

Skykomish Schools 1893 Until Now



The first recorded school in Skykomish opened in 1893. The same year Great Northern Railway connected Sky to the outside world both east and west. It would be 16 years before Skykomish incorporated as a town.

Four of the five students in that first school had the family name of Timpe, the other was a Howard. Three of the Timpes would live their entire lives in Sky. The boys, William Jr. and Henry, built buildings that still stand; they also served as mayor and/or school teacher and/or school janitor. Ella Timpe worked nearly all her adult life in domestic service for Sky's most prominent family, the Maloneys. When school opened in the fall of 1894, three more students enrolled.

Whether the building above left was the first place they met, or if it came into use sometime thereafter is not known, but this was the schoolhouse in 1902 when the new building was built.

It is believed the private residence at the left is the same building as pictured above, but neither the present owners nor SHS have uncovered direct proof. If anyone has information about this idea, they are encouraged to reach out to SHS with their data or even suppositions.



Skykomish was a frontier town with boomtown facades, boisterous watering holes, and seeming wide open style, yet when it came time to take education seriously in 1901, the town fathers chose to construct a remarkable schoolhouse. Just why this elegant edifice with Cape Dutch parapets reminiscent of hundred of buildings in South Africa seemed to fit Sky's profile has been lost to history, but it must have been a clear message to students their learning was important when they entered the new building in 1902.



The "Skykomish Public Schools Souvenir Announcement" brochure published in the summer of 1909 appears meant to assure people far and wide just how up-to-date Skykomish School had become. It touted the "New International Cyclopedia" and a laboratory complete with a "Columbia Crowell Cabinet" and apparatus with which over 500 experiments could be made. Among the pieces of apparatus were working models of a steam engine and an hydraulic ram, a water motor, air pump, bank for compressed air, projection lantern, micrometer, scales, hydrometer, set of lenses and prisms, radiometer, sonometer, tuning forks, dynamos and motor, electric light bulbs, ten Edison-Leland cells, five gravity cells, Wimhurst machine, resistance box, apparatus for electrolysis of water, six Geisler tubes, induction coil, telephones, microphone, static electricity set, voltmeter, ammeter, wheatstone bridge, D'Arsonel galvanometer, arc light, electric bells, electrophorus, electroscope, and wireless telegraphy outfit. Everything may have been up-to-date in Kansas City, but the town fathers in Sky wanted their people to know Skykomish was-up-to date as well.





Aside from the remarkable choice of facade and trim, another interesting design feature was the tee shape, with the entrance at the foot of the tee. Later diagrams indicate the first room was a classroom, without an apparent hall to the rest of the building. Difficult to see in most images we have of this school is the exterior walls were milled tongue in groove boards like Skykomish Hotel and Maloney's Store.

A beautifully rendered "O" scale model (15 inches high) of this building done in exquisite detail by SHS member Bonnie Hollingsworth is on display at the museum and should not be missed.



In 1914 a gymnasium was added with what appears at least as large a footprint as the original school building. It is also interesting to note the old growth timber across the river and very apparent in the views of the new 1902 school had all been logged in the later photos, and the logging railroad appears to have already been built and abandoned once the logs were gone.

Skykomish population peaked in the late 1920s during construction of the 8-mile New Cascade Tunnel under Stevens Pass and the requisite Power Transfer Sub-station that was built in Sky. Conflicting figures are listed in various accounts, but whether the number was 259 or 274 or 329, as one account proffers, in any case school enrollment peaked during that very busy time.

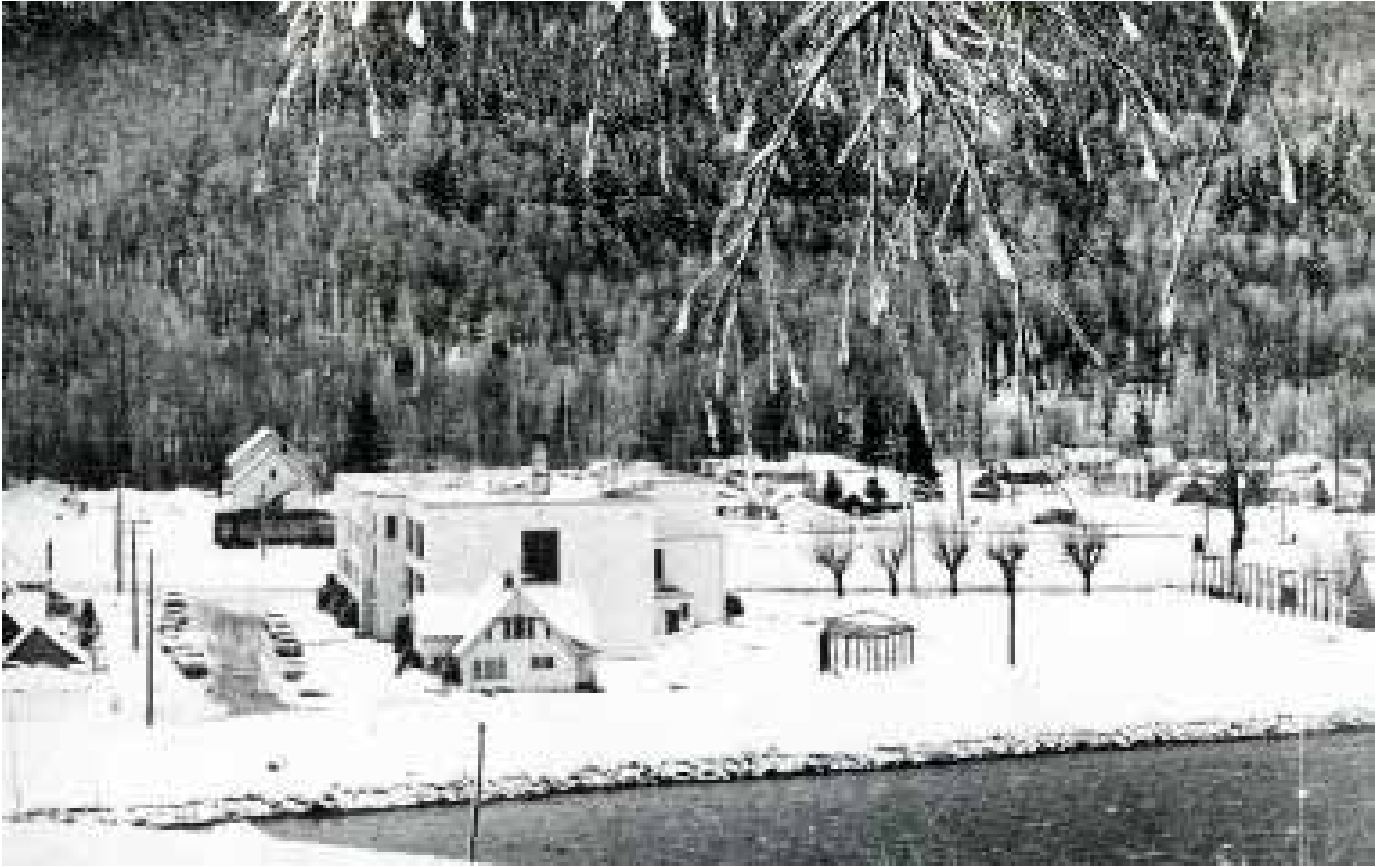


In the 1920 a manual arts building was added to the campus.

In the mid-1930s when the present school was being built, the manual arts building was moved a ways east on Railroad Avenue where it stands today serving as a Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway maintenance facility. Having been built in part by the Timpe brothers from that first Sky School and manual arts students as part of their classwork, this building has through the years been a meat shop, a bunk house for mill employees, Skykomish Fire Hall, town maintenance building with the upstairs serving as a Boy's Club and deputy sheriff's office, and finally as the Skykomish Historical Society Museum, prior to its present role.



In the mid-1930s "Depression" era funding from the Works Project Administration built a new Skykomish School using Civilian Conservation Corps labor and local materials. It opened in 1936. Skykomish Historical Society has found no photos of the original 1902 building removal process nor of construction of the new school, but reclaimed lumber from the gymnasium found its way into the still-in-use town hall, also a WPA/CCC project, and the six-panel doors from the original 1902 school are still the doors one uses to enter Skykomish Town Hall.



The 1936 school is still in use and believed to be the last WPA school building in Washington still in use as a school. It is a designated King County Historical Landmark.

During the massive oil clean-up that dominated life in Sky between 2006 and 2012, the school remained a problem because unlike most other buildings in town with oil beneath them, this venerable pile could not be supported, lifted, moved, and returned into place in any practical way. Clean-up plans and projected completion dates have fluctuated over the years. Cleaning is finally being done section by section through the floor during summer vacations until the job is completed. As with other projections about the clean-up, completion dates have expanded into the future almost annually, depending upon what has been found as they go forward, the latest projection being two to four more years before the earth beneath will be declared oil-free and The Clean-up will be complete.

In some ways Skykomish High School's greatest distinction is that it remains the smallest school in Washington State history to have won a state championship. In 1954 with an enrollment of 56, Sky dominated the class B State Tournament in Tacoma, besting heavily favored Bainbridge Island for the championship. The Bainbridge enrollment of 298 missed being a Class A school by just two students.

An interesting aside about that Bainbridge team is they played home games in a WPA school gym identical to the little gym at Sky that features mostly balcony seating which hangs right out to the edge of the gym floor. In 2003 *Seattle Times* sports columnist Craig Smith did a pilgrimage to visit high school gyms in Washington. Craig and this writer attended U of W Journalism school together, and when we spoke a few years back he said the gym in Sky reminded him of a cathedral. Out of several hundred school gyms visited, he chose to write about ten. Sky was number seven. In the article he wrote, "It felt like walking into a church." Still, when walking into that gym there is a hallowed feeling when one remembers it was home court for those '54 Rockets.