POTLATCH, IDAHO:
A CASE STUDY OF A SINGLE-INDUSTRY TOWN
AND THE FACTORS WHICH AFFECT ITS DEVELOPMENT

By

EMILY A. LOEB

Bachelor of Arts in Geography,
Colgate University,

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Geography)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2003

© Emily A. Loeb, 2003
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 28 August 2013
Abstract

Potlatch is a town reminiscent of many single-industry towns. Created by the Weyerhaeuser syndicate in 1905, the town experienced significant changes throughout the twentieth century. In 1952, Potlatch transformed from being a company town into an incorporated town in Idaho. In 1983, the town’s main employer, the Potlatch Corporation, closed its mill and since that time the town has changed from a mill town to a bedroom community. For the last twenty years, Potlatchites have been adjusting to this new economy and community identity. Using ethnographic and qualitative research, this thesis shows that Potlatch has been able to survive as a community, not a timber community. By analyzing the community’s history, placing the town and its development in a larger social context, and identifying the factors which influence the community’s response to mill closure, we can understand why this community has been able to survive, yet not thrive, post mill closure.

Five factors were determined to affect Potlatch’s response to mill closure. The factors are external and internal perceptions of the town, the citizen’s social roles, regional politics and behavior, the community’s history, and the town’s geographical context. In this analysis ethnographic research and economic, geographical, and sociological theories are synthesized to show how one town represents theories of economic and social development. This thesis is not a blueprint which can be applied to other communities to better comprehend how a particular place has or will respond to social and economic change. Rather, this thesis shows that a micro lens is required to understand the effects industrial closure has on a particular town. Potlatch is used as a case study to explain why one community has been able to survive despite the fact that it appears it should fail. Using this case study, in combination with other case studies, can help theorists understand why some communities succeed and others fail after industry abandonment. In so doing, the many towns currently facing industry closure can be more prepared and understand what they need to do in order to respond in a proactive and productive way to industry restructuring and closure.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Tables v
List of Figures vi
Acknowledgements vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
   Introduction 2
   Statement of Research Goals and Methodologies 8
   Findings and Conclusions 14

Chapter 2: Potlatch Past, Potlatch Present 15
   The Move West: Logging in the United States in the early twentieth century 16
   The evolution of a community: Potlatch, Idaho a mill town 19
   A community adjusting: Potlatch, Idaho after the mill closed 36
   Summary 48

Chapter 3: Portraits of Potlatch at the Millennium 50
   Purified identities 51
   Perspectives of the past 52
   The past is better understood than the present 61
   Potlatch’s future challenges 70
   Summary 72

Chapter 4: Single-Industry Towns and Community Development 73
   The parameters of single-industry towns 74
   Economic geography perspectives 77
   Geographical perspectives 82
   Sociological perspectives 85
   Putting the theories in practice 91
   Summary 93

Chapter 5: Surviving, but not thriving 95
   Potlatch Interpreted 96
   External and internal perceptions 98
   Social roles and economic development in Potlatch 102
   Regional politics and behavior 106
   History’s influence on current actions 109
   Geographical Context: a community nestled between many, ever closer, towns 114
   Summary 117
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Conclusions
Broader implications
The small town versus the global economy

Bibliography

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form
Appendix 2: Interview Questions
List of Tables

**Table 1:** Potlatch, Idaho—a history  

**Table 2:** Perceptions and Influences: factors shaping Potlatch’s response to change  

**Table 3:** Potlatch City and Census County Subdivision (CCD) 2000 Census Statistics
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Palouse landscape 20
Figure 2: Perception versus reality 21
Figure 3: Vegetation of the Palouse 23
Figure 4: Map of the inland northwest 24
Figure 5: Potlatch mill workers 27
Figure 6: Dismantling of the Potlatch Lumber Mill 39
Figure 7: Scenic Six Historical Park 42
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the willing support of the community of Potlatch, Idaho. Strangers opened their homes and their hearts to me, sharing stories and memories about living in this rural community in northern Idaho. I cannot fully express the gratitude I have for the people and their willingness to not only share their own histories, but also recommend others with whom they thought I should speak. This is a special community and this thesis would not have been possible if people had not been so willing to share it with me. I especially want to thank John Hartman who not only recommended several people with whom I later spoke, but also shared his GIS skills, made a large percentage of the maps in this thesis, and contributed several of the photographs. I greatly appreciate his time and willingness to help and take time out his busy schedule to contribute to this project.

My work would not have been possible without the University Graduate Fellowship I received from the University of British Columbia. I greatly appreciate the opportunity the fellowship gave me and the freedom that came with it: the ability to conduct research in a small town in Idaho.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Graeme Wynn, and my second reader, Trevor Barnes. I am grateful that Graeme was willing to take time out of his sabbatical travels in Africa, New Zealand, and England to read and comment on countless drafts of this thesis. I appreciate all that Graeme has taught me, especially how to be a better scholar. I also want to thank Trevor for his thoughtful insight and suggestions that he gave. Thank you both very much. I have learned a tremendous amount throughout this thesis process (and graduate school in general) and much of that is attributed to the attention and suggestions you have given me.

I also need to extend special thanks to my friends and family for their support, encouragement, and suggestions throughout this last year. I want to especially thank my mom, sister and stepfather, all of whom helped keep me sane, were willing to talk with me at all hours of the day, and even coolly handled minor stressful breakdowns when out for dinner. Words inadequately express how much I appreciate their love, help, and support.

Finally, I need to thank Lee, my sounding board, best friend, and husband. Lee, you have moved with me to Canada so I could go to graduate school, moved back with me to Idaho so I could conduct research, and have had to deal with constant discussions about Potlatch for well over two years. You have experienced every step of the way with me, have probably heard every idea I have ever thought of regarding Potlatch, and have even come up with a few of the ideas on your own. I know I could not have made it through this experience without you. I love you and thank you with all my heart.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Potlatch, Idaho was an early 1900's experiment by investors in a western hinterland region. With those investors came hopes of achieving economic success through resource extraction and a desire to develop a community that offered working class people educational and social opportunities. Potlatch’s current social issues are similar to those faced by many other single-industry towns: the town’s history and economy have been greatly influenced by a single, dominant industry; the local economy is linked to a larger world economy and fluctuates with the successes and failures of a particular industry; the community was at the mercy of a company that had few emotional ties to the town; and, the current population contains a new transient community which intermingles with the more stable population that has been there for generations.

The culmination of the investors’ goals was the creation of the Potlatch Lumber Company and their company town experiment, Potlatch, Idaho, two entities which remained closely linked through most of the twentieth century. Table 1 is a brief outline of the history of the town, the Corporation, and some of the major changes that occurred within the community. It exhibits that both the community and the Company experienced significant changes during the twentieth century. The relationship was dynamic; it varied in accordance to national social and economic changes that were taking place beyond this northern Idaho community. After the Corporation divested its ownership of the town in 1952, the people of Potlatch knew that it was only a matter of time before the Company pulled out of Potlatch completely. In 1981, Potlatch Corporation announced the temporary closure of the Potlatch Lumber Mill, and two years later, in 1983, the mill – which never re-opened after 1981—was permanently closed and dismantled. After the mill closed, the people within the community responded as residents of most former single-industry towns do; the citizens either found alternative work or they moved away.
Table 1: Potlatch, Idaho – a history

Weyerhaeuser syndicate located in St. Paul, Minnesota begins looking west (1899)

→

Creation of Potlatch Timber Company (1901)

→

Name changed to Potlatch Lumber Company (1903)

→

Creation of the company town, Potlatch, Idaho (1905)

Potlatch Lumber Company

Edward Rutledge Timber Company

Clearwater Timber Company

Companies merge and names changed to Potlatch Forests, Incorporated, and corporate headquarters are moved from Potlatch to Lewiston, Idaho (1931)

→

Potlatch, Idaho is incorporated into a village (1952)

→

Company name changed to Potlatch Corporation (1973)

→

Potlatch Lumber Mill is temporary shut down (August 1981)

→

Potlatch Corporation permanently closes Potlatch Lumber Mill (March 1983)

The Community of Potlatch Moves On:

→

Keith Petersen’s book Company Town is published (1987)

→

Scenic Six Community Development Council (an Idaho Gem Community project) is created (1993)

→

Creation of the Scenic Six Historical Park (1993-1994)

→


→

Renovation of City Hall (2002-2003)

→


→

Renovation of the Depot (tba)

1 Table created by Author.
I have chosen to study the community of Potlatch because of the community's relevance to other small towns in North America. I have chosen to explore the political and social implications of the close connections between single-industry (and specifically company) towns and their employer and how the intense interaction affects community responses to economic and social change. I am also interested in how the past and present relationship between a community and a corporation influences the population on a day-to-day basis. Potlatch is typical of the traditional small town in which everyone knows each other and losing towns like Potlatch is a loss of American heritage. How to prevent that loss from happening is the challenge. I use Potlatch as a case study to help explain how those challenges have affected one town in particular and how that community has dealt with those trials in an effort to survive post industry closure. It is through case studies such as these that we can better understand how and why some single-industry communities succeed and others fail after industry closure.

In this thesis, I explore how and why the community of Potlatch has responded to corporate closure and the challenges spawned by the need to develop its economy since the company left the town. Potlatch's ability to survive as a community, not a timber community, is significant and raises questions as to what factors have enabled this town to endure since the closure of its mill. Community boosters, regional commuters, and a small number of local entrepreneurs have all affected Potlatch's response to social and economic change. The entire community is bearing witness to Potlatch's slow transition from a single-industry town into a bedroom community. In the process Potlatch has been able to survive, although as yet it cannot be said to thrive. Analyzing the community's history, and current sentiments about Potlatch's present and future path places the town and its development in a larger social context. Through the identification of the factors which shape the community's response to mill closure, we can understand why this community has been able to survive, yet not thrive, after an industry leaves a community.
Chapter 2 sets the historical context in which Potlatch, Idaho developed. By examining the history of logging in western North America and the growing social concerns of the business elite, Potlatch is placed in a larger social context as one among several company towns created in the early twentieth century. The creation of the company town was a reflection of changing social ideologies, technological advances, and the establishment of a national railroad line linking the west with the east. With the establishment of the town there emerged complex interactions between the Corporation and the community, including nativism, paternalism, governmentality, and time and work-discipline. These complexities shaped the development of the town and help to explain the community’s eventual response to mill closure. The community’s history is traced through the mill’s eighty-year existence, during which management changed, the corporate headquarters were moved out of Potlatch, the Corporation incorporated the company town into the state, and finally the mill was closed.

The mill closure was a significant episode in the community’s history. The closure left the community in a quandary. At first entrepreneurial opportunities presented themselves, but these prospects dissipated with time. People worried about their own personal survival, not the economic development of the town. People began seeking employment in neighboring communities, and this immediate transition to commuting evidently changed the community. Many long-time residents talk about the significant differences in the community that have ensued since mill closure. Like the technological advances that originally brought timber companies to the west, further advances have brought some new industries to the community. Understanding the town’s history and how it has shaped the current actions of the community is essential to understanding the town’s character and its potential to develop and change in the future.

Chapter 3 examines personal perspectives of the citizens of Potlatch about their community. This section, *Portraits of Potlatch at the millennium*, considers the community
members' views of their town's past and present challenges, and assesses the future development of the town. This ethnographic perspective is important because it reveals that Potlatch is looking to the past to try to shape its future. The citizens are proud of Potlatch, yet they recognize that the community has shortcomings and challenges which the community might not overcome. In this section the people of Potlatch voice their opinions and the diverging views of the townspeople are realized.

Chapter 4 considers several perspectives that are relevant to an analysis of the Potlatch community. An overview of the literature explains what constitutes a single-industry community, the developmental stages of single-industry towns, and finally the factors influencing the development of rural communities. All of this allows us to understand the community of Potlatch, its history, and its development in a larger social context. I rely on the theories of economists, geographers, and sociologists who have worked to dispel the stereotypes of single-industry towns and better understand what makes these communities similar. Utilizing theories of social capital, entrepreneurial social infrastructure, and social chance, I flesh out a comprehensive picture of how theorists understand rural community development. Examining what other communities have done in response to industry closure—such as tourism development, recruitment of alternative industries, and local development—highlights how Potlatch's response to mill closure is both unique and reminiscent of other communities. Curiously, Potlatch does not possess the qualities various theorists claim are needed to survive industry closure.

Chapter 5 incorporates the developmental theories previously outlined and examines why Potlatch is surviving, but not thriving, by considering the factors which have influenced the community members' responses to change. Plant closure in a single-industry community can often result in both economic and social changes and while there are many single-industry communities with similar economic profiles, specific characteristics of a community contribute
to how a particular place will respond to the imposed changes. For instance, understanding how a community defines itself in contrast to state or national definitions of that same place reveals that a micro lens is needed to examine the community and its ability to respond to the elements needed for development such as social capital and entrepreneurial social infrastructure.

*Surviving, but not thriving* is an interpretation of Potlatch and brings together the theory discussed in Chapter 4 and the community perspectives provided in Chapters 2 and 3. This synthesis is helpful in two ways. The theory helps to explain Potlatch’s current and future development trials. On the other hand, the application of theory to an actual place allows us to question and challenge the observations made by other authors. I show that the community of Potlatch has appeared to favor an economy of flexible accumulation rather than be tied to a corporation, that the town possesses social capital for social issues, but not economic, and that the community confounds the claims of sociologists about the attributes that are needed to survive economically.

In this chapter of the thesis, I examine five factors that have influenced Potlatch’s response to the need for economic and social change. I begin with perceptions of Potlatch, looking at how the ways in which people see this community influence the kinds of development that occur in the town. I move to the second factor, social roles, by examining how the predominantly blue-collar community struggles to attract businesses to town and to entice young adults to stay there. Third, I examine how regional politics and behavior shape this community’s development. Regional philosophies, politics, and notable differences between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives are embedded in Potlatch and have influenced the town’s economic development. Fourth, I consider Potlatch’s history, examining how its company town heritage affects community response to development. Paternalism stifled Potlatch’s ability to spur economic development; and, the tightly-knit, closed community has hindered the few attempts made to attract new people to the community. Finally, I address Potlatch’s geographical context,
noting the five factors indicated in this chapter are not weighted equally. This last factor has helped Potlatch survive, despite the fact that it appears that it should fail. The community's geographical context—located in a timber and agriculturally rich ecosystem, close to several larger communities—has allowed it to maintain a population without working hard to develop its economy. The question then becomes what kind of town Potlatch wants to be, not whether it will or will not be a town.

I conclude that it is essential for theorists and developers to consider places like Potlatch when examining why and how rural communities respond to social and economic change. In an era when the discourse surrounding company towns and corporate campuses is again on the rise, it is important to recognize the long-term social and economic implications that creating a company town can have on a rural community's ability to sustain themselves without the assistance of corporate leadership and dominance. Using this Potlatch case study, in combination with other case studies, can help theorists and planners alike understand why some communities succeed and others fail after industry abandonment. Therefore, the many towns currently facing industry closure and those simply trying to survive in an increasingly global economy can be more prepared and better understand what they need to do in order to respond and react in a proactive and productive way to industry closure and restructuring.

Statement of Research Goals and Methodologies

Research for this thesis involved examining the Potlatch community. The complexity is realized in Potlatch's unique company town heritage, which for one hundred years has been intertwined with the town's affiliation with the Potlatch Corporation. While paying attention to the history of this association through its formative and most important years, before 1983, I show that this relationship continued after the mill closure and influenced community development to this day. In order to begin to understand this relationship and how the
community has worked to change from a mill town to a self-defined community, it is essential to understand how the people of Potlatch perceive their community in the past, present, and future.

In order to gain this perspective, this research required a combination of methodologies. These included formal interviews, informal conversations, literature reviews, archival searches, and ethnographic participation. One problem that was discovered while conducting this research is that while the formal archives at the local universities—University of Idaho and Washington State University—and Latah County Historical Society are rich with data relating to the period prior to mill closure in 1983 they are far leaner for the period after 1983. None have attempted to collect information about the town and community in the recent past. Nor, it seems, are they much interested in recording its current circumstances. Much reliance was placed, therefore, on the Potlatch Historical Society’s newspaper clippings from the time of the mill closure and on community member’s personal clippings that they had stored in their homes. After realizing that the archives were not going to provide the information needed, it was determined that this thesis was going to rely heavily on interview-based research. This posed challenges because Potlatch is not only a small, tightly-knit community, but also politically sensitive. The Potlatch Corporation still has a presence in the area as a fellow land owner and as an employer. Additionally, people found it difficult to recall what they felt and thought about the mill closure and community twenty years before. This meant that I had to strategically decide who I wanted to interview and how I was going to find them.

Recruitment for the qualitative research relied primarily on the snowball effect, by which those who were currently being interviewed would suggest others to interview in the future. I began the process by contacting five people including two friends of mine who grew up in Potlatch, an aunt of a good friend, an author who wrote a book about the town, and a member of the Potlatch Historical Society. A few of these preliminary contacts turned out to be gatekeepers in the community. This group gave me some credibility and trust within the community. They
were well respected and connected to the Potlatch community. Their recommendations resulted in more contacts. For example, I called one woman and explained my research to her and that I was interested in interviewing both her and her husband. Reluctant to agree to an interview she asked me how I got her name, when I told her who had told me to call her, the woman's tone changed and she responded, “well bless him, when would you like to meet with us?” Using the snowball effect in Potlatch was essential. I was able to talk with a wide range of people, many of whom I would have never known about without this process. I interviewed forty-four people and met many more. I used the grounded theory approach of interpretive sociology as a framework to analyze my data.² I started my research with an idea about what I was going to study, and then allowed my final questions and theories to come out of the data I gathered during my qualitative research. But as Emerson et al note, grounded theory is problematic because it does not take into account that the data cannot be immune from the researcher’s personal biases and those biases affect what theories are ‘discovered’ in the data.³ While completely eliminating personal bias is impossible, I attempted to let the thesis questions emerge from the research. This is evidenced by the fact that the original research question was eventually replaced with another as community members revealed the pressing issues that the town is now facing. My research, therefore, is a mixture of approaches that I combined in an attempt to understand this community.

After conducting a few interviews, the research questions I began exploring became apparent and I decided to choose whom I was going to interview. Following Carroll et al's suggestion, I determined that it was critical to interview different people who had specific characteristics in order to gain a wide distribution of occupation, income, gender, age, and view

of the community. These groups included ex-mill workers, local business owners, spouses of mill workers, farmers, teachers, those involved in civic groups, children who were in school in Potlatch during or right after the mill closure, people who commute to work, Forest Service employees, and representatives from the Potlatch Corporation. By having a pre-determined wide distribution of interviewees, I attempted to get a comprehensive view of the community, how it has changed, and what these people think its future will be.

My interview-based research allowed me to gather information from people in a semi-formal manner. In all cases the interviewees were contacted and the project was explained. If they agreed to an interview, they were given the confidentiality policy and UBC Research Services contact information for questions they might have. They were also told that the interviews were going to be taped, and the consent form (See Appendix I) was explained to them. The interviews were structured around a set of questions from which I worked (See Appendix II). These questions often led to lengthy, in-depth discussions out of which I gathered vast quantities of information, and this new information drastically reshaped my final research question. The interviews were recorded. This had both negative and positive impacts. The tape recorder enabled me to listen intently to what the interviewee was saying and to take notes only when necessary. This allowed me to pay close attention and ask thoughtful questions. The presence of the tape recorder, however, was noticed and mentioned by some of the interviewees. Whether this affected what the interviewees revealed is impossible to know. When the tape was shut off, the interviewees relaxed and seemed more at ease.

The option of confidentiality was always given to the interviewees. While most of the information received in the interviews was not damaging, there were some things discussed that could be viewed as politically sensitive. There are Potlatch community members still working

---

for Potlatch Corporation. This is a small community and that people did not want to offend or anger their neighbors. They could either choose to have the interview be confidential or trust that I would not put their name with a statement that might prove to be problematic in the community.

The size of this community is important to understand. In mid October 2002, I drove to Potlatch to conduct an interview. I decided to stop and take some pictures in town. As I got out of the car and took out my camera, a woman who had just finished her morning walk asked me, “Are you the girl coming to town to do research?” All I could do was laugh and say “yes”. After my interview that morning, I walked across the main street in Potlatch to eat lunch at the restaurant in town. I was quickly invited to join not only the woman whom I had just interviewed but also the woman who had approached me that morning in the park. I realized that this was a tightly-knit community and there was no way I could avoid my presence being known. It became clear that the discussions I had with community members would be discussed among them, and therefore, being sensitive to confidentiality was critical.

The interviews I conducted incorporated a series of questions about the person’s history and involvement in the community. I attempted to get as many people as possible to describe where they grew up, when and why they moved to Potlatch, why they still live in Potlatch, their occupational history, and what they think about the community. I continued with questions about the school system and the town’s future, how the interviewee would define the town of Potlatch, whether or not they think it is, or ever has been, a single-industry community. Finally I addressed the questions as to whether or not they worked for Potlatch Corporation, if they thought the Company could have done anything differently when they shut down the mill, and the differences they notice in the community (socially, culturally, economically) since the mill shut down in 1983. While all of these questions were asked of each interviewee, conversations often led to other questions regarding their thoughts and feelings about the community,
makes it different from other communities around the area, the role of government and civic organizations in 'fixing up' the town, and possible industries that could come into the town.

As noted, I have combined methodologies to decipher how to best write this thesis. My primary tool was ethnographic research consisting of interviewing the people of Potlatch and spending time in the community. While some ethnographic researchers go and live in the community they are examining, I have not done this for several reasons. I discovered that there was no available housing in town. Prior to entering graduate school, I lived in Moscow, Idaho for three years. During that time I witnessed the interaction between the communities of Potlatch and Moscow. This was helpful since Potlatch often defines itself in relation to (or in contrast to) the town of Moscow. This meant that my perspective was distinct from that of most ethnographers because I lived in this larger community of Latah County not as an academic, but as a citizen. While I learned a great deal through interviews, I understood the culture and what people meant when they talked about the community of Moscow or how Potlatch was viewed around the county. Additionally, I worked in the community in which many of the commuters from Potlatch also work. I was able to relate to them when they talked about poor snow plowing, lack of jobs, or what it is like to be in the service sector in a college town. From these perspectives, I learned about this place and my assumptions were clarified during the interview stage.

Finally, on a personal note, my husband grew up in northern Idaho. His parents live thirty miles north of Potlatch outside of a small community. Understanding, firsthand, the philosophies of these rural communities helped me to more fully comprehend and connect with the people of Potlatch. In addition, when they learned that I had family in the area who lived in circumstances similar to their own, my interviewees often relaxed, asked questions about my

---

family and did not associate me with the ‘educated fools’ whom they think live in Moscow and Pullman.

Findings and Conclusions

My research shows that community response to industry closure is influenced by many factors and that it is difficult to determine whether a community will fail, succeed, or not change after industry closure without examining the social and economic framework of the specific community. Placing the community case study in a larger social context is critical to understanding the significant social and economic changes these communities have experienced in the last fifty years. Residents of single-industry communities carry with them a long history of community and occupational pride. The buildings, streets, schools, and families act as constant reminders of the changes that ensued during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as western North America was ‘settled’. Many of the small communities in western North America have similar economic histories, social characteristics, and stories of struggles as they adapt to changes imposed on them from external sources.

In the case of Potlatch, Idaho, perceptions of the town, the community’s social roles, regional politics and behavior, its history, and its geographical context have affected how the community has responded to constant economic and social change. Because these factors are not weighted equally, Potlatch’s ability to survive is surprising given the social and economic elements rural sociologists claim communities need to develop economically and socially. Understanding Potlatch’s current economic and social situation can only be done by examining its unique history and social characteristics, while recognizing the broader social patterns the community exhibits. In so doing, we come not only to understand why this one community has responded as it has to mill closure, but also to provide answers to the larger question of why some communities succeed and others fail after industry abandonment.
Chapter 2:

The Move West: Logging in the United States in the early twentieth century

Potlatch, Idaho was a creation of the Weyerhaeuser syndicate. Now existing as a reminder of what once was, Potlatch and its residents are a living testament to the dreams of the great timbermen of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With hopeful ideas of abundant timber and enthusiasm at the potential for great wealth, timbermen bought forested lands and invested in small communities all over western America. The development of the Potlatch Lumber Company and the creation of the company town, Potlatch, Idaho were the "most ambitious of the early Idaho enterprises" made by the Midwestern lumber giant, Frederick Weyerhaeuser. After investing millions of dollars into the town of Potlatch alone, the Weyerhaeuser syndicate had mixed feelings about the place: they felt a responsibility to provide for the community they helped create, but the policy of "cutting the timber clean" combined with town maintenance and high labor costs eventually resulted in unsatisfactory financial returns for the Company and its stockholders.

Much has been written about the Potlatch Lumber Company and the company town experiment. Most notable is Keith Petersen’s Company Town. Known throughout the town and constantly referred to by the residents, this rendering has become in many ways the community’s historical diary. Published shortly after the mill closure, the book makes little mention of the tension that existed between the community and the Corporation. Those tensions are relayed in stories of how only children of the managers were allowed on ‘Nob Hill’, of children’s fears of getting their fathers fired if they misbehaved in school, and of the frustration of having to start over at the bottom if one decided to transfer to another mill. While the Potlatch residents express great pride in their company town heritage, there continues to be lasting resentment of the Potlatch Corporation among long-time members of the community. This tension is seen in the

---

extreme polarity that exists between the residents depending upon whether one is ‘from’ Potlatch versus moved to the town, and of the fact that this town never learned how to govern itself until after the Company left in 1983. Like all communities, Potlatch is a complex place, shaped by its history, and geography into a unique entity, one that is different from other former single-industry communities, and yet reminiscent of them as well.

A combination of events inspired timbermen of the east and mid-west to move to other locales around America in search of new timber. As the forests in the American East and then the Midwest were logged during the nineteenth century, logging companies in the United States needed to find new areas of timber supply. The construction of railroad lines heading west, a growing population in the western states, and a rising demand of timber all over America resulted in the need to find new timber. By the turn of the century, Frederick Weyerhaeuser was referred to as “America’s predominant lumbermen”. In an attempt to gain power in the growing national timber market, Weyerhaeuser and several other lumbermen began to combine firms and sit on each other’s boards. The coalition known as the Weyerhaeuser syndicate was a group that was created to find new lumber to keep their businesses prospering. As external pressures changed the timber industry in the late nineteenth century, the question facing lumber companies was not whether they would have to invest in another American region, but where they would chose to do so. It was the abundance of trees, the rich Palouse prairie soil, and the expectation that timber companies would be able to sell the logged-over land for future farmland believed to lie beneath the imposing forests that attracted lumber companies from the east to look at Idaho as a possible locale for their western enterprises.

---

The Northwest Pacific Railroad Land Grant (NPRLG), signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1864, allowing the grant of “public lands for the purpose of building and maintaining a railroad from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean”, was instrumental in the development of the Pacific Northwest lumbering industry.\textsuperscript{12} The land was surveyed and sectioned off into alternating one-mile square sections. Under the NPRLG, and in Idaho specifically, “the railroad was to be given every other square mile of land in a band…80 miles wide” with a two hundred-foot belt on either side so that on paper, a chessboard was created, with the government and railroad companies owning alternate squares.\textsuperscript{13} In an effort to ensure that there would be traffic along those lines, the government sold the surrounding land—not given to the railroads—to settlers, and hence populated the west. This not only returned revenue to the government, but also provided sustenance to the newly built railroads. Additionally, the railroad companies could sell their grant lands to whomever they chose. For example, the influential Northern Pacific Railroad Company eventually sold thirty million dollars worth of their land to friends and settlers alike.\textsuperscript{14}

The combination of Northern Pacific Railroad Company’s debt and the desire of lumbermen to find new lands to log resulted in one of “biggest real estate deals in American history”.\textsuperscript{15} As neighbors in an upscale St. Paul, Minnesota neighborhood, Frederick Weyerhaeuser and James J. Hill—a railroad tycoon—became close friends. This friendship eventually led to conversations about how “Hill’s financial needs meshed with his (Weyerhaeuser’s) own ambition”.\textsuperscript{16} These discussions resulted in Hill’s 1899 sale, during which Weyerhaeuser purchased 900,000 acres of Northern Pacific’s property for six dollars an acre.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid; D. Jensen and G. Draffan. 1995. p 4.
More importantly, the acquisition resulted in the establishment of Weyerhaeuser Timber Company in Tacoma, Washington. Shortly thereafter, Weyerhaeuser began to search the region for other strands of promising timber, which eventually led him to Idaho.\(^\text{18}\) This first purchase would be added to throughout the years and by 1940 Weyerhaeuser interests held at least 1,489,000 acres in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

*The evolution of a community: Potlatch, Idaho a mill town*

The Palouse landscape is unique. Located in northern Idaho and southeastern Washington, this 4,000 square mile prairie is known for its unique landscape and rich soils. (See *Figure 1*) Driving along Highway 95 south from Coeur d’Alene, the landscape resembles the bottom of the ocean. Passing over a crest of one of the many rolling hills that constitute the principal topographic feature of the area, fog covers the valley, lifting and falling with the topography, mimicking ocean waves. The crests and troughs of this landscape were formed by millions of years of geological activity, including volcanic eruptions, lava flows, and the creation of loess dunes, which were shaped by weather and erosion to eventually become the visually distinct rippled waves seen today. These geomorphological activities combined with the deposition of abundant minerals created the landscape that is recognized today as the Palouse and has made its topsoil—at some points 150 feet thick—one of the richest in the world.\(^\text{19}\)

---

The original perception of a seascape is quickly replaced with the reality that this is farm country. *(See Figure 2)* The rolling hills of the Palouse define the area, visually and economically. Although one occasionally spots wild flowers, the hills and valleys are covered principally with wheat, peas, or lentils in this successful farming area that local promoters deem “The Pea and Lentil Capital of the World”. Yet there is more to this landscape than rolling farmland. Northern Idaho is known for its wealth of trees with species including white pine, ponderosa pine, douglas fir, western larch (Tamarack), cedar, grand fir, Engelmann spruce and lodgepole pine. Many of the trees were abundant in parts of the inland northwest in the early twentieth century and had stood for 150 to 300 years.

---

20 Photograph courtesy of Alison Meyer Photographs.
Figure 2\textsuperscript{23}: Perception versus reality

\textsuperscript{23} Photographs courtesy of Alison Meyer Photographs.
Centering its logging activities in this region, the Potlatch Timber Company was founded in 1901 as a subsidiary of the Minnesota-based Weyerhauesser syndicate. In 1903, the board of directors changed the name of the business to the Potlatch Lumber Company, named the future site of the company town after the Company, and started to plan the community in which the workers and their families were to live.

The Palouse countryside of northern Idaho offered many possibilities as an investment for Weyerhauesser: mature forests promising great financial returns; and the surrounding landscape of rolling hills covered in camas offered optimal farm land for long term settlement. There were double profits to be made. “After logging, this land bordering the rich Palouse country...[the rich soil offered] agricultural potential, which would enable the company to make back some if its investment by selling cleared lands to farmers.” Idaho’s landscape offered the timbermen the opportunity to establish a new lumber mill in this hinterland region of the United States, and it was here that the syndicate decided to build the company town and center its Idaho logging activities. (See Figure 3)

24 The definition of the word Potlatch is “an extravagant and competitive ceremonial feast at which a person gives presents and gives away or destroys possessions in order to enhance his or her status” in mainly Pacific coast Native American communities (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2002, p2303).
25 Potlatch Corporation would go through a series of names throughout its history, including Potlatch Timber Company, Potlatch Lumber Company, Potlatch Forests, Incorporated, and Potlatch Corporation. Additionally, Potlatch Corporation merged with several other companies throughout its history. For simplicity’s sake, the company will henceforth be referred to as ‘Potlatch Corporation’, ‘the Corporation’, or ‘the Company’.
26 The area of the Palouse around Potlatch is also referred to as ‘Paradise’ and the town of Moscow was originally called ‘Hog Heaven’. These names were attributed to this landscape because of the rich soil and plethora of camas root. The root, which was originally harvested by Native American tribes, was later enjoyed by the pigs of the white settlers (hence the name Hog Heaven). While camas is now hard to find in the region, its presence is still part of the regional folklore (Austin, 1982, p 802).
The site chosen to become Potlatch was originally called the Rock Creek property and was located seventeen miles from Moscow, Idaho and twenty-five miles from Pullman, Washington. To the south is Lewiston, Idaho, to the north is Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, and to the northwest is Spokane, Washington, all situated sixty miles from Potlatch. (See Figure 4) While the first mill purchased by Weyerhaeuser in the area was located in Palouse, the company chose to move to the Rock Creek property. The Palouse mill was out-of-date, too small, and there were ongoing issues about water rights which became especially burdensome during periods of low

---

water flow. The Rock Creek site was attractive to the investors because it had easy access to roads, rivers, a railroad, the forests, and there were few businesses around to compete for water rights.

Figure 4: Map of the inland northwest

When creating this community, the Company sought to build an economically viable business for the Company and a town in which workers and their families would want to live. Like other company town created in the early twentieth century, this community was created for and by the Company and was constructed with hopes of achieving high profitably and maintaining control over their labor force. Potlatch’s move to create a company town reflected

---

the growing social concerns of wealthier businesspeople over the common laborers. In England, Ebenezer Howard was proposing that planned cities be built in order to “find for our industrial population work at wages of higher purchasing power, and to secure healthier surroundings and more regular employment” (emphasis in original),31 and, in America, Pullman, Illinois was a well known company town and many theorists claimed that “If it can be shown that it does pay to provide beautiful homes for laborers, accompanied with all the conditions requisite for wholesome living both for the mind and body, the example set by Mr. Pullman will find wide imitation”.32 While much larger than the eventual town of Potlatch, and despite having failed in 1894, Pullman, Illinois served as a prototype for the Company.33 Potlatch purchased the land from the state and farmers, hired an architect to design and build the town, and began moving workers in as soon as possible. Potlatch not only wanted to create the physical structures of a town, but also desired to construct a “social order”, “one that would draw the best workers and, having enticed them, tender them a way of life so attractive they would remain”.34 Their goal was to create an efficient, productive, and economically viable logging community; and in so doing, they created a town that, by official accounts and many a lingering memory, was family and community oriented, filled with people who valued their children’s education and religion, replete with workers who would not rove from town to town, and a population who would be proud to have multi-generational family employees work for the mill.

Potlatch Corporation realized their goals by creating a strict policy about whom they would hire. As expressed by John Hingham in his influential book, Strangers In The Land, nativism was spreading to America’s western states in the early twentieth century. Defined as

30 Map courtesy of John Hartman.
“every type and level of antipathy toward aliens, their institutions, and their ideas”, these xenophobic feelings are perfectly exemplified by the state of Washington’s efforts to encourage Congress to “prohibit all immigration for ten years”. Hingham goes on to explain that the “fear of job competition from foreigners contributed to a host of incidents and movements; most it appeared in the restrictions on employment”. Moving west with the Weyerhaeuser syndicate was a form of these beliefs, which were realized in the Potlatch’s hiring policies. The Company sought to hire married men of white or of northern European descent, and preferred those who had an internal referee in the Potlatch Corporation.

Hingham states that nativism first emerged in America as an attempt to uphold “the concept of individual freedom”. It is ironic that while employing the philosophies of nativism, the ideals behind the concept are at odds with Potlatch’s policies. Moving into the town of Potlatch often meant that the worker was giving up his individual freedom and transferring that decision-making authority to the Corporation, not maintaining it. The nineteenth century economist, Richard Ely, has laid down a poignant challenge in his description of Pullman, Illinois as un-American. He states that a company town is “not the American ideal. It is a benevolent, well wishing feudalism, which desires the happiness of the people, but in such a way as shall please the authorities…. [The establishment of these towns exemplifies] the most absolute power of capital, and the repression of all freedom”. Despite the ironies, the Corporation’s hiring policies did exemplify a form of nativism and these xenophobic tendencies created an obedient, white, Christian populace. (See Figure 5)

40 R. Ely. 1885. pp 452-466.
Exemplifying E.P. Thompson's claims that time-discipline was an essential aspect of the success of industrialization, Potlatch Corporation extended their strict qualifications about whom they would hire to controlling what their workers could do on and off the job. Thompson shows how throughout history some business owners found it necessary to write extensive "civil and penal code[s]... to govern and regulate [their] refractory labour-force".\textsuperscript{43} In order to regulate this force, one business owner found it necessary to calculate wages "after all deductions for being at taverns, alehouses, coffee houses, breakfast, dinner, playing, sleeping, smoking (sic), singing, reading of new history, quarelling (sic), contention, disputes or anything foreign to my
Thompson claims that industrial success was—and still is—dependent upon employee control through regulating time and employee behavior.

The principles developed in the nineteenth century still apply today and the need for employers to control their employees to maintain a financially stable and profitable workforce was evident in Potlatch Corporation’s creation of their company town. The “landscape of disciplined industrial capitalism” was realized in Potlatch by the Company figuring out ways to ensure that their workers would not be late to work, miss work, be hung over (which meant that they needed to control the drinking habits of their employees off the job), or skip out of town. This resulted in Potlatch’s community plan, to make Potlatch dry of any alcohol, to prevent saloons from opening in surrounding communities, and to preferentially hire men with the various ethnic credentials mentioned above. Potlatch worked to establish an obedient, long-term, stable work force; one that would be around for generations. By making alcohol hard to acquire, the company hoped that they would attract steady employees who would not abandon work. The Company created a system that would aid them in finding men who enjoyed working in the single industry trade, were religious, valued education, and wanted a stable community.

This long-term company plan foreshadows developments within the timber industry of sustainable forestry. The community plan was focused on the social dimension of creating communities that were not work camps dominated by males but rather replete with all the amenities for families to live in the town; on the other hand, the idea of sustainable forestry and abandoning the practice of ‘cut and run’ logging in Potlatch followed much later. According to R. W. Hidy in *Timber and Men*, it would have been wise to selectively cut the timber, “with careful preservation of seed trees of the better species”. Hidy’s analysis possesses hindsight
and while one cannot indict people in the early 1900’s for not having the vision of those who
came after, he does draw attention to the fact that the Company logged over the area. And, while
Potlatch’s cut and run policy did not forever hurt the timber industry in the Palouse—there are
still timber operations in the area—the combination of cutting all the giant white pine and not
updating the Potlatch mill worked together to eventually make the Potlatch mill obsolete and
unprofitable.

Because the Corporation had a vested interest in this community, its influence reached
into every facet of the town. With excellent teachers hired for the school, Potlatch was soon
referred to by locals as “The Harvard of the West”. Current high school mathematics teacher,
Jim Haddock, explains how the former resident of Potlatch, Malcolm Renfrew, class 1928,
described the successes of the school.

[He says that among those from his class were students who became a] lawyer, lawyer, judge, engineer, engineer, doctor, doctor, uh, music
instructor, I mean out of a class of 20.... [W]hen he went to the University
(of Idaho) as a freshman, his mathematics teacher at the University asked
if there any Potlatch graduates and he raised his hand and the guy said,
just told the rest of the class, ‘if I’m not available during office hours, he’s
going to tell us where he lives and just find him and he’ll give you some
help’.49

As evidenced in this statement, the Potlatch schools had an excellent reputation. Additionally,
they scored well in standardized tests and excelled in sports because the Company supported and
encouraged these activities.

Company ownership of the community and the fact that it was at heart a business
influenced all aspects of the town and worked to construct a particular set of dynamics between
the Corporation and community. E.P. Thompson suggests that education is used as a method of
normalizing children into the “habit of industry” and that this institution would teach the children

47 J. Haddock, personal interview (Potlatch, ID, 2002).
48 After graduating from Potlatch, Malcolm Renfrew attended the University of Idaho and eventually became a
chemistry professor and the inventor of Teflon.
about work and time-discipline.\footnote{J. Haddock, personal interview (16 October 2002).} Whether or not Potlatch’s underlying intentions were to mold children into future mill employees is unclear. It is evident however, that there was a relationship between the Company and the school and behavior in one directly impacted another’s work in the other. Jim Haddock extrapolates on the stories told by many residents,

[The success of the school was due to the fact that it] was a company high school and that was a knowledge brought about partially by intimidation, because... the ‘not mill’ people, the superintendent, the bosses, that wanted their kids to get a good education, wanted them to go to that high school and so the high school... hired only the very best teachers and ... if a guy’s son caused a behavior problem in class they had a principal that took care of that problem. But then the superintendent of the mill [was told about the child’s behavior and], it was probably not unusual that the superintendent of the mill came in and said, called the employee, and said, ‘if that happens again we’ll give you a week to move your family out of that house and out of town’.\footnote{M. Renfrew, personal conversation (17 February 2003).}

While there has been no evidence found that any parents were actually fired because of a child’s behavior in school, the threat itself often came from the parents as a way to control their children.\footnote{K. Petersen. 1987. p 148.} The Company wanted the citizens to behave in a way that the Company defined as tolerable. The Corporation had high standards for the school and the performance and behavior of the children within that institution.

Corporate control also reached into the everyday lives of the citizens of Potlatch; the company owned the town, the store, the school, the houses—everything.\footnote{K. Petersen. 1987. p 165.} The community reflected a mixture of the growing social concerns of the early twentieth century and the interests of the Corporation. With the creation of a baseball league, a health/sports facility, an opera house, and diverse civic and social organizations, the Corporation worked to give the people of the town many of the amenities of larger communities and the opportunities to excel in them.\footnote{K. Petersen. 1987. p 165.}
As noted, the establishment of corporately-owned amenities and the amalgamation between work and life was common in the era of resource (and specifically company) towns. By using examples of World War II and Los Alamos, New Mexico, where nuclear bombs were tested, Susan Griffin claims that the growing separation between work and home life can be detrimental to families. The community of Potlatch seems to indicate just the opposite; the line between those two entities might have been blurred too much and too often. A long time Potlatch Corporation employee, Alvin Cowger, expressed how living in a company town impacted the workers after work was finished.

.... [T]hey had a company store [in Potlatch] and I didn’t want to give them my check back so I went down [to Palouse] and spent it. (He laughs) See, the company owned [the] town. See, some people, their whole paycheck went to that store over here.... We did buy a few groceries off of them, but we paid for it and I didn’t owe them my check at the end of the month.... I was in line in the pay line and a guy got his check and it was all zeros. See he got nothing, so in a week’s time he had moved out, he had this baby, didn’t pay child support, they taxed his wages. He said, ‘I can’t keep up with this’ and he moved out over night, went to Oregon and never did come back. So if you don’t get a check there’s no use in staying, right?

While Cowger avoided the cycle of never receiving money for his work, there were many who found the relationship convenient and liked that this small town had almost everything the community needed. Sixth generation local resident and now county assessor, Steve Fiscus, recalled how nice it was to have so many goods available to the workers.

.... [If you were working out in the woods] everything would get deducted from your paycheck and then they (Potlatch Corporation) would contract with a local restaurant and they would pay. They would take $1.50 out of your paycheck for every meal you ate and then they’d pay everything above $1.50. Yeah, it was a good deal and so it would cost you $4.50/day and [you] went down and ate breakfast, got a solid lunch and went down for dinner. I ate very well.... [W]hen you [were] working at the sawmill, they had a company store where you get clothes and food and whatever and those would be deducted out of your paycheck, but at reduced costs, not what it would cost you if you went to get it at another store.

56 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
57 S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
Despite the differences in opinions whether company ownership was good or bad, the intense company influence is impossible to ignore. This relationship was the connection between the Corporation and the community and it still exists today.

As the Potlatch Corporation grew throughout the twentieth century, the Company's attention shifted from the community of Potlatch to the many activities in which the Corporation was involved. In 1931, Potlatch Lumber Company combined with two other Weyerhaeuser syndicates, Edward Rutledge Timber Company (based out of Coeur d'Alene) and Clearwater Timber Company (situated in Lewiston), to create Potlatch Forests, Incorporated. With this merger came the responsibilities of maintaining and updating other mills and being conscious of timberlands beyond the Potlatch area. This move was an indicator that the Corporation would not be focusing all of its attention on the mill at Potlatch, that each mill would become specialized to perform a certain job in the production process, and that the Company was growing and moving on from just focusing on the area around the town of Potlatch.

While Potlatch Corporation achieved great economic success during the twentieth century, they did have years of economic hardship. These periods seriously impacted the community of Potlatch and during these times the lack of economic diversification in the town was sorely felt. During the Great Depression lumber prices dropped sharply and because Potlatch Forests, Incorporated had merged three companies together "decisions would now be made on the basis of what was best for these operations collectively, rather than what was best for each individually". After much deliberation, jobs were cut in Potlatch. The Company

---

60 Ibid.
attempted to help the community members by giving employment when they could, extending credit at the Mercantile, and ignoring some debts when people fell behind in rent payments.

The consequences of being a company town were strongly felt any time the Company made a business decision because there was no boundary between one’s work and home life. This was exemplified by the fact that the company owned all the houses in the town, and required that tenants worked for the company. In effect job loss in Potlatch meant leaving Potlatch. Corporate decisions impacted more than the individual families that had to leave the town, however. The company plan was never as long as the community plan. By the 1950’s, Company profits were on the rise and they were “expanding into newer and larger arenas [and] did not want to be burdened by ancillary sideshows”.

The town of Potlatch was in need of maintenance and repair and the Corporation was ready to relieve themselves of that duty.

Within fifty years of being created as a company town, Potlatch was incorporated into the state of Idaho. This move away from the paternalistic administration of the Corporation was carried out for various economic and community centered reasons. While there was discussion about abandoning the Potlatch mill altogether, the Corporation decided instead to sell the town, and told the residents that they intended to keep the mill open for the time being.

Weyerhaeuser’s son, Frederick K. Weyerhaeuser, believed that incorporating the town would be beneficial to the community and said that he would like to “handle the disposal of the property in Potlatch in a manner best calculated to improve the town”. With few options available to them, many of the mill workers found themselves buying the homes that they had lived in for decades.

Local Velda Ross explains,

---

62 The Mercantile, also referred to as “The Merc” was the Potlatch company store. Situated in the heart of downtown Potlatch, the Merc served as the shopping and social center of the community. The store sold everything from local farm fresh eggs to furniture. Common to company town stores, the Merc had a charge system that meant that one could deduct their Merc bill directly from their paycheck. While convenient, this system sometimes resulted in the company and workers debt to one another (paycheck and bills) cancelled each other out.


..... Well you could buy a house for $17/month or you could rent it for $35. Well it made a little more sense to buy it and that's how most of the houses got sold and then of course they (Potlatch) carried the paper on everything because they took that $17 right out of [your] paycheck... I mean it was a good deal... I mean for all these people, I mean how would they have ever gotten started had they not had that?

While Frederick Weyerhaeuser, Jr. said that the mill would not close, the incorporation of Potlatch into the state was just one of the many indications that the Corporation was rethinking its business plans and how the town of Potlatch fit into that future picture. As the Corporation continued to build and update its mills in other communities, Potlatch was left behind. Its machinery was out of date, and Potlatch Corporation would have to invest significant capital to upgrade the mill. A representative from the Corporation explained that the white pine that exists in the woods is "nothing near like it was in the beginning of the 1900's... [and] the size of those logs are a lot smaller now than they were in the early 1900's and that mill was built to handle large logs." He continued to explain some of the other problems with the Potlatch mill site.

[The] location of the property, sure it's got some good positives, it's zoned industrial, it's only a mile off of US95, that's the corridor through Idaho, it's about an hour from Spokane, it's got a rail to it... it's got electricity, water, sewer; it's got some good things to it. It also has some negatives that detract from it, it isn't by a major river, half of the property is in flood plain, so that means you can't build on it, it is located in the middle of an agricultural area with no other industry around, it is an hour's drive to the closest interstate, on a very, very poor road, it lacks transportation, another amenity, [and] it is an hour from Lewiston along a not so great road.

These factors weighed heavy on the Corporation and they realized that they would undoubtedly have to make some changes.

Through the 1900's, Potlatch Corporation changed from a small business into a multinational, Fortune 500 company. Post World War II, American companies reaped the benefits of...
a truly Fordist economy. As David Harvey notes, Fordism’s success depended on a “series of compromises and repositionings on the part of the major actors (the state, corporations, and laborers) in the capitalist development process”.

Potlatch Corporation exemplifies the successes and failures of Fordism (see Chapter 4). The Corporation’s regional success in logging in combination with advancements in technology and an expanding export market resulted in many successes. By the 1960’s, Potlatch was a multinational company with its sights set on continued growth and expansion. Potlatch Corporation eventually moved its corporate headquarters from Lewiston, Idaho to San Francisco, California. The company owned land and mill sites all over America and was beginning to log in other countries as well.

With these changes, and as the original managers of the town and Company were replaced over the years, the initial commitment to the community waned. Robert Wiebe’s interpretation of America’s corporate history in which there was shift from the local companies to corporate enterprises funded by shareholders and managed by professionals with attention paid to the bottom line is applicable to Potlatch. The Company’s and the town’s history parallels this interpretation and the people of Potlatch felt abandoned by the Corporation. As Keith Petersen notes in Company Town, the people of the town felt that the new management was “running things on a cost basis, not on a basis of what’s good for the community…. [They] lacked the personal interest in people that had been there before”. And, while the Corporation can give countless, justifiable reasons why changes were made to the Potlatch mill, the community remembers their history from their deserted position.

---

69 Ibid
71 Representative of the Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
With the death of Frederick Weyerhaeuser and the early participants in the ‘town
experiment’ the willingness to overlook deficits the town incurred for the sake of the community
also passed on. As the Company evolved—in terms of its fiscal and corporate policies—the
financial burden of the town became painfully obvious and it was just a matter of time before the
board of directors and stockholders halted operations in the town. As the Corporation began to
divest their interests in the community, it slowly became apparent to the workers that the
Company would eventually shut down the mill. These Corporate changes indicated a shift in
loyalty of the Company and help to explain why, in the end, the community became frustrated
with the Company. These changes exemplify how the Corporation turned from really caring
about the place into only seeing it as an investment.

The community loss of trust and job security gravely impacted the future developments
within the community. The experience of losing a business that built the town hardened the
community against trying to attract new companies and the economic uncertainty suppressed
internal investment in the town; it would be less painful for the community members to not be a
part of a union, not make as much money, commute to another town for work, then have to
experience the abandonment—both emotionally and literally—of a company that they not only
cared deeply for, but also they felt they helped succeed. Similar to the times when the
community has stood witness as another one of their educated, talented, promising high school
graduates left town to pursue other opportunities, Potlatch watched the company they felt they
helped achieve great financial success leave their town to pursue bigger and better projects.

A community adjusting: Potlatch, Idaho after the mill closed

Potlatch Corporation’s need to succeed as a company meant that they had to end
operations that were not profitable. While the Potlatch Corporation felt responsible to provide
for this community, their first responsibility rested with their financial investment and to their
There was no secrecy in this fact, either. From the beginning it was known that the mill in Potlatch was "constructed to rend lumber for fifty years or more, until there were no more accessible trees to fall and buck and transport and slice into boards". The business plan of the mill was always shorter than the community plan and the fact that the mill operated for eighty years was a lucky benefit for the town of Potlatch. The Corporation's plan for the community they helped to build in northern Idaho, however, was a long-term plan. The Company espoused the need for good education, people investing in the land and buying property, and folks caring about their community. While this commitment to the community is commendable, it provided little comfort to the citizens when the Corporation decided that they have to close the mill.

In August 1981, Potlatch Corporation shut down the Potlatch mill. The closure was said to be temporary. Workers were given a week's notice of the closure, and many assumed that the mill would reopen in the near future. In March 1983, however, a letter from executives of the Potlatch Corporation in San Francisco indicated that the mill was to be closed permanently. While the Corporation discussed the possibility of building a cedar plant, the possibility of selling the mill to another timber company was not entertained, because "for quite a while Potlatch really thought that [they] would be using that property at some time in the future". While the Corporation claims that it was "economics" alone that forced the mill closure, town residents suspect that there are other factors involved. In addition to economic issues such as the weakness of the national economy, high interest rates, and the declining national timber industry, locals explained that poor mill management and the existence of pollution (for example oil, PCB's, and asbestos) also played a role in the mill closure. It was no surprise that the mill

---

74 Representative of the Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
77 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
78 Representative of the Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
eventually shut down. Despite years of rumors about a possible mill closure however, the people of Potlatch were shocked and hurt when this occurred.

Shortly after announcing the permanent closure, Potlatch Corporation hired a salvage company to dismantle the mill, and locals took advantage of this new entrepreneurial opportunity. Some of the older mill workers were hired as watchman to ensure that there were no injuries or accidents at the mill site and to make sure that valuable metal and machinery was not stolen. Local blacksmith, Mark Solomon, approached the salvage company about what they were salvaging and what they were throwing away. Discovering that the lumber stripped from the mill was to be burned, Solomon mustered a crew of twelve to reclaim what they could safely dismantle, which was eight storage sheds, the railroad shed, and the box factory. He recalls, “I took out an ad in Fine Homebuilding Magazine... saying, ‘Give these timbers a home, save them from the torch’, and [I] started selling timber all over the country, by the semi load, by the pickup load; ...I spent two years there.” (See Figure 6) Solomon ended up salvaging roughly a million and a half board feet—or the equivalent of forty-three acres—of timber, bought one hundred and twenty acres on top of Moscow Mountain, paid his employees, and built his home and blacksmith shop. Thus, much of the old mill buildings remain in northern Idaho, scattered across Latah and Benewah Counties in the form of homes, shops, and storage sheds. The actual mill building was too big for Solomon to handle and that building was eventually toppled and burned. He reminisced, “it was quite a big fire; everyone just sat around and watched it all day and night”.

79 G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
80 M. Solomon, personal interview (26 September 2002).
81 Ibid.
Figure 6\textsuperscript{82}: Dismantling of the Potlatch Lumber Mill

\textsuperscript{82} Photographs courtesy of Mark Solomon.
The mill closure gravely impacted the community. Many people talk about the dramatic physical differences that were noticed immediately. Bonnie Rohn grew up on a farm in Farmington, attended school in Potlatch, presently works as the Potlatch city treasurer, is a member of the city council, and is involved with many civic organizations. She commented on her amazement when she came to town and saw the mill gone. She states, “the first time I came in here and the mill site was empty, it was like ‘this is not right’ you know, [because] I wasn’t in [Potlatch] to see a lot of the moving or the dismantling”. Steve Fiscus explains how the closure affected him emotionally. He remembers,

[There was a] smell of the community because of the lumber being milled and anyone that worked there, you know the smell of pine on their clothes. And so there were these things that you didn’t even think of at the time that now that I look at them, the smell of white pine sawed...or whatever, is just something that you’ll never forget.

Potlatch high school graduate and wife of a local mill worker, Joyce Strong, explained all the things she missed: “Logging trucks parked on the street, and you don’t hear that noon whistle, and you don’t hear that fire whistle, you don’t go down there to collect your paycheck either, [and] you don’t owe the Mercantile”.

In addition to the physical absence of the mill, Potlatch residents treasure memories of the intangibles that the mill brought to the community. Many people, in addition to Strong, noted the power of the mill whistle and how it was central to the lives of the community. Fiscus elaborates on the absence of the whistle.

... [I]t really is hard to explain... it (the mill closure) affected everyone emotionally. Um, the mill whistle, um the mill whistle you knew the time, you knew time because of when the mill whistle went off... it started in the morning and then they had breaks and it whistled for the breaks, and they were fifteen or twenty minute breaks and [one blow] was for break and twice was [to go] back to work and then lunch and then afternoon break and then quitting time.

---

83 B. Rohn, personal interview (15 October 2002).
84 S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
85 J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
86 S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
Not the only one to mention this memory, journalist, Barbara Coyner, laughed as she repeated the rumors that she has heard in town: “The mill whistle, they said, determined your sex life.”

Just as E.P. Thompson discusses how different communities keep time according to their daily chores, such as the ‘cattle clock’, the community of Potlatch moved in concert to the ‘whistle clock’. The whistle, however, was not just an indicator of when it was time to go to work, the whistle kept time moving in Potlatch. Everyone woke up at the same time, went home from playing at the same time, and ate dinner at the same time. The mill might have been where everyone worked together, but it was the blow of that whistle kept the community moving in concert and acting as one.

The emotional connections people had to the mill and what it added the community made it difficult for the citizens of Potlatch to think of their community as anything other than a mill town. When asked what they thought was going to happen to the old mill site, many people said that for years they believed that Potlatch Corporation was holding onto the land because they were going build a new plant there some time in the future. As Joyce Strong stated, “...you know for...something like five years in the back of your mind you thought it would start up again, you know you always thought... I don’t know how many other people felt that way, but I always thought maybe it would start up again”. Indeed, she was not the only one who thought this way, many people held onto the idea that a new mill would eventually reopen on that site.

The hopes of Potlatch citizens that the Corporation would build another mill on the site went unfulfilled. The Company still owns the land, and leases part of it for hay storage. They have donated a small parcel of land to the City to be used as the Scenic Six Historical Park (See Figure 7). The park and the Idaho Gem Community Development Council are named after the

---

87 B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
89 J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
Scenic 6 byway along which the town is situated. The name bears great significance in the town as it represents the beauty of the landscape by which the town is surrounded.

Figure 7\textsuperscript{90}: The Scenic Six Historical Park

After working at the mill for more than thirty years, the people of Potlatch realized that they would have to find alternative economic means. This was not at first a negative change. Most of the employees could collect unemployment for two years and the Corporation extended the workers' benefits for a year beyond closure. Donna Quiring said that her husband just went out and found other work, but she also remembered how the mill closure and Potlatch's benefits greatly impacted their personal decisions.

[W]e realized that we were only going to have our insurance [for] a year and.... I said, 'if we're going to have any more kids we're going to have to do it now because after our insurance is up, that's it, we won't be able

\textsuperscript{90} Photograph by Author.
to afford it anymore'. That’s... what I always say, that’s why we got our daughter... because the mill shut down.91

George and Joyce Strong also remembered how they reacted differently to the mill closure. George said that it was “the best year in my life.... It was a good year.... [W]orking odd jobs [in addition to collecting unemployment] I probably made as much as I did when it (the mill) was running”.92 Joyce remembered the year differently. She knew unemployment would run out, and was afraid “that that we’d be hanging here and lose everything we had”.93 George decided after the Potlatch mill shut down that “[i]t just seemed like a good time to get clear out of it (mill work) because they were [closing mills down all over the place] in the 1980s. Everything was closing and the logging industry was just about zilch”.94 Like many other ex-Potlatch mill workers, Strong wanted to stay in the area. His house was paid for and he did not have any debt. Instead of staying in the logging industry, he took a job at the University of Idaho working as a janitor until he retired in January 2000. There were many people like the Strong’s who had worked in the mill since high school and suddenly found themselves forced to make life-altering changes. While some families moved away, the recollection of most town members is that most people stayed in the area and got by.

While some people decided to get out of the logging business altogether, others stayed in the industry. Some who were already working two jobs, one at Potlatch and the other part-time at nearby, Bennett Lumber; when the Potlatch mill closed, they were able to go on full time at Bennett’s. Bennett’s mill was a technologically advanced mill, which handled various sizes and kinds of timber. Its success over the years is an indicator that Potlatch left the area not because there was no timber left, but rather, because their mill was out of date and unable to mill the kind of timber that was plentiful in the woods.

91 D. Quiring, personal interview (16 October 2002).
92 G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
93 J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
The Corporation’s paternalistic role in the community’s life did not end completely when
the mill shut down. Apparently feeling some amount of responsibility to the citizens of Potlatch,
the Company allowed Potlatch mill workers to transfer to another mill in the area—in Lewiston,
Coeur d’Alene or St. Maries—and chose to commute to work there from Potlatch. There was
always need for extra board workers\textsuperscript{95} at the other mills. Most of these arrangements did not
work out, although there are a few people who commute to this day. Jerry Ross commuted to
Lewiston for about a year before transferring to another local mill near Potlatch.\textsuperscript{96} Alvin Cowger
said that he commuted to Lewiston for three weeks before quitting. Cowger was fifty-seven
when the mill shut down, a difficult age to expect to get hired by another mill. He said,
“[Bennett’s] wouldn’t even talk to me, I filled in a resume and never heard from them, probably
after I walked out the door, they threwed [sic] it in the trashcan”.\textsuperscript{97} Cowger found part time
work, driving a gravel truck and working odd jobs in the area, and his wife, Alice, got a part time
job in a lawyer’s office to help pay the bills.

George Strong explained that while Potlatch Corporation allowed you to transfer to any
other mill, it was not as good a deal as it sounded.

...I never moved to Lewiston, I drove back and forth. The reason I
didn’t... [stay] down there, we were working extra board and we were on
call and you never knew when you were going to be called, I mean you
might be called at midnight or you might be called at 7 o’clock in the
morning, so like I said you had to start out at the bottom again and I didn’t
want to go back to common labor work at a sawmill.\textsuperscript{98}

One woman explained how her life was impacted by the mill closure and how her husband
attempted to commute to Coeur d’Alene but then eventually decided to change his line of work.

\textsuperscript{94} G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
\textsuperscript{95} Board workers are those who would come in the morning and be assigned to whatever job needed to be filled, but
if there was no work to be done the worker was sent home.
\textsuperscript{96} J. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002).
\textsuperscript{97} Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
\textsuperscript{98} G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
Well then, he's thinking we were going to have to move to Lewiston or Coeur d'Alene and I said, 'no', I got kind of stubborn and said, I have a good job and the job market wasn't there (in Coeur d'Alene and Lewiston).... I just said [let's just try to make this work]. So, he went and tried to work at both of those mills, he went to Coeur d'Alene for a little while and stayed with his brother at Post Falls and then went to Lewiston and worked just a few days and knew it wasn't going to work out.... He ended up as heavy equipment operator at WSU... and that was a good job, good retirement.... so it was scary back then.... you just don't buy anything extra, you just survive you know.... anyway it all worked out for the best.  

Commuting to one of the university towns proved, for many, to be a better solution than moving to another community, driving over an hour each way to another mill, or starting over at the bottom.  

Commuting to work was not a completely new concept to Potlatch residents. Because the town is situated within forty miles of two university towns, commuting has long been part of its history. Additionally, while some people said they only went to Moscow on special occasions when they were growing up, Moscow and Pullman were definitely part of their extended community. Both Gene and Patti Walters commuted to Moscow and Pullman rather than work at the mill in Potlatch. Gene said, "when I quit the mill and went to work on construction I tripled my income the first year, that's why I kind of like construction". One man commutes roughly fifty miles everyday from Potlatch to Plummer. He said that while he initially moved to Potlatch because of the cheap housing, he stayed because of his connections to the community.

I like the community; it's a little town, but, it's close to two major universities, University of Idaho and Washington State University. So we have all the safety and whatever of a little town and the all the good stuff of those other town, like we can go to a football game or go to a play or go to a concert that are there...[it's only] 20 miles [away].

---

99 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
100 G. Walters, personal interview (15 October 2002).
101 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
Almost all of the people who commuted to work said that they did not mind it and actually enjoyed the drive. Many people felt that it was nice to have some thinking time everyday, some time to 'clear your head'.

In addition to commuting, technology has allowed some small businesses to open up in the area. Technological advances have made this somewhat remote community accessible to the outside world. Marc Lawrence, owner of simplecomplex, a company, which makes packaging molds for other companies, explains how technology allowed him to relocate his business from San Francisco to Potlatch.

I would not be [in Potlatch] if my history had shifted back in time ten years, because Fed-Ex service, I live and die with Fed-ex and modems. And in order to really have it (his business) since I’ve been there... things like fax machines made it possible, even just eleven years ago.... There’s no way I would have moved to Potlatch if it been 1980, instead of 1990, it just couldn’t have happened.

Barry Ramsay, owner of a local aluminum mold-making factory called D8, expresses similar sentiments. Commenting on the decision where to locate his factory, which employs roughly fifty people from around the area, he said:

... I recognized that if I was going to be located in the wrong location, I might as well be in the wrong location I like, which is here. Actually it ended up being perfect timing because as we grew the business, it was kind of the dawn of the internet and being able to move CAD (Computer Aided Drafting) models back and forth, you know, it really doesn’t matter where you’re located, unless you’re manufacturing something that takes a lot of energy to transport, which the molds we build might weigh 500 pounds and we ship maybe 20 a month, so if one goes out a day, a truck pulls up, we load it, and it drives away, and the road structure here is adequate to transport our product.

Improved road conditions, the Internet, fax machines, and Fed-Ex trucks have all helped Potlatch, and the few businesses located there, to survive.

---

103 M. Lawrence, personal interview (25 July 2002).
Yet the same advances in technology which bring people and businesses to Potlatch, make it hard for Potlatch to thrive economically. The internet allows people to do some of their shopping on-line and, as Bonnie Rohn noted, the seventeen mile commute to Moscow does not seem as far as it used to appear to be. Many Potlatch residents now do their grocery shopping in Moscow or Pullman on their way home from work. The little department store in Potlatch is struggling to stay in business and has recently been put up for sale. Members of the local volunteer development council, the Scenic Six Community Development Council, are working to try to make Potlatch more appealing for businesses and there are members in the community working to educate Potlatch high school students about entrepreneurial opportunities in the town. Yet, there are two specific things working against Potlatch right now, poor cell phone reception and lack of high-speed Internet access. One resident said that he can use his cell phone in roughly three spots in Potlatch and there is currently no DSL in the town. County commissioner, Paul Kimmell, said that the county is currently attempting to establish wireless connections all over Latah County, but it is a slow process.

Potlatch has used what it can to attract people to the area. With universities located in the vicinity, Potlatch’s cheap housing has helped the real estate market in the town. Delfred Cone, owner of Venture Real Estate, explained that the population of the community is changing and how he might have played a role in that. He said,

I sold the houses to people from there (out of town), I talked them into buying here because it was a better buy than it would have been in Moscow or in Troy or whatever, so that they’re driving to their work.... I don’t feel bad about it, but when you bring people in and they don’t get into the community and they’re just there, all they do is sleep there and send their kids to school there, and they don’t do their trading there, that’s not good for the community.

104 B. Ramsay, personal interview (17 October 2002).
105 R. Bailey, personal interview (8 November 2002).
106 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
Many people have said that the biggest change they have noticed in the community is that they ‘do not know everyone in town anymore’.

The school is one of the few things that has basically stayed the same in Potlatch. While some people feared that enrollment would decline significantly, it has not done so. Most people tended to compliment the school and some of the superb teachers who are there. As always, there are problems within the school system; funding is always an issue. Some noted that there are teachers who are past their prime, and that sports are over-emphasized in the school. One woman expressed her disappointment that her children did not attend college, but then stated, “I’ve wondered if they’d have been in a school that was more, if they had been in a community that was more college oriented if they would have gone to college, if it would have been important to them”. At the same time, the Potlatch school has always been and continues to be supported by the local community. Holiday concerts and sports events remain central activities for the townspeople. As the community changes, however, so does the school. Jim Haddock explained that he has noticed the changing student body and noted how the kids of professors from the universities have a different dedication and expectation of their schooling experience.

Summary

Understanding how Potlatch’s history has shaped its development is critical to understanding its future development. Potlatch is just one example of the many company towns or single industry communities that emerged in the early twentieth century. And, it is one of many rural communities trying to figure out how to economically and socially exist in society. The community is now struggling with its identity, shaped not only by the collective memory of

108 D. Cone, personal interview (16 October 2002).
the people, but also the written texts about the place, and the constant reminder that Potlatch controls the development of their community. As this community continues to evolve, it will have to come to terms with its history in order to figure out how it can develop its future.
Chapter 3:

Portraits of Potlatch at the Millennium

Purified identities

Intellectuals are prone to romanticize the past, so that when one speaks of something dying out historically it means the dead past was better. That is a peculiar blindness of much utopian thinking; since the past was better than the present, the future ought to restore the past. Such is not my intention: what can be learned from the condition of city life fifty or seventy years ago is perspective about what is missing today, not a guide for how good cities in the future can be built.110

This statement comes from sociologist Richard Sennett’s influential book, The Uses of Disorder, in which he explores the life of middle-class young people living in suburban Chicago. His study reveals that these people have ‘purified’ how they see their identity and altered how they view their lives in a subconscious attempt to make their painful reality tolerable. Sennett explains that this purification is dangerous and claims that people should deal with the truth because people who “held down or suppressed [their feelings]... [had] higher rates of deep emotional disorders” in contrast to those who confronted conflict and truth.111

The local perspectives of the history, present, and future of Potlatch parallel Sennett’s statements quoted above. In general, residents, like the intellectuals to whom Sennett refers, view Potlatch’s company town history as romantic, its present as bleak, and its future as a hopeful restoration of the past which can be realized by once again making Potlatch a technologically advanced industrial mill town. This chapter is an exploration of the views of Potlatch by Potlatchites’s112 who expose what they think their town was, is, and could be in the future.

Sennett’s observation that some people ‘purify’ and others are honest about their history is applicable to Potlatch. Through the stories about its past, the community reveals that there are many people who romanticize what life was like in Potlatch and there are others whose honest

112 I use the term ‘Potlatchite’ to refer to someone who is from Potlatch. I have borrowed this term from Delfred Cone who said that when people ask him where he is from, he now answers by saying that he is a Potlatchite, instead of a Princetonite. (16 October 2002).
vision of the town’s history result in both admiration for and frustrations with the town, the Corporation, and living in Potlatch.

As noted in Chapter 2 and as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, acts of paternalism were not only common but expected in company towns such as Potlatch. People came to depend upon the Company, and therefore, the town was not prepared to fend for itself when the Company left in 1983. Several people believe that the paternalistic relationship is so engrained in the community that it has continued to affect development in the town. It is at this point that the community needs to take Sennett’s advice and acquire a new view of the past and see it as “perspective about what is missing today” and not use it as a guide for what they should be striving for in the future.113

Perspectives of the past

To some Potlatchites, Potlatch’s history seems idyllic. Many interviewees recalled Potlatch’s past with delight and described in great detail how they snuck into areas which the Corporation had forbidden, how they could buy anything they needed at the local Merc, and how the schools were of superb quality.114 These memories have been reported to and by new members of the community who are interested in learning about Potlatch’s history. Journalist, Barb Coyner is one such person. Comparing Potlatch to a lab, Barb explained why she enjoys learning Potlatch’s history: “We have two universities nearby, we had the biggest mill, we had the company town, we had the hog shows, [and] we have had color, that’s why I think the history is so good”.115 In a comment that in many ways disassociates her from the town in which she lives and writes about, Coyner’s summary of a ‘good’ history explains that the town is different from the other towns in the area, but it does not indicate that it was in any way good for the

114 G. Walters, personal interview (15 October 2002).
115 B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
people living there. Coyner’s comment is indicative of someone who is interested in good history, but is not someone who has had to personally experience the dramas which make that history good.

Depending upon each person’s particular circumstance, residents of Potlatch have different perspectives regarding what life was like in the town. Latah County Assessor Steve Fiscus is a fifth generation Potlatchite and was raised on a farm in the area. He worked for the Potlatch Corporation for two years in the late 1970’s as a way to bridge his college days and having more responsibility that came with taking over his family’s farm. Remembering back to his early twenties, Fiscus spoke fondly of the Corporation and of the time when Potlatch residents could buy anything they needed at the general store for reduced prices. His memories reflect those of an unattached young man who knew that he had many career opportunities to choose from throughout his life. Conversely, Alvin Cowger and other long-time mill employees explained that the same time period of which Fiscus speaks were for them filled with fear and anxiety. It was in the late 1970’s that the mill workers began to get the sense that the mill was going to close. It was these men, who were more advanced in their working years with families and mortgages, who remember the late 1970’s as difficult and frustrating and did not ‘enjoy’ it as much as Fiscus did.

It is this latter group of older Potlatch residents who experienced Potlatch as a company town and stayed in the community after the mill was closed that established a love-hate relationship with the town. They, like Sennett encourages people to do, are honest with the reality of their situation. For example, Gene and Patti Walters commented that they think growing up in Potlatch was wonderful, they love the town, they can name every person who has ever lived in their house, and they possess pictures of the manager for whom their home was

116 S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
117 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
originally built. Sentences later, however, Gene recalled, with a hint of anger and frustration, that the only time he was allowed on ‘Nob Hill’ (the same hill upon which he now lives) was to deliver newspapers to the Potlatch Corporation managers who were on his paper route. He laughed as he remembered “I only had one person ever beat me out of my money and he was a Potlatch Mill Manager. He moved out of town and didn’t pay me for my papers.”119 This dissatisfaction with the divided social classes and unfair rules in Potlatch did not make Gene hate Potlatch, instead he turned frustration into determination to change his social positioning and be able to afford to buy a home up on the hill. This meant that Gene spent weeks away from his family working jobs in Moscow, Lewiston, and as far away as the Tri-Cities (which are located roughly three and a half hours from Potlatch) because he could make more money as a contractor than as a mill employee. Gene Walters’ stories are those of someone who admits that he loves his hometown and that it will always be his home, but who is also honest about the painful reality of what it has been like to live there.

Many people who grew up in Potlatch in the 1950’s and worked at the mill have transferred their dreams of achieving economic success to their children. Alice Cowger, an intelligent and personable woman, explained that she enjoyed school and learning. College was not an option, however, for her family was poor. Alice walked four-miles each way to school and noticing her commitment, one of the management families asked her to become a servant in their family.

[She would] wait at their house, [she] would live there and... would eat meals with them, [but she didn’t do it because her] mother said ‘no’, [her mother] didn’t think it was a good idea at all because [the manager’s family] had kids in school at the same time and ... [her mother] never felt that [they] were that poor.120

118 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed); Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002); J. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002); G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
119 G. Walters, personal interview (15 October 2002).
120 Alice Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
Taught to make do with what they had, Cowger thought about entering the army, but decided against it and instead worked as a teller at the local bank and married early. Her recollections reveal the dreams all the children growing up in Potlatch were given, but also the reality that there were people in the community who were expected to go to college and others who were to be their maids. Alice transferred her dreams to her children, who all went to college and moved out of town. She has one daughter who has become a police officer, another who has a job with an oil company, and a son who works at a local university. Alice sees the faults in Potlatch, but is not going to live anywhere else. She is honest and vocal about the town’s shortcomings, but it is obvious that she loves the town.

Not all Potlatch residents have been as realistic or honest about the town’s shortcomings. In fact, some Potlatchites view the community’s relationship with the Company as more significant than the Company does. In response to these sentiments, a representative from the Potlatch Corporation explained why he thinks the community felt different from other Idaho mill towns and why Potlatch had a special connection to the Corporation.

The town of Potlatch probably felt that it had a special relationship [as compared to Pierce or Coeur d’Alene, Idaho] with the company because it bore the name, it was a company town, it was started by Potlatch in 1905, and Potlatch was the home to the company store. People who lived there would have been linked to Potlatch.¹²¹

Not only do Potlatch residents feel that it was home to all of the things that the Potlatch representative noted, but some Potlatchites comment that the Company should be grateful to the community for helping it succeed. Steve Fiscus explained that “the town of Potlatch was started by the Corporation and the Corporation was started by the city of Potlatch, they’re synonymous

¹²¹ Representative from Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
with each other”\textsuperscript{122}. Unfortunately, the Corporation does not express these sentiments. Rather, they view Potlatch as one of the industrial towns where they used to have a mill. Similar to most company towns, Potlatch Corporation had a paternalistic role in the community.

Even though the Company sold the town to the citizens of Potlatch in 1952, there are many who claim that paternalism has ruined the city’s ability to fend for itself\textsuperscript{123}. This claim of a paternalistic relationship between the Corporation and the community resulted in the community thinking that the Corporation would take care of them, even after the mill closed. Barry Ramsay, owner of the mold-making factory, \textit{D8}, said that “for a while there, [people from the] Potlatch community would actually go to Lewiston and pound their fists on the table and say, ‘what are you going to do with this site? You’ve got to rebuild or the community’s going to fail.’”\textsuperscript{124} Ramsay explained that when he was president of the Latah County Economic Development Council in the late 1980’s he felt that there was little community interest in developing the mill site. He explains,

I think the leadership of Potlatch was... stuck in that mentality that the mill had pulled out [and] that Potlatch Corporation still owns that ground [and that] they’re (the Corporation is) going to have to do something with it...[that] they must be getting ready to build some new mill or something to get our jobs back.\textsuperscript{125}

And, when Ramsay approached the Corporation about leasing or buying the land for his own plant, they were not willing to sell because they thought that they were going to redevelop the land in the future. The possibility of future development was kept alive in the citizens’ minds through a public meeting at which the Company discussed the possibility of the construction of a cedar mill\textsuperscript{126}, hence keeping the community hoping for several years that the Company would be

\textsuperscript{122} S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{123} B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{124} B. Ramsay, personal interview (17 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
the major development force in the community. This hope is accompanied by
disempowerment which has filtered down to the present population’s beliefs. Because the
Corporation currently still owns the mill site and has not completely left the town, development
is restricted and in many ways controlled by the Company.

There are many Potlatch residents who feel that paternalism has shaped local responses to
development. Potlatch resident, Carol Haddock insists that paternalism has shaped the town’s
history and explains that the community remained dependent on the Company until the mill was
shut down in 1983.

Everything was owned by the Company, so that meant they (the
community) had to learn how to do those things that the Company didn’t
do anymore. And I think when the mill was still running here, that
Company presence was great enough that a lot of things happened because
the community went to the Company and said, ‘we need this’ or ‘we
would like this’. You know, maybe they needed some equipment to do
something and the Company would do it. So, when the Company left [in
1983], I think probably the hardest thing and the greatest change was that
these people had to learn how to do things for themselves.

Another woman explained, “[The Potlatch community] never had any experience in governing
itself and I think it’s been a long, tedious, burdensome process for them to learn how to do
that.” These comments show that the community has had difficulty meeting the challenges of
the transition from paternalism to self-governance. Even today, however, community members
continue to use the paternalistic argument as an excuse to explain why things have gone awry in
the town for the last fifty years. While the quotations stated above might have some validity, the
statements are not helpful or always applicable. For example, most of the people who would
have experienced paternalism are retired or deceased, and the majority of the people living in the
town have not experienced paternalism. Potlatchites need to learn from the past that single-
industry economies and paternalism are dangerous and potentially detrimental to small towns.

127 D. Quiring, personal interview (16 October 2002); J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
At the same time, however, it is time to admit that if the town is going to economically develop, then Potlatchites have to be active participants in that development and stop claiming that the town’s history is ruining the community’s ability to succeed in the present.

When the mill was temporarily shut down in 1981, there was at least one attempt to respond proactively before permanent mill closure. This endeavor was not economic development, but rather a last ditch effort made by a few friends to try to keep the town afloat.130 In 1981, six community members (a banker, a man interested in getting into the real estate market, and four other anonymous members) created the informal committee Palouse River Industrial Development Expansion (PRIDE). Del Cone, member of PRIDE and now owner of Venture Real Estate, explained that the group’s goal was to purchase and ‘fill’ fourteen out of twenty-eight empty houses in town. The reasons why PRIDE was formed remain unclear, but evidently both the banker and Cone had professional interests in keeping the houses occupied. According to Cone, the group believed that the way to “keep the town from dying was to keep the houses filled; if you can keep the houses full, you’re going to make business”.131 The committee was working under the assumption that town residents would act as they always had, namely they would shop in the town in which they lived. This assumption was incorrect, however, and the people to whom they were selling homes were employed in other towns and they did their trading after work in those towns.132 As those towns became ‘closer’ through time-space compression—and mega-stores such as Wal-Mart and Shop-co were opened in Moscow and Pullman—other Potlatch residents began trading in the larger towns around the area.133 Cone admits that now he thinks that that PRIDE’s approach to development probably

---

128 C. Haddock, personal interview (25 September 2002).
129 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
130 D. Cone, personal interview (16 October 2002).
131 Ibid.
132 S. Beidler, personal interview (29 October 2002); J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002); Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed).
133 V. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002); L. Ross, personal interview (7 October 2002);
contributed more to turning Potlatch into a bedroom community than promoting local business, but he contends that empty houses would kill a town more than the lack of local shop owners. Unfortunately for Cone, who owns most of the commercial buildings downtown, the insufficient local businesses will surely affect the company he started through his work with PRIDE.

Potlatch’s response to mill closure can be compared to another single-industry town, Chemainus, British Columbia. Chemainus’ logging mill was also closed in 1983 and represents another example of a failed Fordist regime (see Chapter 4 for more discussion about Fordist economies). Unlike the Potlatch case, flexible accumulation was realized in Chemainus through mill restructuring. In 1985, MacMillan Bloedel, the timber company which owned the Chemainus plant, restructured and then reopened the mill. Over 650 mill workers lost their jobs in the transition and were forced to make decisions about how they would support their families and what would become of their town.134

Despite the similar histories, Potlatch and Chemainus had dramatically different responses to mill closure. Chemainus citizens were encouraged to create new economic opportunities for themselves. Guided by two community boosters, Graham Bruce (the mayor) and Karl Schutz (a local entrepreneur), and funded by provincial government grants, the community began a long-term project of creating historical murals of the town which were painted on the buildings in downtown Chemainus. By the early 1990’s there were close to thirty murals, international recognition of the revitalization efforts of the town, a proposed $40 million Pacific Rim Artisan Village, and forty new businesses in the town.135 Trevor Barnes, an economic geographer who has written extensively about Chemainus, explains that since that time, enthusiasm—both Schutz’s and tourists’—for the projects has waned.136 The town’s

136 T.J. Barnes, personal conversation (24 April 2003).
website, however, indicates that there are over one hundred businesses in the area, many activities, and an active artist community still functioning in this town of 3600 people.137

There are reasons why Potlatch and Chemainus had such different responses to mill closure and the need for economic development. First, the people of Chemainus were honest with themselves about what had happened and recognized that they were now independent from the corporation that had, at one time, stabilized the economy. This translated into the people of Chemainus radically changing their social roles. They moved from being workers for someone else into creating jobs for themselves. In Potlatch, however, people did not make this transition. Potlatchites remained on the same path, working for someone else instead of creating new economic opportunities which would benefit the community at large. In essence, the community of Potlatch deceived themselves (with the help of some false encouragement made by the Company) into believing that the Corporation would come back and care for them. These opposing visions of what was happening to their towns and economies had different results. The people of Chemainus took advantage of this change and realized that their town presented many alternative economic opportunities. In Potlatch, the residents held onto the identity of being a single-industry town and made few efforts to develop a new economy and instead decided to find work in other towns. Second, there was an element of social chance in Chemainus that did not exist in Potlatch. Chemainus was lucky to have a successful and enthusiastic entrepreneur living in their community. Unfortunately, for Potlatch, the efforts to keep people in the town did not create a new, locally based economy. And, third, Chemainus is located on a tourist island. People come from all over the world to visit Vancouver Island. The citizens, therefore, just needed to establish a reason for people to visit the small town, but they did not have to work to get them to come to the area. On the other hand, Potlatch is isolated in northern Idaho and it will

take more than murals to get tourists to visit the town.

Despite failed revitalization attempts, the belief that Potlatch was a ‘special’ Potlatch Corporation mill town gave the community a sense of unity that proved vital later on in the town’s history. When the mill shut down in 1983, a sense of community support, understanding, and trust grew out of the new challenges that people faced together. One woman said, “Your income’s cut in half, you know... everybody’s was”.\footnote{Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).} In turn, these common hardships created a strong community in which people cared and watched out for each other. This sense of unity has lasted through the decades and is still present in Potlatch today.

\textit{The past is better understood than the present}

There are many reasons why people have chosen to move to Potlatch. Perhaps people move to Potlatch because of its location and abundance of open space, or maybe it is because land is cheap, the people are nice, and there is a large Christian populace. Whatever the reason, in-migration to Potlatch does happen. Rich Bailey explains why he opened his dentistry practice in Potlatch.

[I] narrowed it down to [the] western Montana, northern Idaho, and eastern Washington area... I like the fact that you can buy a piece of ground here and you cannot hear or see your neighbors... [I chose Idaho partly because] half of the state is either owned by the federal government or timber companies... [and there will never] be houses built upon it. That’s worth a lot to me.\footnote{R. Bailey, personal interview (8 November 2002).}

Bailey calls attention to a common ideological desire of inland northwesterners to be in a small town in the country. There is a certain irony in their desires; they want to know all their neighbors, but never have to see them.
Potlatch’s nearness to Moscow and Pullman allows people to live in a small town, but not have to worry about developing it. Larry Ross, who is the Forest Service District Ranger, was raised in eastern Washington but has lived and worked in Potlatch since 1999. He claims that Potlatch’s location influences the community’s posture toward development. He claims that the community’s attitude as compared to other towns “is slower because the need hasn’t presented itself…. [In Walden, Colorado] the need was immediate and here, because of [Potlatch’s] proximity… to these other job opportunities [in Moscow and Pullman, the economy has] been buffered”.  

Potlatch represents a community that has not had to focus on local development because the community has always been able to find work in the neighboring towns.

Advances in technology have enabled Potlatchites to live in the country, but be able to find work in the city. Velda Ross, who was born and raised in Potlatch and is the sister of Del Cone, lived in Moscow for six months before moving back to her hometown. Ross missed living near her family and in a small town and found Moscow too big and crowded. Another resident verifies this sentiment when explaining why he lives in Potlatch.

I like the community; it’s a little town. But, it’s close to two major universities, University of Idaho and Washington State University. So, we have all the safety and whatever of a little town and the all the good stuff of those other towns, like we can go to a football game or go to a play or go to a concert only…20 miles away.

Bonnie Rohn, born in the 1940’s and raised in the Potlatch area, compared her childhood memories of traveling to Moscow with what she experiences now.

If we want something now, we run to Moscow and pick it up, you know, we can go to Moscow twice maybe three times some days, if I’m not organized then I’m just like ‘oh I forgot to do this’ and some things you just can’t get here, so it’s like, ‘eh, what’s the big deal, we’ll just drive over there’. But, [in the past], we didn’t, it was maybe once a month or maybe every two or three months we’d got to Moscow you know, just not a lot.

140 L. Ross, personal interview (7 October 2002).  
141 V. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002).  
142 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).  
143 B. Rohn, personal interview (15 October 2002).
Another couple confirms Rohn’s comments by saying, “we’re down there (in Moscow) on errands, sometimes every day”.\textsuperscript{144}

It is difficult to get a clear characterization of the town or the economy. Potlatchites’ views of their present town are represented by various perspectives, depending upon how that person defines the community. The Strongs confidently claim that Potlatch is a bedroom community.\textsuperscript{145} Kammi Schott explains that the town is still a single-industry town,\textsuperscript{146} and Paul Kimmell says that the town is in transition.\textsuperscript{147} Floyd Akins, owner of the local grocery store, sums up the feelings of most Potlatch residents in regard to the question of Potlatch’s identity. Is Potlatch a single-industry community? “Well sure it is, Bennett\textsuperscript{148} is the largest employer and sure it still is. That’s a tough one…the colleges, farming, [agriculture], you know it all flows together”.\textsuperscript{149} Mr. Akins is confused. His confusion reflects Potlatch’s current state of flux of existing somewhere between the definitions of single-industry town and bedroom community.

Many residents think of Potlatch as a close-knit, small town. Residents talk about how homes are still referred to as “the old so and so place”.\textsuperscript{150} Steve Fiscus explained that in Potlatch there are still a lot of, “old Potlatch names, [meaning] that their families did work at the mill or worked in town or were local farmers. Some of them of course have changed, as you can’t get around change, but a lot of those names are consistent with names from the last 100 years.”\textsuperscript{151} You could fill in ‘so and so’ with one of many names such as Cone, Reynolds, Fiscus, Carscallen, or Nagle. One man joked, “There are quite a lot of people that are related some way and in fact you have to be very careful what you say because there’s probably somebody who’s a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{145} G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002); J. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{146} K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{147} P. Kimmell, personal conversation (10 December 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{148} “Bennett” refers to Bennett Lumber Company, a locally owned lumber mill operating out of Princeton, Idaho 10 miles from Potlatch. Mr. Bennett turned down my invitation to an interview.
\item \textsuperscript{149} F. Akins, personal interview (5 November 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{150} K. Cada, personal interview (15 October 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{151} S. Fiscus, personal interview (8 October 2002).
\end{itemize}
relative of them if they’ve been around here for a while”. Local librarian, Donna Quiring added that as soon as a kid marries a local, that child’s family becomes “part of that extended family where everyone’s related”. Journalist, Barbara Coyner poignantly explained why she has not moved away from Potlatch. “When we moved here my mom had cancer and you know I had people delivering meals to my house that didn’t even know me, huh, that makes a mush out of you. And I said, ‘I’m going to stay here, these people are nice’”.154

Despite Barb Coyner’s first experiences moving into Potlatch, other residents experience a different reality after migrating to the town. In fact they claim that this tightness about which some residents speak is often denied to newcomers. Embodying the view that it is difficult to be accepted into this closed community is Alvin Cowger. After living in Potlatch for fifty-three years, Cowger’s wife told him that he is still a newcomer and cannot fully understand the community.155 Another resident responded to that comment made to Cowger by stating, “you want to kid around, but the biggest share of his life, his years, he’s got [fifty-three] years here and only twenty years gone, but he is a newcomer to us that started out here”.156 Barry Ramsay explains that he is constantly reminded by a neighbor that he is new to the community, even though he has lived in Potlatch for over twenty years and owns a business which is one of the largest employers in the town.157 Another woman added to this sentiment by explaining that it takes a while to be welcomed into the community and as a result, there are a lot of people have moved to Potlatch, but because of various reasons such as harsh winters, not wanting to live out in the country, economic opportunities in other places, or not meshing with the residents of the town means that they leave within ten years of arrival.158 No matter what reason they give for

152 K. Beidler, personal interview (29 October 2002).
153 D. Quiring, personal interview (16 October 2002).
154 B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
155 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
156 V. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002).
157 B. Ramsay, personal interview (17 October 2002).
158 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
leaving, the example indicates that Potlatch is not opening their doors to all newcomers, albeit new neighbors or new businesses.

These exclusionary examples illustrate Sennett’s warnings. Many Potlatchites define the community by looking at what Potlatch was, instead of what it now is. While at one point it was significant if one’s father worked at the mill, today’s society is different. People will move in and out of the community, depending upon how much they like it. Del Cone’s statement that empty houses will kill a town more than a lack of local stores is more apt today then it was in the 1980’s. The stores in Potlatch are struggling to survive and if people do not feel welcomed into the community, then there is no difference between living in Troy or Potlatch, for both towns are located fifteen minutes from Moscow. People can, and will, leave Potlatch if they do not feel welcomed into the community. It is time to ignore the significance of the old family names and instead make the new names feel like they are a wanted addition to the community.

It is important to the Potlatch residents that their town is seen as different from other towns in the area. Again Richard Sennett’s examples of groups of people constructing identities for one another are realized throughout Latah County. One example is that Potlatch citizens separate themselves from the surrounding towns by making comments that “educated fools” live in Moscow and Pullman. Similarly, one couple commented that people in Moscow warned them not to move to Potlatch because the town was full of “drunken, rowdy, independent” people. While they say that the stereotype is exaggerated, they believe there is still an element of that in town.159

The culture and class structure of Potlatch is different from the university towns. The present Potlatch population is predominately employed in blue-collar fields including logging, farming and industrial work. Jim Haddock explains how he would define the culture of Potlatch.

159 Ibid.
I say it's a blue-collar town…. I mean that just absolutely in the best light, it's full of people that do all kinds of different jobs and blue-collar is not entirely fair, but probably the majority of the community works at blue-collar jobs that require very little education and they work hard at it.\textsuperscript{160}

This community is focused on working hard and playing hard and is a town that is known for its bar fights and talented sports teams. Although individuals may not conform to stereotypes, people in and outside of the town routinely make comments that would support this general view.

Another distinguishing feature of northern Idaho are the local conservative, freedom-oriented ideologies. Northern Idaho residents refer to these beliefs as Idaho libertarianism.\textsuperscript{161} These ideologies not only influence who wants to live in the community, but also affect the town's desire to encourage development. In fact, most of the community is not interested in developing or changing the town. For example, in 1994, the city turned down a housing development project because they thought that the influx of homes and people would be detrimental to the town's character and the small school system.\textsuperscript{162} In retrospect, many residents feel that the project would have not only increased the tax base but also strengthened the community.\textsuperscript{163} Local resident, Kammi Schott explained that the conservative approach to development is realized when people discuss their land rights. She states, they think that “this is my land, I'm going to do on it what I want, and [there is] just the idea [that] freedom means going hunting and owning your own land and nobody telling you what you can do on your own land”.\textsuperscript{164}

These conservative philosophies influence people's position regarding how the Potlatch mill site is used. George Strong commented that even though the mill site in an industrial-zoned

\textsuperscript{160} J. Haddock, personal interview (16 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{161} P. Kimmell, personal conversation (10 December 2002); L. Ross, personal interview (7 October 2002); K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
\textsuperscript{162} "Potlatch May Grow" \textit{Lewiston Morning Tribune} (September 27, 1994).
\textsuperscript{163} Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
area located within the city boundaries of Potlatch, the Potlatch Corporation does not “have to sell it (the land) to somebody if they don’t want to”. These local beliefs do not, however, mean that people are happy with how the Corporation is utilizing the land. One woman commented that she feels that “it’s a waste [of an industrial zoned area] to have the hay [stored] down there”, but she also recognizes that if Potlatch Corporation is not developing it, then storing hay on it is better than nothing.

Newcomers who see economic opportunities in the Potlatch landscape recognize that the traditional local philosophies are obstacles to economic development. One woman who resides in Potlatch, but moved there as an adult, commented that she thinks there is a potential tourist draw to the area but feels that the locals might not want the tourists to come.

The people who have lived here forever, they look at this area as a resource…. it’s where they live. People like us that move here like it because we think it’s beautiful, there’s (sic) all these things we like about it, the wildlife [for example]. And, the people who have lived here, grown up here, don’t seem to have, they love it here too, but…. you know, it’s as if they don’t look at this place that way, because they just don’t seem to value its esthetic nature in the same way [that we do]. It’s not that they don’t value it, they don’t value it in the same way and it’s almost like you can’t have a meeting of the minds here; you’re an outsider, you know, tree hugger, rabble rouser, or, which means ‘you’re against us’…. it’s like you can’t talk somebody. How can you talk somebody into ‘that’s valuable in a different way’? So, it’s almost like a language that you can’t [communicate in]…. But people don’t want to be told what to value and what not to value. No, they don’t want to be told anything and ‘this is my property, my property’ so yeah [it] is a rock and a hard place thing, and you can’t… I have yet to figure out how you can convince people otherwise if they’re not open for the debate. So, basically all you can do is, you know, say how you feel if you want, and they say how they feel if they want, and then you just don’t talk about those things.

Larry Ross expanded on this idea by discussing the potential hunting and tourist attraction that Potlatch offers. He evaluated the situation in Potlatch from his Colorado experiences.

---

164 K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
165 G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
166 Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
167 Ibid.
[The people of Potlatch] haven’t even begun to realize, I don’t think, the opportunity that hunting offers here. [They] are very focused on growth and yield of timber... And, I believe that if some economist came in and did the economics of what could be realized on the [tourist] opportunities here, that it would far outweigh the benefits that would come from the 50 years of timber.\textsuperscript{168}

While their beliefs are perceptive and in many ways true, these residents are not working to make any real change in regard to the community’s economic development. Evidently, in Potlatch differing opinions are stated, no minds are changed, and the status quo is maintained.

The creation of the Scenic Six Community Development Council in 1993 was the first community based attempt at inspiring local economic development.\textsuperscript{169} With mixed results the Council works hard as boosters of their community. By writing and receiving several grants, they have many restoration projects in progress, but they have spawned little external investment interest in the town. Jack Coyner, a participant of the development council and an active civic member of the community, explains why there is not a lot of enthusiasm to get Potlatch Corporation to develop the old mill site.

After a couple of [development projects] pop up and everybody gets excited about them... then they die out... I probably don’t have as much enthusiasm about the whole thing as I used to. And really all the [Scenic Six] Gem Community Council can do is provide support and urge whatever politicians or policy makers that might be involved in it to look on it favorably, you know because we don’t have any economic sway, even though we’ve talked to Potlatch Corporation... I haven’t really gotten the impression that they (Potlatch Corporation) are very open to listening to us (Potlatch citizens) anyway.\textsuperscript{170}

The constant rejection and failure makes it difficult to maintain momentum and enthusiasm for development projects.

\textsuperscript{168} L. Ross, personal interview (7 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{169} B. Ramsay, personal interview (17 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{170} J. Coyner, personal interview (5 November 2002).
In addition to the lack of control over the mill site, Jack feels that the predominance of blue-collar workers affects development efforts in Potlatch. He explains his frustration working with the Potlatch community on development projects.

...One of the things that sometimes strikes me about a blue-collar area is that you know a lot of people aren’t used to being in what you call leadership positions or used to being on the ‘doing end’ of things and I’ve wondered, ‘okay, [maybe] when people start to see things happen.... They [will] get involved’. 171

Jack’s wife, Barb Coyner feels that Potlatchites are still recovering from being abandoned by the Corporation. Coyner comments that she thinks that Potlatch’s history has made residents think that “well everything’s just going to leave us”. She paused and added, “This is not a confident bunch”. 172 Her analysis is that the community’s unwillingness to develop the mill site is a result of the community’s history.

In these statements, both Jack’s and Barb’s perspectives are based on the assumption that there are distinct groups of people—namely the Potlatch Corporation and the blue-collar workers—who are responsible for Potlatch’s current state of development. There is some truth to their statements, but this explanation does not represent the entire reason why economic development is not transpiring in Potlatch. These perspectives are once again looking to the past as a way to solve the problems in the present. In statements such as these, the Coyners and other boosters must place blame on other people and not the town itself. As community boosters, they cannot admit that there might be something wrong with the place (such as lack of technology, being a fare distance from the interstate, and sixty miles from any a major city) because that would be contradictory to their cause.

Potlatch’s future challenges

171 Ibid.
There are two opposing community views of Potlatch’s future. Some locals fear that Potlatch will never be able to develop a vibrant economy. Accompanying these concerns are the doubts that Potlatch will be able to retain an entrepreneurial community. Conversely, others believe that a local economy is not necessary and that Potlatch will survive because people will always want to live out in the country and they will always be able to find work in one of the surrounding communities.

Many people in the community are concerned that Potlatch will not be able to retain an educated, entrepreneurial community. Jim Haddock expressed concerns that losing educated citizens could be a long-term emotional and economic drain on Potlatch. He explains further,

[It is] really hard for a community like Potlatch, meaning that as the kids that are so wonderful here that work so hard in school go on and get a degree in computer science or in mechanical engineering or in forestry even they’re going to move because most job opportunities aren’t here... I mean there are limited job opportunities, maybe somebody will get a job with a start-up software company in one of the industrial parks in Moscow or Pullman and they’ll be here for a while until that company makes a go of it and moves to wherever they move and be permanently. And that’s sad and that’s a hard knock on a community that really cares about its school because a small community that really cares about its school and makes it academic is in one sense saying goodbye to their kids and saying goodbye to the people that would be the best people to stay in their community. You know what I mean, all of them are good to stay in the community, but the higher educated ones are going to leave and the ones that have lower aspirations and lower educational levels are going to stay and they’ll still be wonderful citizens, but it leaves the, they’re probably not generally as far-sighted, so they’ll be less inclined to see a need to renovate an historical building or to sacrifice to build a new library or you know what I mean, because it generally requires more education to see those things you know, so it’s almost a community that succeeds at its own expense, because the better its kids are, the more likely they are to go away, sometimes.173

Community recognition of this brain drain has put the parents of these children in a difficult position, for they feel for both the community and their children. Recently, there has been an

172 B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
effort made to encourage local entrepreneurial initiative. Dr. Richard Bailey has started a high school entrepreneurial program in an attempt to inspire local business ventures, which will hopefully help retain a population of educated, motivated individuals.\textsuperscript{174}

There are other people who look at the reality of the economy of Potlatch and feel that the only option for educated young adults is to migrate out of the community. These parents want their children to live in Potlatch, yet they also want them to succeed economically and socially. Del Cone, a fourth generation Potlatchite, said that he understands why his three sons have moved from Potlatch. "If I could have made them a job, I would’ve made a job, but I don’t blame them a bit [for moving away], those kids would love to live here, they would live here if there was a job that they could make the money that they’re making now, but there’s no job, it’s just a fact".\textsuperscript{175} Former business owner and now executive assistant at a regional engineering firm, Irene Bain said, "If they (her children) [would have] gone to college like I’d hoped, I’d doubt that they’d live in Potlatch.... [Most of the time if a kid has] gone to college, they’re going to find a job and it is going to be someplace else".\textsuperscript{176} Bain is not alone in her thinking; many people echo her statements by questioning why a college-educated Potlatchite would move back to Potlatch. In regard to her three children who have chosen to move away from Potlatch, Alice Cowger said, "If you want to make a living, a good living, you have to go where the jobs are, and if you make a good enough living, you can come home whenever you want."\textsuperscript{177}

Many Potlatchites who have been raised in or lived in Potlatch most of their lives think Potlatch’s future will echo the past. Alvin Cowger said, "Well I think it’s going to just go on like it has been, every now and then you’ll see a new house pop up.... But I would think that

\textsuperscript{173} J. Haddock, personal interview (16 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{174} R. Bailey, personal interview (8 November 2002).
\textsuperscript{175} D. Cone, personal interview (16 October 2002).
\textsuperscript{176} I. Bain, personal interview (10 December 2002).
\textsuperscript{177} Alice Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
everything will continue as is, I can’t see that it would really get bigger. Kammi Schott added,

I think it will become increasingly more a bedroom community that there will be a huge house somewhere on a piece of land and that will spread more and more and there won’t be quite as much non-populated areas as there is now. But I think that the actual town itself is going to stay pretty much the same. Not much has changed since I lived there.”

Because they cannot see Potlatch being any different in the future, some people comment that the town does not need the mill site to be developed in order to survive. George Strong comments, “this little plot of land down here isn’t going to make or break Potlatch”. Comments such as this show that part of the community has given up on the idea of internal development and is becoming more comfortable with the idea that Potlatch is a bedroom community.

Summary

The community of Potlatch is at odds. As noted throughout this chapter, people have different views about Potlatch’s history, its present state, and what its future will be. It would be helpful for the community to heed Sennett’s warnings and be honest with themselves about the town’s history. This honesty would allow the citizens to see their community as outsiders view it. With this new vision they would not only recognize the shortcomings of the town, but also the potential that it possesses. It is with this clarity that the community can begin to take control of the development of the town and begin to make positive change that will benefit the entire community of Potlatch.

178 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
179 K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
180 G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
Chapter 4:

Single-Industry Towns and Community Development

The parameters of single-industry towns

Though few North Americans have lived in a single-industry town, popular media have educated the general public about these communities. Successful songs, books, and movies such as Loretta Lynn’s *Coal Miner’s Daughter*\(^{181}\), Merle Travis’ *Sixteen Tons*\(^{182}\), Utah Phillips’ *Direct Action*\(^{183}\), Ken Kesey’s *Sometimes a Great Notion*\(^{184}\), and the film *Silkwood*\(^{185}\) indicate that those living outside the towns have been exposed to the social and economic culture of single-industry communities.

Each account listed above relates specific social characteristics with the term ‘single-industry’. Commonly, single-industry communities are thought of as situated in the country, away from major population centers, economically reliant on the extraction of a natural resource, and possessing a small homogenous population which is characterized by unpredictable relationships with neighbors, oscillating between love and support and gossip and drama.

A closer analysis reveals that while each town can be referred to as a single-industry town, generalizations are not always applicable. The examples listed above reveal that there are many different perspectives on what life is like in these towns. For instance, to Merle Travis living in a single-industry town is a story of being trapped since birth. For him, single-industry workers are born into an unlucky life, quickly get stuck in a cycle of making and owing money, and endure days filled with hardship, violence, and pain. Conversely, Loretta Lynn’s story of growing up in a single-industry town is filled with love, hard work, family, pride, and hope of what the future can bring. Yet both these songs discuss mining towns. Kesey and Phillips portray logging towns but from the opposing perspectives of union workers and independent logging companies. Kesey’s depicts a logging community in a small town in Oregon. He

focuses on the community by telling the story of a young man who has to decide if he wants to fulfill his dreams elsewhere or carry on the family tradition of being a logger. Phillips’ story captures the owner-worker relationship in Spokane, Washington. He shows the dynamic between the timber barons and the employment officers who oscillate between hiring and firing the lumbermen so the barons and employment officers can make more money. This story explains part of the reason the loggers began to unionize. The picture is complicated yet further by Silkwood which shows the danger of speaking out in a community that is controlled by a single nuclear power company. These contrasting representations of superficially similar social and economic lives illustrate that it is difficult to establish a clear definition of what constitutes a single-industry community.

Similar complexities are reflected in academic treatments of single-industry towns. Academic analysts commonly define single-industry communities as small settlements with a narrow economic base typically centered on the extraction of a natural resource, whose existence depends on “technology, a complex division of labor, and a population of wage workers.” Such communities are seen to embody a particular set of attributes that distinguish them from the population centers in which most North Americans live.

Geographers James Randall and Geoff Ironside reveal the ‘myths’ surrounding the identities of single-industry communities and show the diversity amongst these towns. The myths they attempt to dispel in their research are that “community labour forces and economic structures are relatively homogenous, that nonresource sectors play in insignificant role in the communities, and that these communities are found in primarily isolated northern (Canadian)

To do so, they illustrate that a community’s history, geography, and even type of resource extracted influences how a community will respond to economic and social change. Randall and Ironside explain that there is a “previously undiscovered and unappreciated richness and heterogeneity in [their] economic structure”, but there are still “aggregate generalizations” that can be made regarding resource-dependent communities. Some of those generalizations include isolation, economic dependence on a single industry, and a male dominated workforce. These still existent “aggregate generalizations” exemplify the challenge with studies such as Randall and Ironside’s. There are always losses and misconceptions associated with generalizations and thus generalizing should be avoided. At the same time, however, communities possess similar social and economic characteristics which identify them as a particular kind of community. And, by being able to identify a place as having a particular set of attributes, academics work to understand social and economic trends associated with these towns.

The fact that communities experience different economies, sociologies, and politics in different geographical contexts means that there are various perspectives and analyses regarding single-industry community development. This chapter serially discusses the research on single-industry communities from three lenses. The perspectives of economic geographers, geographers, and sociologists are explored in an attempt to comprehend how and why these communities develop and respond to social and economic change. Taken together, the literatures defining single-industry communities, explaining the developmental stages often present in single-industry towns, and teasing out the factors shaping the development of rural communities provide perspective on the community of Potlatch, its history, and its development in a larger social context. In other words, this literature review allows us to recognize that Potlatch is not

unique, not an isolated case, but one among many single-industry communities forced to respond to the departure of its main economic support in the struggle to survive after industry leaves.

Economic geography perspectives

Fordism and flexible accumulation are two theories which are central to the economy of single-industry communities. Fordism refers to a form of industrial practice prevalent from approximately the end of World War II to the early 1980's. Geographer Meric Gertler explains that Fordism is characterized by "widespread mass-production of standardized goods using inflexible, dedicated machinery, exploitation of internal scale economies, a Taylorist fragmentation and deskilling of work, and relatively narrow and rigid defined job descriptions". In his influential book, The Condition of Postmodernity, David Harvey explains that Fordism affected all aspects of society. He explicates that Fordism succeeded because there was an unspoken agreement between business owners, workers, and the government that they would all cooperate: business had to be willing to deal with unions in order to gain loyal employees; in exchange for steady work and a decent paycheck, workers were under-skilled and had little control in the workplace; and, the government was expected to assume a role in solving labor disputes. Unenthusiastic global responses to Fordism, a lagging national economy in America, and competitive international manufacturing with weakly enforced labor contracts made Fordism unprofitable and obsolete by the early 1980's. Michelle Stanton explains that although there is disagreement about the nature of the post-Fordist regime, most theorists agree

---

192 D. Harvey. 1990. p 141.
that “the post-crisis industrial economy is characterised by ‘flexible’ technology”. One can expand Harvey’s theory of flexible technology to include the workers and not just the machines. Therefore, the flexible accumulation which is characterized by increased “reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work arrangements” not only made labor less expensive for companies, but gave labor a sense of freedom and choice that they did not previously possess.

It is questionable whether the move to flexible accumulation gives all workers the freedom which Harvey claims it does. In many cases, the closure of a mill simply means that there is one less job from which to choose and workers have to go elsewhere to find new employment.

Harold Innis was an economic historian who became one of the earliest and most influential voices to explain the Canadian economy. Innis discussed many theories and topics, including how beaver pelt trading helped establish Canada’s current southern border. Innis also explained that a distinct economic relationship existed between immigrants in Canada and the ‘mother countries’ of Europe. Essentially, Europeans desired certain goods such as cod and beavers. Europeans would therefore trade for those commodities with the Canadians who would purchase “goods essential to the maintenance and improvement of the current standard of living” in Canada. According to economic geographers Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter, Innis was concerned with Canada’s predominately staple (characterized by lumber, fur, cod, wheat, etcetera) based economy which made the nation not only economically dependent on other “metropolitan powers”, but also placed it at the “global economic ‘margin’, [which tied its fate] strongly to events in more powerful foreign metropoles.” Economists have used Innis’ various

---

194 D. Harvey. 1990. p 150.
economic theories, and especially his analysis of the importance of staples, to help explain the Canadian and single-industry economies.

In response to these general understandings regarding the economy of single-industry towns, some academics have written about particular communities and how they have reacted to economic change. Barnes and Hayter have borrowed Innis’ theories regarding staples production and Harvey’s analysis of Fordism and flexible accumulation and used them in their research on forest-dependent communities in British Columbia. Examining the small town, Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, Barnes and Hayter explain that because of its inherent dependency on external companies and its staples economy, the community appears doomed to be economically dependent on metropoles. They claim that after Fordist practices established by the company were abandoned, the community became unstable. Barnes and Hayter conclude that given Port Alberni’s geography and history, the town, as a former single-industry community, is “not well equipped to face this brave new world” of flexible production.197 Barnes and Hayter finish, however, with the statement that there is hope for single-industry communities if they can rethink the way they view their community and economy.

Some authors use an essentially diachronic analysis to understand how a particular community develops. In 1935, economist Arthur Weimer studied the factors determining economic development in the small town of Alma, Michigan.198 In Alma, Mr. A.W. Wright, a wealthy entrepreneur, entered the community and attempted to change the town. Technological advancements, such as the rerouting of the railroad through Alma, and hence time-space compression199, significantly changed the community. This act can be seen as both positive and

---

199 The concept, time-space compression, refers to the technological advancements that have allowed humans to 'speed-up in the pace of life while so overcoming barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse upon us'. In essence, humans have figured out how to 'annihilate space by time' (Gregory 2000: 833-834). As the world
negative. On the one hand the railroad brought people to the town, but at the same time, this example of time-space compression simultaneously took residents out of the town just as quickly as it brought outsiders to it.\textsuperscript{200} Nonetheless, one must recognize that the addition of the railroad and a small college helped to make the community relatively stable. Weimer's study is unclear, however, in that he neglects to discuss what the community, not just Mr. Wright, desired for their town. In many ways, Mr. Wright is similar to a large corporation investing money into a business. There is no thought of what the community wants and more significantly what will happen to the town after the entrepreneur (or business) leaves. Weimer's study is helpful in that it is a holistic look at one community and he attempts to understand the factors influencing the community's response to social and economic change. Unfortunately, the article was written in 1935 before significant technological advancements (such as large scale use of the automobile and television) and the presence of Fordism, both of which have significantly influenced modern community development.

Norwegian economist, Inga Gronlund shows that even under the best circumstances, community recovery is often difficult and sometimes impossible.\textsuperscript{201} Gronlund's case study focuses on Mo, Norway, a one-company town whose company restructured in 1988. Mo is a large one-company town and at one time boasted 25,000 residents. The town has a central role in the regional economy and is not as isolated as other Norwegian one-company towns. These factors made the community's survival and recovery a national concern and the government became an active participant in helping revitalize the economy. Despite the government funding, the restructuring in Mo has had limited success. This case study is helpful in that it reveals that

shrink, or compresses and people can get to once distant locales quite quickly, the concept of scale is altered and the spaces and places around us are defined differently.\textsuperscript{200} A. Weimer. 1935. p 217.
regardless of the unique local specifics which differentiate each community’s response to plant closure, restructuring and revitalization in single-industry communities is difficult.

In a more theoretical vein, sociologist Craig Humphrey considers resource-dependent communities’ potential paths of growth and development. Without grounding his theories in a particular geographical context, Humphrey outlines two different scenarios of how timber-dependent communities could develop. He explains that at each extreme are two very different scenarios. First, he presents the technologically advanced “Orwellian Scenario” in which large corporate bureaucracies dominate the future social organization of timber-dependent communities. In this scenario, he explains that the economy and social dynamics are centered on the power of timber companies, advances in and dependency on technology, and movement toward a nonunionized workforce. Second, he outlines the possibility of an “Ecotopian Scenario” in which the environment, local economies, and large businesses can all prosper indefinitely. The problem with Humphrey’s study is that the “Ecotopian Scenario” does not identify an alternative economy for the community and assumes that local land owners disagree with the company’s practices. Humphrey argues that the “Orwellian Scenario” can be avoided and the “Ecotopian Scenario” can be achieved. Unfortunately, because the “Orwellian Scenario” factors (powerful companies, advanced technology, and nonunionized workers) are already present in many single-industry communities such as Potlatch, a transition to an “Ecotopian Scenario” requires radical sociological and ideological transformations. Humphrey states that the “Orwellian Scenario” will deplete the resources so much that the “Ecotopian Scenario” will become inevitable and essential. Unfortunately, that does not offer guidance to a community which cannot maintain their population and local economy as the town changes from the “Orwellian” to the “Ecotopian Scenario”.

Geographical perspectives

Geographers typically ground their investigations of single-industry communities in actual places, thus leading them to challenge many of the generalizations regarding single-industry communities and their development. The single-industry literature within the discipline of geography covers a wide variety of ideologies. In this section, I focus on the geographers’ economic, social, and theoretical analyses of single-industry communities and their development.

One of the most important and most frequently referenced books in geographical studies of single-industry literature is sociologist Rex Lucas’ *Minetown, Milltown, and Railtown*. In this book, Lucas posits the stages of single-industry town development, and his work has inspired significant discussion of the ways single-industry communities change through time and the reasons they do so. Lucas critically examined over 600 Canadian single-industry communities defined by population, employment status, and economic dependency of supporting institutional services on the single industry. With those statistics, Lucas created categories others could use to determine whether or not the community they examine is in fact a single-industry town. In addition to statistical identification, Lucas recognized that communities experience four stages of development—construction, recruitment of citizens, transition, and maturity.

Some geographers have borrowed Lucas’ model and elaborated on it in efforts to understand what makes single-industry communities different from larger, more economically diverse towns. An argument can be made that Lucas’ 1971 book focused on single-industry community development, and since the 1980’s many single-industry communities have been in a

---

state of decline, so it is therefore necessary to explore these communities post Lucas’ fourth stage of maturity. Canadian geographers, John Bradbury and Isabelle St-Martin claim that fifth and sixth stages should be added to Lucas’ model. These stages would represent ‘winding down’ and ‘complete abandonment’ periods which occur during a community’s duration. Bradbury and St-Martin explain that the winding down stage can result in “mine or plant closure, as it can also lead to the ‘closure’ or death of a town”, which directs the authors to their sixth stage, ‘complete abandonment’.

These strict procedures for defining and understanding the stages single-industry communities experience are problematic. The categories cannot acknowledge the differences between these communities or the fact that not all communities conform to a strict stage model. For example, due to different geographical contexts, ‘winding down’ can in fact lead to ‘complete abandonment’, however, another town could experience a ‘winding down’ phase that results in a town becoming a bedroom community or a resort town. The models Lucas and Bradbury and St-Martin outline do not recognize the limitless possibilities communities have for development.

Greg Halseth, a geographer at the University of Northern British Columbia, has challenged both Lucas’ and Bradbury and St-Martin’s models by showing that their stages cannot be applied to every single-industry community. In a critique similar to that mounted by Bradbury and St-Martin, Halseth questions Lucas’ four stage model and its ability to accurately reflect the full development of single-industry communities. Halseth explains that “contemporary economic restructuring pressures” result in “alternative futures for community development beyond the ‘maturity’ stage Lucas identifies”. Focusing on migration patterns in Canadian single-industry communities, Halseth questions Bradbury and St-Martin’s fifth and
sixth stages by showing that a single-industry community could have one of many "alternate futures" other than simply winding down and eventual abandonment. In an effort to reveal the holes in the four, five, or six stage models proposed by other authors, Halseth shows that in restructured resource-dependent communities the overall population does not significantly change, but in- and out-migration is substantial. His conclusion is interesting in that he shows that despite a corporation or industry's efforts to reduce worker migration, in the end it is employment opportunities that keeps people in a place or encourages them to move to another area.\(^{210}\) Taking Halseth's research a step further, one questions: If people move to a community for employment opportunities, then how does a community attract (or create) business and survive post industry closure?

Geographical analyses show that various foci can be explored in regard to social and economic change in single-industry communities. Geographer, William Solecki discusses how a paternalistic relationship between a corporation and a community can define "the kind of collective action the townspeople [will take at times] and the nature of the identity they...define for their embattled community".\(^{211}\) Solecki states that paternalism can be a "local tradition" which is reinforced from both sides: the community expects to be cared for by the company, and the company expects the community to obey the family rules.\(^{212}\) In their article on local responses to the collapse of coal mining, economic geographers Tony Binns and Etienne Nel explain how a South African community turned to ecotourism and game parks as an economic alternative to mining.\(^{213}\) Geographers Conradson and Pawson explain how the gold mining town


\(^{212}\) W.D. Solecki. 1996. pp 5-20.

of Reefton, New Zealand was affected by restructuring; and geographer John Hart explains that small towns' futures rest on their ability to adapt to industrial changes imposed by external forces. Despite the various perspectives each author takes, all of these studies ask a similar underlying question: 'How' do communities respond to change? In chapter 5, I explore a question none of these authors query: 'Why' do these communities respond to economic and social changes as they do?

*Sociological perspectives*

There are common interests and theories amongst all of the fields discussed in this chapter; in this section, however, the work of analysts who direct their attention to community development and social interactions at the community level are examined. Rural sociologist, Gene Summers notes that until the late 1980's rural communities were ignored in the sociological literature and that authors portrayed these towns as "powerless in the face of broad and powerful forces of urbanization, industrialization, bureaucratization, and centralization". Summers goes to great length to show that there is hope for rural communities to gain power and control over their development. Cited in numerous articles, Summers has evidently been influential in the discipline of rural sociology. In 1986, when his article "Rural Community Development" was published, he explained to his colleagues that "rural community development needs a sociology that maps these relationships and...provides explanations for changes in them over time and across societies". Rural sociology has answered that challenge and analysts are attempting to figure out how to promote economic and social change from within these communities.

---

Theorizing on how to effectively develop rural and former single-industry communities is complicated by the significant differences that exist between these towns. Rural sociologist, Jan Flora explains some of the challenges to promoting ‘rural community development’. “It [rural community development] is no longer viewed as identical to community economic development: in addition to the economic aspect, the social, human, and environmental components have become important as well”. While ‘sustainable community development’ combines these four components, each can independently be applied to rural community development. Understanding what community development is and how to achieve it, however, is complicated by many factors including “local culture, history, and personal agency”.

Analyzing community development from a sociological perspective inevitably brings up the concept of social capital. Social capital refers to “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital”. In essence, social capital is the active group of people working to better their social and economic community. In his influential book, Making Democracy Work, political scientist, Robert Putnam contends that civic communities with active social capital “tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being.” Putnam shows the political dimension of rural community development, which in turn reveals the power dynamics inherently present in the process. He argues that a community’s history plays a direct role in the ability for social capital to prosper. “…Communities did not become civic simply because they were rich. The historical

record strongly suggests precisely the opposite: They have become rich because they were civic”.223 Putnam claims that the civic traditions of a community will contribute to economic development, but economic development is not likely to happen in places without a civic tradition.

Even though Putnam’s work has spawned significant discussion and analysis regarding community development, understanding how to create social capital and get that social capital to act has proved challenging for planners and sociologists alike. Theorists Flora, Sharp et al. have added to Putnam’s theory by proposing ways to “convert social capital into organizational forms that facilitate collective action”.224 By their account, creating a safe space in which people can express their opinions, recruiting diverse resources, utilizing network qualities, and mobilizing community members can stimulate entrepreneurial social infrastructure (ESI) and hence social capital. Rural sociologist Adam Weinberg adds to this theory by explaining that all development is affected by ‘social chance’.225 Despite all of this, Flora notes that “Although social capital has become a buzzword, few know how to build it” (emphasis in original).226 This comment is indicative of the fact that it is much easier to prescribe a solution than it is to administer change. Theorists can figure out how to foster social capital, but those theories do not help a community if the people do not act. The result of this failure is that theorists can claim that communities have the tools and knowledge to create social capital and development, but because of various cultural factors, sometimes social capital and economic development are not created. Unfortunately, there are real people who suffer the consequences of that failure.

Job loss and lack of employment opportunities have emotional and economic impacts on citizens as they search for steady, satisfying work. In a study of former three former mill towns

---

(Aliquippa, Duquesne, and McKeesport) in Pennsylvania, professor of business administration, Roger Ahlbrandt, finds that within ten years of mill closure, community members and those living in surrounding communities see little value—economically and socially—in investing in the former single-industry towns. He states:

There was no simple solution to the problem, and there was no obvious comparative advantage around which to build a business development strategy, except availability of the idle plant sites. This meant that renewal of these communities could not be stimulated by a simple, inexpensive approach. These circumstances created a disincentive for involvement—participation in developing a public-private partnership to assist these communities would most likely require a significant contribution from the participating companies.227

Ahlbrandt's study illustrates that economic and social success in these communities is dependent on others thinking that these communities are worth an investment by a company or a state financing organization. As evidenced by Ahlbrandt's article, perception of a place greatly affects development.

Similarly, sociologists Michael Hibbard and Lori Davis show that local self-perception also influences how a community will respond to social and economic change. In their analysis of the cultural myths of small-town America, Hibbard and Davis explain that many single-industry towns see themselves as traditional American towns living out the American dream. Their case study, Oakridge, Oregon is a small logging town that was established in the 1920's. They explain that the residents of Oakridge see their community as "a traditional town, agrarian and grounded in the experience of the pioneers of the 1890's, rather than industrial and grounded in the experiences of railroad workers of the 1920's and the mill workers of the 1940's".228 Hibbard and Davis state that using the 'traditional town' definition to explain single-industry communities is a form of 'self-deception'. They claim that planners need to recognize the

---

community ideology as an important factor in successful development. This theory is similar to sociologist Richard Sennett’s claim that urban adolescents create a ‘purified identity’ in an attempt to create an image of themselves that is quite different from their reality in order to deal with the actual circumstances of their communities.229 Essentially, Hibbard and Davis suggest that residents of single-industry towns construct their community as an ideal oasis in order to cope with their painful reality of a changing economy, community, and way of life. It would be misleading, however, to assume that people live in a blissful state of denial forever, for the painful realizations that people cannot find work or that their children are moving out of town cannot be ignored.

Some rural communities have attempted to establish entrepreneurial development as an alternative economy to resource-dependency. As noted, Flora, Sharp et al. claim that entrepreneurial activity is essential if a community wants to create social capital and hence community development. Geographers Barnes and Hayter question whether a community can easily develop entrepreneurial activity. In their case study of Port Alberni, they show that entrepreneurialism “brought about little diversification, and few new ‘real’ jobs were created.” They conclude that this should not be a surprise because the “very nature as resource communities, single-industry towns, such as a Port Alberni, which are typically isolated, have no history of an independent entrepreneurial culture, and lack appropriate institutional support”.230

In the community of Potlatch, as I discuss later, there have been efforts made to stimulate entrepreneurial activity. Like Port Alberni, however, the program has challenges that it must overcome in order to be effective. In addition to the shortcomings Barnes and Hayter note, in Potlatch entrepreneurial training is occurring for the high school students but not for the adults living in the town. While this education is good and will be helpful for the individuals receiving

it, there is the possibility that those being trained will move away (see Chapter 5) from Potlatch with the dreams of economic success that other communities offer.

Sociologists have embraced the need for communities to be realistic in their developmental endeavors and have emphasized different aspects of economic development to which they think community members should pay attention. Summers states that successful community economic development depends on a community’s “ability to renew its export base; the capacity to invent, to innovate, or to acquire new exports... requires a local network of services and facilities which insure the continued availability of factors of production—especially land, labor, and capital”.

Summers claims that with these factors, a community can work for the “betterment of the people”. Sociologist Kenneth Wilkinson challenges this goal of economic and social advancements by begging the question: How can one economically develop a town without losing the unique social cohesiveness which exists in these resource-dependent communities? He comments that if a community works together and wants to develop, then it should be successful, but warns that “dependency, distance, and inequality” all work as barriers to community development.

Lastly, professors of natural resources, Keith Russell and Chuck Harris, explore a community’s ability to survive and remain autonomous after an industry leaves. They claim that a community is more economically and socially autonomous the further it is from a large population center, and conclude that the more autonomous a community is, the more likely it will possess social capital and social cohesiveness. Their analysis falls short, however, in that they do not analyze population retention or show the longevity of the community. Just because people shop in a community since the next grocery store is many miles away does not mean that the population will forever

stay in the community. As Halseth noted, people will move where there is work, and if the main employer has left town and there are no job opportunities for the citizens, then one can assume that at some point out-migration will occur. All of these articles show that development is complicated and that some of the goals of a community—such as wanting to socially remain the same yet economically improve—are at odds and complicate local development.

_Putting the theories in practice_

Local economic development councils have promoted economic change in an attempt to maintain their community’s economic vitality. Given their geographic isolation many communities have turned to tourism as an alternative to resource extractive industries and as a way to develop internally their community. For example, in Chemainus, British Columbia, an aggressive community development plan was initiated in the 1980’s creating historical murals in an attempt to stimulate an active tourist economy. Chemainus is not alone in its hope that tourism will save the community from economic demise. Kathie Durbin reports that the mayor of Ketchikan, Alaska confidently believes that the town is “not going to die”, and goes on to suggest that cruise ships holding thousands tourists every summer will offer the community a chance to succeed despite the closed Louisiana-Pacific mill. Similarly, Matewan, West Virginia, the Appalachian town famous for its Hatfield-McCoy family feud, is looking to “preserve itself, accentuate its history, and try to attract tourists” by restoring the business district to resemble its 1920 architecture. The Idaho Department of Commerce developed a Gem Community Development Council to help finance rural community development. Consequently,

---

237 “After coal, tourists” The Economist 363(June 1, 2002): 32.
many small towns throughout Idaho are looking to stimulate tourism by revitalizing their historical downtown streets.238

Exchanging resource extraction for tourism might not be the economic savior rural communities hope it to be. Keith, Fawson, et al. have conducted extensive economic research showing that Utah counties “which primarily rely on tourism and recreation to maintain economic viability exhibit annual employment variability much greater than those counties which rely on alternative economic activity”.239 This research is significant because while many former single-industry communities are looking toward tourism as a stable economic alternative to resource extraction, they are finding that tourism might be just as uncertain as the original industry. From this research a new question is raised. Is anything ever certain? If a community is trying to figure out a way to be economically self-reliant, it seems that tourism is a good avenue for a rural community to take; however, the future is uncertain in any business venture. Despite years of economic and time investment in developing the town’s appeal for tourists, the original tourist interest in Chemainus seems to have been short-lived and the community is still struggling to figure out how to develop its economy.240 Richard Butler claims that there is a pattern in the success of a tourist economy. Demand starts low, rises fairly steeply, and then settles to a steady state.241 In Aspen, Colorado that ‘steady’ state is quite high, in Chemainus, British Columbia that ‘steady’ state is proving to be quite low. The concern here is not whether the tourist economy will follow Butler’s pattern, but rather how successful tourism will prove to be for the local economy in the end.

While all local economies are part of and influenced by the global market, in many ways, these communities are trading one staple industry for another in a way akin to that which Innis claims explains Canada’s history. In addition to Keith, Fawson, et al.’s question of tourism’s economic unpredictability, by trading a resource staple industry for the tourist trade, former single-industry communities will remain at the economic margin and will continue to be dependent upon the citizens of metropoles for their economic stability. For example, despite the efforts of the Walden, Colorado tourism and real estate development council, when the national economy is bad, there are no investors coming to town. Finally, it is questionable whether there are enough tourists interested in traveling to all the rural communities attempting to sell their history to justify the amount of grant money being spent on revitalization projects. A future study evaluating those statistics would prove helpful for both developers and former single-industry towns.

Summary

Diverse though they are the single-industry community development theories explored in this chapter are essential in order to gain a broad understanding of the challenges single-industry towns face after industry closure. For decades theorists have pointed to what they regard as the best viable alternatives are for these communities, questioning and contrasting what has worked for different towns across North America. Understanding, however, that history, geography, and community dynamics differentiate each community’s strategy for development complicates the ability to choose a prescribed solution to the developmental process. Therefore, figuring out what drives a community’s development is dependent upon each community’s circumstances. Barnes and Hayter believe that new kinds of thinking can help communities learn how to survive

---

in their new economies; Hibbard and Davis claim that the community members need to be honest with themselves and with each other when contemplating their town; Durbin states that the will of a community to bring a new economy (such as tourism) to town can save the community; Putnam claims that social capital is essential for a community to prosper; and, Kelly believes that fanatical local leadership can save a town from turning into a ghost town. Despite the differences in each community, I have shown that single-industry towns have many similarities as well. It is unclear, therefore, why some towns such as Rantoul, Illinois245 and Columbus, Indiana246 possess active town leaders who have successfully recruited new industries to their towns, and others such as Potlatch, Idaho have not.

One would expect that Potlatch would be economically and socially failing: the town has very little social capital, no external investment in the community, no control over the mill site, and few jobs in the municipality. Curiously, even though Potlatch does not possess the qualities various theorists claim are needed to survive after industry closure, it continues on. Authors have done significant work in answering the question: How does a community respond to economic and social change? In the next chapter, I work to answer the question: Why does a community respond as it does to economic and social change? To do so, I explore the factors that have contributed to Potlatch's response to mill closure and show that despite the challenges noted above, Potlatch is getting by; the town is not thriving, but it is surviving.

Chapter 5:

Surviving, but not thriving

Single-industry communities share many economic characteristics, but every community responds differently to industry abandonment. When Louisiana Pacific closed its mill in Walden, Colorado, the community conferred to decipher 'what they should do next'. Similarly, the citizens of Newton Falls, New York began a North American search to find a new industry to replace the paper mill, which closed in the year 2000. Within two years of the mill closures in these towns, the communities had created restructuring plans, had committees working to find new industries to invest in the towns, and were trying to transform radically their communities from single-industry towns into a flexible economy. Other communities such as Aliquippa, Pennsylvania are making similar attempts to promote economic growth in their towns but have been less successful than Walden and Newton Falls in stimulating their economies after the closure of their single-industry mills. Examining the factors that influenced Potlatch, Idaho’s response to economic and social change after the closure of the town’s logging mill reveals that development to bring new industry is shaped by more than human will.

Combining the ethnographic research outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 with the theories discussed in Chapter 4 produces a rich understanding of the Potlatch community. This synthesis reveals that there are many factors influencing Potlatch’s development. Internal and external perceptions of the town and the mill site contribute to how these places are defined and the efforts put forth to develop them. In addition to the perceptions, there are specific factors that contribute to Potlatch’s particular response to economic and social change—the citizens’ social roles, the regional politics and behavior, the community’s history, and the town’s geographical

---


248 L. Ross, personal interview (7 October 2002).

context. Table 2 illustrates how these five factors contribute to the community’s response to the imposed changes. This chapter is an exploration of those five factors and shows that despite the tensions that create difficulty, the community has maintained a population and a small downtown after mill closure.

Table 2:

Perceptions and Influences: factors shaping Potlatch’s response to change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External:</td>
<td></td>
<td>History:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potlatch Corporation sees land as not worth developing and companies have not shown a great interest in investing in Latah County.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge and pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Roles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potlatch community sees itself as blue-collar, rural, and tight-knit.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employable in other towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Politics and Behavior:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of development, yet stable population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographical Context:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity to other towns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potlatch’s response to social and economic change

---

External and internal perceptions

As discussed in Chapter 4, perception can play a large role in how a community defines itself and what they see as their future. Understanding internal and external perceptions of the community and the mill site reveals that there are subtle challenges that need to be addressed in order for the community to redevelop and thrive economically. First, Potlatch Corporation has not sold or developed the site, thus creating a perception that the site is not worth developing. In addition to Latah County’s lack of cellular, cable, and DSL reception, companies perceive the area as being ‘behind’ other places and have not shown great interest in relocating to and investing in Latah County. Second, the community sees itself as a small, rural, blue-collar community; suggestions to change that identity through development are seen as ‘outsider’ and minority perspectives.

External perceptions of Potlatch do not always correlate with the internal perceptions of the town. For example, Potlatch residents explain that the school district boundary is the real Potlatch boundary. According to city clerk, Bonnie Rohn,

Potlatch, that includes the whole area, you know basically the school district.... the boundaries, whatever.... I mean they might live out in the country but they’re still part of Potlatch you know as a community, the community of Potlatch, not the city of Potlatch... and Princeton, Harvard, Onaway, they’re all part of the Potlatch community.

Despite the fact that the community defines the entire area as one communal entity, the government does not. Table 3 shows some of the differences between the city of Potlatch and the Potlatch Census County Subdivision (CCD) according to the 2000 Census. Recognizing the differences in economic and social distributions between the city and the CCD sheds light on

---

251 Created by author.
252 P. Kimmell, personal conversation (10 December 2002); Representative of the Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
253 B. Rohn, personal interview (15 October 2002).
254 The Potlatch Census County Subdivision (CCD) is approximately conterminous with the Potlatch school district.
some internal factors that could have an impact on the development of the town. For example, only Potlatch city residents can run for public office in Potlatch or be on city council. The majority of the people involved in activities such as the Potlatch Historical Society, the Scenic Six Community Development Council, and the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railroad History Preservation Group, however, do not live within the city’s borders.255

Table 3: Potlatch City and Census County Subdivision (CCD) 2000 Census Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Potlatch City (working population: 324)</th>
<th>CCD (working population: 1726)</th>
<th>Difference between City and CCD %s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining</td>
<td>15 people or 4.6%</td>
<td>226 people or 13.1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services</td>
<td>25 people or 7.7%</td>
<td>61 people or 3.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$28,021</td>
<td>$39,935</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median House Value</td>
<td>$76,300</td>
<td>$97,500</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

External groups’ perceptions reach beyond who can sit on city council and influence how the mill site is developed. The Potlatch Corporation and the Latah County Rural Development Committee significantly shape the town’s development. Potlatch Corporation still owns the former mill site and their view of the land determines whether or not that parcel is sold, developed, or left to sit idle. This is influenced by many factors including what that land is worth, investment cycles, speculative interests, corporate strategies, and tax structures. Similarly, Latah County officials affect the development of the mill site because despite the fact that there is a small development council in Potlatch, the major efforts to attract development in

255 K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
the county occur in Moscow where the Latah County Rural Community Development Committee office is located. According to County Commissioner, Paul Kimmell, the committee is investing its time in establishing a wireless internet service for the area and is not presently focused on attracting business for the Potlatch mill site.257

As discussed in Chapter 4, sociologists Michael Hibbard and Lori Davis indicate that a community's self-perception can greatly shape how it will respond to economic and social challenges. They explain that people can deceive themselves into believing that their community is quite different than it actually is. That self-perception is realized in Potlatch. There are some Potlatchites who believe that Potlatch is significantly different from other single-industry towns and that their unique downtown can, with a little revitalization, attract tourists from around the country. Potlatchites recognize that tourists are not coming to the town. At a Potlatch Historical Society meeting there were comments about how other communities are attracting tourists and in analyzing their own situation people asked, "Are we missing the boat?"258 The people of Potlatch love their community; they are emotionally connected to the town and many can tell you the history of the buildings and homes in the area. The sense of community pride is important because it keeps organizations such as the Potlatch Historical Society and the Scenic Six Community Development Council functioning. What the self-perception also does, however, is shield these community boosters from seeing the reality: Potlatch is really not that different from other single-industry towns; the town is located in the middle of northern Idaho with no large bodies of water or mountains around it to help attract tourists; and, the community has not yet discovered a way to lure tourists or external investment to the town.

It is possible that the community of Potlatch is deceiving itself into believing that the town is different than what it really is in an attempt to deal with their actual life circumstances.

257 P. Kimmell, personal conversation (10 December 2002).
258 Potlatch Historical Society, monthly meeting, (9 October 2002).
As was discussed in great detail in Chapter 3, this form of self-per(de)ception in many ways parallels Richard Sennett’s warnings of how a community can create a reality different from their own in order to deal with their reality. Potlatchites contradict themselves by saying that their town is still a small, close-knit, community, but shortly thereafter making comments that reveal just the opposite. They are deceiving themselves into believing that their community has not significantly changed over the years. Changes have occurred, however, for example Potlatchites are now working as janitors instead of loggers and their children live in Spokane instead of down the street.

Internal perceptions of the community can become reality. Depending upon whom you ask, people perceive the community differently. For example, people feel differently about how easy it is to be accepted into the community. Barry Ramsay explained that “if you weren’t born here, you’re an immigrant you might as well have a big ‘I’ on your forehead”.259 Not everyone shares the sentiment that life in Potlatch parallels a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel. Contrasting Ramsay’s statement is Barb Coyner’s story of feeling like she was immediately accepted and welcomed into the community.260 Furthermore, people disagree on whether they think the school system is good, if the town is a bedroom community, or if the food at the local grocery store is reasonably priced. The fact that people are involved with their school, shop at the local grocery store, and support each other during trying times could be an expression of self-deception. Because they believe their town is a tight-knit rural community, they act like they live in a tight-knit community; their perception, therefore, becomes their reality.

This analysis of the different perceptions of Potlatch reveals that ethereal perception has concrete consequences and can therefore become reality. Potlatch Corporation views the community and the mill site as expendable. This perception of an undesirable site/community

---

259 B. Ramsay, personal interview (17 October 2002).
260 B. Coyner, personal interview (9 October 2002).
will become a reality if the Corporation chooses to not redevelop or sell the site to the city or another company. Fighting this external perception are some Potlatchites’ perceptions of their town as special, different, and capable of attracting people to work, live, or visit. If this latter perception perseveres, and everyone sees the town as the some of locals do, then outsiders would see the potential benefits of revitalizing the downtown, and people who want to live in a town that is out in the country but close to employment would move to Potlatch. Therefore, the internal perception of Potlatch can become a reality for all. However, there are different ideas about what the community of Potlatch is, what it should become, and how the land should be used. These different ideas result in contradictory approaches to development—or lack thereof—and varying ideas about what the town of Potlatch should be in the future. These tensions problematize the town’s ability not just economically to survive but also to thrive.

Social roles and economic development in Potlatch

The social roles of Potlatch citizens have been a factor in the community’s development. As noted throughout this thesis, Potlatch is predominately a blue-collar town. Those few employed in white-collar occupations are widely regarded in Potlatch as different and apart from the ‘original’ community. More importantly, there is an understanding that those with the skills to obtain a white-collar job have no reason to stay in Potlatch. The population, however, is changing as more loggers move out of town and more commuters migrate in. The lack of community identity caused by the constantly changing commuter population in combination with the working class identity have influenced and in many ways plagued economic development in the town.

Potlatch’s blue-collar community, along with its poor regional reputation, affects the community’s ability to gain power and control over local economic development. Doreen Massey suggests how one’s subject positioning—race, gender, social class, or level of
education—influences how one is able to respond to societal changes. The social positioning of the people of Potlatch is influenced by their blue-collar occupations, compounded by their community’s company town heritage, and results in a community that does not have the essential components—such as entrepreneurial social infrastructure (ESI)—that many theorists claim are necessary for economic development.

The socialization of a blue-collar community also hinders development, in that it teaches the workers to be followers and not leaders. Following William Solecki’s theory on paternalism previously outlined, Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter state that due to the common history of company ownership or guidance, communities become dependent on the paternalistic relationship between the town and the company. While there have been cases of entrepreneurs emerging from these communities (for example in Chemainus, British Columbia), they explain that expecting entrepreneurs to materialize from these towns is shortsighted because “the history of many single-industry towns is one of an absence of individual initiative... [because] decision-making and other such entrepreneurial activities are externally located... [and the general] emphasis is on taking order rather than giving them”. This is not to say that the community has no ability to organize or develop their economy, it simply means that they have not been encouraged to do this in the past. In fact, in Potlatch much of the recent economic development work has been inspired by external entities such as the Idaho Gem Council or has been led by immigrants who have moved into the community.

The development of the town and hence its employment opportunities affect which people decide to live in and move away from the community. Common scenarios exist around the world; people want their children to succeed, yet know that success most likely means that

children will move away. This tension has put the community of Potlatch in a difficult position. The specialized skills of a single-industry rural community mean that a corporation hiring white-collar professionals would most likely not relocate to Potlatch; simultaneously, kids with white-collar futures will not stay in a community that does not have professional jobs. Not being able to fix either of these problems results in the cycle that currently exists in Potlatch: the children who go on to college rarely come back and the kids that do not attend college and enter blue-collar industries remain in the community.

Despite the lack of local economic development, there has been steady migration to the Potlatch area since mill closure. Affordable housing in a small, safe, family centered community and the presence of good schools are just two of the reasons people give when asked why they relocated to Potlatch. Since Potlatch Corporation left in 1983, the number of people living in Potlatch has declined 9.2% from 871 in 1980 to 791 in 2000; conversely, the population of the CCD has increased 9.6% from 3417 in 1980 to 3746 in 2000. Even though the overall number of people living in the Potlatch community has not significantly changed (a total increase of 249 people or 5.8%), over 18% of the community has relocated in the last twenty years. Loggers' homes have become the residences of commuters and 160-acre family homesteads have been parceled, sold, and now covered with new cabins instead of crops. Many who have lived in the town for their entire lives claim that they “don’t know three-fourths of this town anymore and [they] used to know everybody”. This land exchange has shaped community development and long-term population retention.


268 G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
Potlatch's changing population poses challenges for community development. Immigrants to the town claim that it takes time to be welcomed into the community. The resistance to an inclusive, diverse, evolving community contradicts what Flora, Sharp, et al. claim is needed in order to spur local entrepreneurial social infrastructure (ESI). They state that openness and experimentation are essential if a community is going to succeed in local development. The tight-knit exclusive community creates a situation that while the demographic statistics of Potlatch are changing for the short-term, the family names will likely stay the same in the long-term. Although Potlatch has seen a rise in the number of professional people moving into the area, these citizens' children will most likely not remain in the community. There are two reasons for this out-migration. One, is that the new family is never fully accepted into the community; and two, the children of those people are raised with the expectation of attending college and starting a career, and unless they too work at one of the universities or for one of the few professional businesses in the area, they cannot attain their career goals living in Potlatch. The continuation of civic volunteer work and the presence of social capital are therefore dependent upon the future migration of others who think that involvement in civic activities is important. Considering that Putnam claims that volunteerism and community involvement are typically learned from one's immediate community, there is the possibility that the work being done now will not be continued in the future if the participants are not replaced with new Potlatch immigrants who think similarly.

There is hope, however. While in some ways detrimental, the constant population change means that there is a constant source of new energy and enthusiasm for volunteerism. Work by new immigrants, such as Rich Bailey, is one such example. It is this kind of inspiration and

empowerment that can create ESI and therefore local development. Potlatch’s cultural and social history of interaction will need to be modified in the future if the town hopes to promote entrepreneurial activity and migration to the community that lasts for more than a generation.

**Regional politics and behavior**

According to locals the areas comprising the inland northwest (eastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana) have more in common geographically, geologically, socially, and politically, than they do with the rest of their respective states. In fact, northern Idahoans often joke that northern Idahoans should be called ‘Nidaho’ and southern Idaho should be renamed ‘Northern Utah’. The differences in religion, politics, and community loyalty are obvious to locals; this area thinks of itself as different from other places. James Kelly explains in his PhD dissertation on the small logging town of Skoglund, Idaho, that Idaho is “characterized by a social climate of sectionalism”.

Kelly explains that the northern region’s desire to separate itself from the south is the result of feeling disempowered. The majority of the Idaho population lives in southern Idaho and therefore “the south usually controls the state government as well as the congressional delegation. The bulk of state and federal funds goes (sic) south, and this is a constant source of irritation to Panhandle (northern Idaho) residents”. That inequity has created significant resentment and hostility to their southern neighbors and a feeling of

---

273 J. Skriletz, personal conversation (1 December 2002).
276 At some point, everyone who lives in northern Idaho hears the story that the state capital was at one time located in Lewiston, Idaho (a town located roughly sixty miles south of Potlatch). As legend has it, there was a movement by residents in southern Idaho to get the state capital moved to Boise. It failed in state congress and there was a midnight raid and the documents were stolen and the capital was reestablished in Boise. This urban legend (true or false) represents the resentment northern Idahoans have for their southern counterparts by being cheated not only out of state funds, but also out of a capital city.
kinship with communities similar to their own, namely small communities in eastern Washington and western Montana.

Accompanying the sectionalism which abounds in northern Idaho is a conservative philosophy which is applied to politics and life on a daily basis in Potlatch. When Kelly wrote his dissertation in 1974, he claimed that political liberalism dominated the Panhandle region. Potlatch residents who were former mill employees and union members agreed, but explained that most of the old, democratic mill workers have been replaced with a community of young, conservative people. In fact in the 2002 election, 71.9% of votes cast in the Potlatch school district population went for either a republican or a libertarian. These conservative philosophies are also realized in Potlatch and help explain why this community has not taken great initiatives in attempting to gain control over the mill site. There is a common belief that government should stay out of citizens' personal business (which is realized in Potlatch with incredibly low property tax and in Onaway where there are no property taxes) and that private property is the sole business of the land owner, and everyone else should mind their own affairs.

Understanding what is important to the residents of the inland northwest and knowing why they have moved to a small town provides insight as to why the community of Potlatch has responded differently to economic and social change compared to other single-industry communities around the country. A significant philosophical difference in how inland northwesterners view their community in relation to the rest of the country is realized when exploring the issue of tourism. As Keith, Fawson, et al. note, many communities in Utah have

---

278 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002).
280 Alice Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002); C. Haddock, personal interview (25 September 2002); P. Kimmell, personal conversation (10 December 2002); B. Rohn, personal interview (15 October 2002); K. Schott, personal interview (10 December 2002).
turned to tourism as an economic alternative to "extractive resource-based industries".\textsuperscript{281} Throughout my interviews in Potlatch, however, the subject was rarely brought up as a potential economic development tool for the town. Northern Idaho is not Utah or Colorado and the ideologies espousing tourism and development are not found as readily in northern Idaho because most of the people who moved to the region and want tourism either do not stay very long, their children eventually move away, or their opinions are the minority view.\textsuperscript{282} Locals might welcome a new industry to town if it provided jobs; but, they are not going to change the structure of the community for the sake of a few jobs.

The people in northern Idaho are not really interested in sharing their region with others. Often, people note that it is difficult for newcomers to make the transition from being regarded as outsiders to accepted members of the community. A fellow northern Idaho resident complained about his 'Californian' neighbor and in so doing, immediately set his neighbor as outside of and different from the community. Similar sentiments can be heard in logging communities in western Montana, in which people refer to vacation homeowners as 'damn Californians'. These comments can be explained by the fact that people believe that these 'outsiders' have different histories, lifestyles, and do not share in the economic hardships of the regional locals. As one immigrant to Potlatch noted, he thought the title of the movie "My Own Private Idaho" was incredibly apt; Idaho residents are not interested in outsiders moving to their state.\textsuperscript{283}

There have been some internal attempts to create change in Potlatch; unfortunately, those attempts are overridden by other more powerful influences. For instance, the Corporation owns the mill site and overrides the efforts made by the Scenic Six Community Development Council to attract investors to the area. Additionally, verifying Flora, Sharp, et al.'s claim that

\textsuperscript{282} Anonymous, personal interview (Date suppressed 2002).
mobilization of diverse resources is essential for ESI, the lack of participant diversity in the Development Council has hindered Potlatch’s ability to develop successfully and spur economic development within the community. Many Potlatchites comment that they would simply “like to see something come in”, but only a small group of people who are a part of the Development Council are working to make that happen. That small group cannot stimulate economic development to change the community in a fundamental way.

Potlatch Corporation has maintained power in the community by controlling the mill site and has established that they will sell or develop the land when they are ready to do so. This lack of control of land is detrimental to the community of Potlatch. Sociologist, Gene Summers notes that land dictates the “extent of the economic vitality of the community” and when a community does not control their land, they lose control over the direction of their community economic development. Whether the community members’ inaction toward the Corporation is due to feelings of being powerless against a Corporation or the fact that they do not really feel that it is their place to interfere with another’s property is difficult to distinguish; it is most likely a combination of many factors that contribute to this paralysis.

**History’s influence on current actions**

The ways Potlatch citizens see their communal past and how they view their future trials have shaped the community’s transition from a single-industry town into a more flexible economy. Starting as a farming community, transforming into a company town, being incorporated into the state, and eventually changing into a pseudo bedroom community for two

---

283 Ibid.
285 W. Wright, personal interview (7 November 2002).
286 K. Schott, personal interview (9 December 2002).
university towns has altered how the people of Potlatch think of their community and how they react to new economic challenges.

Understanding Potlatch’s history helps us comprehend the community’s response to mill closure and the need for economic development. As noted from the comments made by Potlatch citizens, working for the Potlatch Corporation was more than simply a job; the people of Potlatch deeply cared for and relied on the Company. When the Corporation left in 1983, their absence was felt economically and in their civic organizations. Barb Coyner’s comment that the Potlatch community “is not a confident bunch” is a result of this intricate corporate-community relationship. Moreover, the community’s historical pride in the Corporation and their present day frustrations with that same organization exemplify the complex emotional connection the community has with the Company. That frustration translates into a community that distrusts big business and has little historical evidence that corporate investment in a small town will have long-term community benefits.

Potlatch, Idaho was an example of a Fordist based economy that (similar to many small towns throughout North America) proved inefficient by the early 1980’s. The transition to an economy based on flexible accumulation, however, is different from most other towns. Unlike the examples given by Barnes, Hayter, et al. and David Harvey of flexible accumulation being realized through plant restructuring or entrepreneurial activity,\(^\text{288}\) in Potlatch, flexible accumulation was achieved through commuting. Job opportunities in the surrounding college towns gave Potlatch citizens the sense of employment freedom and choice that they did not have under the Fordist regime. That freedom has come with a price, however. From the comments made by community members it seems that the citizens, consciously or not, decided that making minimum wage, working in a less respected field, and commuting would be more preferable than

---
working for another company, getting emotionally involved, and that business leaving the town once again.

Even though citizens have been able to find work in the surrounding communities, Potlatch's historical relationship with the Corporation has had detrimental consequences on the participation levels of civic involvement. Putnam claims that social capital is critical to community development and success. Statements by the few Potlatchites involved with civic activities reveal that the majority of the population is not involved with civic activities. Insight into Potlatch's corporate-community relationship exposes why Potlatch's social capital is so tenuous: the community of Potlatch never learned to be independent; from its inception, the majority of the community was taught to depend on the Corporation.

Social capital does exist in Potlatch. The smallness of the town and the shared history of its citizens taught many people the importance of loyalty and commitment to their neighbors. Exemplifying Putnam's theory of why social capital develops, Potlatch's abundance of social capital in regard to social needs is noticeable and strong. Examples of this wealth include consistent fund raisers for residents who are in need of medical care, active volunteers with the fire department, and the successful Potlatch Historical Society working to promote knowledge of Potlatch's past.

Putnam claims that social capital and economic development are inextricably tied and that economic development is difficult to establish absent social capital, but that social capital predisposes successful economic development. He says that, "generally speaking, regions today that are civic are also healthy, wealthy, and industrial".\textsuperscript{289} He also claims that civic traditions alone cannot create economic development, but that there are many other factors which influence that development.\textsuperscript{290} For example, disempowerment compounded with Potlatch's lack of

\textsuperscript{289} R. Putnam. 1993. p 152.
leadership has made it difficult for economic development to emerge out the Potlatch community.

The interactions between the Company and the community is an example of what philosopher Michel Foucault has discussed in his various books and studies regarding power relations. Foucault states that,

The characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men’s conduct—but never exhaustively or coercively... If he can be induced to speak, when his ultimate recourse could have been to hold his tongue...then he has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power. 291

Foucault’s ideas of power are directly applicable to the relations between the Company and the community of Potlatch. Years of corporate dependency deterred development of community trust, stifled the willingness of people to work together for the greater good of the community, and hampered Potlatch’s ability to pull together as a community and internally develop the economy.

The Potlatch case study raises questions about Putnam’s theory because it seems that the ‘other factors’ which Putnam says can influence economic development have an overwhelming influence in Potlatch. First, in Potlatch there is an abundance of social capital, but close analysis reveals that only a small group of people are conducting the civic work. That small group can work to raise money for a sick child or write a grant to renovate the city hall, but it would be difficult for a small group to economically develop the town. 292 Second, the history of the civic tradition in Potlatch is complicated by the fact that for eighty out of the one-hundred years of civic activity was organized and run by a Corporation that is no longer in the community. This relates back to Foucault’s position on power and how one group acted for another. The one civic


292 A couple of examples would include the failure of the group of five members of P.R.I.D.E. who tried to alone economically develop Potlatch and failed, and also the entrepreneur in Chemainus who made great strides but failed to develop the popular tourist destination that he promised (T.J. Barnes, personal conversation, (24 April 2003).
tradition that was organized by the citizens of Potlatch was the union and that group was disempowered in the early 1980's when all the members lost their jobs. That brings us to the third point in which Putnam claims that unions are a good sign of civic involvement. After mill closure most of the union workers did not get involved when social capital was needed or economic development should have occurred, rather the members became disenchanted and went to work at other, nonunion jobs in other communities. And, fourth, Potlatch is celebrating their centennial in 2005 and the community has not yet reaped the benefits of their established social capital. This raises questions as to how long it actually takes for civic involvement and social capital to transform into economic development.

Even though the Potlatch case study raises questions about Putnam's theories, it also might be a great example of the power of civic traditions. Potlatch's economic situation might be quite different if they did not have the civic tradition and social capital that they currently possess. If they did not have people taking care of each other during trying times, citizens fundraising to fix up the old buildings, or volunteers trying to teach the youth about their history and entrepreneurialism, then the community might be in a much worse position. The people I interviewed said that they felt that the community of Potlatch was stronger than those of Palouse and Troy. Perhaps, if Potlatch would not have had the history of a civic tradition then the community would not have the social capital that they possess or the pride in their community which will, according to Putnam, eventually become economic development.

Authors continually focus on economic development as necessary for survival; however, Potlatch has essentially chosen to ignore this aspect of their community. Instead, residents have focused their reserves of social capital on social issues, which has in turn attracted people to this community. Because of the community's proximity to other towns and job opportunities, the

293 Alvin Cowger, personal interview (6 November 2002); J. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002); G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002).
existence of social capital and not economic development has proven sufficient to keep the community surviving. This case study shows that even though a stable economy is essential for community stability, sometimes a community can develop other aspects of their town (such as philanthropic and social activities) and people will find ways to subsist.

*Geographical Context: a community nestled between many, ever closer, towns*

Despite the challenges to community development noted above, Potlatch has survived. This is due to the fact that the factors are not weighted equally and this last factor, the geographical context of Potlatch, has given the community economic opportunities outside of the town while being able to maintain a residential population. Just as the magnificent scenery and wildlife of the Rocky Mountains has helped Walden, Colorado to develop a real estate market, or how being close to Victoria has enabled Youbou, British Columbia to become a bedroom community and retirement destination, Potlatch’s surrounding ecology of both farmland and forest in combination with their proximity to Moscow and Pullman offers the community economic stability in various financial sectors.

Since the mill closed, Potlatch has proved that the community offers more than simply jobs in the timber industry. Situated in the rolling hills of the Palouse, Potlatch’s farming community has a long tradition of being a contributor to the local economy. While some people talk about how many granges have closed and how there used to be several run out of Potlatch and Princeton, in 2000 there were still 109 people (6.3% of the population of the CCD) working in the farming industry. Additionally, many Potlatchites commute to work in Moscow or Pullman for decades. Potlatch’s geography allowed the community to avoid dealing with the mill closure immediately. There was work in other towns nearby, hence no one really

---

295 D. Ball, personal interview (30 October 2002).
thought Potlatch was ever going to ‘fold up’ and become a ghost town. Consequently, many people said that the mill closure did not have a significant impact on their financial well being. Land was cheap in Potlatch and there were other jobs available in the area; life continued as it had before, but now many drove to work in Moscow or Pullman instead of walking to work in town.

While Potlatchites do not want to live in the larger college towns, the employment availability and the security of working in a stable industry—such as education—allowed people to find jobs easily. As George Strong noted earlier, he simply wanted to get out of the volatile lumber industry and the universities offered him steady employment. Unlike places like Walden, Colorado, which is located at least sixty-five miles from any large town or city, Potlatch has two communities within thirty miles and three other cities located within sixty miles to which people can commute. Potlatch’s case is similar to Youbou, British Columbia, whose proximity to Victoria and Nanaimo gives the community economic stability, so they do not have to “lur[e] outside capital or cultivat[e] it indigenously”. The economy of Potlatch has become more intertwined with Moscow and Pullman as its residents spend more time in the other communities. This interaction with Moscow and Pullman helps explain Potlatch’s ability to survive as a small town. The University of Idaho provides over forty percent of the jobs in Latah County, and as long as there are not any budget cuts in the state government, those jobs are insulated from variations in the national economy. Despite the fact that there are not many businesses located in Potlatch, its proximity to communities with a buffer from the national economy has added to Potlatch’s ability to survive post mill closure.

297 J. Ross, personal interview (12 November 2002); G. Strong, personal interview (12 November 2002); G. Walters, personal interview (15 October 2002).
Technological advancements and hence time-space compression affected the community of Potlatch in that driving to the surrounding towns is faster and easier than in the past. The dramatic changes in scale caused by these ‘shortened’ distances can ultimately contribute to a crisis of identity. This is particularly apt in western America, where the big sky and open landscape have been integral parts of the definition of the region. Through time, however, that space has begun to get smaller and people have come to fill in the empty spaces. Potlatch is experiencing this crisis as it shifts from being a mill town into something else. The confusion about what constitutes the economy of Potlatch is indicative of the fact that the community no longer thinks of itself as isolated in Latah County. Rather, it recognizes them as part of the larger regional economy and yet still does not know how Potlatch contributes to that economy. This change is significant. Potlatch is no longer defined by its economy—a mill town—but rather it is defined by its geography—a small town in the Palouse with a blue-collar community. As the population changes and more commuters move into the area, filling up the open landscape, Potlatchites will struggle even more as they discern how to define the town now and in the future.

This identity crisis extends further as the community of Potlatch grapples with its economic future and creates its own stable diverse economy, while maintaining a unique community identity. This is a common problem for rural communities. As rural sociologist Adam Weinberg notes, rural communities struggle as they attempt to develop their economy, maintain their culture and values, and resist becoming little cities.\(^\text{300}\) Additionally, abandoned single-industry towns face many challenges, such as “competition among cities…high wages, unionization, and creeping urban decay… [and specialized] skills of local workers”.\(^\text{301}\) Potlatchites are keenly aware that in order to have a durable economy, they need to rely on the


\(^{301}\) K. Kelly. 1995. “Try as they might, the dead seldom rise” Business Week September 11: 112.
communities around them, but they do not want to be a bedroom community and hence defined in relation to the university towns. The subject positioning of Potlatchites places them at odds with their surrounding communities: Moscow is full of white-collared, over-educated snobs, and Potlatch is replete with working class folks who, together, are all struggling to get by in this world. Their positioning, therefore, makes it harder for Potlatch to succeed in defining itself economically and socially independent from the surrounding university towns.

Even if the town wants to be independent from the communities around it, the fact that Potlatch is located in Latah County is critical to the community’s development. A representative from the Potlatch Corporation explained that the Company has decided that it is now willing to sell the land, but comments that “there [have not been] many people who are beating down the door in Latah County to put a major industrial facility there”. The challenges noted above that single-industry communities inherently have to confront in combination with local inadequacies such as lack of cell phone reception and DSL makes Potlatch a hard selling point to industries around the country who are thinking about relocating.

Potlatch’s geography has enabled the town to maintain its social status as a blue-collar community and still have a decent, stable economy. Geographical context has given a time cushion in which Potlatch could ignore the need for local economic development. Now, as community members work to create local economic opportunities, it is that same geographical context they fight as they try to show that they are more than a community defined by the cities that surround it.

Summary

The inability to control the abandoned mill site has left the community confused and at odds regarding what the community is and what they want it to be. While most of the residents
of Potlatch want to see something built on the site or the mill site changed into something else, the community has done little to make this happen. There is a discrepancy regarding what the mill site means to Potlatch and what it could do for the community. To many the empty site is a constant reminder of what the community was and now is and there is a sense of embarrassment and disappointment when people discuss how the site is currently used.

As shown throughout this chapter, these characteristics—perception, social roles, regional politics and behavior, history, and geographical context—have greatly affected how the community of Potlatch has responded to mill closure. Despite the fact that the factors are simultaneously working to influence the community’s response to mill closure, they do not have equal value. Potlatch’s geographical context is the biggest determinant enabling the community to still have an economic and social base regardless of the fact that the other elements are working against its success. The community has maintained a population, a few businesses, and community-wide respected schools. At the same time, the lack of community unity in Potlatch has hindered its ability to stimulate a local economy. Significantly, the requirements Flora, Sharp, et al. claim are needed to foster ESI are not met in Potlatch, because there is little acceptance of another’s opinion about what should be done in regard to Potlatch’s development; the community has a difficult time mobilizing resources for the common good of the town; and, there is little diversity across the developmental organizations. These challenges have created the scenario which currently exists in Potlatch: the community can survive, but it cannot thrive economically until the factors are dealt with in a constructive and meaningful way.

302 Representative of the Potlatch Corporation, personal interview (6 November 2002).
Chapter 6: Conclusion

the last log drive

Conclusions

Potlatch, Idaho is a single-industry town that has responded to the changes flowing from mill closure and industry abandonment. In investigating (i) the history of Potlatch and other single-industry communities to assess how the past influences community response to change; (ii) current citizens’ views of Potlatch’s present state of affairs and the challenges it will face in the future; (iii), theories of single-industry community economies and rural development; and (iv), the unique social factors which help explain why Potlatch has responded to mill closure, this thesis explores why this former single-industry town has been able to survive after mill closure.

Inhabitants of Potlatch are struggling to maintain their town in a world that is dramatically different from the one in which it was created. Technological changes remade the industrial world. In the late nineteenth century, the new technology of railroads brought lumbermen to the west and the Potlatch Lumber Mill was established. Less than a century later, that mill was closed for many reasons. While the Corporation will not reveal all the reasons they dismantled the Potlatch Lumber Mill, it is clear that the mill was gravely out of date and technologically behind other mills, the supply of old growth white pine was running short, and the Corporation’s business strategy shifted in such a way that the Potlatch Lumber Mill no longer fit into the Corporation’s plans. Since mill closure, technological advancements, realized through such mediums as the internet, fax machines, and Federal Express delivery trucks, have enabled small businesses to establish themselves in the community and more people are commuting out of Potlatch for work. The town can no longer be identified as a single-industry town and community boosters are now wrestling between two community identities. Economically, the boosters recognize that the town is a bedroom community, but socially they want to maintain an autonomous, small town community.

Despite the changes that have ensued, the people of Potlatch must come to terms with their history to maintain their community identity. They need to learn from the investigations
and observations of sociologists and other theorists such as Richard Sennett whose work has revealed the persistently invoked tendency of beleaguered communities to see the world as they would wish it to be rather than as it is. In other words, the people of Potlatch must fight the temptation to purify their identity in an attempt to deal with the painful realities of being a small community in a globalizing world. If they do not find a way to generate jobs in the town, then Potlatch will increasingly assume the character of a bedroom community. While becoming a bedroom community is not inherently bad, the movement toward a commuter-based population would likely result in changing the social structure of the town. Replacing a single-industry town with a bedroom community is an issue about which many community members express concern. Potlatch’s history obviously presents challenges of civic leadership and how the community defines itself, but the community needs to come to terms with their history if they want to control the future of the town.

The literature on single-industry communities and rural development is rich with data, and I have chosen specific angles to pursue in my study of a single-industry town. For example, one could explore Potlatch’s history by situating the community in a wide framework of industrial capitalism, or one could analyze gender roles in the community and how those roles have changed since 1903. My personal research interests resulted in a need to combine the theories of economists, geographers, and sociologists in order to understand how Potlatch compares to other single-industry towns and its potentially different futures as it develops as a rural—not single-industry—community. Because I employed both ethnographic and archival methodologies and because my own interests lie in understanding how this community has changed, I examined the factors that have influenced Potlatch’s responses to mill closure. In order to consider a town that has survived mill closure, the theories of rural sociologists (entrepreneurial social infrastructure and social chance), political scientists (social capital), and
economic geographers (Fordist and flexible economies, and time-space compression) are utilized.

This thesis is not an invitation to other single-industry communities to be inactive and resistant toward development. People should not assume that they can be idle and indifferent to the issue of development and they will survive as Potlatch has. Rather, a micro lens is needed to examine the particular community in question to understand what important features will contribute to its economic and social development. The community of Potlatch has not survived because the citizens have ignored development but rather because of the town's distinct geographical context, the desire of community members to stay in the town, and the active social capital working in the town. If Potlatch did not have social organizations raising money for people in need, or was located thirty more miles away from Moscow and Pullman, it is questionable whether there would be residents still living in the community.

Combining some of the theories and stories outlined in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 into a critical analysis in Chapter 5 shows that Potlatch's response to mill closure has been influenced by five social factors—perceptions, social roles, regional politics and behavior, history, and geographical context. Despite the fact that each element significantly shapes the community's response to change, they are not weighted equally. Potlatch's geographical context has an overwhelming positive influence on the community's success by providing steady employment in surrounding towns and hence overrides many of the factors that might otherwise contribute to Potlatch's demise.

The community of Potlatch is currently in a difficult position. Potlatchites regard their town as different and its history as special. They fear that if Potlatch becomes a bedroom community, then it will lose that 'uniqueness' and history. Nonetheless, a quandary remains. The people opposed to Potlatch becoming a bedroom community have not shown great interest in developing their community, and the people who think commuters are good for the town are
involved in civic activities. It would benefit the citizens of Potlatch to be honest with themselves about their history and current situation. They are going to have to come to terms with these conflicts. Because Potlatch is so closely connected to the economy of the surrounding communities, and in a sense the world these days with electronic media and global politics, they cannot help but change. They are therefore going to be forced to deal with the question of how they want their community to develop. If they do not begin to take control of their development, then it is likely that they will turn into exactly what they do not want to be, another bedroom community in Latah County.

Potlatch represents a community that has maintained a population despite a lack of economic development. Surviving and development are very different approaches to economic stability and if Potlatch wants to develop—as some community members claim—then the community is going to have to create that development, and not just be a reactive or passive community waiting for the world to dictate how they will live. Two questions immediately present themselves: how do you create economic development; and, does the culture of Potlatch support the establishment of that development? These questions remain unanswered. Potlatch has been able to produce social capital for social development, but has not yet spurred economic development. The citizens know how to organize; they know how to raise money; they know how to work together. Perhaps the people of Potlatch are indifferent to the value of an internally based economy. Perhaps they would rather commute, work for someone else, and live in a small town than be bothered with running a business or attracting business to town. Perhaps they have learned the hard lessons involved in attempting to attract an externally based company to an area. When Potlatch Corporation left the town, it caused social upheaval and economic turmoil. If the community is never again dependent upon a single industry, and has an economy that is more diverse because people work at many different companies, then the town will not have to cope with the fears of industrial closure that accompany any (especially a multinational) corporation.
The community of Potlatch should strive to thrive, and not just survive. As noted in Chapter 5, the absence of economic development has been a result not only of Potlatch's history, but also the perceptions of the town, the shifting population base, regional ideologies, and geographical context. If the community wants to maintain the social cohesion and unity as they claim, the town needs to foster development. As Putnam notes, "communities did not become civic because they were rich...they have become rich because they are civic". While there is civic work in Potlatch, in order for Potlatch to succeed economically, the community needs to establish a common recognition that economic development will benefit the town. The community will survive without this development, but economic development would empower and improve the subject positioning of Potlatchites. This empowerment would allow the community to have more control over the development of the town and perhaps stop projects such as the placement of a landfill transfer station that has been suggested as a potential use of the mill site. There needs to be an awareness of how economic development could benefit the community and then, one hopes, people will begin use their social capital to stimulate not only social but economic development.

**Broader Implications**

There are important issues regarding corporate-community relationships discussed in this thesis that can be applied to other communities. It is essential to recognize Potlatch's company town heritage in order to understand the community's response to mill closure. Because of Potlatch's history and its inability to create economic development, the community acts as a reminder of how communities and companies should (and should not) interact. Several recent articles illustrate that the concept of the 'company town' might again be on the rise. Modern day

---

company towns are seen in corporate campuses around North America, \(^{304}\) and are even identified in such places as Silicon Valley. \(^{305}\)

The creators of new company town experiments can look at the Potlatch case study and realize that there are many long-term and potentially detrimental effects of company-community relationships in company towns. First, the community comes to rely on the company to make decisions—social, economic and political—for the community. This dependence suppresses social trust and civic engagement, and potentially social capital. Companies should participate in civic activities and be mindful of the communities in which they conduct business; that does not mean, however, that the community should not act on its own behalf. It is beneficial for all parties—the company and community alike—for the community to learn how to take care of itself. Therefore, the company does not feel that they have to spearhead every civic organization, and if the company leaves, the community will not spend years trying to figure out how to govern its own town. Second, the suppression of social capital and the continued dependence on company leadership reinforces the established class structure of blue-collar workers following the guidance and rules of white-collar professionals. We should be working to empower blue-collar workers, not to continue practices that keep them subordinate to a white-collar community.

In a time when single-industry communities—such as Newton Falls, New York, Enumclaw, Washington and Libby, Montana—are seeing their industrial sites closed, it is important to understand why some communities organize and are able to get companies and people to invest in their town, and others, like Potlatch, do not make an effort to revitalize their economy. This particular case study is not complete; further work could be conducted examining each factor more closely, working to understand how, why, and to what extent they influence community response to economic and social change. However, because of social


chance it is impossible to create a reference to determine the future of a particular community. Social chance can come in the form of a community booster moving to town or an industrial plant surprisingly deciding to relocate to the area. This study is helpful, however, as it shows that explanations for community responses to social and economic change can be understood, and it gives hope to other former single-industry communities that they might be able to survive even after an industry leaves a town. Most significantly, by closely examining Potlatch's unique community factors, we realize that despite the similar histories of many single-industry towns, they will most likely have completely different futures.

The small town versus the global economy

Potlatch calls attention to the plight of small places in the (post) modern world. It is in this new world of global communication that technology is working for and against these places. On the one hand, technology has been the savior of Potlatch. Technological advancements enable people to want to work in the cities but escape from those metropoles and live in the country. Advancements in technology also allow people to conduct business in the place the owner wants. As Barry Ramsay explained, every place he wanted to establish his business was bad for at least one of his clients, he therefore decided to establish his business in the town in which he wanted to live, which was Potlatch. On the other hand, technology has also been the slow destroyer of Potlatch. The increase in commuting means that there is more of a chance that people will shop outside of the community in which they live. Furthermore, there is a lack of technologically advanced tools in Potlatch. The city does not have cable, cell phone, or DSL reception. These inadequacies have made Potlatch an unattractive spot for businesses to relocate. The citizens of Potlatch must consider how these factors affect the town's ability to succeed in the modern world as a rural community, and not a single-industry town, in a constantly changing technological world.
Potlatch is not the only small town struggling to succeed in this ever shrinking world. Brian Fawcett’s 2003 book Virtual Clearcut: or, the way things are in my hometown is a study of Prince George, a large logging town in northern British Columbia.\textsuperscript{306} Prince George’s current trials parallel Potlatch’s, and the locals’ views about the town and its future are very similar to the community of Potlatch. Prince George is a one-company logging town; locally owned stores in the downtown are closing as Wal-Mart and Costco are established in the area; and, some people see tourism as the only stable economic future for the community. Prince George is the economic hub for northern British Columbia and more significantly home to a giant clearcut that Fawcett parallels with the economic failures and declining pride of the small town. Fawcett keenly analyzes Prince George’s current state by showing that the downtown stores are closing as multinational corporations establish local outlets, occupational and town pride has been shattered as local control over employment and income has decreased, and the long-term community success is threatened by the out-migration of young educated citizens. He claims that the few changes that have been made to improve the esthetics of the community have been made for those who are not there, namely the “tourists, conventioneers, a future influx of the elderly”.\textsuperscript{307} Fawcett’s book allows us to situate Potlatch (a town of 800) and Prince George (once a town of 80,000) on the same page. These are two towns whose leaders are trying to figure out how to succeed in a world that is dramatically different from the one that led to the creation of these places. More significantly, the citizens have to change their conventional social roles and begin to take charge of their development (that is they must begin to create their world, rather than allow external entities to create their world for them), and they have to turn their pessimistic view of their future into an optimistic vision of what their community can become.

\textsuperscript{306} B. Fawcett. 2003. Virtual Clearcut: or, the way things are in my hometown. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers.
\textsuperscript{307} B. Fawcett. 2003. Virtual Clearcut: or, the way things are in my hometown. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, p 293.
There are towns that are attempting to gain control of their development and trying to create an economy before significant out-migration occurs. Rural sociologist Adam Weinberg has been working with the hamlets of Madison County, in central New York to help them develop environmentally sustainable economies.\textsuperscript{308} He explains that the success of this project is largely due to the efforts and commitment of the community members, foundational support, an element of social chance, and the participation of Colgate University. With signs of success and optimistic futures, these communities are struggling to resist turning into little cities. They are working to maintain their unique community identities while also attempting to develop stable locally-based economies. Another place that points to the possibility of hopeful futures for rural communities is Manteo, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{309} This former boat building town decided to use the community’s manufacturing skills as an attraction for tourists. Instead of redeveloping their downtown to attract tourists, landscape architect Randolph Hester asked the community to identify places and aspects of the town that were sentimentally special to the community. They proactively preserved these places and then established a ‘do it yourself’ boat-making workshop business in which people come to the town for something very specific (to make a boat), instead of hoping that revitalization would simply attract people to the community. This unique approach shows that a community, when determined and innovative, can succeed.

In the ever-changing world in which people are striving to once again experience local and intimate communities, there could be a positive future for the town of Potlatch. The community needs to figure out how to situate the town in the ever growing, and at the same time ever ‘shrinking’, complex world in which we live. In many ways it seems that the present challenge for small towns is to figure out a way to maintain their identities in a time when all the cards are stacked against them. Because of Potlatch’s unique characteristics, the community has

been sheltered from many of the pitfalls that other single-industry communities face. However, in order for Potlatch to economically thrive and enter the global market, the community needs to regain control of the development processes in Potlatch. When the citizens do this, they can begin to dictate the future of Potlatch, which will work to change the citizen’s subject positioning and empower the community to move toward a successful and promising future.

Bibliography

“After coal, tourists” The Economist 363 June 1, 2002: 32.


Akins, F. “Local business owner” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (5 November 2002).

Akins, I. “Local business owner” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (5 November 2002).


Anonymous. “Potlatch residents” personal interviews throughout the research process who chose to remain unknown. Dates suppressed 2002.


Bailey, Dr. R. “Local business owner” personal interview conducted in Viola, Idaho (8 November 2002).

Bain, I. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Pullman, Washington (10 December 2002).


Barnes, T. J. “Professor of economic geography” personal conversation in Vancouver, British Columbia (24 April 2003).


Beidler, K. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Princeton, Idaho (29 October 2002).

Beidler, S. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Princeton, Idaho (29 October 2002).

Benson, M. “Potlatch Corporation representative” personal telephone conversation (18 November 2002).


Cada, K. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (15 October 2002).


Carroll, Dr. M.S. “Professor of Sociology” personal conversation in Moscow, Idaho (13 November 2002).


Cone, D. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Princeton, Idaho (16 October 2002).


Cowger, Alice. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Onaway, Idaho (6 November 2002).

Cowger, Alvin. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Onaway, Idaho (6 November 2002).


Coyner, B. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (9 October 2002).

Coyner, J. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (5 November 2002).


Fawcett, B. 2003. Virtual Clearcut: or, the way things are in my hometown. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers.

Fiscus, S. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Moscow, Idaho (8 October 2002).


Haddock, C. "Potlatch resident" personal interview conducted in Onaway, Idaho (25 September 2002).

Haddock, J. "Potlatch resident" personal interview conducted in Onaway, Idaho (16 October 2002).


Kelly, K. “Try as they might, the dead seldom rise” *Business Week* September 11, 1995: 112.


Kimmell, P. “Latah County Commissioner” personal conversation in Moscow, Idaho (10 December 2002).


Quiring, D. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (16 October 2002).

Ramsay, B. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (17 October 2002).


Renfrew, Dr. M. “Former Potlatch resident” personal telephone conversation (17 February 2003).

Representative of the Potlatch Corporation. “Potlatch Corporation employee” personal interview conducted in Lewiston, Idaho (6 November 2002).


Rohn, B. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (15 October 2002).

Ross, J. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Princeton, Idaho (12 November 2002).

Ross, L. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (7 October 2002).

Ross, V. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Princeton, Idaho (12 November 2002).


Schott, K. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Moscow, Idaho (9 December 2002).


Skriletz, J. “Latah County resident” personal conversation in Moscow, Idaho (1 December 2002).


Solomon, M. “Latah County resident and local blacksmith” personal interview conducted in Moscow, Idaho (26 September 2002).


Strong, G. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (12 November 2002).

Strong, J. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (12 November 2002).


Virgin, B. “Weyerhaeuser to close mills in King County” *Seattle Post Intelligencer* October 23, 2002: A1, A10.


Walters, G. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (15 October 2002).

Walters, P. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (15 October 2002).


Wright, W. “Potlatch resident” personal interview conducted in Potlatch, Idaho (7 November 2002).
Appendix 2: Interview Questions

I) Interviewee Information:

Name of person interviewed: ____________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________________________
City: ___________________________ Phone: ______________________________
Zip Code: _______________________ Fax: _________________________________
Email Address: ________________________________________________________
Date of interview: ______________________________
Is the interview taped? Yes  No___________
Is the interview anonymous? Yes  No__________

II) Arriving in Potlatch:

1) Where did you grow up?

2) How long have you lived in Potlatch/Latah County?

3) Why did you move to Potlatch/northern Idaho?

III) Living in Potlatch

4) Why do live in Potlatch?

5) Do you have children?

   5a) If yes, did they grow up in Potlatch and attend the Potlatch school system?

   5b) What did you think about the public education system in Potlatch? What were the strengths (and weaknesses) of the school?

6) Do you own or rent your home?
7) Have you owned more than two different homes while living in Potlatch? Why?

8) Do you own a home that you rent to someone else? If yes, where do they work?

IV) Employment Information:

9) What is your occupation?

10) Where do you work now?

11) Where did you work in 1981?

12) Are you connected now, or have ever been, with the Potlatch Lumber Company? And, how are (were) you connected to the Potlatch Corporation?

13) If you worked for the Potlatch Corporation in the past:

   a) How long were you employed by the company and when did the employment end?

   b) What did you do when you worked at the mill?

   c) Did you like your job?

   d) Why did you change jobs?

   e) In your opinion, why did the Potlatch Corporation close its mill in Potlatch?

14) What do you now do for a living?

15) Is your employment based in Potlatch or do you commute to another town?
15a) If yes, do you enjoy commuting or would you rather work in Potlatch?

16) Have you always been in that line of work?

17) How is the job market in Potlatch?

18) Are there jobs available in Potlatch for graduates of the Potlatch High School?

V) Questions about the Potlatch community:

19) What the biggest changes you've noticed in Potlatch in the last 20 years?

20) What are the differences you notice economically, socially, culturally since Potlatch closed the mill?

21) Do you think the Potlatch Corporation could have done anything differently in regard to shutting down the mill in the 1980's?

22) How did you cope with the mill closure?

22a) Financially?

22b) Emotionally?

VI) References:

Do you have any suggestions for people who you think would be helpful for my research?