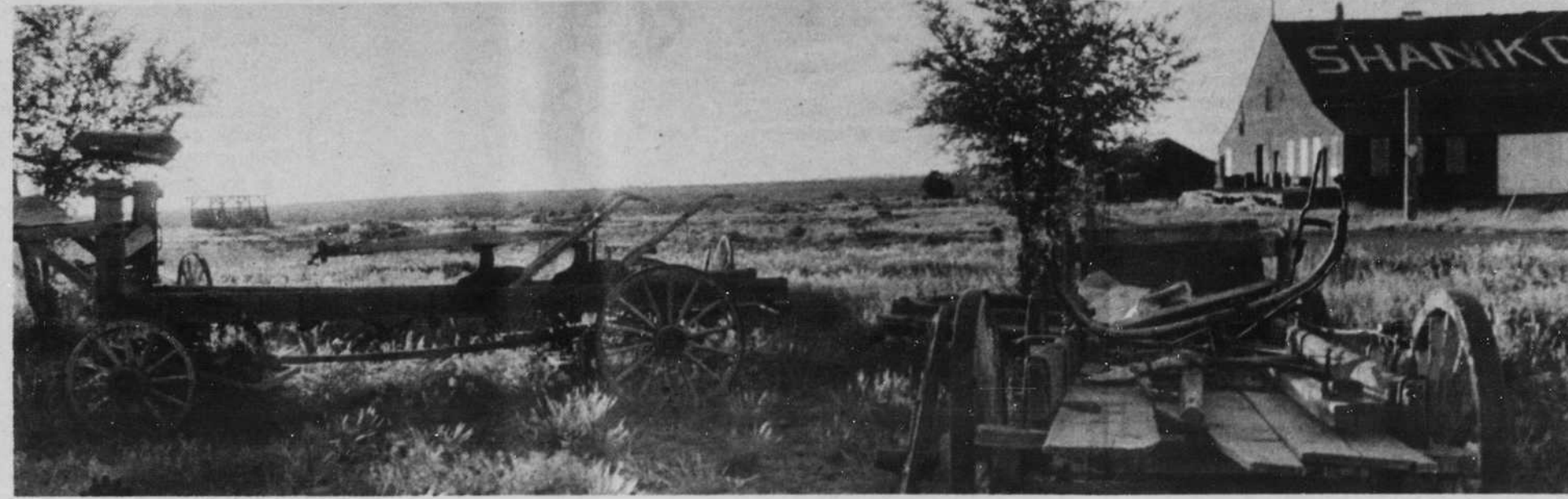
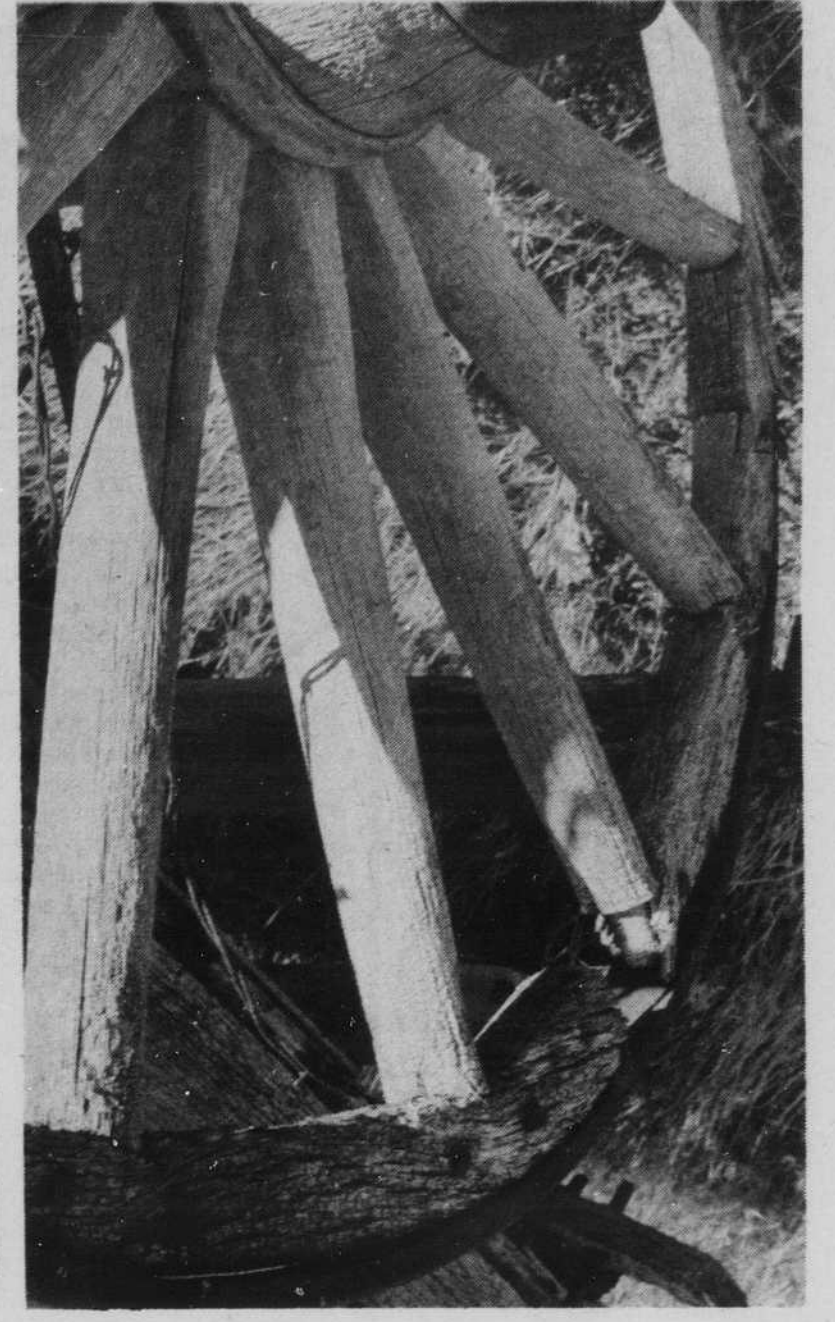
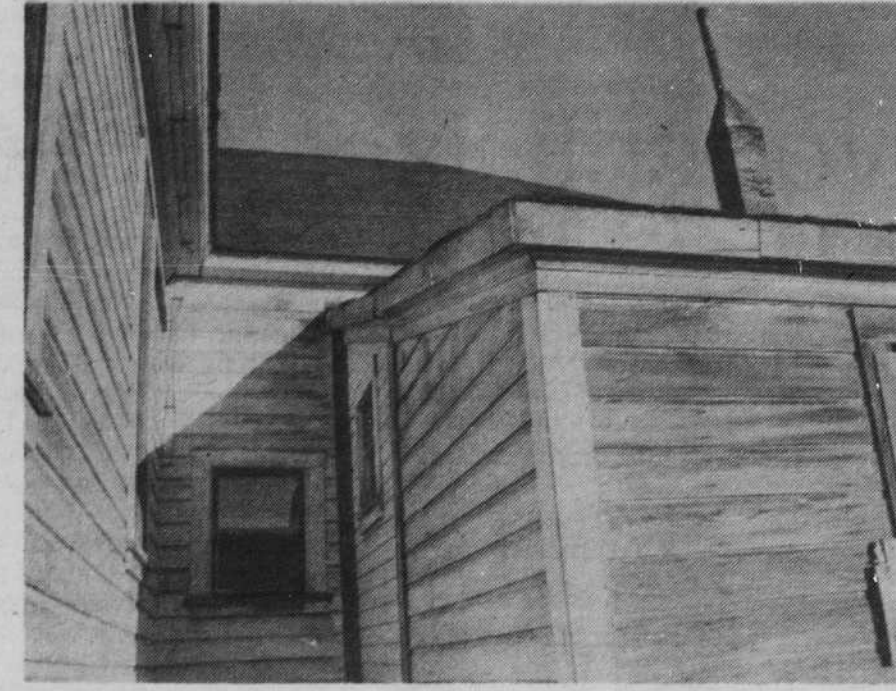
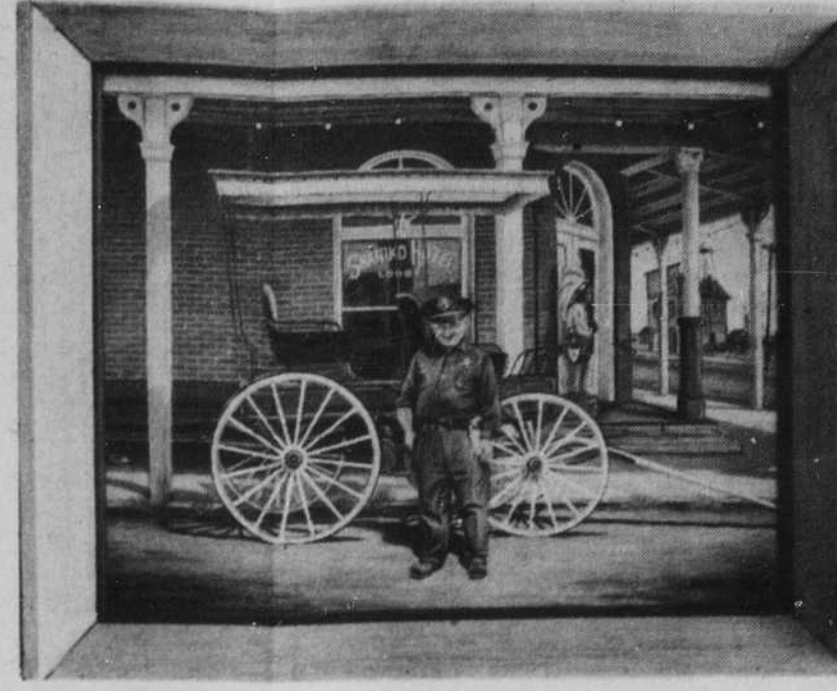




A long time ago

It held 13 saloons, 6 whorehouses, 3 hotels, and 12 warehouses; Shaniko never had a church or a graveyard

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In the midst of Oregon, in the land of big wind and brown hills, loose twigs that scurry across the road like scorpions in heat, and covering trees that hunker down over basaltic rock and brown re-fried grass, lies Shaniko.

Once, from 1902 to 1910, Shaniko was the inland wool capital of the country. Positioned around a railhead, five million tons of wool passed through its borders yearly. It was known as the wildest town in Oregon. It held 13 saloons, 6 whorehouses, 3 hotels, and 12 warehouses. Shaniko never had a church or a graveyard. When someone died, and it was usually by unnatural causes, the deceased was thrown out on the desert.

H.M. Gregor, a Shaniko resident until 1909, now living in Vancouver, remembered the days: "One day Doc Moodie offered us kids a sodie," he recalled. "Then we saw old Del Hal walking up the street. When he came up to us, he shot Doc in the stomach. Doc said, 'C'mon boys, I promised you a sodie.' He keeled over on a stool at the sodie bar."

Then came the war between Union Pacific and Southern Pacific. Trade shifted to The Dalles, and Shaniko was abandoned. Almost.

Today a large handpainted sign outside Shaniko informs visitors that it is a "Ghost Town." Those who take the trouble to turn off the main road find themselves on a dusty street, lined with seemingly abandoned houses and false-front businesses.

Stage coaches, wagons, surreys and wood are strewn about in the adjoining field, while a faded sign informs tourists that "These wagons reveal the history of Shaniko." Across the street stands the only remaining Shaniko hotel.

"Time splits and goes on either side of Shaniko," exalted one inspired tourist observing the town at sunset, as a dusk wind enveloped the scene.

But there is more to Shaniko today than history, sunsets and boards. Shaniko is, and always has been, made of people.

Those who look closely will notice metallic trailers anchored among the wooden Shaniko structures, representative of over 50 full-time residents. Most of them have come to the self-proclaimed ghost town to retire from the city. Shaniko's oldest, and most famous residents live in the Shaniko Hotel, which never really closed.

"Time will be the downfall of Shaniko," warned Sue Morrelli, who since 1957 has owned and run the Shaniko Hotel. Morelli, a large woman of over 50, can only be described as the mother of Shaniko, and is officially designated the foster "parent" of her 10 tenants, some of whom may well be original Shaniko residents.

For Morelli her tenants ARE Shaniko. Last October she lost four of her oldest to rest homes, in spite of the support offered by Eugene residents Rita Van Cleve and John Materius, and by politicians Sen. Mark Hatfield and Gov. Bob Straub.

Government regulations required that sprinklers be installed in her hotel if it were to continue as foster-home for the mentally deficient. But ever since the water tanks in Shaniko disappeared, Shaniko's water pressure has not been great enough to run overhead fire sprinklers.

"Those people had been Shaniko residents for a good part of their lives," she said. "I hated to lose them, but I faced a fine and a jail sentence if I didn't."

Now Morrelli is afraid the rest of her tenants will also have to go. "I can't go on like I am," she lamented. "The financial strains are too great. I'll have to fold if I can't get help."

As for the "help Shaniko" campaign, "Nothing came of it," said Morrelli. "The people in Eugene raised some money, but it didn't come close to covering the restoration costs, and government procedures take time. Time is one thing Shaniko does not have."

Around the lobby in the Shaniko Hotel, among deer heads and wood and old stuffed

furniture, sat the Hotel's full-time tenants. Howard Lane, the town's 87-year-old sheriff, sat slumped in a chair, his sheriff's badge pinned to his belly. "I used to work with the dairy, then I came here," he responded to a question. Then all his answers became shortened to "yyup."

Charley Parker, another of the residents, volunteered his picture. "This is my picture," he said, displaying a small two-by-two inch color photo. It showed him slouched on a couch, looking forlornly into a camera. "This is my picture."

The other occupants of the room remained mute.

In the brochure on Shaniko, sold in the tiny one-room Shaniko museum, the sheriff and the others are pictured as the proverbial "old coots." "colorful" characters to be observed like the old jail and the wooden false-front on the museum.

But the residents of Shaniko know the Shaniko Hotel group differently. "Sure they act quiet around strangers," explained Justin Nestor, who recently came to Shaniko to do promotional work. "So many tourists come through here who aren't really interested in them as people they have learned to ignore them totally," he said. "But if you really get to know them, and they are having a good day, they can be interesting — a lot of fun."

There are some in Shaniko who would like to have it return to its early-day self. Ed Martin, formerly a Portland construction worker, has made restoring Shaniko his business. A thin, quiet man with a tanned, unshaven face, he and his son spend most of their summers in Shaniko. Martin now owns half of Shaniko's main street.

He has also created some strange paradoxes. Red, white and blue plastic beach-balls glare from a five-and-dime he has reconstructed out of old wood. A red popcorn box was discovered wedging a wooden wash

machine open as Nestor was leading a tour of the museum.

"We're trying to give Shaniko its former spirit," said Nestor. "We're all carrying loaded guns, and on Shaniko Days, every Memorial Day weekend, cowhands flock in here and have old-style brawls on the street." On Monday, as part of the Fourth of July celebration, a horse-drawn carriage was driven to Shaniko from Madras.

As a member of the Shaniko restoration committee, Martin also restored the Shaniko jail, and has begun restoration on the Shaniko school house, an enormous building with a silo-style tower. "We've been using this place as a council chambers," he said, unlocking the door, and leading the way into a large, empty schoolhouse classroom. On the blackboard, in pink chalk, are written the words "Help save this place."

Martin stopped by a long cord and gave it a pull. Somewhere up in the tower, a bell resounded. "A ghost town is the only place to live," he said.

"Ed is doing some restoring but it's not enough," said Morrelli. "We have Shaniko Days, and I finally got a stage coach last year for summer rides, but we need more if I'm going to keep the hotel and my tenants."

Morrelli said she has made an offer of sale to a center for the mentally retarded. Both the hotel and the only warehouse left in Shaniko would be included, according to Morrelli.

"They could use the hotel for sleeping quarters, convert the warehouse into a craft center and my tenants could stay in Shaniko," she said. "With the historical drawing this place has, and the number of tourists who pass through, it's a natural."

Yet, just outside of town a coyote trots among piles of rusty cans, weeds and abandoned bee hives. He looks toward Shaniko, then moves off into the morning desert.

Counter clockwise from the left a cigar store Indian stands as one of Shaniko's few residents. The welcome sign and portrait inside the hotel greet the few visitors passing through. The abandoned schoolhouse and deteriorated wagon stand in contrast to the bar still in use inside the town's one remaining hotel. The shrinking edge of town opens directly onto the desert slowly encroaching on what was once the "wildest town in Oregon."

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