

Rick,

Excellent perspective on roadside architecture! And as always a great photo.

I couldn't agree with you more. The places you describe all have stories.

Let me try to add to this thread with a story from this Spring I have been meaning to tell.

In the mid 1800's after the Civil War, gold was discovered in and around what is now John Day, Oregon. To reach the new strike, miners came along the Columbia River by steamer to The Dalles, and then struck south and eastward on foot, mule and horseback toward Canyon City and John Day.

Miners needed supplies and supplies required wagons. So as you might expect a road developed. And eventually towns and settlements followed. Farmers, sheep ranchers, and merchants came along, and people needed transportation, not just to the mines, but to The Dalles, and to the growing number of settlements in Central Oregon. So stage lines and freight lines were organized.

Stagers and freighters needed food, for themselves, for their animals, and their passengers, and because they only moved at a few miles an hour, they needed a place to sleep along the way. So stage stops developed.

One such stage stop was Nansene. The image below shows the Nansene House with a freighter in the 1890 carrying wool from the interior to The Dalles on the Columbia River for transport to market by steamer. Nansene was a small community with a post office, school, and the hotel. In the early days of the automobile it was on the main road from Central Oregon north to The Dalles. But by the late teens other routes also developed. Around 1920, or just before, the Oregon transportation people decided that the state supported route should go another way. So what became The Dalles-California Highway of the 1920's, now US 197 in this area, bypassed Nansene by several miles. It was left to molder on a little used county road.



Freighter in Front of Nansene House, 1890

If you are not an old map nut like I am, you probably would never know where Nansene was. The schoolhouse and Nansene House are long gone.....but one building still stands!!! The Nansene community center or hall.

Jim, like you describe, each decade that passes, I find more of the building on the ground, and more gaps appear in the roof. Happily it is too far off the main road to attract some social deviate with a match or spray can, and too remote to be an attractive liability that the landowner must tear down because it is an insurance risk.

It is cited in the Automobile Blue book of the teens as a control point, which in my world makes it notable. As my photo shows, it stands alone now, in an overgrown field, with Mt Hood behind on the skyline.



Nansene Community hall, 2018

When you think about it, you recognize that it once was the hub of a community in the day when entertainment was other people, your friends, and fellow Nansene'ers. Almost certainly young people met here, coupled up, fell in love, and probably married right here. Dances that drew families from miles around were held here. They ran long into the night, and those who attended slept in neighbors nearby barns rather than ride a horse or wagon back to the farm in the dark, and maybe a little tipse.

I have researched the available newspaper articles and publications I can fine about the Nansene Hall and have not found a story written about it. If they exist, they are in old faded letters written to friends and family, or perhaps in the mind of someone now in a nursing home in The Dalles. But you or I could write a story, and it would be true, if not to the specific events, to the spirit of the place. Anyone who loves roadside architecture can describe what happened there, because it was happening in the same sort of places spread all across America, and we have read and heard the descriptions.

My mind supplies the story and fills out the scene. The collapsed porch is back up and young people are standing around talking and flirting, and from the inside comes the sound of a fiddle or accordion, perhaps even a piano. Oil lamps provide a warm glow from inside, and the old folks are sitting on benches along the sides of the room talking, while the younger ones are dancing. The women have brought their best dishes with all the fixins, set out on a table in the back. There would be a meal served before midnight. The wooden floors creek under four score busy feet while laughter and conversation fill the air.

Such was the scene.

And down the road I discovered a wooden gem, hidden in the brush. The old wooden bridge is a puzzle, and I think it could have been old enough to have been a stage bridge, and certainly an early auto bridge.

The only other explanation is that it was a bridge for a farmer to get from the road to his field, but I want to eliminate that possibility with a little old road savvy. See if you agree.

First, in my 78 years I don't recall a farmer building railings on his bridge to cross a creek. He knew the bridge and he was not about to run or fall off it. Second, it was a very serious bridge builder who built a handsome bridge abutment and flue of stone and concrete. A farmer would have constructed a sturdy span, supported by the bank. If the bank was unstable, he made the span longer until it was on a firm setting. He wanted to get across the creek, not build an edifice to bridges.



I can't say if a freight company would build railings. It seems counter intuitive because it might limit the loading of a freight wagon. I don't know. But it was common that automobile bridges had railings.

In the end, I don't know the history of the bridge. It is not evidently built to modern standards, is entirely of wood (other than the abutments), but is of sturdy construction. Maybe I will phone the historical society director at the nearest town (Dufur) and see what she can tell me. In any event, it is an interesting bridge and might be a real "find." :)

I hope this qualifies for your thread!!

Dave