the territorial period, and when he and Barton Park killed each other in a gunfight in a lonely cabin out on the sagebrush plains of the Big Bend, the double tragedy attracted intense interest throughout the Northwest.

Born in New Jersey, Condit at an early age made his way to California where, during the lush gold years, he was a successful miner and a lavish spender. From California he came to Washington territory where he became a packer carrying goods from Walla Walla to the mining camps.

On one of these trips, he came upon a flock of geese in a pond by the trail. Thinking that they were wild, he fired on the birds and was surprised when a very indignant man appeared on the scene and told him that he had been shooting his domestic geese. Bill thought it was such a good joke on himself that he told the story far and wide and soon gained the nickname of "Wild Goose Bill."

In 1875 he settled on a ranch where the town of Wilbur stands today and raised cattle and horses. With this he combined a ferry and an Indian store on the Columbia River. When the Washington Central Railroad was built into the Big Bend, a townsite was established at the Condit ranch and the Condit's property interests steadily increased. He had three sons by Indian wives and one, Charlie, the youngest, was a hopeless cripple and the particular object of his father's affections.

In 1889 the Elwell family came to Wilbur from Minnesota. One was a daughter, a young woman 19 years old. Mrs Millie Harshman, who had separated from her husband and who had a son, James, a babe in arms, married William Dunn in 1892 but the marriage did not turn out happily, the couple separated and later Mrs. Dunn sought a divorce.

Condit's Indian wife, Mary Ann, had left him for some unrecorded reason and he persuaded Millie Dunn to go to his place on the river to

CONDON FERRY (CONT.)

care for Charlie and keep house for him. Here Condit, a man of sixty, fell in love with Millie and declared that he would marry her when she obtained a divorce from Dunn, but Millie thought otherwise and during Condit's absence she went to Jack Bratton's cabin on the Hollis-King horse ranch where Bratton was working as a horse wrangler. With him was a young man of 19 named Barton Park, from Lorene, not far from Davenport. The Park family had settled there a few years before and was well respected in the Lorene neighborhood.

When Condit returned and found that Mrs. Dunn had left him, he wrote out a will that provided for his crippled boy, Charlie, and for the disposal of the property in the event of Charlie's death. Now the chips were down and he started for the Bratton cabin accompanied by Bert Woodin, who had married Millie's sister.

The story, as substantially told the writer by James E. Sykes, is as follows: I was born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, January 17, 1888. In the next year my mother and her parents came west and settled in the town of Wilbur. We lived with my grandparents while Mother worked and I went to school in Wilbur when I became of school age. As I remember when I was a boy, the Roads were very rough and rocky and as crooked as a snake. The country was open prairie with few ranches, virtually no fences, with lots of sagebrush, badgers, coyotes, and herds of wild horses and cattle.

In those days there were in the Wilbur country some of the greatest bronco riders that ever lived in the west - Tom Berry, Walt and Charlie Deer, Bill Condit, Bob Hopkins, Bill Stubblefield, the Treefy boys and many others and the greatest time of the year was when these boys and many others like them got together for the big roundup of the stock and for branding the young cattle.

Practically all the cowboys and ranchers carried sixshooters and the west was really wild and woolly when I was a boy of six years. There were several gun battles around Wilbur but the best known is the Condit-Parks killing which I remember because I was present and I am the only living eyewitness to the tragedy. Condit was a determined man; when he made up his mind to settle any difficulty he did it, no matter how dangerous it might be.

In the year 1893 Condit came to my grandfather, James E. Elwell, in Wilbur, and gave him the job of hauling freight to the store and trading post on the river and in the same year he got Mother to take the job of caring for his place and crippled child at the ferry. I was with her on this job but it was very lonely because I had no playmates except the crippled son of Condit.

The child was both foolish and deformed. It was a most unpleasant life for my mother as well, although Condit was good to both of us. We were many miles from white people and she couldn't bear to think of me being brought up with this foolish child for a playmate. When Grandfather Elwell came to the ferry with a load of freight Mother would

CONDON FERRY (CONT.)

sometimes let me go back to Wilbur with him. We went through Grand Coulee by the north end of Steamboat rock. I was quite young but I remember that Grandfather used to wrap me in a quilt and lay me back of the seat to sleep in his canvas-covered freight wagon.

In the winter of 1895 Mother and I went to live in the Bratton cabin on the King Ranch and here was the biggest thrill and excitement of my life which occurred on January 21, 1895. I remember this day was very bleak and cold and that there were about three feet of snow on the ground. This was also a very lonely place for me as I had no one to play with - the nearest settler lived two miles away. Mother's sister had been out to warn her that Condit was coming after her and that she should come back to Wilbur to be safe. This occurred the day before he came, but Mother was so sure Condit loved her too much to ever harm her that she would not go home.

So we stayed there in the cabin with young Parks, but Bratton, the coward, took off and stayed away so he wouldn't get hurt. The shack was a one-room affair with only drawn curtains to divide it off, Mother and Parks each lay on their bunks waiting to see what would happen.

Parks was a young hired hand and he told Mother he would do all he could to protect her. So he took his rifle from the wall and placed it beneath his blanket on his bunk and lay there with his revolver by his side out of sight. The curtains were pulled apart and I was playing on the floor of the cabin.

Then Mother and Parks saw Woodin drive up with Condit, who got out of the cutter and started for the cabin. Mother was lying crosswise on her bunk and Park lay on the foot of his while both waited for Condit to come in and start something. When he reached the cabin he walked right in without knocking and picked me up and sat me on a box, as that was all we had for chairs.

He asked me if I would like to come back and live with him and he gave me some candy; that was the way with Condit - he always treated me kindly. Then he went over to talk with Mother, but first he told me to get back of an old cook stove that we had there with two oven doors, one on each side, which he pulled open and told me to stay back there so I wouldn't get hurt. Then he went to Mother's bunk and asked her if she was going to marry him; she came back with a blunt "No."

He said, "All right, then, damn you, I'll kill you!" and started firing at her. She threw up her arm over her face to protect it and the bullets made two holes through her arms. At that moment Parks began shooting at Condit and Condit turned and started firing at Parks, at the same time backing up toward the door where he fell out in the snow on his face.

Although Parks was bleeding badly he picked up his rifle, went to the door and fired at Bert Woodin, the man who had brought Condit there, but he was about 200 yards away and was only wounded in one of

CONDON FERRY (CONT.)

his heels. Mother was standing in the door beside Parks when he shot at Woodin; he then turned and walked to the foot of his bunk and got down on his knees and said to Mother, "I've done all in this world I can do for you," then died with his head down on his arms, as if in prayer.

I was so frightened that the picture of this scene will never leave me.

What has always puzzled me was how these two men could still stand after they were shot so full of holes at a distance of not over ten feet apart.

Mother wrapped up her arm and started with me to the nearest neighbors, about two miles away. The snow was very deep and we had a hard time getting to the Burns Ranch. From here we were taken as soon as possible to Wilbur, but Dr. Yount was not there and George Wilson, a veterinarian, cared for her and the wounds healed satisfactorily.

Bratton was afraid of Condit and early in the morning after they had been warned that he was coming out, Bratton left on horseback and never showed up until late in the evening of ~~January 2~~, 1888.

He then spent the night there with the two dead men in the cabin. When he was asked by a neighbor if he was not afraid to stay with the dead men his only reply was "I would rather stay with Condit dead than alive."

There are many versions of Wild Goose Bill's death story, but Mr. George Trefry who knew him and lived in this area at the time of the shooting agrees with that told above. Mr. Trefry identified the landmarks of the story above and says, "The Hollis-King Horse Ranch belonged to Hollis King, a nephew of Abe King who homesteaded where Jim Alling now lives - all land is now a part of the Ben Alling holdings in the Rex country, but the building where the shooting occurred is destroyed. The Burns Ranch also referred to, was later known as the Stainard place, and is now owned by Ray Knighton." The Trefry boys refers to Alec, Jim, Charlie, and George Trefry - Charlie at one time worked for Wild Goose Bill. Condit's Indian wife whom Mr. George Trefry knew and also the one Bess Seaton Dumas recalls, was named Julia. The "History of the Big Bend," published in 1904 adds this: "A mass of sensational stories have been floated concerning Condit's wild life. It has been asserted that he had killed innumerable Indians 'for interfering with his domestic relations'. His killing record, however, embraced five Indians shot in a running fight while resisting arrest. The story which has been repeated many times, that he killed the man who first dubbed him 'Wild Goose Bill,' is untrue."

George Trefry said Condon's cable ferry was in full swing when he first came to this country in 1888; however he recalls seeing the first ferry - a row type. In this row ferry Condon and his wife, Julia, were

CONDON FERRY (CONT.)

able to take a team and wagon across the river. Both were exceedingly strong persons, and by rowing way up the river at first they managed to get out into the current drifting downward and across in this manner. Mr. Trefry described Wild Goose Bill as being a big tall man - chin-whiskered and grey haired when Mr. Trefry knew him.

According to George Trefry, Wild Goose Bill ran a lot of cattle, and at one time sold 1100 head to a man named Ogden Vash in Okanogan. The cattle were sold at \$12.00 a head with everything unbranded (calves) to go in the herd free.

It was not uncommon for a bunch of cattle to be "jumped into the river" to swim across behind a cattle load on the ferry. Charge for crossing Condon Ferry was about \$2.00 for six horses or two teams and wagons.

Bess Seaton Dumas as a young girl lived at Condon Ferry's settlement where she took care of Dorothy Strahl Holbert who was then a baby. Mrs. Strahl taught school at the ferry site. Mrs. Dumas says, "Bill Condon, Wild Goose Bill's son, was operating the ferry then. The Condon family including Julia, Wild Goose Bill's wife, lived in a house apart from the main buildings. Mrs. Johns was taking care of the crippled son, Charlie. The other children were; Bill, George and Eddie. At the ferry there was a large building which housed a store, a bar, and rooms. No liquor was sold when I was there, but it had been formerly. There was a little cafe and another building called "the Commissary" where they kept freight, supplies, and groceries. Mrs. Strahl taught school in the hotel building; community dances were often held in this same schoolroom."

Jay Sellers said, "I recall the Condon Ferry as being about sixteen feet wide and about sixty feet long. I believe it would hold about four teams and wagons (empty), and about twenty-five head of cattle. It used current power with a plank rudder to aid in guiding. One time the cable broke and the ferry floated about five miles down river where it caught in an eddy. An Indian came along, caught the dragging rope and tied up the ferry. Arthur Strahl, Gordon Sellers, Lon Davis and I brought the ferry back up river by using a windlass and tying to rocks. It took us a long time as we seldom made more than a quarter mile a day. Besides the Condons, I remember Flaherty, Bryan, Cotter, Clive and Byron Vance operating this ferry."

Prepared by Helen Rinker

MORE ON WILD GOOSE BILL AND BARTON PARKS.

Interesting facts relating to Wild Goose Bill and Barton Parks, whom he killed, are told by the late Charles E. Myers in the 34th chapter of his book, "Memoirs of a Hunter."

Mr. Meyers was the father of Richard M. Myers (Dick), Coulee Dam sportsman. He was a pioneer of the Davenport area. At the time of the shooting, Mr. Myers was postmaster at Larene, about 45 miles away.

He tell how he received a blunt telegram, the morning of January 25, 1895. It read, "Barton Parks was shot and killed today. Notify his mother."

The Park's home was two and a half miles east of Larcne. It was bitter cold and a deep snow didn't help matters. Myer's hired man was using his team to haul wheat to Davenport, so he had to use the hired man's "outlaw" pony.

After, a difficult ride, on the unbroken horse, he arrived at Park's cabin. He found his mother sitting in a rocking chair, knitting socks.

He handed her the telegram, and told her to send Barton's older brother Charlie, to him as soon as Charlie arrived home. He was helping a neighbor cut wood.

Charlie arrived at 4 p.m. The roads had drifted badly, but they took the bodies to Wilbur in a bob sled. "The bodies were frozen stiff as logs," he wrote. "I helped carry them to the G.A.R. Hall, where we placed them side by side on rough boards supported by saw horses."

When Wild Goose Bill's legal agent in Wilbur, removed Bill's coat, he found the will he had previously written, in the pocket. It read, "If I am killed before returning home, I shall die with my boots on, and I want to be buried in the sand pit below the ferry."

Young Parks was buried in the Davenport cemetery.

The Editor

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Assisting Mrs. Rinker were Gene Thoren, Mrs. George Trefry, and all those
who submitted interviews.