



Overview of Sherman Avenue from First Street on the left to Third Street. Left: Desert Hotel, Milwaukee Railroad depot and the waterfront, 1930. CDA-9-33

Coeur d'Alene Beautiful & Progressive The Depression Years By Robert Singletary

Robert Singletary has been working on his book *Coeur d'Alene Beautiful & Progressive: An Illustrated History Of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 1878-1990* for many years. Here is an excerpt from the book.

Note from the author:

The description of Coeur d'Alene as beautiful and progressive was first used in a booklet written in the 1920s by George Weeks, former president of the Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce. Even as a village of tents and log cabins, the emerging town adjacent to

Fort Coeur d'Alene was noted for its beautiful location. It was also known for its ability to adapt and grow, even in difficult times.

The purpose of this book is to give readers a concise, straightforward overview of Coeur d'Alene's growth and development from its beginning in the late 1870s to 1990. Emphasis is placed on the major economic, political and cultural events and developments, plus background on some of the key people who helped shape the city's history. The book will feature hundreds of photographs.

THE DEPRESSION YEARS 1930-1941

On October 29, 1929 the stock market crashed and Coeur d'Alene, like the rest of America and much of the world, suffered the consequences into the early 1940s. High unemployment, poverty, low profits and the closure of banks, businesses and industries were the norm. In Coeur d'Alene, there was a drastic decline in the timber industry, the backbone of the area's economy. Several mills closed and others cut back production. In addition, the Inland Northwest experienced a major flood in 1933. However, beginning in the mid-1930s, the Coeur d'Alene region was beginning to recover from the Depression with the aid of several federal programs and projects. By the early 1940s Coeur d'Alene was growing again.



The Blackwell Lumber Company during the 1933 Flood. CDA-3-2

Timber Industry Declines

Since the early 1900s, the timber industry was the leading industry in Coeur d'Alene and most of northern Idaho. Between 1929 and 1940, there was a drastic decline in the number of mills operating in the region. The surviving lumber companies had periodic shut-downs and many were on low production schedules. In 1925, the region produced approximately 500 million board feet of lumber. By the mid-1930s production was down to 160 million board feet.

In 1928, seven mills operated in and around the city of Coeur d'Alene; by the end of the 1930s only three remained. Fred Herrick went bankrupt at the beginning of the Depression and the court dealt with his assets including closing the Coeur d'Alene Mill Company and three other large mills in the region. The Blackwell Lumber Company weathered the worst of the Depression but, in 1937, closed due to accumulated

losses. Two smaller mills, the Tuscor Lumber Company and the Hauser Lumber Company, closed in the early 1930s. The Winton Lumber Company remained in operation but eventually scaled back production in the late 1930s. The Rutledge Mill, owned by Weyerhaeuser, operated only one shift throughout most of the 1930s.

Major Flood Brings More Problems

The 1933 flood was a blow to the region's economy, especially for the timber industry. On the 16th of December, light snow showers in the region soon turned into a steady rain. The rain, accompanied by warm winds, resulted in the melting of the heavy snow pack in the mountains. Within two days, the level of Lake Coeur d'Alene rose to 2,131 feet (average lake level is 2,126 feet). Two days later, it was up two more feet. The rain continued and three days before Christmas a

violent storm swept over the area uprooting trees, downing telephone and electric lines and ripping off roofs. On Christmas Eve, the lake level was at 2,135 feet. Volunteers began piling rocks and sandbags along the city beach from First Street and around the Fort Grounds to the bridge at River Avenue. Floodwaters soon covered the grounds at the Blackwell mill, parts of Sherman Avenue and the area around the Milwaukee depot, the Desert Hotel and the Electric Line depot.

Throughout the region, logging roads, bridges, railroads, flumes, chutes and sawmills received heavy damage. The existing economic crisis in the timber industry was compounded by the effects of the flood and contributed to the closing of several mills throughout northern Idaho.



Looking west from Independence Point at the flooded City Park and beach, 1933. CDA-3-9



The Flyer, one of most the popular cruise boats on Lake Coeur d'Alene during the early 1900s, was burned near the city beach on July 4, 1938. TRW-9-33

Flood Control Act

Three years after the flood of 1933, the Flood Control Act of June 28, 1936 authorized the construction of a floodwall along the City Park and Sherman Addition. A levee was built around the old Fort Sherman grounds, soon to be the campus of NIJC. With an estimated cost of \$308,000 an Act of Congress guaranteed the payment for the project on March 18, 1938. On August 13, the building contract was granted to Salter & Sons. Completed on September 14, 1940 the combined length of the floodwall and levee was 1.5 miles. Provisions were made to extend the height of the wall, if necessary, by means of planks supported by vertical steel stanchions. The planks were stored in the sewage treatment plant.

Depression Brings Decline in Business

A negative economic impact was felt on almost every type of business from grocery stores to hotels. Some businesses cut back on employment and operating costs, while others closed down. In 1928 there were two banks in Coeur d'Alene but by 1939 there was just one. Fred Herrick closed the Red Collar Steamboat Line, which he had purchased from J.C. White in 1923. Ten boat building companies were thriving in the 1920s but only two survived the depression. The community supported six department stores in the late in 1920s but only J.C. Penney and Montgomery Ward continued to operate through the Depression. In 1928, eight hotels operated in Coeur d'Alene but by 1939 only the Desert Hotel and three others were still in operation.

Electric Railroad Closes

Due to the popularity of automobile transportation in the 1920s, railroad passenger service was beginning to decline. The depression hastened that decline. The most popular passenger line into Coeur d'Alene was the electric line, which began operations in 1903. In 1929, the electric line from Coeur d'Alene to Hayden

Lake was discontinued. As operating deficits grew worse during the 1930s, rail service to the Palouse was discontinued in 1939. One year later, the line from Coeur d'Alene to Spokane closed.

The Last of the Big Steamboats

The *Flyer* was built by P.W. Johnson and launched on October 11, 1906. With Claude Barnes as captain, the *Flyer* made regular runs from Coeur d'Alene to St. Maries until 1935. From 1936 to 1938 she made Sunday excursions and two trips during the week. In 1938, Potlatch Forest, owners of the *Flyer* and the *Clipper*, decided they had no further use for the old steamers. The *Flyer*, one of most popular steamboats on Lake Coeur d'Alene, was deliberately burned as part of the 4th of July celebration in 1938.

Movie Theaters and Recreation Become Popular

Before the mid-1930s, Coeur d'Alene had two profitable movie theaters, the Dream and the Liberty. In 1936, Eugene Huff built a large theater on the northeast corner of Second Street and Sherman Avenue which he called the Huff Theater. In 1940, Edna Wilma Simons purchased the theater and renamed it the Wilma. The first film shown at the Wilma was "A Midnight Summer's Dream," starring Spencer Tracy. Also, in 1940, Oscar Paisley opened another movie theater on the west side of south Fourth Street between Sherman and Front avenues, named the Roxy. The Dream, Liberty, Wilma and Roxy were very popular through most of the 1940s, especially during World War II.



Huff Theater, 1938 on Second and Sherman. CDA-14-2

New Civic Center in the Park

In 1935 plans were underway to build a new civic center in the Coeur d'Alene City Park, replacing the 1905 dance pavilion built by George Thomson. Construction began on March 6, 1935, and was completed in the fall of 1937. The Works Progress Administration, a public works program for the unemployed, created



The Coeur d'Alene Civic Center soon after completion in fall of 1937. REC-14-3

in 1933 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, provided most of the labor.

The new Civic Center was one of the largest log structures in the Pacific Northwest, using nearly five linear miles of peeled fir and tamarack. The main floor, designed for conventions, banquets and other activities, had a seating capacity of about 2,000. There were bleachers with balconies on the sides and the end which were designed to seat 1,800 people. On the west end of the main floor, there was a 23 by 60-foot stage. In the front of the building was a two-room annex with a large fireplace. The annex on the south side of the structure was used as a kitchen.

Amusement Park Built Near City Beach

In the fall of 1940, Earl Somers and his wife, Byrd, moved to Coeur d'Alene with the idea of building an amusement park. Earl organized the Coeur d'Alene Lakeside Development Company and began meeting with city officials about leasing land for an amusement pier near the new Civic Center in the city park. It took Somers over a year to convince the city administration that his project was a good thing for Coeur d'Alene. In

the spring of 1941, Somers was granted a 15-year lease for a 140 by 300-foot section of land for his amusement park, which became known as Playland Pier. The City hired George Schneberger to build the pier. By June of that year, walls were constructed and over 20,000 cubic yards of soil was trucked in to create the foundation for the pier. The first permanent structure was a 100 by 40-foot concession and arcade building with a 40-foot tower.

In late spring of 1942, several permanent rides were in place and ready to go. These included a Ferris wheel, a carousel, a miniature roller coaster and train for the kids, a loop-o-plane and a swing that went out over the water. The penny arcade consisted of several amusement machines, a shooting gallery and balloon dart games. Concessions included an array of souvenirs and novelties plus a soda fountain and sandwich shop. The grand opening for Playland Pier was July 4, 1942. From 1942 to the late 1960s, Playland Pier, the small amusement park on the banks of Lake Coeur d'Alene, provided many fond memories for thousands of kids of all ages.

County Fair Gets A Home

During the early 1930s, the Kootenai County Fair was held in various locations, including the Coeur d'Alene High School gym, the Elks Club gym and the old planer shed at the Coeur d'Alene Mill site at the base of Tubbs Hill. In 1935, the county commissioners levied one twentieth of a mil to help finance the operation of a county fair. In 1937, the City purchased the grounds of the Coeur d'Alene Mill and the first fair board was appointed. Between 1938 and 1941, several buildings were constructed including a large exhibit hall, a poultry building and two livestock barns. It is estimated 24,000 people attended the 1941 fair, making the Kootenai County Fair one of the most popular events in the area.



Playland Pier, early 1940s. REC-11-2

Community College Established

One of the brightest spots in Coeur d'Alene's struggle during the Great Depression was the creation of a private junior college. In fact, the terrible economic conditions in the area helped bring about the need for a local junior college. Many families simply could not afford a college education for their children.

Moritz A. Brakemeyer, a book salesman, proposed the establishment of a community college. He held a doctorate from the Minnesota College of Education, had served years as a public-school superintendent and was well

aware of the junior college movement in the country. On June 21, 1933, Brakemeyer made a formal presentation to the Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce about the need for a junior college in Coeur d'Alene. The possibility of a junior college in Coeur d'Alene became the topic of conversation throughout the community.

A few weeks later, a board of directors was selected, articles of incorporation were drawn up and the new college was officially named Coeur d'Alene Junior College. The board hired several instructors and the third floor of the city hall was converted into the college facility with five classrooms, an office for the president, an auditorium with a stage, storeroom and restrooms.

Classes began on September 18, 1933. Within the first week of classes, enrollment reached only 74 students, well below what was expected. Lurking under the apparent success of the college were three ongoing problems: low enrollment, accreditation and financial difficulties. These problems were compounded with the resignation of Moritz Brakemeyer, the college's founder, first president and most vocal supporter. Making matters even worse, he resigned just a week before the beginning of the 1935 fall semester. The beginning of the semester was delayed until science instructor Lester J. Dalton, was named acting dean of the college. Only 18 students enrolled for the fall semester.

Despite all of these problems, the college board of directors and many community leaders refused to let the college go under financially. On November 10, 1935, the Coeur d'Alene Junior College Sponsors' Club was organized, and with community support, raised money for the college.

In the fall of 1936, the board of directors appointed Orrin E. Lee, a graduate of the University of Idaho, the new dean of the college. He later became the second president of Coeur d'Alene Junior College. Lee worked diligently to increase enrollment and solve the college's financial problems. In November of 1937, a vocational training program was offered for the first time increasing the enrollment. The Idaho Legislature passed a law on February 8, 1939, allowing the formation of junior college districts and the collection of property taxes for their support. On September 12, 1939, Coeur d'Alene Junior College opened its doors as North Idaho Junior College (NIJC) with a record enrollment of 100 students and, for the first time, was financed by taxpayer's dollars. On August 11, 1940, NIJC got its own campus when the Winton Lumber Company gave the college a 32-acre tract of land in the old Fort Sherman grounds.

Athletic Round Table Gives Community Support

The Athletic Round Table was an important civic organizations in Coeur d'Alene. Founded in 1939 this organization gave financial assistance and support to almost every civic activity and project in Coeur d'Alene

and Kootenai County. It helped build and support, sports programs for the public schools and NIJC. It bought musical instruments and uniforms for the Coeur d'Alene High School Band. The Athletic Round Table was a major contributor to the Chamber of Commerce. It brought many nationally known speakers and entertainers to Coeur d'Alene. The club founded and sponsored the USO in Coeur d'Alene during World War II. The Coeur d'Alene Athletic Round Table was, without a doubt, an important contributors to Coeur d'Alene's recovery from the Depression.

WPA Builds Highway into Town

For years, traveling through Coeur d'Alene from the east on US Highway 10 meant traveling several blocks on Sherman Avenue, and then north on Fourth Street to Appleway, the main arterial. By the 1930s, the north Fourth Street section was becoming congested. A Works Progress Administration (WPA) project was created to redirect traffic to Northwest Boulevard. Completed on June 29, 1937 the new route was known as the Gibbs Bypass.

The bypass soon became the main western entrance into Coeur d'Alene. It did not take long for businesses to start developing along Northwest Boulevard. One of the most popular businesses was a restaurant/lounge called the Plantation owned by Roy Fowler. It was located near the junction of Northwest Boulevard and Highway 10. Fowler later sold the business to Carl Bennett who renamed it the Boulevard Club and it continued to be the place to go in Coeur d'Alene for several years.



The interior of the Boulevard Club had two fireplaces and could seat 150 people. CDA-16-32

Coeur d'Alene Book Coming Soon

Robert Singletary's book *Coeur d'Alene Beautiful & Progressive: An Illustrated History of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 1878-1990* will feature over 250 photos depicting the history of Coeur d'Alene from 1878 to 1990. We are still looking for donations of photos, especially more recent ones. The book is expected out in the spring of 2019.

Museum News

From the Board President

It is a rare opportunity to celebrate a 50th anniversary and what a privilege it has been to be part of the Museum of North Idaho's (MNI's) milestone year! After months of planning and a flurry of activities, I find it hard to believe this special year is almost over .

As our community grows, MNI continually strives to raise awareness of the many programs and services we offer to the public. Our 50th anniversary was the perfect opportunity to "toot our horn" a little louder. The MNI staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to host a variety of events, and to bring history to the community through school programs and lectures. Our dedicated team also designed the feature exhibit "Keeping History Alive" specifically to celebrate 50 years of collecting and preserving important artifacts from our region.

This year was an opportunity to tell the history of the museum and to showcase significant accomplishments. It was also a springboard to inspire the community to partner with us as we work to achieve our vision for the future. We are eager to roll up our sleeves and get to work creating new and engaging museum experiences. We invite you to join us as we embark on the next 50 years!

In the July 2018 newsletter I mentioned our high priority is a new museum facility. Thanks to the enthusiasm generated from our 50th year activities, we received donations to our Building Fund that enable us to actively pursue new sites. The MNI staff and Board are working hard to make a new facility a reality.

Throughout this special year, I was overwhelmed to meet so many

people who care about our work and who support our mission. Everything we do is only possible because members and donors like you invest in our work. A sincere "thank you" for your generous support

Onward to the next 50 years!

Julie Gibbs, President of the Board

Serve on the Board

The nominating committee is seeking applicants for two positions on the Museum's Board. The appointment would last until the April election at which time you could be elected to a three-year term. Please consider serving on the Museum's Board of Directors. These are exciting times. We need your support. Contact Dorothy Dahlgren 208-664-3448, Board Member Mike Dixon at 208-659-2807 or visit www.museumni.org for more information. We thank Chip Sitton and Kristen Rebmann for serving on the board.

Help Make the Museum Strong

- * Tell people about the importance of the Museum
- * Donate to the building fund and endowment
- * Include the Museum in your estate planning
- * Meet with museum board members or staff to discuss the Museum's future
- * Pledge over a span of years
- * Keep Museum membership current. Your renewal date is on your mailing label.
- * Donate regional artifacts
- * Make in-kind donations
- * Volunteer, serve on the board or the fundraising committee

Cash Donations

Robert Yuditsky
James & Lois Worst
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Frank Darlington
Tom & Kirste Richards
John & Betsy McTear
Beverly Cabbage
Bob & Sandy McDonald (Chapel)
Doug & Deidre Chadderdon (School Field Trips)

Building Fund Donations

Frank Darlington
Carl & Sally Gidlund
Helen Branson
Sandra Winterer

Artifact Donations Since August



Sid & Debbie Rohles: Early 1900s John Deere buggy with wheels and sled runners. Used on the Rathdrum Prairie by August & Georgie Thayer Neustell. Art Thayer arranged to store it for the Museum until we have adequate space.

Glen Brandvold: Photos of Wolf Lodge School, 1971.

Jeff Davis: Photos of Kootenai County towns scenes from 1989 and 1994.

Heidi Higgins: Coeur d'Alene and Cougar Gulch slides, 1942.

Wacela Rhodes (Gene Soper): Photos of Coeur d'Alene Airport activities.

Jack & Fran Bischof: Pressure cooker.

Clyde McCaw: *Coeur d'Alenes* by May Arkwright Hutton.

Jerry Adams: Photos of tearing down the Wilma Theatre, 1997.

Gridley Investment Co.: Over 70 photos of Coeur d'Alene including aerials of north of I-90 in the 1970s. Promotional brochures and a 1931 inventory of City of Coeur d'Alene property with photos.

Thanks You Museum Members

We had a great response to our membership renewal appeal. Thank you for your support. Your membership along with our volunteers and general support makes the mission of the Museum a success.

Help us meet our membership goal by renewing your membership, increasing your annual level or giving memberships as a Christmas gifts.

Please let us know if you have a winter address and also put us in your email contacts.

Memorials

Remember your loved ones and friends with a memorial donation to our Endowment.

You can send the donation to us or deposit it directly to the Idaho Community Foundation at www.idcomfdn.org then type in Museum of North Idaho.

- For Mary Beth Broderick from Jay Broderick
- For Barry Sartz from Steve Shepperd

This is a great way to honor and remember your friends and loved ones.

Please include the address of the family member you would like us to notify.



Ian Wright (left) and Larry O'Leary partner to greet visitors and man the Museum Store on Thursdays. It's been a great year celebrating the Museum's 50th anniversary and showcasing the Museum's accomplishments and looking to a bright future. Thank you all!

Successful Season

Planning Next Year's Exhibit

Over 5,500 people enjoyed this season's feature exhibit "Keeping History Alive" and the Museum's permanent exhibit hall. This is the time of year we start planning the 2019 exhibit. If you have an exhibit idea or would like to volunteer on the exhibit committee to help with research, design and installation contact the Museum.

School children, primarily Fourth

graders, enjoyed the Museum in larger numbers this year. 1,200 students visited the Museum with the majority of them taking advantage of our Field Trip Fund which provides the cost of transportation and the \$1 admission to the Museum. We could not offer this without the generous donations to the fund. Thank you Doug and Deidre Chadderdon Ken and Vickie Roberge for your donations. Robert Singletary and Dave Eubanks' historical presentations in the schools reached an additional 1,000 students.

Inland Northwest Milestones

Robert Singletary's Lecture On Coeur d'Alene

Coeur d'Alene Public Library 7 pm

Nov. 7 *The Timber Boom, then World War I*

Nov. 29 *The Dynamic 1920s*

Jan. 24 *The 1930s in Coeur d'Alene*

Feb. 28 *Farragut's Influence on Coeur d'Alene*

March 28: *Coeur d'Alene After WWII and into the 1950s*

April 25 *Coeur d'Alene in the 1960s and 1970s*

May 23 *The Turbulent, but Progressive 1980s*

Annual Meeting Tuesday, April 16. Mark your calendar.



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Membership Benefits Include: **Free admission to the Museum**
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Please check your mailing label for your membership renewal date.

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To pay with credit card call 208-664-3448 or go to www.museumni.org
Please add dd@museumni.org to your email contact list

Museum of North Idaho

Our mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of the Coeur d'Alene Region to foster appreciation of the area's heritage.

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