

SERVING

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In Huntington, Burnt River Junction Good Eats has reduced its hours and is closed on Sundays due to the restrictions and the resulting drop in tourism. The restaurant is offering takeout, and will deliver meals in Huntington, about 45 miles southeast of Baker City. “I’m grateful to be here, grateful to be open, and still able to do what we’re doing,” said owner Bill Carter. “Everyone’s safe and that’s what’s important.”

In Sumpter, the Sumpter Nugget, which includes a separate cafe and a marijuana dispensary, has had mixed results. “In general we’ve seen a little bit of an upswing in things. The cafe has been a little bit slower,” owner Justin Long said. Long said that when the pandemic started, but before restaurants’ dining rooms were closed, he and his wife, Jenny, were prepared with plastic sneeze guards, signs and hand sanitizer. “We were lucky to get on the front end of those types of measures,”

Justin Long said. In Richland, the Richland Cafe is benefitting from the drive-thru window installed 18 months ago. “Our drive-thru window has kept us open, has kept income coming in,” owner Nina Petersen said. “People are wanting to come in and sit down, but of course we’re not allowed to do that, so we are losing some business.” Petersen said she has changed the menu to focus on items designed for “grab and go.” The Richland Cafe has also added outdoor seating, she said.

“We’ve set our tables six feet apart, are practicing other social distancing behaviors, and so now people have a place to sit outside,” Petersen said. Petersen said she received \$1,000 in financial aid in March but is still waiting for other assistance. “Any other actions or any other things that have kept us alive have been decisions that we’ve made to change things up in order to survive,” she said. “But there has been no help from state or federal government.” The Shorthorn restaurant in

Richland had to close its bar, and lay off 10 employees. Owner Kari Halley said she and her husband, Chris, are cooking burgers and preparing some breakfast options. They did have to temporarily drop from the menu large salads, steak and eggs and corned beef. “We haven’t taken a whole lot off the menu but we have had to try and keep things that are easy to get each week,” Kari Halley said. Previously open every day, the Shorthorn is now open Thursday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

CONCLUSION OF SERIES FROM LOCAL HISTORIAN GARY DIELMAN EXAMINING 1864 LAND SURVEY OF THE AREA THAT WOULD INCLUDE BAKER CITY

Part 5: What happened to Powder River’s bend?

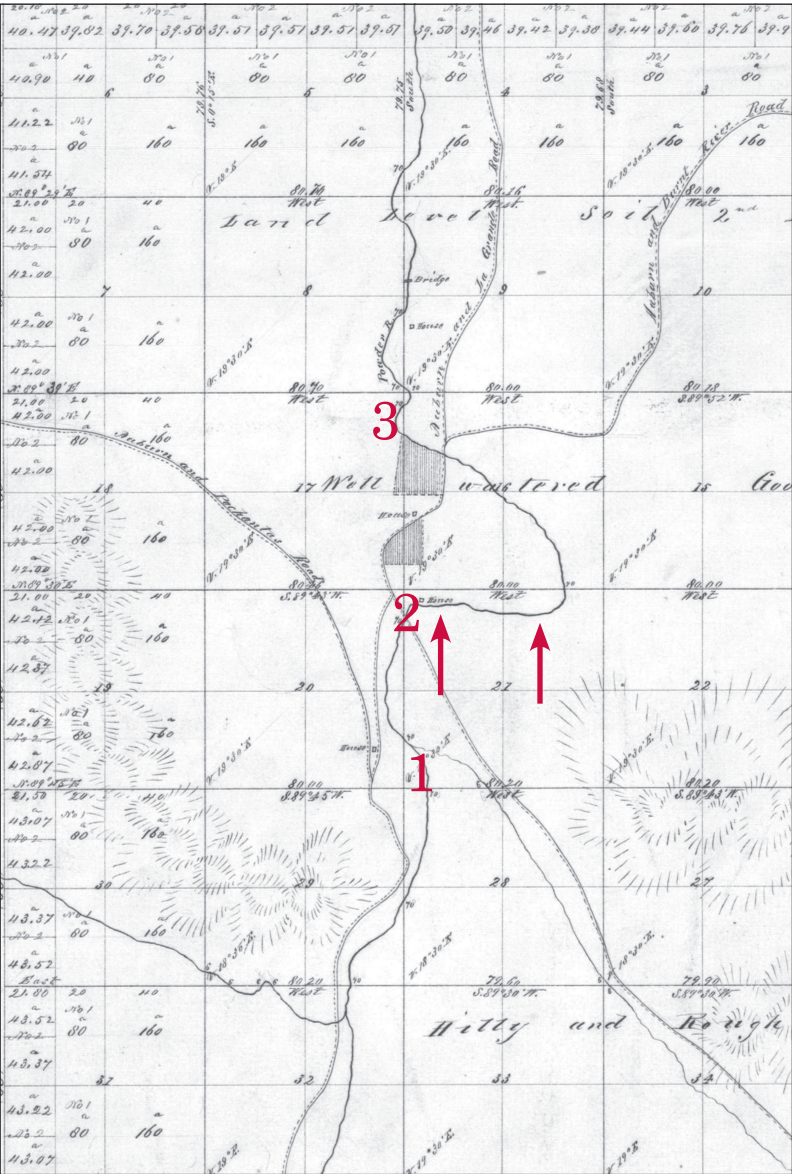
By Gary Dielman

For me the most striking feature of the 1864 Baker City Township Map is the route of Powder River. The surveyors drew the route pretty much on a straight south-to-north route through the township, except for a surprising, nearly 1-mile swoop through the area that today is the east side of Baker City. South of Colorado Street and north of Hughes Lane are the only areas in Baker City where the old and present Powder River channels share about the same channel. In between those two locations the old channel, depicted on the 1864 map, crossed the present course of Powder River six times.

A discussion about the old channel of Powder River drawn on the 1864 Baker City Township Map is an approximation of where the river flowed, except for the 13 points where Powder River crossed section lines. The surveyors noted in their field notes exactly where those crossings occurred.

How accurate is that old channel of Powder River the surveyors drew between those 13 points? We will never know. The course should only be considered an approximation. At the spot where Auburn Avenue and Oak Street intersect today, for example, the course drawn by the surveyors shows Powder River about 135 feet further south than the base of Spring Garden hill would have allowed. The surveyors did not survey the course of Powder River, nor did their contract require that they do so.

Following are some comparisons between the old and present channels of Powder River. (Please keep in mind that these comments should only be considered approximations.) Starting at the east end of Colorado Street — see red “1” on the map — the old channel veers northwest from the present channel. Sutton Creek flows into the old channel between Failing and Virginia streets about a block west of present Powder River. From there the old channel continues slightly northwest until it crosses the present railroad track and present Powder River just south of Cliff Street. Then the old channel flows north through the middle of the Elks youth baseball field south of Myrtle Street. North of Myrtle at the west end of Edgewater Street the old channel again crossed present Powder River and headed almost due north, where it passed within a few yards of the east side of the present Federal Building. Where



A map that includes the site of Baker City was drawn based on a survey that was done from May 13-18, 1864.

did it go from there?

The Mysterious Bend in the Old Channel of Powder River

Here’s the mystery. Why did two groups of people — the 1862 emigrants and the 1864 Baker City Township surveyors — have two different recollections about the course of Powder River through the township? The diaries and memoirs of the 1862 emigrants, who arrived in late summer, mention camping near a cabin, probably Fisher’s, on Powder River in the center of what became Baker City. Yet they mention nothing about Powder River flowing through the east side of town. Plus, Charles B. Fisher obtained title to land between Main Street and Powder River. The surveyors, who in May 1864 surveyed north along a section line through the middle of future Baker City, mention nothing about seeing Powder River in the middle of town. Instead, the surveyors drew very prominently on their township map

the course of Powder River flowing east for three-quarters of a mile into what became the east side of Baker City. The 1864 map shows Powder River flowing from south of town pretty much straight north, as it does today. But at about Main and Bridge streets — red “2” on the map — the 1864 surveyors drew Powder River abruptly turning east and flowing three-quarters of a mile in an easterly direction, until it nudged up against the I-84 hill. From that point the surveyors show the river flowing north and northwest through the east side of Baker City to about Main and D streets — red “3” on the map — where it then resumed a northerly course out of Baker City. As far as I know, none of the diaries and memoirs of the first emigrants arriving in Powder River Valley in late summer of 1862 mention the Powder River’s big swoop east. Instead, those 1862 migrants tell about camping on Powder River near a lone cabin just south of pres-



Ice floes on the Powder River caused flooding in February 1957.

ent Geiser-Pollman Park. The 1864 surveyors, as they were surveying north through the area that became Baker City’s Main Street, mentioned Fisher’s cabin in their field notes, but not a word about Powder River flowing north in that area. I have a theory that partially explains the discrepancy between the Powder River route the surveyors described and the Powder River route that early emigrants remember. Most of the emigrants were arriving in late summer or early autumn. The 1864 survey was accomplished in May. At that time of year Powder River would have been experiencing high spring runoff due to a melting snowpack in the Elkhorn Mountains. I assume that Powder River jumped its bank into an ancient channel that flowed northeast out Baker City. In 1864, and today, the east side of Baker City is several feet lower than downtown. When the spring runoff was over, the river would have then resumed its northerly course. Baldock Slough may be the remnant of that ancient channel. But my theory does not explain why the 1864 surveyors did not mention the Powder River the emigrants observed flowing through what became the center of Baker City.

My theory that Powder River flowed through future Baker City in 1864 is supported by the fact that cottonwood trees (Fisher’s Grove) and willow trees (present grove north of D Street, which was called Boys Jungle when I was a kid) are species known to grow along water courses. Both groves no doubt pre-date settlement of Baker City. Also supporting my theory that Powder River jumped its bank in the spring of 1864 is the fact that, at the height of the Depression of the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps placed rock riprap along both banks of Powder River to prevent the river from flooding the middle of Baker City. The riprapping material was the same tuffstone from the Pleasant Valley quarry used in construction of several of Baker City’s most prominent structures, including Baker City Hall, Baker County Courthouse, St. Francis Cathedral, several downtown businesses, and several private homes. The best examples of riprapping may still be seen along Powder River between Baker County Library and Geiser-Pollman Park. In spite of the riprapping of the Powder River channel, Baker City still experienced occasional floods. Perhaps the worst flood was in February 1957. At that time I was a senior at Baker High School and a member of Company F of the Oregon National Guard. Governor Mark Hatfield declared an emergency and activated Company F for the weekend to fight chunks of ice as much as 14 inches thick heaved up south of Baker City and rafted north through town. The riprapped channel was full almost to overflowing. Large pieces of floating ice piled up against Baker City’s bridges.

City employees, National Guardsmen, and volunteers used long poles to push those huge blocks of ice under the bridges in an attempt to prevent them from damming up the channel. In spite of their efforts, water flowed into town east of Resort Street. Geiser-Pollman Park became a lake and a large area from east of 10th Street and as far as Hughes Lane was inundated. Now I continue describing the approximate route through future Baker City according to the 1864 Baker City Township Map, starting with the aforementioned east bend. Within a stone’s throw of Hotel Baker, the old channel made a 90-degree turn to the east — red “2” on the map — crossed present Powder River just west of the Les Schwab tire store on Bridge Street, and proceeded east about three-fourths of a mile along the foot of Spring Garden Hill to about the intersection of Birch and Pear streets. At that point an abrupt rise in elevation diverted Powder River north to about Washington and Birch streets, where the river crossed Campbell at about Oak Street, and continued on an azimuth to the present Powder River channel at Main and D streets. From that intersection the old channel flowed due north through the backyards of residences on the east side of Grandview Drive. At about 75 yards north of D Street, the old channel again crossed present Powder River, turned northeast about 75 yards then back northwest another 75 yards, where it crossed present Powder River at H Street. From there the old and present river channels paralleled each other at about a 100-foot separation, until the old channel angled east. The old and present channels coalesced at Hughes Lane north of Kirkway Drive. From there the combined old and present channels continued north and off the top of the 1864 Baker City Township Map. The government surveyors did not record the route of Baldock Slough on their 1864 Baker City Township Map. The slough is named for pioneer William Baldock (1828-1907), who settled on the east side of Powder River Valley near Flagstaff Hill in 1862. Today the slough has its origins in springs on the east side of Baker City, which feed the slough with running water. Pioneer diaries of travelers of the Oregon Trail called it the “first crossing” of Powder River. The famous Lone Pine of the Oregon Trail stood tall at that crossing, until it was cut down in September 1843 by members of the first wagon train to traverse Baker County. Since water still flows in Baldock Slough, it can be considered a short branch of main Powder River, into which the “slough” finds its confluence with Powder River about 2.5 miles southeast of Haines. For readers interested in seeing remnants of many ancient channels of Powder River, take an airplane flight over the valley north of the airport or go online and view the area using Google Earth.



This aerial photo shows flooding along the Powder River in February 1957. Geiser-Pollman Park is denoted by the red “1.” The intersection of Resort and Madison streets is at the red “2.” The line of cars at the bottom of the photo are on Main Street. The Baker Heritage Museum, at the upper left of the photo, is marked by the red “3.”