

Politics

Whew! The campaigns are over and the votes have been counted! I didn't know many of the candidates personally (have met only two or three), but it got me thinking about politicians in general, and how they develop. Did we have any in Granite Falls? Were we a "power" in County or State politics? Then, in another museum "coincidence", on Nov 11th a museum visitor brought in a perfectly preserved metal stencil from a long-ago campaign season that he found in a house on E. Union St. It says:

C. H. VOORHIS
LIBERTY PARTY
NOM
COMM. 1ST DISTRICT
GRANITE FALLS



Clearly, it was intended for making signs and placards to support the campaign of Charles Voorhis, one of our City Council members who apparently ran for a County Commission position. A quick check of our newspapers provided a couple short articles mentioning his candidacy in 1932. Oddly enough, it was Frank Ashe (well-known Granite Falls businessman) who was famous for being a popular County Commissioner from District #1 through most of the 30s and 40s. How did that happen?

We have a handwritten history of Frank's career, given to us by his daughter Lois Jorgensen. She describes the Granite Falls arrival of the Ashe family (Frank Sr and wife Martha), with three sons (James-oldest, Frank-12yrs old, and Bernard-youngest) in 1906. Frank won an essay contest in 1907, garnering 3 dollars, enough to buy a used bicycle that he repaired. In 1910, at the age of 16, he quit school to open a bicycle repair business, which quickly turned into City Cyclery. Selling Excelsior motorcycles was a mainstay, and that progressed into Model T Fords. The garage building on W. Stanley St stood where today stands Mark's Country Store, and we have a great picture of a multitude of Granite Falls young men on their Excelsiors in front of the business.



Frank's older brother James joined him in the business, and they ultimately bought the large brick building on S. Granite, built originally for the Granite Falls Mercantile Co, but for decades serving as Ashe Bros Garage. Today it serves as our firehouse! For a while selling both Fords and GMC trucks, they were forced to choose, and ultimately chose GMC/Chevy/Oldmobile. In 1926, they built a new building on their property on W. Stanley, opening it as the Mountain Loop Service Station with Bernard as the proprietor (but it said Ashe Bros) on the overhang. That became the Chevy and GMC dealership Frank operated until 1969.



But back to our political mystery stencil – what happened in the Charles Voorhis 1932 campaign? In the biographical sketch provided by Frank’s daughter, she mentions that Frank was appointed County Commissioner for District #1 in 1935 by Governor Clarence D. Martin, to fill out the remaining term of Charles Smith of Arlington, who had been removed from office (allegedly for grand larceny and false payroll checks). So, apparently the stencil we now have at the museum failed in its mission to elect Mr. Voorhis, the 1932 victory instead going to his opponent from Arlington. However, Frank Ashe went on to win several re-elections before finally retiring from office in 1946. His retirement letter explicitly referred to it as **Road District #1**, a reflection of how important transportation was to our ongoing County development.

During his term as County Commissioner, two major County attractions were completed: Paine Field (a County airport) and the Mountain Loop Highway. Frank was there when the first plane landed, along with other local dignitaries. I’m sure he was also among the first to drive around the entire Loop . . . but not on an Excelsior. After all, transportation was his life!



Who knows? Maybe there’s another politician growing in our backyard.