WEBFOOTER EXTRA

How Boring Got its Name by Willard Boring

Post card courtesy of Steve Kenney.
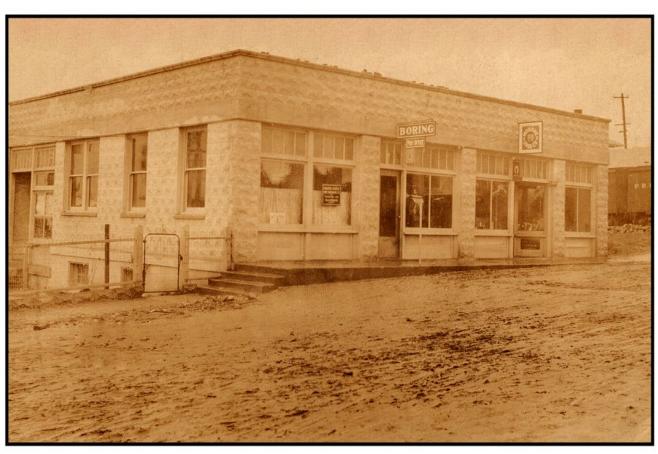
How Boring Got its Name
by Willard Boring (1910 – 2002)

There is a small community in Clackamas County, Oregon located some one hundred miles from the Pacific Ocean on the west, forty miles from majestic Mt. Hood on the east, ten miles from the mighty Columbia River on the north and the name of this community in the center of this Pacific Northwest beauty is Boring. How can it be? Well, here is the way it happened.

In 1861, William Harrison Boring, at the age of 20, left his father's farm in Greenfield, Greene County, Illinois and enlisted in the Union Army as a member of the 33rd Illinois Infantry Volunteers. He served with distinction in the army and was given a medical discharge shortly before the end of the war due to injuries and poor health. He returned to his home in Illinois and worked his mother's farm as his father had passed away.
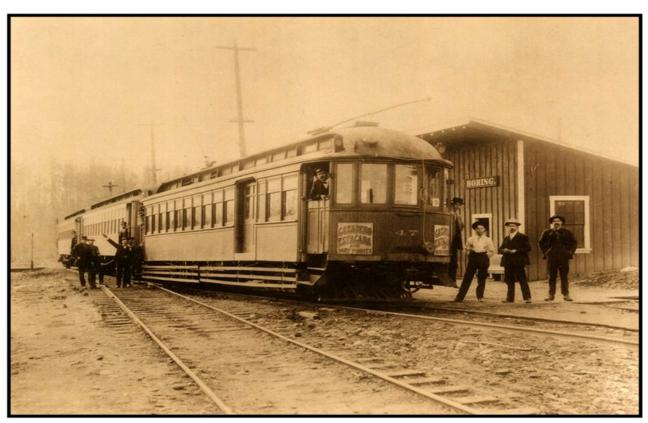

Early post card view of the building that housed the Boring Post Office (left) and the Morand Drug Store (right). Post card courtesy of Steve Kenney.

In 1867, William Harrison Boring and Sarah Elizabeth Wilder were married and continued to live in Illinois until 1874 when they decided to take advantage of free land in Oregon. They came west by train to San Francisco and then up the coast by boat to Portland. They had a choice of 80 acres of what is now a part of southeast Portland or 160 acres about twenty miles farther east. They chose the latter and built their home among the tall, beautiful fir trees of that region where they cleared a farm and made their living from the land.

In 1879, their son Orville Wilder Boring was born. In 1883, William and Sarah saw the need for a school for their son and other children in the area and gave an acre of land adjacent to their home for a school. This one room school on Kelso Road, which was known as Boring's School, remained in existence as a school until 1904 when it was replaced by a larger building on Richey Road.

In 1901, the Oregon Water Power and Railway Company (OWP) began building a railroad through the area primarily to haul logs to the sawmills and to return with the produce of the farms in the area as well as cut lumber for builders. A railroad station was built and a small town was platted around it. This community was named Boring in honor of William Boring who had been instrumental in starting a town by seeing the need for a school and doing something about it.

Early view of a Portland-bound interurban train stopped at the first depot in Boring, circa 1905.

A Portland-bound interurban stopped at the depot in Boring.

Boring began to take shape. In a very short time there appeared: a hotel, a post office, a depot, a general store, two livery stables, a confectionery, and other shops common to most small towns. There also was a saloon and a dance hall. Boring had three different depots over the years. The two-story building shown above and below burned in 1928 and a single-story building was built in its place.

Passengers wait for a train at the depot in Boring, circa 1915.

Boring was platted in 1903 as *Boring Junction* after the construction of the railway line. The post office was established here on March 10, 1903 and named Boring, which builders of the interurban railway adopted as the name of the community. Early residents of the area were mainly German and Swedish immigrants. Boring is about twelve miles from Portland and five miles southeast of Gresham.

The rail line was electrified and streetcars began transporting passengers in 1905, operating on the OWP railroad line from Portland through Gresham, Boring and Estacada, and ending in Cazadero. The streetcar significantly reduced travel time between Portland and the communities to its east. Horse and buggy travel from Boring to Portland took an average of six hours, while a trip to Portland via the interurban system took only about an hour.

When Boring Grade School was built on Richey Road in 1904, the property where the original building stood was given back to William Boring and he built a two story home using the one room school building as part of that home. In 1905, William and Sarah's son Orville was married to Lucy Ida Perret and they spent the remainder of their lives on the old homestead. They had two sons, Lester and Willard, who also grew up on this same homestead.

Early view of a church in Boring, circa 1905. Photo courtesy of Steve Kenney.

Boring's rail line was absorbed into the Portland Railway Light and Power Company in 1906 and it evolved into Portland Electric Power Company in the 1930s. In 1946, Portland Traction Company took possession of the line and operated interurban cars from Boring to Portland until 1958. Subsequently, the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads jointly took over operation of the remaining portion of the line for freight operations. Freight operations ended in the late 1980s and the tracks were removed in 1990. Much of the line's right-of-way has since been purchased by local governments for the creation of a long-distance rail trail named the Springwater Corridor.

After its inception as a railroad community, Boring evolved into a hub for the timber industry in the Northwest, beginning in the pre-World War I era and continuing throughout much of the 20th century. One of the first mills established in Boring was the Hillyard Sawmill, which began operations in the 1890s; the mill produced over 30,000 feet of lumber per day, mostly consisting of railroad ties. Bert Jonsrud, an early resident of the area, would later establish the Jonsrud Bros. Lumber Company, which would become Boring's main lumber mill. In a 1915 survey of timber and logging camps in the Pacific Northwest, it was reported that Jonsrud mill was producing 20,000 feet of lumber per day.

Early post card view of ties cut and ready for loading at the lumber mill in Boring. Post card courtesy of Steve Kenney.