

A factory, a bridge and the name that made them legendary

Exploring the origins of the 'Popsicle Bridge'

By Hannah Combs
Reader Contributor

One Friday afternoon with nothing pressing to do, I turned onto the “Popsicle Bridge road.” My eyes habitually searched for a stand of aspen trees that no longer beckon with their fluttering green or golden leaves. This left me hunting nostalgically for a glimpse of something that would place me in a Sandpoint before my time, when I imagine things were quieter, quainter.

I passed an old metal barn, the blooming lilacs at its edges a balm for my malaise. Down the winding hill, I wandered out onto the bridge and was jolted with confusion. On a dozen walks along Sand Creek or canoeing through its channel, I had seen the Popsicle Bridge from a distance and told

myself it was so named because as its density helped it withstand it was supported by rows of cedar the pressure of being treated, and pilings, like the Cedar St. Bridge its mild scent didn't impact the in miniature, or a row of popsicle flavor of the ice cream sticks. My brain must have been Satterlee had previously forcing associations where there managed his own manufacturing were none, or I desperately needed business, Plylite Inc., in the 1950s, to visit the eye doctor. Clearly, which created birch paneling for the bridge beneath me was built home interiors on a concrete frame with an open “Bert Satterlee and his wife passage underneath and simple were my parents' best friends,” railings made of two-by-fours. remembered Dutch Miedema.

One illusion shattered and “When I was a teenager, [Bert] opened up a bigger mystery. How built a machine to peel birch logs did the moniker “popsicle” arise in my dad's machine shop in if it didn't allude to the bridge's Spokane. Before they opened [the appearance? Thanks to BCHS's Sandpoint factory] he toured me historical archives, I was able to through there; it was amazing with find out.all the punch presses and other In June 1966, the father-son machinery.” team of Laurin and Gary Pi-When it opened, PP&S was etsy — savvy businessmen “the only manufacturer of stamped who helmed the *Sandpoint News* hardwood veneer products in the *Bulletin* — partnered with me-West,” according to an article chanical engineer Bert Satterlee in the *Sandpoint News Bulletin*. to form SS&P Products, Inc. They Later that year, PP&S announced, set up shop in a “modern plant” “Second floor space is being just north of town on Airport Way added inside the building to allow (now E. Mountain View Road), expansion of the plant's packaging in which they manufactured thin and grading abilities.” sticks for ice cream bars. The local The owners hoped this ex-birch was ideal for these products, pansion would bring production



Left: *The Popsicle Bridge today.*

September 11, 1952 *Sandpoint News Bulletin*: Mechanical engineer Bert Satterlee had worked with birch for years prior to his time with PP&S, Inc. In 1952, he owned his own company making birch paneling for home interiors, shown here. Photos courtesy Bonner County Historical Society.

up to 1 million ice cream sticks per day. But by late 1969, PP&S closed down and auctioned off its building and equipment.

The popsicle factory didn't define any of the men who owned it. Laurin Pietsch is remembered for a newspaper career in Sandpoint that spanned half a century. Over the years he held positions as president of the Idaho Press Association, president of the Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce, president of the Bonner County Sportsmen's Association and exalted ruler of the Sandpoint Elks Club. He received many accolades for both his professional and civic work over the years.

Bert Satterlee led a long life full of varied interests. He was a “honky-tonky piano player” and piano tuner who led a dance band in the '30s. He was also known for designing a steel trolling fishing rod in the late 1940s, which is considered a rare collector item today. In the '70s, he was the first to advocate for a Goodwill store to benefit the newly-formed senior center.

Gary Pietsch is a retired news-

paper editor and small business owner who, among numerous accomplishments, has written two books on Bonner County history to benefit the museum — both of which can be found at the museum gift shop or at bonnercounty-history.org.

The popsicle factory was no business empire. It didn't make men rich, and its history is chronicled in only a few short newspaper articles. But it met a unique need, and it employed more than 20 people for a short time. Like most small businesses, it made an income for local families then disappeared into obscurity over the next couple of generations.

Or it would have, if not for the association with a little bridge down the street that borrowed its nickname and became the “Popsicle Bridge.”

Originally the bridge was an access point to the highway for people living on the north side of town. During highway reconstruction in the early '70s, the creek crossing was rerouted and the Popsicle Bridge was condemned. In 1998, the North Idaho Bike-

ways nonprofit led a fundraising effort to rebuild the Popsicle Bridge for bike and pedestrian traffic, creating an integral link in the Sandpoint area bike system.

In the summer, the bridge is regularly frequented by anglers, kayakers and bikers. There's nothing quite like the thrill of rushing down the steep hill toward the creek on a bike.

The popsicle factory may be an old metal barn overgrown with lilacs, or it may have been torn down years ago. It's hard to know without knocking precociously on doors and asking questions. On a glorious spring day with the scent of lilac in the air, it feels right to let legends rest; to let layers of stories past and lives lived sift together down by Sand Creek.

This article was brought to you by the Bonner County Historical Society and Museum, of which Hannah Combs serves as administrator. Research provided by the Bonner County History Museum and Sandpoint's Early History, by Gary Pietsch.

