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FRANKLIN: IT'S ABOUT AS 'LOST' AS A TOWN **There's Not Much Left of the Little Mining Community** **Which Was the Center of a Rip-Roaring Labor Dispute**

(This is the third in a series of articles that will appear from time to time about the lost towns of King County)

by Lucile McDonald

One of the most thoroughly "lost" towns in King County is Franklin, three miles east of Black Diamond.

You can drive through it, just before crossing the high bridge over Green River Gorge, and never know the place is on the map.

Several dwellings are strung out above the river between a trimly kept fenced cemetery and a tiny old summer house at the bridge. If you drive straight south along the stream instead of crossing the gorge, you'll find that Franklin still has a working vestige of the industry on which its long-time prosperity was based. Five or six years ago the Pacific Coast Coal Co. opened a new tunnel on the opposite bank and employs a small crew. The miners drive to and from home some miles away.

Franklin had a population of 1,000 in 1888, a year and a half after the Oregon Improvement Co. drove its initial tunnels into the steeply pitched bank on the west side of Green River. The main part of town was on a bench 400 feet above the stream. There were many steep stairways running to the houses on other levels. Their white paint was dulled with black dust and a heavy odor of burning coal waste hovered over them.

A company store, with offices upstairs; a school, which served as church on Sundays; a boarding house; hotel; blacksmith shop; meat market; two saloons and the coal bunkers were the other structures.

The population was principally Welch, with lesser percentages of Scottish, English, Irish, Italians and Belgians. Some 450 or more miners went down the steep slopes daily to chip black nuggets from the great McKay vein and load them on cars.

Franklin was an unlucky mine, with a full quota of disasters and financial troubles. Once it was the center of an intense duel between capital and labor.

Coal was discovered on Green River in 1880 and three years later the Columbia & Puget Sound Railroad was extended towards the fields at Black Diamond and Franklin. The latter mine barely had opened in the summer of 1885 when masked representatives of the Knights of Labor drove out and burned the quarters of the 41 Chinese employed by the Oregon Improvement Co. at Newcastle and Franklin, miners from Missouri and Tennessee late in 1889.

The Oregon Improvement Co., desiring to reduce wages took a cue from that and refrained from offering the idle miners in Franklin a new contract. T.B. Corey, superintendent at Newcastle, quietly went to Missouri and circulated handbills among Negro workers, offering a three-year contract at "a new mine in Washington." They were told it had not previously been worked and that 50 whites were in the vicinity, all employed.

The outlook sounded attractive and recruits did not question the pay, since they were accustomed to a lower scale than the whites. In this instance, it was to be 15 to 25 percent lower.

A Northern Pacific train of ten tourist sleepers was made up to carry 675 Negroes, including 40 women and two ministers to Franklin. Some had misgivings and left the train at stops along the way.

When the cars reached Pasco, M.C. Sullivan, head of a Portland detective agency, took charge. Pinkerton guards, wearing white, felt hats, had traveled with the recruits all the way from St. Louis. Sullivan's men and the Pinkerton guards handed out rifles to the recruits. Asked why the armament, the workers were told there was "lots of wild game" where they were going and they "could have plenty of sport."

Later they were informed that they might encounter trouble and the rifles were for their protection.

On Sunday morning, May 17, 1881 the coaches rolled into Palmer, a few miles from Franklin. Here they were met by 75 additional armed guards, who had been routed through Enumclaw in order to cloak the recruit's arrival in secrecy.

The train stopped at a quarry and the passengers poured out. They were served breakfast and more carbines and pistols were distributed. At a signal they started walking at a fast clip toward Franklin, escorted by guards carrying Winchester rifles.

A lookout spotted their approach and fired a shot to warn the miners when the procession reached the east side of the gorge. Mrs. S.P. Collins, of Seattle, who witnessed the entry from the front porch of her parent's home, said the bullet went wild and grazed the hip of a woman on the opposite bank of Green River.

Mrs. Mary Ann Mills, of Black Diamond, will never forget that Sunday.

"Mother had taken us children for a walk down to the bridge", she related. "We were with several other women and children. We never got home for ten days. When we reached the bridge, armed men on horses told us to keep going, that there would be shooting.

"We walked all the way to Cumberland, and it was some walk. My mother was carrying my baby brother in her arms. When we got to Cumberland, several bachelors gave up their quarters so we could stay there. After our return home, Mother kept the curtains drawn. I remember peeking out below them to watch men with rifles patrolling."

The recruits entered a silent town. The warning signal was the only shot fired and not a person was in sight. The newcomers, whistling "Marching Through Georgia," were guided to the company store, where the attic had been converted into a temporary kitchen. Bacon, beans and coffee were provided and the recruits were sent to vacant buildings to sleep. More than 200 were tightly packed together on the floor of the mine engine house.

Work began at once on erection of a mess kitchen and sheds for housing, some of which were placed near the white worker's homes.

A block square around the mouth of the mine was enclosed with a high wire fence, which took in the school and gave the children an unexpected vacation.

The town thronged with guards, who forbade white miners to cross a dead-line. Citizens were angered to see armed Pinkertons exercising more authority than the lone deputy sheriff. They insisted that presence of an armed body of men in a public place was a violation of the Constitution.