

S P R I N G 2 0 1 9

the BLHS Newsletter



1939 Chevy fire truck purchased used in 1949 from the city of Burlington for \$239. Parade ready and on display at the new BLFD fire station. (Photo courtesy of Christine Farrow)

Mark Your CALENDAR

WELCOME!

JOIN the BLHS for the second Quarterly Meeting of 2019

5:30 PM

Big Lake Community Church

Thursday, April 25

Guest speaker, **Louis Requa** of *Skagit Surveyors*, will be sharing information and tales of the early surveying of the Big Lake area.

Thank you Brett Berg and Donna Moore

A special thank you to Brett Berg, BLFD Fire Chief, and Donna Moore, wife of the late Fred Moore, a former Fire Chief and Fire Commissioner (1973-1988), who gave outstanding presentations on the Big Lake Fire Department's history at the January 24th Quarterly Meeting. Highlights from the presentations follow:

Brett Berg: In 1949, the community voted to become an actual Fire District, which allowed them to levy tax money. The BLFD bought a used 1939 Chevy fire truck from the city of Burlington for \$239. The volunteer firefighters went door-to-door to collect the money for the truck. This truck was in service until 1984 when it was sold. Using fundraising money (\$8000) that first truck was bought back a few years ago and is now used for parades. In 1963 Lyle Robbins, Duke Murden, Fred Moore, and Thor Nersten were responsible for creating and organizing the July 3rd Big Lake Fireworks show as a source of income for the department. It has helped fund three stations.

Donna Moore: About 1976, Donna and six other women formed a Big Lake Fire Auxiliary. The women had pletrons in their homes so they could listen to the fire calls come in during the day. The women became volunteer firefighters while the men were working and unable to take the calls. Fred Moore trained the ladies how to run the trucks and equipment.

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BLHS Bits and Pieces

By-Laws: Mid June the BLHS will present a draft of the up-dated by-laws for review before the membership votes to accept them at the Annual Business Meeting July 25.

2020 Calendar: A committee has been formed to create a BLHS calendar for 2020.

Editor error: My apologies to Phil Zimmerman who was identified as Phil Fenimore in the Winter Newsletter. Thank you again for your assistance during our exhibit in August. T. Davis.

Day Lumber Company Store

The Tin Money—Ties Did Bind

By Margaret N. Banks—*Courier Times* July 8, 1973 (Printed with Permission)

Copper-filled sandwich coins confused most persons. Everyone has looked into a pile of change and picked out a penny when they thought it was a dime. But how many who miss pure silver had to deal with *tin money* or *company money*, as it was called by some, I do.

Our family lived in Big Lake, in Skagit County, a sawmill town operated by the Day Lumber Company in the years before and during World War I. These were the years before widespread private ownership of cars. Mount Vernon and Arlington were long round trips away by horse and buggy or train.

Most Big Lake residents didn't have much money, much less a horse and buggy so they did their buying at the company store, which is exactly what mill management wanted.

There was no paper money. The metal coins were in the same denominations as U.S. coins—nickels, dimes, quarters, 50-cent pieces and dollars. (The company didn't buy imitation pennies). The coins were same size as U.S. money, except the dime, which was larger but only half as thick. "Day Lumber Co, non-transferable" was printed around the outer edge, with the denomination's numeral in the center. At the bottom of the circle was an insignia design and the words "in trade"—for whatever the coin's value. The shiny, "tinny" outer coat led us to calling it *tin money*. The coat wore thin before long, to show a brass center, much as the silver wears on U.S. coins today.

The post office, of course could only accept government currency or coins, although sometimes the kind-hearted postmaster would take a small coin or two and exchange it from his own pocket. Also, the railway had no use for the company money, which was another restraint on going away. We tried to have a "good" nickel now and then for a special Sunday school offering.

These were also the days of grocery charge accounts and the company did extend credit to their regular employees during some winters when times were really bad for a one-industry town. Usually we were expected to be able to pay our accounts promptly after the monthly payday, but it helped to be able to pay current or old accounts with *tin money*.

When times were good in the lumber industry the

company would pay off in a large amount of "real money". In other times the manager would announce that a large percentage of the month's pay must be accepted in *tin money*. This was long before such things as unions, government supervision, inspections, or individual rights. So, we were pretty well tied to the company. Some would move on, hoping to find a mill company with less desire to dictate. And most would gripe to their families and fellow workers about being "wage slaves" and "tied to a mere job". But there really wasn't a large turnover in the work force, because a job was a job, a house was a roof over one's head, and everyone could eat, even when the mill was shut down.

Tin money didn't limit our spending, it only limited where we could shop, especially for clothes and furniture. That and transportation kept us almost completely under the eye of the company manager. He could know what we bought at the company store, when we went away to Mount Vernon or another town and even if we received many packages from mail order companies, as the post office was just part of the company offices and the packages sat around on the floor. The men complained to one another when they saw the company manager examining the packages, but always held their peace when speaking to anyone in authority.

With *tin money* and usually some credit at the store for groceries we had enough to eat we could buy boots, children's shoes and clothing, my father's work clothes, and sometimes shoes for my mother. We got used to doing without things until we could pay for them, even though it sometimes was a real hardship. It did not take us children long to learn it was much easier to get a nickel in *tin money* from our parents than a real one. A nickel at that time was plenty; it would buy a large candy bar almost twice the size of a 10-cent bar now.

None of us had the foresight to save a set of these coins. Well at least the copper money we have now can be used anywhere. We don't have two kinds, and we are limited only by the amount of money we have. The workers bore a great share of the hardships of the time, so they accepted *tin money*, charged their groceries and absolute necessities, and waited for the mills to reopen for another payday.